Love Stories of India

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Love Stories of India

By EDISON MARSHALL

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Designed by Stefan Salter

To Vernon Bartoo Marshall of Placerville, California,
good critic and stout friend of my books

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The Closed Trophy Room

The fifteen stories in this book are laid in the Far East-India, Indo-China, and China, the Indies of the geographers. Sexual love is the motif of most of them, and a factor in all except one. One editor called them "Once Upon a Time" stories—meaning that they could well begin with that olden-day appeal to the imagination, since they are essentially timeless, and deal with strange, romantic events and adventures rather than with everyday life.

On each story I have made a brief comment in the light of its history. In ten of the fifteen tales I did not find any insincerity; in the other five there are no contrivances illegitimate to the ancient art. It seems to me that six or seven represent my best short-story telling, and two may be somewhat better.

The first story in the book was dreamed up and written down in a tent in the tiger jungles of Assam, India. On the homeward journey I read it aloud to the assembled passengers—we were only about sixty on a President liner—and offered a prize of a Bhutanese rug for the best title. Jimmy Thatch, a young naval officer who has since become world-famous for the invention of flying tactics, won the prize with the title "The Lady and the Tigress," cleverly paraphrasing the well-known title by Stockton.

Jimmy Thatch was impressive even in those days, and I was flattered by the title's linking the story with the Stockton novelty. Actually another title, proposed by a Californian whose name I have forgotten, was a better fit. He suggested "The Closed Trophy Room," and as such the story has been rechristened. If the namer will make himself known, I will send him a prize.

Four of us were sitting around the fireplace at the University Club in one of the fashionable fruit-growing colonies of the Northwest. We often had good talk there—our fellows were a knowledgeable lot, and they had come from the four quarters of the country in the years of the big land boom—and tonight it was special.

"The old doc," as we called him, had just made the point that an astonishing number of the great captains in history had been pint-sized men, frail or physically unimposing. He mentioned for example Napoleon, and Lord Nelson.

“An able leader who is big and manly looking can win the trust and devotion of his men,” the old doc said, “but if he happens to be a shrimp, or a delicate chap with a limp or some other frailty, he is simply worshipped. He appeals to his men’s chivalry, I suppose—anyway, to their innate sense of dramatic contrast.”

“By and large,” Colonel Shawburn assented, “the small man will go further than the large man, talents being equal, in civilized countries. And after all, it’s only natural.”

“Why is it only natural?” I asked.

The colonel adjusted his pince-nez and examined me curiously. “It should be obvious. The big, burly fellow grows up too easygoing. He feels no need to assert his virility or display his courage—it is taken for granted. The little guy of the right stuff carries a chip on his shoulder. And that reminds me of my friend Johnson, whom I knew in Des Moines. Well, well, Johnson! A good case in point.”

We said nothing—only waited. We knew the colonel.

“It’s a very curious story,” the colonel went on thoughtfully.

We lighted our pipes and crossed our legs. “Shoot,” the old doc invited, speaking for us all.

Yes, it was a curious story. And although many of the conversations were doubtless the colonel’s own invention—he could not have had a dictaphone under Johnson’s table—they seemed to us in character; and we all felt that in the larger sense, at least, the tale was true.

Johnson returned from his single year at the University of Iowa in 1889. (So the colonel related.) He was definitely one of your shrimps. Although he wore thick-soled shoes—for economy and to prevent colds, so he explained—the most he ever claimed was five feet six.

I should like you to note especially those thick-soled shoes. Nothing could be more typical of Johnson, and they play a part all through his story. It is a fact that he never allowed anyone to see him without them, scarcely even his wife. He never wore bedroom slippers; and to me there is something not merely pathetic but heroic—and the two words bear a curious relationship—in the way he wore that heavy footgear from pajamas to pajamas every day of his life. By that fact alone we might have known he was destined for great things.

His first name was Harold. Now, no Englishman could imagine why this should be a handicap, but you and I know it was, and Harold knew too. It is part of our inexplicable American tradition that the name Harold, when worn by a small, insignificant-looking man, is mildly comic.

An even greater handicap was that Johnson had been born on the wrong side of the railroad tracks. You know what that means, in a growing country town with the crude beginnings of a social consciousness. There was one person who never let him forget his handicap; on her, unfortunately, we must dwell later.

Looking and feeling insignificant, Harold Johnson went after the biggest game in town. First he got a job with a contracting firm—Des Moines was booming those days. Next he joined the Masons and the Knights of Pythias, and got himself nominated, in spite of general resentment, to the Revellers, the principal social club. Well, in five years he was in business for himself—he had a flair for anticipating good residence districts and putting up dignified houses—he was Junior Warden of the Masons, Doorkeeper of the Knights and on the finance committee of the Revellers.

At the Revellers he met Dorothy Moreland, the banker's daughter. She too was small—five feet three, perhaps—but she flaunted her smallness: called herself "little me," dressed like a child, and snuggled up to dance with the tallest youths in town. Naturally, she didn't have much time for runty little Harold. Yet in the year 1895 she married him.

No, she did not love him. I don't think she was ever decent enough to pretend that she did. She was head over heels in love with an adventurous young blade named Ashcroft, but he married another girl, and anyway, she was headed for the shelf. Half for spite, half for bread and butter, she took little Harold Johnson for better or worse.

For him, it was definitely worse. It is hard to account for such an odious creature as Dorothy Johnson. Yes, a fine housekeeper. She was such a good housekeeper that she wouldn't let Harold smoke cigars in the best room—and Harold loved to smoke cigars, because they made him feel masculine. She was active in club work, had a kind of brutal honesty, dressed well, and was cultured in that unspeakable nose-tilted fashion that invariably spells a puny mind.

On the other hand, her vices were so appalling that I shudder to relate them. It is not enough to tell you that as soon as she married Harold she began to wear *high heels*! Besides, she was always throwing up to him his

humble birth, reminding him of her condescension in marrying him and making light of—bringing to the light—all his innocent little pretensions.

Among his other gestures—perhaps the most touching of the lot—Harold was a big-game hunter. He began with a fortnight's deer hunt in Minnesota, and as time went on, took longer and more ambitious trips until he had shot moose and caribou in eastern Canada. I won't say that Harold did not enjoy the woods. At least they were an escape from Dorothy. But the hardship and solitude he endured, for a little extra self-respect and a few moth-eaten heads!

But do you think Dorothy would give him a word of appreciation? Never. She belittled the whole business: accused him in company—pretending to be joking, in that inhuman way you've all experienced—of faking his photographs and buying his skins and horns. She wouldn't let him tell his hunting yarns to their dinner guests. She wouldn't even let him hang his trophies in the front room, but banished them to the attic.

"I won't have them here, collecting dust and breeding moths," she declared once and for all. "Besides, I don't want to be reminded of your silly imitation of a 'strong silent man of the open spaces.' You're not another Stan Ashcroft, you know, to hunt tigers instead of tame cows, and stick wild boars from horseback with a lance." (It was just like her to say "lance" when any decent creature would have said "spear.")

Yet her words gave Harold his biggest idea. Spearing wild boars was definitely out of the question—Harold could not manage horses—but he might conceivably shoot a tiger! He was paralyzed at the very thought of a tiger, but such was the stout heart in his narrow chest that this made him dream about it all the more. And if he brought home a fine tiger skin, Dorothy would let him keep it in the parlor!

But a tiger hunt in India would cost four thousand dollars, a fourth of his year's income. Dorothy would never hear of his spending such a sum. Then suddenly the chance came to make his dream come true.

It was in the fall of 1919, in the last days of war prosperity; Harold was just fifty years old. He came home this September night with a glitter in his eye.

He said nothing of his great scheme until dinner was over. "Sweet," he began adroitly, then, "you spoke of a new fur coat this winter. Well, a little windfall came to me today, and I don't see why we shouldn't blow it."

"You have everything you need——" Dorothy began self-righteously. But Harold interrupted her.

"Well, I know a thing or two I'd like to buy. I thought at first of sending this windfall to my brother Will—he needs it, heaven knows—but if you'd rather, we'll split it, and each of us spend our share exactly as we wish."

"What is it you want? I'll spend my share on necessities, and it isn't fair ____"

The splendor of Harold's dream strengthened his spine and steadied his voice. "On second thought, I think we ought to send it to Will. He's having a tough time with that mortgage."

It happened that Brother Will was a sore subject with Dorothy. A happy-go-lucky, almost illiterate man, still he was Harold's boyhood idol and his very own. He was forever helping him, and Dorothy could not prevent it. On this point, if no other, little Harold always stood his ground. So she tacked quickly.

"I suppose you deserve a little extravagance," she said, as graciously as she could manage. "How much did you get?"

"Then it's agreed—fifty-fifty, and no complaints on either side?"

"It's not fair, but I agree."

"It's a right sizish little amount. As a matter of fact, I got an offer for that paper-mill stock that I'd thrown into our deposit box and kissed good-by. I realized"—and Harold gulped but went on gamely—"ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand—*dollars!* And you mean to tell me you're going to spend half of it on your selfish pleasures? May I ask how?"

"Why, that's simple. I'm sure you'll agree with me, my dear, that I need a vacation, and the boys can handle the office perfectly well."

"Continue, please."

Harold rose to his feet. He always felt stronger when those thick-soled shoes were solid beneath him. And it is forever testimony to the innate valor of the man that he looked her straight in the eye.

"I'm going to India and shoot a Royal Bengal tiger, and that—that's a fact."

Harold Johnson never enjoyed anything in his life as much as his preparations for his tiger hunt. First there were letters to travel agencies in India, and then, as the time grew short, hurry-up cablegrams at five dollars each. Camera films with "tropical packing" written plainly on the package! Antivenom in glass tubes for cobra bites, and a new skinning knife, with a clever verse attached, from the boys at the office. Last but not least, a rifle, very flat trajectory but with a muzzle impact of a clean five thousand pounds, a long bolt which if half thrown might jam the cartridge, but perfectly positive if handled cooly; in other words, as Harold explained to his bright-eyed friends, just the medical specific for a charging tiger.

But oh, Lord, how he hoped no tiger would ever charge him!

There was a full column in the leading Des Moines newspaper about Harold's proposed trip. It showed his picture, with the new sun helmet on his head and the new rifle tucked under his arm. But when he finally arrived in Calcutta to meet his outfitter, the latter's eyes must have opened very wide.

In writing to the agency, it seems that Harold had styled himself an experienced big-game hunter; the agent had taken him at his word and planned an expedition that would give his money's worth to the toughest old Nimrod in the game.

I should have liked to see that agent's face at the first sight of Harold. Even more should I have liked to see Harold's face when he heard what awaited him.

"I wanted to give you something new and different, Mr. Johnson," the agent said, "but—but I'm not sure you'll approve. If not, I can take you to the Central Provinces. There's good shooting there, comfortable resthouses, and no doubt you'd get your bag with less trouble than on the big trip."

"What is the big trip?" Harold asked stanchly.

"Well, it's to Northeast India—the Sadiya Frontier Tract. There's been no trouble with the Abors and Mishmis—they're the hill tribes—for some years, and the government has opened for shikar some forest reserves just inside the Inner Line. You see, on the frontier there's an inner line, where anyone can go, and an outer line, the extreme limit of British territory, the country between not being policed or fortified. There's some fine tigers there, big fellows, bison and water buffalo. But it's wild rough country, human sacrifice and head-hunting within a hundred miles, and if you'd like a little more civilized——"

But Harold was just as game, just as proud, with strangers as with friends. He gulped and said: “Of course we’ll take the big trip. That’s what I’m here for. The more excitement the better.”

But the agent had definite misgivings. He would, you know, after a first look at Harold. Later in the day he talked it over with his partner.

“I don’t know what we’ve let ourselves in for,” he said. “The Sadiya frontier is littered with tigers, and this man Johnson hardly seems the type. It wouldn’t be good for our business if he’s brought back in a basket. But I’ll give him Kalna Badur as guide, with some secret instructions. Badur is the quickest and steadiest shot in our outfit.”

“And the best timed,” said his partner with a wink.

If you’ll take a map of India, you’ll notice a railroad running north from Calcutta and branching off along the border of Bhutan generally northeast. This was Harold’s route. With him was a Bengali servant, some sort of native cook, and his chief guide and interpreter, Kalna Badur. Badur was mostly Gurkha—with the Sikhs the best stock in India. He and Harold got on well together from the start.

After thirty-six hours on the train from Calcutta, and several more on trucks and ferries, they fetched up at the town of Sadiya, on the Brahmaputra River near the Chinese border. Here they outfitted, and with oxcarts and elephants struck off into the Blue.

I like to picture Harold at this stage of the journey, heading deeper and deeper into the jungle, with tiger and wild elephant tracks at every ford, and an immense shikar elephant between his short legs. When the elephant was easing himself up and down hills—maybe you know how they pitch and roll on broken ground—Harold balanced himself with all the sangfroid he could muster, held on secretly with one hand, and wished that Dorothy could see him.

In the meantime they had picked up a whole native village, to work as trackers and coolies. These people were Mishmi stock, tame compared with their wild brethren in the hills, but as wild as March hares just the same. They belonged to the jungle—little, dark people, armed with bows and spears—and the jungle looked out of their eyes.

In the outfit was a girl, the headman’s daughter, whom Harold noticed at first casually, then with a queer uneasy interest. She was about fifteen, which means a mature woman among the plains tribes, but in the hills still a young

girl. She had been to a mission school in Sadiya, and spoke understandable English in that funny, chirping way that North Indian travelers know.

"Gud m'rneeng, Sahib," she would say, when he passed her in camp; and once when Badur was out scouting, he made use of her as an interpreter.

I wish I could trace for you all the stages of Harold's interest in the girl, and all his thoughts. At first he was principally impressed by the fact that she walked around camp, utterly unconcerned, with bared breasts. But after all, Harold argued, why not? Every people had its own idea of modesty. And the breasts of a young girl were one of her most beautiful features! All artists and such people of discernment knew this fact.

Although he had his tigers to consider, from time to time Cheetal—he soon learned her name—kept stealing into his thoughts, and always with a vague quickening of his pulse. She had a quick smile with flashing teeth, a childlike smile, but her face in repose had a pensive cast, a quick and lovely slope from cheekbones to chin that somehow suggested those marvelous faces of Buddha from Angkor Vat. And she was supple as pampas grass in the wind. By jingo, there wasn't a single social leader in Des Moines that wouldn't have envied her carriage—her head thrown up and back from carrying loads!

At night Harold liked to stroll over to his followers' campfire, mostly to talk to them through his interpreter about their gods and devils, but partly to see Cheetal's dusky face and naked upper body in the light from the blaze. She would get instantly to her feet with a quick clasp of her hands to her forehead, but he beckoned her back to her place. And afterwards it pleased him to lie in his tent and hear the murmur of her voice and her chuckling laugh as she sat late with her people, gnawing deer shanks and sucking out marrow.

Although she had been to a mission school, her ideas as to religion were a trifle sketchy. Originally an animist, she had had to make room for the God of the White Men in a pantheon already crowded with gods and demons. Most of her gods were a dangerous and malignant lot, and she was childishly pleased that the Father and Maharaja of all the gods felt kindly toward her. And she had been profoundly touched by the immortal story of the Star and the Manger. Still, she had managed fairly well. Of course she still employed charms and believed in puja—devil propitiation—and her ideas of right and wrong remained unchanged; yet on the whole the teaching had had a gentling influence on her wild heart.

And again Harold was tolerant. By gosh, he told himself, she had got more out of the Christian religion than many folks he knew!

As the agent had warned him, the country was littered with tigers. Every morning there were fresh tracks by the spring; every night he heard the brutes singing along the trails—a rumbling roar at spaced intervals—mingled with the trumpetings and crashings of wild elephants.

Every day he rode out on his elephant—Badur behind him, the mahout in front—hoping to meet a tiger, praying that he wouldn't. And in his anxiety he did not notice that although Badur always carried his own rifle carelessly in his lap, his fingers were always near the safety lever.

One morning they were threading their way through a still, dark forest when, with a crash of brush, a large tiger burst from a thicket and loped off through the trees.

"*Don't shoot, Sahib!*" Badur called. Of course he was right: it was a practically impossible shot, and Badur had the native habit of saving ammunition. But Harold did shoot. In the excitement of the moment his rifle jumped to his shoulder and went off.

An extraordinary thing happened. You can blame the jungle gods, if you are of a poetical turn of mind, or blind chance; but don't blame Harold. He had shot absolutely without aiming. It was not a case of subconscious strength, the power-of-the-mind sort of thing: Harold was not that kind of fellow. Yet the tiger turned a somersault and rolled over dead.

The bullet had gone straight through the brute's breast, the ideal *coup de grâce* from the old shikari's standpoint; for you understand that as a rule only a tenderfoot aims for a beast's head. When Badur climbed down from the elephant and saw the wound, his eyes bulged with amazement.

The tiger was a fine specimen, and just under the skin of his neck was a lump that proved to be an old arrow head. Instantly the mahout identified him as an old cattle-killer that the Mishmi tribesmen had known for years and had tried ineffectually to kill. Harold's reputation was immediately enormous. No matter what he did from now on, he was a great shikari, for the hill people never forget.

Both the mahout and Badur were in transports of exultation. Would you think Harold shared it? He would have loved to, heaven knows. But although he could fool the two natives, he could not fool himself. He knew

that he had fired without aiming and was no more entitled to credit than if the tiger had broken his own neck in flight.

Yet his painful calmness, enforced by his own inward-seeking, only added to Harold's prestige in the natives' eyes. Only *a pukka Sahib*, one of the greatest of all Sahibs, could remain in such a moment so remote and still.

In his excitement—the Gurkhas are an excitable people—Badur made a confession.

"Sahib, hear me! When you first came, I did not know what kind of Sahib you are, nor did those who met you in Calcutta know. They thought that because you are small of size and gentle of speech you might not be able to look *Bhag* in the face and kill him. So I was told to ride behind you with ready gun, and when you raised your gun to shoot, I was to shoot also, the reports sounding as one, and throw out my empty shell in secret. But when *Bhag* ran off through the trees, I did not raise my rifle. I knew there was no use, although I am known as a good shot.

"But now I know you, Sahib," Badur went on, his Gurkha eyes alight. "No more shall I ride behind you to protect you; it would be as a child who goes to protect his father. I can serve you better by scouting for sign, the hunting grounds of other *Bhag*, for you to come and kill."

It was the proper time for Harold to make his own confession. It would be not only honesty but plain common sense. But as always, that cussed pride of his rose and got him into trouble.

"It *was* a hard shot," he confessed, with that calm, self-questioning way of a great liar. "I was a little doubtful whether I could make it. But I knew your game, Badur—how you meant to shoot when I did—and I thought I'd try to teach you a little lesson. You may spend your time scouting from now on."

The celebration in camp that night could almost be called an orgy. There was a tremendous feed of wild hog; there were stone jars of rice spirit—and where they came from, in that jungle, Harold could not imagine. And then a local troubadour sang a long song extolling Harold's virtues, and the tribe roared, swaying to the chorus, while an old savage set the jungle throbbing with a drum made out of a hollow stump. Harold sat on a camp chair, the savages squatting on the ground around him, and thought how little half the

world knows of the other half, and how he himself had never really lived before tonight.

Among those who sat nearest him was little Cheetal. She seemed to take almost a proprietary interest in him. She said very little, but she smiled shyly when he met her eyes, and those eyes mystified him with their dark brilliance. Really beautiful, he told himself. Once he gave her a fatherly pat on the shoulder—I'm afraid he rather invented the provocation—and although the night was chill, her flesh was just as warm as the firelight made it appear.

It stirred him strangely. And still he couldn't quite get used to her naked breasts. The sight of them gave him a curious disconcerted feeling, a kind of vague regret.

She was just a savage, for all her childish English and her infantile Christianity. The wild, strange perfume of the jungle hung over her. Her little feet tucked under her were gray with ashes and thorn scars—wiry little feet with lively toes. But, by jingo, she didn't wear high heels!

After the feed was over and the people had cleared out to their grass huts, Badur lingered a moment.

"Sahib," he began, "do you like the little girl, Cheetal?"

Harold found himself sitting very still, a singular excitement stealing over him. "She's a nice little thing," he admitted. "I take an—er—fatherly interest in her."

"I was just thinking, Sahib, that if you wish I could send her to your tent. She thinks you are a great Sahib, and you have been kind to her. She would be glad to come."

"Do you mean"—Harold had trouble steadying his tone—"to *give* herself to me?"

"That would not be all. She would wash your clothes, sew on your buttons and serve your meals. She would not let the Bengali servant come near your tent. In the end you could give her *baksheesh*, if you desire—a few silver rupees—but she would be happy with nothing."

"Oh, I couldn't consider it."

"I beg your pardon, Sahib. I meant no harm. Many Sahibs have taken hill girls for their stay in India."

"Oh, I don't blame them. I'm not a prude about such things—I know how customs differ in different parts of the world. But I couldn't consider it. Really I couldn't."

"Then good night, Sahib. The Bengali has your bed ready."

"Wait just a minute. I'm—er—naturally curious about the customs of these people. Suppose the girl *did* come, wouldn't she lose the respect of her tribesmen?"

Badur smiled faintly. "If anything, Sahib, she would gain face. There's no restraint put on the young Mishmi girls, the same as with most hill people. Until they are married they are free to do what they like."

"That's very interesting. It is indeed. I must say, I'd never thought about it quite that way. Thank you for telling me, Badur—and—and I'll let you know later—what I decide."

"Right, Sahib."

Harold undressed in a daze. He heard the tigers roaring and the wild elephants trumpeting long after midnight.

And only two days later occurred another hunting incident that affected Harold's destiny. Just before sundown, he decided to walk up the dry nullah to a water hole, in the hope of shooting a sambar deer for the pot. It was only three hundred yards, and he didn't want to wait for the mahout to put on the elephant's pad. One Mishmi boy followed him, carrying his little motion-picture camera and his tea flask.

The sambar deer was there, but it had already been killed. It had been slain by the most terrible hunter in the jungle—and Harold turned the corner of the nullah and ran straight into her: a big tigress, crouching there over her prey.

They were not twenty yards apart. Their eyes met, Harold's mild blue eyes and the cruel yellow, basilisk eyes of the great cat poised there in all her terrifying beauty, framed against the jungle green.

It was a serious, an intensely dangerous situation. The tigress would probably make off—there were at least three chances in four. But on the fourth chance she would charge—one roaring yellow burst to break the nerve of any but the stoutest hunter.

Harold threw up his gun, his finger feeling for the trigger. If he had fired on his first impulse, I shudder to think of the consequences. He would

probably have only wounded the animal, and then she would surely have been on him before he could work his rifle bolt for a second shot.

But Harold held on, gallant little guy that he was. The thought flashed through his mind that he must kill that tiger or be killed, and he checked his desperate impulse to fire blindly, leveled the big rifle and drew down the sights until he looked through them squarely into the brute's eyes. Then, and not till then, did he press the trigger.

He pressed it: he didn't pull or jerk it. He did not miss. He could not have missed, with all the power of his heart and soul thrown into that second of aiming. The beast collapsed without a quiver. He would have shot again, to make sure, but the Mishmi boy stopped him. The tigress was dead.

Harold tried to keep cool. He had read of tiger hunters who opened their cigarette cases and lighted smokes without a tremor of their hands. But when he tried the trick on a cigar, the match broke and the wrapper all came off.

They had heard the shot in camp, and the whole outfit moved up in a body, little Cheetal included. The Mishmi boy told and acted out the story, while the little savages gasped and laughed and looked at Harold with that bright-eyed look he had seen so rarely and craved so profoundly. He stood silently in their midst, his lips curled in a fatherly smile such as he thought was proper for a truly *pukka* Sahib.

Harold had in his bag a few bottles of rum. Knowing Harold, you would have known it would be rum, not whisky, and he would have preferred grog if he had known what it was or how to get it. Every night he took a peg—rum's very bracing, you know—and tonight he took a peg and a half. Then he ate a good thick venison steak, and called in a loud voice for Badur.

"Yes, Sahib?"

"Badur, I'm a little tired, and am going to my tent."

"Yes, Sahib."

"And you may send Cheetal there, if she wants to come." He poured his nerve into it, and his voice held steady. And then, with a reactionary shiver and excusable human frailty: "I think I'd like to have a little chat with her, anyway."

Harold went into his tent and sat down on his cot. Even now, he did not believe it. He could not realize that it was actually he, Harold Johnson,

waiting here to keep an illicit assignation with a lady.

She wouldn't come. He didn't even want her to—but his bursting heart told him he lied. Anyway, she wouldn't come.

But she did come. He saw the firelight on her dusky skin, and then the flash of her white teeth as she smiled.

"You send for me, Sahib?" she asked, in her best English.

"Well—that is—yes, I did, as a matter of fact. Come in, won't you? We'll have a little chat."

She was not in the least embarrassed. They take life simply, you know, they who war with realities. She fastened the strings of his tent door, tidied up his table and turned up the wick of his lantern, then with a faint smile took the seat he offered her beside him.

He talked to her nervously a few minutes. He asked inane questions about her life, her schooling, her beliefs and customs. Meanwhile, fifty years' conditioning was making a last frantic effort to save him, or defeat him—whichever way you happen to regard it. She was not a white girl. Her skin was definitely brown. Yet when she gave him again that dim little friendly smile, some last tether snapped within him, and lifting her dark face, he kissed her on the lips.

His first sensation was of incredible astonishment. He had forgotten that a kiss could be so meaningful, so utterly sweet.

"Cheetal?"

"Sahib!"

"Would you like to stay with me, and be my girl, the rest of the trip?"

"*Bas.*" She had forgotten her English.

"It won't make you any trouble? You won't be sorry afterward?"

"No, Sahib. I be glad."

"You know I'm going away, back to America, in a few weeks—and—and I'd have to leave you here."

"*Bas."*

"And there is a *mem-sahib* at home." It was true; he had almost forgotten.

"*Bas.* But it is a long way, Sahib, where the sun sets."

Yes, it was a long way, another world.

He was very gentle with little Cheetal. She had not dreamed that a man who could face *Bhag* and kill him could be so. And he was her first love!

The Bengali servant did not come to Harold's tent again. Little Cheetal would not stand for it. She alone repaired the thorn tears in his shirts, sewed on his missing buttons and washed his clothes.

She kept track of all his outfit, held his soap and towels when he washed his face and even resented Badur's cleaning his big tiger gun. But she wouldn't insult him by eating with him. When he urged her, she smiled and shook her head, and sat in the corner of the tent with her back turned. And she made her bed on the tent floor, below his cot at his feet.

Harold remembered afterward her every favor, almost every word and gesture, and especially he remembered the delicate little half turn of her head, her chin thrown up toward her right shoulder, which was her assent to any request or command. What he did not remember was his own thoughts, his own mental reaction to the extraordinary thing that was happening to him.

I think he was unable to view it as his own experience. It was more like something he had read or dreamed. He was only aware of a deep-flowing happiness that abided with him day and night, that was there waiting for him whenever he turned to it, that filled the intervals between one immediate interest and another. Sometimes at night he would waken, listen a startled moment to her peaceful breathing at his feet, then drift with a sense of utter well-being into sleep.

This and no more was enough, heaven knew. Nothing more need ever happen to him. But something did happen, something unforeseen and out of bounds.

Harold had earned his tiger skin. He had won Cheetal. But this other thing seemed simply the tribute that the gods pay to those who defy them.

Beyond the hills, in a trackless region of steep-cut ridges and broken narrow gullies, lived the wild Abors, a persistent thorn in the flesh of the British government. They had raided to the inner line two years before, murdered and burned, and scampered back to their mountain strongholds, but the British had sent a punitive expedition, killed their leader, burned their thatch and laid waste their crops, and supposed they had been taught a

lesson they would remember for thirty years. Otherwise, of course, Harold would not have been permitted to penetrate the country.

But the British had failed to reckon on the deepest tribal instinct of the Abors, which is revenge. As blood feudists, our own Kentucky mountaineers are meek and mild in comparison. The Abors had determined to kill the first English Sahib they could get their hands on.

In some fashion they got word of Harold's hunting trip. Their oracles and priestly hocus-pocus told them that the time was auspicious for a raid. Of course it never entered their heads that Harold might not be an Englishman; no doubt they thought that all white men were English. So one night they came stealing out of their steep, dark ravines, with spears and knives and poisoned arrows.

It was about eight o'clock on a pitch-dark night. Badur had not yet returned from a scouting trip; Harold had just finished dinner and was sitting on a camp stool by the fire. His loaded rifle was leaning within reach, but all his extra ammunition was in the lock box in his tent.

Suddenly there was a humming sound, a wicked, deadly hiss, and something streaked by Harold's cheek. It was a poisoned arrow, and he distinctly saw it plunge into a tree beyond the campfire.

The next instant pandemonium, as Harold used to put it, broke loose. There was a volley of unearthly yells and howls, just at the edge of the firelight, and then a barrage of arrows and spears. How they all missed him he cannot understand. Very modestly he ascribes it to chance. But I think they missed him partly for the same reason that an amateur sportsman is likely to miss a tiger, no matter how short the range. To the wild Abors, little Harold was dangerous game.

True, this Sahib, as they saw him through rifts in the firelit leaves, was not so large as the men who marched in line to burn their thatch, not much larger than themselves, but he sat very straight and looked quite fierce. And when the first arrow missed, he snatched up his rifle and began to blaze it at their dodging figures in the dark. It was as swift and terrifying a retaliation as a tiger's charge.

But there were at least forty of the Abors—and only one of Harold. His men had no weapons except brush knives, so with their wives and children they simply scooted into the cover of darkness at the first Abor yell. The raiders did not pursue them. They wanted the Sahib. But his rapid fire, and

quite possibly his yells—I always like to picture Harold standing there, yelling like a red Indian—held them at bay for a few vital seconds.

Harold's rifle contained five cartridges. He fired them all without a jam. Then he started sprinting toward his tent to get more.

But instantly he saw that the Abors had cut him off. Before him and behind him they were closing in, still warily, but cocking their emotional triggers for a last stabbing, hacking rush. They were to the right of him, too, and to the left, in the pitch-black dark, there was—

There was a sudden low call.

"*Sahib! Come, Sahib!*"

Harold came. A little hard hand shot out of the dark and clutched his. Then he felt himself running blindly through the thickets, with someone beside him who seemed to see in the dark like a wolf, someone who held fast to his hand and snatched him along.

He didn't know how far they ran, he and his unseen guide. He did not remember the thorns that ripped his clothes and tore his skin, the logs he was dragged over, the thickets he was yanked through. The next thing he clearly recalled was being haled into a bamboo clump, and then jerked down flat on the earth. He was literally sobbing for breath, but a hand pressed tight over his lips to hold back the sound.

And he remembered clearly the other hand and arm thrown around his neck, pressing him close, as though to protect him from harm.

It seemed hours that they lay there, Harold and Cheetal; probably it was only minutes. On all sides they heard the Abors yelling and beating brush, and saw the flare of their torches under the trees. Once one of the murderous little brutes approached within fifty feet, but together they held Harold's breath, and he passed on.

When the lights dimmed, they rose and crept on, very softly now. Presently they struck a small stream, and Cheetal made Harold get in and wade. He was too dazed at the time to think why. Cheetal's naked feet left no prints in the mold of the trail, but Harold was wearing his logger boots with hobnails.

Then, it seemed, they climbed a ridge, tramped for endless miles along its crest and finally dipped down into a brush-grown valley.

"And here, Sahib," Cheetal told him, "you go sleep."

He obeyed. He was exhausted. Only dimly he knew that Cheetal sat beside him all that long, chill night, warming him with her body, her hands roaming constantly over his own hands and his face to drive off insects.

In the first gray light she wakened him, and they trudged on. On the way she pulled up a plant with a long yellow root: Harold never was able to learn its species.

"Eat, Sahib," she said. And he ate.

They traveled until the sun was well up, then paused in a warm, open glade. "Now Cheetal, she sleep," she told him. "I am so veree tired."

It seemed quite natural, Harold remembered, for them to be alone there in that illimitable jungle, she curled up asleep, he keeping watch beside her. All she had done for him did not seem strange, either, but just the natural order of things.

Cheetal opened her eyes shortly after noon, and at once sprang to her feet. Without a word she took Harold's hand, and led him up the ridge and away. All afternoon they tramped, rough country mostly, heartbreaking steeps and painful descents, and camped at sunset on the edge of a small lake.

Camped! They had nothing to camp with. If you imagine the subtropic jungle as an Enoch Arden island of luscious fruits and mighty nuts you are on the wrong track. All afternoon Cheetal's eyes were darting, but the bitter jungle fruits were green, and all she had found was a handful of roots, not half enough for a meal.

She laid them at Harold's feet, her hands clasped at her forehead, but he shook his head and divided them.

"It's fifty-fifty from now on, Cheetal," he told her. And this was the nearest they ever came to a marriage vow.

That night they risked a small fire—the wood was green; there was no ax to cut it with, only Harold's skinning knife, and Cheetal's wood-skill and patience alone kept it burning. He would never forget how she crouched over it, blowing at it with pursed lips, and making little whistling sounds as she inhaled, its meager light meanwhile burnishing her bared breast and arms.

"But no boil water," she told him sadly. "No pot, no boil."

For she remembered that all his drinking water, and even the water he used for the little brush for his teeth, must be boiled. For some reason

beyond her ken, uncooked water was bad for Sahibs.

When he lay down to sleep, he made Cheetal lie opposite the fire, so she could have her share of warmth in that piercing mountain chill. But as he was drifting off, too tired to protest further, he felt her lie beside him and press him close. All night he slept with the fire on one side, Cheetal's loving warmth on the other.

Four days more they wandered through the jungle, an adventure in its way as heroic as the ten years' journey of Ulysses. On the morning of the fifth day they struck a man-made trail. Three hours later they saw a military telephone line, and followed it down. And in mid-afternoon they came up to a remote outpost of British law, garrisoned by native troops.

The native sergeant turned out the guard at the sight of a Sahib; and Harold managed to raise his arm in what he fancied was a snappy military salute. And the next thing he remembers clearly was jolting along in a government lorry, headed for the town of Sadiya.

It was the end of Harold's great adventure, but not the end of his story.

He did not return to camp. Government officials had already visited it and searched in vain for Harold's belongings. Not only his tiger skins, but his cameras and every other article he possessed had been taken by the raiders. All of Cheetal's tribe who had escaped the attack had gone to Sadiya for protection, and here it was that Harold said good-by to her.

He called her outside the native rest-house. It was dusk; the snow peaks of Tibet were vast dark shapes against the graying sky. To all that he told her —and I doubt that either of them knew quite what he was saying—she touched her hands to her forehead in acknowledgment.

She was not crying. It was not fitting that a Mishmi handmaiden should show pain before her lord. Her eyes looked only very large and dark. And very simply she accepted the thousand-rupee note that he gave her. She had never seen even a fifty-rupee note before.

"But I hardly need it now," she told him forlornly. "I have prayed to the God Jesus—and did what was needful that the old gods be not offended—but my prayer was not answered."

"Do you mean," he faltered, "th-that you really wanted——"

"Sahib?"

"I see. I beg your pardon, Cheetal. I didn't understand."

"But I shall give Sahib's gift to the Political Officer Sahib to keep for me," she told him in her quaint-sounding English. "And when some village chief, old and toothless, offers my father many cattle and some silver to buy me, I can pay the dower price and be free."

"But you'll marry sometime, Cheetal. Some young man of your own people——"

"It may be so, Sahib. There is no law among us forbidding a widow to marry. It may be, after many moons and many rains, that the aching heart will ease a little, and the tears dry, and the arms cease to grope in the darkness. But no father of my sons can ever make me forget one of Sahib's smiles, or his least careless word, or one touch of his lips."

"But we won't say good-by forever. I'll come back in a year or two and see you again."

"No, Sahib."

"You don't want me to come?"

"No, Sahib." The fingers of her little dark hands met on her forehead in entreaty.

"Why not, Cheetal?"

"Sahib is going back to his own land. The moon has reached the full and begun to wane. It is another world, where the sun sets; it is too long a road for Sahib's tired feet. And besides, I could not bear——"

"What is it?"

"I am not a *mem-sahib*. We women of the jungle grow old quickly. It is not fitting that my lord should see me then. I would want him to remember me as I was when I found favor in his eyes."

Harold did not pursue the point. He did not wholly understand, but he felt something deep and strange which must have been akin to awe. . . And then she began talking about his shirts.

She had repaired the tears in his khaki shirt, but a button was missing from the cuff of the white shirt, the one that Sahib had bought only two days before at the bazaar, and she had not been able to match it. This must be left to the Bengali—and her little brown nose wrinkled in disdain—who would go with Sahib on the T-rain. And Sahib's soap was to be found in the little pocket of his new handbag.

“And Sahib will remember to take the quinine that Doctor Sahib ordered?”

“Yes, Cheetal.”

“And he will not walk bareheaded in the sun on the station platform?”

“No, Cheetal.”

“And the blister on Sahib’s foot? Will he make his handmaidens on the great ship wash and tend it every day?”

Harold smiled dimly. “Yes, Cheetal.”

“Then—then,” and her eyes met his, “ ‘you have—my leave—to go.’ ”

Answering the proud, sad little jest, Harold touched his hands to his forehead. “Good-by, Cheetal.”

“Good-by, Sahib, my lord.”

“You—you won’t be sorry—for anything?”

“While water runs and stars shine, I will be glad.”

So he kissed her on the mouth, and went away.

Although until now he had been afraid of the air, Harold crossed India on an air liner and enjoyed the trip. Then he sailed from Bombay.

The story of his escape from Abor raiders, “by the aid of a faithful body servant,” had gone ahead of him by telegraph and cable, so three reporters came to the dock in New York to meet him. They questioned him, looked at him with a startled expression in very bright eyes, and wrote glowing stories about him which their papers printed with his picture.

It was believed, the stories ran, that he had killed from three to six of the Abor raiders. He was a big-game hunter of international reputation. In addition to the raiders, he shot three man-eating Royal Bengal tigers. His heroic body servant was a child of the jungle, and his name was Cheetal.

When Harold’s train drew into the station at Des Moines, the Kiwanis Club was there in a body to meet him. They slapped him on the back, called him an old buzzard and paraded him all the way home. Dorothy, wearing a new mink coat, rode beside him, her nose slightly elevated as though detecting a malodor.

Of course the reflected glory in which she shone only fed the creature's malice. And the Kiwanians had scarcely left the house before she was back at her old tricks.

"So you lost your three tiger skins, did you?"

It hardly seemed worth his trouble to answer, but his native politeness prevailed. "There were only two. Yes, I lost them. A pity, wasn't it? The Abors stole them. You know they use tigers' whiskers for poison. It's ground up and fed to their enemies, and acts as an irritant on their digestive tracts."

"How interesting! And your photographs were stolen, too!"

"Yes."

"So you had a body servant, did you? I should have liked to see you being waited on. Babied you, I suppose."

"When I was very tired."

"Probably took off your boots, too. Likely enough rubbed your feet for you."

A dim smile curled Harold's lips. "Yes," he answered, "and warmed them. The nights were quite cold."

That smile must have given Dorothy a pang, although she couldn't have understood why. She did realize that her shafts were not going home the way they used to, so she loosed the deadliest she had.

"I suppose you've already caught up on all the important news," she said in her sweetest tones. "All your friends are about as you left them. By the way, I had a note from Stan Ashcroft."

"Yes?" He sat down, leaving her standing. He was tired from the excitement.

"He has just crossed the mountains of Sumatra on foot, one of the first white men to achieve it, if not the very first. He killed ten or twelve tigers, and single-handed fought and *conquered* a whole tribe of head-hunters."

"Well, that's fine. I sure envy him. Fine fellow, Ashcroft. Let's get him to come down next summer. I'd sure love to hear him tell about it."

And Harold spoke with utter sincerity.

Time ran on. By all outward signs, Harold's world was much the same. He continued to be successful in business; he took such honors as came his way; he had a fair share of friends. He did not talk a great deal about his

experiences in India, and with the passing years, his friends forgot what little they knew about them. On the whole, he was singularly cheerful, though Dorothy noticed that he liked to sit alone, gazing into the fire. She did not understand that faraway look in his eyes.

He went on no more big-game hunts. His health was not quite so good as it had been. In 1929, when he was sixty years old, he turned over to his subordinates the practical operation of his business. He was growing a little deaf, a trifle absent-minded, and the sun was not quite so bright.

In the summer of 1934, when Harold had just turned his sixty-fifth birthday, he was walking in an aimless fashion across an intersection in the business district of Des Moines. He stepped out from behind a parked automobile and was struck a glancing blow by a passing truck. Although conscious and in no pain whatever, he was rushed to the hospital.

His friend Doctor Hargrave examined him—and sent for Dorothy. When the two entered his room he seemed to be asleep; actually, he was in a pleasant half-doze. He heard them distinctly, but it was too much trouble to open his eyes.

"More scared than hurt," Dorothy was saying.

"I wish I could be as certain," Hargrave answered in a low voice. "If he isn't hurt any more than he's scared, he can walk home from this hospital today. Harold never struck me as being the scary kind."

Harold opened his eyes. At first he looked only at his old friend, the doctor. "No, I'm not hurt," he said distinctly. "I must confess I'm not scared either. But I *am* dying."

Dorothy gave one deep, sharp gasp. "What do you mean, Harold! What are you saying? You're *not* dying!"

Harold looked at her for the first time, "Don't answer me, woman," he said. He said it perfectly distinctly.

She stood there, her mouth open. Harold eyed her gravely. She did not make a sound.

"I've something to tell you," he went on. "No, you needn't step out, doctor; there's no secret about it. Dorothy, you sent my fine white-tailed deer head to the attic."

Doctor Hargrave may have thought at first that Harold was semi-delirious, but Dorothy knew otherwise. She tried to speak, but no sound came.

“No, don’t speak,” Harold told her so very quietly. “You have no call to speak. And Dorothy, you sent my fifty-four-inch moose head to the attic, too.”

“I’m sorry, Harold.” It was a gasp, not speech.

“You are a trifle late. Just a trifle late. And my Osborn’s caribou, with the rare double eye-guard, went up there, too.”

“*Harold!*”

But Harold raised himself on his elbow, and Hargrave said afterwards that his eyes burned with an unearthly fire.

“But there was one trophy you didn’t send to the attic,” he went on, his voice ringing. “She was in the front room all the time. By God, she was even nearer than that! *She was in my heart.*”

And these were the last words of Harold Johnson.

Masks Off

In April, 1933, I flew from Karachi to Athens over the route described in "Masks Off." It was only a little more than half of my air trip that had begun at far-off Bangkok. Emergency landing fields were far-flung and few in Asia, and other safety devices of today were in a preliminary stage. My fear of what would happen in case of a forced landing helped to write the story.

It proved an extraordinary success as a magazine feature, and justified the editor in sending me the largest sum I ever received for a short story. Most readers can take off in full assurance of a singular adventure.

Bowing his black, rugged head, Sam Bellamy got his six feet of height and football shoulders through the little metal door of the big cabin plane bound from India to England. At once a boyish-looking steward, neat and trig in the British fashion, took him in charge.

"Mr. Bellamy, sir? Very well, sir. We won't be crowded today, and you can have a double seat to yourself. Will you sit aft—or would you care to go forward where we have extra seats?"

As Sam considered the question, he was also vaguely considering the steward's accent. Sam had been long enough in India—in the unimportant post of American vice-consul at one of the western ports—to know British accents fairly well. They were an interesting study. American accents usually meant very little—a seaboard Senator was likely to talk like a midwestern farmer—but the speech of an Englishman often told the whole story of his life. This clear-eyed little man was cockney-born, but he had bettered himself by study and close attention to his masters, until he stood as the best type of British servant, holding down a responsible and dignified job.

"If I may suggest it, sir, you'll have more company back here," the steward went on. "A bit lonesome, up forward, all the way to London."

"Then I'll sit right here," Sam told him.

"We'll be off in a minute, sir. . . I'll put your dispatch case handy. . . Now if you'll excuse me——"

Sam hung his sun helmet in the rack overhead and settled himself in the seat like one to whom a six-day flight to England was a common thing.

Actually it would be his first trip aloft, but this fact he did not mean to publish. Aged twenty-six and proud with the thin-skinned pride of youth, he hoped fervently not to appear excited before those calm-eyed English, his fellow passengers.

Really, some excitement was his due. To fly from Karachi to London was practically as safe as traveling in a ship, yet the route was so new, the deserts to cross so wide, and the big four-motored plane so gallant, that by any man's standards it constituted a real adventure. Besides, it was a luxury Sam could scarcely afford. His meager salary as vice-consul would not stand many hundred-pound tickets; and only his determination to spend every possible week of his leave on American soil had made him take to the air. Finally, he would travel in remarkably exciting company. The Bombay papers had been full of it for weeks.

He was the first passenger aboard; there had been no reporters to delay him for a farewell message. But at least three of his fellow passengers were surrounded by respectful throngs. One of these, the most famous, was now just outside Sam's window, shaking hands with half the dignitaries of the Indian Empire. This was no less a personage than Viscount Harbordton, head of the latest and most powerful commission sent out from England to bring calm to stormy India.

"Pronounced Hobton," Sam told himself, with a wry smile. "And isn't he the Rock of Gibraltar of British tradition!"

Lord Harbordton was rock-like in many respects. His lean cheeks, cleanly cut, seemed like gray flint. His gray eyes were stony; his facial bones, too large for his spare flesh, gave him a knob of a chin and bulged upward in a noble-looking arch on his long Norman nose. Even under Karachi's searing sun his tall, fine figure looked cold and gray, as might his own granite statue.

Sam had had plenty of opportunity to read Harbordton's amazing career. As the younger son of an obscure new baron, he had risen through sheer ability and strength in statecraft to be the virtual chief of the reactionary wing, the hope and stronghold of the most bitter Tory feeling in the British Empire. His visit to India had been of tremendous political importance. His recommendations on his return to London might mean a complete reversal of British colonial policy.

Those recommendations had been carefully guarded from the native press, but Sam could guess their content. The only dogs that Lord Harbordton seemed to like were fox-hounds and setters: the underdog was

dirt beneath his feet. His answer to smoldering revolt in India would be a deluge of cold steel.

He was traveling alone. His secretary had met an odd accidental death in Simla.

He came grimly into the cabin and, without a glance at the fluttering steward, took the seat across the aisle from Sam.

The next passenger to enter the plane was quite in contrast to the famous statesman, yet he, too, was a distinguished figure. His clerical clothes identified him as Bishop Scott, who Sam knew was returning to England after visiting his daughter at an Indian army post. His skin was pinkish-white, not gray like Harbordton's; his face was round and plump, not lean and bony; his eyes were fat and benevolent, not deep-set and hard. He paused in the doorway, beaming on the steward.

"Are you not—give me a moment—Alfred Horner?" he asked the little man in a voice which Sam irreverently called syrupy, but which worked wonders in certain fashionable churches.

Horner turned quite pale with pleasure. "I wouldn't 'ave thought you'd remember, my lord."

"I pride myself that I never forget one of my own. I christened you in—let me see—was it nineteen-hundred and eleven?"

"Nineteen-hundred and ten, my lord."

"To be sure. Now show me where I am to sit. Where the view is good, and where—ah—in case of accident——"

The voice droned off, and Sam's attention was drawn to a last-minute arrival, now in a tug-of-war with a native porter for the possession of his handbag. This man was not, the native knew, a "proper sahib." He knew it by his clothes and manner; otherwise he would not dare be so persistent.

"But I'll carry it myself, I tell you," the man was protesting in a shrill voice that streamed through the cabin door.

But in the end he yielded. Men with voices of that precise pitch usually did yield, Sam thought. They were the kind to be pushed aside while the world rushed by.

He was in the way of an anticlimax to the two lords who had preceded him. Sam could hardly imagine a more insignificant figure. True, he was middle height, but he looked shorter than Horner. He had colorless hair, pale

lashes, and eyes pale-blue and featureless as china marbles. The only conspicuous thing about him was his untidy dress. His flashy cravat was badly tied, his shirt cuffs soiled, and his vest unevenly buttoned. Three small cuts on his newly-shaven face indicated a nervous hand.

He hesitated, faltered, then selected the seat that faced Viscount Harbordton's, across the reading table. His lordship did not glance up.

"I want my bag beside me," the man was insisting to the embarrassed steward.

"There's no room here, sir," Horner answered kindly. "But I'll set it just aft, where you can get at it when you like. Would you care to get something out of it now?"

The man got up, with an odd, strained look, walked aft, and knelt beside his cheap-looking bag. As it opened, Horner came up behind him, ready to help him in the trained British-servant fashion. The steward glanced at the contents and gave a little start.

"You have firearms, sir?"

"What of it?"

"It's against the regulations, sir, to have them in your bag on the ship. You must let me carry them to the captain, to keep for you."

At that moment the captain—a young blond Englishman with clear, crow-footed, airman eyes—swung aboard. Horner handed him the pistol.

It happened that Sam liked guns. Small-game shooting was one of the compensations of his meager job in India. But he instinctively bristled at a gun like this. It was the mail-order type, cheaply made, brightly nickeled, inconspicuous in a thug's pocket but quite adequate to kill a man.

"It would save delay—explanations to the police and all that—if you'd tell me why you happen to be carrying this," Captain Beason said in casual tones.

"Why shouldn't I carry it? India is an unsafe country to do business in—your cursed British oppressions have made it so—and I got it to protect my property."

His cracked voice streamed through the compartment, but Lord Harbordton did not look up from his book.

The newcomer—his name was Korlak, he said, and Sam spotted his red passport as American—had no reservations. He had decided to take the

plane at the last moment: he would buy a ticket to Bagdad, where he had rush business. He paid in ten-pound notes, and Sam could not help but gasp at the bulk of his purse.

Korlak returned to his seat; the blades began to whirl and clouds of dust dissolved native fieldhands and visiting dignitaries into one gray blur. But one passenger was still missing. Sam noted her absence because he had been reading about her, to the point of acute annoyance, for the past month. He had been shown her, rifle in hand, over a dead tiger; as being received by an important native king; as gazing, with a rapt expression, at the Taj Mahal. Worse still, his bored perusals of snobbish English magazines had acquainted him with her months before.

She was *the* Lady Darcy Hall, world traveler and an authentic member of the very oldest and most exalted British aristocracy. Her father's earldom went back to the War of the Roses: indeed, her lofty position had become such an old story to her that she ignored it completely. She even dared be an individualist. Her comings and goings, and the occasional startling things she said and did, had furnished reams of chit-chat for the society columns. Sam had heard enough about her for her to be forty, but she was only twenty-four.

"And I hope she's gone and missed the boat," Sam growled to himself.

But Lady Darcy very rarely missed what she really wanted to catch. A slim figure burst from a dust-veiled group beside the plane and took the little metal steps in two leaps. The next instant Sam sensed her standing beside him.

He did not look up. He would emulate Lord Harbordton. He'd be hanged if he would show the slightest interest in her. A curious stubbornness, as well as a full share of cross-grained American pride, were prominent characteristics of Sam Bellamy.

The steward closed the door; watching through the window Sam saw the big right wheel get into motion. He glued his eye upon it. It gathered speed. Presently it made its first tentative leap. Smoothly, miraculously, the great ship took the air.

But it happened that he was the only passenger of the five who saw the ground slanting and falling away beneath the wheels. Lord Harbordton did not miss one word of his book. Korlak sat staring at the statesman's shirt-front with a look of trance. Bishop Scott bent over his table, his hand shading his eyes. Horner, lingering worshipfully by his chair, suspected that

this earthly saint was praying for the safety of all their lives. Lady Darcy's behavior was frankly out of keeping with the customs of her class. Although there were plenty of extra sections, she carefully chose the seat across the table from and facing Sam; and calmly fixed her clear gray eyes upon his face.

Presently he glanced up, and their eyes met. And then his heart—young, free, and until now perfectly steady and trustworthy—threatened also to take off and go soaring to the sky.

Sam could not understand. He believed he was the victim of a ridiculous illusion. Even though it were real, it could have no meaning.

Granted she was the best type of country-raised English girl. In spite of her slim figure and small bones—her delicate features and sunny coloring—she could land a threshing salmon, tramp the grouse moors all day, and ride to hounds like a witch. But what was all that to him? He owned no salmon rivers, leased no shooting box, and the only horses he had ever sat were his uncle's plow teams on an Illinois farm.

Wait! There was a look a little forlorn about her mouth. There lay a clew to the mystery.

Somehow that wistfulness, that little touch of common, lonely, lowly earth, might somehow sweep a stranger's distant admiration into an intimate dream.

"Nice take-off," she began—as any ordinary girl might begin. So perfect were the acoustical properties of the closed cabin that Sam heard her with ease.

"My first experience," he confessed.

"I wish it were mine. I'm getting just a little fed-up with nice take-offs. I almost wish——"

"Don't!" Sam glanced overside at the littling earth.

"Oh, nothing will happen! Captain Beason knows his—what is it you say in America?—onions." She laughed gayly.

"We haven't said that for quite a while, now. I think it was *yams*, the last I heard. But how did you know I am an American?"

"How could I mistake you? The horn-rimmed glasses——"

"But I'm not wearing my horn-rimmed glasses——"

"No, but you have them in your bag. Element'ry, my dear Watson! I can see the little dent between your eyes, and besides, all Americans wear horn-rimmed glasses, whether they need 'em or not. It's a national obsession."

"Almost as bad as tea with the British."

They had an hour's rapid fire. Sam was so busy forging and hurling shafts that he forgot his introspections, and everything else in the world save his delight.

"What's your name?" she asked simply and gravely.

"Sam Bellamy."

"I suppose you know mine. I've been making a holy show of myself all over India. It was great fun for me, but it must be harrowing for innocent bystanders who have to read about it."

Sam caught her frank spirit. "It *was* a bit tiresome, to tell the truth."

"Always tell me the truth, and we'll be friends. I'm so sick of liars. This cabin is full of them." She was not jesting now. There was a passing intensity in her eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"Old Hob, for instance. Sorry—I mean Lord Harbordton. He's lied to himself and the country for years. If he'd just tell the truth and be natural, he'd turn out quite a human, decent old man. As it is, he spoils every dinner party people have to invite him to."

Sam opened his good brown eyes. "What about Bishop Scott? I know you wouldn't imply——"

"I only wish our little steward wouldn't hang so worshipfully upon his words. No, my friend, yours is the only honest face in sight, and that's why I sat down with you."

"You forget Horner—the steward."

"I beg your pardon—and his. I wouldn't wonder but he's the nicest human being on board, not even excepting you."

"I'm sure of it. Of course, we won't get to know the rest of the ship-crew. But you haven't given me your expert opinion of Korlak."

"Is that his name? He interests me immensely. I'd have sat down by him if I could have got out of talking to old Hob. What do you think about him?"

“I don’t like him.”

“I’m afraid I don’t either. He’s so weak that he makes people sick, and so they kick him—and—and I’d like to kick him, too. It’s cruel but natural. You know the jackals that come to the rubbish heaps outside the Indian villages? They hate themselves for not being able to kill their own meat, but they hate the villagers that supply the rubbish even more. And occasionally a jackal goes mad——”

At that very instant Korlak was trying to strike up a conversation with Lord Harbordton.

“I’ve been reading about you, sir,” he said. “Don’t you think British troops in India do more harm than good?”

The nobleman did not look up from his book. Possibly he did not hear.

“I say, sir! Can’t you answer a civil question? I tell you that Gandhi is the greatest man in the world today!”

Lord Harbordton’s eyebrows rose and fell in a brief acknowledgment, utterly heartless, willfully blind. “Oh, really?” Apparently he had not even stopped reading.

Darcy shrugged her slim shoulders. “There’s an example,” she told Sam. “He’s acting a lie right now. He hasn’t an idea what he’s reading, thinking so hard about what that vile little man said. But no, he can’t talk to him a few minutes and get on some basis of human understanding. He has to go on playing the part he has written for himself—the uncompromising Tory of old England. No wonder the world is full of wars!”

“Look at Korlak’s face,” Sam said.

“I know. White with fury. If human beings would only treat each other half as decently as they treat dogs——”

Soon their quiet grave talk moved to other subjects. The hours sped. The desert crept, a miraculous seven-league creep, below. At noon they were at Gwadar, that wild city in Baluchistan, a week’s camel journey from their take-off.

Sam and Darcy walked together to inspect a group of Arabs camped back of the rest house. These were haughty-looking sons-of-the-thirst, but at the girl’s frank request, they mounted their horses and posed for her camera.

At lunch the passengers had their first chance to mingle. Bishop Scott told a number of dull jokes, while Horner lingered behind his chair glowing

with pride. Lord Harbordton ignored Sam and Korlak—"We're birds of a feather, as far as his nibs is concerned," Sam whispered to Darcy—but was polite and almost affable to the Earl's daughter. Korlak sat brooding, while weird lights chased each other across his pale eyes.

That afternoon they flew over the Gulf of Oman, looked down at its odd purple tints, then stopped for the night in a new tent camp on the Persian Gulf. As the light still held, a young Arab offered to guide them for a call on the local sheik, in an old walled town not far from the landing field.

All except Korlak elected to go. They were led through a number of guarded doors, down a dark passage, and finally into a gaudy chamber where the Sheik sat in state.

Coffee was served, a tablespoonful at a time, in an adequate number of cups. Custom demanded that if they accepted one cup, they must drink three: Darcy made sure by taking four. Lord Harbordton, suspecting insanitary methods in the kitchen, waved the beverage away.

With the coffee came an immense tray filled with some sticky substance that disconcerted even Darcy. Certainly it did not look appetizing. But when she was handed one of the two spoons, she dug in cheerfully. It proved to be a kind of Turkish delight, not precisely good but a long way from bad; and Sam took an enthusiastic turn at the spoon.

Meanwhile it seemed that he and Darcy had known each other all their lives.

After leaving the castle, they strolled through the narrow, evil-smelling streets and returned to camp. After dinner, the Sheik repaid their call, and there was a hurried consultation among the passengers as to what hospitality to offer him. As a Son of the Prophet, he could accept none of the company's good drinks. Darcy finally solved the problem with two bars of sweet chocolate, which the desert chieftain gobbled with avidity.

"Dirty hog," Lord Harbordton scorned. "Darcy, I don't see why you don't show him the door."

"He didn't show me the door. Yet he probably thinks I'm a shameless baggage, not to wear a veil. I shan't let an Arab outdo me in human tolerance."

The new moon and the fabulous white stars drew the girl far from the tents to the edge of the desert. Sam saw her go, and followed her with

hungry eyes until the darkness swallowed up her form. No doubt she wanted to be alone. What did a girl of her gifts, the toast of princes, want of a dub like him? She had been kind, true—but she was also kind to a fat Arab sheik. Better go to his tent, light his pipe, and begin the long job of driving this sky-madness out of his heart and brain.

This decision made, he marched out of the rest tent straight in the direction the girl had gone.

Soon he saw a wraith-like figure on the silver sand. It spoke without turning its head.

"I thought you would come."

"Do you mind?"

"No—I'm rather glad. I'm even *very* glad. I'd be a pig, not to share this marvelous night with someone."

"Would you rather have me—or Lord Hob?"

"Hob, of course. His society is elevating. But I won't mind falling to your level tonight."

He stood beside her and felt the warmth of her bare arm not a quarter of an inch from his hand. "How did you know I would come?"

"You're a man, aren't you—young and burly—and I'm the only girl in the vicinity. Of course, I may not be your type—you might even prefer those mysterious-looking Arab ladies—but I'm all there is handy. And if you hadn't come—I'd have been mighty disappointed in you, Sam."

Seeing him start, she bit her lip in mock chagrin. "Blimey, what a slip! Won't I ever learn not to be for'ard with young gentlemen? Oh, Mr. Bellamy, I've tried so 'ard to act the perfect lady——"

"See here, Darcy." Sam spoke sternly.

"Yes, Sam."

"If you don't stop ragging me, you know what I'm going to do?"

"I can guess." This in a very faint voice. "You so big—and burly——"

"And I'm not doing it for a joke. I'm doing it because I want to, powerful' bad. And I'm not punishing you for ragging me. That's just an excuse—for something I meant to do all the time."

"Spoken like a man, Sam."

“You see, you’re teaching me to be honest. By the way, are you going to fight?”

“Mercy, no. Why should I, after enticing you on? But I’m not sure I’ll like it——”

His arms went about her slim shoulders and drew her close. She gave him her lips, then slipped away.

For a moment he could not speak. He was glad of the veil of the night

“Did you like it?” he asked at last, with a surge of his will.

“It was worth trying—once——”

“Yes or no?”

“I’m not sure. I’ll have to think it over. It wasn’t—just what I expected.”

“You expected just another casual kiss in the moonlight, like——” He paused, knowing he must not give voice to his bitter and senseless jealousy.

“Like those I’ve had scores of times? That was what you were going to say. Curiously enough, it isn’t so, but you won’t believe me, and it doesn’t matter anyway.” She was quite grave, and he saw again the forlorn curve of her lips. “Now let’s walk, and not say one—single—word.”

So they tramped side by side, in silence, nearly to the town and back. When they paused to listen, they could hear the faint hiss-hiss of the sand, restless under the light wind. It had covered lordly temples, thronged cities; in an hour there would be no footprint to show their trail.

So be it, Sam told himself.

But it was not until they returned to the landing field, and saw the great ship silver-gray on the silver desert, that the spell broke, and their own world took them back. When they made out a dim figure that she took to be one of the mechanics tuning up the engines, Darcy called a cheery greeting.

There was no answer. Startled, she came close and peered into the man’s eyes. They were Korlak’s, wide open in the moonlight, and they had an odd, fixed stare. He muttered something about the heat of his tent, and gruffly turned away.

“Poor fellow,” Darcy murmured in Sam’s ear. “I suppose he’s been lying awake, hating himself—and gone out to search for something he’ll never find.”

The next day the plane battled strong winds. The air was rough; Bishop Scott succumbed to air-sickness which even Horner's reverent nursing could not ease.

When they left the Persian Gulf, flying conditions grew rapidly worse. Captain Beason saw the danger of trying to reach Bagdad, and landed for the night at Basra, four hundred miles to the southeast.

Most of the passengers were glad to be out of the swaying, pitching ship, and to take refuge in the comfortable rest house at the Basra landing field. Korlak alone wanted to go on.

"Captain Beason's a coward," he complained bitterly to Sam.

"I can't let you say that," Sam answered quietly. "He's just looking out for our lives."

"You're one of 'em too, are you?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"One of the master class who've got time to burn, and think only of themselves. I've got business in Bagdad. I was supposed to be there tonight. You'll cut me out of it, rather than stand a little discomfort. You're all the same."

As Sam studied the weak face, the hard answer he had been about to make died on his lips. No doubt Korlak was in real distress. He looked sickly white; agony and terror gazed out of his china-marble eyes.

"I'm sorry your plans have been knocked out," Sam said, and quickly walked away.

Oppressed by the wind-blown solitudes beyond the lamplight, the passengers lingered long in the mess room over their after-dinner coffee. At Captain Beason's request, Horner got out his banjo and sang in his pleasant tenor voice. Sam, Darcy, and the Bishop joined in on the chorus of an Old West Country ballad. The Bishop contributed a number of anecdotes—they seemed much funnier than on the preceding day—and even Lord Harbordton told an amusing tale of his childhood meeting with Disraeli.

It was a golden hour. Across the gulf that separates human souls—wide and lonely as interstellar space—music and laughter flung an airy bridge. . . But it quickly fell.

With her unfailing kindness, Darcy had turned at last to Korlak, brooding in a corner. "Can't you give us something? I'm sure you know a

song—or a good story."

"I know only one song, and you don't want to hear that," he answered gruffly. Then, with a certain dignity, "It's the *International*."

"Please sing it. I've never heard all of it—there was always a fight. I'd love to hear you."

"But I would not," Lord Harbordton broke in sternly. "I heard enough anarchy in India."

To cover the awkward silence, little Horner broke into "The Road to Mandalay," rendered with great enthusiasm and the proper barrack-room twang.

There would be no joyous rendezvous on the desert tonight. When the gathering broke up, Darcy went straight to her room. By midnight the mechanics and field hands had finished their regular inspection and thorough tuning-up of the ship, and except for two native guards, had gone to their quarters.

But plainly the sahibs were unusually careful tonight—so the watchman thought—or else special repairs had been ordered. At one o'clock a second work-crew came on the field—a mechanic and a single native helper—and the white man nodded to them as he passed their brazier. They saw his service uniform, but in the darkness and blowing sand could not make out his face.

For more than two hours they saw the workmen moving about the great ship.

"The engineer sahib works late tonight," said Abdulla to Hafiz.

"The Roc flies far tomorrow. She must be fed and watered, and her feathers combed," Hafiz replied and shrugged his lack of interest.

So they talked of love and war, and after a while the workmen went away.

Just before dawn, the call-boy knocked on all the passengers' doors. On Korlak's door he had to knock thrice. At last a shrill voice, harsh with nerves, came through the wall.

"Go away. Tell the captain I'm not going on—I'm sick. I'll take the train to Bagdad."

When Captain Beason got this message, he repeated it to the quarantine officer, early at the airport to check out the passengers.

"I'd better take a look at him," the doctor said. "Probably it's just funk—from that rough weather yesterday. But there's been some cholera in Calcutta."

When the doctor came into his room and flicked on the light, Korlak's pale eyes opened very wide. His hand trembled as he held it out for inspection. His temperature and pulse were taken, and his skin examined.

"You can go on, all right," was the quick verdict. "Your pulse is a little fast, but it's not from fever. The weather's a bit gusty, but the captain will fly above it, and the air shouldn't be too rough."

Korlak saw the gleam of amusement in the doctor's eyes. With one leap he was out of bed.

"You think I'm afraid of the air, do you? You think I'm afraid of anything. I *will* go."

"See here, my man, if you've got a little case of nerves——"

"I'll show you what my nerves are. I'll show 'em all." Then, gripping himself, but still with a touch of melodrama, "Tell the captain I'll be there."

The doctor smiled—his patronizing British smile—and walked away. Korlak began to dress mechanically. But at the last he was fairly leaping into his clothes. His pale face had flushed; his eyes slowly caught fire. He remembered the oily eyes and fat palm of the rich Hindu, Puran Dass, bidding him good-bye at the lodge. . . "*You are a very lucky man, Comrade Korlak*". . .

Stalking to the field, he watched the passengers pass one by one through the little metal door of the plane. And he would go with them!

As the propellers droned and he took his seat, Horner glanced at him in amazement. His scrubby face was alight, almost transfigured by some secret dream. His eyes were lifted, as though he saw his glory in the sky. His manner was lofty.

But Lord Harbordton did not notice him. He did not even glance up.

Together Sam and Darcy watched the sun roll up from behind the utter rim of the desert. It was dull red as though burning through a dust cloud.

“How would you feel,” she asked, “if you knew this was your last day on earth?”

Sam started a little. “What put such a morbid idea in your head?”

“I don’t know—precisely. The last two days I’ve been more conscious of the forces of death surrounding us than ever before. They are so pitiless, so sure. They never forget us, never let us go. They hate us for the air we breathe, for our happiness when we watch the sun rise. And when they see us up here, flying above the earth, they must just ache to cut us down.”

“You’ve been seeing too much desert. It’s deadly stuff. Or else the roar of the engines is getting on your nerves.”

She nodded, a little sadly. “You haven’t answered my question. How do you think you would feel?”

“I can’t say. Once I saw a telephone post and a ditch looming up before our car going fifty miles an hour. All that I remember is saying ‘Ouch!’ But we jumped the ditch and dodged the post.”

“I suppose we’d both be desperately afraid. . . and both try to hide it.”

“And that would be one lie worth telling, wouldn’t it? To try to smile—and read the paper—and maybe crack a joke—all the time we saw that black shadow rushing toward us. And if we could only say, and really believe, what a great man said as the *Lusitania* went down—‘Death is the greatest adventure in life——’ ”

Darcy sat very still. “People *are* great, aren’t they?”

“Marvelous.”

“I’d much rather die—today—than find out they weren’t great. Often it’s hard to see—they hide their greatness behind all kinds of silly, wicked masks—but for one or two minutes, in almost every life, they let it come out. And those minutes are worth living for, aren’t they?”

Suddenly Sam knew that his love had not gone to waste. He would not try to deny it any more, to laugh at it, to scorn it. It would ever be his dearest, most closely-cherished secret. His heart had told him the truth, the splendid untainted truth, and at last it had made him free.

She was the end of one man’s search. And he was proud that he could admit it to himself, and hide from it no more; he was caught up in solemn exaltation that he had found the courage to stand by his idealism, rather than compromise with the world.

“When this flight is over, we’ll probably not meet again,” she said after a long pause.

“Our ways are far apart,” he agreed.

“I’ll probably marry in a few months—a suitable marriage with some clean, fine man I’ve known since childhood—and go to my job of bearing babies, as many as possible. There are only a few of our race left, you know, and it must be carried on.”

He nodded. This was her true call, and he could not blame her for answering it. There were only a few of the race of Darcy Hall, and that race must not die.

“Even if we did meet, we’d both be wearing masks,” Darcy went on. “Much heavier—much uglier—than the little thin ones we’re wearing now.”

She took a book from the rack and began to read. He looked down at the desert valleys of the Tigris-Euphrates, where, perhaps, Darcy’s race and his own had a common origin. But that was long ago.

An hour passed. Sam was still watching the girl’s face when he felt the ship dip to the left, then quickly straighten. Something streaked passed the corner of his eye, making him look out the window. Behind him and far below among the wind-tattered clouds, he saw a round dark object rapidly diminishing to a mere point. But it was not until he glanced at the landing gear and saw the struts hanging bare, that he knew for sure what it was.

The right landing wheel had fallen off.

A cry of alarm rose in his throat, but he forced it back. Slowly, almost furtively, he glanced at his fellow passengers. Darcy was still deep in her book. The remaining three passengers were seated on the left side, out of easy sight of the bare struts. Bishop Scott was reading his Bible. Lord Harbordton was making notes—probably preparing the epochal speech he meant to deliver in London. Korlak sat as if he were in a trance, his face drawn and wet.

Casually Sam rose and went forward. Only his intense pallor showed that this was no common errand. In the pantry between the two compartments he found Horner sitting, reading, on his bench.

Horner leaped to his feet. “You are ill——”

"No." Sam licked his lips. Horner's eyes were so clear, his face so young. Then he blurted out, "The right wheel is off."

The only change in Horner was a slight widening of his eyes. "Do the passengers know?"

"Not yet."

"They'll be bound to see it in a minute. I'll go back and stand by."

"Right you are! I'll tell the skipper."

But, of course, Captain Beason already knew. He had turned over the controls to the first officer, and was coming through the passage. He looked cold and grim.

He glanced only once at each face. "Do the others know?"

"Not yet," Sam said.

"How much do *you* know?"

"Only that the right wheel's off——"

"If you look out, you'll see the left wheel hanging loose on the axle. Great business, eh, what?"

"In God's name, what does it mean?"

"Workmanlike job some blighter did at Basra—I s'pose a native mechanic who thought he had a grudge. Well, I'll break it to the others. They're a sound lot, 'cept for Korlak."

Beason led the way aft and halted in the aisle. The Bishop saw him first and with a low cry leaped to his feet. This sudden movement caught Lord Harbordton's eye and made him glance up from his notes. His face was impassive. Korlak started violently, and his frozen visage jerked into a grimace that might have been either terror or some terrible ecstasy.

Sam looked straight at Darcy. Feeling his eyes, she glanced up. She, too, moved as though to spring, then leaned back, her lips curving in a strange dim smile.

"My friends, I have something to tell you," Beason began. He did not shout, but his voice carried clear above the subdued roar of the motors. "Something very serious has happened, but I want you to keep calm and help me see it through."

In the brief pause the only sound was a gasp from Bishop Scott. Sam thought he said, "Oh, my God!"

"The right wheel's gone, and the other's loose," Beason went on. "That means that landing will be a rum go. But I'll do my best—hold her off as long as possible, then pancake her down. She'll crack up sure, but with even fair luck we'll come through."

There was a brief silence. Lord Harbordton removed his pince-nez and carefully put them in his case. "A question, please, Captain Beason," he said, perfectly calm.

"Yes?"

"When will you attempt the landing?"

"At Bagdad. We're nearly halfway there, and facilities are better."

They all knew what he meant. They were physically stunned, but strangely clear-thinking and alert. The alarm had gone forth by wireless, and they would be met with ambulances, doctors, and fire-fighting equipment.

"I have here a document to be put in your dispatch case," Lord Harbordton went on.

He rose and handed Beason a folded paper.

Bishop Scott's face worked, and presently his voice came out, slowly gathering power. "I've got a question, too, Captain Beason. We're all men and women, and we may have certain preparations we wish to make. Would you say—it would be only a guess, I know—that we have one chance in two of coming out alive?"

Beason seemed dismayed by the question. "I'd like to tell you our chances are nine out of ten," he replied. "They would be, under good weather conditions. The hard wind in the desert is blowing a lot of dust, and visibility—well, let's look at the worst side, and say four chances out of five." But Sam knew he was lying like a gentleman.

It seemed that Korlak started to speak but Lord Harbordton's level tone silenced him.

"You say we are the victims of sabotage."

"Yes, sir."

"I wouldn't call it a workmanlike job—indeed it seems to me quite a slovenly, inadequate job. Only a chance in ten—or of five at most—of

killing us off."

Beason had been thinking about that too. Horner was searching every cubby of the ship for something. . .

"Well, sir——"

Then came an ugly interruption. Korlak's mouth opened, a black hole in his twisted face, and a high-pitched howl burst forth. His eyes had a maniacal shine. "You liar! You fool! This plane lands at sixty miles an hour. You'll be blinded by the sandstorm. You know they haven't got a dog's chance——"

He did not say "we." He said "they," as though he were merely a spectator. But no one noticed this, at first. With that strange charity that so often softens disaster, the other men thought he was merely hysterical from terror. Only Darcy's quick imagination leaped to the truth.

"Steady, Korlak," Beason said. "I know my ship. I tell you honestly that we've got a good fighting chance."

"I tell you, you lie! She'll pitch over and throw you all in one dead heap, and burn your bones, and you'll all go to hell where you belong."

For the first time in the trip, Lord Harbordton turned and looked at Korlak. His aristocratic face was still impassive; but over Beason's spread a dark cloud. Yet for many seconds more he could not give voice to his appalling thought. His hard-taught British sense of justice tied his tongue: the charge was too dreadful, even against a man like that. He walked to Korlak and examined him closely.

"You speak as though you thought you had expert knowledge of this thing," he said quietly at last. "Do you know something about it we don't know?"

The question seemed to steady Korlak. His tortured features relaxed; throwing up his head he appeared to increase in stature. Why, this was his great moment! He had almost failed to recognize it. So real was his illusion of a great deed accomplished and his own vindication, that his eyes kindled and his mean face took on a semblance of grandeur.

"I do know something." His voice had a ring of power. "I know that an enemy of human freedom is going to his death, and a lot of his gang with him. It's my work, and I'm proud of it! Now kill me if you want to. Hurrah for the Red Flag!"

The voice ceased, and its echo died. A strange silence, startling, terrifying, almost horrible, filled his ears, his head. He could hear only the steady drone of the motors.

He looked from face to face, but every one was calm. No one was screaming at him, no savage hands were reaching for him. Didn't they catch what he said? Couldn't they grasp what he had done? It was his great moment—but no one—not even one—seemed to understand. All they did was look at him, curious, even a little embarrassed. . . But yes, one face now showed emotion. Two tears were running out of the girl's eyes, down her cheeks.

He looked at them hungrily until a sudden horrible fear gripped him by the heart. Slowly that dread suspicion became a certainty. Those tears reflected human tragedy; they were tears of pity.

It was his great moment, but it had failed.

Lord Harbordton turned quietly to his other fellow passengers. "I'm sorry you all have to suffer because of my unpopularity," he said.

It was the first time in the memory of man that he had ever mentioned his unpopularity: Darcy had never dreamed he knew it. And there was no coldness in his face or voice, only the great dignity that is born of sincerity.

It was Sam who answered—perhaps because as an American he was less reserved than these Britons. "It's all square with us, Lord Harbordton."

"Thank you." Then, turning to the broken man beside him: "I'd like to talk to you, Korlak. I still don't understand why you did this monstrous, this inhuman thing. . . And we may as well sit down."

"Just a moment, Lord Harbordton," Captain Beason broke in. He turned with a low command to Horner, who brought a piece of rope used in securing the ship at night. Round and round it went about Korlak's wrists. "Now you may talk to him if you wish."

"But must he wear that rope? I'm sure he'll make no more trouble."

"Sorry, we can't afford to take the chance. . . Will you all please sit down? I'll let you know in plenty of time when we're ready to try to land."

With odd, stiff movements, the passengers obeyed. Horner went to his pantry, but whether to pray or to hide no one knew. Harbordton's challenge

had aroused Korlak, shocking into life his dazed brain, and color flowed back into his ashen face as he leaned over the table.

"Can you speak to me of inhuman things?" he asked the nobleman.

"But to take the lives of innocent people, just to kill me. . ."

"Weren't you ready to wage war in India, to uphold your ideas? Wouldn't innocent people have suffered then?"

The statesman did not answer this question, but probed into Korlak's early life and background. He found the usual sordid story. Korlak's mother and father had emigrated from Russia to America in his early childhood. The elder Korlak's native taste for vodka changed to an appetite for cheap American whiskey; and in four years he died. His widow supported the child for a year or two more by such means as were most convenient; but one night she went away and never came back. All of Korlak's days had been spent in twilight; never in the bright sun. Squalor, semi-starvation, disease, vice, and all the ugliness that man can make on his fair world were the child's daily vistas. And the sins of his fathers had been visited on him in the guise of a weak brain and body.

"I grew up hating," Korlak said. "I've hated ever since. When I saw the rich people ride by, I wanted to kill 'em with a bomb. When the settlement worker came, with her fine clothes and clean face, I wanted to kill her, too. I was inferior and knew it. I was mean and dull-witted and dirty-minded and a liar, and the strong Irish boys kicked me around. I was a cur-dog, that could only snap and run away. And that made me hate all the more."

Lord Harbordton did not speak for a long time. There were troubled lines between his fine brows. "It was hate that made you an anarchist?" he questioned at last.

"I suppose so, but it became the only beautiful thing in my life. Maybe that's not the word, but it seemed beautiful to me—to fight for the poor and downtrodden, and put bombs under their cruel masters. For the first time in my life I felt important—a little of human dignity that you feel every day. I *was* somebody."

"I understand." The statesman looked old and weary. "We ourselves are partly to blame."

Korlak clasped his bound hands, and he could hardly speak. "If I'd only known that you'd admit that——"

" 'Take physic, pomp,' " the older man quoted, in low tones:

“ ‘Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, That thou may shake the superflux to them, And show the heavens more just.’ ”

“But things aren’t just, are they?” Korlak begged. “You’ll admit that, too?”

“Very sadly I admit it. But if we had only tried a little harder to understand—if we’d only been willing to compromise, just a little—perhaps it would have never happened.”

Korlak’s pale eyes filled with ugly tears. “You *are* a human being after all, aren’t you? Not just a block of ice——”

Lord Harbordton rose, and with unsteady steps moved toward the cockpit. “Captain Beason, have you already put that paper in your dispatch case?”

“Haven’t got around to it, yet.”

“Give it back to me, please. I want to make some last-minute revisions.”

He had hardly returned to his seat when Horner emerged from his pantry. His cap was jaunty as ever, his uniform trig and smart, and although his eyes were intensely bright, his movements were sure and calm. In his hand he held a tray loaded with tea and cakes.

He went first to Darcy, spread a doily before her on the table, and filled her cup with the steaming drink.

“How many lumps, my lady?” he asked, with his old cheer.

“One, Horner, and a little cream, and your blessing.”

“You Americans are not so fond of it, sir, as we British,” Horner explained to Sam. “But it’s a grateful drink at a time like this.”

And it was!

Horner went down the aisle. He served Korlak the same as the others, and helped him manage his cup. Bishop Scott was the last.

“It’s so kind of you, Horner, to think of us in this dreadful hour,” the churchman said with ill-restrained emotion.

“It’s about the regular time for a spot of tea anyway, my lord.”

“I wish there was some way I could reward you. Something I could do for you——”

“You have done something for me already, just being on the ship. If I may say so, it’s a great consolation to us all.”

Bishop Scott stared at him as though he did not understand. “You mean—as a Bishop—of the Church of England——”

“Of course, my lord. And to me especially, since it was you who baptized me.”

“Does that mean so much? It seems—so—strange—to me now.”

“It isn’t every one who is baptized by a bishop.”

“I wasn’t a bishop then, Horner. Only a vicar in a small church. How long ago it was—but only twenty-three years—and how much I have changed! I wish I’d taken more real interest in you, Horner.”

“You did remember me, my lord. That was more than I could ask——”

“It is one of my tricks, to remember people—just a common trick. But I wish I could do something real and worth while for you now.”

“You can, my lord—if you would be so kind.”

“I’ll do anything. What is it?”

“This is a fast-landing plane—the wind’s rising and the dust and sand will almost hide the field—it may be none of us will come through alive. It would be a great help to me—a great comfort—if you would come into my pantry, and let me kneel to you and have your blessing.”

The bishop passed his hand over his forehead. “My—my blessing?”

“Yes, if you would care to give it to me.”

“Great God!” Then, with a gray face, “But who am I, that I should presume to let you kneel to me?”

“I don’t understand——”

“I, the politician more than the priest, the amateur Wolsey, the flatterer of the great. . . You—who do your job—and serve us tea in what is likely the last hour of your life! It would be more fitting that I should kneel to you.”

Horner smiled and put the cream in the tea. “You are a little upset, my lord, and no wonder. We are all out of our heads, I suppose, from thinking of what’s before us. But you couldn’t make me think ill of you.”

“I—I’ll give you my blessing for what it’s worth, from a full heart. But you mustn’t kneel to me. You must kneel to God, whose unworthy servant I

am.”

Sam and Darcy were bending over their table talking in low tones. “Are you afraid?” she asked.

“Terribly.”

“Does your mouth feel dry—and your spine cold—and your stomach sick? Are you almost afraid to speak for fear you’ll yell?”

“All of that, and more.”

“But we’ll hold on, won’t we, Sam?”

“We’ll hold on, Darcy.”

She gave him her hand across the table. He pressed it to his lips.

“Masks off, Sam?”

“Masks off, Darcy. Shall I tell you now?”

“If you want to—and if it’s true. There isn’t much more time.”

“It’s true, always and always. I’d never have told you, except for this that’s coming, but now I know it’s the only fair thing for us both.”

“Say it, Sam.”

“I love you, Darcy.”

“I thought so—but I wasn’t sure. I’m glad you told me.”

There seemed nothing more to say. But Darcy still held his hand and searched his eyes.

“Am I still wearing a mask?” she asked at last.

“You never did.”

“Yes, a thin one, so I wouldn’t see so clear the things I fear. And now I don’t know whether it’s just that veil—or something real—that keeps me from answering you.”

His heart made one great bound. “Tell me the truth, Darcy! You must.”

“You are very dear to me. But whether I love you or could ever love you I can’t tell. And it looks as though I may never know.”

At that instant Korlak, still talking to Lord Harbordton, felt a blinding rush of remorse. He sprang to his feet and raised his bound hands in a

compelling gesture. Although he was still dramatizing himself to the utmost, it was plain that behind his dramatics lay some stark terrible reality. His pale eyes were wet with tears; his ignoble face flamed.

"Comrades, I've got something to tell you," he began. "I'm sorry for what I've done. I never knew—I never dreamed—that you were human beings like me. A world above me, I know, but still my fellow passengers—people with hearts, and troubles of your own, and—and—everything like me. I thought you were all fiends in human form. And so I'm going to do all I can to save you."

Then, in hoarse, frantic tones: "It's much worse than you know. We must land at once. I put an acid compound on the rudder wires to crash the ship—loosening the wheels was just to make sure she'd burst and burn. It may eat through at any moment. Quick, someone tell the captain——"

No, he had not told the captain himself at the instant of his penitence and saved many precious seconds. It would have cut him out of his speech. Korlak believed he had been reborn, but he was still Korlak. It was Sam who bounded to the cockpit and gave the alarm.

Captain Beason's narrowed gaze hardly flickered sideways. "Painstakin' cove, that Korlak," he muttered—British to the last—as his eyes scanned the desert.

It was only a few seconds later that he stood in the cabin, facing the white, tense passengers, calmly, tersely telling them of their coming gamble with death. "I'm going to try a kill or cure," he said. "Can you all swim?"

Most of his hearers nodded.

"I can't, but it don't matter," Korlak said, still clutching at his fading illusion of grandeur.

Horner, who could not swim a stroke, muttered "Righto!"

"There's a straight stretch of the Euphrates River not far ahead," Beason went on. "It lies square into the wind, and I can make out the channel through the dust. I'm going to slip down and mush her in. If we strike no submerged bars and the water's of good depth, we *may* all come through. If not—but it's our only chance, anyhow."

"Let's go!" Sam cried, with a boom in his voice.

Korlak's wrists were freed. A document in Harbordton's neat handwriting was placed in Beason's fireproof wallet. The emergency exits

were made ready. The passengers crowded in the rear seats and fastened their safety belts.

Beason returned to the cockpit, and presently they heard the roar of the motors die away to a dull drone.

“Get close to me, Sam, and hold my hand,” Darcy murmured. “We’re going down.”

There was not a sound in the cabin as the dust-dimmed earth leaped up. With one big-muscled arm around Darcy’s shoulders, strong to help her, and his right hand clasping hers, Sam watched overside. With the face of a snow-image, her eyes burning out of it, Darcy watched only Sam.

Bishop Scott was looking down at his folded hands, and his lips moved. Horner stood beside him, comforted by his nearness. Korlak sat erect and rigid, gazing straight ahead with the fixed stare of a madman. Lord Harbordton closed and laid aside his book, then without a trace of excitement on his gray face calmly looked out his window.

Sam too could make out the course of the river through the blown sand. He glanced up with a grave smile. “Did you know that the lost Garden of Eden is supposed to be somewhere in this valley?” he murmured to his companion.

“Yes—and I think—we may find it.”

Three hundred—two hundred—one hundred feet. The plane cast a broad shadow on the water. Now the dim river seemed to be leaping up, rushing by. Fifty—forty—twenty feet. Sam’s arm tightened like a steel band about Darcy’s waist.

Suddenly the plane seemed to drop from under them. Their hearts ceased; a black shadow leaped across their brains; then came a violent, paralyzing shock. Water leaped high, the great ship lurched on like a dying whale—tipped up—all but turned over—righted with a second shock—shuddered in every beam—groaned loudly—and came to rest.

Sam was jerked half across the table, but there was still something warm and precious, to be guarded with his last breath, in his arms. And as vision came back the first thing he saw was Darcy’s face.

She was alive, not even hurt. As she gazed at him, at first in stupefied amazement, he saw the rapture of deliverance kindle her eyes. They had come through. The ship rested on the river bottom, the floor of the cabin only a little below the water level. They were safe.

They still could not speak, but now their stunned brains moved and began to record the scene about them. They could share their good fortune. Horner was picking up Bishop Scott from the floor—stunned, ghastly white, but apparently uninjured. Korlak sat upright in his chair like a man of wax, with the same fixed stare in his eyes. Lord Harbordton lay over his table with spread-eagled arms, but at once straightened and seemed to be scrutinizing his right hand.

"How odd," he observed in the hushed cabin. "I can't lift it. I dare say my wrist is broken."

And now Beason, pale but cool and steady, was walking among them. "Pretty much all right?" he asked cheerfully.

"Definitely," Darcy told him.

"Righto! Quite a seaworthy old scow, this packet! You hardly got your feet wet. But I see a native shoving off from shore, and he'll take you in."

It was true. The episode was closed. Even before the boat drew alongside, the passengers had set their faces, steadied their voices, said their prayers or their praise, and declared another armistice with death.

"I'll have this boatman take you to his village, and then we'll send you by auto to Samara," Beason went on. "You'll find a doctor there to fix that wrist, Lord Harbordton. But there's no plane available, and I think you'll all have to go as far as Bagdad by train."

The passengers nodded, but did not speak. And now Captain Beason looked troubled.

"It's just occurred to me—perhaps I shouldn't mention it—that some of you might prefer to go by train and steamer all the way to London. A bit of a shock, business like this today. If you would, don't mind saying so——"

"Don't be ridiculous, Captain Beason," Lord Harbordton answered stiffly.

"Right you are. . . Horner will be along with your baggage in a few minutes."

The village was typical of Irak. The passengers sought refuge from the dust storm in a byre cleaner than the huts. Time moved; pulses resumed their normal gait; the world was with them once more—far too much with them, Sam thought with a sinking heart.

The gray tints faded from Bishop Scott's pink face. "You know, we were all a little mad, up there," he remarked placidly. "What folly we thought and said!"

When Horner came with the bags, the Bishop beamed on him, his very best Sunday beam. "I'm especially indebted to you, my lad, for your solicitations and care," his voice flowed out. "I'm quite sure I was out of my head, for a little while——"

"It was enough to put anyone out of his head, my lord," Horner answered gratefully.

"Then you will understand some of the—er—extravagant remarks that I might have made, eh? Very well. And you must come to see me sometime in England. Perhaps you can come to my church. I baptized you, you know, and so I regard you as one of my own flock."

"Thank you, my lord."

"And I shall be pleased—very pleased—to commend you to your company for the—er—excellent steward that you are."

Horner flushed with pleasure. "It would be too good of you, my lord."

In the meantime an efficient light-stepping young Englishman in uniform had arrived by car from Samara. He spoke a moment to Lord Harbordton, then walked to the dazed and staring Korlak and snapped irons about his wrists.

"I recommend leg-irons, too," the statesman said in icy tones. Save for the sling about his left wrist, he was the same gray man of granite Sam had seen in Karachi. "This is a very smooth and cunning scoundrel, and might easily give you the slip."

"But you said——" Korlak broke in pitifully, as the sweat rolled down his face.

Lord Harbordton did not turn his head. "It will be a great satisfaction to me to testify against him at his trial," he went on. "I hope an example will be made of him. I am only sorry that our weak-minded legislators ever repealed the law that made attempted murder punishable by death."

The officer marched Korlak away: Lord Harbordton turned calmly to Captain Beason.

"By the way, Captain, you may destroy that paper I left with you—better still, let me destroy it. I have decided that my first draft will stand."

Sam Bellamy listened and bowed his head. “Forgive us our trespasses,” he whispered, to his distant God who alone knew and understood.

Sam and Darcy walked a little way from the village.

“Masks on?” he asked.

“What do you think, Sam?”

“I don’t dare think. I have seen Harbordton and the Bishop, and I don’t dare look at you.”

She laid her hand on his arm and smiled through tears. “Are you sure you still love me?”

He turned to her, his fear conquered, his grave face glowing.

“Completely sure.”

She drew down his head and kissed him. “I believe that I love you, too, Sam,” she told him. “You are kind and good and true. . . I’m almost sure. . .”

He would not ask more than this, now. They would be together a few days, and he would come to her on his return from America. Now they looked out on the brown desert, the ancient valleys of the Tigris-Euphrates.

“It isn’t far from here—our lost Eden. Sam, can we find our way back at last?”

So the story ends, not far from the Garden where it began. But the search for the Gate must go on.

Pooja

When I was an undergraduate at the University of Oregon almost every good baritone used to raise the roof with "The Road to Mandalay." Two young instructresses, who had studied in Europe by gosh, had their apartment named "Mandalay" because that was the place where "there ain't no Ten Commandments." I thought that was about the most Bohemian thing I ever heard of.

Twenty years later, the sophomoric thrill bore fruit. I proposed to Mr. Harry Burton, editor of Cosmopolitan *Magazine, that I write ten stories, laid in about Mandalay, each dealing with one of the Commandments as applied to the Orient. Actually I wrote only seven.*

But in reading over these stories, I find I must omit from this book the first of the series, based on the First Commandment. It does not in my opinion "come off." So the following story is the second of the series, and is based on the commandment "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images." I consider it one of my best and most significant tales.

In lieu of the First Commandment story, I shall insert, further on in the book, a love story of another kind.

When Brahma ceases to dream, say the people of India, earth and heaven will pass away.

All the white men living who have even a glimmer of what this means would not make one ordinary-sized garden party at the viceregal palace. It *seems* to mean that earth and heaven and all the beasts and men and gods inhabiting them are merely dreams moving through Brahma's mind—and a priest explaining to a thick-headed Sahib usually lets it go at that—but actually it means much more and probably something entirely different. And it *may* mean, in some queer fashion beyond the grasp of the Western mind, that dreams are realities and realities are dreams.

So even a mere man, let alone a god, must be very careful what he dreams. Suppose, for instance, he dreams about a god—so strongly that he takes a piece of wood or a gob of mud and makes its image. If that god did not already exist, it begins its existence straight off. If he has dreamed it good, it will be good; if bad, it will be bad. If it already existed, it will change according to the form and light and shadow of his dream.

But India is far away from New York. Priestly hocus-pocus and Brahman mysticism are all very well beside the Mother River, but they cannot go far in heavy traffic regulated by big policemen at every corner, and they do not fit in with cocktail bars, major-league baseball and five-and-ten-cent stores. At least, Gordon Fowler thought so, and he was one of the most knowing men of the seven millions. When in his brief Indian exile he dreamed a dream, he could not dream that it might come true among the mountains of mortar and the valleys of asphalt of his native city.

But the gods of the Ganges were old and wise when Leif Ericson first laid his Baltic-blue eyes on Furdurstrandir. The tablets of the Ten Commandments were weathered and moss-grown when the only colonies on the Hudson were beaver colonies. And of course what happened might have been only coincidence. Anyway, this is the story:

Everyone took for granted that Fowler was a gentleman. Everything about him was expensive, yet in good taste.

Perhaps he was a shade too handsome. A tall, broad-shouldered man, he had a nobly shaped head with wavy dark brown hair gray at the temples, and features that a second-rate sculptor would have given to Apollo. His brown eyes were well spaced, his lips finely chiseled but not too thin, and he had even, white teeth.

But he did not flaunt his good looks. When anyone mentioned them, he said, “My God, yes, me and Robert Taylor.” His clothes would have pleased Polonius, and were mostly tweeds so nicely woven and of such impeccable pattern that they were never snobbish-looking among business suits.

He lived with his wife in an expensive and beautifully furnished apartment just off Park Avenue on East Seventy-second Street. Two men rode in the front seat of his limousine, but their uniforms were inconspicuous. He collected Chinese landscapes, read the newest books, went to the highest-browed concerts but joked about them, spoke to headwaiters in the precisely proper tone of voice, friendly but not familiar. And although he drank whisky steadily from five o’clock until bedtime, it made him not vulgarly jovial but just a little cross.

His wife’s good looks were not nearly so apparent; in fact, many people missed them altogether. Edith Fowler had a thin face with high cheekbones, grave gray eyes and a large mobile mouth. But she walked as though she were about to take wing, her breasts pointed out and high, her eyes a little raised; and a few men—a very few—thought her indubitably beautiful.

She had something else that Gordon could see and feel but never quite analyze. It seemed to be a kind of tenderness toward all the world. Life was at once so splendid and so pitiful, she thought. She was merely a country doctor's daughter; she had little money and no exalted social position or great talents to justify her taking such a queenly attitude—and as she would not lift a finger to cultivate the "right people," it annoyed Gordon at times—yet rather guiltily he found himself looking up to her.

Especially her tenderness flowed out to him. When he was worried or upset she would come to his bed and hold his head against her breast. Gordon thought it was because she had no children to mother. At first he could not afford them—there was so much else to spend money on—and now at thirty-eight Edith agreed with him that it was too late. But sometimes he resented her babying him. He felt she did not appreciate what a dominant man he was.

There were plenty of other women who did appreciate it. But he never fell in love with them; he merely had them and let them go and did not even spend much money on them. On the other hand, he never really questioned his love for Edith, and spent his wealth on her freely.

So the bomb she dropped after dinner that September night shook Gordon Fowler and all his works to their foundations.

They had not gone out that night, or had guests. Although such tête-à-tête dinners bored him, Gordon had complied with Edith's wishes. Their English butler had served them coffee in the library and retired. Edith, who seemed to wear her prettiest things when she dined with Gordon alone, was in filmy white; and in the dim light her hair was a golden mist.

"I wanted it this way tonight because I have something awfully important to tell you," she began.

Gordon smiled tolerantly, for usually what she thought was important he regarded as trivial, and vice versa.

"It's something I dread telling you, but it's the only fair thing for us both," she went on. "And I feel almost sure that in the end it won't turn out as serious as it seems now."

Her eyes were always vivid, but they seemed especially large and bright tonight. He noticed them for the first time. And looking closer, suddenly he saw that she was quite pale.

"Why, Edith, you're putting the wind up my back," he said with gentle humor.

“I hope you can take it that way until it’s over—if it ever is. After all, it’s just life—and we must try to smile at it. Gordon, you know I’ve been seeing quite a lot of Cecil Porter.”

Cecil Porter was an obscure magazine illustrator, a tall, thin, homely man with tobacco ashes all over his poorly cut dinner jacket. But there was something in Edith’s face as she spoke of him that Gordon did not like. It was a kind of light he could not remember having seen before. He had to struggle against anger, almost against fear.

“I’m awfully sorry, in a way,” she went on. “I’m glad too, in a way—I’d be lying if I said otherwise. But I’ve fallen in love with him.”

“You—what did you say?”

“I said I’ve fallen in love with Cecil.” And her eyes, big with wonder, looked straight into Gordon’s.

But Gordon felt his eyes drawing in and his face turning black. He was not weak—he felt strong as a gorilla—and from the dim haze in which the room swam the fire tongs by the fireplace stood out vividly. But he grasped the arms of his chair, and the fire tongs sank back among the odds and ends of shadows.

“It’s jolly decent of you, Edith, to tell me,” he said, his voice sounding a little hoarse.

“I was tempted not to, Gordon,” she confessed. “Anyway, it may be just a passing infatuation.”

His hand ached to strike her. In what was an agony of resentment he thought of all he had done for her: he had taken her from her country town, married her, given her gowns and furs and jewelry, got her into the Social Register. He raised his foot to kick over the coffee stand and put it down just in time.

“Whatever it is,” she went on, “I’m fighting against it. Just give me time, Gordon. If you want to divorce me you can, but if you’ll just wait——”

“Do you mean—you don’t mean that you have given me legal grounds for divorcing you?”

Her lips that had been curled in a tender smile instantly straightened out. “That is not a proper question to put to me, Gordon.”

Yes, it was a slip. He recognized it instantly. He had perceived long ago that people like his wife had a certain manner with one another—an intense

respect for one another's dignity and freedom. It was a kind of game which he did not understand but had learned to play. One of the rules of that game was that a man did not seek to know what his wife did not care to tell him. It ignored what Gordon felt in his deepest heart—that he owned Edith, body and soul.

"Forgive me," he said quickly. "I have no right to question you at all when you've been so honest and sporting."

Her eyes filled with tears. "And you've been so kind, so considerate and understanding. You've surpassed my highest expectations."

Suddenly Gordon understood wife-murder. Her throat was so lovely and slim. Better yet, he understood how a man could face prison or the electric chair to murder his wife's lover. But murder would not be the word, he told himself. It would be the defense of his honor, his home. He would keep on imitating his fine friends, not act vulgarly, but men who did not own their wives were cowards and fools.

"And Gordon, I'm going to try harder than ever to remain your wife. Trust me—and give me a little more time—and I'm sure everything will work out all right."

He smiled and nodded. Trust her! He knew what women were, he thought savagely. He knew what human beings were—hypocrites and traitors and thieves.

For the next two weeks Gordon's friends noticed that he was drinking a bit more than usual on social occasions. What they did not notice or know was that he was also drinking deeply when alone. He told himself that it was to forget his wrongs, to keep from going crazy over his wife's infidelity, but a psychologist would not have been impressed. In a measure, at least, he drank to remember his noble resentment and for courage to act upon it.

There is no demon in the black bottle; there is only a key to unchain the demon in man. Still, Gordon's next move was almost incredible, the mere habit of doing the socially correct thing seemingly forbidding it. To uphold his own "honor," he put two detectives on Edith's trail.

But soon he was not satisfied with the detectives' reports. They did not tell him what Edith and Cecil actually did; only the time and place they met and when they parted. So he told the men he wished to see for himself.

They protested, at first. They couldn't afford to be a party to any trouble. But as Gordon stood there listening with a faint smile, they began to feel silly. He could not condemn his wife on hearsay and wanted to give her every chance, he said.

Gordon told Edith he would go to South Carolina on a shooting trip. It was a little early in the season, but he would find something to shoot at, and —well, lately it had been a little difficult to pass the time. Edith's eyes filled with tears. She did not tell him how she appreciated his trust in her, but only because she could not find words. She took him to the station and kissed him good-by.

But Gordon went only as far as Philadelphia, then returned to a hotel. Nor did the bold lovers keep him waiting long. Two nights later, the detectives telephoned him that the quarry had come to the bait and the trap was ready to be sprung.

Gordon's voice over the wire was quiet, level, almost good-humored. But before he left his room he pocketed a small automatic pistol. The whisky he had been drinking all day had not dulled his mind but stimulated it, he told himself. Only fools and cowards and suckers allowed their wives to be stolen under their very noses.

In the cab Gordon was dizzy with passion, half ecstasy, half agony, but when he met the detective a block from his home he appeared calm and urbane. Also, there was not the slightest perceptible bulge to his dinner jacket. Yet at the risk of making a fool of himself, the detective laid a hand on Gordon's shoulder.

"You're a gentleman, see," he said, "or we would never have taken this job on."

Gordon waited patiently, his lips curled in a faint sneer.

"They'll be just the three of you, see? She let all the servants go, see? And sometimes even gentlemen act like dock hands when they catch their wives in some other bozo's arms."

"Are you Emily Post in disguise?" Gordon asked.

"Okay. You win. If you can pour him a drink and all that, that's swell. And even a good beating-up, provided you don't use any blunt objects, won't do anybody much harm, see? But you haven't got any concealed weapons, have you?"

Gordon blew smoke in his face.

“Then don’t grab any fire tongs or vahses, see? Sometimes a fellow picks ’em up before he thinks, see? So long.”

Gordon continued to seem cool and urbane as he rode up in the elevator. He noted how smoothly the mechanism worked. When it stopped, the sound would be inaudible in Edith’s room.

Smoothly and silently he got his passkey into the lock and opened the door. In the hall he stood listening. And when he heard voices through the open door of the library—low and tender voices—he got out his pistol and pressed down its safety catch.

Edith was standing in front of the fireplace, her hands clasped at the back of Cecil Porter’s neck. And she had just finished kissing him when Gordon fired.

He did not fire at Edith; he fired at the man who had stolen her from him.

But he did hit Edith, because Cecil did not fall; and in fact, Gordon saw clearly a little red hole appear on her bare arm.

Before he could shoot again, Cecil rushed at him. He was a thin, frail-looking man, but Gordon sprawled to the floor and when he came to himself, he was sitting in a chair and a doctor was bandaging Edith’s arm.

It was not strange that Gordon was able quickly to adjust himself to the scene. Only for a moment it puzzled him; then he realized it was the same scene to which he had been adjusting himself for years. It was the game that ladies and gentlemen played. He could not understand it, but he knew the rules.

Edith lay on a couch talking to the doctor. If she had any feeling about what Gordon had done, it was hidden behind her calm expression. Cecil Porter stood beside the couch, giving her an encouraging smile.

“Of course you needn’t report it,” Edith was telling the doctor. “My husband got out the pistol to show Mr. Porter. He was explaining how it worked, and it went off. Then my husband fainted.”

“Should my wife try to talk, doctor?” Gordon broke in.

“So you’ve come to, have you?” the doctor asked. “You’ll be glad to know that your wife seems perfectly capable of a fast set of tennis this very minute.”

“You see, doctor,” Edith went on, “my husband is a hunter, and he has many guns. He got this one out tonight because he’s just starting on a long hunting trip to Africa—lions, you know.”

“I hope he’s not going to shoot lions with a thirty-two pistol,” the doctor observed with a smile.

“Not quite,” Gordon answered. “I need a French seventy-five. But I happen to like that little gun.”

The doctor said he would leave now and look in first thing tomorrow. Meantime he’d send a nurse. It was merely a flesh wound, but the patient might become nervous from shock.

Cecil escorted the doctor only to the next room, then returned quickly and stood by Edith’s couch. “I’ll stay till the nurse comes,” he said.

“It isn’t necessary. He seems quite rational, now.” She turned gravely to Gordon. “But just to be sure—did you aim that shot at me or at Cecil?”

“I shot at Cecil,” Gordon answered. “He was breaking up my home.”

“You’d better stay awhile, Cecil,” Edith said. “I’d like to get this over before the nurse comes. Gordon, I’ve something to tell you before you leave for Africa.”

“But I’m not going to Africa.”

“To India, then.” Her tone was firm.

“But Edith, I am in my rights—the unwritten law. You have no right to try to punish me.”

“I’m not trying to punish you, Gordon. I’m trying to see how to forgive you. I’d like to if I could—I’ve cared for you for so many years. But you must go away now if you ever want any more of me. I mean it, Gordon.”

“I’ll go. I’ll do anything. But it was only because I love you——”

“Don’t say that. It makes my flesh creep.”

“Didn’t I catch you in this man’s arms?”

“Catch me, yes. By pretending to go to Carolina; by hiring detectives to tell you what I had already told you—that I was in love with Cecil.”

“Detectives? What do you mean?”

“Please don’t, Gordon. Cecil saw the men when he came in tonight—he said they looked like detectives—but I wouldn’t believe it. But even spying

is a small matter compared with trying to kill the man you thought I loved."

"Good Lord, Edith, don't you know there's such a thing as jealousy?"

"I do know. I know very well. But I conquered mine, not once but many times, because you were doing what you felt you had to do, being the kind of man you are." Again that high compassion shone in her eyes, and he had only to look into them to see himself as in a mirror—but he glanced away. "And I didn't lay traps for you."

He sat still for a minute. "Edith, there were only a few, and they meant absolutely nothing to me."

"Cecil did mean something to me. And now I've got only one more thing to tell you before I go to a hotel—and you go to Africa."

Gordon waited, his face ashen.

"I didn't think I'd tell you at first, but I'd better, to give you a little more chance to see what you've done. When you shot at Cecil tonight I had just done what I had promised you I'd try to do. I was kissing him good-by—for good."

But Gordon did not go to Africa, after all. He went to India, instead. And he went almost willingly. He realized that it was his only hope of keeping Edith.

But before the ship passed Aden, he began to feel cruelly misjudged and ill-treated. There could be no single standard, he told himself. It was biologically impossible. A man's wife was his wife, and his home was his castle. All he had really done was to prove his manhood.

He had been not only misjudged, but bamboozled. Edith had lied when she said she had kissed Cecil good-by. She had merely kissed him good night after an hour of illicit love. And she had run Gordon out of the country not to forget and forgive, but so she could go on with her affair without fear of his revenge.

But he did not take the first boat back to New York—he did not dare. Of course he did not admit this. He would teach Edith to appreciate him, he told himself.

India is the modern Lotus Isle. In Calcutta especially, where Gordon settled down, there is every inducement to forget. He had the entrée to the clubs. And there was a gay social life for a man with money and leisure.

But Gordon was fighting something deeper and stronger than he realized. After two months had dragged away, Edith had not faded from his mind.

He had no liking for the hardships of a tiger hunt, but he craved to kill something other than himself, and at the end of the Christmas holidays he telegraphed an upcountry forest officer whom he had met. The next day he took the Assam Mail for the Bhutan frontier.

As he was rich and important, the forest department did him well. A lorry was waiting for him at the railroad station with a complete outfit furnished by a half-caste guide. At the end of the road was one of the best reserve forests in India, trained hunting elephants, native shikaris and camp servants. And knowing the great Sahibs who came from afar, the outfitter had provided a case of whisky and three cases of soda.

That night Gordon found a new world. The firelight glistened on the vines, dark faces moved in and out of shadow; there were new smells, heart-stilling sounds. But even into this world came the ghost of a dim smile and compassionate eyes.

The days began to drift by, each with its haunted night. He saw no tigers, but here in the silence and solitude he saw deeper into his own heart than ever before. There was no use trying to forget Edith. He did not know whether he loved her or not—at times he seemed to hate her—but she must love him or everything else was lost.

"How soon can we get that tiger?" he demanded of his guide. "I've got to start for America in a few days."

"The luck is against us, sir," the man answered. "And it will be against us until we do what is fitting."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"You would laugh at it, sir. Only a few Sahibs, *burra* Sahibs who have been in India for years, do not laugh."

Gordon looked about him. An enormous purple-tinted moon picked up the jagged foothills. The throb of a tom-tom rose and fell with the rising and falling of the night wind.

"I won't laugh."

"Sir, there is a guru living at the village. He is more than a guru; he is a lama. And he says until he makes *pooja*—magic—you will see no tigers."

"How much does he charge? I don't intend to be imposed upon."

"He charges nothing. He, too, wishes you to kill the tigers that eat the cattle, but you cannot do so until with your consent he seeks the favor of the shikari god. Afterward—if you get the tiger—you can give him a rupee or two."

"I'll try anything once. Tell him to shoot the works. If I get a tiger, I'll give him five rupees."

Runners were sent at once to the village. But when the priest came at dawn, Gordon did not feel quite so cynical as he liked to feel. It was not the man's getup that impressed him—his white robe and turban, amulet and rosary—but his ascetic highbred face and childlike limpid eyes; not his ceremoniousness but his extreme simplicity.

"There are many tigers here," he explained. "The Sahib cannot see them because his eyes are blinded by lust."

"You speak English!" Gordon marveled.

"Yes, Sahib. Long ago I went to a great school. There I learned that all gods are one god, and that there is only one law for white and brown alike."

"Your gods will make me see a tiger?"

"No, Sahib. My gods are impotent to help you; only if they become your gods can they open your eyes. Only if they become *you*. It is possible for any man to be all the gods himself; then he can see all things, do all things. But that is a task too great for one lifetime. Only one man has achieved it—two or three, at most. Yet the least of us can aspire to walk a few steps toward godhead."

"Can you, or can't you, help me get a tiger? That's what I want to know. If you can, I'll give you five rupees."

The guru smiled dimly. For some reason Gordon remembered Edith of the compassionate eyes. He felt vaguely annoyed, too. Why should he waste his time on this native mountebank?

"Sahib, when you walk in the woods without your gun, do you see game?"

Gordon's eyes opened slightly. "That's when I do see it. All over the place. But when I go back after my gun——"

"The game is gone? No, Sahib; your eyes are blinded by lust. It is easy to slaughter deer fenced in a park or fowls fed at the doorstep, and the gods

do not protect the killer against himself but let him stew in his own shame. But when the true shikari goes forth to kill sparingly for food, or even as the triumph of a long fair chase to refresh and make young his spirit, the life of one deer is a cheap price for his full joy. But if he goes forth with lust in his heart, the kind gods blind his eyes."

"I don't want a deer. I want a tiger."

"Then you must make entreaty to the shikari god; pray that you may test your courage against the tiger's fangs and claws—for the gods love courage. Ask that you take the skin to recall in later years the foolish but honest passion of the chase. Consider that if you kill a tiger you will save the lives of many of our cattle. And I will do ceremonies to free the heart of evil and unveil the eyes."

The ceremonies were utterly childish, Gordon thought—the drawing of queer figures in the sand of the river bed, bead-telling, incantations. It was all he could do not to laugh. But that he did not laugh seemed to mean something. At least it was better manners than the guru seemed to expect; the beginning of tolerance; perhaps the start of a long journey back to the heart of a child.

"Now if the Sahib will mount his elephant and ride up the nullah until the hills grow steep, he will meet a tiger," the guru said when the rite was over.

Not greatly to Gordon's surprise, the *pooja* seemed to work. At least, at the head of the nullah he caught a glimpse of a large tawny animal slinking into a thicket. It was *Bágh*, the mahout assured him. If the Sahib had raised his gun quicker, he could have had his skin.

But Gordon felt no shame or regret at having missed his shot. He had other things on his mind.

When the guru visited camp that night, Gordon gave him not five rupees but ten. Also, he offered him a drink, but this the man refused.

"Sit down on the floor," Gordon said in a brusque voice. "I want to talk to you. I'm interested in the occult. I want to know how far it can go."

"It can go to the Sahib's own land and back in the twinkling of an eye."

"Then what can you see in my own land? I am going there soon."

"I see a Mem-sahib, a white woman. But she is very far away and dim. The Sahib wishes she were near."

“What do you mean, far away? You don’t mean—in love with another man?”

“Yes, Sahib.”

Gordon reached for his bottle, but his hand shook, and the liquor spilled. “Is she coming back to me? Tell me the truth. If you lie to me——”

“I will speak truth, Sahib. She will come back and hold Sahib in her arms—if Sahib truly desires.”

“I want to hold her in *my* arms. I want her kneeling at my feet.”

The guru shook his head and turned to go.

“Wait. I’ll give you a hundred rupees.”

“Five rupees is enough for me—to buy my rice for two moons. But what will Sahib give her?”

“What do you mean? I want her at any cost.”

“Cost in silver, Sahib? The silver in all the treasure hoards of all the rajahs will not buy her. Or cost in Sahib’s tears, in his pride, in his love instead of lust?”

“Just tell me what I have to do, and I’ll do it. Anything to win her back.”

“Would Sahib leave his tent and walk with me to the river?”

“Yes, I’d walk from here to Calcutta.”

“Only to the river, Sahib. It is farther than Calcutta, farther than you dream. And would Sahib dare to call down the high gods, hear them whisper in the reeds, and make such *pooja* as few gurus, let alone white men, have ever seen?”

“No, I wouldn’t be afraid.”

“Be afraid, Sahib! Such *pooja* is perilous beyond all the tigers in the jungle. Be as a little child who walks alone into a dark room.”

“You’ll be with me, won’t you?”

“Only to the door. Beyond, you must go on alone. And waiting there, I too will be afraid—for you. Perhaps it is best that Sahib be content with his silver and his pride of place, and not——”

“No, I’ll take the chance. I’ll go to hell and back.”

“Only to the river, Sahib—the glassy margin of the river in which a man may see his own image—but that is very far.”

An inexplicable dread seemed to clutch at Gordon’s heart, but he remembered who he was and it passed off. “I’m ready,” he said.

“Is there a little milk in camp?” the guru asked. “And tobacco? And has Sahib a knife?”

“I have tobacco and a hunting knife. The cook has milk.”

“Is it well? The gods have put all things needed in reach of Sahib’s hand. You must come quickly, Sahib. The moon will soon be hidden by the jungle.”

The river was hardly a hundred yards. Soon they were squatting side by side on the bank, the priest and his disciple. But the ceremony that followed was even more childish than the tiger *pooja*, Gordon thought.

First the guru cleared a little space on the bank and placed there three mounds of fresh cow dung. In the hollows of these mounds he put some pipe tobacco and poured on milk. Then he walked slowly around them, counting his beads and mumbling.

“Is that all there is to it?” Gordon demanded.

“No, Sahib. This is only to make ready and to beg audience of the Great Ones. The Sahib must make the *pooja*. Take in your hands as much good clay from the riverbank as is possible to hold.”

Gordon obeyed. “But it’s damned dirty and sticky,” he complained.

“No, Sahib. It is the good earth in which seeds grow. The years have been too long since Sahib has had it in his hand, pressed it with his naked foot. Now shape it into the form of the woman.”

“*The* woman? Or just a woman?”

“You know, Sahib. It is no time to jest. The high gods are here.”

It seemed to Gordon that he heard a strange rushing sound, unlike any sound he had ever heard before, close by him in the reeds. There came a curious prickling sensation in his scalp.

“Shape her as she is, Sahib,” the guru warned him in hushed tones, “not as you would have her be. If you lie now to the gods they will have terrible revenge.”

Gordon's hands began to ply the clay with uncanny skill. With bulging eyes he saw it take shape. A woman of lovely form, with breasts that pointed out and up and a thin face that only a few men thought beautiful. Afraid of the vengeance of the gods if he lied to them, he shaped her eyes just as they were—pitying, not worshiping—high art born of sad truth. In the travail of creation he shaped her tender lips.

But Cecil Porter had kissed those lips, he remembered. He might be kissing them this minute. Don't let him, gods! Give her back to me, gods!

"She's ready," Gordon said, aloud.

"Lay her gently on the grass, for no harm must come to her."

Gordon laid her down as gently as he could. But it was not very gently, because he remembered her infidelity. "There she is," he said. "Lying as I've seen her so many nights. Asleep and dreaming, guru; but is she dreaming of me? That's what I want to know."

"It is enough that you dream of her. Now you must give the sign of sacrifice. With the point of your knife prick your little finger until the blood flows."

I can spare a little blood, Gordon thought dreamily. I'm a full-blooded, vigorous, virile man. But the pain seems to run up my arm into my very heart.

"Now dip your forefinger in the blood and make the shape of a heart on Mem-sahib's breast," the guru murmured.

"There you are. Her lover is a magazine illustrator, but he couldn't draw a better heart than that. You can almost see it beat."

"You can feel it beat if you lay your finger on it gently."

Gordon tried it. He certainly felt something. Perhaps it was his own pulse, he thought. He'd better believe it was his own pulse or he'd be a raving maniac!

"All right, doc," he said, whistling in this dark room. "What now?"

"With the point of your knife cut out her heart."

Gordon glanced up, his eyes wide with terror and a crawling sensation all over his skin. "You didn't say—cut out her heart?" he whispered, "I don't want to kill her. I only want her back, loving me. I never said I wanted to kill her."

"No, Sahib. She will not die. You will swallow her heart, washed down by the holy milk."

"Swallow a gob of clay?"

"It is only a symbol, Sahib, that you want her heart and will keep it warm and safe within your own."

It would take delicate surgery, Gordon thought, but he would be very careful. His hand did not shake as he traced with his knife point the heart-shaped blood-spot on Edith's breast and then deftly lifted it out. But as he was about to convey it to his mouth, he saw his reflection in the river's glassy brim.

Suddenly the spell broke. The world was with him again—the material world which was the only one he had ever known or needed. For he saw the clean-cut features that he had loved so long, his New York haircut that Calcutta barbers had so carefully maintained, the neat-fitting collar of his expensive outing shirt. Beside his own reflection was that of a tribal medicine man, his lips moving as he muttered hocus-pocus.

"*And I'm Gordon Fowler!*" He had forgotten for the moment; he had been a little child playing on the ground. But not now. He remembered he had bought and paid for Edith. Why should he eat dirt to keep what was already his own? So with a movement of disgust he flicked the tiny gob of clay off his knife point.

He had been cold and contemptuous, but when the guru started to speak his fury flared. "Get the hell out of here with your flapdoodle and don't let me lay eyes on you again!"

Gordon broke camp the next day, and in a furious temper returned to Calcutta. But there he found a letter that curled his lips in a triumphant smile.

He could come home now, Edith had written. Enough time had elapsed since their trouble to give perspective and to heal her wounds. Whether she could be his wife again she did not yet know—she could not know until she looked into his eyes and listened to her heart—but certainly the chance was as good as it would ever be.

It was not complete surrender, Gordon told himself, but perhaps it was even more satisfactory. She was "saving her face," and never before had he known her to take the trouble.

His confidence grew steadily during the journey home. He found that he was more charming than ever to young lady passengers. For all her grande-dame manner, he exulted, Edith was no fool. She knew on which side her bread was buttered.

He had cabled her to meet him at their Seventy-second Street apartment. The answer—a telegram delivered to him at the New York dock—told him to come to her hotel. But his smile did not fade. He would not begrudge her this last little gesture of independence.

He considered carefully and decided to take flowers, concealing among them a magnificent ruby bracelet he had bought in Bombay. And of course he dressed his best. Then, cool, masterful, and ten minutes late, he rang at Edith's door.

She, too, was beautifully dressed, and she gave him her lips to kiss. That practically settled everything, he thought. But she did not linger in his arms, nor did her lips burn with passion. They had been apart for nearly six months, he thought; things were bound to seem a little strange. . .

But that strangeness took a strange form. There was something unfamiliar in her eyes as she stood with her back to the fireplace, looking at him. She said, "Would you like tea or a smoke?"

"I'm in a hurry to take you home," he said.

"This is home now," she told him.

"But——"

"And it's only three blocks from where I work. I didn't write you, Gordon, but I got a job as soon as you went away. And with that and the little money I have, I haven't needed the allowance you arranged for me."

"Edith, that's silly. You're a silly little woman, but I love you." And dropping into a chair, he smiled and made a gesture that she knew.

But she did not make the little face he remembered and come into his arms. She stood quite still. And in the dream he had built, there came a little rift.

"Come here, Edith."

She shook her head.

"Edith, what does it mean?"

"Just what it seems to mean, Gordon."

“Not that you won’t come back to me!”

She nodded.

He sprang to his feet. “Why? You’re not in love with another man?”

“Not now. Perhaps sometime I will be—I hope so. I need love, Gordon—to give and receive. But I can’t give it to you. It’s finished.”

“But your letter?”

“I’m sorry. I thought that when I saw you—but it doesn’t work.”

He drove his mind to the last notch. “But that letter showed you’d forgiven me for the crazy thing I did.”

“It wasn’t crazy. It was you. Yes, I’d forgiven you, but the love I had for you is gone, I don’t know where.”

He lost his head then. He tried to take her in his arms; he pleaded and wept. Why? he demanded. She *had* to tell him.

“I’m the same man I’ve always been,” he stormed. “And you used to love me.”

“I didn’t know you then. I was always sorry for you—you were so weak—but I didn’t know you were a—but you know too, already.”

“I don’t. I insist on your telling me.”

“I’d rather not, I think. It would be kinder not to. But somehow I can’t feel any strong impulse to be kind to you.”

“Don’t torture me! What am I?”

“A phony, Gordon.”

“Oh, Edith, haven’t you any heart?”

“It’s strange you should ask that. As far as you are concerned, I feel as though my heart had been cut out of my body.”

Detour to Calcutta

Before the last war, W. F. Bigelow of Good Housekeeping *Magazine told me I might write for him an adventure story of India, provided it had "love interest" of the acceptable sort. If he liked the piece, he would send me a check well up in four figures.*

Now this is the kind of thing greatly disparaged by many serious young writers of today. It makes, they say, for mechanized stories, and for literary prostitution. Actually if we removed from libraries, museums, galleries, and even churches all the works of art made to order and brought C.O.D., the desolation thereof would be equal to that wrought lately by the acquisitive connoisseurs from the Pinakothek.

True, a great many gruel-thin stories are turned in and peter out through this editorial practice. But while "Detour to Calcutta" is in a different class from "The Closed Trophy Room," and its slight love story is patently strained, I am still of the opinion that my deal with Mr. Bigelow benefited all concerned. One popular columnist wrote me that, reading the story in a hospital bed, he become so excited that he mistook a nurse for a dacoit, and tried to shoot her with an urinal!

George Launcelot's grandfather, who settled in North-eastern India in 1880, had been a proper pukka Englishman. A fine Sargent hanging in the big bungalow of the Launcelot jute plantation east of Bhutan shows him behind an extensive mustache, in a buff riding habit with a hunting crop in his hand. He read the Times two months late, insisted on a fish course with every dinner even though it was only a sardine on a cracker, and pronounced the "Doors" of Bhutan—the passes into the country—as if they were spelled "Duars," and so they are printed on official maps to this very day.

George Launcelot's father was pukka English, too, but not quite so proper. He had been born in India and learned to jabber Hindustani before he could stammer a word of his mother tongue. Occasionally he forgot to dress for dinner, and in a crisis would drink palm toddy instead of Scotch and soda.

But George Launcelot himself was an out-and-out Colonial. He had little more in common with the bank managers of Calcutta than with the Akas, Daflas, Miris, Mishmis, and Abors of his own jungled hills. His father

worried about it, but it was all his father's fault for not sending him to England to school, for raising him on this far frontier cut off from his own kind.

Yes, it was British soil. Musty records in Delhi stated positively that it had been conquered by the soldiers of the Queen. But this did not prevent the tigers from killing his father's buffaloes, and the Akas, Daflas, Miris, Mishmis, and Abors from cutting off and stuffing the heads of his coolies, and his son George from smoking native cheroots from the age of fourteen. George had himself accounted for twenty-two of those tigers, not to mention a wild rogue elephant that insisted on leaning against and rolling over all the houses in the native compound, but he had never attended a viceregal levee nor dined at the Bengal Club.

But this distressing situation would now be remedied. Today George was leaving for his freshman year at college in Calcutta. George himself, well aware of the drabness of his existence, was thrilled at the prospect. A new and breathlessly exciting world was opening before him.

Gay Firpos. Race meets. Cricket and football. Beautiful English girls just off the boat. It wasn't quite like going to Oxford; still, it was escape from this hole-in-the-jungle of a jute plantation. He, too, would learn to say "ra-a-a-ther" and "definitely" when he meant "*bas*." He was just eighteen, worse luck, but a clean six feet in his socks, and with a little coaching the golden down on his upper lip would be a mustache.

His bags had been loaded in the plantation lorry. His brand-new tennis racket and golf clubs, which he would not trust out of his sight, were under his arm. His old .404 Express rifle was oiled and put away, and although he had had a bit of fun with it from time to time, he didn't care if he never laid eyes on it again. He could hardly wait for a decent leave-taking with his bright-eyed mother and with his old ayah weeping softly in the corridor.

"I'll miss you heaps," he told the erect, smiling woman beside him. "But why can't you and the Pater come down to Calcutta for my Christmas vacation? *Wah*"—he caught himself hastily—" 'Pon my word, you need a rest from this graveyard. Without a little change and excitement you get in a rut."

Meanwhile he was edging toward the door. But his exit was interrupted by the entrance of Kodo Doro, his own body servant, trouble in his brown face.

"Little Sahib," the old idiot began.

Kodo Doro was always forgetting and calling him that. Likely enough he'd say it in front of his college mates in Calcutta. But when George gave him a look, he salaamed quickly.

"Great Sahib! Protector of the poor! Is it my fault that I am the bearer of bad news?"

"What news? Speak, Kodo Doro."

"The driver's brother has just come from Bishnath. Without Sahib's leave, a great rain fell last night in the Dafla Hills. The Bhareli River, already high, has made war against the bridge and washed out a span so our lorry may not pass."

George answered nothing, but his mother saw his face.

"The span shall be replaced at once," she said. "With many men and elephants it is only two days' task." Her eyes skipping George's eyes, she turned to her husband. "But, dear, isn't there some way George can avoid this delay? I know he'd be glad to have two days more with us, but it would make him late for qualifying. Isn't there some way around?"

"Let's see. There's that bridge at the old Kali shrine eight miles above. It's a long, high span and probably won't be damaged. If George would ride Birchi Guj across country to Thurston's mission—what's his name, that little sawed-off elephant with the wired tusks, could carry his baggage—he could borrow the Reverend's lorry——"

"That would mean he could catch the midnight train at Nowgong——"

"Save the layover at Gauhauti——"

"Arrive in Calcutta on the second morning in time—why, George, it's perfect!" George's mother whipped to Hindustani. "Kodo Doro, call up Purun Dey and bid him put the howdah on Birchi Guj."

George's young blue eyes had lighted up. True, it wasn't up-to-date to ride partway to college on an elephant. He wouldn't want the fellows to know he was such a country bumpkin. But no one would see him except the old missionary and his gangling daughter. The latter was just a child—not even sixteen yet—and probably still played with dolls. And he'd miss only one night of fabulous Calcutta.

"I fancy I won't take the howdah," he conceded after a brief struggle. "Don't mind a little discomfort, and there's not much clearance in that trail across the hills. Kodo Doro, tell Purun Dey to use only the pad."

"And see here, Georgie-Porgie."

It was his father speaking, but when George looked at him, he paused, gulped, and pretended to busy himself lighting a cigarette.

"If it won't be too much trouble, I suggest you take your rifle," Launcelot senior went on. "You may see a sambur you'd like to shoot for Thurston, and you might—just might—run into a wild rogue elephant. You can leave the rifle at the mission, and I'll send one of the boys for it later."

George saw no sambur and met no rogues on the jungle trail across country. He was glad because he was in a hurry to get on and desired no interruptions of his rosy dreams. Once he heard a tigress bellyaching in a nullah, but he didn't want to dust up his new boots going after her. And golf and tennis—really bang-up sports—awaited him at college.

But when he emerged on the long hill running down to Thurston's mission, something more than his dreams was interrupted. Troubles never come singly. When it rains, it pours. At his first glance into the valley he seemed to know he was going to miss that train!

He peered closer. What he saw now made him forget the train entirely. Thurston's "tame" Dafla villagers were either running frantically about or standing in little groups, shrieking and yelling. All their houses on one side of the road were in flames or had already burned down. And from his eminence George could see three black things lying in a row, like human figures except that they looked too blunt at one end.

"Dacoit raid," he gasped—for he had seen similar blunt black things in his own father's compound one night long ago when torches flared and terror ran in the dark.

"Yea," the mahout breathed.

"*Julda*, Purun Dey! Bid him go down quickly."

The mahout turned his head, and his face was like wet ashes. "Nay, little Sahib, let us go the way we came. Thou knowest the wild Daflas. They will still be watching just beyond the fields. They are many, and thou art only one."

"Two, lord," Kodo Doro broke in from behind him on the elephant pad. "But verily they are many, with poisoned arrows, and it is not well that my little—that my great Sahib's head be hung in their joss house, stuffed with straw. If thou wilt return and summon the old Sahib——"

In the meantime George was trying to keep that wet-ashes look from his own face. There were cold drops in the down on his upper lip. His mother had not intended him to see those things in the compound that night, for he had been only twelve years old, but his father had taken him by the hand and led him straight up to them.

"For it's his own country, y'know," his father had said.

He was glad he had looked at them then, because now he could look again. They were only the bodies of men without heads. And, yes, this was his own country. He didn't want it—he wanted the lights and the hurrying motorcars of Calcutta—but it had been forced upon him. It was creepy, complicated business he hadn't time just now to figure out.

"*Julda!*"

His voice was little better than a croak, but the mahout understood. And the punch George gave him in the middle of his naked back added emphasis.

"Yea, Sahib," and the mahout pricked Birchi Guj's huge gray head with the point of his ankus.

When the wise beast realized the emergency—Purun Dey hadn't told him, so he must have picked it out of the air with his trunk—he tore down that hill like an avalanche. Usually elephants arch their backs on steep slopes, to couple up themselves and use their forelegs as brakes, but Birchi Guj ran fully extended. *Clump, clump, clump, clump*, his pile-driver feet hit the trail, his legs like bounding trees; and the slow, easy motion that usually put George to sleep was now a vicious zigzag-jerk, zigzag-jerk, that almost shook his teeth out.

Birchi Guj was the best elephant the Launcelots owned. For the moment George was almost as proud of him as if he were a prize pony at the Christmas race meet in Calcutta. And now his trunk was high and blaring, because he smelled blood.

"Be still, my child," Purun Dey told him. "Wilt thou have the whole cutthroat band about our ears? And if thou art slain also, blame me not! We come down by the Sahib's order."

Birchi Guj pulled down his trunk and curled it out of harm's way between his tusks. The mahout groaned at the sight, and George himself bit his lip. This was the first real indication that there would be fighting.

Until now George had consoled himself that the dacoits had already fled to the fastnesses of their hills. But Birchi Guj's trunk was his pride and joy,

and while he didn't mind swinging it to slap down a tiger, he took no chances with it during serious engagements. To see him curl it up was like seeing a Gurkha unsheath his kukri. And now he said nothing at all to his mahout and made no sound but a series of enormous grunts.

Yes, Birchi Guj might be mistaken. George quickly remembered occasions when this had been the case. For instance, that day they had climbed a steep hill through tall grass looking for a wounded rhino, only to find the brute dead. But today the general look and smell and feel of everything seemed to bear him out. No doubt the raiders had gone—otherwise the survivors would be in hiding—but in the back of their heads, where George and the mahout and Birchi Guj felt about things, it seemed that the murderous little brutes had not gone far.

Suddenly he noticed that one of Reverend Thurston's out-buildings was burning, too. Kodo Doro handed up the .404 Express. Chopping off native heads was one thing, and destroying Sahib's property was quite another. And what if they hadn't stopped with destroying Sahib's *property*? The very thought made George's scalp tighten over his skull with a ghastly prickly feeling. Lord, let him see old Thurston bustling around, soothing his terrified villagers!

He should be in sight by now. George knew for a fact that while Thurston's wife and little son were summering in Shillong, he and his daughter Rose had stayed at the mission. And he wouldn't have sloped for the bushes when arrows began to hum. No, in his own way he was a pukka Sahib, and he'd stand out there with his old double-barreled shotgun until ——

It was queer and kind of creepy to be looking for him and at the same time not looking for him, to stare so hard at long figures standing up and skip so quickly over blunt objects lying down. But a fellow couldn't see very well, jerking and bumping downhill on a stampeding elephant. Why, he couldn't even see Rose, Thurston's daughter. . .

But there she was! George muttered some curious native names in thanks. Unhurt, she was running up the hill to meet him, crying and waving her hands.

The mahout stopped his elephant. George did not wait for him to *putt*, but slid off, breaking the ten-foot drop with one hand on the pad ropes. Then he stood looking down at the little girl, somehow unable to speak.

She wasn't so little, either, any more, and maybe he needn't treat her as a mere child. She wasn't so flat in front as he remembered her, nor down the sides. Her dark bobbed hair was full of leaves and grass, and her big eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, *you*!" Her voice sounded heartbroken. "I thought it was your father. And now what shall I do, what shall I do?"

George took her by the arm and shook her. She was just a brat, hardly sixteen, but she ought to know better.

"Tell me what's happened. Where's your father? I'll take charge here!"

But now she looked in a queer startled way into his face, and just a little of the despair went out of her eyes. "They were wild Daflas. There must have been a hundred—no, about thirty. Most of the villagers ran away, but they killed three or four. And—and—they carried off Father."

"You don't think they—they——"

"No. I was hiding in the closet, and I heard them say the Government would pay five pony loads of rupees for the white magician's freedom. But if they get excited——"

Her voice faded out. His head lifted and his eyes fixed, George had begun to think in Hindustani. Yea, the Daflas were as monkeys in the trees. Like the bandarlog, they gathered fruit only to spill it on the ground. They might carry the white priest to their ape nests and keep him safe many days, but if they became alarmed or fought among themselves for his gold watch chain, they might cut his throat at any turn in the trail. It was not well to leave the Sahib even one night in their treacherous hands. But what could the four of them do?

He caught himself with a jerk. He was a Sahib, too, George Launcelot Sahib. And as his father had told him long ago, this was his own country. He turned, caught the girl's hand, and held it firmly. In a short time her wild rapid breathing became steady.

"How long have they been gone?" he asked her.

"Half an hour."

"Are you sure? Think carefully. Everything depends on that."

"Not more than fifteen minutes."

"They'll hit for Baloo Pass, of course. But they can't ford Bhareli in flood; they'll have to go all the way to the bridge and back." He was

thinking in English now.

"Yes, George. Yes, yes."

"Who's the best man in your village? If you only had *one* Gurkha! How about that Pin Wun fellow, the chief?"

But now Pin Wun and his villagers were legging it up the hill to join them. Coming for protection, George thought with a little thrill. For he was a Sahib, and Rose, unappreciative child though she was, a kind of Mem-sahib. George raised his hand, and the gasping, gobbling throng grew silent.

"Pin Wun!"

The chief looked at him dazedly, then touched his forehead. "Sahib!"

"Collect and arm all thy men. The strongest of wind and the swiftest of foot. Thou shalt lead them on the trail of the raiders."

"Nay, lord. These men are only rice growers. They can not throw the spear or shoot the arrow."

"Wilt thou bandy words with *me*? It is thine own brethren who have committed this shame, burned half thy village and stolen thy master from his house, and the shame is thine unless it be atoned."

"Yea, lord. And if thy father, skilled in war, will lead us——"

But when George looked at him, he stammered and salaamed.

"If *thou* wilt lead us, Protector of the Poor!"

"I go by another route. And thou and thy men need never come in arrow range of thy kinsmen. Only follow them with many shoutings, and show as if to do battle, so that they will stop often on their trail to form their battle line and will not peer too carefully into the thickets ahead. For ye there is no danger. For now they are in haste to reach their bamboo palings in the hills."

"But for thee, lord? While thou art a great hunter——"

"No more words, but go quickly. And—and when ye hear the big gun speak, ye will know it is safe to come up."

It took all his breath for that last statement, yet he made it ring loud and clear. Pin Wun called his men, and they ran to their houses for their rusted spears and long-slacked bows. The little baggage elephant, who had made a tardy appearance, would wait here with his mahout. George turned to Rose.

“We’re off.” He gulped just once. “You stay here and hide in the woods.”

“George, you shan’t go.”

“Don’t be silly. They’re only a lot of natives, after all.” He was reaching up his hand to Kodo Doro.

“But they’ll kill you, and then they’ll kill Father, too. You’d have to take them completely by surprise.”

He didn’t answer because he was scrambling up the clifflike side of Birchi Guj.

“Oh, I’m going with you,” she called after him. “Oh, I’m afraid to stay here alone. Oh, there may be bands of them hiding in the woods——”

It didn’t seem likely, but somehow George wanted to believe her. It would be so dark and lonely in those dense jungles of Baloo Pass. Yes, there *might* be some of the devils still lurking about.

“Hold onto my leg, Kodo Doro,” he commanded, and leaning down, he caught Rose’s upraised hands.

It wasn’t so bad, George thought, as Birchi Guj padded off for the river. It really didn’t amount to anything very much. Purun Dey had the wind up his brown back, but was pushing the elephant along at his best long-distance gait. Kodo Doro had moved up just behind the mahout; and although the back of his neck was wet with sweat, he held it straight.

George sat next, straddling the pad, with Rose behind him. For a secure seat, she had to put her arms around him and cling tight. They were warm arms, and felt strong, and presently his own arms felt unusually strong and quick and eager—well adapted to the big rifle—and there was no more cold sweat on his face.

When they came in sight of the river, Birchi Guj uttered an inquiring grunt to his mahout, and all the riders fell silent. It had been no little drizzle in the Dafla Hills. The reddish brown waters were out of their banks, whirling and rushing and roaring. A drowned buffalo from some village unnamed in the Assam Gazetteer was floating down, pitching and tossing. “When the plow bull swims on his side, stay only to count the little ones,” say the lowland cultivators among the Brahmaputra.[1]

“Sahib?” gasped the mahout.

“Bid him cross, Purun Dey.”

“But consider, lord. In the deep of the drought cattle can not ford here. Now there is more water than inches to a Punjab lord—six feet, yea, eight, perhaps, and great holes scooped out, and she runs like a thousand fiends. At least let us seek a higher crossing.”

“There is no time. What says Birchi Guj?”

“Yea, Birchi Guj, speak truly.”

Purun Dey employed the language in which only one caste of Assamese mahouts—a small but exalted caste—address their elephants. It was not modern Hindustani, but a tongue of the same root forms, and perhaps was the speech of pale-colored kings when Benares was a mud flat.

“Canst thou cross here, my son?” Purun Dey inquired of Birchi Guj. “Do not say thou canst for a boast, then lose thy great feet in the rapids and drown us all! Look at her roll by, my lord, and hear her roar! Do not let thy boy’s heart betray thee into battle thou canst not win, but tell us if thou wilt bear us safely to the other side.”

Birchi Guj looked up and down and across, and gurgled and muttered.

“What did he say?” George broke in. “I could not catch it all.”

Rose was holding her breath in astonishment—he felt her—but she was an American girl and had lived in northeastern India only two years.

“He saith, Sahib, that it is not safe, but he thinks he can carry us over.”

“Bid him try, then. But tell him of our need, or we would not ask such service.”

“He knows already, Sahib. Then push on, Birchi Guj, my jewel. And for the love of God, step gently.”

Birchi Guj eased his five tons into the water. Almost at once it was at his knees, and before they were half-started was lapping at his belly. George ordered Purun Dey to sit far forward on the big head, so Kodo Doro could move up and leave room for Rose and himself to get their feet on the pad and out of water. For his pongee suit was his second best, made by a London tailor in Shillong, and his boots were new and glossy. Even so, it was a little cramped.

The power of those rushing waters was prodigious. As they banked up on Birchi Guj’s upstream side, they felt him quiver from the strain.

“Brace thyself sturdily, my little one,” Purun Dey was imploring, “and beware of sink holes.”

But Birchi Guj came to a dead halt in the middle of the river. He gurgled something, but they could not hear him above the war drums of the waters, so he raised his trunk and trumpeted.

“What’s the trouble?” George shouted to the mahout.

“I think he would have me get back on the pad. The full sweep of the current is just ahead. He would have me brace my feet behind his ears, lest I be washed down. And thou, Sahib, and the Mem-sahib, will sit more firmly with thy legs astraddle.”

George had made the same interpretation. It was a queer mist of feeling in the back of his head. He took one last look at his trousers’ crease and the polish of his boots, then dropped his feet in the water.

Kodo Doro could now move back and allow the mahout to resume his usual seat.

“But, Rose, your feet don’t need a bath,” he said with a laugh. No, it was not his mother’s idea of a joke, but it was hard to be really comical here in the middle of the river. “I’ll hang onto the pad ropes with my right hand, and you hang onto me, tight as you can. That’s right. And even if he should lose his footing, hang on for all you’re worth.”

His heart was thumping no end, and his feet felt warm even in the water. Birchi Guj turned his head and looked at them. His little eye was fairly shining with the fun of the water fight.

Satisfied, he trudged on. They felt the full power of the current strike him, no deeper than before but three times stronger; and they knew that for once in his sixty years he was giving all he had. But it was enough. The river boiled up on his side and swirled around him and raved and raged in vain.

It wasn’t a river, but a god! George knew this breathless secret, for Kodo Doro had told it to him before he had learned English, and the god’s name he could never remember except sometimes in the middle of the night when half-asleep, but he took the form of a giant buffalo with white hoofs and horns. And you could bet he was mad as blazes to see Birchi Guj battling back the waters with his big head and surging nearer and nearer the bank!

And now Birchi Guj raised his trunk and gave a triumphant joyous trumpet peal that would set the wild herds blaring a league down wind. And the riders sighed and smiled at each other, because they knew the worst was over.

“But make no more such noises, my darling child,” Purun Dey told Birchi Guj as they walked out of the water. “One the wicked Daflas will mistake for the war cry of a wild tusker, but two may put them on guard. Thou must remember that we go in stealth.”

Hanging his head a little, Birchi Guj pushed into the dark jungle. And this little *daur* might not be simple from now on, George confessed. A man felt different in the jungle than under open sky. There were so many things he didn’t understand, and the oftener he came here, the more there were, and the queerer.

The Daflas were only ratty little natives. But they brewed a mysterious poison for their arrow points, and once he had seen a gypsy horse dealer die from that poison. They knew how to lie in ambush, in scanty grass or almost open jungle, better than a panther.

“You’d better keep your arms around me when we go up these steep hills,” he told Rose. “We don’t want to have to stop and pick you out of a thorn bush. And I don’t mind, for it’s cool here under the trees.”

No, he didn’t mind. And for some reason—he didn’t try to explain it—her arms kept him feeling and thinking English instead of Hindustani.

“Make haste, my lord,” the mahout told Birchi Guj. “I know these hills are steep, but this is Sahib’s business.”

And he, George, was the Sahib! He raised his head, and Birchi Guj quickened his pace.

They were heading straight for Baloo Pass. The jungle was fairly open, and only occasionally did Birchi Guj’s trunk weave up, twine around an obstructing limb, and jerk it from its socket. And now they could hear the shouts of Pin Wun’s villagers to the right and well below them. It seemed likely George would win his race with time to spare. But he didn’t hear a sound from the dacoits. For the bloodthirsty little brutes were always silent as cobras until they were ready to strike.

“Are you afraid, George?” Rose whispered.

“Me? What’s there to be afraid of?”

“Then I’m not, either. But you won’t be reckless, will you, just because you don’t know the meaning of fear?”

“Oh, I’ll watch out for you, Rose, and for your father. I haven’t forgotten the rules are different where women and old men are concerned.” He drew a deep breath. “And if you’re feeling a little nervous,” he went on staunchly, “you can climb into one of these trees——”

“Oh, I want to be with you! Oh, I’d die with fright if you left me here.”

He patted her arm. Nice little thing, she was.

Meanwhile Birchi Guj went stealing along almost to Baloo Pass. And now he scarcely needed instructions from his mahout. An old shikar elephant, he avoided looming on the skyline, walked quiet as a tiger, and often raised his trunk to test the wind.

They made the summit, with Pin Wun’s hullabaloo still faint in the distance. And a perfect natural ambush was waiting for them here—a right-angle turn in the trail around vine-covered thickets about twelve feet high. These would screen beast and riders until George was ready; then by standing erect he could shoot anywhere up and down the Dafla file.

“But will Birchi Guj be still?” George asked with a catch in his voice. “One grunt——”

“Look at him, lord. He knows.”

George looked and felt his eyes bulge. Birchi Guj swung high his trunk, then tucked it between his tusks. His ears were standing out.

“They must be close, Purun Dey.”

“Yea, Sahib. And the beaters have hung back, afraid.”

“Make no sound or move. I think I hear them.”

“Remember the gun barrel, Sahib, my son,” Kodo Doro whispered. “If thou movest it even an inch, it will shimmer in the sun.”

All of them stopped breathing, and now they heard the low murmur of talk not two hundred paces down the trail. Kodo Doro peered through the vines.

“*Wah*, here they come,” he whispered. “They are thirty at least, and they march Thurston Sahib before them, a spear at his back.”

“They are only Daflas.”

George’s lips moved, but not even a whisper came out, just because he was so careful not to make any noise. Then he gave one convulsive shiver; but his companions would know it was only from the strain of waiting.

“And thou art a Sahib, too,” Kodo Doro told him.

“Yea.”

“*My* Sahib,” came a breathless whisper from behind him.

And then he knew it was going to be all right.

“Oh, my heart’s heart, do not flap the ears,” Purun Dey was whispering to Birchi Guj. “Do not even let the stomach rumble and growl. It is only a moment now——”

Birchi Guj was a great gray stone, only his red eyes alive and glowing. The gobble-gobble of Dafla voices drew quite close. His eyes to a rift in the vines, George could see Dafla faces, dark and cruel, and could see what three of them carried in their hands. Also he saw a fellow Sahib, prodded on like a buffalo before their spear points, staggering from exhaustion and panting for breath.

Purun Dey and Kodo Doro had moved forward to give him room. He waited until the foremost in the file made the turn in the trail, then sprang to his feet on the decklike elephant pad.

“Halt,” he yelled in English.

And the little brutes heard him, too! He had been afraid it would come out a little peep, but the obstruction in his throat had mysteriously cleared away.

The dacoits stopped in their tracks, their heads jerking on their necks. Bewilderment was on their faces, and terror. But there was only one Sahib. He saw this fact dawn in their leopard eyes. There was going to be fighting. . .

But before he had hardly seen it coming, there *was* fighting. The man whose spear was at Thurston’s back flung back his arm, his face shouting murder. George shot, and saw him start to fall. And then he whipped his gun toward the fourth man in the file, who was in the act of aiming a poisoned arrow. For a split second he thought he wouldn’t be in time, but, by God, he was!

“Drop down on the pad, Sahib,” Purun Dey yelled. “I send in Birchi Guj ____”

George got his seat just in time. The old shikar elephant did not wait to encircle the brush, but crashed straight through it. And his trunk was no

longer curled out of harm's way between his tusks. He had seen that these were only Daflas, vermin of the hills. He struck right and left.

But he bagged only one. The rest were dodging and running and yelling, leaving their prisoner and most of their weapons on the trail. George blazed away at them, but somehow he had lost his skill. So it was only a trifling shindy, after all.

George had missed his train to Calcutta, but he hardly gave it a thought as Rose and he picked flowers by moonlight to put in her father's room.

Not that the old gentleman had taken any harm. His villagers had brought him home in style, in a sedan chair manufactured on the spot. But he was worn out and perhaps a little nervous, not at all surprising in a man of his age, forty-five or maybe even forty-eight. And Rose thought it would be nice to pick him some flowers in her garden, late as it was.

"Speaking of flowers, Rose is a good name for you," George told her, in a burst of inspiration.

"Why is that?"

"Well, your cheeks are red, and so are your lips."

She smelled sweet, too, but of course he didn't tell her that.

"My lips?"

"Ra-a-a-ther! I'd almost think you use lipstick, in spite of your being only sixteen."

"Well, sixteen is almost as old in a girl as eighteen in a man." She came quite close to him, looking over her shoulder. "George, you don't think it's dangerous being out here, do you? If those dacoits should come back——"

George started to laugh at her fears and tell her—but he stopped short. It would sound like bragging, and really top-hole pukka Sahibs never brag.

"There's no danger, but we'll keep a sharp lookout."

"George. I'm sorry for what I said when you first came today," she went on. "About wanting your father."

Now he looked back on it, he didn't blame her! And if it hadn't been for Birchi Guj——

"And, George, I want to tell you something," she went on.

"*Bas.*"

"You may not believe me, but I don't use lipstick."

"You don't? Well, you'll have to prove that to me."

She seemed surprised at his manner of proof, and he could hardly believe that such a young girl's lips could be so sweet and willing. Suddenly he knew this was the real climax of the day's adventure, and its wonderful reward. Tomorrow he would start for college, but he wouldn't send back his rifle to the bungalow; he'd lend it to Mr. Thurston until his return. That return would be something to look forward to, all the time he was away.

He would not bring merely golf and tennis cups, or be talking like a Calcutta bank-manager. He would not say "r-r-a-a-ther" when he meant "*bas*."

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[1] The author made up this saying, but it has the true native ring.

The Unturned Card

The following story was first published in Harper's Bazaar. *Since its characters are upper-class people to the like of whom the magazine catered, my readers may fear a put-up job. Actually I offered it first to* Cosmopolitan, *hoping for a larger audience and fee. Also, in that misty remote period around 1936, the ethics and outlook of authentic aristocrats were still as valid fiction material as the frustrations of a stevedore.*

The class has since become practically unmentionable in American fiction; it is being slowly dropped from the gossip columns to give space to more lively performers; only the advertisements still postulate its existence. What a change! Except for a few clowns and rogues, Shakespeare wrote of no other human variety. In all his plays, I can recall only three humbly-born characters who spoke heroic lines.

The following story, about two aristocrats, lacks the dynamics of my tales about heroes. I don't know what to make of that, or of the fact that it is probably the smoothest story in the book.

Graham Fordham fell in love with Grace Wilson on the night of September 24, 1927. It was the first and the last time he ever did such a thing.

Graham experienced none of the fine frenzy which poets ascribe to lovers. Nor did he imagine that Grace Wilson was the most beautiful and marvelous girl in the world. He was the least subject to illusion of any man in his circle of friends—a very distinguished circle in an old and distinguished American city—the most positively sane.

Still he was sensitive as a shepherd dog. One must grasp this fact, to make head or tail of his love affair. It came out not only when he dealt with servants but at the bridge table with his peers—and it was all the more telling because he could be perfectly deadly at bridge. On a shooting trip his friends had to watch him to prevent his giving them the best of everything. Yet all the time—this also is important—he had a manly and unswerving respect for his own rights.

He was a rather tall, slim type, ruddy complexion, inclined to baldness, with a slow but quite radiant smile showing superb teeth, and the finest, kindest eyes any one could wish to be judged by.

He was thirty-two when it happened. Until then his experiences with women had been close to average for men of his type and background. He had liked a great many nice girls and found pleasure in their company. He had larked with a number of the demi-monde, and several had half-fallen in love with him because he had made them feel as ladies feel. He had had no affairs with girls between those two realms, girls who wanted to be nice but could not quite manage it; he didn't think it was cricket. His conscience—perhaps it was a kind of pride—prevented him from taking chances on the future to which many men never give a thought.

It happened, that September night, under rather ordinary auspices. At a small dinner party given by one of his cronies Grace Wilson sat across from him. He had known her as the kid sister of one of his younger friends, had always been entertained by her and attracted by her beauty, at once dark and glowing; but tonight was the first time it had dawned on him that she had grown up.

She was just twenty, and tonight she wore a white dress. Whether the latter fact had anything to do with what happened will never be known: it is by no means improbable. Love, even for a sane and solid type like Graham, is very mysterious business. He had never seen her in white before. While it cleverly set off the rosy dusk of her arms and shoulders, it also pointed up the other-worldliness—spirituality, if one may call it that—of her inmost person.

He watched her rather uneasily during dinner. She had an unstudied and surprised smile that came and was gone almost too quickly for the eye to catch. His dinner-companion complained that he seemed absent-minded. Actually he felt a little melancholy, without knowing why.

After dinner, the ladies struck off for the veranda, leaving the men to port and smokes. But as Grace was going out the door, she turned to call back some unimportant remark to her host. Graham saw her there, framed in the doorway, in what was no doubt a flattering light—candle-shimmer that isolated all the peculiar beauty of her face, bringing its deeper meaning clear to his eyes, and made her white dress at once luminous and transparent, so that she seemed an angel with mortal girlish breasts and earthly lovely limbs.

He saw her wholly—the precise blend of spiritual and animal beauty that she was. And this one look was all he needed. The situation was almost instantly clear. As a matter of caution he might try to question it, but it would be quite useless. He wanted Grace Wilson forever.

The surprise of it almost lifted him from his chair. Yet he soon perceived that it had been growing on him since Grace wore pigtails. He had not rushed around looking for love because he had deeply known it was waiting for him. The effect of that lone violent leap of his heart was an immense tingling tenderness flowing through him to the very tips of his fingers.

"Do you suppose the man means what he says?" Ted Greenough was asking him.

"Sorry, Ted. Who means what?"

"What's eating on you, Graham? I asked you if President Coolidge means what he says about, 'I do not choose to run.' "

Graham told him—But Grace was out on the veranda now, he told himself, sticking her tongue into a crystal thimble of yellow Chartreuse. He wondered how soon he could get there with her, then get her alone. It would take some expert maneuvering and perhaps a little lying to manage it at all quickly. For strangely enough, a man could not turn to his dinner companions, old friends though they were, and say,

"Look! I've just found out I'm in love with Grace Wilson. Excuse me a moment while I go tell her and ask her to marry me."

No, it was such a natural and simple thing to do that they would think he had gone crazy.

But now the host was pushing back his chair. . . . She was sitting on a chaise-longue affair, relishing a smoke, her legs half drawn up in one of those graceful postures a man's legs could never achieve in ten years' practice, her skirt too short to conceal the shimmering swell of her calves. He looked her over, fine dark hair to narrow silk-clad ankles. There was not the slightest doubt.

The time passed fairly fast, from now on. He listened to her occasional remarks—none of them needed recording with the sayings of Solomon—rejoiced in her voice, watched her face and every little movement of her head and hands. And in a very little while, his break came.

"There's ten of us—two tables and a half," he said. "Grace, let's you and me be the half for the time being. There's a rare vegetable out in the garden I want to show you."

"Is zat so?" She was hardly twenty. "Well, Graham, you know your vegetables. I think it would be worth while to accept."

He led her to the dreamiest moonlit nook in the whole garden. He did not intend to leave one stone unturned. She chatted livelily for a moment or two, then suddenly became grave.

This did not surprise him. He had always sensed her innate dignity, although under pressure of her generation she had gone to great pains to conceal it. Not only dignity, but a kind of high-mindedness. All unawares, she had nursed and fostered her girlish romantic notions into genuine ideals.

"Well, Graham?" She was gazing quietly into his eyes.

He said nothing, but took her in his arms. Simply and happily she accepted his kiss, returned it actually, then stood there waiting, her hands locked at the back of his neck.

Still he said nothing. But his thoughts were simply flying, an erratic jerky flight like that of jack-snipe. Of itself the kiss meant little, he told himself. The ardor she put into it, an enthusiasm he could soon groom to passion, was encouraging, but he could not win her by these means. She could only be won by the capture of her ideals—and they were mysterious, unpredictable.

Yet now he had kissed her, he *must* win her. What had been an abstract conviction was now a law of nature; in one strange sense of the term, a matter of life and death. He had never dreamed it could be so imperative. He had not known that love could be like this, so remorseless, so terrifying.

"Have you any idea why I brought you here?" he asked suddenly, an almost angry roughness in his tone.

"I've been suspecting for the last half-hour. Cards on the table—if you want them—I've been halfway expecting it for the last four years."

"We'd better have the cards on the table. It's pretty damned serious business. Well, what about it? I wouldn't expect you to say positively on the spur of the moment, but do you think—do you think there's much of a chance?"

She stood away. His heart—he believed a stethoscope would prove it—stood still. She looked him up and down.

"It's very strange," she murmured at last, in a very strange dejected way, "but I don't think—there's much—of a chance."

He had once seen a man stand before a judge and be sentenced to hang. There had been some chance for a reprieve or a new trial, but precious little. That was also an affair of life and death, and now he knew why that man had thrown back his shoulders. He had been a brave, proud man. It was necessary for such beings, having fought up and out of nothingness and silence into conscious life, to show the fates where they could jolly well head in.

"I can't think of anything that would make me so proud before the world, and so happy, as to love and be loved by you," she told him after a pause, and there was nothing of the girl of twenty about her now. "Ever since I was sixteen I've been praying for it, and I mean literally praying. Until six months ago."

"And six months ago?"

"I had the bad luck to fall in love with Roger King."

"Did you say—Roger King?"

"You know, the little boy who likes his bottle. But he doesn't suck it while I'm around. The same little boy who wanders off, marries grisettes, and costs his papa thousands of guilders to get the marriage annulled. But he stays put when he thinks he's got a chance for a date with me. That's the little boy I'm in love with. Now what do you know about that?"

Only the words, not her tones, were harsh.

"Are you sure, Grace?" Graham asked, "that love is the right word?"

"How can I tell? Nobody seems to agree what the word means. But if it means to have my throat fill up when I speak of him, my breast hurt when I think of him, to feel I'm not all there when he's not there with me—if that's not love, it comes to the same thing."

There fell a long pause. "Devil of a note, isn't it?" Graham murmured.

"Right."

"Tricky, this business of life, isn't it? But don't you suppose there's a chance—think before you speak—that you'll get over it?"

"It's just as reasonable I'll get over it as that I ever got into it. Still——"

"I can wait a long time, you know. I have nothing else pressing. And if you won't slam the door in my face when I try—as I want to try right now

_____”

When she understood what he meant, she came with a quick movement and big-eyed met his kiss. She wanted to open that door wide, give him every break. There was a big rustic chair in this garden-nook, and he carried her there in his arms.

For a little while, the bad dream of Roger King seemed very distant and dim. Then her lips grew still against his own and soon drew away.

“It’s no go, Graham,” she told him, very quietly.

He nodded. This fight for a reprieve had failed to pan out.

“It doesn’t seem to work,” she went on. “I don’t know why—they were the sweetest kisses I ever dreamed—but they only make me feel guilty. Figure that one out, will you, Graham?”

She hummed a bitter little tune and got to her feet. “I know that this is right and the other’s wrong,” she told him after a moment’s thought. “If you still want the cards face up—you’re my man and I’m your woman. But I’m going to marry Roger.”

He thought of a number of things he might say, but none were of any use.

“I suppose the cosmic arrangements go hay-wire rather frequently,” she concluded in passionless tones. “God gets matters running smoothly, and up jumps the Devil. I need you, Graham, very much—I don’t think I got this out of a book, but I may’ve—but Roger needs me.”

Then she turned and walked quickly away from him and from the moon.

Grace Wilson was true to her word. The following January she married Roger King. And because in some strange way she was true to herself as well, there was nothing Graham Fordham could do about it.

Roger, a sweet-natured, finely-bred, and generous man, asked Graham to be one of the groomsmen. “I’ve half suspected that you too were fond of Grace,” he told him shyly. “Fact is, perhaps I kind of did you out of her—breaks like that come to me, sometimes—and I’d take it as a high compliment if you’d have a share in the shindig. Bygones be bygones—that sort of thing.”

Graham flushed. “I still am fond of Grace,” he answered. “And that’s the reason——”

"You'd rather not serve?"

"If you don't mind. It's a little hard to explain. I'd be a wet blanket, I'm afraid."

"Well, Grace told me not to ask you. I didn't understand at the time. I'm no end sorry, old man. But you'll come to the wedding?"

"Certainly."

"And afterward you'll come to see us, often?"

"As often as I can."

Roger thought he understood, but he did not. Graham himself only half understood. He only knew he could not be a party to a wedding he hoped and prayed would soon go on the rocks. He could not follow Roger down the aisle and then strive to thrust him from his altar.

"As often as I can," he had said. And this meant precisely never. There was the law of nature, but also there was the Law of the Bread and the Salt. He could not sit at Roger's table, dreaming and scheming to get his wife away from him. It was a shame, he thought, to array great odds against a man and then tie his hands.

Sitting in the pew with the outsiders, he heard the organist begin the Wedding March from Lohengrin. He had always loved the piece—that part, well along, where it stole into the modulation he regarded as the most beautiful single fragment in all music—but today it froze the marrow in his bones. Man alone was so foolish, so generous; the tribe assembled was so cunning, so merciless. It was unfair to employ magic of this kind to enforce its taboos—to sanctify its self-made laws. And the altar, the candles, even the white dress of the bride!

He saw through them all, but they bound him just the same. Finished him, for that matter. He watched the ceremony as from an interminable distance. Today her white dress did not set off the dusk of her face, because her face was white, too. Many eyes were wet, but hers were immense and shining, and his were dry and cold.

"*Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*"

Graham didn't believe that God had a thing to do with it, but just the same he went out of the church to a telephone, and ordered steamship tickets for Italy. His family's bank had a branch in Rome with which he could pass the time.

Thinking it over calmly, in later years, still he did not see what else he could have done. Certainly he couldn't have hung around Roger's house, trying to seduce his wife, or arrange hole-and-corner rendezvous with her. Seduce was not the right word—he was certain of this—but the fact stood.

He had his meanness and his dirt, but they refused to function in this direction. Anyway, he couldn't have got what he wanted. Had he conquered his own ideals—a very fancy name, he thought, for his accursed pride—still he could not have undermined hers. She was a natural sticker to a bargain.

And he had fled far. If it were cowardly, he couldn't help it. When his bank had established a branch in Calcutta, he had taken over the managership. But he had never considered slinking away into the dirty fog of booze or drugs. And he had cheated no other woman by marrying to forget.

For a long time he had cherished the hope that he might fall in love again. Then he could marry and again aspire to immortality. It was so sad to have that long silver chain out of the abysmal beginnings stop with him. Sometimes in a half-dream he perceived it was worse than sad—desperately wrong. But God knew he could do nothing about it. New love never visited him, because the old had never gone away.

So his relationships with women became outwardly much the same as before he had met Grace. Occasionally he sought the company of girls of his own class—to feed his eyes with their beauty and tune up his ears with their voices—and sometimes late at night he visited Hariya Lane. For the rest he made a few man friends, shot small and big game in his vacations from the bank, played cards at his club, and somehow passed the time.

It came to be the summer of 1935; Graham was forty years old. His love for Grace had not changed in the slightest particular; and the only mercy on the yawning unhealed wound of her loss was that he had accepted it as permanent, as men learn to accept an incurable maiming.

No more did he scan the divorce-news in the papers from America. From friends he learned that Grace and her husband had made a modest success of their marriage. They had mourned together over the death of their infant child; and although Roger occasionally strayed away for a prolonged drinking-bout, Grace always tracked him to his lair and brought him home.

The last he had heard of them, they were wintering in Hawaii. There, he read, Roger would study native customs, for in late years he had taken up

the science of ethnology. “The only thing he’ll study is *mikoolikow*,” Graham muttered grimly.

But Hawaii was halfway across the Pacific Ocean. Visitors there frequently strayed on to the Orient. For a few days Graham transacted his banking business in a half-daze. For a few nights he was possessed by violent and fantastic dreams. But that was nearly a year ago, now. No doubt the Roger Kings had returned to America the way they came. Graham no longer watched the shipping-news in the Calcutta papers.

It was a misty, dismal afternoon in early October. He sat at his desk at the bank; his secretary was answering a telephone call.

“Will you speak to Mrs. King?” the girl asked him.

Graham did not glance up. “What Mrs. King? Find out what she wants.”

“Mrs. Roger King, I think she said. I’ll ask her——”

It was his expression, not a sound, that silenced the girl. It was at first startled, then resolutely grim. No doubt there were hundreds of Mrs. Roger Kings in the world, but it was rubbing it in a bit to have one of them call him. The remote possibility that it might be—Good God, it was more than a possibility—It had all the signs, poetic shaping-up——

“I’ll speak to her,” he mumbled, and taking the phone, he asked, “Is this Grace?”

“Of course.”

“Not really.”

“Yes, if this is really you.”

“Where are you? I’ll come right away.”

“The Great Eastern Hotel. Room—wait a minute—204.”

“You’ll be there, won’t you? I mean, you won’t go anywhere. For I’ll come in five minutes.”

It was not easy to get himself in hand in that short ride to the hotel, yet he achieved it. For after all, Grace was merely passing through the city. No doubt Roger was with her, standing beside her and winking at her as she telephoned. He had once fled half way around the world from the sight of her, so it was absurd and inconsistent to go stark, staring hog-wild over seeing her now.

He waved to friends in the lobby of the hotel. They would not remember this moment from any other. He braced himself before the door of Room 204, straightened his tie, drew a deep breath, knocked sharply. He heard her quick step to answer, and remembered her quick step into his arms when he was young.

"Graham!"

"Well, Grace. Well, well."

It was odd he could speak at all. He couldn't *believe* she really looked like this. Not that she had changed, only that he had half-forgotten. In the years his picture of her had become dust-covered: no doubt he himself had sprinkled on the grains for his own heart's ease. Her hand was in his, but he did not kiss her sweet, smiling mouth. Perhaps she was wondering why he didn't, but it was because he did not dare. Loving her was his own funeral, not hers: he had no right to inflict it on her.

"I knew you were in Calcutta," she said rather hastily, her eyes fixed on his necktie, "so I called you up."

At once he felt a little steadier, better able to manage. "A hot note if you hadn't. But why didn't you tell me you were coming? Is Roger with you?"

Suddenly the tautness went out of her. She looked him queerly in the face. "I understand now, Graham. You haven't heard."

There came a furious deafening ringing in his ears. "Heard what, Grace?"

"There has been so much uproar about it I thought surely you knew. Roger has turned up missing. It's more serious than usual. It seems almost certain that he's—dead."

He started to say, "I'm so sorry," but it was such an abysmal lie that his throat closed up.

"Let's sit down, Graham," she went on, "I think it would help out if I'd order tea. After all, you're still Graham and I'm Grace. And you remember," there was a catch in her voice, "we have a tradition of cards face-up on the table."

He felt his eyelids grow hot and swollen, but it passed. She ordered tea, and they sat down in two close-drawn chairs and lighted smokes from the same match.

"I'll tell you about it," she said. "It won't take long. Roger and I came on from Hawaii to Shanghai, and then to Manila. I realized I was getting pretty near you, but I didn't think you'd know."

One of the reasons he loved her, he suddenly grasped, was her honesty. He could never stick liars.

"That was thoughtful of you, Grace, but it wasn't as bad as that."

"Roger had a new hobby—ethnology. It was as real as anything could be to him. He had just a smattering of it, of course, but he talked about it constantly, bustled around getting stone hatchets and native daggers, and was very happy over it." Her eyes were starry with tenderness. "I encouraged him in it—it made him feel important and slackened him up on the bottle—and that was why we went to Manila, and later why he came here."

"Here?" Graham echoed.

"Pretty close. Rangoon. I let him go alone, Graham. I shouldn't have—I knew it at the time—but he wanted so much to go off on his own and achieve something all by himself to surprise me with. He told me so earnestly that he was going into wild native country where a woman wouldn't be safe. I *couldn't* refuse him, his eyes were so big and shining."

Hers too, he noticed. But it did not give him one pang of jealousy. He had always understood the situation too well to suffer from that passion.

"He made his arrangements with a half-caste from Rangoon. I've learned since he was a drunkard and no good. They hired a launch and went down the Arakan coast. You know where that is?"

"Of course. A very wild and lonely country."

"The last they were seen was at Akyab. That was four months ago. Both Roger and the half-caste were pretty well soaked, there. They seemed to be heading south, but almost a week later their boat was found, wrecked, nearly a hundred miles north, with the body of one of his boatmen washed up on the shore."

"It looks pretty definite," Graham said.

"I know it. The American consul at Rangoon held out no hope for me. But I thought he might have got to shore somehow, and was being cared for by a native tribe completely cut off from civilization. Every one tells me it's

at least possible, on a wild coast like Arakan. And Roger has the most astonishing way of landing on his feet. He seems in the care of a special providence."

Graham looked at her and considered that this could quite possibly be true.

"It's even more likely that the whole thing was framed," she went on. "Roger has always had a longing to escape from the world, and on that warm, soft jungle coast, it got him. Perhaps the death or drowning of one of his boatmen gave him the opening, and the half-caste knew some remote tribe where for Roger's big bag of rupees they could hide away with plenty to drink forever. Or perhaps they didn't go into the interior. A strange white man resembling Roger has been seen in Chittagong, farther up the coast. He may have landed there, and arranged for the boat to be wrecked. Roger does all kinds of queer things when he wants to get off alone for a good old-fashioned drunk."

"But the police——"

"They've searched Chittagong thoroughly. But he might have taken the train there for Calcutta. He might be somewhere in this city, he and the half-caste, this very minute."

"And you've come here to see?"

"Yes," she breathed.

"And—and you want me to help?"

"If you care to. I know that if he's still alive, you can find him for me. You've been here several years—you know how to go about it—and you're the most thorough man I've ever known—in everything. And I thought," she faltered, then looked him in the eyes and went on steadfastly, "I thought you might take a special interest."

Before he could answer, a native servant brought in tea. It seemed hours since she had ordered it, actually it had been just long enough for the pot to boil. She poured it steadily enough, but when she held out the cup, her hand shook so that it spilled in the saucer, and it spilled again when he took it in his hand.

"You spoke a while ago," he said, "of our tradition of cards face up on the table."

“Of course. Any other way, we’re sunk.”

“I’d like to know what you mean that I might take a special interest. It won’t make any difference in my helping you find Roger, but still I’d like to know. For, of course, you realize I love you just the same, with all my heart.”

She put down her cup and reached for his hand and kissed the back of his fingers.

“I love you, too, Graham.” She smiled and wiped her eyes. “That’s why we can come out in the open about everything. If Roger is still alive, I want you to find him at any cost—to both of us. I can’t fail him, as long as he needs me. And if you do find him, nothing will be changed. There’s no chance for you and me.”

“I understand. But if he’s dead?”

“Then I’ll know that he’s safe from harm—and I am free.”

Graham took leave from the bank and set about his quest. His first move was to engage the services of an amazing young Burmese named Ho Pan, who knew the Arakan country, its people, secrets, and multitudinous tongues, better than any living man. He must go to that wild coast and seek Roger King Sahib. If he found him he was to send back word, but on no account to let him out of his sight.

“Thou shalt guard him as a little child, and feed him soundly, and hide away the rice-spirit when he drinks too deeply, and let him take no hazard whatsoever, until we can come and relieve thee of the charge. For he be very precious to the mem-sahib.”

“It may be a long watch,” Ho Pan said. “If I find him in some far village it may take many days to send my message to the telegraph, and many weeks for thee to make the journey.”

“Yea, but be patient. Here are many rupees. And here is a calendar, with the names of cities written thereon, showing where and when to send all tidings, good or bad. For it is my mind to seek Roger King Sahib from Chittagong to Delhi, and will send all news to thee to Kanyinchuang, to Akyab, and to Sandoway, to be held for thee until thou shalt come.”

“They are a month’s journey apart, at my snail’s pace. But the cost is thine, not mine. If Roger King Sahib be alive or dead in Arakan I shall find him, and do what is well.”

Ho Pan went out of the room and all sight and sound of him was instantly lost. Doggedly, Graham and Grace followed other clues.

They interviewed bored but courteous police officers. They listened to many rumors, most of which were incredible, and retained numerous native investigators, largely patent frauds. At Allahabad they got trace of an opium-addict who was most assuredly the missing sahib, and followed him to his den only to unearth a red-haired cockney named, God save the mark! Harry Hawkins. At Benares they were called to the morgue to see a squat German suicide with the portrait of the Kaiser tattooed on his chest. The orderly plan of campaign Graham had made had been forsaken long ago.

The weary man-hunt dragged on for nearly two months. It became ever harder to tell their hopes from their fears.

But back in Calcutta, a police officer reported what seemed to be first-hand evidence of Roger's death. A native fisherman had seen a large launch capsize in the surf off a jungle island on the Arakan coast. There had been a sahib in the launch—the native had paddled close as he dared and had tried to rescue him—but he had gone down.

"We'll check it up, of course," Graham said. "There's the possibility it was some other boat, or that the native lied."

"You're a very punctilious man, Graham. I don't know whether it's a good thing. Whether I'm glad—or sorry."

"Look, Grace. Suppose this report is true. Must you go through the conventional period of mourning? Good heavens, another year——"

"I'll mourn for Roger more than a year." Her eyes, wide, luminous and unafraid, leveled now on his. "But you and I have mourned each other eight years. That's long enough, isn't it, Graham? Anyway, it's practically six months since he was last seen at Akyab."

The smile where he moored his love, that came and went almost too fast for the eye to follow, flicked at her lips. "I will marry you," she told him gravely, "any time you like."

But they went to Chittagong to get a more detailed report of the fisherman's story. At District Headquarters outside the city they met a high-type young Englishman, greatly distressed to be the bearer of bad news. He

had talked to the police officer from Akyab, he told them hesitantly, and there was no doubt that Roger King had been drowned.

And now the young Commissioner began to feel more at ease. He liked these two people: they knew life had to go on. There was somehow a happy atmosphere in his cramped little office. He took from a drawer a gold ring bearing a family seal, and handed it to the beautiful young widow.

"Do you recognize this?"

He knew she did by her little start and her sudden pallor.

"Yes. It's my husband's."

"I am sorry, Mrs. King. A native fisherman took it from—from the hand of a dead white man he found in the water. He made no effort to recover the body—he wouldn't, you know—but his story is backed up by two other natives of good reputation, who were in his boat at the time."

"I see. May I keep this ring?"

"Of course."

"Thank you for all you've done. You needn't go to any more trouble. We consider the matter closed."

The officer nodded gravely, but he did not know his face had lighted up.

Graham and Grace spoke hardly a word on the drive back to the city. Once she wiped her eyes, but immediately smiled in a kind of tremulous happiness. He himself was aware of no positive emotions, only a profound peace.

They lunched at a comfortable English hotel, then smoked in a queer, stiff little parlor. Again Graham felt what must be the proximity of heaven, at least an intimation that there was such a place, in reach of ordinary men like him.

About four o'clock Graham rubbed out a cigarette in an ashtray and rose and stood over Grace's chair. She glanced up—they smiled at each other—and as he stooped she lifted her face to receive his kiss.

"I think it's all right now," he said. "Don't you?"

"I think so."

"You're a Presbyterian, I remember. I've learned there's a Presbyterian missionary—an ordained minister—only a half hour drive in the country.

We could stop at Government House on the way. But it probably closes at five, and unless we go pretty soon we'd have to wait till tomorrow."

"Let's not wait till tomorrow," she instantly replied. "It's so long."

She rose to her feet, and added, "Would you like to have me put on a white dress?"

He quite literally thanked God. It was so thoughtful of Him to show that it was all, all right. He had been sure of it before, but now he knew.

"I'll wear the chiffon," she went on, when she saw Graham's face. "There's a shop next door where they sell native rings. And while I'm changing, you can phone and make sure that the missionary will stay put. I couldn't bear," and her mouth was wistful, "I couldn't bear to have to wait till tomorrow."

It was only a little after six when they returned to the hotel. Both were fairly calm, but it was partly a kind of awe at their own happiness. It was hard for sane people to believe that such a perfect thing could exist on earth. As they came into the door, a half-caste clerk with liquid, black, vision-haunted eyes got the passing impression that they looked somehow alike.

But when Graham asked for his room-key the clerk became very businesslike, and spoke in funny chirping English.

"Mr. Graham Fordham? I have a telegram for you. Oha, yess."

Graham took the envelope, and turned with a gay smile to his bride. "Grace, you'll like George Corliss. He's Number Two at our bank and one of the best financial minds in India. But he won't move a finger about the big loan to the Jute Association coming up this week until he's convinced I'm not in reach. Well, I'm not. I haven't received any telegram." And he thrust the envelope unopened into his coat pocket.

She made no reply, and in fact scarcely seemed to hear. Perhaps she was wondering if he would change her name on the register, and their separate rooms for a suite. He had intended to, but on second thought, what was the use? They had nothing to conceal, but also no obligation to promote gossip among the white residents of Chittagong.

In fact it might be a sensible and pleasant thing to keep their marriage quiet, for a few more months. It would fit in with their plans for a quiet honeymoon in the Himalayan hills. No one need know their whereabouts.

“It ain’t goin’ to rain no more,” they hummed together, as they went arm-in-arm up the stairs. Yes, and that prophecy held good, while the days jostled each other in their haste, and the moon waxed and waned. There was rainbow mist in the great gulf over which their Darjeeling hotel hung like a swallow’s nest—it floated and infiltrated and loafed along from hill to hill, never in haste or passion but swallowing up Mount Everest if it had a mind—but no rain fell.

It was a quiet honeymoon, and quietly blissful. In some strange way it seemed the maiden adventure of both of them. Their breathless amazement at having each other passed, but another wonder took its place—a sense of fulfillment that grew stronger every day.

It could not be put in words, and they only knew it was in the music that the lamas played within their temples, in the fluttering of a prayer-flag on a hill-top, in the face of a stone Buddha carved by adoring hands stilled centuries ago. Perhaps an intimation of immortality.

Even what she told him, in their hushed wakening one night of fabulous moonlight, did not wholly tear away the veil. But Graham knew that he was closer to the secret than he had ever been before, or ever would be again in his present existence. Nor was it exactly happiness that it brought him, but something dearer, more significant than happiness.

For a moment as she pressed him close he saw its vague outline taking shape—all his senses were converging into one sense of perfect and complete perception—then it faded, and only the gray moonlight was in the room with them, and he was only an earth-bound mortal with his earth-mate in his arms.

“I’m sure of it, Graham,” she was whispering, reveling in each word. “Don’t you see how it fits in with all the rest? You can still question it if you want to, but I’m absolutely sure.”

When the moon was full again they were both sure. And the time had come to turn face up that last unturned card.

He would wait till after breakfast on their airy balcony, he thought. In the meantime inspiration might come to him how to go about it—courage to face it. But Grace did not wait. She stretched like a kitten in the warm sunlight, then flung down beside him and said, quite casually, “Now that we’ve put it over, don’t you think, you’d better open that telegram?”

His guard was down, and he flinched. “What telegram?”

“The one from the bank. After all, it might be something important, and people mustn’t—neglect—their work—just because they are in love.” She was speaking very slowly, her eyes on his.

“You knew all the time it wasn’t from the bank?”

“No. Did you—for certain?”

“Not for certain. Grace, that’s the truth. I thought it was at least possible that Corliss had heard I was in Chittagong and wired me on some business matter. If I hadn’t thought so, perhaps. . .” He stopped in bitter shame at his own words. “No, I would have gone ahead just the same.”

“Thanks, Graham.”

“Don’t say that just to be kind. Not unless it’s—important.”

She smiled so strangely. “You thought it might be from the bank,” she said, “but you felt in your heart that it was from Ho Pan.”

“Yes, Grace.”

“Because he was the only man who had any reason to believe we would be in Chittagong. Although we had long ago discarded the schedule we gave him, we happened to cross it that day—walked straight into that telegram. It looked like fate was laying for us, Graham.”

“*Yes, but we escaped.*” He spoke in dark pride.

“And, of course, you guessed what might be in the telegram. Ho Pan was back in the interior. He’d not likely learn there of a white man drowned at sea, but he might easily learn of a white man supposed to be drowned but really hiding away from life, going native. Hiding away from his wife, who had forced him to be a man.”

“You’ve followed my reasoning very closely, Grace.”

“But it was quite a while before I saw any weak point in the native fisherman story. The trouble with it was, it worked both ways—Roger dead or Roger alive. It could be part of the frame-up. Or if a native was caught with a gold ring stolen from a drunk white man he’d naturally make it fit the report of the drowning, and get his friends to back him up.”

“That’s the works,” he told her, and drew a deep breath. “But Grace, since you figured it all out, why didn’t you demand to see the telegram?”

It was so strange that this present moment, just one of the day’s thousand, while they waited to be served their breakfast and while rickshaw

coolies singsonged on the road below, could make or break his whole life. He steeled his heart and waited for her answer.

"Graham, don't you know?"

"Was it for my sake—alone?"

"Oh, my darling! For my sake alone."

In no great while they were ready to go on.

"Where is the telegram?" she asked.

"In my pocket. All the time. I've run no risk of losing it."

"We can open it now, can't we, Graham?"

"Yes. For it's all right now, either way it goes."

"Will you—or shall I?"

"I'll do it." And with unshaking hands he tore open the telegram.

Bird of Paradise

I ought to be ashamed for ever foisting this story on the American public. It is clearly contrived, its fitting into the Commandment series is labored to say the least, and its dénouement, although ingenious, is overdrawn. I am not as ashamed as a strong literary conscience should make me, because, once foisted, the piece made a decided hit. No few women wrote in that they knew women just like Alice Neville, and wanted to scratch her eyes out.

That was in 1938. It hardly seems possible that the soupy saccharine she dispensed would throw Brushwood Boys today, provided any are left. If Humphrey Bogart et al. have since taken the punch out of gentlemen punching ladies, Ronnie Wingate's brutality to the Bird of Paradise was arresting in her era. Indeed I never heard of Humphrey going to quite these lengths.

To visitors in the cold weather, India seems the very Garden of Eden. Tender young grass grows in the track of the winter fires and stretches for miles in a green, mediterranean sea. The jungle is green but dry: a man can walk through it without cutting undergrowth from his trail or leeches from his flesh. The native villages paint a picture of peace and immemorial contentment; and in the evenings the beauty and chivalry of all the world seem to gather at the club.

But when the rains break in June the illusion is also broken. The grass grows with almost terrifying rapidity. By August it is waist-high, and in November it can easily screen a herd of wild elephants. The jungle is a tangle of vines that snatch a man and try to choke him to death; and if there are Mohammedans in striking distance of the Hindu villages, some morning there will be ugly corpses under the peepul tree. And swiftly it becomes plain that the ladies and gentlemen around the club's bridge tables and tennis courts have not only tasted of the apple of the tree of knowledge but gnawed its core.

It is the country that "swells the ripenin' coconuts an' ripens the woman's breast." Not only the grasses grow rank overnight; it is the same with loves, hates, friendships, jealousies and most of the glories and shames of the human heart and soul. When scientists desire to study the malarial mosquito they go to India. Psychologists who wish to know the inmost nature of a far more deadly and complicated organism should do the same.

Even so, the psychologists would have their work cut out for them. The great laboratory under the tropic sun is hidden behind a bewildering façade of tradition and good form. The specimens crawl from their cocoons usually in the dead of night; and even when the microscope is trained on them, their passions and cruelties and frantic strivings seem to make no sense.

And surely only the great god Brahma, who dreamed her, understood the Bird of Paradise and the little hell she made.

Actually, the name of that upcountry Assamese town was Pairideaza. In Zoroastrian lore it means literally an enclosure, but it has been freely translated as Paradise, and as such it fitted what was no doubt the most charming station in all Northeast India.

The Bird of Paradise was Alice Neville, wife of the commissioner. There was some question as to who gave her this title, but not one at the station—least of all the cynical tea planter, Ronnie Wingate—doubted her right to it. For her beauty was so extraordinary that in certain lights it seemed almost unearthly.

"Of course all Englishwomen in India are beautiful," Ronnie declared with the usual glint in his eye. "We wouldn't be English gentlemen if we didn't think the plainest Mem-sahib of suitable age more lovely than any dark-browed maharajah's daughter. But it doesn't take chivalry or a shortage of white women or invitations to Government House to make Alice Neville beautiful." And then on that lyric note he frequently struck, "In London or on a desert island, she would still be that rare and incomparable bird, *Paradisea apoda*."

Coming from Ronnie Wingate, this was praise indeed. Ordinarily he was openly skeptical of commissioners' wives. Nor was he wangling for invitations to Alice's parties. In fact, although she invited him regularly, he did not even go. And he was the one bachelor in the countryside who did not take to going to church when the sun of Paradise through the stained-glass windows seemed to make a halo about her head.

In one way, however, she was misnamed. Her beauty was not the gaudy kind that flashed through the New Guinea forests. It was vivid, startlingly so, but also it seemed highbred. Although she was the adopted daughter of a Sussex clergyman, no one really doubted the current story that she was the grandchild of down-at-the-heels nobility, and that blood blue as the Vere de Veres' flowed in her veins.

But when young Englishmen wrote home about her they found her hard to describe. Usually they got no further than the contrast of her enormous black eyes with her milky skin and shining golden hair. They could find no words for the lovely curve of her forehead, the upward tilt of her delicate nose, the breath-taking effect of her heart-shaped face, the mingled wistfulness and gaiety of her full-lipped, dark-red mouth.

Most of the girls visiting Paradise in the cold weather were rangy, big-boned and hearty, with a powerful serve and a perfectly timed drive. They made the best pals in the world but did not invoke dreams. On the contrary, Alice Neville's tennis and golf were adorably feeble. At the end of the game she would slip a confiding hand into her partner's, smile forlornly and tell him she knew he would never play with her again.

She did not seem to realize that her very childishness made her irresistible. And it fitted so well her delicious figure, her companions thought. She even looked like a child, until they noticed the swell of her breast and the curves of her slim thighs—but they noticed these very soon.

And she was good as she was beautiful, the station proclaimed. "You don't see many like her, these days," peppery old Colonel Jones-Dells remarked at the club. "I mean, dash it, a lady of the old school. 'Tother day I was annoyed. 'God damn it, this is a bit thick,' I said, and the sweet little thing heard me. When I 'pologised, she didn't say I needn't—she thanked me for having that much respect for her. 'I'm old-fashioned, I'm afraid,' she told me, taking my hand like a child, 'but I still don't think it's cricket to take the Lord's name in vain.' "

Of course she was the rector's pride. In addition, she was kind to the natives and the poor, and generous with some of her goods. Her husband was a rather ordinary-looking man, capable rather than clever, and he let her have her way, but he had no cause to worry. There were at least four men—from the day she first set the station agog with her beauty up to the time she crossed swords with Ronnie Wingate—who could testify to this.

Those four men were each, in turn, the envy of the countryside. For a period averaging three months each, they rode, tennised, golfed, bridged and danced with Alice Neville day after day. But apparently she was not to blame that every mother's son of them fell in love with her, nor did they blame themselves. In the first place, a male seraph in heaven could not have resisted her loveliness, and in the second place, those three months were the high spot of each of their lives.

For she requited their love. She confessed it, each time, her eyes brimming with tears beautiful as pearls. But as they were gentlemen who did not kiss and tell, there was never any scandal to electrify the station. Anyway, the kisses she gave them were few and chaste, barely hinting at the fire and passion of her heart, and then bravely she let them go.

Two of those four lovers were bachelors. Here the barrier to their happiness was Alice's husband, George Neville. "I can't hurt him," she told one of these bachelors the night they said good-by. "Oh, darling, I just can't."

"Brave, wonderful girl," the man answered.

"You'll understand, won't you? You're the most understanding man I've ever known. And I'll never forget how you didn't urge me—how you played the game! I'm afraid I couldn't have resisted you if—but you were marvelous not to ask for more than I feel right to give."

If a recording machine had spoken the words back to her, even reflecting the tremor of her voice, they may have sounded silly. They did not sound so to the bachelor, who was in love in the frightening, headlong way of young, decent, lonely, idealistic English exiles. The scene was her own garden, lighted by a mysterious moon. She always chose such settings, but instinctively rather than deliberately, and with unfaltering belief in her own sincerity and goodness. Love was the most beautiful thing in the world, she thought. She felt heartbroken that it was all over and she could never truly love again.

If she said almost the same thing to the second bachelor on their farewell night, it was not because it was surefire but simply because the scene and situation inspired her similarly. The variations were largely due to the mood and temperament of her lover, but she was equally sincere. Her other two lovers happened to have wives, so the barrier was twofold. She could not hurt George, she said, nor could she hurt Winnie and, in turn, Jane.

Throughout and after these love affairs she remained the pride and joy of her husband and almost everyone worth knowing in the station. Her parties were little triumphs. It was said openly that if George ever obtained a provincial governorship it would be due largely to her.

"But of course I didn't ask everyone I wanted to," she explained to her friends. "There are two women—you know who they are—that I just *couldn't* invite. But I like them both. They're well-meaning people, the salt of the earth, really, even if they do drop an '*h*' now and then."

Although one of the two absent women had a discernible cockney accent, Alice's friends had not noticed that the other was similarly afflicted, and in fact had considered her a quiet and refined young lady. But apparently Alice herself had noticed it only recently. Before then the woman had come often to the Residence, and Alice had showed her favor by many rides and games with the woman's husband, a bronzed and handsome forest officer.

Later, he was transferred to another station. Generous as she was in many ways, still there were some things Alice could not forgive. "But it's not true that it's the worst station in India," she said at the big party she gave the man's successor. "Anyway, we all have to go where the government sends us, and perhaps his work here hasn't been quite up to his *really* great abilities, although he was not altogether to blame, poor man."

But she did not speak of the stations to which four other men had gone in the past three years.

Her beauty and loveliness seemed to need no greater tribute than the fate of those four. If it was incredible, this was India and she was the Bird of Paradise. One of the two married men had forsaken his career and taken his wife to East Africa to make a fresh start. The other had separated from his wife and was now serving in Tibet. One of the two bachelors had drowned his grief in the dark bottle. The other had sought oblivion in the dark arms of a native girl.

Alice Neville pitied these men. She wouldn't hurt one of them, she told herself, for the world. But she was not to blame if men loved her to ruin, or if her own love died and perhaps was mistaken to start with. And the new forest officer—Alastair Orkney was his fascinating name—was the most engaging man the station had seen since the rains.

Possibly he was *the* man. Meeting him seemed different, somehow, from meeting those other four—a prophetic happiness so sharp it was almost pain. He was young and handsome, innocent and gay.

"And it would make Ronnie Wingate sit up and take notice," she told herself.

Wingate was only a tea planter, but not the common tea-garden variety, bowing down to the wife of the commissioner and her husband. He did not seem to have a great deal of money, yet he was not impressed by wealth. He did seem to have position—at least the governor of Assam got off the train one day to eat one dinner at Alice's table and to loaf three days in shorts at

Wingate's bungalow—but Ronnie was cynically indifferent to the code that a Sahib must wear evening clothes even when dining alone.

But he conceded Alice's beauty, and she thought it best to admit publicly that he was a good-looking man. He was only thirty-five, with the broad shoulders and narrow waist that women admire; his face was long and lean and so impassive that the peculiar brilliance of his gray eyes seemed all the more marked.

As usual, he was not at Alice's party. She almost hated herself for inviting him. But at the long last he *would* come, she vowed. The higher they fly, the harder they fall. And in the meantime, there stood Alastair Orkney, gazing at her with simple wonder in his eyes.

She found time for a few minutes' chat with him in the billiard room. He was only twenty-five—the age Alice claimed herself and only five years younger than her real age—but she told herself she could do more for him than for an older man; bring more happiness into his life. He had good connections, charm, a boyish eagerness that melted her heart, and the most innocent blue eyes that she had ever gazed into.

"I looked forward to meetin' you," he told her shyly. "Heard about you even out in the C. P.—the jolly way you look, I mean. Sue is keen to meet you, too."

"Sue?"

"Didn't you know? Course you wouldn't. My fiancée, Susan Farnam. She'll be along in a fortnight, visitin' Captain Grady and his wife. She'll stay till the hot weather, and then after the rains I'll go to her uncle's home in Delhi for the solemn event."

Alice's eyes did not narrow. Instead, they shone with a soft splendor that made Alastair catch his breath. But her thoughts had the swiftness and hard brilliance of lightning.

There were always other women, she thought. She could not be the only one; anyway, competition was the spice of life and love. But suddenly she felt what seemed to be an intuition that Sue was not the right girl for Alastair, and the wrong girl would be fatal to his career. Her heart glowed with desire to rescue him.

"Tell me about her," she said.

"Well, there's not an awful lot to tell. She's just the jolliest kind of girl. She's pretty, too, but not exactly your type."

“I dare say she makes me look like a scullery maid.”

“Good gad, no. She’s just pretty, that’s all. Her face wouldn’t launch a thousand ships, if y’understand me. But she’s just pretty enough for a bloke like me.”

“A bloke like you!” Alice laughed.

“What’s so funny about that?”

“You’ll never know. . . She’s lovely, I’m sure. And Mr. Orkney, I’ve never had a nicer compliment, ridiculous as it is. Most compliments I get are so meaningless, so empty.”

“Good gad.”

“I want to help you plan for Susan. I’m just silly enough to get an enormous thrill out of young love, for I feel so out of it myself. I’m sure she’s the right girl for you, Mr. Orkney.”

For the next two weeks Alice was with Alastair part of every day, helping him to arrange his quarters and prepare Sue’s welcome. Yet she would take no thanks. She thanked him, she said, for easing her loneliness.

But perhaps he was lonely too. He had a lonely hobby—ornithology that took him into the jungles where for hours he watched and classified birds. Was it true that he had discovered several new kinds? Well, if they were only variants of well-known species, one of them never before recorded this far East, the avocation meant so much more than most men’s—tennis and polo and shooting—and made her ashamed of her own silly pastimes. She wanted to read his articles in the *Ornithological Journal*. Would she be in the way if he took her with him on one of his scouting trips? She’d be very quiet.

But she would not go with him to the train to meet Sue. She wouldn’t tell him why, but he guessed. In the end, she decided to drop by on her way to tennis, but like the sport she was, she tried to look her worst, he thought, instead of her best. Her hair was tousled, and she did not seem to know that it took the late sunlight and made an aureole about her exquisite face.

A tall, slim girl with brown eyes and hair, Sue was more than merely pretty. She had intelligence and dignity and a grave charm. But to the Bird of Paradise the great god Brahma had given the power to believe her every wish—a noble gift he usually reserved for kings and madmen. Sue was not the girl for Alastair, Alice told herself, and she must save him at any cost.

Two weeks fled by. Sometimes Alastair saw Sue alone, usually he saw Sue and Alice together, and occasionally he still saw Alice alone. And at the end of that exciting fortnight Alice had made enough progress to say in a voice to rend the heart of a stone lion:

"We've got to take what life gives us in this world, old boy. We mustn't long for what is forbidden. I don't think we'd better see each other any more."

"Alice! Beautiful! I've got to see you. And Sue understands."

"I wonder if we ourselves understand. . . And we're not going to try to, Alastair. We can't go to opposite ends of the earth, but we can pretend there's nothing to run away from, and maybe—after a long time—there won't be."

"You're the most wonderful woman I've ever met."

"No, Alastair," she answered sadly. "If I were, I'd never have let you come to see me after that first day. I knew even then. . . Alastair, do you think it would be wrong for us to be together just one more time?"

But the next day this quadrangle—counting George Neville as one side—became quinquangular. Ronnie Wingate decided to take a hand.

Alice kissed her own lips in the mirror. Her dark eyes glowed.

At first she did not quite know what had finally started Ronnie off, but soon she solved the mystery to her satisfaction. He had always been attracted to her, she thought, but had fought it. The straw that broke the back of his resistance was his jealousy of Alastair.

She understood jealousy very well. It appeared to strike like black cholera, willy-nilly, but actually it always went hand in hand with respect. You could envy almost anyone, but you were really jealous only of those who were near you physically and socially. Ronnie had been envious but not jealous of those other four men, for they were remote figures, hardly touching him personally. But Alastair was his social equal: they had been to the same school; in fact, Alastair's brother had been Ronnie's fag.

So she was not such a fool as to drop Alastair. In fact, his complete conquest seemed more necessary than ever; and anyway, two fish were better than one.

The excitement of the next month was almost beyond bearing. Although she had various small setbacks, her campaign progressed with almost terrifying swiftness. The only real difficulty was with her timing: Alastair was ready for the gaff while Ronnie still struggled in midstream.

So she dared not land Alastair yet. To hold him and to add fuel to Ronnie's jealousy, she must make him send Sue away. But I'm sorry for her, Alice thought, almost in tears. If she was at all fitted for him, I'd let her have him.

"You can be happy with Sue," she told Alastair in the moonlight. "Maybe it won't be *this* kind of happiness, but this will have to end sometime."

"Why? I'll never give you up."

"Don't, darling. Don't ever give me up. I mean, don't say that. And I must give you up, too. I won't admit it's too late."

"It *is* too late."

"Alastair, is that a ring-necked parakeet I hear in those trees?"

"No, a coppersmith bird."

"We can't look for them anymore—at least the blue bird. Go back to Sue; tell her you love her; make her believe it; believe it yourself. It's either that, or——"

"Break our engagement?"

"No, no. I won't hear of it!"

"Don't you see it's the kindest thing in the long run? I'll never give you up. We'll find a way to have each other."

"Don't talk about it. I don't want my heart to jump clear out of my body. Don't decide about Sue for a day or two more. Let's just pretend——"

She stood there like an angel new from heaven, a wistful smile on her lips. With a gasp, Alastair took her in his arms. But she gave him her lips for only one immortal second, then slipped away. "It's not fair to Sue," she told him.

The following morning Ronnie Wingate was strolling with Alastair Orkney through a little jungle, looking at birds.

“Here’s the place,” Ronnie said. “The ground here is full of some kind of worm that attracts all kinds of birds. And that rare bird comes here just before dark.”

“An absolutely new species, you think?”

“It could well be. I venture it’s a new species as far as India proper is concerned. It might be common on some of the adjacent islands. But you can tell about that.”

“A kind of crow, you think?”

“Related to the crows. You’ll know that if you hear its call when alarmed. It has a crow bill, too, and those lecherous bright eyes. It’s been here three different evenings, and anyway, you’ll see plenty of other birds, and you’ll have to lie doggo only for an hour or so.”

“Can’t you lie doggo with me?” Alastair asked.

“Sorry, old chap. I’d smoke and cough and squirm, and that bird has eyes like gimlets. Maybe I’ll sneak up later, but if you see me, don’t make a sound.”

“Right you are. I’ll bring my camera. If it’s the first record of the species in India the picture will make the *Ornithological Review*.”

“And I’ll have the blind all ready for you. It will be here in the steep bank of the nullah. My boys will dig it right after lunch, and when you get in at sundown be sure to replace all the leaves and grass.”

“Don’t go to too much trouble. A bird isn’t a tiger. Just a little screen of brush——”

“I tell you, it’s wild as a buck. I’ve gone to a lot of trouble already in scouting it, and I don’t want you to bitch it. I want you to hear its natural call —one of the damnedest sounds you ever heard. Will you stay absolutely still?”

“You certainly have worked up a lot of scientific zeal. I’ll be still as a corpse.”

But Ronnie had not given all the reasons why he could not sit with Alastair in the blind. The most important was that he had an engagement with Alice.

As usual, she left the Residence in the first rift of the day’s heat, and rode up a forsaken lane that flanked Ronnie’s tea garden. They met at their

own little gap in the hedge and rode together to a small summerhouse beside his bathing pool. And at the first touch of his hand, she knew she would win.

Today was the day. Ronnie was yielding. She looked awed and frightened. Her eyes brimmed with light.

"This can't go on, Ronnie," she said at the proper time. "I'm a woman, not a stone image. If this keeps on, soon we'll go *too* far. And whatever the right and wrong of it, I can't bear to hurt George."

"I want it to go too far," he said.

She sprang to her feet. Her fear was not altogether feigned. But he rose and slipped his hands under her arms.

He was not chivalrous like her other lovers. His caresses were lascivious. As she resisted them, a dizzy passion possessed her. If she had fled that instant, she could have been saved, but she could not resist making one final, characteristic gesture.

"This isn't fair to either of us. You know we can't have each other——"

"You're wrong about that, Alice." He picked her up and carried her in his arms.

"Ronnie, you can't—you can't——"

Then she fell silent, her mouth bound.

When they left the summerhouse he strolled off through the woods and made a little gesture for her to follow. It was not in her power to disobey, for the time had come to put on the greatest show of her life—not to win another but to save herself.

She was not repentant but frightened. If he had told her that he loved her, the situation would not have been half so serious. The best of women might be swept off her feet by love. But he had *not* told her so. The horrible possibility was that he had played his own game, and had won.

Ronnie said almost nothing until they reached a cool glade under a nullah bank where they had sat before. A number of birds flew up, but she did not notice whether they were coppersmith birds or ring-necked parakeets. She noticed only the stern line of Ronnie's mouth.

"I've got one question to ask you about what happened in the summerhouse," he began in a cold voice. "How *could* it happen if you're in

love with Alastair?"

A frantic need of justification was already upon her, and perhaps her mind was dulled by fear. She could think of only one answer—the obvious one.

"I'm not in love with him. I've just been sorry for him. He's persecuted me half to death."

"That's a pity. But it's been a little tough on Sue, too, don't you think?"

"I wish he'd go back to her. I've tried my best to send him. If you only knew how he bores me—but why I should feel I have to explain to you ——"

"You've explained already, perfectly. I'm glad you haven't betrayed your lover or I my friend. But there are a few other incidents in your life I'd like to discuss with you."

I must take hold, she thought desperately. I can save myself yet. "Ronnie ——" she began softly.

"You've danced a long time, but today was the first time you've had to pay the fiddler," he went on. "The Greeks had a word for it but it's not a nice word, and we must be nice at all costs."

"*Ronnie!*"

"We Englishmen are the most chivalrous men on earth," he went on. "I just happen to be old and tough. But almost any Frenchman—maybe even a few Americans—would have seen through you a lot quicker than I did.

"You see, Bird of Paradise, I'm not chivalrous at all. You'll see even more clearly when this little talk is over. There are many girls in this world who can appreciate chivalry and not take advantage of it, but there's no use being chivalrous to vermin, whether it's jackals or vampire bats or crows."

"What—what did you say?" But his tone was clear and matter-of-fact, and she heard him perfectly. Instantly her fear passed off, leaving only fury.

"Those other four lovers of yours were chivalrous enough," Ronnie went on. "And you know how they paid for it—one broken marriage, one lost career, one drunkard and one squaw-man. That poor devil who preceded Alastair couldn't be chivalrous because his wife wouldn't let him, so he's been sent to the worst station in India. And Alastair himself might be such a fool as to be chivalrous to you, but I hope he'll restrain himself for just a little while longer."

In her fury she did not hear in the nullah a rustle that rose and died away.

“There’s just one more thing I want to tell you,” Ronnie went on. “I wouldn’t want even you to think that I’ve been going with you because I’m attracted to you. Vermin can’t help being vermin—when a crow raids a nest and eats the baby birds, he is certain that he’s doing the proper thing—but decent people try to avoid it, just the same.”

“You say that—after what happened today?” Alice was panting.

“It was necessary to expose you. I went with you only to try to save from you the younger brother of the dearest friend I have in the world.”

She slapped him across the face with all her strength. “God damn you!”

“Is that all, Bird of Paradise?”

It was only the beginning. Her tongue ran on until it passed all bounds and finally shocked her into silence. Ronnie sat listening with a sardonic smile.

“You shouldn’t take the Lord’s name in vain,” he told her at last. “The Lord doesn’t mind, I think, but it’s apt to show you up. And Alice, you’re interested in birds: Did you ever hear how the Bird of Paradise showed himself up?”

“What do you mean?”

“When he was first discovered in New Guinea, the ornithologists thought he was literally a bird of paradise—too beautiful to be earthly. But one day he was frightened or angry. He took the Lord’s name in vain in the only way he could—a raucous outburst, half a caw, half a squawk. And then they knew that his fine feathers were all a fake and he was really a kind of crow.”

“Crow or no crow, I’ll send your precious friend after those others. I’ll get at you that way if I can’t any other. I’ll break his heart and his girl’s, too. Tell him everything; he won’t believe you. He’s on his knees right now ____”

“I suspect that he is—on his knees thanking God,” Ronnie broke in. “Alastair”—and he spoke no louder than before—“you can come out. You’ve classified this rare bird by now.”

Bird of Omen

This is a war story. The language used to describe the Japanese is, of course, the language of wartime. But it is also a love story; and the language of love is timeless and universal. Quite possibly it is my most "authentic" story of India, and, written several years later than the others, my most "mature." Indeed I was made a little uneasy when, preparing it for the printer, I found no lurid phraseology. I was afraid I hadn't composed it with all the stops out. But its restraint is little if any, it remains unabashedly romantic in spirit, and I count it one of the half-dozen best pieces in the book.

No, Sahib, I will not address the white chief with the crown and stars on his shoulders as the *burra* (great) Sahib. Nor will our women, with honey on their tongues, nor the naked children begging for coppers. Doubtless he is a mighty chieftain, the favorite son of the British Raj, for all I know, and we be a poor and lowly people of the hills. Yet we will address him too as *chota* (little) Sahib, or as the Colonel Sahib.

"Can you understand what the little chap's saying?" Colonel Dallas-Smith asked his aide, Lieutenant Wilson.

"Perfectly," the other replied. "If you cut through the rich, agglutinate Naga accent, you'll find a layer of fairly passable Hindustani. Queer how some johnnie can speak it in every village, no matter how far back. I should say that this fellow has been down to the plains several times, probably swapping jungle products for salt and iron. Note the good-luck charm on the copper wire around his neck. That's Hindu—passed along all the way from Benares, probably—yet this beggar's as animist as they make 'em."

"He seems very much in earnest."

"He's headman of the village, and trying to explain something rather rum. You might even say an aspersion on you, Colonel. I've made it clear that you are the *burra* Sahib, and I the *chota* Sahib. He absolutely refuses to dignify you by that title."

"I'll be damned."

"I never ran across anything like it. They're usually willing to call a sergeant the Lord of Creation, in hope of a little *baksheesh*. Do you mind?"

“Heavens, no. It’s such a relief not to find the Japs on this side of the river that he can call me *barnshoot*, for all I care. I can hardly believe it yet. At the very least I thought they’d’ve sent a platoon to seize the buffaloes and carts, burn the fields, and capture or kill every villager we could turn to account. This village is the keystone of the whole range. Maybe if we let him gab away without scaring him with questions, he’ll throw some light on the mystery.”

Wilson turned to the hillman. “What is your name, chief, if it may be given?”

Sahib, my name is Boogano. In our poor tongue it means a good smeller. We are a poor people, many days’ march from the bazaar, and it is not that we set ourselves up, that we are unable to address the Presence as *burra* Sahib. It is our fate and the judgment of our gods (*bhut*: good or evil spirits). Be not offended!

Thou and the Presence are not the first Sahibs that have come to our distant village. Ten rains ago one who called himself a *shikari* (hunter) Sahib came here, but not riding on a pony with many boys to carry his guns and baggage. He came alone and on foot, and was very footsore. He had only one gun, not with two barrels such as I have seen in the camps of tiger hunters in the jungle, but a gun such as soldiers carry at the stockade. Also it came to me that he walked like a soldier, on his first waking up in the morning. Later in the day he drank deeply of his jug and could not walk at all. Also there was a faint white line down his cheeks and under his chin as though from a strap, and his red hair was cut short. But he did not wear the garments of a soldier.

He did not give his name. Doubtless he feared that some spell could be worked upon it. We called him *lal* (red) Sahib because of his hair. Nor did we think him a very good *shikari* Sahib. He could shoot well at times, but he could not read sign or follow spoor. He had blue eyes like the Presence, but his speech was different. When he spoke of Hindus he called them ’Indus, and when he talked in his own tongue, after drinking of his jug, in every breath he cried “bloody.” It was the name of his god, for all I know.

There was something else that he said often—so often that even the children learned to mock him. I do not know what the words mean—perhaps the Sahib may know. “Dishonbal diss-jarged anta ’ell witha-king.” In truth, Sahib, he hated his own kind.

When his jug was empty, we thought he would go away. Instead, he bought with a silver rupee a jar of toddy that we make with sago, millet or rice, and certain roots found in the woods. When his rupees were all gone, he traded with us little things that he had about him—buttons, needles and empty shells from his gun—for more of the same drink. When these were gone, and we thought surely he would go away, he took one of the village girls for his woman.

Her name was Athka, which in our tongue means the fawn of the spotted deer. Although her father was in one way proud that she had found favor in a Sahib's sight, in another way he was troubled. For *lal* Sahib was not rich, like ye two Sahibs. In the first moon of his hunting he killed only one leopard and one barasingha. It is well for a woman to work hard, but if her husband does no work at all and drinks much toddy, she must work overhard.

Athka worked like a buffalo, to keep his thatch house, and food in his bowl, and toddy in his jug. She had always been a good worker, and now the gods gave her the strength of a tiger in his pride. More, she sang as she worked. There was ever a brightness in her eyes. On the first new moon after the equal matching of day and night, when our *guru* (no proper *guru*: actually, a wizard) made magic in the men's house, and the women sang their songs to our gods, this was the song that Athka sang:

Behold, I am wedded to a Sahib.
I have forsaken my playmates to be his woman.
I work very hard, that he may eat richly and drink deep.
From dawn till dark I am in the fields, or at the corn-grinder.
But my lord lies in the grass and talks to me.
His voice is like honey dripping when the bear robs the bee-tree.
His eyes are a brighter blue than the sky.
His smile is like sunlight at the end of the rains.
My lord is drunken every night, but never beats me.
He is gentle and loving when he wakens before the dawn.
Gods, I ask no more than to be strong,
To work long for my Sahib,
And that I may ever favor in his sight.

But *lal* Sahib did not always find favor in our men's sight. We no longer boasted of his presence among us when we met to trade with the folk of the under hills; and hearing of his rags and his deep drinking and great sleeping, they called him Sahib Junglewalla—meaning the white man that is worthless.

We no longer salaamed to him, and the children mocked him, and the young hunters played tricks on him. When we called Athka "Mem-sahib" it was in bitter mocking.

So it came that she and *lal* Sahib kept much to themselves. When Athka worked with the other women, it would often end in a great fight, with Athka scratching their faces and pulling out their hair because of their mockery of her Sahib.

"He is not Sahib Junglewalla!" she would scream. "He is a great Sahib, a soldier Sahib 'dishonbal diss-jarged anta 'ell witha-king.' "

"If he is so fine, why have you borne him no *baba*?" they would ask.

That was the only thing they could say to make her weep. Once indeed she had swelled, but the babe was born before its time and never breathed.

Truly, we counted him a poor sort of Sahib. When he had fired all the cartridges he had brought, we called him the *shikari* Sahib in great mockery. Then Athka worked even harder, and traded her harvest with the north men for many pods of musk, and took the musk to the under hills in hope of buying more cartridges for her lord. When she brought back only gunpowder and lead balls, the village rang with laughter, for these fitted muzzle-loading guns, not guns that loaded in the middle like *lal* Sahib's.

The rains came, and the rains passed, and after a while we ceased to mock him, being tired of our own laughter. When we did have cause to notice him again, it was only for his drunkenness, on the night that a salt merchant brought news he had heard in the under hills.

It was at seeding time, before the summer rains. The salt merchant told us how some yellow people, called Nips, had gone to war with the Sahibs, and a city named Singapore had fallen, and the yellow soldiers were marching into Burma.

Does the Officer Sahib understand my poor words? I thought, when thou didst lean forward just now, that my monkey tongue had faltered! Truly, when *lal* Sahib heard the news, he became possessed of a devil. Bitter-lipped and white, he drank all of the toddy in the jar and then spoke wildly in his own tongue.

"Dishonbal diss-jarged anta 'ell witha-king!" he shouted, laughing like a fiend. Then he stormed against his own people, calling them names. In our tongue he told us that it was good enough for them that the Nips were beating them.

In the morning, though, he was again pale and quiet. In the next moon he would go many days without tasting toddy, then drink half a jar of it in one night and lie as one whose spirit has departed. Sometimes he walked alone in the forest. Athka became very thin, her eyes big as silver rupees; and she made gifts to our *guru* that if the Sahib's gods were afflicting him, he might have peace.

Whenever one of us returned from a journey to the under hills, *lal* Sahib would question him closely for news about the Nips. They had overrun Burma, killing or making slaves of the Sahibs and Mem-sahibs. But the most frightening news came from the banks of the river called Puglanadi (crazy water), only a day's march across the hills.

Kohou, a hunter of our village, and his little son Ko-baba had followed a wounded barasingha almost to Puglanadi, when they heard the noise of woodchopping and tall trees falling. Creeping near, they saw some men such as they had never seen before in all our hills. They were no taller than we, but yellow in color, with large teeth and swine eyes. All were dressed alike, being undoubtedly soldiers, and all had guns with knives fixed at their muzzles. Kohou saw they were felling trees for a bridge of logs.

Hiding in the thickets, Kohou and little Ko-baba watched in breathless wonder. Because they had made no more noise than jungle cocks in the dry leaves, they had no fear of being discovered. But the monkey-toothed men had posted outliers, two of whom made a sudden rush from the rear. By great nimbleness, Kohou escaped, but little Ko-baba was not fleet enough. Laughing, the Nip caught him by the neck and dragged him into the camp.

Kohou could not run far, for lack of the boy's hand in his. As a doe whose fawn has fallen in a pit, he circled back to the scene, listening and peering and trembling with fear. Presently he climbed a tree, quiet as a snake. From its top he could look down into the Nip camp, where three of the yellow men were questioning his son. Then because the boy cried, and they could not understand his speech, one of them drove a gun-muzzle knife into his belly. Ko-baba quivered and gasped in the red grass a long time before his troubled spirit could depart.

He was Kohou's only son, and his pride.

When Kohou returned with the word, all the men in our village gathered in the magic house. *Lal* Sahib stood among us, taller than any of us by a head, but so gray of face that we could think he had covered himself with ashes, even as Kohou in his grief.

Our headman, Ra-Pora, was very old and wise. Our *guru*, who had great power with the spirits, threw chicken bones on the floor, closed his eyes and spoke.

"My spirits say that the war is between the Sahibs and the Nips. It has nothing to do with us. If Kohou had not tried to spy on the yellow soldiers, his son would not have been killed. We will go on tilling the fields and caring for our buffalo—and paying due service to our gods."

"May I go back for the bones of my son?" Kohou asked.

"We will till the fields and care for our buffalo and not go near Puglanadi," Ra-Pora, our headman, answered.

It seemed to me then that *lal* Sahib drew his breath to speak, but his mouth shut and his hands fell open. Doubtless he knew that we would hold his words as chaff in a measure of grain.

Now the gods have made us small in body, but in old time great in spirit. Even in my grandsire's time, the debt of Ko-baba's blood would have been paid in blood. The plains people dared not rob us then of our dye and woven cloth, and the leopard dared not kill our buffalo calves or the bear raid our goat pens. It may be that we did other things—the Sahib knows?—that did not please the English Raj, but at least we were men! Now we had become small in spirit too. The salt merchants cheated us at their will, and the leopard and the bear ravished our herds in the open day.

Yet we would never have believed, until tonight, that yellow soldiers with monkey teeth could slay a boy of our village without eating our vengeance.

The young moon grew big of belly. Softly we went about our work, and short was our talk under the peepul tree in the first dark. Our women did not look at us with the same look as before. When the moon waxed full—the time that usually they most yearned to us, with eyes like sunlit waters—they turned from us in coldness. But can men go against their gods? And what could thrice-ten hillmen do, armed only with hunting spears and brush knives, against an equal number of Nips, from whose guns that stabbed as well as boomed even the Sahibs fled?

Yet even in that hour of shame, did we but know it, great things were afoot. All we saw was that *lal* Sahib drank no more toddy and talked long and often with Kohou, and Athka strode about like a maharani with a moon-bright face.

The truth was, Sahib—although it was hidden from us yet—the gods were whispering their commands not in our *guru's* ears, but in the ears of *lal* Sahib.

Yet we would never have believed it, save for signs and wonders in our plain sight. Near the peepul tree where we lolled in the twilight there was a small grass cell, where our *guru* hid himself to make secret magic. As we were sitting under the tree, the anger of the gods came down upon the hut and destroyed it utterly. There rose a great roar, as of twenty guns, and the roof flew off, and the walls fell down.

"What is the meaning of this sign, O Wise one?" old Ra-Pora asked.

"Great chief, it is a warning to the people that unless they honor their *guru*—and not murmur against him, as one has murmured—the village will be destroyed," the wizard answered.

"But is it not strange that the first destruction should be of your charm house and not the house of the murmurer, whose son's blood cries for vengeance?" Kohou remarked. And we remembered that and puzzled greatly.

When the moon changed, another sign was given. Know, Sahib, that a small tree grows at the edges of our fields, bearing a bitter fruit, that we call the hungersign tree. When its leaves turn sere in the growing season, it augurs a barren harvest. There were three such trees near the village, and now the leaves of every one curled up.

Plainly the gods were angry and proposed to send famine upon us unless we obeyed their will. When we asked again of our *guru* what that will was, he stammered and failed to give us a plain answer. And then for the first time in many rains *lal* Sahib spoke in our councils.

"Hear me, O Men," he began. "When I was a soldier of the King, I knew a great *guru*—the greatest of all *gurus*—who dwelt in a temple as high as the trees. When he wished to know the will of his gods, he did not throw down chicken bones, but he threw down the bones of a fowl found in the woods, a bird with gay feathers and a thick curved beak, and always they told him true.

"He told me that sometimes this bird will speak the will of the gods not by his bones, but out of his beak like a man, although this I could not believe."

"What bird can speak like a man?" scoffed our *guru*.

"I said, O Holy One, that I did not believe it. Even so, Kohou will depart tomorrow for the bazaar where certain sons of Allah have such birds for sale, and buy one, and bring it here."

Now the bazaar, as the Sahib knows, is three days' march from our village, and it had as well be three moons' march, in our peoples' minds. Since that long-ago time when we did not well and the English Raj was moved to anger against us, most of us would rather sup with devils than set foot on the plains.

Will the Officer Sahib believe that Kohou went into the very throng about the stalls, bought the Bird of Omen from a son of Allah and was back in our village at the end of the third day? Truly, the tiger had lent Kohou his heart, and the chital deer her fleet feet, because he had seen the monkey-toothed men thrust a gun-knife into little Ko-baba.

Kohou carried the bird in a box straight to the house of *lal* Sahib. Then both of them bore him into the woods, saying that certain ceremonies must be performed far from the cooking fires before the bird could receive the spirit of the gods and his bones make auguries. These ceremonies went on two days and two nights; then *lal* Sahib and Kohou brought the bird back to the village in a box.

"Will you now sacrifice the bird and boil his meat and throw down his bones?" our *guru* asked *lal* Sahib, when we had gathered in the magic house.

"First we will see if he can prophesy while yet alive," *lal* Sahib replied.

"I, for one, would like to hear a bird talk." And our *guru* smiled knowingly.

"Perhaps, Holy One, you shall. The son of Allah assured Kohou that if the gods will give us a last chance to obey them before they destroy us, often they will speak through the bird's beak. If you hear the bird say the word 'polly,' listen well! That is big *puja* (magic)—his spirit word meaning the great gods."

Do you wonder, Sahib, that the men's eyes were round as our children's when Kohou lifted the bird from the box and let him perch on his arm? The bird was bigger than a raven and of many colors. He had a thick curved bill, and great eyes that blinked at the light.

Then, with a stiff, white face, *lal* Sahib approached and held his thumb and forefinger close to the bird's beak. It may be that he had a grain of corn,

between his thumb and forefinger. And may demons drive my soul, if the bird did not open his bill and talk like a man!

More wonderful, he did not talk in some strange tongue known only to *lal* Sahib. He spoke the speech of our village. First he said, "Polly," in a fond tone—his *puja* name for our gods; then in a loud outcry: "*Polly ko-ak wona.*"

Officer Sahib, those words mean, "Polly wants heads!"

It is true that in old time we took many heads. We hunted them on the plains, whereby our gods were gratified and gave us good crops. But when a rash fellow took the head of a Sahib, the English Raj was most angry, and the Sahib knows the bitter price we paid. Since then we dared not take the head even of a Hindu salt merchant.

When the bird spoke these words, it was as though we had eaten fire. Now every man seemed to grow taller, and his eyes gleamed.

"If the bird speaks those words again," our *guru* said, trembling, "I will know that my ears do not lie."

"*Polly wants heads!*" the bird screamed in our tongue, beating his wings. "*Heads! Heads! Heads!*"

So dost thou wonder, Sahib, that when *lal* Sahib took down from the wall a certain long knife and went out the door, every man of us followed him?

The truth was, Sahib, that we had been yearning for this with a great inward yearning. We had lived tamely so long that we had thought our hearts were tamed, and dared not heed their surgings. Now that we knew our gods desired us to be men, not sheep, even our *guru*, fat from rich feeding, dared not propose that we be content with the turbaned heads of a few Hindu cultivators. No, we would seek the monkey-toothed heads of little Ko-baba's killers, the foes of the English Raj.

"I cannot keep pace with you." Ra-Pora spoke to *lal* Sahib. "I am too old."

"Then remain here, in honor, and Boogano, the good smeller, will take your place at my right hand," *lal* Sahib replied.

But *lal* Sahib would not let us start until every spear point was sharp as a mongoose fang and every long knife was whetted until it could cut a hair. Lastly he fixed the *puja* knife at the end of his empty rifle, that he might pay the debt of blood in kind. The women cooked each of us a basket of rice,

rich with mutton fat, to give us strength. All of them but one, followed by the children, came with us to the end of the plowed land to wish us good hunting.

The absent one we did not miss—for, truly, we were half drunken with glory and pride—until we saw her come up from the stream with a full jar of water on her head. Sahib knows that the sight of a woman with a full jar is a sign of good luck to any hunting party, and we raised a great cry. Proudly Athka strode to *lal* Sahib. His farewell to her was the same that Sahibs make to their beautiful wives when departing on long journeys—their lips pressed long together.

Thereafter when we called Athka "Mem-sahib," it would not be mockery.

Never was such hunting since the hills rose. Throughout the day *lal* Sahib schooled us in our parts, meanwhile hoarding his strength the best he could, for he was no longer young and sinewy. When in late afternoon we came in sound of the Nips' camp, he and Kobou and I crept forward like three pythons upon a band of monkeys and did not return until we had located every outlier and knew the lay of the land.

We could not have hunted the Nips in a better season. Only that morning they had returned from raiding a village south of us, killing no few of the men and carrying off the others as slaves. The younger women and the buffaloes they had likewise carried off. And now we knew how good and merciful were our gods, for surely our village's turn would have been next. By the Bill of the Bird of Omen, we were not helpless now!

After their easy victory the Nips had no fear of other hillmen, deeming us jackal-hearted. They had laid aside their rifles to make sport with the captives; many of the outliers had left their posts for a share in the fun. Soon after nightfall, we stalked and slew their remaining watchmen and crept up within fifty paces of their fire. Then *lal* Sahib left us with strict orders, and we saw no more of him until he appeared on the opposite side of the fire, his rifle with its gleaming knife firm-held in his big hands.

Not the only gleaming was the knife! He himself, with the firelight on him, shone like a tiger at noon. He was naked save for a khaki garment that the Sahibs call shorts. He had cut his hair close, and the blood of one of the outliers streaked his body. His voice, as he shouted a command in his own tongue, filled the forest.

The monkey-toothed soldiers were taken utterly by surprise. They gazed upon him, and for a few seconds their hearts failed, thinking he was the captain of a great troop of Sahibs. In that failing, we rushed upon them, our blades thirsting.

The heads dropped like ripe coconuts when a wild bull elephant butts the tree.

The Nips had no room to snatch up and swing their rifles. We were not as leopard-swift as Kobou, with his terrible steel, but we were wolf-swift. Save for the pistols in their belts, we would have lost hardly a man. As it was, only three of us hillmen were slain, and of our three wounded, two were able to walk.

Was this all our loss, O Sahib? We deemed it so, when only three or four of the Nips were left alive, running and shrieking this way and that to dodge the knives. *Lal* Sahib still leaped about the firelit ring, the red thirst of his gun-knife yet unslaked. What a drunkard it had been throughout the fight! He alone had paid Ko-baba's debt five times over.

But as the head of the last Nip toppled from his neck, *lal* Sahib stopped still, then sank to the ground. Before one of us could reach his side, the spirit had departed from his body. In that body we counted five bullet holes, any one of which would have felled a lesser Sahib. He had lived the fight through, partly because of the pod of musk he had eaten just before—the Sahib knows its magic to tired bones and aging hearts—and partly because his was a soldier's heart.

We bore his body to the village and laid it in a grave in the custom of the Sahibs, and on the grave heaped thrice-ten heads, now cleaned by the birds of death. Abundant rains have fallen, and the crops do well. After many rains Athka will forget her grief and remember only her glory.

So now the Sahib knows why I will not address the Presence as the *burra* Sahib—not I or my men or the honey-tongued women or the clamoring children. For our Sahib lies still—our *lal* Sahib, our *shikari* Sahib —our *burra shikari* Sahib!

The Gentleman and the Tiger

It so happens that in both this story and "The Closed Trophy Room," the hero finds himself and escapes enslavement by conquest of a tiger.

In Hemingway's famous piece, the hero turned the same trick with a buffalo. I hasten to add that it happened a year or two after Harold Johnson's exploit. Of course the plot was a hoary one when tribal singers entertained their clansmen beside the retreating glaciers. But now that Peter Wiggam is in the same book with Harold, I am not too happy about his, also, winning a dusky sweetheart.

The fact remains that blonds are scarce in the tiger jungles; and surely the turning of an English valet into a burra sahib is a reasonably fresh form of the immortal, God knows momentous, giant-killer story. Also, it is a clumsy but well-justified slap at English snobbery, which was especially vicious about 1937.

The upper Burma club is far and away the most exclusive in all Mandalay. And as Mandalay has a population of approximately one hundred and sixty thousand, with more than a thousand white people, one can readily see how exclusive this must be.

No one would dream of inviting there a man with purple moons at the base of his fingernails, because this would indicate that his English blood, the blood of a people that has been more or less civilized ever since King Alfred fought the Danes nearly eleven centuries ago, had been tainted by the blood of a people that produced Gautama Buddha over twenty-five centuries ago and wrote the Vedic hymns about 1200 B.C. That man might be a distinguished doctor or a scientist honored by the world's greatest scientific societies, but there are many members of the club whose second or third cousins went to Eton, and to suggest that they should sit under the same *punka* with him would be too dreadful for words.

Besides the *punkas*—a kind of overhead fan—the club has a reading room, a billiard room, a dining room where the food is fully as dull as London food and quite as grandly served, a lot of other rooms, and of course a bar. But whether a one-bottle man or a two-bottle man, one remains an English gentleman, discoursing in a well-modulated voice on dogs, horses, golf and tennis; and if one is absolutely *burra* and *pukka*, on fox huntin' and pig stickin'.

But on a winter night of 1937, a shocking thing happened at this bar. It happened without warning, at a table where four seemly-looking men were sitting. In fact, three of the four were government officials—a deputy commissioner, a deputy superintendent of police and a sessions judge; and even the fourth, a planter from the Chindwin, was properly long-jawed, poker-faced, lean and brown. Moreover, not his second cousin but he himself had been to Eton, so he was the last of the four from whom one would have expected downright sacrilege and bad form.

But this man was Quigley. And Quigley, it was whispered, was not completely *pukka*, although he was the grandson of an earl—and whom can we look to, to uphold the traditions of Old England, if not to the scions of the nobility?

"Look here," he broke in on the horsy, doggy conversation at his table, "don't you think we might talk of something else?"

One of his three companions almost choked on his drink. Another set his glass down with a thump.

"If our conversation bores you——"

"It does, as a matter of fact," Quigley told him. "It bores you, too. Not one of us is a moron. We all have interesting jobs; we live in an exciting country. Yet we sit here and drink and drivel, drivel and drink, until the servants must go crazy listening to us."

"At times, Quigley, I almost think——"

"No, you don't. If you thought so, I'd listen, but you're only going to tell me what you're supposed to think; what, according to the best English tradition, it's your duty to think. Can't we get away from the best English tradition for a few minutes now and then? Good God, it's almost halfway around the world."

"What would you suggest as a topic worthy of your ears?" the sessions judge asked icily.

"I'd like to hear about some of your cases: why you decided them as you did. I'm more interested in law courts than in tennis courts; in how you got out of sentencing Moung Ne to death, instead of how you got into the sand trap on the fourteenth hole."

Quigley drew a deep breath and went on with deadly candor. "To hear you fellows talk, not one of you ever did an honest day's work in your life, or ever knew anyone who did a day's work. You pretend to be more

interested in a yacht race on the other side of the Atlantic than in the price of teak.

"In England we look up to leisure. The more generations removed from his old ancestor who made his money, the higher a man stands. Nothing's so grand there as London for the 'season,' Scotland for the grouse, the Shires for the hunting, over to Cannes for the so-and-so, every day a Sunday.

"But here we live in a new country. There's work to be done. That's why we're here; that's why we ought to have new standards, honoring work first and leisure second. Instead of falling on our faces to English countesses, why don't we save our salaams for people who have done something for *us*; helped to make Burma a good country to live in? Why can't we be like the Australians or the Canadians, men of the new country, instead of visiting Englishmen? It's time we remembered the Fourth Commandment."

"But 'there aren't no Ten Commandments,' out here," remarked the police officer, known for his wit. "Kipling said so."

"Kipling was wrong. The Ten Commandments are the fundamental laws of society, but they need modern interpretation. The Fourth Commandment is, 'Six days shalt thou labour; remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.' "

"You've stated it in reverse order," the sessions judge remarked.

"Did I? Well, that's what it means to me. If we haven't worked, it's just another day in the week; it isn't holy, no matter how much we go to church; we haven't justified its existence or our own."

"You're a queer sort, Quigley," the deputy commissioner remarked.

"Maybe; but follow my steer if you want to get to heaven, wherever or whatever it is. In spirit, anyway, take a leaf from Peter Wiggam's notebook. But of course you don't know Peter Wiggam."

"From the sound of his name, I don't think I'd care to," the witty superintendent of police observed.

"You may be proud and grateful to know him sometime. I'll tell you about him—and about Sir Thomas Greer, Bart., although for reasons that will be apparent that's not the man's real name. And as it is one of my preserves, I'll not use the name of a certain hill tribe involved. I'll call them Tha-thi La-byi, Sons of the Full Moon."

And this is the story Quigley told, as the *punkas* waved and still-faced Indians in the club's livery served *chota*-pegs without end.

I don't know in what shire Peter Wiggam was born. (So Quigley began.) For that matter, Sir Thomas Greer did not know either, although they were inseparable for fifteen years. Sir Thomas Greer did not encourage confidences from his servants.

The date of Peter's birth must have been just before the turn of the century. Certainly he was about twenty-five when his father, old Absalom Wiggam, brought him to Sir Thomas, at that time about twenty-two, and told him there stood his master, not only in this world but apparently in the next. For the Wiggams had served the Greers for three generations, and if Old Wiggam ever heard of Young Wiggam's failing in his duty, he would take a stick to Young Wiggam.

It was a touching scene. One of our more genteel novelists of yesteryear could have made much of it. The old servant retiring to his rose-grown cottage after a lifetime of laying out ties and putting in studs, and passing down his sacred office to his son, while the young master condescended to chaff him, his eyes a little moist. Such scenes did old England proud. Somehow or other, they showed that Britannia still ruled the waves.

But perhaps the scene was touching on another score. Peter Wiggam stood six feet in his socks, had fine blond hair and calm blue eyes and a magnificent pair of shoulders. He had not been to Harrow, but he knew Shakespeare and arithmetic better than his new master. And although Sir Thomas had been too young, Peter Wiggam had got in on the last two years of the war, there to see men torn to scraps that democracy might prevail.

Yet if there was something grim here it did not cross Peter Wiggam's mind. Sir Thomas Greer was a master of whom any servant could be proud. He was the third generation in the money. He, too, was six feet and blond and blue-eyed, but in a fashion to which no Wiggam could aspire.

So Peter Wiggam gave his life and soul to Sir Thomas Greer. Never having had a valet, I cannot tell you of what his duties consisted, but you may be sure they were Wiggam's pride and joy. When I saw Greer again, fifteen years later, he would do as a model for the advertisements in the swanky magazines, a veritable pillar of the Empire.

He belonged to one of the best cricket clubs in all England. Middle August always found him in Scotland, the host of a merry party, for the grouse shooting. At the proper season he shot pheasants, stags, and even chamois in the Tirol; and he fished for salmon. He was known as a hardy thruster at the Sweetbrier Hunt and of course he knew the pedigree of every good hunter and racer in England, and of most of the good hounds.

But the man's energies were inexhaustible. When he met in London an important Indian maharaja and was invited to the latter's palace for a tiger shoot, his sporting instincts were instantly set on fire. But it was very dangerous, His Highness warned him.

As Sir Thomas was dressing for dinner that night, he informed Wiggam of the impending expedition. "And we'll sail on the *Viceroy of India* from Marseilles in a fortnight," he announced.

Wiggam's blue eyes were shining. No doubt he was thrilled, Sir Thomas thought, that the man he served should be so adventurous as to hunt tigers. For once Sir Thomas was wrong. Wiggam was not glorying in his master's coming adventures, but in his own. It may shock you to learn that Peter Wiggam could so violate the traditions of Old England's old family retainers as once to think of himself before he thought of his master, but this is exactly what Peter Wiggam did.

The whole truth of his infamy had better be revealed. Sometimes he got tired of laying out white ties or black ties and putting in shirt studs. The number of brace of grouse that fell to Greer's guns was to Wiggam often a matter of complete indifference. On the other hand, he had read widely about India and Burma. He knew the names of many of the wild tribes and of all the important wild animals and had seen every cinema that portrayed the terrors of the jungle. Even a servant can dream dreams, so he had learned the handling and mechanism of every one of Sir Thomas' rifles. In fact, he had practiced aiming at a doorknob, hearing the firing pins click in the empty chambers with his sights still lined on the tiger's—on the doorknob. If God was good. . .

Peter Wiggam had been on the Mediterranean before, so he found nothing encouraging until the ship stopped at Port Said. But here Sir Thomas bought him a sun helmet, and here the beggars and French photograph peddlers gathered about him just as though he were a genuine passenger instead of a piece of Sir Thomas' baggage.

One dragoman—that meant a guide—whispered something exciting in his ear. The name of the place was the Golden Palace, and the Sin that flaunted there didn't give a hang whether he was master or servant, provided he spent the required number of piasters. There were French and Greek girls and dusky-skinned Cleopatras and golden-haired ladies from the Caucasus, and if there was anything more exciting to contemplate than golden-haired ladies from the Caucasus, Peter Wiggam could not imagine what it might be.

But to contemplate it was the sum total of Wiggam's indiscretion. In the first place, Sir Thomas thought that English housemaids, and only the homeliest and most respectable of these, were Wiggam's style. Besides, his common sense as well as his dreams told him that bought adventures were not real adventures; that victories won, not chattels paid for with silver, would set him free.

At Aden he began to smell the East. At least, he smelled something very strong. And at Bombay he saw the palm trees against the sky.

Of course you have already foreseen what would have happened had Sir Thomas' tiger hunt gone off as scheduled. As a special favor, from a distance, Wiggam would have been allowed to see an outdoor fête with fireworks. At most, he would have seen one of the dead tigers which his master had helped kill.

But God was good to Wiggam and disarranged Greer's plans. One of the maharaja's French concubines had died under circumstances displeasing to the British, and His Highness was too busy explaining to entertain guests. Consequently, all that Sir Thomas had for his long voyage to Bombay was a fervid telegram of regrets.

But the English always muddle through. Beneath his cricket-club blazer beat the heart of a bulldog, or so Sir Thomas implied while Wiggam was holding his dinner trousers. "Perhaps you've noticed, Wiggam, that I'm not one to be easily dissuaded from any undertaking I have set my heart on," he began.

"I have noticed that, sir," Wiggam answered.

"We English are good losers, I fancy, but we don't admit we've lost until the game's over. Instead of disembarking here, I'll continue to Colombo, then take ship for Rangoon. I've a pal there—the chief conservator of forests, whom I knew at Harrow—who can put me on to good tiger grounds. The shooting there is not well organized as in India proper. I'll have to run my own show, but that makes the prospect all the more attractive to me."

"I'm proud to hear you say so, Sir Thomas."

"But I mustn't be worried by details," his master told him.

Wiggam's luck still held, and the chief conservator of forests was away on leave. The number-two man had not known Sir Thomas at Harrow, but knew his reputation as a great sportsman, so he sent him and his servant, a native cook and an interpreter to the upper reaches of the Chindwin River.

Of course Sir Thomas had no idea what he had let himself in for. He began to grasp the truth only after the river boat had struggled for a full week beyond Mandalay with several days to go. Actually he was getting into one of the wildest, loneliest regions of the earth, inhabited mainly by pagan hill tribes and animals. Besides Wiggam, there were only two other white men on the boat, the captain and a Scot who had something to do with timber. They did not pay Sir Thomas the proper deference. They called him "Greer," and often interrupted his remarks to speak of their own affairs. The quarters were cramped, the beds hard, and the food native.

On the other hand, Wiggam was having the time of his life. He saw deer, bison, and once a herd of wild elephants on the riverbank; he was flirted with by native girls bathing in front of the villages; he was treated respectfully, indeed companionably, by the two Sahibs. The boat captain had had the most breath-taking adventures. Best of all, from Wiggam's standpoint—it gave him such a warm feeling in his heart—the captain ran his boat on schedule, flood or drought, serving not only the far-scattered Sahibs but the natives along the shore.

It was so different from laying out ties and holding trousers for a baronet. Yes, and it was also different from putting on the ties that Wiggam laid out and the trousers Wiggam held, then going forth to the Gold Cup or the Derby. . .

The timberman, too—Duncan was his name—told him exciting things. He had shot tigers and wild rogue elephants, not for sport but to protect his workmen. The work itself was the most fascinating Wiggam could imagine—getting great teak trees out of the jungle to build ship decks on the River Clyde. But the most exciting of all his remarks he made at dusk on the last day of the river journey, while water fowl streamed overhead and deer grazed on the bank.

"Have you ever thought of leaving Greer?" Duncan asked.

"No, sir. I never have. The thought could hardly occur to me unless I did something to incur his displeasure."

"Well, if you ever do, I could find a place for you in my outfit. The pay would be small, at first—no more than you make now, likely, and less found—but if you show you can command natives, there'd be a chance to go ahead."

Wiggam's heart had never leaped so in all his nearly forty years. But he said to it, "Be still," and to Duncan he said, in sad and simple honesty, "I

couldn't command natives, sir, or anyone. I've been commanded myself too long."

"Are you sure, Wiggam? This is Burma, Upper Burma; we're a long way from Piccadilly. A man can find himself, out here, you know, if he is a man."

"Will you leave me your address? You can be sure I'll not apply to you unless I've some reason to think I can make good."

Of course he would leave Wiggam his address! And Wiggam was all atremble as he helped Sir Thomas dress for dinner, and so flustered that he held Sir Thomas' trousers wrong side before.

Native boats had brought Sir Thomas' outfit two days up a tributary of the Chindwin, and four of Duncan's trained elephants had transported it the remaining distance. And Wiggam was no longer merely a piece of baggage.

"Details bore me, Wiggam," Sir Thomas told him. "Attend to them and make all the minor decisions. I won't interfere as long as all goes well."

So Wiggam hired the men, bought the supplies, and laid out the camp. But the childlike natives did not understand. When the elephants had gone back to the timber company and the hunting was about to begin he had to explain to them that he was not the *burra* (big) Sahib, merely the *chota* (little) Sahib.

Yet he was happier than he had ever dreamed. It was like a breath-taking cinema coming to life. All day he was in the open, scouting with scarred old jungle men, looking for tiger sign, putting out baits and erecting shooting platforms in the trees; and his naturally strong body thrilled to the exercise.

He was completely fascinated by the La-byi, Tibeto-Burman people, probably a branch of the far-flung Nagas. Although they worked hard in their fields, the warm sun was in their hearts, and they laughed and sang all day long. Undoubtedly they were heathens. Unquestionably the girls wore insufficient clothes, especially from the waist up. But how any man with red blood in his veins could keep from looking every time they came swinging down the trail with their water jars, Wiggam could not imagine. Of course Sir Thomas had blue blood, and that was different.

There was one La-byi girl that Wiggam looked at constantly. She was only about fourteen, tall as most English girls, and the dressing of her glossy black hair showed she was still a maiden. Her name was Net-kah, which

meant the Evening Star, and her eyes were two black, bright, beautiful stars. And when her dark-red lips parted as she laughed and showed her pretty teeth, Wiggam experienced desires that would justify his immediate discharge from Sir Thomas' service.

But Sir Thomas, too, was not quite the same man as at home. He was more irritable and fault-finding, not quite so self-possessed, and he drank more whisky than was good for him. But to what degree he had changed Wiggam did not realize until one evening Sir Thomas came in from a fruitless watch over a tiger-kill and called his servant to his tent.

Sir Thomas began by complaining about the progress of the hunt. This business of sitting for hours on a platform in a tree over an ill-smelling cow-carcass was boresome. He had sat that day from three to six, and Wiggam had failed to butter the sandwiches, and the tea in the flask was lukewarm and he couldn't drink it.

Wiggam expressed polite regrets.

"Why can't you organize a shoot like the ones they have on the preserves of the maharajas?" Sir Thomas demanded. "You could build me a platform, hire all the men in the village and have them beat out that grass-jungle by the nullah. Then I could get my tiger in an hour or two, and we could get out of here."

"I've discussed it with the *thugyi* (head man), and he says it's impossible," Wiggam answered. "He says the grass is so high the tiger might lie in wait and kill one of the beaters."

"No pluck. That's what I call it. Chicken-hearted."

"Besides, sir, they say that Akon Kya—the Leaping Tiger—may be in the neighborhood. The hunters think they have recognized her tracks."

"Probably that beast is a myth. At least, she doesn't hunt in this area."

"Akon Kya is not a myth, if I may venture an opinion, sir. She's known for her unusually long leaps, as well as for her man-eating."

"Well, perhaps we can't blame the natives. They are not English, you know." This sudden turn-about-face astonished Wiggam for the moment. "But the tiger shooting is not what I wanted to see you about, Wiggam. It's a private and confidential matter." Without waiting to be served, Sir Thomas poured himself a double peg of whisky. "As you know, Wiggam, that, although a bachelor, I've always lived an upright moral life."

"Yes, sir."

"However, I have temptations the same as everyone, and circumstances alter cases. These people here don't understand what morals mean. The young girls are allowed to indulge themselves as they see fit. Also, this rough life has unchained instincts within me which—well, we must all break over now and then, and I see no real reason why I shouldn't gratify them. I wonder if you've noticed the girl called Net-kah?"

Wiggam stood very still. "I have observed her, sir."

"She's comely, in a barbaric way, and has taken my eye. I don't know, but I venture that quite likely I have taken hers. Wiggam, I am thinking that for a few rupees she would be only too pleased to come to my tent tonight. I'd be glad to give her twenty rupees—one pound, ten shillings—a fortune to one of these hill girls, Wiggam. And as you seem to have made friends with the natives, I'm wondering if you couldn't make the arrangements. It would be more in keeping—less conspicuous—than if I should be seen talking to her."

"I could ask her, sir. Her mother was once the ayah of a white planter, and she speaks quaint-sounding English. But—but——"

"You may bring her here after the village and the camp are asleep. Probably I'll merely talk to her, yet I'm keen on the little adventure, Wiggam. So attend to it at once."

You may ask why Wiggam did not throw up his job on the spot. Was not Sir Thomas trying to make a procurer out of him? But men are rarely angels. They do not strike heroic attitudes half as often in real life as in imagination. They have too keen a consciousness of their own frailties, too much of a sense of humor.

Besides, Wiggam understood perfectly how the baronet might like a *tête-à-tête* with Net-kah. Although it would be much too nice for a mere servant, to tell the truth, he would like it himself.

There was another reason that carried him forth on his errand. Sir Thomas' honor was Wiggam's honor, too. He would much rather make the arrangements in a gentlemanly way than have Sir Thomas attempt them and disgrace himself. The latter did not understand that savages as well as servants had sensibilities.

Watching his chance, Wiggam beckoned to Net-kah, and a moment later she followed him to the bathing pool. But as she stood there, the young moon shining in her dark eyes and glinting on her bare shoulders and arms

and breast, it seemed to Wiggam that he could not execute Sir Thomas' commission, could not find words for what he had come to say.

Net-kah was a tall girl—five feet six, perhaps—and she stood very straight. She was grave yet friendly, polite and interested but reserving judgment. She's a lady, that's what she is, Wiggam was thinking. If the master doesn't realize it, he's no gentleman.

But there was something else that tied Wiggam's tongue, a kind of tempest in the humble teapot of his own breast. Net-kah was beautiful. There was simply no other word. Comely, Wiggam's eye!

Her sweet mouth, her slim brown throat. . . The bit of moonlight that her slim body blotted out had the most beautiful curves he could imagine. Sir Thomas had no business speaking of her the way he did, as if he owned *her* the same as him; what did he know about her? But Wiggam himself felt that he knew the whole world about her—her gay warm heart, her pride, and her grace.

But he had to go ahead and see. It was up to Net-kah, now.

"I've been sent to you by the *burra* Sahib," Wiggam began. "He has admired your beauty from a distance."

"It is a great honor."

"He invites you to his tent. If you'll come, he says to tell you he'll be greatly honored. And he is so bold only because he knows that by the law of your people an unwedded girl can give her favors without being ashamed."

A faint smile curled Net-kah's lips. "Does he wish me to come now?"

"No, Net-kah. For your sake he thought best to wait till his men are asleep."

"How much silver will he give me?"

Her eyes were bright, but somehow that brightness did not look like greed.

"He did mention a gift. It's the custom of great Sahibs. Enough rupees to buy ten pigs; more if you'll put out your hand."

She smiled again. "He is a very rich Sahib. Tell him it is a great honor—but I cannot come."

Wiggam wanted to throw up his hat. "What reason shall I give, Net-kah?"

"You speak for me. Speak as good as you speak for him."

"Shall I say you have a lover?" Wiggam was cheating now, he was so interested in Net-kah.

"If you like. But I have none. I do not know I have yet seen the man I want for lover." And she sighed.

"It's not because he's so much older than you?"

"Maybe I would more likely come if he was older still. I could do for him more, make him more happy than one who is young and has all the morning in his hands. But say I am too young to be out so late."

She was a sly minx, Wiggam was thinking, for all her childlike beauty. "If he had said come at once, would you be more likely to go?"

She was instantly grave. "Yes, Sahib."

"I thought so. But you see, the *burra* Sahib doesn't understand that. He doesn't realize that if you went it would be because you had nothing to hide; that if you had something to hide you wouldn't go."

"But you, the *chota* Sahib, understand. That is enough."

"The people in your village would not blame you, Net-kah?"

"Not if my heart led me there for all to see. No word of blame would even our priest speak. But if I went like a jackal to the rubbish heap, then Net-kah could never lift her head again."

"He'll be here only a few weeks. Did that keep you from going, too?" Wiggam did not know just why he asked this question.

"No, Sahib. We are poor and foolish people. We love the rainbow on the hill, although it lasts not long enough to boil one pot of rice. If I had the *burra* Sahib's favors, I would thank the gods until he went away; then, weeping, thank the gods for days gone by."

"But you could have the *burra* Sahib's favors, Net-kah?"

"They are not his favors, Sahib. It is only his silver that he offers, and I cannot eat it. Now, have I your leave to go?"

"Yes, Net-kah."

She looked up into his blue eyes. "Tell the *burra* Sahib that if he will come to me and plead for you, the *chota* Sahib, I will give ear."

And before Wiggam could realize what she had said, she had slipped away.

Wiggam was no flatterer. Every admiring word he had said to Sir Thomas he had meant from the bottom of his heart. By the same token, he had no intention of slandering Net-kah to save Sir Thomas' feelings. He explained respectfully but plainly that Sir Thomas had failed to understand the native viewpoint; that Net-kah would not be party to an intrigue and that she was not for sale.

Wiggam had hoped Sir Thomas would be pleased that a girl who attracted him was virtuous, but he was disappointed. The look on Sir Thomas' face could almost be called a sneer. He ventured that the girl was trying to hold him up; that she was afraid she would be seen; that Wiggam had muffed the whole business. So when Wiggam left the tent, it was as a ship without a rudder; a wanderer in the jungle without a light.

From then on, Wiggam drove himself all the harder to serve Greer. He had not studied psychology: he did not know that he was leaning backward from an almost unconscious loss of faith in his master and therefore the loss of meaning and dignity in his own life. Within a week he had given Sir Thomas a shot at a tiger, but the light was poor and the bullet went astray.

Serving both men, the interpreter also was overworked, so occasionally Wiggam employed Net-kah's quickening English. But they did not always talk tracks and baits and kills. One evening after an especially weary day their conversation took a strange and perilous turn.

"Is that all the Sahib wish to say to the *thugyi*?" Net-kah asked as they stood together in the dusk between the camp and the village.

"That's all, I think."

"And is it all the Sahib wish to say to Net-kah herself? For Akon Kya—the Leaping Tiger—may come in the night for her, and then she would be too far to hear."

"You can tell her that she is sweet and good and beautiful, and I'll see her in dreams all night." Wiggam's heart was pounding.

"Only in dreams, Sahib? See, the moon is up already; in two nights she will be full, and then we will honor her with a feast because she is our mother, but even tonight she will shine bright till dawn. She would light this tent well, lord."

“But you won’t be in this tent, Net-kah, unless——” He paused, trembling.

“Unless the Sahib commands me,” she concluded quietly.

“I can’t command you, Net-kah. I’m only the *chota* Sahib. I can’t command anyone, except in the name of the *burra* Sahib. . . But have you anything to give me, a free gift?”

“Very little, *chota* Sahib. My loved one must also be my lord—for I am a chief’s daughter.”

So she understood his position and in reply had made herself quite plain. No servant could reign over this free-born daughter of the hills.

“Yet one mango hangs very low on the tree,” she added cunningly. “Even a *chota* Sahib could reach it if he would, and taste it, and see if that tree bears fruit ripe and sweet, worth climbing high to harvest.”

She stood very still as he came to her, lifted her face and kissed her on the lips. He was nearly forty years old but this was the first time in his life that he had fully known he was alive.

The people of India say that an old tree must die before a new seed can find root; that a soul must pass before another can be born. This is plausible if one believes the Hindu and Buddhist doctrines of the transmigration of souls, but Wiggam was a Christian and Net-kah a pagan if not an animist, so it seems best to lay the blame for what happened on a *deus ex machina* named Akon Kya.

The movement of events was not as cruel as it appeared. The attack of a tiger is almost always a complete surprise, and it is so violent and is over so soon that usually the victim hardly knows what hit him. Certainly this was true of Pin-gyin. He was half blind and almost completely deaf; the tigress sprang on him from the rear as he was toddling into the village at sundown after scaring birds from the new-seeded fields, probably blasting his frail old life with the first cannon-ball impact of her body.

Several of the villagers had seen the great golden beast spring out of the thickets, and others rushed to their doors in time to see what tore the heart even more—the tigress picking up her victim by the shoulder, and running off with him into the jungle. But her rush seemed more like flying than running, her bounds were so long and graceful.

"*Akon Kya!*" the men shouted. "*Akon Kya!*" the women shrieked in echo, and "*Akon Kya!*" wailed the terrified children.

Pin-gyin was old and ripe for death, but who would be next? If Akon Kya found no pig or goat or deer, she would soon hunt the villages again. Next time it might be a husbandman in his prime, or a bride newly won, or even a little child gathering flowers and wandering too far from the elders.

It was not well that Akon Kya should live on. Perhaps the *burra* Sahib would take his guns, pursue her without rest and slay her. Then they would make offerings to him as to a god.

But though the *burra* Sahib snatched up his gun and magic light and ran with the villagers to the fields fronting the jungle, he did not cross those fields. He looked very warlike standing there, his eyes ranging far and wide as if for a glimpse of the tiger, and his face calm as the face of a great hunter, but presently he shook his head and turned to go back to his tent.

It was at that instant that the *chota* Sahib ran to join him with his master's extra rifle in his hand.

The natives could not understand the conversation between the two men. Even Englishmen could hardly have understood it or credited it. By every outward sign Sir Thomas was an English gentleman. His face was composed, his eyes steady, his hands firm. Wiggam was a mere servant; his eyes were wide and wild with excitement; he was pale and trembling.

Thank heaven, Sir Thomas was by no means typical of his class. But he was the inevitable product of an ignoble way of life, an example of what wrong standards and false values can do to a privileged people. He was a sportsman, God save the mark, but he had never earned his holiday by six days' labor. He had never sacrificed an hour of pleasure to serve others, and he had been taught the most vicious doctrine in the world—that men like him were God's anointed and must be served.

On the other hand, Peter Wiggam had inherited the simple virtues of a great race. And he was not yet so crushed by snobbery and servitude that he could not arise.

"Bad business, Wiggam," Sir Thomas began.

"Yes, sir. But we'd better get started, sir."

"What are you talking about? There's nothing we can do. Night's coming on. How could you expect us to find one cat in that expanse of jungle? Don't be ridiculous!"

“She won’t carry the body far, sir. If you’ll lead the men, they can follow the drag and find it before dark. She’s certain to come back to feed, and if we lie over it maybe you can get a shot at her. I’ll hold the flashlight for you.”

“I won’t hear of anything so absurd. Tomorrow we can build a platform in the nearest tree——”

“Tomorrow will be too late.” Probably it was the first time in his life Wiggam had ever interrupted Sir Thomas. “She’ll devour the body tonight and then go killing again.”

“I don’t propose to argue with you, Wiggam.” Again Sir Thomas started back toward his tent.

“May I take this rifle, sir?”

“Certainly not. I forbid it. I won’t let you risk the lives of these natives on such a desperate chance.”

“Then I’ll have to take it anyway. I’d like that flashlight, too.”

“You shan’t have it. I’ll need it to protect the camp, in case the tiger returns. And I warn you, Wiggam, if you go without my consent, you’re discharged.”

“I fancy I couldn’t use the flashlight anyhow, alone; and there’ll be a fine moon.”

Wiggam turned away and called the interpreter. He wanted a dozen of the boldest men to follow Akon Kya’s trail quickly, for the light was already beginning to fail. And as soon as they found the body they could light torches and return safely to the village. “Would the men come?”

“Yea, *burra* Sahib,” the old *thugyi* answered. “We will come.”

Wiggam walked with the head tracker. Some of the men had seen where the tiger had entered the jungle, and torn vines and fallen leaves showed which way she had dragged her victim.

Scarcely two hundred yards in the jungle they found Pin-gyin’s body, one leg already devoured. From now on it was Wiggam’s show alone; his men must return to the village. And as he looked about him for a blind and saw that all the big trees had been cut away and none of the new growth would support his weight, he yearned to return with them.

But he did not. Something more than vengeance for Pin-gyin’s slaying was at stake, although Peter Wiggam could not put in words what it was.

While his men retreated, he crouched with his back against a stump screened by low brush.

This action was not as suicidal as it seemed. He knew that tigers have only a rudimentary sense of smell and hunt entirely by sight; and as the jungle was somewhat open and the moon bright, he hoped to see the tigress before she saw him. This was about all he dared pray for. What happened afterward, the fracas with a man-eater here in the moonlight and the brush, would have to take care of itself.

It was queer, Wiggam thought, to be out here alone on such business watching the daylight fade and die. It was so different from putting in studs or holding trousers. Thinking of that, he was not quite so frightened. It seemed to make any danger worth enduring.

Still, he was terribly frightened. Possibly the tiger had already discovered him, was stalking him this instant; at the very next instant she might leap—one of those long leaps for which she was so famous. He could hold trousers and be safe, but not hunt tigers and be safe. Come *soon*, Akon Kya!

Just then he saw a kind of dark place in a narrow opening between two bushes. . . He was almost positive the moon had been shining there only a second ago. He stared hard, and that dark place moved.

Yes, it was the tiger. She was standing there turning her head, surveying the scene. But he waited until she moved into the open moonlight, then quickly brought his rifle to his shoulder.

She saw the movement, but stood still a second more, trying to decide whether to run or charge. And Wiggam was so used to getting a quick aim on a doorknob he had plenty of time to level the barrel on her shoulder and hold it there while he pressed the trigger.

The gun was a double-barreled .470 express, and it had a terrific kick, Wiggam was banged back against the stump, and for a second or two he did not know whether he had killed the tiger or was about to be killed himself. There was not a sound except the echo of the gun, and when he looked again, there Akon Kya lay, stone-dead beside her kill.

“And it serves you bloody well right!” Wiggam yelled at her—and gave her the other barrel.

The villagers heard the shots and came running out to meet him with flaring torches. But they did not seem astonished that he had killed the tiger. They were happy about it, yet they seemed to have expected it. And somehow, this was even more gratifying to him than if they had been unable to believe their eyes.

It was all very gratifying, he thought. Just the way the men stood aside and let him fall into the lead in the trail was wonderful. As they crossed the field he heard them chattering behind him excitedly, happy as children on a picnic because their enemy was dead.

But a cloud seemed to come over his happiness as he passed through the village.

The men fell off at their own houses; no others joined him, and when he walked into camp he was alone. And the camp looked so deserted, just the cook bending over his fire and one light in his master's tent.

Wiggam started toward that light to report the kill, but he stopped. He had no master now. Sir Thomas had told him that if he went after the tiger he was discharged. He was his *own* master now. So he went to the fire and sat down at the camp-made kitchen table where he took his meals. But he did not feel hungry. He felt only very lonely.

"I fix your dinner at big table tonight," the cook told him.

And there Wiggam ate it—at the fine folding table Sir Thomas had brought, and on a white cloth.

After he had finished his dinner he started across the moonlit camp toward his tent. But he stopped again, his heart bursting. Someone was sitting on the ground beside the tent door waiting for him.

There was only one person that it could be; one who had been on his mind every minute since he had shot the tiger; one whom his eyes had yearned for in the village road. And suddenly he was not lonely, could never be lonely again.

"Has the *burra* Sahib orders to give before I sleep?" Net-kah asked.

"I haven't seen the *burra* Sahib," Wiggam answered. "Anyway, he'll give his own orders from now on."

"That is why I have waited," she told him, looking up into his eyes. "To hear my *burra* Sahib give his own orders. And it is well that he give them boldly, so that they will be quickly obeyed."

The blood rushed to Wiggam's head, but he was a man now, so he said gently and distinctly, "Come into my tent, Net-kah."

She sat down on the cot beside him and waited for him to speak.

"You're so young," he told her at last, "and I'm so old."

"Yes, Sahib. Much too old to run in the jungle at night like a yearling stag. Sahib's place is under the roof, with his handmaiden to mend his fire."

"Soon I'll go to work for Duncan Sahib at the timber camps. There I'll be the *chota* Sahib again. Would the daughter of a chief be ashamed?"

"No; for now he will always be a *burra* Sahib in his heart, and in the eyes of the people, and in my heart."

"Some day I may return to my own land. Think of that, Net-kah, before you decide."

"Decide? I do not know that word—but I know my heart. Sahib has made this his own land, in reward for making him a *burra* Sahib. My *nat* (familiar spirit) has told me he will stay here always. And if some day I lose favor in his eyes and he takes a Mem-sahib, there will pass before my eyes the days gone by, and I will be happy still."

"I'll never take a Mem-sahib, Net-kah," he said. "I swear it by your god and mine."

The moon was the symbol of Net-kah's god. Her heart too full for words, she rose quickly, stole to the open tent door and gazed upward in childlike gratitude and worship. Wiggam came and stood beside her, holding her warm brown hand in his.

The cooking fire had died down, but a light still burned in Sir Thomas' tent. As Wiggam gazed, his bitterness at his betrayal, at his waste of fifteen years serving an unworthy master, passed away. Suddenly he felt sorry for Sir Thomas.

He did not know why—it did not seem like common sense; Sir Thomas need not serve, only be served—yet Wiggam pitied him and everyone like him in the world.

Net-kah gave his hand a little tug. Wiggam nodded and smiled. She freed her hand only for a moment, and her quick fingers fastened the tent strings.

Matter of Honor

Born and raised pro-English, pro-Empire, let alone a devotee of Kipling, I never expected to make a pukka sahib the villain of a piece. The trouble was that my last long stay in India occurred in 1937, when British glory reached an all-time low. Hitler's ranting was scaring the breeks off the hunting squires, but instead of admitting it and doing something about it, all England tried to drown it out in the cymbals and sounding brass of the Coronation, wherein sentimentality and bad taste hit an all-time high in a maudlin, gaudy show which Johnny Wilkes and other eighteenth-century realists would have belly-laughed to scorn. The sahibs in India went to unbelievable lengths, some of them atrocious, in being pukka. The most appalling conversations were heard in every British club.

There are not many sahibs like Arthur Millbank, but even a few hasten the liquidation of the Empire.

Kipling was wrong when he said "there aren't no Ten Commandments" east of Suez. In the case of the Fifth Commandment, children out there honor not only their parents, but all their parents' faiths and prejudices, their gods whether true or tin. India is the greatest stronghold of tradition in the world.

"No, my son," says the Hindu father, "thou shalt not play with Dweesa's little boy, and if his shadow crosses thy shadow, thou shalt spit on him and beat him with sticks. Why? Because my father was a merchant, and Dweesa's father a donkey driver. Wah!"

"Dash it, Gwendolyn," says the English colonel to his daughter, "of course you can't go to the races with that young clerk. Ours are the seventh oldest rifles in the Service."

So the Hindu's son plays with a boy of his own caste, and Gwendolyn weeps briefly and goes to the races with a subaltern of Horse. India is a very pious country in this respect.

But here is a story of a young man out in India who honored his father and mother in a way that might have made the true gods smile and certainly made the tin gods squeak with horror.

Arthur Millbank had married rather late—thirty-three, in fact—but he had married well.

This was no surprise to his few friends and many admirers. Arthur Millbank had done well all along the line. He was merely the Younger Son of the Honorable Archibald Millbank—which meant, by the way, that his grandfather was Lord Millbank, Fifth Viscount of Stratholden; but of course he never mentioned this; you had to find it out for yourself. He entered neither the army nor the government, but really eclipsed both his older brothers, for he became the lord of a great manor in his own right.

True, that manor was in Northeast India, its principal crop was tea instead of wool or beef, but in 1912, when Arthur Millbank was thirty-six years old, his income put in the shade the rent roll of many of the finest manors in England. And on the high ground he had built what he modestly called a bungalow but which was really a manor house of great spaciousness and distinction.

In that house he lived with a grace and luxury fitting to his ancient name. The horses in his stables were of unquestioned pedigree, the hounds in his kennels by the best dogs and out of the best bitches in the Register, and his servants—well, he did not know the names of many of them, but they were highly trained and wore suitable livery. Needless to say, he dressed for dinner even when dining alone.

He had married Edith Liddel-Courtney, the daughter of Brigadier General Albert Liddel-Courtney, a tall girl with large dark eyes and smooth dark hair and an especially sweet voice, who had some money of her own. Yet although he was the prize catch of several seasons, he had had to woo her three solid years before he won her.

“Dashed odd sort of girl, y’know,” her fiercely mustached father explained. “Dreamy—demme if she didn’t write poetry, off at school—all that sort of thing. But her mother guided her a bit—even I put in a sly word now and then—and she saw the light in time.”

That such a man with such a wife had to become involved in the Thompson affair distressed everyone. It is said that when the police officer, young Fordham, heard the news from one of Millbank’s bearers, his first words were, “It’s a ruddy shame.”

But this could not affect young Fordham’s duty. He was an I.C.S. man. He would have to question Millbank as though he, Millbank, were a common clerk. If distasteful publicity followed in the yellow journals, then it must follow. All because Thompson happened to be Millbank’s neighbor, and Millbank had found his body!

As young Fordham raced his motorcycle to Millbank's plantation he reviewed all he knew about Thompson. He was the son of a carpenter in Kent. Of course no one held this against him, provided he kept his place, least of all Millbank. But Thompson was an upstart. He had been traveling about India, poking his nose into matters none of his concern, then had rented the old bungalow of a small American-owned tea plantation as a place to write a book. And that book was not about a Bengal Lancer, but about a Hindu boy, aged seven, working in an English-owned factory.

Millbank was waiting for Fordham at his big stone gates, with two horses and a groom. He was in riding clothes, the picture of a country gentleman. "This is very bad business, Fordham," he began.

"Right you are."

"You're not going to be able to ride that infernal contraption of yours across the ditches, so I've ordered my June Belle for you. We can ride over at once."

"Is there anyone with——"

"Of course. I didn't leave until two native boys I knew came along the lane. . . Will she do? This way, then. . . Shall I begin at the first?"

"Please."

"About tennish this morning—say, a quarter to—I took my light Greener and with old Mike—y'know, the Irish spaniel with the torn ear—thought I'd tramp over to the big jheel to pick up a few brace of snipe. There are a good many in there."

"Yes, yes. You were saying——"

"The Mail from Rangiya came along and stopped for water at the tower just north of the jheel. In the window of one of the carriages not twenty yards from me, I thought I recognized the down-country girl who was Thompson's maid of all work. Pabati is her name. She dodged back from the carriage window, as though she didn't want me to see her. Well, about three o'clock I determined to ride over and see Thompson. If his servant had left him, I'd try to——"

Regardless of June Belle's velvet mouth, Fordham pulled up quickly. "Good Lord!" he broke out. "That girl. Damn it, Millbank, I wish you'd told me about her in the chit—or at least before we started this ride."

Millbank stiffened slightly. "She's only a poor servant, and I do not believe in——"

“Who else could be guilty if not she? Haven’t you every reason to think that she was more than his servant? That would give us our motive, you know.”

“I’d hoped you would not ask that. Any vague impressions that I might have got, the single time I called——”

“Well, give me the main facts quick as you can. Where was the wound?”

“Just over the left eye. That’s all I noticed.”

“Did you see the pistol?”

“I didn’t see it, but I didn’t look very close.”

“How long had he been dead, do you think?”

“I touched the poor devil’s hand. It was quite cold. I judged it must have happened last night or early this morning.”

“Is that all? I’ll have to ask you to ride on alone and keep watch until I can send some telegrams and get back. Hell of a mess. I’ll get a wigging from headquarters.”

“I’ll speak to the superintendent myself. But I have one favor to ask, Fordham. My wife, you know, is in—er—a delicate condition.”

The police officer was at once patient and respectful. After all, Thompson was certainly an upstart and probably a rotter, and this was Arthur Millbank, a *burra* Sahib, and his wife, a Mem-sahib of first water.

“I understand what you mean.”

“I’d rather not have her questioned, at least until she has had time to recover from the shock of the news. Thompson has never been invited to our home, and she knows nothing about him.”

“I’ll see she’s not disturbed.”

But Millbank himself was not spared in the investigation of the crime. He was questioned respectfully but closely by the superintendent of police from Shillong, and indeed some of the poorer sort of Sahibs were so vulgar as to laugh at his long delay in notifying the authorities.

“My bay gelding, Victor, began to favor his right foreleg just after I left Thompson’s bungalow,” he had explained. “I did not propose to injure him permanently by pushing him.”

But the *burra* Sahibs did not laugh! They wished they could tell such a story on themselves: it was so very, very English. Ripping, by gad! old cavalry officers exclaimed. Victor was a good horse, by Conqueror out of Laurel Lady, but Thompson—well, the less said about him the better. And those *burra* Sahibs hoped openly that the lameness was not serious and were much relieved when Millbank's *syce* found a small sharp stone embedded in Victor's hoof.

Pabati was not caught. Evidently she had enough money to reach Calcutta and hide away. In time the affair blew over like the rain clouds from the charming Pairideeza countryside. Thompson's book died a-borning, which showed that every cloud had a silver lining. Edith Millbank's delicate condition was nearing its acute stage, so she went home to England to be delivered of a blue-eyed son who was named Roland Millbank.

Sending her there, in spite of first-class obstetricians and hospitals in Calcutta, was another instance of Arthur Millbank's good form. He knew that the better clubs were rightly suspicious of white men born in India on the grounds that they might be tainted by Indian blood. "I would not permit any club to make an exception in our own son's favor and establish a dangerous precedent," he explained rather stiffly to a gentleman who should have seen for himself the great principle at stake. Later, he sent Roland home to one of the smaller, but still very aristocratic schools.

This was all completely *pukka*. There was only one thing wrong—merely dumb and bewildered grief in a little boy's heart and a dazed wistfulness in his big blue eyes. For in spite of all the advantages Arthur Millbank showered upon Roland, he did not love the boy, and—dreadful as it sounds—even hated him.

Roland himself discovered this at a pitifully early age. The grim man with the long, strong jaw and carefully clipped brown mustache would not let him lean against his knee or climb into his chair. Occasionally Roland wanted to kiss him and be kissed. But Millbank pushed him off: there, he had rumpled the paper; he was filthy; couldn't his mother teach him to behave like a little gentleman, instead of——

"Hush, Arthur," his mother would break in. "Roland, go to your *ayah* now."

But of course his mother loved him world without end. When he and she were alone, she would hold him close and whisper in his ear the sweetest

words, but she was careful not to pet or even praise him in her husband's presence. Papa didn't like demonstrations of any kind, she said, and Roland mustn't worry him, ever.

And Roland returned his mother's love till he thought his heart would burst. She was so beautiful and so gentle and had no one else to love her. The Gray Man didn't. He didn't sleep with her, as Mr. and Mrs. Martin slept together, or even in the same room with her. He never kissed her or said funny little things to her, and he spoke to her in the same cold, contemptuous voice in which he spoke to Roland.

So Roland did not say any more prayers to God. Instead, he repeated under his breath all the bad words he had picked up from the natives. He was going to hell anyway, and if God had bears come out of the woods and eat him, as they ate bad little boys in the Bible—well, let 'em come.

Of course he was very little when he did this. Later, he began to realize that God was too far off and busy to take a hand. If the Martins thought so much of Him, he couldn't be so mean as He appeared. The Martins—Papa, Mamma and a lot of children, including Elsie—were the jolliest family and the nicest he could imagine in his wildest dreams. And this was in spite of the fact that they were "Americans, the poorer sort at that," nothing but managers of a small American-owned tea plantation, and "practically beggars."

"I shan't have him going there all the time," the Gray Man declared in his crisp, cold voice.

"The child must have someone to play with," his mother answered gently.

"Hasn't he a horse and a gun? Haven't you just bought him that unspeakable horn so he can drive me to distraction with his tooting? If the Martin children come here, send them home. If he goes over there, he'll get a thrashing."

Well, what was a thrashing? Roland had had several already, much harder ones than he would naturally expect even from the Gray Man. But five hours' laughing with the Martin children was worth one hour of bitter weeping. Besides, usually the Gray Man didn't find out.

The "horn" of which the Gray Man had spoken was a cornet. His mother had bought it for him when she heard the little tunes he learned to play on an old cornet with some of its stops broken which he had found in the garret. "You come naturally by a love of music," she told him—and then she cried.

But one reason he loved the beautiful shining thing was that now he could play in the Martin "orchestra"—Mrs. Martin at the piano, Elsie as first violin, and little Buddie beating like sixty on a drum, while Mr. Martin clapped and stamped about in the middle of the floor.

When he was thirteen and Elsie was twelve, they became engaged. She kissed him under the mango tree. Her mouth was as warm and soft and sweet as his mother's mouth.

"And now we're engaged, I'm going to tell you a secret," she whispered.

"A real secret?"

"A really, truly secret. Buddie doesn't know it, or even Ruth. I wouldn't've, either, but one night Papa and Mamma thought I was asleep on the sofa and I heard them talking. They thought that if I knew it I'd be scared half to death. It will scare you, too, unless you're awful brave."

"I've been thrashed so much I'm not scared of anything in the world."

"All right. I'll tell you. Our house once had a murder in it."

"Oh, you mean some native stabbing some other native——"

"You just wait. It was a *white* man."

"When? A hundred years ago?"

"N-no. Just about when we were born, but I know you're a year the oldest. His name was Mr. Thompson, and he was in our sitting room when he was shot *dead*."

She told him all the rest she had heard—about Pabati being guilty and running away. "And she must have been *kind* of his wife, Mamma said, but Papa said it was a pity he never had a chance to deny it. And it was *your* papa who found him lying weathering in his own blood!"

Roland said he wasn't afraid. But he was—although not in the way Elsie or anyone else could understand. It was the same feeling he sometimes had in the dead of night: that his little world was full of secrets too black and awful to probe; that God had not merely forgotten him as he liked to think, but had gone out of His way to plague and destroy him. He began to talk of other things. . .

The years passed. Roland was going to school in England, but every year his mother sent him airplane tickets, so he could spend two months in India.

Here there was no great change. The best people admitted now that Elsie was extraordinarily pretty—her fair hair and clear gray eyes and her form curved in loveliness—but Roland had known it all the time. They were still engaged, and the Gray Man still had no inkling of it. And Roland could now play the cornet even better than Elsie could play her violin, so well that he had a chance to join a famous dance orchestra in America.

But the Gray Man still wanted him to be a *burra* Sahib, and it had never really occurred to Roland he could do otherwise. Soon, now, he would be ready to stand examination for the Indian Civil Service. Of course it meant putting aside his cornet, except for amateur performances at the club. Worse still—he might as well face it—it meant giving up Elsie.

"Honor thy father and thy mother." That covered his whole family tradition—the great house in which he lived; the servants; the plate; the portraits on the wall; the creed and the cult and the code. In time he could be Sir Roland Millbank, with a K. C. I. E. after his name. And though Elsie would make a perfect wife for a dance tuner, the notion of her being Lady Millbank made her shout with laughter.

"I couldn't make a go of it, old sport," she told him when that laughter quickly died. "To get to curtsy to the viceroy is just more honor than I could stand. I'd never be able to entertain generals and commissioners and high-court judges without wanting to pour ice water down their backs. The only kind of dogs I like are plain old cur dogs, and I really don't know what horse won the Gold Cup."

"Elsie!"

"Wait, Roland. I love you from here to hell, but I can't ruin both our lives. Dad has ruined me for Tradition with a capital T. Even if you'd marry me—which you might, as an English gentleman—I wouldn't do it."

"I love you, Elsie."

"I know it, strange as it seems. But you'll kiss me good-by, and I'll cry a little bit and cry a lot more in my room, and you'll be a *burra* Sahib, and I'll go back to America and play my fiddle. Dad says he can stand the pressure of a year's study, and he'll be ready to come along himself soon. So it's all right, Roland."

No, it was all wrong. Roland had seen too many other homes to accept a divided house and child-beatings as the natural order of things, but even this could not explain losing Elsie. The Gray Man was polite to him now,

promised him preferment in his career, but better a dinner of herbs where love is. . .

But how horribly and unspeakably wrong everything was, Roland never even dreamed until the night he went to tell Elsie their fated good-by.

Her eyes were wide that night, and she seemed nervous. He thought at first this was an attempt to hide her grief, but thinking over Elsie, he knew better. Her way of hiding grief was either to make fun of everything and shout with laughter, or else to get angry and swear.

"Come across, Elsie," he said at last.

"Oh, Roland!" She had turned very white.

"What is it, Elsie?"

"It's an awful responsibility. I may be doing you the most awful harm—I know I am, according to all the books."

"Who cares about the books? You and I never did."

"You've learned to care. Oh, Roland, you're a 'have.' What are the thrashings you used to get and all the rest compared with that? You're on your way toward a brilliant career, so brilliant it hurts my eyes. You'll be a commissioner or something no one like Dad and me can even see, unless we get permission from half a dozen clerks, and then not when you're having your tea. It's not my duty to tell you what I know. It's my duty to shut up and never tell a soul, not a soul."

He was worried, but he hid it behind his smile. "Then why are you telling me?"

"Not for your own good. That would be the biggest lie I ever thought of, for you're pretty well sold now on being a *burra* Sahib——"

"I'm not sold on it. I want to play my cornet and marry you. Down in my heart I know it's the right thing, but I'm a coward."

"No, you're not. You're being very brave. I mean it, Roland. It takes a lot of bravery for a young Bengal Lancer to let himself be shot in a mutiny for the glory of the Regiment, when he must know—And you'll go ahead, just the same."

She was the one who was fighting; he just stood still.

"So why am I telling you? Just on the chance that you're not blind and dumb and that you don't believe all the lies you've heard. I'm fighting for

myself, I suppose—for the man I love."

She was beautiful. It was strange, he thought, that such beauty and such strength could go together.

"No, don't kiss me. Later if you like, just once. There's no use prolonging the agony—that—or this. I'll show you now."

She made sure the door was closed—the house was much too small for such a large family—then she took from a hiding place a dusty photograph, bearing the trade-mark of a studio in Dover and dated 1911, and put it in his hands.

"I found it in an old trunk in the garret," was all she said.

He looked at it a long time. The sweat leaped from his pores and his hands trembled, but at last he gave it back to her, trying pitifully to smile.

"Since I haven't a long-lost brother——" he began.

"Oh, Roland!"

"Don't cry. What is there to cry about? My eyes, hair, everything, almost like looking in a mirror. Of course it's the man who lived here before you came."

"Of course."

"No wonder Dad hated me. His name was Thompson, wasn't it? *So my name's Roland Thompson.*"

"You don't have to take that name, Roland. It's a cool night. This picture would start a little fire for us to sit by and say good-by." Her eyes were round.

But his eyes were full of visions: another fire blazing where a man was working; a pistol spurting fire; a little black hole appearing in a broad, noble forehead, and then red blood seeping on the hearthstone. She saw only Roland's face—tried to take him in her arms—but he thrust her aside.

"He did it," Roland whispered. "Millbank did it."

"Yes, but——"

"For breaking up his home? But he didn't confess, did he? It didn't go that far, did it? No, he let suspicion fall on a servant girl—motive and everything. But he gave her time to escape—money, too, I suppose. *That* was damned gentlemanly, instead of letting her be hanged." Roland bit his lip and a drop of blood ran down his chin.

"I'd have kept that part from you, Roland, if I could, but it goes with the rest."

"A lame horse. He couldn't hurry with the news, he might hurt his horse. They still tell about it. God, how *pukka*! And his hand still bloody!"

"Roland, don't think about it any more. You could go ahead with your career and never have to speak to Mr. Millbank again."

"Huh! But why did Mother speak to him again? Why in hell did she go on living under his roof? The same old thing, of course. Good form—what will people say?—protect her reputation."

"No. For you."

"For *me*?" Roland flung back.

"All these years, Roland. To protect your name."

"Then she didn't understand."

"Of course she didn't understand, Roland. What woman of her generation could?"

"But could she imagine that I'd blame her?" In pity for his mother, Roland's horror passed away. "Millbank never loved her. He couldn't love anyone. But he wouldn't give her a divorce when she found someone who did love her and whom she loved. A duke, perhaps, but not the son of a carpenter. He'd commit murder before he'd let a thing like that get out."

"Your father was a writer, a good one. Dad looked him up. He would have been a great writer."

"Are you telling me that so I won't be ashamed of him?"

"Atta boy, Roland!" Elsie approved.

"I'm not such a snob as that, in spite of all my training. My name's Roland Thompson."

"I hardly dared hope you'd take that view. An illegitimate son——"

"It sounds awful, doesn't it? Much worse than the coldness and cruelty and neglect that drove Mother to it. By all the rules I've got to go the rest of my life hanging my head. But I'm not going to: what do you think of that? I'm going to——"

She came quickly and grasped his hands. "Don't do anything now, Roland. Take a long walk and think it over. Sleep over it, not only tonight

but many nights. After all, your own dad is dead and doesn't care what lies people tell; anyway, they're mostly forgotten. Think of your career—a wonderful career, for all the fun I've made of it."

She kissed him fiercely, his cheeks, hair, lips. "You could be a real *burra* Sahib," her voice swept on. "Tolerant, kind to poor people, generous to the unfortunate, because you know now. You could fight what's bad in India and uphold what's good. I've got a match right here, and one little word——"

Instinctively he pressed the photograph against his breast. "Father lost the woman he loved by being killed," he answered. "Am I going to lose the girl I love by killing myself, all I stand for, all I am? Elsie, what was that Commandment about our fathers and mothers—— I remember. Well, I'm going to do it. I'm going to honor them. Then maybe my days will be long —upon the earth—that the Lord—has given me."

They talked a while longer. Would she go to the house with him, now, tonight? He needed her, he said. Without her, he might fail.

"All right. You're mine. Nothing else matters. I'll go."

They drove in his car to the big bungalow. A liveried servant opened the door.

"*Sahib hie* (Is the Sahib in)?" Roland asked.

"*Harng, Sahib.*"

"*Sahib ke sart korn hie* (Who is with the Sahib)?"

Only the Mem-sahib was with him. But she heard their voices and met them, her color changing and her eyes widening. But she recovered at once and came quickly to give Elsie her hand.

Roland kissed his mother. "We can skip the amenities tonight," he told her gravely. "Just come with us to talk to——"

He hesitated because he did not want to say "Father." Perhaps Elsie thought it was because he was afraid. But all fear had died in him as shadows die in the wild, bright rush of the tropic sunrise.

"Father? Oh, I'm afraid you can't, tonight." His mother looked from one to the other, and her voice failed. "Why——"

"Don't you worry, Mother. Just remember that I love you and am with you and will protect you. Come on, Elsie."

Before his mother could answer, the girl led the way into the big living room. She was a tall girl, and she walked very straight and lightly. Roland waited for his mother to pass through the door; then he entered and shut the door behind him.

Arthur Millbank was already on his feet. He was in evening clothes and could readily pass as the perfect type of India's ruling class. When he saw his visitor the mask of his caste remained impenetrable.

"Miss Martin, I believe," came his gray voice.

"I've something important to tell you that Mother and Elsie both have a right to hear," Roland said, only a slight tremor in his voice. "But you may as well sit down."

"I cannot for the moment imagine what could concern your mother and me, and Miss Martin too. But——"

"Please sit down. It may take a few minutes."

"Certainly. Have a chair, won't you, Miss Martin?" He waited punctiliously till both she and Roland's mother were seated. "And now, Roland"—he sat down and carefully laid aside his pince-nez—"I'm prepared to hear this important thing you have to say."

"To begin with, Elsie and I are engaged."

Arthur Millbank did not start, nor did his face change expression. "We will discuss that later, privately. What else?"

"We'll be married at once and go to America. I've got an opening with a dance orchestra, and later we hope to get something better."

Color crept into Arthur Millbank's face and his eyes turned brighter under the lamp because he hated the clear-eyed young man before him worse than he hated hell.

"This is very interesting," he said. "It is indeed. My son appearing in a Yankee dance orchestra. Now, if that is all you have to say——"

"That's not all." Roland paused to steady his voice. "My main business concerns Mother. Elsie's and my income will be very limited for a long time, perhaps all our lives. Mother has some money of her own, and we want you to endow her with enough more so that she can live in comfort with us in America or anywhere she chooses."

Millbank leaned forward ominously in his chair. "This has gone far enough. If I may say so, it's gone too far already. I can understand a young

man's being swept off his feet by an infatuation but to talk folly—and damned presumptuous, impertinent folly——"

"I didn't think you'd like it very well, but it can't be helped."

"May I ask you to excuse me from any further discussion in front of this young person. Perhaps it would be best if you take her away at once."

"She came on business, as I have"—Roland paused, and then added distinctly—"Mr. Millbank."

Roland heard his mother make a sound that might have been a low sob. He did not turn to her. He kept his eyes fixed on Millbank's eyes. The Gray Man sat rigid a moment, transfixed, then slowly leaned back in his chair. The color seeped out of his face. There was no sound but the tick of a clock on the mantel.

At last Millbank cleared his throat. He was fighting hard as a man hanged, but all inside. "Why do you call me that?" he asked at last.

"You know, don't you?"

"If you have discovered the shame of your birth, still it gives you no right to make demands on me. It would seem to be the natural thing to feel all the more grateful for what I've done to hide your disgrace——"

"It's not my disgrace," Roland broke in.

"In a sense, no. You were not responsible. But you must share with your mother——"

"It was my disgrace!" Roland's mother cried.

Roland turned to her, very white, very grave. "Mother, if you say that, if you even imply that my birth was a disgrace to you or to my father, I'll never speak another word to you as long as I live."

"I didn't mean it, Roland. I only repeated what I've been told so often that it had begun to seem true." She straightened in her chair, transfigured. "Oh, you've set me free! He gave me the only love I ever had, and I bore him a man! I'm so glad, so glad."

Roland's tears leaped into his eyes and burned, but he smiled at his mother, nodded to Elsie, saw her nod in return. His eyes were quite dry when he turned again to Millbank, breathing hard in his chair.

"It was not her disgrace, or mine, or my father's," he went on slowly, "only yours. For I know the whole story."

Millbank trembled now. His face turned ashen. “What story, Roland?” He could hardly speak.

“Do you want me to tell it? One of the servants may be listening in, you know.” Roland was breathing fast; his eyes had begun to blaze, and he could not hold in—hold out—much longer. “But I don’t mind telling it, not a damned bit, if you want to hear it.”

“No. *No!* But you couldn’t prove it, Roland. Come, Roland!”

“Do you want me to try? That native girl could still be found. One photograph we have will prove the motive. Oh, I’d be *glad* to try.”

A gleam of cunning came into the frightened eyes. “To get at me would you expose your mother? Show her an adulteress?”

“It wouldn’t be a tenth as bad as what she’s gone through to save your skin——”

“I’ll give my own testimony if you need it, Roland,” his mother broke in quietly. “I was persuaded to be silent only for your sake.”

Millbank looked from one to the other with unquenchable hatred. But they waited, and at last he asked, “What are your terms, Roland?”

“You’ve got to produce some evidence that my father was killed by an unknown native, for robbery. That’s a lie but it will kill two worse lies you’ve let live—that Pabati was guilty, or that she was anything more than a servant. Opening the case yourself, you won’t be suspected. And see that this is published in the papers here—there may be a few people who remember him kindly—and in the papers in Kent, where his father was a carpenter and may still be alive.”

“I’ll do that. I’ve always been distressed——”

“I can imagine. The endowment for Mother, too—don’t forget that—so she can live where she likes and not be dependent on you for anything.”

“I have enough money of my own, Roland,” his mother said. “More than enough. We’ll talk about it later.”

“Will you come with us to America?” Elsie asked, the only words she had spoken.

“No, I’ll go back to England.” She tried to say more but shook her head helplessly.

“But Roland—Edith—I was only defending my home, my honor. I was the most wronged. And English gentlemen——”

Roland laughed wildly, but stopped suddenly and wiped his eyes. “Just what we needed, Mr. Millbank. It’s called comic relief. The situation called for it. And to save your feelings, Elsie and I will be married tomorrow, I think—under the old name. But of course we’ll change our name to Thompson as soon as we get to America.”

“That’s the name you deserve. I might have known you’d come to it in the end. Blood always tells at last. The name of a carpenter in Kent.”

“Carpenters are very humble people, aren’t they?” Roland asked thoughtfully. “But the humblest carpenter of all didn’t live in Kent.”

The Heart of Lily Long

The following story, "The Heart of Lily Long," was first published as "Mercy Killing."

It seems to me that this story "turns out right." Indeed I have never written a story ending in despair: it would be a physical impossibility because of a congenital condition commonly called chicken-hearted. The story I cannot bear to read is one in which an innocent or stupid or humble person is hounded to heartbreak, as in "The Piece of String."

Not long ago I was comparing my list of favorite stories with a publisher's. My top three were "The Miracle of Puran Bhagat," by Kipling; "The Old Chevalier's Tale," by Isak Dinesen, and "The Luck of Roaring Camp," by Bret Harte. In all three the chief character meets death, but not a dusty one; there is a sense of a thing of beauty being a joy forever. All three have an out-of-this-world beauty.

My favorite Hemingway story is his unearthly "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." In my opinion, the best volume of short stories ever published is Dinesen's Seven Gothic Tales, *although its impact on and importance to the world can not begin to compare with that of Kipling's works. This century has brought forth "The Devil and Daniel Webster," by Stephen Benét; "A Municipal Report," by O. Henry; "The Mob from Massac," by Irvin S. Cobb, and "Two Soldiers," by William Faulkner, although I doubt if Mr. Faulkner would consider the latter one of his best pieces. The stories of Wilbur Daniel Steele made a profound impression a quarter of a century ago; and who remembers the strange detective tales of Melville D. Post? Can any reader of Dorothy Fisher's "The Bedquilt," ever forget it? How much we would have missed by not having "A Jury of Her Peers?"*

These are a mere sampling of great stories. Most of them are widely famed; but a short tale by Ben Hur Lampman, whose title was something like "The People About the Fire," might never have won its high literary place save for its recognition by Harry Hansen. Of this list of unforgettable stories, not one ends with despair. I believe that lists of favorites made out by most short-story readers of the Western nations would indicate a similar optimism. If so, it is a fact of large human significance.

Peering out of his bathroom window, old Doctor Walker saw the telegraph boy pedal up the shady street, stop, lean his bicycle against the

gatepost and turn into the yard. It was Tommy Baker, but for once he was not whistling. A high seriousness was in his manner, an air of ceremony not in the least absurd in a courier from all the world. So it did not seem likely that he was delivering either a parcel or an advertising telegram, the usual reasons for his rare visits to Doctor Walker's door.

The doctor dropped his shaving brush and hurried down the stairs. "All right, Tommy," he said cheerfully. For Tommy's freckles were standing out against a pallid skin.

"I've a cablegram for you, Doctor Walker." The lad's voice was not quite steady.

"A cablegram from China?"

"Yes, sir. And before I give it to you—they told me to tell you to prepare yourself for a shock."

"Thank you, Tommy, for warning me. I'll call you if there's an answer."

He did not tip Tommy on this occasion. Both knew it would be highly improper. He shut the door and opened the cablegram.

You, the news-reading, radio-listening world, know its general contents. The exotic setting, a young doctor's heroism, his aged parents alive in an Indiana country town, and the fact that it broke upon a cynical generation in a year of tottering ideals made it a perfect human-interest story for feature writers and speakers from the newsroom. But you do not know the love story behind it, the greater story—"and now it can be told."

It is not the story of young David Walker as much as of Lily Long. Those names! An old traveler once remarked that if the devil ever gets inside the church, it is at a christening service, a rowdy horse-laughing devil at that. The old doctor's doctor-son was named for that stern, terrible old man, King David. Miss Long, the child of a parson's dreamy wife in Pennsylvania, was called after Lily Langtry.

But Lily Long did not follow the footsteps of her famous namesake. Apparently they had only one thing in common—beauty. People in the street did not stop to stare at Lily Long, but her face came back, floating in on quiet waves of memory, at odd and unexpected times.

She had straight dark hair, smooth and parted in the middle—a coiffure too effective to be blundered into, a testament to a shy, sly, and altogether lovely vanity—a broad white forehead, grave wide-spaced hazel eyes, a nose you didn't notice, a full-sized mouth with full lips that seemed to turn

up at the corners, and a small, pointed chin. Her throat had a childish spring that all who have met her remember. The lines of her body were long but definitely feminine.

She did not go to London to be the mistress of a prince. Instead, she went to southwestern China to teach a mission school. Good God, why? People she met on the journey asked that. The Frenchmen she encountered along the Mekong—that blue, mysterious, murmuring road to Yünnan—asked her repeatedly, their hands beating the air. Her answer was always very simple and sensible. She never said she had a "call," or anything hard to understand. She merely looked at those people with her large grave eyes, and said:

"I want to."

For she was not the kind to be carried away by a romantic ideal, and was only unobtrusively religious. She danced on the boat deck—singularly well, in fact—smoked when she felt like it, drank occasional whisky-sodas and held them admirably. Nor had she been disappointed in love, although a rather surprising number of young men had been so disappointed on her account. Even as a young girl, she had wanted to teach school in some far country.

But the questions ceased when she arrived at her destination. The Thai natives took her presence there for granted, and the only person of her own race within forty miles, a woman medical missionary who shared her quarters, was too intent on the next world to care what the Mekong brought or took away. And a bare fortnight after Lily's arrival the old woman died.

For some six weeks Lily Long was alone in one of the loneliest places in the world. A white traveler—there were no white travelers—would have been astonished to see her there, but when she looked in the mirror or at her reflection wavering out over the gray-seamed green water, she did not feel the least bit astonished.

She taught the children who came from the Thai villages a mile away, did what she could for patients in the little ten-bed hospital, cooked and ate hearty meals, and watched, smelled and heard the jungle pressing thick and ravenous about the high log fence of the mission.

From time to time she speculated a little about the dead woman's successor. Naturally, she assumed it would be another female doctor. But someone made what any mission board would regard as a serious mistake. A young male doctor, foot-loose in Shanghai, applied for the job and got it.

“It’s too late to recall him now,” the chairman said, when the matter was brought up at a board meeting in America. “But we can trust our young people.”

“Brother, I wouldn’t trust my own self in a position like that, and I’m sixty-five years old,” a cynical farmer-deacon answered. “It ain’t fair to put temptation smack-bang in their path in a warm climate. There’ll be doin’s of some kind, and you mark my words.”

The farmer-deacon was a good prophet. Doings began almost at once—in the heart of Lily Long.

As Doctor David Walker got out of the river boat, looked around dazedly and walked up the bank, you would suppose he was the last white man in China to attract a first-water girl like Lily. He was short and stocky, with untidy dark hair, a round face and round dark eyes. His eyes were kind, and his hands fine, although perhaps a little too sensitive to be good hands. This is what you would have seen, not much more. But Lily saw—probably in one lightning flash of intuition—the man of her destiny.

No, she agreed, this did not make sense. Of practical mind, she believed that destiny, or kismet, or foreordination with which her parson father used to explain away the mystery of life, was a lot of moonshine. Nor did she credit some psychologists that all love is at first sight, usually unknown to the victims themselves.

She had her own idea of love—a flower that seasoned in the sunlight when the right seed fell on fertile ground. But the fact remained: her ordered world was falling in ruins. She knew now that the wildest fantasy ever conjured up in opium smoke by a Chinese dreamer beside the towers of Sung Shan might be true.

Up to this time she had not seen his smile. Suddenly he flashed it at her. Probably it would have had no special meaning for outsiders. They would have been a little troubled by it, it was so terribly bright, like the smile of a little child who discovers his mother isn’t angry with him, after all. But it flung the heart of Lily Long into her throat so that she could hardly breathe.

“I’m Doctor Walker,” he said, flushing. “David Walker.”

She nodded. She had been mildly curious what his name might be. “Very well. I’m Lily Long.”

“But I’ve come to take the place of the woman doctor who died.”

“I know it,” she said. “I’m the schoolteacher here.”

“Th-there’s just us?”

“Except for some servants and two native nurses, we’re the works.”

“Good God!”

Lily understood this awed cry. She, too, had felt an impulse to call upon the Lord—as ever, when things come too thick and fast—but she had resisted it. It wouldn’t do any good. And she wouldn’t blame Him, no matter how it turned out. Being born imposed a sporting obligation to take the medicine life gave.

The next few weeks only verified what she had divined at first. She loved the man.

It was not the warm climate, only David. When he talked—and he talked far too much—it tore her heart as you’d tear a tragic letter. When he gave her that ingratiating smile, so bright, so sad, she could hardly bear not to run to him, fold him in her arms and promise to protect him from all the world. At bedtime, when he went to his room adjoining the hospital, she ached to follow him, climb in beside him and hold him all night close to her breast so that his sleep would be peaceful and his dreams sweet. . .

No, she did not yield to these impulses. But the Mekong, flowing by her window, murmured something that sounded like, “Lost. . . lost. . . lost. . . lost. . .”

Every day the word was plainer, its meaning clearer.

Although he was gentle and sweet as an awkward male-angel with his patients, she soon saw he was not much of a doctor. Not that he lacked a wide technical knowledge of medicine, or failed to air it. A common cold was a respiratory infection, blackwater fever was hemoglobinuria. But she loved him as he was, not as she wanted him to be. If he were as she wanted him to be, she probably would not love him—at least in this pitiful way.

He talked a great deal about his boyhood in an Indiana town, and his parents, an old family doctor and his gallant wife. “Their love for me is a marvel,” David said. “I have brothers and sisters, first-chop people who’ve done far more for Mamma and Dad than I ever have, yet they love me best.”

“I understand,” Lily answered simply, her eyes smarting.

No, he had not served in the Great War. She did not ask—she was careful not to—but he insisted on telling her.

"I was just twenty, in college, when the war broke out, and—and was crazy to go. All the boys were going. But though Mamma said I could, I knew it would break her heart. So I went to work in a shipbuilding plant till the war was over."

"I love you, David," I think she whispered then, but too softly for him to hear.

He had had a first-rate medical education, three years internship, two years advanced medicine in Munich.

"So naturally you'd like to know what I'm doing here, in a one-horse ten-bed hospital on the upper Mekong." And he gave her one of those dreadful smiles.

"*Lord, make him shut up!*" The silent prayer was ripped bodily out of her heart. But the Lord, she had already observed, had no intention of coming between them. It was usually this way with the facts of nature. He did not stop the evil jungle growing, or the Mekong flowing through the night, saying, "Lost. . . lost. . . lost. . ."

"I can understand how service like this might appeal to you," she said hastily.

"It does, of course." His round face flushed, and he put his hand through his carefully brushed hair. "But I had a case in a hospital in Portland, Oregon. The patient was dying a slow and horrible death, and—and—an operation would only prolong his agony."

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Some of the other doctors thought I ought to operate, but I knew better. Lily, have you ever heard of euthanasia?"

"No."

"It's the new scientific term for the practice of putting to a painless death victims of incurable diseases. Our laws ought to permit it, but they don't. Lily, I did it anyway."

"That was very brave."

"When he begged me for an overdose of morphine, I gave it to him. But the other doctors made all kinds of charges against me, so I threw the whole business overboard and went to Shanghai."

"I understand," she said. For surely it was right to relieve hopeless suffering. She agreed with David that a truly civilized country should legalize mercy-killing under proper safeguards. *Euthanasia*—the very word had a good sound.

She had only one fault to find with David's story. It was a lie.

It did not take her long to guess what had really happened. For the trouble was, it happened again. That was the main thing the matter with life, she reflected forlornly—the fundamental fault with the administration of the law of God and man. Sinners repented, only to sin again. A coward cursed himself for cowardice, only to remain a coward.

A native woman was brought to David's hospital suffering from a ruptured appendix. David boiled his instruments and prepared to operate, but Lily noticed that his first rapid efficient movements gradually grew slower and clumsier until they stopped altogether. Only his talk accelerated. It was too late to operate, he said. He explained in infinite detail why it would only cause the patient needless suffering. She took a long time to die—Lily thought that David would surely give out of medical terms, before the end—but at last, thank God, it was over.

David's big eyes were shiny-wet in pity for the woman. Hers were wet, too, but not wholly for his victim, nor even for the forsaken children that wailed beside the grave. For people lying under earth do not toss in their sleep, or gaze with wide-open eyes into the dark, and even orphans left to starve had not themselves to blame, and their agonies were merely of the flesh. Yes, some of those stinging drops were for David himself.

For David knew. She saw it on his pale lips, twisted in that intolerable smile.

That night she considered hiding David's pistol. She even took it from its holster; then thoughtfully slipped it back.

If he wanted to, she decided—and had the courage—she would not stand in his way, in his light. A bored soul in heaven might insist on life-adventure, but surely God would have pity on him, when he came rushing home, afraid.

In the morning she examined the weapon. She saw David's fresh fingerprints where he had handled it in the still of night, but his wide eyes had gazed into the round black eye of the barrel—then looked away.

This black door to David's freedom was forever barred, as she might have known. And it tended to reconcile her to what the river murmured. Only love could save him, that was plain, and she had been appointed to furnish it. It was a kind of foreordination after all—the two of them meeting on this shore, and she chosen from all the women in the world to heal the physician. She was the instrument of an implacable Providence.

But she wondered, with a strange stillness in her heart, what providence had up its sleeve.

Wholly justified at last, she no longer kept her tender hands off David, so the affair moved swiftly from then on.

Except for his hours with his patients and hers with her school, and their brief meals and sleep, he spent most of the time in her arms. No, he rarely held her. She could hardly expect it. He wanted to be held, she seated on her poor little divan, he lying there with his lips at her throat.

His lips burned with a passion native and intense, not just a reflection of hers. And this, she dimly perceived, was catastrophic.

"If marriage means having children," she said, "we can't be married."

He looked a long time at the wall, his eyes very large. "But maybe the children would be okay—with you for the mother," he murmured at last. "Not—not temperamentally handicapped, as I've always been."

She drew him down against her breast. "Still, there mustn't be any children. Do you understand that, David? Do you still want to go ahead?"

"God, yes. On your own terms, of course. There's no use of me even pretending to act independent, it would be such a dismal joke."

"I love you, David." And she closed his lips with hers.

But marriage presented difficulties. One of which—the only one they continued to mention—was at once serious and absurd. There was no Christian minister within forty miles.

"Let's send one of the villagers to bring him in," David pleaded. "But it will take two days for the trip, and probably three or four days for him to get here. And Lily—that's a whole week."

"A week isn't long." But she knew it would seem a century.

“We’re the whole works out here, and can make our own rules,” he went on boldly. “What difference does it make if the words are spoken now or a few days later? It’s forever, just the same.”

She shook her head, not knowing quite why.

“I need you, Lily, so much,” he whispered. “I want you.”

It was the same with her. Not just a want, but a need that permeated every cell of her body, that called and was never still.

“No, David, no.”

But the Mekong, murmuring through the silence, said, “Lost . . . lost. . . lost. . .”

It happened that the next three days were the busiest they had yet had. Lily was enlarging the school; unseasonable rains had brought a steady trickle of malaria victims to David’s quinine dispensary. Besides, he had three bedridden patients and only one native nurse to care for them, the other having chosen this inappropriate time to return to Luang-Prabang.

To cap the climax, a Yünnan official was unceremoniously dumped from a river boat at David’s landing, accused of black cholera. Moreover, although he seemed to be dying then and there, his groans and other noises carrying the length and breadth of the compound, David could not be found.

It must have puzzled the boat crew. They had seen him, the white doctor *Chow*, only a moment ago at the compound gate. But now he was neither in his office nor in his quarters, so the native nurse took charge alone.

Her face was an expressionless mask as she came up to the sick man’s writhing form for a brief examination. But her long eyes had a curious light —it seemed compassion—when she turned to Lily.

“When you find Monsieur the Doctor,” she said in her capable French, “kindly tell him there is no danger of an epidemic. This is not black cholera, but acute dysentery.”

Lily found David in his bathroom, shaving a bleeding face. “Be with you in a minute,” he called cheerfully. And then, seeing her face in the glass, “What on earth’s the matter?”

“Please don’t, David.”

He covered his face with lather before he glanced at her again. “I—I don’t understand. I’ve been right here——”

“I beg you not to, David. I tell you, I can’t stand it. I love you just the same, but you mustn’t tell me lies that you know are lies. Only those you think might be the truth.”

He wiped the lather from his face and looked in the mirror. “The carotid artery lies right here,” he murmured, touching the blunt end of the razor blade to his throat. “Laymen make the odd mistake of calling it the jugular vein. I wish——”

“It wasn’t cholera,” she broke in quickly; “only dysentery.”

“So?” He gave a little smile. “It’s tragedy for a doctor to run away from cholera,” he said at last in mocking tones, “but to run away from dysentery is comedy; pretty low comedy, at that. But this razor doesn’t seem to work.”

“Okay, David.”

He shivered once, threw the blade from him, then stood breathing hard. To her amazement, when he looked at her again, it was with that terrible smile.

“Okay, Lily. Don’t be afraid—I won’t do anything rash. For you see, it wasn’t as bad as you think. I haven’t had any cholera antitoxin lately. The nurse had the stuff only last month. I decided to let her handle the case until I could take some, and give it a few hours to work.”

“You might have warned me, too, David.”

“Oh, I knew you had too much sense to get close. It’s true that Asiatic cholera is highly contagious——”

And he was still talking when they walked out of his quarters toward the hospital.

Thank heaven, Lily rejoiced, the rush of work continued. The new patient particularly demanded constant attention.

For it was to be understood he was a very important person. He must be made well at once, or the Doctor *Chow* would hear speedily from the war lord at Yünnanfu. In his bags were five hundred silver piasters—three hundred dollars in American money—entrusted to him by the French for most important affairs. What was to prevent Thai river pirates—the upper Mekong was infested with these water-wolves, and their spies were at every

wharf—from raiding the hospital, making off with the money, and cutting his throat for their pleasure?

David answered in his gentle voice and with his usual kindness. Magic medicines would make the patient well in a few days, he promised. And the river pirates were wise enough to stay clear of white people.

"I always carry this pistol. In my office is an automatic rifle that shoots twenty rounds without reloading. I would stand at the gate, behind the log fence, and wipe out a boatload of pirates before they could cross the clearing."

There were three days of this, and then an ominous quiet over the little station by the Mekong. The day was Sunday: Lily's school children remained in the villages celebrating a native feast. The Yünnan official was too spent to do more than doze the hours away. There were only three other patients in the hospital, helpless but quiet. Lily felt David's heart drumming against hers. She was floating away, out of herself, out of reality, out of the long corridor of time so haunted-gray behind her, so haunted-black before.

"Now?" he whispered, drowsy-eyed.

She whispered in answer, but to her amazement, the words were not what she had intended. "Not now."

"Do you mean that, Lily?"

"I don't mean it—but it's true."

He sat up, fumbling for a smoke and a match. "Then will you go to the village and send for that plagued minister?"

She laughed a little. It was marvelous to laugh. "You're so sweet, David. So damned sweet."

"Will you? Right now? I'd go, but I have to stay with that cussed dysentery case. You said you wanted to go to the village, anyway. Burn your bridges behind you, Lily. This can't go on, this way."

She was tempted. He saw it in her face. At once he jumped to his feet and began to pace the room, his hand disheveling his hair.

"Listen, Lily. I know enough psychology to understand your hesitation. It's only a subconscious feeling that you must protect your integrity until you wear a wedding ring, an idea pounded into your head in childhood. I

don't blame you. In a way it's playing safe. But after the ceremony's over, you'll be so glad."

It was convincing explanation. His voice had a persuasive male ring. And he needn't continue pretending to practice surgery, and could go ahead in some other carefully chosen branch of medicine. After a while he would grow up—most children did so. His lips would learn to hold straight except for manly mirth.

"All right," she said clearly.

"Now?"

"As soon as I can change my dress."

"Oh, darling, darling."

But she did not take him back into her arms. It was time for his midday inspection of his patients. She put on her stout boots, and in ten minutes was hurrying, singing, down the river trail. She could not hear the river for her singing.

The tree shadows had just begun to finger out along the grass when she left the village to return to the mission. Her errand was done. And she wasn't sorry, she told herself, but triumphant. And now that her bridges were burned behind her, perhaps. . .

As though from one of those burning bridges, just then she noticed some white smoke streaming up above the dark flank of the jungle.

At first she thought it might be some native boatmen camping on the riverbank. She couldn't tell for sure, so winding was the river, but the smoke seemed to be fairly close—quite close—to the hospital. She hastened her pace.

A moment later she heard some sharp sounds, like gunfire, through the sultry air. Still, she thought, it might come from the campers. It was a scattered fire, not a stuttering roar as from an automatic rifle. It soon ceased.

But the smoke over the trees did not cease, only grew heavier and darker. And all at once it turned dull red.

"It's the hospital on fire," she said aloud, quite clearly, "and the pirates came, after all."

As far as she remembered afterward, her mind was a blank the rest of the way home. She only knew that when she arrived, she was sobbing for breath but desperately cool. On the chance that the bandits were still on the ground,

she turned off the trail a short distance from the clearing, crept to the edge of the timber and peered through.

A cheaply built wooden structure, the hospital had already practically burned down. She flanked the clearing until she could look through the gate of the log fence. Yes, the pirates had gone.

She emerged from the woods, entered the gate. There was nowhere any sign of life, but plenty of sign of death. A dark form was lying on the bare ground just in front of the hospital door. . . But she soon saw it was the native nurse. She knew by the woman's posture that she was dead.

Others, inside, were dead. Only the Yünnan official was strong enough to have escaped; the other three patients were fast bedridden. One was an old man, one a young man, and one a little girl with a fractured hip. The only mercy was that the bandits had no doubt cut their throats before they set the fire. They would not miss sport of this kind, Lily thought.

There was no one lying by the gate, the natural place for a defender of the hospital to fall. But there was someone standing by the fringe of dark jungle beyond. She did not look at him for a moment. She could not. She only turned when he came running, stumbling, toward her.

He flung into her arms. He was not crying: his round eyes were quite dry. She wished, very curiously, that he *would* cry, but he only clung to her, quivering. And he only said, "Lily! Lily!"

After a while, she thrust him gently away, and asked in a quiet voice, "Did anyone but you get away?"

"Yes, the Yünnan official. I suppose he's running yet."

"It was a daylight attack. Didn't anyone see them coming?"

It did not seem to occur to him that he could answer her direct questions with lies. "The nurse upstairs saw them first—and cried out—and then I saw them through the window. They were just coming around the bend in two boats."

"The nurse had a chance to run away?"

"Yes, but she must not have realized how hopeless it was—how many pirates there were. She got the machine-rifle and ran out toward the gate, but didn't think to swing aside from the opening, and they shot her before she got there. Of course they stole the rifle."

"You saw all this?"

He nodded. “It was horrible.”

“Where were you?”

“In a thick tree behind the hospital. But Lily, where else could I go? There were so many of them, I wouldn’t have had a chance. You understand that, Lily, don’t you? I would have been killed, too. And you couldn’t bear for me to be killed. You love me.”

“Yes, I love you, David.”

“So you understand, don’t you? I was as helpless as though I’d gone with you today—or gone a little way to meet you, and hadn’t seen the pirates come. That was the way it might have been. You don’t blame me, do you?”

“No, I don’t blame you, considering everything. But you see, David, that was the way it might have been but not the way it was. We can’t get away from truth. It beats us every time.”

She walked nearer the dying fire. He stood still a moment, as though in a daze, then came hurrying after her. They stood watching until the last flaming wall toppled to a smoldering ruin. Then she turned to him very quietly.

“Come with me to the gate, David.” Without looking back, she walked toward the gate, but he came obediently behind her. Not until she reached there did she look at him again.

“Here is where you would have made your stand, if you——”

“I know.”

“Here is where you would have fallen. For there were two boats full, you said, and they would have probably killed you before you could reload.”

He looked at the empty ground, blinking his big dry eyes.

“The natives will be here soon,” she went on. “They’ve seen the smoke by now.”

“Yes, they’ll be here soon. But if you’ll tell them I had gone to meet you ____”

“Give me your pistol, David.” She spoke very gently.

He raised his eyes slowly to hers. “What are you—going—to do?”

“Don’t you know?”

“Yes, I know.” He gave her a dim ghost of that bright smile.

“We’re the whole works here,” she explained. “There’s no one else to do it.”

“That’s right. Anyway, no one else would have the heart. But—but I’m terribly afraid.”

“You needn’t be afraid. It’s only a kind of—euthanasia.”

“That’s right. ‘*The painless killing of one suffering from an incurable disease.*’ ” He brightened a little.

“Give me the pistol, David,” she repeated.

He took it out of the holster, fumbling only a little, and handed it to her, butt foremost. He was looking at her, and his face was as she wanted to remember it.

“It isn’t only for you,” she explained, “you—and your folks at home—and the rest. It’s for me, too. For you see I love you more than anyone in the world.”

As he looked at her quite steadily, she aimed carefully at his pale forehead, just below an untidy lock of dark hair. Then, with the tenderest of smiles, she pressed the trigger.

There would be something in the village to do for paper on which to write out a cablegram.

The Cat That Would Not Die

This is an old-fashioned story of nemesis moving in mysterious ways to punish evil.

One of the highest offices of fiction used to be the demonstration of such idealistic concepts. We honest romanticists have always been priests of providence; we are definitely on the side of the angels, if any. Many of the younger writers aren't up to it; they not only lack the faith but the hope and charity; they shrink from the happy ending. When we have all died off, and the unceasing barrage of bad news has finally convinced everyone that life is a mistake, will we not be numbered among the saints?

Even now Harkin Sahib observed that the native woman had a good figure. In spite of her fever she lay on her mat with the grace of a kitten, a slim woman whose long legs tapered with hardly a bulge from thighs to ankles, whose arms thinned down to long, dark hands in a way that had once thrilled him, and whose breasts were still round and bold in spite of nursing two or three of his half-caste children.

A few seconds more Harkin kept the gelatine capsule filled with white powder cupped in his hand. But the glow of passion in his heart died away and left it cold as slag. This was the night, the hour, the opportunity. If he waited even ten minutes, her fever might break and she might refuse to take her "medicine." Anyway, her dark skin, usually warm and glossy, was too hot and dry tonight to give him pleasure.

"It is time for another dose of quinine," he told her in the vernacular. "But taken in this capsule there will be no taste."

"I would rather have the powder in my hand, Sahib, and take it the old way," the woman answered. "We who know the sickness love the bitter taste better than the sweet of the first mangoes of the year."

"Nay, thou art a Sahib's woman and the mother of his sons. Thou shalt take thy medicine like a Mem-sahib, in this capsule. And here is water to wash it down."

Her eyes lighted. "Am I then thy woman? Sometimes, lord——"

"Take the medicine! Later, when the fever breaks, we will talk sweet words. Here."

Obediently she swallowed the capsule. She choked and gasped a little before she got it down, but soon her silky dark throat was serene as ever. She settled back on the mat, faintly smiling. “Tomorrow I will be well, and again set out the milk and *chapatties* of which Sahib is so fond.”

He turned quickly and went out so she would not see him smile. It was not the kind of smile she loved and yearned for, and her fevered eyes were keen. So tomorrow she would be well! That was one of the best he’d ever heard. Tomorrow the plantation and the village, too, would know Chitri had died in the night of malarial fever. Morphine is a white powder too, and the capsule held five grains.

Harkin went around to the veranda and waited in his favorite chair. It was a big, thronelike chair, with foot and armrests, and usually he reclined in it while giving orders to his Bengali foreman standing on the steps, or to the coolies crouching on the ground below. He wished for someone to whom to give orders now. Harkin Sahib, ordering cultivation or care of the buffaloes or fence-mending, when he had just committed his first murder.

I’m a strong man, Harkin thought. There aren’t many like me in this world. Not strong like a buffalo, but like a tiger, an old cattle-killer that lives within two hundred yards of the village but is too cunning to come to poisoned bait or to fall into a pit. Butter wouldn’t melt in my mouth, but don’t get in my way when I want something. I’ve come far but I’m going farther.

He had come all the way from a village in Wales. There he had been just a navvy, but good-looking enough to catch the eyes of every miner’s daughter at the fair. Six feet, fourteen stone of brawn and bone, curly brown hair, soft brown eyes, features of a bold cut for a bold man. He was forty now, without a gray hair in his head or a sag in his belly, and he could still knock a yearling buffalo off its feet with one smash of his fist.

From the foreman of native crews he had soon worked his way to the managership of a tea plantation. True, it was one of the loneliest and most remote in all India, relatively small and not very fertile, but it suited Harkin! Untroubled by spying neighbors and long-nosed government agents, he could work his men to suit himself and make that unfertile ground yield better crops than the owners even hoped for. Or ever knew, he gloated with a smile.

Of course he had made a little free with the Ten Commandments. In fact, he had chalked down most of them, and tonight he had defied the only one

he had ever feared. It was the first time too, but instead of feeling worried he felt exhilarated.

Why not? Even the preachers no longer believed in hell, and he was too clever to get in trouble with English law. From his other so-called crimes he had never suffered, but always profited. By his last and boldest stroke he would profit as never before.

But just then he stopped his glass on the way to his lips. Bloody queer thing, that. There flashed to his mind, as though it had happened yesterday, a conversation he had once overheard on a river boat in Burma. It was high-flown talk at a table of swells not six feet from where he stood.

"I grant you that nine of those Ten Commandments are social laws," a man named Quigley had said. "Stealing, adultery, false witness—mere offenses against society. But the Sixth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill,' is a natural law as well."

"How do you figure that?"

"The most savage animals rarely, if ever, kill their own species. They knock one another about for the best food and the best mates, but they don't often fight to the death and weaken their tribe. In fact, English law recognizes murder as an unnatural act, when it speaks of 'an abandoned and malignant heart.' "

"If natural law forbids murder, it ought to provide a penalty too. Does it?"

"That's a debatable question. Certainly many murderers live to a ripe old age. Whether they have a hell of their own in their dreams or in the secret closets of their minds, I can't say. Anyway, I'd hate to have murder on my soul, especially out here where the old gods still reign."

Old gods, Harkin's foot! True, the natives told mighty queer stories, some of them about this very neck of the woods. In fact, this neighborhood was especially bad, they said; the jungle so rank and thick, strange-looking mists floating at night over Shytarnjuri (devil waters), and the hills of Bhutan rising so black and steep that the eyes kept rolling up in the sockets to follow them. But there was nothing to it; anyway, his hand had been forced.

It was not a case of getting tired of Chitri. He had had her ten years, but she was still in her middle twenties, still prettier than most of his field hands' wives and daughters. Besides, he had taught her how to please a Sahib day and night. But he had answered an advertisement from an

American matrimonial agency, and a Mem-sahib was coming out to India to marry him.

She was "thirty-one but with a school-girl complexion; five feet six; curly brown hair and big blue eyes; good figure, neither fat nor slim; sweet, loving disposition; has fifteen hundred dollars." And Chitri was not one to take her brats and a hundred rupees and settle down with one of her own tribe, like a sensible native girl. He could never have made her understand that she was no longer wanted. She was like a pet dog or cat that a man had to kill to get rid of.

But he'd been clever enough to take advantage of her spell of fever. Neat, he called it. And soon he could arrange for a half-caste orphanage in Kalimpong to take her children. Then he could sweep and garnish his house for the new Mem-sahib.

Just then a sweeper came running and dropped to his knees on the veranda steps. "Sahib!"

In spite of his iron nerves, Harkin jumped. This fool had probably wandered into Chitri's hut and found her checking out. But he knew how to handle natives. "Yea?"

"Chitri bade me come to thee and beg that you go to her."

Hell! He had thought she would be dead to the world by now.

"Am I at the beck and call of a black woman?" he demanded angrily.

"Have mercy, Sahib. But she charged me by my gods to deliver the message."

"Then she must be out of her head with fever, so there is no fault." And this was just a sample of his cunning.

Yet he had to stop a few seconds outside her hut, to get his breath and remember that she was only a lean, dark Assamese woman worth less than a good horse. Then he flung open the door, and their gaze met.

Once Harkin had shot a kitten that Mrs. Parsons, the wife of a missionary stationed twelve miles away, had given the children. He had caught it stealing his milk from the spring-house, and anyway, Chitri had neglected her work to pet it, as though they had been sisters in some other world. . . . When he had come up to the bloody thing, it was dead except for its eyes, which were shining like the eyes of a moth, caught and dying against a screen in candlelight. He thought of that—he thought of it with a

queer feeling—when he looked at Chitri. She, too, was dead except for her eyes.

Her body was already gray. That was the way low-caste natives looked when they were dead—a damned nasty gray. Her limbs had the limpness of death, and he could not see her breast rise and fall. But in the candlelight her eyes were two circles of pale yellow fire.

There was no sense in his stomach turning and churning. In a minute or two that fire would dim and die down. It was like the last glare of an electric-light bulb just before it burns out. And although her eyes were blazing straight into his, burning holes in his own eyes, there was no fury in them or in her face. There was nothing personal; nothing at all; that was it, nothing personal; nothing more than the meaningless shine of a moth's eyes as it dies against a screen in candlelight.

But just then her lips moved. She's going to accuse me of killing her, he thought. But it won't make any difference if she does. No one's in hearing; no one had better be; I'd smash the skull of anyone in hearing. . .

But instead of accusing him, Chitri only smiled. At least she tried to smile, although she managed only a hard grin, like a cat's. And then she tried to speak, but at first could make only a purring sound, bloody queer in this silent room. But she kept trying—a nasty thing to watch—and finally he heard her whispering plainly, "Sahib?"

"Yea?"

"I die."

"Nay, you will be well in the morning."

"Nay, the fever has burned out my heart. But the ashes are thine, Sahib. I am thy slave."

He wished she'd die and be done with it. His trick had worked. She didn't even suspect him. He was one of the cleverest fellows in India. He could make women love him even on the deathbeds he made for them. The white woman would love him the same way after their first night together. But now he was sick to his stomach and his scalp felt too tight on his head. Chitri's eyes were getting brighter instead of dimming. The oil lamp had begun to flicker, and the shadows jumped up and down the walls.

"The Mem-sahib—the white woman—will not come," that hollow whisper went on.

"What white woman?"

"She has written thee she will come, but even now she turns back. But it was not my doing, Sahib. If Sahib wanted her, I would have gone to my village and waited. I am Sahib's slave."

"Thy doing? What are thou saying? Does a Mem-sahib come or go at the will of a black woman?"

"I thought to make magic against her, but I did not. Never will I make magic to bring sorrow to my lord. She turned back by her own will, not mine. But do not grieve, Sahib. Thou shalt not be lonely."

"I—I do not understand."

"Tonight I go—but soon—I will return—to comfort Sahib."

"Return? How can the dead return? Thy body will be burned; thine ashes strewn to the waters. Thou are out of thy head with fever. Take back thy words quickly, lest I strike thy mouth. The Mem-sahib *will* come. Thou wilt *not* return."

"Strike my mouth if thou wilt, still it speaks truth. I love thee. Never will I leave thee for long. Be comforted."

He railed at her again, but her only answer was the ghost of a tender smile. And then slowly the pale yellow fire in her eyes dimmed and died away.

Chitri had belonged to one of the more primitive tribes scarcely touched by Hinduism. The dead of that tribe were usually scorched with a few sticks of wood and thrown to the crocodiles. But Chitri had a pyre any prince's son would envy. Harkin Sahib paid for it himself.

When there was not a bone left to rattle in the night, Harkin resumed his thronelike chair, his usual jug of milk and bottle of whisky close at hand. So Chitri was coming back, was she? Ain't that good! So the Mem-sahib wasn't coming, a white wife for a white man among this swarm of natives? I'm Harkin Sahib. That's who I am, and when I want something, I go and——

"What in hell do you want?" he broke out in English, to a native boy who had whizzed around the bungalow on a bicycle and come to a stop at the veranda steps.

"Sahib?"

Harkin collected himself. “What hast thou for me? A letter from London?”

“Nay, Sahib. From *Amerik*. And this is the book for Sahib to sign.”

Harkin waited until the *sss* sound of the bicycle tires on the hard ground had vanished, and still he waited. He poured a drink and took it straight, just to show he was in no hurry, was never calmer in his life. Then he tore open the envelope.

The letter read:

> I take pen in hand to tell you I dicided not to go to India as it is to far from my fokes and I heer the climet is very bad and besides I had better stay to home. Hopeing there is no hard fealings,
>
> Your true freind
> Opal

The sweat that had been prickling his skin flowed freely now. This was April; you had to expect hot weather; the day would be a scorcher. And didn’t he see everything now, clear as day! Chitri and the native postmaster had been in cahoots. Probably they were lovers. Anyway, they steamed open and read all his letters.

Yes, it was their fault the white woman hadn’t come. Chitri had been giving the postmaster money; the man didn’t want it stopped, so he had written to America and told a pack of lies. The proof of it was that he could read and write English.

The day dragged out, grew dim, flamed up again, and died. Harkin was back in his chair, pleasantly tired from the day’s work, content to finish his bottle and jug and go to bed. Self-control. That was his motto. Don’t let things worry you. The white one was not coming, the black one was dead, but——

Just then he got a queer impression—bloody queer. It was as though some little black thing was sitting on the rail of the veranda off to the left of him. It was probably a plaything the children had left, or some junk one of the natives had placed there and forgotten, but if it was something alive, he’d better not look straight at it or it would run away.

In fact, it ran before he could get his eyes screwed around. It jumped off the rail and scooted into the shadows. He wished he knew what it was. The

jungle was full of little animals—mongooses and squirrels and ferrets—and often they came round the bungalow. But this looked more like a half-grown cat, black as—as ink.

"Boy!"

Kushru came on the jump. "Sahib?"

"Have I not given orders that no cats be allowed in the compound?"

"Yea, Sahib. There are none, lord." Kushru's voice was trembling.

"Then one has strayed in from the village, I just saw it."

"There are none at the village either, Sahib. Perhaps it was a jungle cat Sahib saw."

"Nay, it was black."

"Black, Sahib?"

"Why dost thou bung thine eyes at me? A black cat, I said. Is there anything in a black cat to make thee stand and tremble like a woman?"

"Perhaps it was a trick of the shadows, lord. I have often been so tricked."

Harkin gripped the armrests of his chair. "Yea," he said in a changed voice, "it was but a trick of the shadows."

But Harkin knew better. It took twice as much whisky as usual to give him a sound night's sleep. And although on the following night he emptied his bottle again, his sleep was not sound.

Just before dawn he was awakened by a scratching noise on the window screen. It had been going on a long time, he thought, but the instant he opened his eyes and ears, it stopped. There were other noises—his pulse in his ears, the little intermittent creaks and cracklings of boards cooling off in early morning—but that sound had stopped.

Stealthily he got hold of the flashlight that for the past three nights he had kept under his pillow. He pressed the button, but the light could not break through the big mosquito net enclosing his bed; he felt like a great black spider in a horrible golden web. But he beat aside the curtain with his free hand and let the beam leap free across the room.

It showed half a chair and his dresser, big and black against the wall. The knobs on the dresser drawers were shining like eyes set wide apart, two by two; but the medicine bottle and hairbrush and collar box and shaving mug

on top of the dresser looked exactly like the common things they pretended to be, instead of the horrible things they really were. Even so, he grasped the light firmly in his wet hand and swung it around the room toward the window.

Another chair lighted up and winked out. No one was sitting in it, and that was a trap too. The picture of a ballet girl on the wall smiled out of the blackness, and he got the light past just in time. It exposed a great hole in the plaster, the meaning of which he had never guessed before, then the frame of the window, then the black hole itself.

Low down in that black hole was what he was looking for. It thought it could fool him, but it couldn't; it jumped and ran away, but not before his light picked up its eyes. Not very large eyes, yet. They had a long time to grow before they were the proper size. But they were circles of pale yellow fire, and he was not deceived.

The Black Cat was never far from him, after that. She mewed in the dark outside his veranda; came and stood at the edge of patches of moonlight; whined under the floor of his room; looked at him from around corners. But she meant him no harm. She loved him, wanted to rub against his legs, climb into his lap. She ached to have him stroke her.

Once he came out of the house to find her curled on the footrest of his favorite chair. She was only five feet distant: if he had a gun, he could blow her to bits; if he had a stick, he could crack her skull; if he had a saucer of milk in which he had dissolved not five but twenty grains of white powder, he could finish her off, completely, cleanly, forever. Yes, and if he had just kept still he could have caught and strangled her.

For she was not afraid. In fact, she jumped down and moved toward him, licking her lips. But he shouted, the sound bursting out before he could stop it, and she cut past him and raced down the steps.

Shouting, he ran after her. She led him around the bungalow, across the compound, and behind one of the native huts. He saw her streak between two of Chitri's children, playing there, then spring on a bamboo fence to the roof of an outbuilding. Here she stopped, crouched, and watched him over the edge of the roof.

"Whose cat is that?" he demanded of the older child.

"Sahib?"

"That cat that just ran by. Where did she come from?"

“I did not see her, Sahib. We were playing, Muta and I.”

The ground swayed beneath Harlan’s feet, but he braced his legs and twisted his lips into a smile. “Yea, when children play they have eyes only for the game,” he said. “But *kala billi* almost knocked thy feet from under thee.”

“I wish I had seen her, Sahib. I would like a black cat for a pet.”

“Thou canst see her now, if thou wilt look. See the top of her head over the edge of that roof?”

“Where, Sahib?”

Harkin did not strike the child. He did not even seize him by the shoulders and shake his teeth out. He must be gentle. He must be patient. He must make no enemies, on this side or the other. The whole situation could be cleared up with a little care and common sense.

“Are those pretty eyes blind?” he jested. “See—not the far roof, but the near one. See her bold black head thrust forth, sly jade that she is, as she waits for thee to call her to join thy game?”

“Y-yea, Sahib. If you sayest she is there, then she is there. Thou art the *burra* Sahib, and I am only a little boy. B-b-but I will not call her now, by Sahib’s favor. In a little while, Sahib.”

Harkin went to his own house and drank half a tumbler of whisky. Then he went into his bedroom, locked the door, sat down, and looked straight and calmly at the facts. They were plain and simple.

There were werewolves in the jungle. His most reliable men had seen them. There were other things, neither man nor beast nor bird. There was a well, not far from the village, where a woman whose feet turned backward instead of forward wept on moonlit nights. And in his own compound there was what there was.

But the solution was plain and simple, too. Chitri had returned because she thought he wanted her. She didn’t know it was he who had sent her away. Well, he need only send her away again, by some means she could not mistake, and then she would stay away. But he must do it soon, before she grew too large.

He began to lay for her. He kept one shotgun in his room, another on the veranda, and carried a stout cane when he walked about the compound. But he did not let her know these weapons were for her. There was no use in merely frightening her off a few days, only to have her return, so he

employed a clever trick to reassure her. Every time a stray dog came near the compound, he pretended to try to shoot him, so she would think the weapons were for her protection. There were not many men as clever as he, Harkin Sahib.

In a few days his chance came. He was sitting in his veranda chair, pretending to doze, when he saw her come tiptoeing up the steps. She stopped at the head of the steps, sniffed at the floor, stretched, wiggled her ears, then came stealing towards him. No doubt she wanted to kiss him in his sleep, then creep away.

He was an active man, desperately quick. When she was almost at his feet, he raised his cane and struck at her. It caught her across the head and shoulders, with such long-repressed ferocity that she was knocked ten feet across the veranda floor.

He sprang up and stood over her, ready to strike again if she twitched an eyelid. But she did not. When he touched her head, he found it like pulp. So he went into the house, got fire tongs, picked up the carcass and carried it to the edge of the compound. Then with a howl, half a laugh, half a curse, he flung it among the thorns.

That night he drank with a light heart. Afterwards he slept peacefully, dreaming of white women. But the dream broke off, in that heaviest, thickest dark just before dawn. He wakened, sprang out of bed and screamed—all on the same point of time.

An impatient, passionate someone was scratching frantically at his window screen, mewing her love.

So his plan hadn't worked. Chitri was more determined than he had realized. Whether or not that blow on the head had killed her, certainly she must know by now that he did not love her any more, did not want her hanging around making love to him, but she persisted in it. So now he would have to take extreme measures. He wished he had taken them when he had had the chance.

She avoided him the next two days. On the evening of the third day his nerves were so frazzled and his eyes so tired that he withdrew early to the refuge of his room. Comforted by his locked door and heavy window screens, he fell asleep in his chair before his bottle was half empty.

At first he did not know what it was that wakened him. He only knew that he was afraid, horribly and desperately so, and in a different way from before. It was not just his body but his soul that was in danger now.

His kerosene lamp was still burning, but feebly. He saw that the oil was almost gone, and the blackened globe gave a queer gray tinge to the light. Everything in the room frightened him: his dressing gown hanging on a nail, a pair of old boots in a corner, a broken-down water cooler against the wall. They were his things, but he was another man; or they were another man's things and he was himself; he couldn't figure it out.

The shadows did not move. But he wished they would and get it over with. He wished the unseen menace in this room would hurry and take shape so he could fight it, grapple with it, feel its club against his head or see the poison in its hand, and either live or die quickly. But most of all he wished that whatever was under his bed would come out.

Well, it came out. It was behind his left shoulder, low down, but he couldn't turn his head to look; he was paralyzed. Now it was touching him. It was rubbing against his leg, lovingly, rapturously. It was *purring*. After a while it gave a little bound and sprang into his lap.

His lips began to move. "Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. . ."

Chitri licked his hand. He felt her hot, rough tongue. She rubbed her long black body against his breast. She stood up on his lap, her hands against his chest, and sniffed at his ear. "I love you," she mewed. "I have come, come, come," she purred.

"But I'm busy now," he told her in English. Then, in careful Hindustani, "Thou hast my leave to go."

But she shook her head and smiled. Her eyes were drowsy with passion.

"But I am not well, Chitri. I—I would be alone. I am Harkin Sahib. Go now before I am angry."

But she leaped lightly onto his shoulder, stretched her sinuous body, and licked his lips.

He began to float off into a warm sea. Sensation so exquisite that it was agony was thrilling and killing every nerve of his body. But he made one final supreme effort to save himself; his soul in its last throes called for help, and his palsied flesh responded. With a grunt, he grasped the creature around the neck.

At first she thought he was playing. In their love-making he had often taken Chitri's warm sleek throat in his two hands and pretended to strangle her. But as the pressure of his fingers increased, he saw surprise, then terror

come into her big yellow eyes. But when she understood, this also passed. It changed to sorrow, supreme, unutterable sorrow, unconsolable in this world or the next.

There was no plea in those eyes. There was no anger, not even reproach. As he held her out from his body her limbs threshed a little, but that was the mere spasm of her muscles. Even this soon ceased. Her limbs hung straight down and limp. But as the film of death came over her eyes, they were still gazing into his with infinite eternal sadness.

Never changing his grip except to unlock doors, he went out of his room, out of the house, into the kitchen garden. He needed no light but the sickly gleam of the half-dead moon. The tree branches against the sky looked sinister, the stars were malignant, the perfume of the flowers obscene, but he knew what he must do and did not shrink.

He dug two deep holes well apart. In one of them he placed Chitri's head; in the other, her body. The first had no legs to walk with, the second no eyes to see with, so they could never find each other through all eternity: this was the theory on which the Lushai head-hunters worked, and it was said never to fail. He packed the dirt in well and smoothed it over, so no one would ever find the graves. It was hard work, but his skin stayed cold as a toad's.

When he had finished, he returned to his room, emptied his bottle of whisky in two drafts, and without undressing, lay down on his bed. He had beaten the devil at last, he thought, because he went straight to sleep.

In the morning his first clear sensation was of triumph. It had been a long, tough fight, but he had won. He would always win. Ordinary rules did not apply to him; even black Indian magic could not stop him. No one had ever appreciated him before; he had hardly appreciated himself.

When he had washed the grave dirt off his hands and face and started for the back room where he took his meals he was still gloating. I'll be the manager of the biggest tea plantation in India. Later, I'll see a way to get control of the stock. I'll marry a white woman, but not some leftover from a matrimonial journal. She'll be young and rich and beautiful, with a satin skin white as——

White as milk. There was his bowl of milk on the table that Kushru had placed for him, with a plate of *chapatties* for his breakfast. And standing on his chair, her front feet on the table edge and her head in the milk bowl, was the Black Cat.

She saw him at almost the same instant that he saw her. She dropped on all fours in the chair seat, rubbed against the wooden back rest, mewed in delighted welcome. Her eyes were softly glowing with trust and love.

He did not scream. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. Nor did he at once turn to flee, lest she bound lightly to his shoulder. But as soon as he could move his flaccid muscles, he took a stealthy backward step toward the door.

"*Meow*," she told him eagerly, hopping down on the floor. Then she stood there licking her lips, so they would be clean to kiss him.

"Don't come," he muttered hoarsely. "I'll be back in a minute."

Oh, but she was glad to follow him wherever he went. No trouble was too great to go to, to keep him company. When he took another backward step she began to walk slowly toward him, looking playfully up into his eyes.

He whirled and stared through the hall, gazing over his shoulder. She quickened her step to keep pace. He began to run. She bounded lightly in pursuit. It was a long way—to the end of the world—to his bedroom, but he made it and slammed the door behind him just in time. She scratched on the door, mewing for admittance.

"No, no," he begged through the panels. "Don't come in. Please don't come in, Chitri. If you'll wait just a minute I'll come where you are. I swear it. I'll be with you in a minute, if only you'll not come in."

"*Meow, meow*," she insisted, scratching harder than ever on the door.

"Nay, Peace." For now he remembered that Chitri did not understand English. "Did I not tell thee I would come and join thee, and never leave thee again?" Meanwhile, he had opened a dresser drawer and was searching frantically for a small cardboard box he had concealed under his clothes. "Be patient, Chitri. Only a moment, and the thing is done. Nay, I will not trick thee again. Thou shalt have thy way. Only do not scratch upon the door."

The scratching ceased. But he couldn't trust her to wait patiently outside; she would find some other entrance and at any instant rub against his leg. So he must hurry. Oh, God, he must hurry. Give me time, God. Just a few seconds more. . .

He found the cardboard box, and with frantic, swift fingers he opened one of the empty capsules and tapped both shells into the white powder.

Presently they were full. Closing the capsule, he put it on his tongue, snatched up his water pitcher in both hands, and drank.

Some of the water ran down his chin, but the capsule went down his throat. . . He was on his way to her now. She had no more need to come here, because he was going there. And they would live happily—ever—after. . .

It was an eternity later, or perhaps only a second or two, that he heard a car drive up the road from the village and stop just outside his window. But he could not rise and greet the visitor, or even call out a welcome. His tongue lay like a rag in the bottom of his mouth, and he could not twitch a finger.

The visitor was Mrs. Parsons, the wife of the missionary stationed twelve miles away. He recognized her honeyed voice as she called the three children. "And how are my three little men?" she chirped sweetly.

"We are well, by the Mem-sahib's favor," the eldest of the children answered, laboriously translating his Hindustani thoughts into English.

"And the three pretty kitties? Are they well, too?"

"One of them is well, Mem-sahib. But the *burra* Sahib killed two of them."

"What a pity! Is it Queenie that's left, or Frisky, or little Bright Eyes? Or did they look so much alike you can't tell? But you said you could keep the Sahib from knowing about them."

"We tried, Mem-sahib, and the men helped us, but his clothes smell of milk—he is always spilling it, Mem-sahib—and they followed him about. Once"—and the boy laughed—"he chased one of them almost between my legs and on to the shed roof. But we pretended not to see it, as Kushru taught us, and the Sahib went away."

"I really didn't mean for you to tell an outright lie, little boy. You must come to Sunday school, if the Sahib will give you horses to ride. Where is the Sahib?"

"He has emptied many bottles and is asleep."

But the boy was mistaken on this point. Harkin Sahib was not yet asleep. It seemed to him he was wider awake than ever in his life—a wakefulness that would never end, like that of the inextinguishable stars. But although he thought of trying to call out, he knew it was no use. A great wind blowing in

ever longer, more powerful gusts was sweeping him on and outward, and what seemed to be a warm dark hand was tugging impatiently at his.

"We won't disturb him," Mrs. Parsons twittered. "No doubt he is very tired."

Benefit of Clergy

This story had a narrow escape from non-existence—in its stead a yellowing manuscript in a dusty drawer.

The first time I wrote about Tommy, it appeared that he was killed. Cosmopolitan *very properly sent back the manuscript. I considered Tommy again; plainly I had been mistaken about him getting killed; he was saved by a curious twist of fate—with a lot of bang in it too. I resubmitted the piece, and he and Ruth have lived happily ever since.*

Actually, as the good old tales used to end, "they lived happily ever after." They kept right on living in their never-never land of story as long as people read them or remember them. In their small way, they are like the picnickers and lovers and pipers on Keats's urn: nothing bad can ever happen to them until the vase is broken. But what if I had persisted in that mistake? No tale exists until it is told to hearers: until then it is only words on paper. Not merely an imaginary Tommy would have died young. Thereby a sort of real Tommy—having a brief "reader identification" in a great number of minds—would have been still-born.

Cosmopolitan's *check was smaller than usual, the piece being far-fetched*.

In appearance, Tommy Wilson was in no way unusual. You saw a rather small and very wiry man in his early twenties: dark hair, plain but pleasant features and dark eyes that seemed always to be looking a long way off across the water. At first my only interest in him was his interest in Ruth Crandall.

You know the bright-eyed relish with which the staidest passengers watch shipboard love affairs. The yearning of middle-aged people for vicarious romance finds startling expression on ships like the *Buchanan*, large enough for intrigue but too small for secrets. But the affair between Tommy and Ruth was not regarded with this widespread sympathy. The opinion of the smoking room was that Ruth was too young.

Actually she was seventeen, in the glowing dawn of her beauty. Tommy was not more than five years older, but was put down as a hard case, a barn-storming aviator who took his fun where he found it and cared no more for a girl's virtue than for bailing out over the Great Lakes in a snowstorm. Yes, we male gossips declared, right now he was going out to be a money-fighter

for a Chinese war lord! And Ruth, going out to join a missionary father, was practically at his mercy.

The pair played deck games, whispered in the lounge, and disappeared from sight among the ship funnels immediately after dinner. But no one knew how far the affair progressed—and few really cared after land was sighted and we were jerked violently back to our own affairs. That's the way of shipboard.

But I saw their parting at Shanghai. For some reason it touched me, perhaps because they were both so young, so careful of appearances. Ruth wanted a good-by kiss, but there were some prim-looking people on the tender to meet her, and Tommy was afraid to give it to her. Then they were waving at each other, while the brown water widened between them.

Both Tommy and I were going to Hong Kong, so that night I cornered him in the ship's bar. He was not a free talker, but before midnight I had learned the chief facts of his life and its mainspring.

He belonged to a respectable family. Five years before, he had run away from prep school to become a flyer. He knew a number of Kipling's ballads by heart. He was going to China, he said, to make five thousand taels a month, but his real quest was *life*.

I had never seen such a hunger for life—the ultimate fiery distillation—in anyone.

"But Ruth Crandall won't want you to be a money-fighter," I said cautiously.

"There's no war in sight for our country," he explained.

"Then you won't see her again?"

"No."

"Pretty tough, eh Tommy?" For I was nearly twenty years older than he.

"Tough for me. I'll never find another girl like her as long as I live. But not tough for her. Damned good luck, in fact. Thank God I left her free!"

"Free?" I spoke quietly, so as not to frighten him into putting back his guard.

He did not answer except to sing a line from Kipling. "I wouldn't do such, 'cause I liked 'er too much." And then he called the bar steward for two whiskies.

When I went to my room, I speculated a long time as to Tommy's future. It would be quite interesting while it lasted, I thought, but it wouldn't last long. Tommy had been marked down by the fates. But it turned out that I hadn't given the fates nearly enough credit.

Tommy said good-by to me in Hong Kong, then went upriver to the southern province of Kwangsi. A little off-side war which the newspapers hardly noticed was going on there, and ultimately Tommy became the one-man air force for one of the opposing armies.

I heard of him from time to time. Apparently he was doing so well that the enemy war lord, powerful Liu Ho, first tried to bribe him, then sent him a courteous warning not to be captured alive. As a final compliment, he imported five flyers—four Chinese and one scapegrace Englishman—just to get shed of him.

When I heard this, I did not expect to hear of Tommy any more. But I did—a story so strange that if I had not seen Tommy's eyes one night on shipboard, I would never have believed it, even in unbelievable China.

It was a summer afternoon in 1936. Three years had passed; the war was finished; unless all signs failed Tommy was finished too. In that last battle, the five enemy flyers had guessed the identical hole in the clouds from which Tommy emerged. No doubt it had been a glorious fight—the stuttering thunder of machine guns, whistling bullets, wind shrieking through struts, and the raw taste of life in Tommy's mouth—but though he downed two of the Chinese and frightened off the other two, a bullet cut his fuel line.

Apparently he would get to the ground all right. He was not in flames; and the renegade Englishman spiraling about him, being another white man, had no intention of hitting him with those savage-sounding bursts of machine-gun fire. But Liu Ho and his army were bivouacked down there and waiting shiny-eyed for him to land.

Why not cheat them? This was Tommy's grim inspiration. Liu Ho was a soldier and a gentleman, but he might not polish off a foreign-devil mercenary in any decent fashion. Tommy had lived long enough in China to know that some of the wildest stories of heathen tortures were understated. All he had to do was to stall and crash his ship.

So he put on the mask he sometimes wore—hard, impenetrable, only his eyes gleaming through—and began to nose up. But in the last split second

he changed his mind.

No one—least of all Tommy himself—knows why. Certainly he was not afraid to crash; he had figured it all out and written it off long ago, and it was the logical course. But he was genuinely afraid of Liu Ho, and perhaps this was the reason he had to go down and face him.

He landed neatly and with a flourish in the open field in front of the long-forsaken medical mission. But the enemy did not seem interested in taking him alive. He had hardly touched the earth when machine guns opened fire.

They hit his wing and then his tail, and as he coasted across the field toward the buildings, the bullets were cutting neat designs in his fuselage. A whole company of men had jumped out of a ditch and were shooting at him with rifles.

None of the nearer soldiers dared run in lest they be struck by their comrades' fire.

Tommy swung out of the cockpit and ran. Instinctively he made for the only shelter in sight, the abandoned mission house.

He did not notice that there were blinds at the windows and that the grass was newly cut, and with bullets whistling by his ears he did not remember the rumor that a medical missionary had taken over the station. Once inside, with his pistol in his hand, he could dance one last jig. . .

Suddenly the firing ceased. Still stunned by his disaster and dazed by terror, Tommy at first could not understand. And then in that enormous silence he heard someone call.

"Run, soldier! *Oh, run—run!*"

It came from the house. The door had opened and a form was standing there, half hidden by the gloom within. For fear of hitting this person—some member of the mission doctor's family—the soldiers held their fire.

Tommy sprang on to the porch and through the doorway. The door slammed shut behind him; he heard the noise of a thrown bolt. But the window shades were down, and after the blinding light of the field he could at first see only a dim form in white by the door.

But slowly his sight cleared. "Good God!" breathed Tommy.

A girl was standing there, a white girl. This fact alone took all of Tommy's powers for wonder. This very morning not five miles away had

raged the last battle of the war, all the raw and violent drama that man makes for his soul's desire when he is free of woman's hand. Hardly two minutes before he was darting among clouds; guns roared, hate and death had all the world, men fell in flames. And there stood a white girl in a white dress.

But the rest he had to take on faith. It couldn't be true—but it was true. The girl was Ruth Crandall.

"So it's you, is it?" she said very quietly.

Tommy nodded, wide-eyed. "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I belong here."

"But don't you know you've got to go?"

"Why? I'm perfectly safe. Every soldier in Liu Ho's army knows he'd lose his head if he fired one bullet into this house. Liu Ho promised absolute protection for all our family when Father took over this mission and agreed to treat the wounded."

"Where is your father? The whole blamed army——"

"I know. It moved in here after the battle, when Mamma and Dad had gone for a week to the mission center. I'm here alone, except for servants."

You must try to see her, standing there, through Tommy's eyes. For him her face had all the power and glory of, say, the face of the Venus de Milo in the Louvre. Remember, the man was in love to start with, and an inch of pine stood between him and blind, oblivious death.

But she was pretty enough on her own account to justify any extravagance. She had amber-colored hair[1] and eyes so dark blue that in this light they looked black, and a happy mouth beautiful to the most jaundiced eye. He remembered her as slim and small, but now she had had three years in the tropics that "swell the ripenin' coconuts and ripe the woman's breast."

"He'll take you in the end," she was whispering. "Father isn't allowed to shelter combatants."

"Will they search the house?" Tommy asked.

"No, but when Father returns tomorrow——"

"*Tomorrow!*"

Tommy turned pale with thankfulness and hope.

But apparently he had been cheated, after all. There came a sharp knock on the door.

Ruth looked at him with enormous eyes, her finger on her lips. “Go through that door and stay there,” she commanded, indicating an inner room. And when he hesitated: “Do what I tell you. I can handle this.”

Tommy tiptoed away, but he paused in the shadows just beyond the inner door to watch and listen. Ruth opened the outer door to find two of Liu Ho’s officers standing on the porch. Both bowed low to the white virgin.

“I am so sorry,” the elder officer told her in Chinese. “Is His Excellency the Doctor here?”

“No, he won’t be here until noon tomorrow.”

“His Excellency Colonel Wilson came in here a few moments ago. Please, may we speak to him?”

“I’m sorry, but he is resting now,” she said.

“You understand, His Excellency the Doctor promised neutrality. To break that promise would be very bad; we could not answer for the consequences.”

“Father will not break his promise. You know that. But Colonel Wilson is an American. I wish to entertain him here a little while.”

Both officers bowed low. “We understand,” the elder told her. “It is a lonely country for white people, and we so very much appreciate your father’s good works that keep him here. We shall be bivouacked on this plain until our transport comes up tomorrow evening.” And with more bows, they took their leave.

When Ruth had closed and bolted the door, she saw Tommy’s eyes burning in the shadows. “Ruth, are you sure it’s all right? I’ll surrender tomorrow, of course, but maybe you’d rather not have me here, a refugee, all night. I won’t mind so much. It’s the same in the end, you know.”

She leaned against the wall, light from around the edges of the window curtain glorying her hair. “I let you go once,” she answered in low tones. “I don’t want to let you go again until I have to.”

And do you think that at this instant Tommy swooped forward and took her in his arms? No; he was the same Don Quixote of the air, the man who had refused General Liu Ho’s offer to change sides because his own general was the underdog. The two of them head over heels in love and the minute

hand of the wall clock turning like the wheel of doom—twenty minutes and maybe half an hour gone already.

"I suppose you want a drink," she said. "Dad's medical whisky is locked away from the servants, but we could have some tea. It will pick you up, if you're tired."

"I'm not tired," he said, "but I'd like some tea."

So they went to the kitchen, and she put on an apron. He washed his hands and face carefully at the kitchen sink. He told her a story while the water boiled, and she laughed with all her heart.

Later, they turned on Ruth's radio to a program of dance music in the Cathay Hotel in Shanghai. But Tommy did not ask her to dance.

"All those people, dancing round and round, jostling one another, so much noise they can't hear themselves speak—and we two sitting here all alone in the twilight," he said. "Ruth, is it wonderful to you, too?"

"Yes, Tommy."

"Is it the same as when we were on the ship?"

"Tommy, don't you know?"

"No, it couldn't be the same. It's just not in the cards."

And now Tommy's high passion gave him power of words he never had before.

"You're a missionary's daughter—and I'm a money-fighter. You're going to stay on the earth, so you have to act sensibly and be careful, and not give it the razzberry as I can. You haven't wanted to write poetry—and couldn't do it. You haven't wanted to fly to the moon, only to end up in a pile of rubbish in a Kansas cornfield. Even if you felt what I feel, you'd have too much sense to admit it even to yourself."

"No," she answered quietly. "I'd have too much sense to deny it."

He held his breath and waited.

"I did try to deny it three years ago," she went on, "but it wouldn't work even then. And I'm wiser now."

"What does it mean, Ruth?"

"If you don't know, I can't tell you."

“But maybe knowing that tonight will be the only night makes you see it through colored glasses. It would be the same to me if it were going to be a thousand years, but you mustn’t make a mistake.”

“I’m not wearing colored glasses. I shall be careful not to make a mistake.”

He rose, circled the room, muted the radio, then sat down again beside her. “What are we going to do about it, Ruth?”

“I suppose it’s for you to say. That’s the conventional idea.” She hesitated, then added without shame, “But we’d better not waste too much time.”

“But I can’t help you fight against me, tonight. I could, if I didn’t love you—but now all life—and death—is against us. Do you realize that, Ruth? Do you want to run the risk?”

She waited until he swayed toward her and found her young lips.

“I love you too, Tommy,” she told him, “so I’ll run the risk.”

Still they did not count the flying hours. Although they could hardly bear to have their lips apart, they sang together and raided the cupboard and laughed. When they opened the blinds to let in the moonlight, they did not even glance at the watch fires on every side.

“But the moon will set above five,” Ruth told him, “and that’s when tired sentries grow careless.”

“What do you mean? There’s not a chance on earth——”

“Even no chance is worth taking.”

Had he noticed the hedge running almost from the back door to the servants’ quarters? If he could creep along that hedge, wait until the sentries were at the far end of their beats, then crawl across about fifty yards of open ground, he’d find a little creek running down from the hills. Once in the hills, he could hide in the day and travel at night to the banks of Wu-Ni-Kiang.

“I could get a closed sampan there and head for Canton,” Tommy whispered. “But Ruth, what would Liu Ho do to you?”

“You came here and then you went away. Liu Ho might behead the guards, but he wouldn’t say a word to Father or me. He is a just man as Chinese generals go.”

“And a longheaded, resolute man who keeps his promises. It won’t work, but I’ll try it anyway.”

For a little while Tommy stood tense and grave, then his smile broke slowly and he held out his arms to Ruth. “But it won’t be five o’clock for nearly seven hours—almost a lifetime.”

But soon there were only six hours left, and then before they could breathe again the relentless hour hand of the wall clock went around and stood at midnight.

Tommy was sitting on the divan, Ruth in the hollow of his arm. “Only five hours more,” she whispered.

“And some of those we’ll have to spend apart, while you rest,” he answered.

“No, Tommy.” She slipped her arm about his neck and drew his ear close to her lips. “We mustn’t part. This is our night, our only night. I’d never forgive myself if I left you even an hour.”

In the deepest dark just before dawn Ruth and Tommy stood whispering in the little kitchen of the mission house. Stealthily she had opened the door, showing Liu Ho’s watch fires burning red and low.

“It’s no good, Ruth,” Tommy said. “Those babies are just waitin’ for me to try a break. I’m going to stay with you——”

As a matter of fact, he could almost make out the enemy ambush. Long-headed Liu Ho had anticipated the move, and had taken the necessary steps. He could not quite hear the soldiers breathe or swear that he could smell them, but their presence was as a mathematical certainty. However, he had not spoken emphatically enough, and Ruth stepped through the door to see if the coast was clear.

He tried to stop her—too late. Swerving from his hands, she stole down the steps into the compound. The darkness obliterated her least outline, but a wedge of yellow light burst from behind the hedge, showing her in vivid grace, like a deer photographed by flashlight. And instantly the shadows danced and pounced as innumerable Chinese soldiers burst from the blackness and swallowed up her form.

She gave one cry, not of terror but of warning to the man she loved. Stay inside, it said. Shut and bolt the door. It was a trick to catch him; she would

not be harmed. They dared not enter her father's house, but if he ran out to help her. . .

But he ran out to help her, just the same. He was not a realist like Ruth, not longheaded like Liu Ho. And before he had gone three strides the soldiers had released the girl and were diving for him.

His pistol was knocked out of his hand, but it seemed that he struck down two or three before they pinioned his arms. And then they were half carrying, half marching him out of the compound.

"Okay, Ruth!" he called over his shoulder, his voice rising loud and clear above the excited singsong of the soldiers. "I'll be back soon."

But he did not quite know what he meant. He knew only that this parting was but an interlude in their strange story, not the end.

In Liu Ho's bag at last, the white war bird was treated with high honor. He was not herded in the wire enclosure with the Chinese prisoners, but given a comfortable tent, with a full platoon of regulars in real uniforms standing guard. Gazing through the doorway, he watched the dawn's volcanic explosion over the shoulder of Nan-Shan.

When the light had cleared, Tommy called the officer of the guard.

"When am I to be shot?" he asked in Chinese.

"Please, it will be delayed a little, I am afraid," the officer replied, standing at attention. "It may be that our General will order a parade to do you honor and let the army see. It is a great day for us, when His Excellency Colonel Tommy Wilson flies no more."

"Thank you. Thank you very much. But will you tell General Liu Ho that I wish to speak to him on a matter of great importance? Tell him if he does not grant this interview, his triumph will be incomplete."

The interview was arranged much sooner than Tommy had dared hope. No doubt Liu Ho was curious about the white flyer who had harried him so long, and Tommy suspected that the illustrious war lord wanted to show off a little, parade his chivalry and savoir-faire. Immediately after breakfast, Tommy was led under an imposing guard to General Headquarters.

Behind a folding table sat a solidly built man, with scanty gray hair, highbred features and a fanatic's gleaming eyes. Tommy clicked his heels and gave him his best salute.

“It was so kind of you to come to tell me good-by,” Liu Ho said, returning the salute. “I am sorry that destiny has brought such a gallant soldier to my sword.”

“The fortunes of war, Your Excellency. But I have one request.”

Tommy’s face was composed, his manner formal, but General Liu Ho saw the desperate hope and agonized entreaty in his eyes. “Surely you are not going to ask for—mercy?” he said nervously. “That would be most painful——”

“Not on your life,” Tommy broke in. “The favor I ask is in return for a favor.”

Liu Ho sighed with relief. “I did not realize, Colonel Wilson, that you were in a position to do favors for General Liu Ho,” he commented with a faint smile.

“A small one, at least. Time is short and I’ll go straight to the point. Your soldiers seized me on neutral ground, the compound of Doctor Crandall, an American missionary. It constituted an attack on the mission itself.”

“It is true. I owe an apology to His Excellency Doctor Crandall. But as his daughter was sheltering a combatant——”

“The doctor would have surrendered me at your request. Now he’ll feel it his duty toward me to report the matter to our government.”

“It is a small matter. What is your proposal?”

“If you will have your soldiers lead me to the gate of his compound and let me enter the house alone and without restraint, I shall ask His Excellency the Doctor not to report my capture. And I will give you my word of honor as an officer to appear for execution within an hour.”

A film seemed to drop over Liu Ho’s brilliant eyes. “But I see no reason why I should not grant your request for a leave-taking with your countrymen. I am only sorry that my promise to my troops demands that you return at the stated time.”

Tommy clicked his heels again, gave and received a salute and, pale with happiness, marched out of the tent with his guards.

It was still an hour before noon when Doctor Crandall and his wife dismounted from an oxcart at their own door. At once Tommy was escorted from his prison tent and, with a full company of soldiers under a mounted

officer, marched off to keep his rendezvous in the mission house. The captain halted his men and dressed their ranks not far from Tommy's discarded airplane.

"By general order, you are granted an hour's parole," he told the prisoner, "and we will wait for you here."

The captain's face was an ivory mask. The long line of men seemed an earthen wall, part of the dead landscape. A strange, solitary figure in the sunlit space between the troops and the compound, Tommy marched forward.

But he stopped, his heart hammering and clanging, when one of Liu Ho's combat planes glided down and landed beside his own. A white man leaped from the cockpit and waved his hand.

"Wait a minute, Tommy," a voice called in English. And then in Chinese, "I wish to say farewell to a brave enemy."

It was Chilcott, the English flyer, nominally an enemy, actually another white man on a yellow planet. Leaving his motor idling, he ran to intercept the American, stopped three paces from him, clicked his heels and saluted. But Tommy hardly heard Chilcott's flowery compliments in the Chinese tongue, so intent was he on the sparks shooting in the blue British eyes.

"Come toward me as though to shake hands," Chilcott told him in an undertone.

With a strangled heart, Tommy obeyed.

"Now hit me in the jaw, hard as you can, then run for my ship. They'll all open fire, but there's one chance in a hundred you can get away."

But Tommy smiled with his pale lips and shook his head. "No, thanks, old man. You see, I've an important engagement."

"Great God, man, I can't wait! I've got to be in the air in a minute more. Sock me, dash it, and slope—even one chance in a hundred is better than none at all."

Tommy looked at the troops, then at the plane. The hundredth chance had saved his life before now. If he were free, he'd give his immortal soul for this final song-and-dance. But at last he looked at the sky, the sunlight on his face, the mad idealism of his barbarian race shining in his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Chilcott, old sport,” he said. “It’s sure nice of you. But there’s something I’ve got to attend to before I leave here.”

Their eyes met. The masked but burning excitement in Chilcott’s face changed to startled wonder. “Beg pardon, Wilson,” he said contritely. “Didn’t understand before. Good-by—good luck—congratulations. Old soldiers never die, you know; they only fade away,” he added in grim jest.

Drawing himself erect, he gave Tommy not the Chinese but the British military salute, upper arm level with the shoulder, forearm turned in, half-cupped hand palm out by the right temple.

It was strange how simply everything worked out. Ruth met Tommy at the door, and without a word of explanation to her dazed father, came into his arms. Nor could Tommy tell his errand, for her lips were crushed to his.

But presently he turned to the grave, gray man standing there so patiently, so still. “In charge of this mission, of course you are empowered to marry people,” Tommy said without a tremor in his tone.

“Of course.”

“We want you to marry us—Ruth and me.”

Crandall turned his wide eyes to his daughter’s. “Ruth, is that true?”

“Yes.” And she smiled.

“Not—not at once?”

“At once,” Tommy put in. “I’m about to go on a long journey.”

Crandall gazed from one to the other. Ruth’s eyes were bright with tears, but she did not let Tommy see. And at once the missionary changed his stricken look to that jovial expression which runaway couples expect in the faces of marrying parsons called from their beds at midnight. A good soldier in his own way, Tommy thought.

“Well, well!” Doctor Crandall burst out, as though he had not instantly perceived the full meaning of Tommy’s return. “This *is* a surprise. How clever you were to keep it from us all this time, Ruth. But at least we’ve got to call your mother.”

“Of course.”

“I’ll call her myself, if you don’t mind. And you’ll want flowers, too. I’ll send Hsiao-Shun to pick some.”

Doctor Crandall bustled from the room. Tommy and Ruth said not one word while they were left alone, but their lips pressed together told each other all they need ever know. Doctor Crandall returned in five minutes, wearing a black coat and bearing the family Bible in his hands. His wife in her best dress walked before him, bright-eyed, smiling and erect.

There were flowers—roses from Ruth's garden—and a ring engraved with a caterpillar, from Tommy's little finger. And then the missionary's deep voice:

"*Dearly beloved, we are gathered together in the sight of God . . .*"

Only once did the note of solemn exultation drop and change, or the silence around their voices break. It was when Crandall asked Thomas if he took Ruth to love, comfort and honor, "so long as ye both shall live."

"I do," Tommy said in a clear voice. And Ruth's mother drew a sharp breath.

By all the rules of art and life, this should be the end of Tommy's story.[2] Those who don't know Tommy, who are interested in him merely as a character in a remote drama, would prefer to leave him here, about to kiss his wife good-by, wave from the doorway, march with a quick step to his rendezvous with Liu Ho's firing squad. But those who want the facts must follow on.

It is true he kissed his wife, waved from the door, marched off with a quick step. It is also true that Ruth's father tried to follow him, but was courteously stopped at the outer lines of Liu Ho's camp on the trumped-up excuse that his pass was not in order. But the rest was pure discord, the outrageous raucous laughter of the gods.

Among Liu Ho's aides was a man with a perverted sense of humor. Also, he was cruel with that exquisite cruelty peculiarly Chinese. He was much disappointed that Liu Ho would merely shoot Tommy, not boil him in oil, bury him in an anthill or peg him out with a mouse under a tin can on his bared abdomen. If you insist on logic, blame this man for what happened. The good gods were so intent on his downfall that they completely forgot their poetical plans for Tommy.

As the American was receiving his sentence from General Liu Ho, the aide remarked with a thin-lipped smile, "Excellency, you have a sweet revenge. Instead of the warm and perfumed bed of his new wife, he will sleep tonight in the cold ground."

“His new wife?” General Liu Ho echoed absently.

“Fearing betrayal, one of my spies peered through the window. He has just now married the daughter of His Excellency Doctor Crandall.”

General Liu Ho looked at his aide like a man demented. Then his face began to swell and turn dark; his slanted eyes protruded from their sockets, and he leaped to his feet with a neighing yell of rage.

“Son of a pig!” he roared. “Grandson of a turtle! Why did you send a spy? Did I not give Colonel Wilson a free hour? Why did you tell me? Now you should go to the firing squad in his place.”

“Lord——”

“Do not speak! Haven’t you spoken enough already? Off with your sword! Off with the gold insignia I pinned on your uniform with my own hands. Oh, you child of an ill-famed woman, sired by a jackal!”

“What is it, Excellency?” Tommy asked, throwing all his nerve into his voice. “It is true I have just married the doctor’s daughter.”

“Devils of the Pit! And now you are a member of his family.”

But with an effort that sent sweat oozing from his pores, General Liu Ho now regained his Oriental calm. “It is not your fault, Colonel Wilson,” he admitted grudgingly. “If this dog had kept his place and shut his mouth, everything could have been carried out as planned. But you see, now that I have heard the news in the presence of witnesses I cannot ignore it.”

“I see.” Tommy nodded wisely, but he was still too bewildered to grasp the truth.

“I informed my troops that they would see you dead. I sent you a warning not to be captured alive. But I swore by my ancestors to His Excellency the Doctor to protect the members of his family. I will lose much face by letting you live, but not a tithe, an inconsiderable fragment, of the face I should lose if I broke my vow.”

Tommy stood rigidly at attention. It helped prevent him from losing face himself by fainting, yelling or jumping around the room.

“I sympathize with your position, General Liu Ho,” he said sonorously.

“Thank you. Thank you very much. Now, as His Excellency’s son, you will be escorted in honor to his compound. No doubt your lovely young wife will be glad to see you.”

Liu Ho mused a moment; his swollen neck receded to its normal size, and his eyes grew dreamy as he remembered various brides of his own.

“After all,” he murmured at last, “you have been a good soldier and deserve a soft couch. And if later you wish to serve under my banners——”

“No, thank you, Excellency.” And to put them both at ease Tommy translated into Chinese one of his favorite verses from Kipling:

“The bachelor ’e fights for one
As joyful as can be;
But the married man don’t call it fun,
Because ’e fights for three—
For ’Im an’ ’Er an’ It
(An’ Two an’ One makes Three)
’E wants to finish ’is little bit,
An’ ’e wants to go ’ome to ’is tea!”

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[1] Amber was a fairly new color-adjective in 1937.

[2] It *was* the end in the first version.

Double Cross

Once a young clergyman reported to an older minister that his bicycle had been stolen, apparently by one of his congregation. The elder advised him to preach a sermon on the Ten Commandments, and on dealing with the Eighth, "Thou shalt not steal," to employ a good deal of eloquence, so that the thief might repent and return the ill-gotten vehicle. But the sermon petered out without hardly a word about stealing.

"You were doing well," the older clergyman said later. "Why didn't you follow through?"

"When I got to the Seventh Commandment," the younger replied, "I remembered where I left my bicycle."

This is the usual treatment, in folk tales, of the Seventh Commandment—light to say the least. Here is the fundamental common sense of the human race—nine out of ten of the Seventh's myriad breaches had better be laughed off. In the first place, there is no way to prevent them even if we cared enough to try. In the second place, one never knows when he is going to get caught breaking the ordinance, or catch someone whom he will wish he hadn't, and the laughter is good medicine for his repressed fears. In the third place, nine times out of ten no apparent harm is done—a case of a sober pedestrian slipping on a banana peeling without breaking his leg.

But the tenth violation is very frequently tragic. For that reason the law remains on the books, and it is the theme for more literary works than all the other Commandments put together. Although some readers of this book may skip the stories dealing with the others, very few will fail to read "The Double Cross." Such stories have a personal appeal.

The famous anecdote quoted above has that appeal: the young minister was himself so involved in the prodigious ramifications of the Seventh Commandment that he failed to complete his sermon. The reason I failed to complete mine—I never did write of the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth—was the instinctive feeling that the stories would be anti-climactic. Although the following tale is not, in my opinion, as good a job as some of the earlier Commandment stories, both the editors and I knew it was the high point of the series.

VII: "*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*"

"When Kipling sang of 'no Ten Commandments' east of Suez, he must have had in mind such a town as Pairadeeza in Northeast India."

It was Quigley speaking, Quigley who had heard the wind among the palm trees and knew what the temple bells were saying as well as any white man ever knew. The night was a windless, magical one on the Indian Ocean, with the moon swimming alongside. We had been observing some of the love affairs, not all of them innocent, that had developed among our fellow passengers. Now we moved our chairs closer to Quigley's table.

"But was Kipling right?" Quigley went on. "I'll tell you a love story of the country and you can judge for yourselves. It's a terribly intimate story, but you'll never meet the people involved. If you did meet them—under their real names—you'd say merely, 'What charming people!' and would never guess. . ."

The name Pairadeeza means Paradise (so Quigley told us). The latter is a pagan concept, world without end removed from the saintly gold-paved heaven of us Western peoples. The town was built on a cool hill under an ardent sun and peopled mostly by well-off, well-born English. And as it was so far from home, quite far even from Delhi or Calcutta, they could live like lotus islanders,

"On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind."

Of these charming people you need meet only four. You need not know even Archie Pelham, for he was stationed there only three years: his shadow fell across the stage but he never really moved out of the wings into the footlights. These four were Stanley and May Corbitt, and Ben and Kitty Melrose. Stanley Corbitt was the tall, lean, long-jawed type of Norman English and Ben Melrose the shorter, stockier, somewhat darker John Bull variety. At the time the affair began, in the early nineteen-thirties, both men were about thirty years old.

May Corbitt, Stanley's wife, was likewise *pukka* English—fair and oval-faced, small-mouthed, pink-and-white but athletic. Kitty Melrose was too exotic-looking for this part. Her eyes were violet-hued and wide apart between high cheekbones; her wavy hair was dusky red, her skin strikingly fair; her mouth was large and luscious. She looked younger than her twenty-four years; May, somewhat washed out by the rains, vaguely older.

When Stanley and May Corbitt had been stationed in Pairadeeza for two years, Ben and Kitty Melrose were sent there from Delhi. Like a boy playing

with dynamite caps, the great god Allah had the newcomers quartered next door to the Corbitts, with adjoining gardens and only a low hedge between. But perhaps Stanley and Kitty would have met anyway. Perhaps it would have taken an Allah to have kept them apart; certainly Stanley thought so.

Still, there is some doubt just when the affair began. Stanley thought at the beginning of the world, but more likely it started when Kitty looked over the hedge and saw Stanley bossing his gardeners, his tall, graceful body clothed in white pongee, his blond hair shining in the sunset light. In any case, all the ground had been laid by the time they actually met.

This meeting occurred at a cocktail party given by the commissioner's wife in honor of the newcomers. Stanley went there, utterly unsuspecting the trap that Kismet or Kitty had set for him. When he was presented, she laid her hand in his and looked into his eyes—that was all. Her touch was timid, not wanton; her look was not voluptuous, more like an appeal to him for mercy. Yet an intense thrill shot through him, almost lifting the hair on his head, and making him dizzy.

What was happening there no psychologist could fully explain. It was not merely a case of two people desiring each other, which can occur scores of times in any ballroom in one night. Indeed, it seemed to be love full-blown—passionate, physical love—making actual changes in their minds and bodies. If love at first sight is impossible, Stanley did not appear to realize the fact. In Kitty's case it was second sight, in the true sense of the term. In their hearts they had already broken the Seventh Commandment.

During the remainder of the evening Stanley appeared neither to avoid nor pursue Kitty, the first outcropping of cunning in his hitherto direct and simple soul. But this alone was the most thrilling adventure of his life, because he felt that she understood.

His level of consciousness of her rose and fell as he talked to the other guests, but never faded out. He had tuned in on her voice so that he heard it not above but through the babble. The curves and contours of her body and the changes of expression on her face beat upon him like the changing strains of a symphony, bringing him to a pitch of almost unbearable tension. Yet he felt that she knew all this.

He was a high-type Briton, and until today his fidelity to May had seemed one of the verities of his existence. So was he fighting his infatuation for this interloper? It was not mere infatuation, he assured himself. Instead of an interloper, Kitty was his predestined mate whose entrance on the stage of his life had been tragically delayed. He was fighting

only the remaining obstacles between them, among them his own idealism. And he fought with that awful relentlessness that the kindest-hearted men often show in the fury of battle, and with almost Oriental guile.

Instead of hanging over Kitty, he sought out Ben Melrose, Kitty's husband, appearing attracted to him as a future friend.

"But Melrose *does* seem a top-hole chap," Stanley justified himself. "No doubt a thoroughly competent man. It's a pity he takes his wife too much for granted."

When May caught his eye and beckoned toward the door, Stanley answered with the slow, droll wink that was one of their intimate signals. "Dare say we've got to do the customary," he said, coming to her quickly, "or can we just sneak out?"

"Stan, you're a bad boy. Of course you've got to say something nice to the hosts and the guests of honor, too."

"I've been talking to Melrose. Seems not a bad sort. Needn't go back to him—don't want him to think we're pushing. His wife's got a crowd around her, but if it's a 'must'. . ."

For May to see, Stanley and Kitty merely observed the amenities. May did not know the semaphore of their fingers or the heliograph of their eyes. But it might not always be so. As Stanley sauntered home with her, he was tormented by fears like a poor man who has suddenly struck gold.

If May found out about it, he was done for. He could not possibly make her understand that she was in no danger; that she was his wife, and he would be faithful to her, Cynara, in his fashion. She would fight like a tigress for her cub. But also she would be heartbroken. So it was not only his right but his duty, he felt, to lie and sneak and steal. If love had its seamy side, it was still the first law of life.

He had to guard every word, every glance. He talked of matters that would grip May's attention—their garden, servants. He dared not ignore the Melroses altogether—that might waken her suspicions—but he approached them obliquely.

"Did you have some of those toasted-cheese canapés?" he asked. "Jolly good."

"They *were* good. I wonder if I'd dare ask for the recipe."

"That new chap—Melrose—did himself pretty well, both on the food and the drinks." Stanley's voice started to tremble, but he steadied it. "Did

you talk to him? Think he's going to be an addition to our set?"

"No, but I talked to his wife. Her name's Kitty." Stanley's heart flooded with happiness at this innocence. "*I* think she's pretty."

"I didn't say she isn't. Now I think of it, she's nice-looking in her way. Her neck's just a bit long."

"But exotic-looking, don't you think? She has a very vivid face."

"Yes, but I'd rather she played a good hand of bridge. Melrose asked if I played; had to say I did. We can give 'em a try when the time comes. That reminds me. . ." And he talked of something else.

But the worst was when he had read and dawdled as long as he could and must go to bed. As she lay beside him with her head on his arm, how could she help but know the theme and destination of his every thought and dream?

"This is my own place, isn't it?" she whispered.

"Always," he gasped.

"I'm a little blue tonight, Stan."

"Blue? What have you got to be blue about?" But he couldn't hold his breath all night; he must swallow and she would hear him. "Forget it and go to sleep."

But she awakened in the first gray of dawn, and that wakened him. He had been dreaming of Kitty. His first thought was that he must have talked in his sleep. But May's first movement—her hand slowly drawn across his face—reassured him.

What happened then was at first beautiful, then tawdry. May became Kitty in his imaginings, but afterwards he felt that he had cheated her, Kitty and himself. But if he had ever dreamed that yesterday's experience had been an illusion, he knew better now. Stanley Corbitt was genuinely and desperately in love.

He wondered if Kitty were asleep on Ben Melrose's arm. The thought was intolerable. That day he drove hard at his office, finished an hour early and came home, ostensibly to see how his down-country gardeners were getting along with the fall transplanting. Of course he was hoping for a glimpse of Kitty beyond the hedge.

He was rewarded. She came out, picked a red flower and pinned it over her heart. But to no other person in the world, he thought, would that act

have meaning. To him it was full of erotic symbolism that he could feel but not think out. The evening light became charmed. The garden colors were not brighter but infinitely richer.

Their acquaintance seemed to develop so gradually that it escaped the notice of evil-minded people. When May returned from calling on Kitty, he pretended a reluctance to lay down his book and hear about it. When Kitty called on May, he stayed late at his office and saw her only when she had risen to go—but he knew by the light in her eyes that she understood. When they met at the club or at the homes of their friends they hid their burnings behind a crisp, careless banter, but with every look and gesture pregnant with meaning.

Rather sooner that he had dared hope, May suggested that they have the Melroses for dinner. Stanley agreed that it was in order—probably it would be rather jolly—but please set the date when it wouldn't interfere with his snipe shooting. When they came, Kitty was careful to dress simply and not appear to outshine May. God, what a girl! Stanley thought. Oh, God, what a thing to happen to a man!

Still his hands were tied, that night by his own choosing. Because no gentleman can "foul his own nest," he had not laid plans to get Kitty off to herself in the garden or some dark corner of the veranda. But this was the last gasp of what he believed was a false conscience. Before that evening was over he was bitterly ashamed of his insult to their love, sorrowing for his lost chance. And Kitty seemed to understand and once caught and pressed his hand under the table.

Ten evenings later Kitty and Ben would return their obligation. Stanley tied his black bow eight times before he could even the ends. Meanwhile he talked to May, but his voice sounded hoarse and queer; he laughed too often and too loudly. When they walked across the gardens he paused to admire the moonlight, as though he were in no hurry.

When the bridge game had gone an hour or so, Kitty looked up thoughtfully and asked, "Ben, do you suppose Kushru locked all the kitchen windows?"

"I never knew him to forget it."

"He did a few nights ago."

"I'll go and see if you like, but——"

"And hear you say, 'I told you so'? If they weren't so hard to fasten I'd —but Stanley, you'll help me, won't you? Let Ben sit there and get the

gout!”

Stanley was on his feet before Ben could protest. On the way to the kitchen Ben and May heard him ragging her in his usual vein: “Tryin’ to make a houseboy out of me, eh, what? Ask a man to dinner and then make him work!”

But this stopped short the instant the door closed behind them. Kitty turned to him, her face like a French doll’s, dampness on her forehead, her eyes turning black.

“Oh, Stan,” she sobbed.

“Oh, my God!”

But May and Ben were in the next room. They could never forget May and Ben. In an even shorter time than it would take to look at all the windows and perhaps fasten one left unlocked, Kitty straightened the shoulder straps of her gown, patted back Stanley’s hair, wiped his mouth with her handkerchief.

“Right?” she asked.

“I can make it.”

“I love you so!”

“Good God, how I love you!”

“Ben’s going to Shillong Friday till Monday.”

“I’ll do the rest. Be in the garden at five tomorrow evening.”

“Right. . . No, not any more. Carry on!” And when the door was open, “As a houseboy, Stanley, you’re a washout. How May can put up with you. . .”

By five o’clock of the following evening Stanley’s plans were complete. When he handed Kitty, laughing, a bouquet of weeds and thistles over the hedge, he told her these plans out of the side of his mouth. Early Friday afternoon he would go snipe shooting at Hurrar Jheel. In the woods near by was a snug cabin, used as a camp by wild-fowlers in certain seasons, and its caretaker was an old native whom Stanley could completely trust. If Kitty would lunch that day at the Talbots’ tea garden . . .

There was no hitch to the plan. When Stanley mentioned that he could get off Friday for a little shooting, provided he felt up to it, May insisted that

he go. He had seemed a little nervous lately, she thought; a day in the open with his spaniel would do him good. So he was in sight when Kitty's car appeared to break down not far from the cabin.

She called him, and in two minutes he had disconnected enough wires of the ignition to keep old Khudo, the cabin caretaker and an amateur mechanic, puzzled for two hours.

Khudo looked wise but said only, "*Harng, sahib*." Kitty and Stanley walked away slowly, but gradually increased their pace.

Every difficulty imposed from without had been overcome. Kitty was breathless with wonder and happiness, as though it were her maiden adventure. But to Stanley came the need to search his heart. He resolved that later he would not excuse himself on the ground that his crime against society was unpremeditated.

Whom God hath joined together. . . Keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live. . . A man's home is his castle . . . Things no fellow can do. . . You'll be a man, my son. . . Noblesse oblige. . . The Seventh Commandment. . .

But it was no use. Stanley was in love. Love pointed up every beauty here, blotted out all ugliness.

"I know where I stand," he said at last.

She nodded, waiting.

"Where do you stand, Kitty?"

"Just where you stand, Stan."

"Ben's back there. What about him?"

"You can leave him out. He's my pidgin, not yours." She folded her hands across her breast as though to keep them still.

May was back there, too. He started to speak of her, but refrained. She was his pidgin, not Kitty's; he had no right to delegate the responsibility.

"But there's one thing I've got to know," he went on doggedly. "Will you be sorry later?"

"*Sorry!*"

"I couldn't bear it, Kitty."

"Did you say '*sorry*'?"

“I know I won’t be. I’ll be glad all my life. But you must tell me if you have any sense of wrong. If you have, we’ll walk out that door—now; watch Khudo repair the car; forgive each other in time; forget in time. It must be right in your heart. It must be pure. A secret forever, yes—that’s our responsibility—but guilt, no. Otherwise, we’d better die.”

Yet Stanley’s friends knew him as a typical, somewhat unimaginative, laconic Englishman. It was inexplicable except that he was in love, and love and the fine arts—including poetry—spring from the same lobe of the brain.

“We will go to heaven or to hell together, Sahib,” she told him.

They were not sorry later. If the truth must be told, they felt glorified and triumphant. If marriages are made in heaven, heaven’s ways are inscrutable, for it seemed they were more truly mated than Ben and Kitty, or Stanley and May.

Before they parted they planned another meeting. This led to a third, so successful that they were both thoroughly frightened. But they were brave and honest enough to face it in the open.

“Where’s this road coming out, Kitty?” Stanley asked, wide-eyed.

“In the heart of the jungle,” Kitty answered.

“I don’t see any other end if we follow it too long. In the first place, we’ll be found out. Are you sure Ben isn’t already suspicious?”

“Not suspicious. But a little worried, without knowing why.”

“Are your relationships with him the same as they used to be?”

She looked down. “Not quite the same. I try to make them so, but it’s no go. I was never passionately in love with him, but until now I didn’t much mind. Now. . .”

“It’s the same with May and me. What will Ben do if he finds out?”

“Perhaps kill you. Certainly divorce me.”

“In either case, his life smashed up?”

“Yes. He loves me.”

“If May finds out, her life too will be smashed. She’s already uneasy, like Ben—without knowing why. She’s begun to want to be noticed by other men—to tell me about it. She’ll go riding with poor old Archie Pelham if no one else offers. It’s heartbreaking.”

"So what, Stanley?"

"We must either give each other up—not at once, but taper off—or tell our partners that the jig's up, divorce them and marry each other."

She shook her head. "Your career gone up in smoke. 'What will people say?' Can any amount of love pay for that? And over and above all that—Ben and May. We can't wreck Ben and May."

"We're wrecking 'em now, aren't we?" he demanded.

"Not forever and ever amen. If we can give each other up, we can begin where we left off—love our partners because they are our own; have our homes and all they mean. In time, this thing would become like something we had dreamed or read about in a book—too wonderful to have happened to people like us."

She had been watching his eyes as she talked. Now she held her breath.

"Anyway, we can't smash up Ben and May. Nothing between you and me is as important as our marriages. God knows why."

She nodded and smiled, but her smile seemed to be painted on her dead-white face.

So they set the date for their next meeting a full fortnight away. They could stand it, they thought. This was Friday; by the next Friday it would be only one week away, only seven days. But when the time had passed and Kitty found Stanley waiting with arms outstretched, she burst out crying.

When she had quieted, she asked him something which at once glorified and frightened him. Could she? Oh, he mustn't refuse her. Ben would never suspect. It would give Ben happiness, too, for he had always wanted a child; the fact that he had been disappointed had hurt his self respect and raised a psychological barrier between them; that barrier would be removed and their chance of a successful marriage would be far greater. It would be cheating him, yes, but a white cheat.

"And I'll have him when you're gone," she murmured. "I can look into his eyes and see you."

"But would it be fair to the child? The word 'illegitimate' sounds dreadful, Kitty," Stanley told her.

"Who's going to sound it? Not you or I, the only people who will ever know. You're not thinking straight, Stan. The only 'right' is what does good; the only 'wrong' is what harms someone. Don't mistake social propaganda

for truth. Would I be harmed, or you? Would Ben, who otherwise would have no child at all? Would he—or she—when otherwise he would never have been born?"

Instead of wrong, it might be their duty to the world. Love like theirs was not given for nothing, she said; it was a great force that should not go to waste. Nature knew what she was doing. The world needed children born of flame and starlight. What were marriage lines compared with that?

Leonardo da Vinci, Stanley was thinking, his eyes alight. . . . Don John of Austria, the last knight of Europe. . . . Edmund had stated the whole case in *King Lear*.

"But I'm just *saying* all this," she confessed at last with a forlorn gesture. "I'm thinking only of myself."

But Stanley would not consent. He was not the stuff of Kitty. His faith in the righteousness of their love was not so unfaltering as hers, and he was more conventional. But mainly it was his sense of fair play. He put himself in Ben's shoes. You can't steal from a man just because he won't miss what is stolen.

"But you realize, don't you," Kitty asked, "what this decision means?"

"I'm not sure I do, fully."

"It's the beginning of the end. By passing this up, in the long run, you're passing me up. You said you would—we both said it was inevitable—but I'd hoped you couldn't do it. Now you've put it over."

"I don't see——"

"If I bore you a child, I'd be in your life always. Perhaps that was my deepest reason for wanting to do it. All the obstacles between us wouldn't matter then, we'd knock 'em all galley-west. But you've let them stand. What is there between us now that May's happiness, Ben's, your career, the whole damned shooting match, can't conquer?"

But Stanley stood his ground, and that evening he was sure he had done the right thing. May had come in from riding with Archie Pelham, and as Stanley started across the lawn toward them, he saw May sway toward Archie and give him a quick kiss. But it was too pat. So was her air of surprise when he joined them, as though she had not seen him approaching. She even tried to look a little alarmed, Stanley thought.

Poor May! That night her insistence on talking about Archie wrung his heart. She liked older men; Archie was so homely he was distinguished.

They had so much to talk about, both were so fond of riding, and when Stanley was shooting or *en tour* she found it hard to pass the time.

"But if you object to his attentions to me. . ."

Shame and guilt came close to Stanley then, closer than ever. Instead of a lover, May had Archie Pelham! He was devoted to her, but if they were alone on a desert island he would treat her "with respect." But fear drew nearer, too—May's groping heart might lead her to the truth.

"Oh, my silly little girl! As if I wouldn't trust you with anyone in the world!"

"I wish you wouldn't say that. It's more flattering to you than it is to me. And Archie isn't the old stick you seem to think." She bit her lip. "So you don't care if I go around with him?"

"Good heavens, May! This is nineteen thirty-four." Stanley's life as an outlaw had taught him to think quickly. "We're both grown-up, and to try to restrict each other's liberty would be as vulgar as to spy on each other—or suspect each other."

"And you won't mind if I get talked about?" May asked.

"You won't. I'm glad to say that Pairadeeza is an enlightened town. A little of the stuffiness at home failed to get off the P. & O. But if you did, I'd be the first to tell them to shut their mouths."

But during the next month Stanley thanked his pagan gods for Archie Pelham. His attentions to May not only saved her pride and Stanley's own guilt, but kept her out of the way. While May went riding with Archie, and Ben Melrose worked early and late, love could laugh at the little green hedge between sequestered gardens.

Yet the evil hour was slowly but surely drawing nearer. Although the two lovers rarely spoke of it, the fury of their caresses showed they were not deceived. Even Archie Pelham, their good angel, could not stave it off much longer. Word came through that in another month he would be transferred to a distant station.

But before this month was out, the long-awaited crisis came. And Stanley had to face it all alone.

Stanley was a long-time friend of the head of the department in which Ben Melrose served. On a tour of inspection this *burra sahib* dined with Stanley and May, and when the latter had retired the two men sat late on the veranda with their pipes and tall, cool glasses.

“Stan, I didn’t come here tonight just to talk over old times and lap up your good drinks and rations,” the chief said thoughtfully. “I want your help in making a very important decision.”

“Much flattered, Reg, old chap,” Stanley answered.

“Here it is. The post at Lahore is going to be vacant in two weeks.”

“You don’t say!”

“Dallas-Smith has been called to England. I’ve got to find a man to take his place. And I’ve got my list down to two, both of whom you know personally.”

“Jove, that’s exciting.”

“I know the records of both men; both are top-hole. But I don’t know the ins and outs of their personalities or the social qualifications of their wives. You have no ax to grind, it’s not your pidgin, and I want you to tell me which of those two men would best fill that important post a thousand miles away in Lahore, their good ladies in mind too, of course. By Jove, I’ll abide by your choice.”

“Fancy that! Who are the two men?”

“One of ’em is Phil Henly-Jones, at Benares. The other is Ben Melrose, your neighbor.”

Stanley was a cool and steady man, but his hand jerked, and he tipped over his drink. Viewing the damage and calling a servant to clean up the mess gave him time to brace himself and stop the posts of the veranda from spinning around him.

At last he said, deep in his throat, “You know, old chap, that will take a bit of thought.”

“Well, I’m off for Shillong tomorrow, If you could telegraph me Friday at headquarters, ’twould do.”

“On the spur of the moment, I’d say Phil, but——”

“Don’t let losing a good neighbor have a hand in it, Stan. It’s a temptation in this lonely land of India, but two men’s careers are affected, and the job’s dashed important. But you won’t, I know.”

“I’ll take the broad view,” Stanley promised.

“Good. And old chap, I’d rather you wouldn’t mention this to May. She’s no doubt thick with Ben’s wife, wants to keep her here, and she might

influence you against your will."

"Shan't whisper a word."

The chief went to bed. Stan waited on the veranda until Kitty's light went out. She was lying there in grace and beauty, relaxed as a child, already beginning to dream. If she went to Lahore, *his* light would go out.

Phil was the better man—a shade the better, anyway. It was his plain duty to nominate Phil. The long view need not take into account Phil's personal fortune that made promotion unnecessary, nor Ben's lack of funds that might make him the harder worker. What a fool he had been not to nominate Phil on the spot!

Yet on the following morning the chief went to Shillong with his question unanswered. Indeed, it was not until the afternoon of the next day that the last little doubt, the last lingering cowardice, seemed to fade from Stanley's mind.

Kitty was in his arms, her all-compelling magic stealing through him. He was watching her eyes grow drowsy, her lips curl in a smile at once childlike and unutterably blissful.

But he did not send the telegram that night. He was not sure it would catch the chief on his travels. If he had—but one of the grimmest and greatest of all the gods is named "If."

The next morning. . .

May came down to breakfast with an expression on her face Stanley had never seen before. Her blue eyes, ordinarily neither greatly beautiful nor expressive, were like lamps. When he questioned her, she cried, "Oh, Stan!" and ran to his arms.

"What's the matter, May?" He could hardly breathe.

"Oh, Stan, can't you *guess*?"

"You don't mean——"

"I do, Stan, I do! But I've hoped and prayed so long I can hardly believe it. Stan, do you really think such a wonderful thing could happen to *me*?"

But what had happened to Stanley? Here was a wonder as great in its way and yet as ordinary as the biological activity May had just reported.

Her news did not change his love for Kitty or pierce his heart with guilt. But he seated himself in the nearest chair and cuddled his wife in his arms, a

feeling of gentle but dominant strength flooding through him. For “in spite of all temptations” he was an Englishman! When everything was said and done, his home was his castle.

When he had comforted May, with a calmness that is hair-raising to contemplate, he walked to the post office and sent a telegram nominating Ben Melrose for the post at Lahore.

All that remained for the two lovers was their farewell scene.

Happily this scene was not some shabby hide-out but Kitty’s own hearth. Although Ben was away, May had suggested that Stanley go over and tell his good friend good-by. Alone? Why not? He mustn’t be old-fashioned; this was the year 1934; marriage should not mean prison. There was no harm in a man’s having a married woman for a friend, she said, or occasionally wanting to be alone with her.

So he and Kitty clung and kissed with the purest ardor they had ever known. The renunciation of their great passion inspired them to poetic language that both could treasure all their lives. “And our memories will perfume all the rest of our days on earth,” Stanley said as the curtain fell.

If he had read this somewhere, it was perfect just the same.

Kitty and her husband left the next day. Seven months later Mortimer Ronald Corbitt arrived to fill some of the ringing hollow in Stanley Corbitt’s heart. He weighed just a shade under eight pounds. Even at birth, Stanley observed, he had the “Corbitt” nose which had appeared in every family portrait since the Georges.

He was named Mortimer in honor of a wealthy uncle, of whom May had great expectations. The baby’s middle name was May’s whim—she had always liked the name Ronald, she said—and of course Stanley did not dream of opposing it.

So everything had worked out all right, Stanley decided. He had passed safely through the glorious but perilous storm of his great love, nor had May, Ben or Kitty been really harmed. His vision and understanding had been infinitely broadened. It was the great adventure of his life.

By all conscience this should be the end of Stanley’s story. Few are so sinless or so sinful as to want him punished more than he had been punished already by Kitty’s exit. But true stories cannot be concluded at popular request. Effect inevitably follows cause; time and event march hand in hand.

Stanley's love affair was over, but the Seventh Commandment still endured. It had endured since the dawn of history all over the world. If it could be violated with impunity, this would not be true.

When the baby was three years old, Stanley had an impulse to compare him with a picture of himself, taken at the same age: he thought the resemblance would be astonishing. He had given the picture to May, but she was out for the afternoon, so he opened her desk and looked in an ebony box in which she had once kept souvenirs. She would not mind, he thought. May had never been one to have secrets from her husband.

He did not find the picture but he noticed a crumpled sheet of paper in the bottom of the box. Idly spreading it out, he noticed that it was in May's handwriting and addressed to "Dearest Ronald." His wife had always liked that name, she said. Human, he read the fading lines:

> I am writing this very bravely, but I don't suppose I'll ever mail it. It might become lost in the mails. Or you might forget to burn it up. We have never trusted to letters and shouldn't begin now.
>
> But how I miss you! Won't you know it without my telling you? Am I sorry I ever met you? No, because you saw me through the darkest period of my life—when my whole world was going to rack and ruin—and made it bright. Now that lost world is being restored—Stan is coming back to me. But you are gone.
>
> You are gone, but you are still here. Do you understand what I mean? In a few months more I shall be able to look into your eyes. His first name will be Mortimer but his *real* name will be Ronald. But when you write Stanley and me a note of congratulation, sign it "Archie." Stanley does not know your middle name is Ronald, and must never know.
>
> Oh, I can't go on with this letter. I must burn it. . .

But she had not burned it, Stanley thought dully. She had kept it, finally forgot it, and left it in this dust-covered box, never dreaming that it might be found and used in a divorce action. Well, he'd see to that. Scratching a match, he saw the flame consume the letter.

"Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Well, he'd live up to that; not let Archie Ronald Pelham or any of his clan put him and May asunder. But as the ashes fell on the floor his laugh rang through the

hushed room—loud and long and wild, a laugh that would have been as shocking to the ears as a strong man's scream of pain.

The Elephant Remembers

This story, substituted for one of the Commandment stories, has had an astonishing history. I think it has been read by more Americans than any other short story written since the first World War, not excepting such super-dupers as "The Killers" by Hemingway, and Stephen Benét's "The Devil and Daniel Webster." The reason is, for many years it was used in a literature textbook standard for the vast majority of high schools. The students could not get out of reading it to make their marks. The number of volumes was astronomical; besides it has appeared in many other supplementary reading schoolbooks and more than a score of anthologies.

I was not twenty-five at its writing, and had never seen the jungle. Now that I have spent many moons in its deep shade, I wish I could describe it half as well.

> The hillfolk say that a great ghost-elephant is sometimes seen in their deepest jungles. A gray-haired Mahout is ever with him, companion in his games and revels.
>
> From *The Memoirs of a Traveler*

An elephant is old on the day he is born, say the people of the hills, and no white man is ever quite sure just what they mean. Perhaps they refer to his pink, old-gentleman's skin and his droll, fumbling, old-man ways, and his squeaking treble voice. And maybe they mean he is born with a wisdom such as usually belongs only to age. And it is true that if any animal has had a chance to acquire knowledge it is the elephant, for his breed is one of the oldest of this old world.

They are so old that they don't seem to belong to the twentieth century at all. Their long trunks, their huge shapes, all seem part of the remote past. They are just the remnants of a breed that once was great.

Long and long ago, when the world was very young indeed, when the mountains were new, and before the descent of the great glaciers taught the meaning of cold, they were the rulers of the earth, being the most powerful and perhaps the most intelligent of all land-creatures. Now their cousins, the mastodon and the mammoth, are completely gone, and their own tribe can now be numbered by thousands.

But because they have been so long upon the earth, because they have wealth of experience beyond our reckoning, they seem like venerable sages in a world of children. They are like the last veterans of an old war, who can remember scenes and faces that all others have forgotten.

I

Far in a remote section of British India, in a strange, wild province called Manipuri, Muztagh was born. And although he was born in captivity, the property of a mahout, in his first hour he heard the far-off call of the wild elephants in the jungle.

The Manipuri, just like the other people of India, always watch the first hour of a baby's life very closely. They know that always some incident will occur that will point, as a weather vane points in the wind, to the baby's future. Often they have to call a man versed in magic to interpret, but sometimes the prophecy is quite self-evident. No one knows whether or not it works the same with baby elephants, but certainly this wild, far-carrying call, not to be imitated by any living voice, did seem a token and an omen in the life of Muztagh. And it is a curious fact that the little baby lifted his ears at the sound and rocked back and forth on his pillar legs.

Of all the places in the great world, only a few remain wherein a captive elephant hears the call of his wild brethren at birth. Muztagh's birthplace lies around the corner of the Bay of Bengal, not far from the watershed of the Irawadi. It is a land of rain-washed hills, great dark forests, unknown, slow-moving rivers, and jungles silent and dark and impenetrable.

Little Muztagh weighed a flat two hundred pounds at birth. But this was not the queerest thing about him. Elephant babies, although not more than one hundred and eighty, often touch two hundred. The queerest thing was a peculiarity that probably was completely overlooked by its mother. If she saw it out of her dull eyes, she took no notice of it. It was not definitely discovered until the mahout came out of his hut with a lighted fagot for a first inspection.

He had been wakened by the sound of the mother's pain. "*Hai!*" he had exclaimed to his wife. "Who has ever heard a cow bawl so loud in labor? The little one that tomorrow you will see beneath her belly must weigh more than you!"

This was rather a compliment to his plump wife. She was not offended at all. But the mahout was not weighing the effect of his words. He was busy lighting his firebrand, and his features seemed sharp and intent when the

beams came out. Rather he was already weighing the profits of little Muztagh. He was an elephant catcher by trade, in the employ of the great white Dugan Sahib, and the cow that was at this moment bringing a son into the world was his own property. If the baby should be of the Kumiria——

The mahout knew elephants from head to tail, and he was very well acquainted with the three grades that compose that breed. The least valuable of all are the Mierga—a light, small-headed, thin-skinned, weak-trunked and unintelligent variety that are often found in the best elephant herds. They are often born of the most noble parents, and they are as big a problem to elephant men as razorbacks to hog breeders. Then there is a second variety, the Dwasala, that composed the great bulk of the herd—a good, substantial, strong, intelligent grade of elephant. But the Kumiria is the best of all; and when one is born in a captive herd it is a time for rejoicing. He is the perfect elephant—heavy, symmetrical, trustworthy and fearless—fitted for the pageantry of kings.

He hurried out to the lines, for now he knew that the baby was born. The mother's cries had ceased. The jungle, dark and savage past ever man's power to tame, lay just beyond. He could feel its heavy air, its smells; its silence was an essence. And as he stood, lifting the fagot high, he heard the wild elephants trumpeting from the hills.

He turned his head in amazement. A Manipuri, and particularly one who chases the wild elephants in their jungles, is intensely superstitious, and for an instant it seemed to him that the wild trumpeting must have some secret meaning, it was so loud and triumphant and prolonged. It was greatly like the far-famed elephant salute—ever one of the mysteries of those most mysterious animals—that the great creatures utter at certain occasions and times.

"Are you saluting this little one?" he cried. "He is not a wild tusker like you. He is not a wild pig in the jungle. He is born in bonds, such as you will wear too, after the next drive!"

They trumpeted again, as if in scorn of his words. Their great strength was given them to rule the jungle, not to haul logs and pull chains! The man turned back to the lines and lifted higher his light.

Yes—the little elephant in the light-glow was of Kumiria. Never had there been a more perfect calf. The light of greed sprang again in his eyes. And as he held the fagot nearer so that the beams played in the elephant's eyes and on his coat, the mahout sat down and was still, lest the gods observe his good luck, and being jealous, turn it into evil.

The coat was not pinkly dark, as is usual in baby elephants. It was distinctly light-colored—only a few degrees darker than white.

The man understood at once. In the elephants, as well as in all other breeds, an albino is sometimes born. A perfectly white elephant, up to a few years ago, had never been seen, but on rare occasions elephants are born with light-colored or clouded hides. Such creatures are bought at fabulous prices by the Indo-Chinese and Siamese princes, to whom a white elephant is the greatest treasure that a king can possess.

Muztagh was a long way from being an albino, yet a tendency in that direction had bleached his hide. And the man knew that on the morrow Dugan Sahib would pay him a lifetime's earnings for the little wabbly calf, whose welcome had been the wild cries of the tuskers in the jungle.

II

Little Muztagh (which means White Mountain in an ancient tongue) did not enjoy his babyhood at all. He was born with the memory of jungle kingdoms, and the life in the elephant lines almost killed him with dullness.

There was never anything to do but nurse of the strong elephant milk and roam about in the *keddah* or along the lines. He had been bought the second day of his life by Dugan Sahib, and the great white heaven-born saw to it that he underwent none of the risks that are the happy fate of most baby elephants. His mother was not taken on the elephant drives into the jungles, so he never got a taste of this exciting sport. Mostly she was kept chained in the lines, and every day Langur Dass, the low-caste hillman in Dugan's employ, grubbed grass for her in the valleys. All night long, except the regular four hours of sleep, he would hear her grumble and rumble and mutter discontent that her little son shared with her.

Muztagh's second year was little better. Of course he had reached the age where he could eat such dainties as grass and young sugar cane, but these things could not make up for the fun he was missing in the hills. He would stand long hours watching their purple tops against the skies, and his little dark eyes would glow. He would see the storms break and flash above them, behold the rains lash down through the jungles, and he was always filled with strange longings and desires that he was too young to understand or to follow. He would see the white haze steam up from the labyrinth of wet vines, and he would tingle and scratch for the feel of its wetness on his skin. And often, when the mysterious night came down, it seemed to him that he would go mad. He would hear the wild tuskers trumpeting in the jungles a

very long way off, and all the myriad noises of the mysterious night, and at such times even his mother looked at him with wonder.

"Oh, little restless one," Langur Dass would say, "thou and that old cow thy mother and I have one heart between us. We know the burning—we understand, we three!"

It was true that Langur Dass understood more of the ways of the forest people than any other hillman in the encampment. But his caste was low, and he was drunken and careless and lazy beyond words, and the hunters had mostly only scorn for him. They called him Langur after a gray-bearded breed of monkeys along the slopes of the Himalayas, rather suspecting he was cursed with evil spirits, for why should any sane man have such mad ideas as to the rights of elephants? He never wanted to join in the drives—which was a strange thing indeed for a man raised in the hills. Perhaps he was afraid, but yet they could remember a certain day in the bamboo thickets, when a wild bull buffalo had charged their camp, and Langur Dass acted as if fear were something he had never heard of and knew nothing whatever about.

One day they asked him about it. "Tell us, Langur Dass," they asked, mocking the ragged, dejected-looking creature, "if thy name speaks truth, thou art brother to many monkey-folk, and who knows the jungle better than thou or they? None but the monkey-folk and thou canst talk with my lord the elephant. *Hai!* We have seen thee do it, Langur Dass. How is it that when we go hunting, they art afraid to come?"

Langur looked at them out of his dull eyes and evaded their question just as long as he could. "Have you forgotten the tales you heard on your mothers' breasts?" he asked at last. "Elephants are of the jungle. You are of the cooking pots and thatch! How should such folk as ye understand?"

There is an old legend among the elephant catchers that at one time men were subject to the elephants.

Yet mostly the elephants that these men knew were patient and contented in their bonds. Mostly they loved their mahouts, gave their strong backs willingly to toil, and were always ready to join in the chase after others of their breed. Only on certain nights of the year, when the tuskers called from the jungles, and the spirit of the wild was abroad, would their love of liberty return to them. But to all this little Muztagh was distinctly an exception. Even though he had been born in captivity, his desire for liberty was with him just as constantly as his trunk or his ears.

He had no love for the mahout that rode his mother. He took little interest in the little brown boys and girls that played before his stall. He would stand and look over their heads into the wild, dark heart of the jungle. And being only a beast, he did not know much about his two-legged keepers, but he did know that one of them, the low-caste Langur Dass, ragged and dirty and despised, wakened a responsive chord in his lonely heart.

They would have long talks together: that is, Langur would talk and Muztagh would mumble. “Little calf, little fat one,” the man would say, “can great rocks stop a tree from growing? Shall iron shackles stop a prince from being king? Muztagh—jewel among jewels! Thy heart speaks through those sleepless eyes of thine? Have patience—what thou knowest, who shall take away from thee?”

But most of the mahouts and catchers noticed the rapidity with which little Muztagh acquired weight and strength. He outweighed, at the age of three, any calf of his season in the encampment by a full two hundred pounds. And of course three in an elephant is no older than three in a human child. He was still just a baby, even if he did have the wild tuskers’ love of liberty.

“Shalt thou never lie the day long in the cool mud, little one? Never see a storm break in the distant hills? Nor feel a warm rain dripping through the branches? Or are these matters part of thee that none may steal?” Langur Dass would ask him, contented to wait a very long time for his answer. “I think already that thou knowest how the tiger steals away at thy shrill note; how thickets crash beneath thy hurrying weight! A little I think thou knowest how the madness comes with the changing seasons. How knowest thou these things? Not as I know them, who have seen—nay, but as a king knows conquering; it’s in thy blood! Is a bundle of sugar cane tribute enough for thee, Kumiria? Shall purple trappings please thee? Shall some fat rajah of the plains make a beast of burden of thee? Answer, lord of mighty memories!”

And Muztagh answered in his own way, without sound or emphasis, but giving his love to Langur Dass, a love as large as the big elephant heart from which it had sprung. No other man could even win his friendship. The smell of the jungle was on Langur Dass. The mahouts and hunters smelled more or less of civilization and were convinced for their part that the disposition of the little light-colored elephant was beyond redemption.

“He is a born rogue,” was their verdict, and they meant by that a vicious elephant, sometimes a young male, more often an old and savage tusker alone in the jungle—apart from the herd. Solitariness doesn’t improve the dispositions of such hermits, and they were generally expelled from a herd for ill temper to begin with. “Woe to the foolish prince who buys this one!” said the graybeard catchers. “There is murder in his eyes.”

But Langur Dass would only look wise when he heard these remarks. He knew elephants. The gleam in the dark eyes of Muztagh was not viciousness, but simply inheritance, a love of the wide wilderness that left no room for ordinary friendships.

But calf-love and mother-love bind other animals as well as men, and possibly he might have perfectly fulfilled the plans Dugan had made for him but for a mistake the sahib made in the little calf’s ninth year.

He sold Muztagh’s mother to an elephant breeder from a distant province. Little Muztagh saw her march away between two tuskers, down the long elephant trail into the valley and the shadow.

“Watch the little one closely tonight,” Dugan Sahib said to his mahout. So when they had led him back and forth along the lines, they saw that the ends of his ropes were pegged down tightly. They were horsehair ropes, far beyond the strength of any normal nine-year-old elephant to break. Then they went to the huts and to their women and left him to shift restlessly from foot to foot, and think.

Probably he would have been satisfied with thinking, for Muztagh did not know his strength and thought he was securely tied. The incident that upset the mahout’s plans was simply that the wild elephants trumpeted again from the hills.

Muztagh heard the sound, long-drawn and strange from the silence of the jungle. He grew motionless. The great ears pricked forward, the whipping tail stood still. It was a call never to be denied. The blood was leaping in his great veins.

He suddenly rocked forward with all his strength. The ropes spun tight, hummed and snapped—very softly indeed. Then he padded in silence out among the huts—a silence that was all the more marvelous because of his two tons of power.

There was no thick jungle here—just soft grass, approaching dark fringe that was the jungle. None of the mahouts was awake to see him. No voice

called him back. The grass gave way to bamboo thickets, the smell of the huts to the wild, bewitching perfumes of the jungle.

Then, still in silence, he walked forward with his trunk outstretched into the primordial jungle and was born again.

III

Muztagh's reception was cordial from the very first. The great bull leader stood still and lifted his ears when he heard him grunting up the hill. But he slipped among the cows and young bulls and was forgotten at once. They had no dealings with the princes of Malay and Siam, and his light-colored coat meant nothing whatever to them. One can fancy that the great old wrinkled tusker peered at him now and then out of his little red eyes, and wondered. A herd-leader begins to think about future contestants for his place as soon as he acquires the leadership. But *Hai!* This little one would not have his greatest strength for fifteen years.

It was a compact, medium-sized herd, ranging in size from the great leader, who stood ten feet and weighed nearly nine thousand pounds, to little two-hundred-and-fifty-pound babies that had been born that season. And before long the entire herd began its cautious advance into the deeper hills.

The first night in the jungle—and Muztagh found it wonderful past all dreams. The mist on his skin was the same cool joy he had expected. There were sounds, too, that set his great muscles aquiver. He heard the sound that the bamboos make—the little click-click of the stems in the wind—the soft rustle and stir of many leafy tendrils entwining and touching together, and the whisper of the wind over the jungle grass. And he knew, because it was his heritage, what every single one of these sounds meant.

The herd threaded through the dark jungle and now they descended into a cool river. A herd of deer—either the dark sambur or black buck—sprang from the misty shore line and leaped away into the bamboos. Farther down, he could hear the grunt of the buffalo.

It was simply a caress—the touch of the soft, cool water on his flanks. Then they strode out, like great sea gods rising from the deep, and grunted and squealed their way up the banks into the jungle again.

But the smells were the book that he read best; he understood them even better than the sounds of green things growing. Flowers that he could not see hung like bells from the arching branches. Every fern and every seeding grass had its own scent that told sweet tales. The very mud that his four feet sank into emitted scent that told the history of jungle life from the world's

beginnings. When dawn burst over the eastern hills, he was weary in every muscle of his young body, but much too happy to know it.

This day was just the first of three thousand joyous days. The jungle, old as the world itself, is ever new. Not even the wisest elephant, who, after all, is king of the jungle, knows what will turn up at the next bend in the elephant trail. It may be a native woodcutter, whose long hair is stirred with fright. It may easily be one of the great breed of bears, large as the American grizzly, that some naturalists believe are to be found in the Assamese and Burman jungles. It may be a herd of wild buffalo, always looking for a fight, or simply some absurd armadillo-like thing, to make him shake his vast sides with mirth.

The herd was never still. They ranged from one mysterious hill to another, to the ranges of the Himalayas and back again. There were no rivers that they did not swim, no jungles that they did not penetrate, no elephant trails that they did not follow, from the Duars of Bhutan eastward to the Patkai Hills. And all the time Muztagh's strength grew upon him until it was too vast a thing to measure or control.

Between the ages of twelve and fifteen he often left the herd for long, solitary ramblings. He no longer needed its protection, and its old and mighty leader, as cunning as he was strong, made him unwelcome at certain seasons of the year. It did not occur to Muztagh to resist the law he had obeyed so long, enforced by those terrible tusks; and that was Mother Nature's care for him, for he was not yet reached his prime of strength and prowess. But he fought the bulls of his own age, and always won. When at eighteen he sought to mate with a young cow, the old king gored him in the side and, trumpeting with fury, chased him away. Muztagh did not offer combat, but as he went into exile, there was a strange soothsaying in the wind that some day he would return.

At twenty, he stood nearly eleven feet at the arch of his shoulder. Except for men who came with ropes and guns and shoutings, there was nothing in all the jungles for him to fear, although he still stood in awe of the herd-leader. He had wonderful adventures, sometimes in the company of other young bulls exiled from their herds, sometimes in happy solitude. On the whole he was a great deal like a youth of twenty in any breed of any land—light-hearted, self-confident, enjoying every minute of wakefulness between one midnight and another. He loved the jungle smells and the jungle sounds, and he could even tolerate the horrible laughter of the hyenas that sometimes tore to shreds the silence of the grassy plains below.

But India is too thickly populated by human beings for a wild elephant to escape observation entirely. Many natives had caught sight of him, and at last the tales reached a little circle of trackers and hunters in camp on a distant range of hills. They did not work for Dugan Sahib, for Dugan Sahib was dead long since. They were a determined little group, and one night they sat and talked softly over their fire. If Muztagh's ears had been sharp enough to hear their words across the space of hills, he wouldn't have gone to his mud baths with such complacency the next day. But the space between them was fifty miles of sweating jungle, and of course he did not hear.

"You will go, Khusru," said the leader, "for there are none here half so skilful with horsehair rope as you. If you do not come back within twelve months, we shall know you have failed."

Of course all of them knew what he meant. If a man failed in the effort to capture a wild elephant by the hair-rope method, he very rarely lived to tell of it.

"In that case," Ahmad Din went on, "there will be a great drive after the monsoon of next year. Picked men will be chosen. No detail will be overlooked. It will cost more, but it will be sure. And our purses will be fat from the selling price of this king of elephants with a white coat!"

IV

There is no need to follow Khusru on his long pursuit through the elephant trails. He was an able hunter and, after the manner of the elephant trackers, the scarred little man followed Muztagh through jungle and river, over hill and into dale, for many days, and at last, as Muztagh slept, he crept up within a half-dozen feet of him. He intended to loop a horsehair rope about his great feet—one of the oldest and most hazardous methods of elephant-catching. But Muztagh wakened just in time.

And then a curious thing happened. The native could never entirely believe it, and it was one of his best stories to the day he died. Any other wild tusker would have charged in furious wrath, and there would have been a quick and certain death beneath his great knees. Muztagh started out as if he had intended to charge. He lifted his trunk out of the way—the elephant trunk is for a thousand uses, but fighting is not one of them—and sprang forward. He went just two paces. Then his little eyes caught sight of the brown figure fleeing through the bamboos. And at once the elephant set his great feet to brake himself, and drew to a sliding halt six feet beyond.

He did not know why. His instincts told him that this man was an enemy, jealous of his life or his most-loved liberty. He knew no fear, because an elephant's anger is too tremendous an emotion to leave room for any other. It seemed to him that memories came thronging from long ago. . .

He remembered his days in the elephant lines. These brown creatures had been his masters then. They had cut his grass for him in the jungle, and brought him bundles of sugar cane. The hill people say that the elephant memory is the greatest single marvel in the jungle, and it was that memory that saved Khusru then. It wasn't deliberate gratitude for the grass cutting of long ago. It wasn't any particular emotion that he could reach out his trunk and touch. It was simply an impulse—another one of the thousand mysteries that envelop, like a cloud, the mental processes of these largest of forest creatures.

One day a rhino charged him, without rhyme or reason. This is quite a common thing for a rhino to do. They have the worst tempers in the jungle. Muztagh had awakened the great creature from his sleep, and he came bearing down like a tank over "no man's land."

Muztagh met him squarely, with the full shock of his tusks, and the battle ended promptly. Muztagh's tusk, driven by six tons of might behind it, would have pierced a ship's side, and the rhino limped away to let his hurt grow well and meditate revenge. Thereafter, for a full year, he looked carefully out of his bleary eyes before he landed his charge.

Month after month Muztagh wended along through the elephant trails, and now and then rooted up great trees just to try his strength. Sometimes he went silently, and sometimes like an avalanche. He swam alone in the deep holes, and sometimes shut his eyes and stood on the bottom, just keeping the end of his trunk out of water. One day he was obliged to kneel on the broad back of an alligator who tried to bite off his foot. He drove the long body down into the muddy bottom, and no living creature, except possibly the catfish that burrow in the mud, ever saw it again.

He loved the rains that flashed through the jungles, the swift-climbing dawns in the east, the strange, tense, breathless nights. And at midnight he loved to trumpet to the herd on some faraway hill, and hear, fainter than the death cry of a beetle, its answer come back to him. At twenty-five he had reached full maturity; and no more magnificent specimen of the elephant could be found in all of British India. At last he had begun to learn his strength.

Of course he had known for years his mastery over the inanimate things of the world. He knew how easy it was to tear a tree from its roots, to jerk a great tree limb from its socket. He knew that under most conditions he had nothing to fear from the great tigers, although a fight with a tiger is a painful thing and well to avoid. But he did not know that he had developed a craft and skill that would avail him in battle against the greatest of his own kind. He made the discovery one sunlit day beside the Manipur River.

He was in the mud bath, grunting and bubbling with content. It was a bath with just room enough for one. And seeing that he was young, and perhaps failing to measure his size, obscured as it was in the mud, a great "rogue" bull came out of the jungles to take the baths for himself.

He was a huge creature, wrinkled and yellow-tusked and scarred from the wounds of a thousand fights. His little red eyes looked out malignantly, and he grunted all the insults the elephant tongue can compass to the youngster that lolled in the bath. He confidently expected that Muztagh would yield at once, because as a rule young twenty-five-year-olds do not care to mix in battle with the scarred and crafty veterans of sixty years.

Muztagh had been enjoying the bath, and would not give it up. Something hot and raging seemed to explode in his brain and it was as if a red glare, such as sometimes comes in the sunset, had fallen over all the stretch of river and jungle before his eyes. He squealed once, reared up with one lunge out of the bath—and charged. They met with a shock.

Of all the expressions of power in the animal world, the elephant fight is the most terrible to see. It is as if two mountains rose up from their roots of strata and went to war. It is terrible to hear, too. The jungle had been still before. The river glided softly, the wind was dead, the mid-afternoon silence was over the thickets.

The jungle people were asleep. A thunder storm would not have broken more quickly, or could not have created a wilder pandemonium. The jungle seemed to shiver with the sound.

They squealed and bellowed and trumpeted and grunted and charged. Their tusks clicked like the noise of a giant's game of billiards. The thickets cracked and broke beneath their great feet.

It lasted only a moment. It was so easy, after all. In a very few seconds, the old rogue became aware that he had made a very dangerous and painful mistake. There were better mud baths on the river, anyway.

He had not been able to send home a single thrust. Muztagh chased him, battered and bleeding into the thickets, but he was too proud to follow a beaten elephant for long. He halted, trumpeting; then his little eyes grew ever more red as he stood rocking back and forth, his trunk lifted to catch the sounds and smells of the distant jungle. Why should he abide alone, when he could be the ruler of the herd and the jungle king? He grunted softly and started away down the river. Far away, beyond the mountains and rivers and the villages of the hillfolk, the herd of his youth roamed in joyous freedom. He would find them and assert his mastery.

V

The night fire of a little band of elephant catchers burned fitfully at the edge of the jungle. They were silent men—for they had lived long on the elephant trails—and curiously scarred and somber. They smoked their cheroots, and waited for Ahmad to speak.

"You have all heard?" he asked at last.

All but one of them nodded. Of course this did not count the most despised one of them all—old Langur Dass—who sat at the very edge of the shadow. His long hair was gray, and his youth had gone where the sun goes at evening. They scarcely addressed a word to him, or he to them. True, he knew the elephants, but was he not possessed of evil spirits? He was always without rupees, too, a creature of the wild that could not seem to understand the gathering of money. As a man, according to the standards of men, he was an abject failure.

"Khusru has failed to catch White-Skin, but he has lived to tell many lies about it. He comes tonight."

It was noticeable that Langur Dass, at the edge of the circle, pricked up his ears.

"Do you mean the white elephant of which the Manipur people tell so many lies?" he asked. "Do you, skilled catchers that you are, believe that such an elephant is still wild in the jungle?"

Ahmad scowled. "The Manipur people tell of him, but for once they tell the truth," was the reply. "He is the greatest elephant, the richest prize, in all of the jungles. Too many people have seen him to doubt. I add my word to theirs, thou son of an ape!"

Ahmad hesitated a moment before he continued. Perhaps it was a mistake to tell of the great, light-colored elephant until this man should have

gone away. But what harm could this wanderer do them? All men knew that the jungle had maddened him.

"Then it could be none but Muztagh, escaped from Dugan Sahib fifteen years ago. That calf was also white. He was also overgrown for his years."

One of the trackers suddenly gasped. "Then that is why he spared Khusru!" he cried. "He remembered men."

The others nodded gravely. "They do not forget," said Langur Dass.

"You will be silent while I speak," Ahmad went on. Langur grew silent as commanded, but his thoughts were flowing backward twenty years, to days at the elephant lines in distant hills. Muztagh was the one living creature that in all his days had loved Langur Dass. The man shut his eyes, and his limbs seemed to relax as if he had lost all interest in the talk. The evil one took hold of him at such times, the people said, and his thoughts fled back into the purple hills and the far-off spaces of the jungle. But tonight he was only pretending. He meant to hear every word of the talk before he left the circle.

"He tells a mad story, as you know, of the elephant sparing him when he was beneath his feet," Ahmad Din went on; "that part of his story does not matter to us. *Hai!* He might have been frightened enough to say that the sun set at noon. But what matters to us more is that he knows where the herd is —but a day's journey beyond the river. And there is no time to be lost."

His fellows nodded in agreement.

"So tomorrow we will break camp. There can be no mistake this time. The chase will cost much, but it will return a hundred-fold. Khusru says that at last the white one has started back toward his herd, so that all can be taken in the same *keddah*. And the white sahib that holds the license is not to know that White-Coat is in the herd at all."

The circle nodded again, and contracted toward the speaker.

"We will hire beaters and drivers, the best that can be found. Tomorrow we will take the elephants and go."

Langur Dass pretended to waken. "I have gone hungry many days," he said. "If the drive is on, perhaps you will give your servant a place among the beaters."

The circle turned and stared at him. It was one of the stories of Langur Dass that he never partook in the elephant hunts. Evidently poor living had broken his resolutions.

"You shall have your wish, if you know how to keep a closed mouth," Ahmad Din replied. "There are other hunting parties in the hills."

Langur nodded. He was very adept indeed at keeping a closed mouth. It is one of the first lessons of the jungle.

For another long hour they sat and perfected their plans. Then they lay down by the fire together, and sleep dropped over them one by one. At last Langur sat by the fire alone.

"You will watch the flame tonight," Ahmad Din ordered. "We did not feed you for pity on your gray hairs. And remember—a gypsy died in a tiger's claws on this very slope—not six months past."

Langur Dass was left alone with his thoughts. Soon he got up, and stole out into the velvet darkness. The mists were over the hills as always.

"Have I followed the tales of your greatness all these years for this?" he muttered. "It is right for pigs with the hearts of pigs to bend their backs in labor. But you, my Muztagh! Jewel among elephants! King of the jungle! Thou art of the true breed! Moreover, I am minded that thy heart and mine are one!

"Thou art born ten thousand years after thy time, Muztagh," he went on. "Thou art of the breed of masters, not slaves! We are of the same womb, thou and I. Can I not understand? These are not my people—these brown men about the fire. I have not thy strength, Muztagh, or I would be out there with thee! Yet is not the saying that brother shall serve brother?"

He turned slowly back to the circle of the firelight. Then his brown, scrawny hands clenched.

"Am I to desert my brother in his hour of need? Am I to see these brown pigs put chains around him, in the moment of his power? A king, falling to the place of slave? Muztagh, we will see what can be done! Muztagh, my king, my pearl, my pink baby for whom I dug grass in the long ago! Thy Langur Dass is old, and his whole strength is not that of thy trunk, and men look at him as a worm in the grass. But *hai!* Perhaps thou wilt find him an ally not to be despised!"

VI

The night had just fallen, moist and heavy over the jungle, when Muztagh caught up with his herd. He found them in an open grassy glade, encircled by hills, and they were all waiting, silent, as he sped down the hills

toward them. They had heard him coming a long way. He was not attempting silence. The jungle people had got out of his way.

The old bull that led the herd, seventy years of age and at the pride of his wisdom and strength, scarred, yellow-tusked and noble past any elephant patriarch in the jungle, curled up his trunk when he saw him come. He knew very well what would happen. And because no one knows better than the jungle people what a good thing it is to take the offensive in all battles, and because it was fitting his place and dignity, he uttered the challenge himself.

The silence dropped as something from the sky. The little pink calves who had never seen the herd grow still in this same way before felt the dawn of the storm that they could not understand, and took shelter beneath their mothers' bellies. But they did not squeal. The silence was too deep for them to dare to break.

It is always an epoch in the life of the herd when a young bull contests for leadership. It is a much more serious thing than in the herds of deer and buffalo. The latter only live a handful of years, then grow weak and die. A great bull who has attained strength and wisdom enough to obtain the leadership of an elephant herd may often keep it for forty years. Kings do not rise and fall half so often as in the kingdoms of Europe. For, as most men know, an elephant is not really old until he has seen ninety summers come and go. Then he may linger forty years more, wise and gray and wrinkled and strange and full of memories of a time no man can possibly remember.

Long years had passed since the leader's place had been questioned. The aristocracy of strength is drawn on quite inflexible lines. It would have been simply absurd for an elephant of the Dwasila or Mierga grades to covet the leadership. They had grown old without making the attempt. Only the great Kumiria, the grand dukes in the aristocracy, had ever made the trial at all. And besides, the bull was a better fighter after thirty years of leadership than on the day he had gained the honor.

The herd stood like heroic figures in stone for a long moment—until Muztagh had replied to the challenge. He was so surprised that he couldn't make any sound at all at first. He had expected to do the challenging himself. The fact that the leader had done it shook his self-confidence to some slight degree. Evidently the older leader still felt able to handle any young and arrogant bulls that desired his place.

Then the herd began to shift. The cows drew back with their calves, the young bulls surged forward, and slowly they made a hollow ring, not greatly

different from the pugilistic ring known to fight-fans. The calves began to squeal, but their mothers silenced them. Very slowly and grandly, with infinite dignity, Muztagh stamped into the circle. His tusks gleamed. His eyes glowed red. The watchers looked him over from tail to trunk. They marked the symmetrical form, the legs like mighty pillars, the sloping back, the wide-apart, intelligent eyes. His shoulders were an expression of latent might—power to break a tree trunk at its base; by the conformity of his muscles he was agile and quick as a tiger. And knowing these things, and recognizing them, and honoring them, devotees of strength that they were, they threw their trunks in the air till they touched their foreheads and blared their full-voiced salute.

They gave it the same instant, as musicians strike the same note at their leader's signal. It was a perfect explosion of sound, a terrible blare, that crashed out through the jungles and wakened every sleeping thing. The dew fell from the trees. A great tawny tiger, lingering in hope of an elephant calf, slipped silently away. The sound rang true and loud to the surrounding hills and echoed and reechoed softer and softer, until it was just a tiny tremor in the air.

Not only the jungle folk marveled at the sound. At an encampment three miles distant Ahmad and his men heard the wild call and looked with wondering eyes upon each other. Then out of the silence spoke Langur Dass.

"My lord Muztagh has come back to his herd—that is his salute," he said.

Ahmad Din looked darkly about the circle. "And how long shall he stay?" he asked.

The trap was almost ready. The hour to strike had almost come.

Meanwhile the grand old leader stamped into the circle, seeming unconscious of the eyes upon him, battle-scarred and old. Even if this fight were his last, he meant to preserve his dignity.

Again the salute sounded, shattering out like a thunderclap over the jungle. Then challenger and challenged closed.

At first the watchers were silent. Then as the battle grew ever fiercer and more terrible, they began to grunt and squeal, surging back and forth, stamping the earth and crashing the underbrush. All the jungle folk for miles about knew what was occurring. And Ahmad wished his *keddah* were completed, for never could there be a better opportunity to surround the herd

than at the present moment, when they had forgotten all things except the battling monsters in the center of the ring.

The two bulls were quite evenly matched. The patriarch knew more of fighting, had learned more wiles, but he had neither the strength nor the agility of Muztagh. The late twilight deepened into the intense dark, and the stars of midnight rose above the eastern hills.

All at once, Muztagh went to his knees. But as might a tiger, he sprang aside in time to avoid a terrible tusk blow to his shoulder. And his counter-blow, a lashing out with the head, shattered the great leader to the earth. The elephants bounded forward, but the old leader had a trick left in his trunk. As Muztagh bore down upon him he reared up beneath, and almost turned the tables. Only the youngster's superior strength saved him from immediate defeat.

But as the night drew to morning, the bulls began to see that the tide of the battle had turned. Youth was conquering—too mighty and agile to resist. The rushes of the patriarch were ever weaker. He still could inflict punishment, and the hides of both of them were terrible to see, but he was no longer able to take advantage of his openings. Then Muztagh did a thing that reassured the old bulls as to his craft and wisdom. Just as a pugilist will invite a blow to draw his opponent within range, Muztagh pretended to leave his great shoulder exposed. The old bull failed to see the plot. He bore down, and Muztagh was ready with flashing tusk.

What happened thereafter occurred too quickly for the eyes of the elephants to follow. They saw the great bull go down and Muztagh stand lunging above him. And the battle was over.

The great leader, seriously hurt, backed away into the shadowed jungle. His trunk was lowered in token of defeat. Then the ring was empty except for a great red-eyed elephant, whose hide was no longer white, standing blaring his triumph to the stars.

Three times the elephant salute crashed out into the jungle silence—the full-voiced salaam to a new king. Muztagh had come into his birthright.

VII

The *keddah* was built at last. It was a strong stockade, opening with great wings spreading out one hundred yards, and equipped with the great gate that lowered like a portcullis at the funnel ends of the wings. The herd had been surrounded by the drivers and beaters, and slowly they had been driven, for long days, toward the *keddah* mouth. They had guns loaded with

blank cartridges, and firebrands ready to light. At a given signal they would close down quickly about the herd, and stampede it into the yawning mouth of the stockade.

No detail had been overlooked. No expense had been spared. The profit was assured in advance, not only from the matchless Muztagh, but from the herd as well. The king of the jungle, free now as the winds or the waters, was about to go back to his chains. These had been such days! He had led the herd through the hills, and had known the rapture of living as never before. It had been his work to clear the trail of all dangers for the herd. It was his pride to find them the coolest water-places, the greenest hills. One night a tiger had tried to kill a calf that had wandered from its mother's side. Muztagh lifted his trunk high and charged down with great, driving strides —five tons of majestic wrath. The tiger leaped to meet him, but the elephant was ready. He had met tigers before. He avoided the terrible stroke of outstretched claws, and his tusks lashed to one side as the tiger was in midspring. Then he lunged out, and the great knees descended slowly, as a hydraulic press descends on yellow apples. And soon after that the kites were dropping out of the sky for a feast.

His word was law in the herd. And slowly he began to overcome the doubt that the lesser bulls had of him—doubt of his youth and experience. If he had had three months more of leadership, their trust would have been absolute. But in the meantime, the slow herding toward the *keddah* had begun.

"We will need brave men to stand at the end of the wings of the *keddah*," said Ahmad. He spoke no less than truth. The man who stands at the end of the wings, or wide-stretching gates, of the *keddah* is of course in the greatest danger of being charged and killed. The herd, mad with fright, is only slightly less afraid of the spreading wings of the stockade than of the yelling, whooping beaters behind. Often they will try to break through the circle rather than enter the wings.

"For two rupees additional I will hold one of the wings," replied old Langur Dass. Ahmad glanced at him—at his hard, bright eyes and determined face. Then he peered hard and tried in vain to read the thoughts behind the eyes. "You are a madman, Langur Dass," he said wonderingly. "But thou shalt lie behind the right-wing men to pass them torches. I have spoken."

"And the two extra rupees?" Langur asked cunningly.

"Maybe." One does not throw away rupees in the Manipur.

Within the hour the signal of "*Mail, mail!*" (Go on, go on!) was given, and the final laps of the drive began.

The hills grew full of sound. The beaters sprang up with firebrands and rifles, and closed swiftly about the herd. The animals moved slowly at first. The time was not quite ripe to throw them into a panic. Many times the herd would leave their trail and start to dip into a valley or a creekbed, but always there was a new crowd of beaters to block their path. But presently the beaters closed in on them. Then the animals began a wild descent squarely toward the mouth of the *keddah*.

"*Hai!*" the wild men cried. "Oh, you forest pigs! On, on! Block the way through that valley, you brainless sons of jackals! Are you afraid? *Ai!* Stand close! Watch, Puran! Guard your post, Khusru! Now on, on—do not let them halt! *Arre! Aihai!*"

Firebrands waved, rifles cracked, the wild shout of beaters increased in volume.

Then men closed in, driving the beasts before them.

But there was one man that did not raise his voice. Through all the turmoil and pandemonium he crouched at the end of the stockade wing, tense and silent and alone. To one that could have looked into his eyes, it would have seemed that his thoughts were far and far away. It was just old Langur Dass, named for a monkey and despised of men.

He was waiting for the instant that the herd would come thundering down the hill, in order to pass lighted firebrands to the bold men who held that corner. He was not certain that he could do the thing he had set out to do. Perhaps the herd would sweep past him, through the gates. If he did win, he would have to face alone the screaming, infuriated hillmen, whose knives were always ready to draw. But knives did not matter now. Langur Dass had only his own faith and his own creed, and no fear could make him betray them.

Muztagh had lost control of his herd. At their head ran the old leader that he had worsted. In their hour of fear they had turned back to him. What did this youngster know of elephant drives? Ever the waving firebrands drew nearer, the beaters lessened their circle, the avenues of escape became more narrow. The yawning arms of the stockade stretched just beyond.

"Will I win, jungle gods?" A little gray man at the *keddah* wing was whispering to the forests. "Will I save you, great one that I knew in babyhood? Will you go down into chains before the night is done? *Ai!* I hear

the thunder of your feet! The moment is almost here. And now—your last chance, Muztagh!"

"Close down, close down!" Ahmad was shouting to his beaters. "The thing is done in another moment. Hasten, pigs of the hills! Raise your voice! Now! *Aihai!*"

The herd was at the very wings of the stockade. They had halted an instant, milling, and the beaters increased their shouts. Only one of all the herd seemed to know the danger—Muztagh himself—and he had dropped from the front rank to the very rear. He stood with uplifted trunk, facing the approaching rows of beaters. And there seemed to be no break in the whole line.

The herd started to move on, into the wings of captivity, and they did not heed his warning trumpet to turn. The circle of fire drew nearer. Then his trunk seemed to droop, and he turned, too. He could not break the line. He turned, too, toward the mouth of the *keddah*.

But even as he turned, a brown figure darted toward him from the end of the wing. A voice known long ago was calling to him, a voice that penetrated high and clear above the babble of the beaters. "Muztagh!" it was crying. "Muztagh!"

But it was not the words that turned Muztagh. An elephant can not understand words, except a few elemental sounds such as a horse or dog can learn. Rather it was the smell of the man, remembered from long ago, and the sound of his voice, never quite forgotten.

"Muztagh! Muztagh!"

The elephant knew him now. He remembered his one friend among all the human beings that he knew in his calf-hood; the one mortal from whom he had received love and given love in exchange.

"More firebrands!" yelled the men who held that corner of the wing. "Firebrands! Where is Langur Dass?" But Langur Dass stepped out from behind a tree and beat at the heads of the right-wing guards with a bamboo cane that whistled and whacked and scattered them into panic—yelling all the while.

"Muztagh! O my Muztagh! Here is an opening! Muztagh, come!"

And Muztagh did come—trumpeting—crashing like an avalanche, with Langur Dass hard after him, afraid now that he had done the trick. And hot

on the trail of Langur Dass ran Ahmad, with his knife drawn, not meaning to let that prize be lost to him at less than the cost of the trickster's life.

But it was not written that the knife should ever enter the flesh of Langur Dass.

The elephant never forgets, and Muztagh was monarch of his breed. He turned back two paces and struck with his trunk. Ahmad was knocked aside as the wind whips a straw.

For an instant elephant and man stood front to front. To the left of them the gates of the stockade dropped shut behind the herd. The elephant stood with trunk slightly lifted, for the moment motionless. The long-haired man who had saved him stood with upstretched arms.

It was such a scene as one might remember in an old legend, wherein beasts and men were brothers, or such as sometimes might steal, like something remembered from another age, into a man's dreams. Nowhere but in India, where men have a little knowledge of the mystery of the elephant, could it have taken place at all.

For Langur Dass was speaking to my lord the elephant:

"Take me with thee, Muztagh! Monarch of the hills! Thou and I are not of the world of men, but of the jungle and the rain, the silence, and the cold touch of rivers. We are brothers, Muztagh. O beloved, wilt thou leave me here to die?"

The elephant slowly turned his head and looked scornfully at the group of beaters bearing down on Langur Dass, murder shining no less from their knives than from their lighted eyes.

"Take me," the old man pleaded, "thy herd is gone."

The elephant seemed to know what he was asking. He had lifted him to his great shoulders many times, in the last days of his captivity. And besides, his old love for Langur Dass had never been forgotten. It all returned, full and strong as ever.

It was not one of the man-herd that stood pleading before him. It was one of his own jungle people, just as, deep in his heart, he had always known. So with one motion light as air, he swung him gently to his shoulder.

The jungle, vast and mysterious and still, closed its gates behind them.

Beside the Shalimar

The first and last positions in a volume of short stories are its chief places of honor. I chose "Beside the Shalimar" first published as "Pale Hands He Loved," especially for the book to be remembered by.

The story rose out of an event told to me by a tea planter in Assam. By an unprecedented set of circumstances, a young Englishman, traveling to India, managed to make love to a maharajah's daughter returning from a French school on the same ship. An older Englishman, long stationed in India, found out about it. By various means, some of them just short of physical force, he induced the young man to return to England without getting off the boat.

"His point was," my informant remarked, "that barely out of sight of a Sikh policeman regulating traffic, India remains exactly what it was in the days of Akbar the Great."

My young American did *get off the boat*.

With the closing of the book, I should like to hold a very brief brief for modern romantic literature in general. In spirit, meaning, and intent it is not greatly different from the stories and songs of the troubadors. These fellows persist, under different names, in a remarkable way. Literary fashion changes, the schools come and go, but there are always tribal story-tellers to go on with the chronicle of heroes, glamourous heroines, strange situations, colorful scenes, magnificent adventurers.

Are they true stories? When well told, they are true to themselves, a projection from the real world and mysteriously related to it, all that can be said of the most "realistic" story. The people's love of them through the generations in every land—from Tristan and Isolde to Scarlett O'Hara, with the rich mines of Scott, Cooper, Dumas, Blackmore, Stevenson, Kipling, Haggard, and London along the way—is proof enough of their high office and significance.

If I had not met Jim Carpenter face to face, I would never have known, and could never tell, his story. It would be nothing but a collection of clues, of shadowy facts and curious minor happenings, without meaning or continuity. But Jim Carpenter himself, as I saw him with his guard down that night on shipboard, brings order out of chaos. His personality becomes the key to that strange jigsaw puzzle; knowing him, I can postulate the rest.

You will say it is only guesswork. This is true in a sense, but please take it on faith, because by the nature of things I cannot reveal my few and scattered sources of information. On the other hand, have no fear that the telling of the story will bring trouble or harm to any living being. All necessary safeguards will be taken.

Its ultimate truth and final meaning you must decide for yourself. To me it is a case of angels rushing in where fools fear to tread.

The curtain rose during a journey from New York to Genoa. I had been invited to tourist class to act as judge for a fancy-dress party, a much livelier affair than any of the entertainments in first class. The other judges and myself awarded the prize to a Roman Senator—a tall young figure dressed in a toga made from a bed sheet, with some fake laurel on his brow and a scroll in his hand.

When the prize winner removed his mask, I got my first and almost last look at Jim Carpenter.

He had rough black hair, shiny-bright brown eyes, and a generous mouth with a singularly engaging smile. He seemed about twenty-three, and had that clean look, that touching charm, that goes with young male innocence, not nearly so rare in this world as the cynics would have us believe. It is not at all like the dewy freshness of an innocent girl, but it gets under one's skin just as effectively. One knows so well how sadly it will fare against the forays of the world and the merciless years.

Jim was immensely thrilled to win the two-dollar fountain pen which the prize committee had bought for five dollars from the ship's barber. When the crowd called for a speech, he flushed all the way down his toga, and declared that although he did not deserve the prize, he would treasure it always. Then rather shyly he offered to buy me a glass of beer; and because he was far more wonderful to me than the liner and all her company, I accepted proudly.

Not the strong silent type, but enthusiastic and emotional, he was easy to make talk. The son of a small-town lawyer in the Middle West, he was just off a one-statue denominational campus I had never heard of. He wore a Greek-letter pin adorned with pearls, and when he learned that I too was a fraternity man, he dropped his reserve and his voice and led me into the ultimate mysteries of his precious youth.

So I was a Delta Tau Delta? Well, he was a Sigma Alpha Epsilon. But a lot of his friends were Delts, and after all there wasn't much choice between the big nationals. He hoped to organize an S.A.E. Alumni chapter in Calcutta, where he was going, and he'd entertain me there the next time I visited the city. It was sure fine to be a fraternity man, he said; it gave a fellow so many fine contacts. He expected some of them to be of value in a commercial way.

Knowing Calcutta and its viceregal levees, I shivered a little. But he did not notice; his eyes kept on shining, and he told me of his wonderful luck in landing a job in the Calcutta office of one of the big American life insurance companies. Selling life insurance was a real profession; in a way, a great public service. Lord, he hoped he'd justify the trust that had been placed in him, sending him 'way out there. And then it was such a broadening experience.

No, he hadn't left a girl at home. Working part of his way through college, he hadn't had much time for girls; hardly enough for his long-distance running and oratory. It was mostly luck, of course, but he had won the college prize for oratory. Yes, he expected to marry some day—an American coed who could share all his intellectual interests—but he had never been in love and was not going to be until he'd definitely made his mark in business.

I left him after midnight, afraid I would never hear of him again; cold with fear that I would hear—another of those vague and calloused tales of human tragedy told between drinks in a Shanghai or Bombay bar. I had seen so many young knights in shining armor go forth to conquer the East.

If I had known the truth, I would have withdrawn from his presence backward, with reverent bows.

We docked the next day in Genoa. I went about my dull affairs; Jim Carpenter took himself, his bags, his long-distance running shoes, his volume of "Great Orations," and his insurance rate book aboard one of the crack Italian liners bound for Bombay. And because his company had shipped him first class—no doubt with an eye for "contacts"—Jim found himself in an utterly strange new world:

Bowing, tip-avid flunkies. Tuxedos not just for the college senior ball, but every night for dinner. Cocktails and caviar; black coffee and liqueurs. A motion-picture star only three tables away, diplomats, English titles, a

captain of the Bengal Lancers, a world-famous explorer. True, he looked at many waistcoats in vain for the sight of an S.A.E. pin, but there was a swimming tank and deck sports galore. And there were many rich Indians returning from summering in Europe, one of whom I will call the Maharaja of Bakratan.

The latter dignitary did not in the least fulfill Jim's idea of a native king. His skin was less dark than that of most sun-tanned Englishmen; he wore no jewels or decorations, just old English tweeds, and even in America Jim would not have looked at him twice. Probably he was a king in name only, Jim thought—a petty princeling bossed by the British, and of mixed blood.

But Jim was never more mistaken in his life. The blood of the Maharaja of Bakratan was infinitely purer than his own; actually he was the highest living representative of one of the oldest white families in the world. Except for a few military and trade concessions to England, he was absolute monarch of an area twice as large as Belgium and had five million adoring subjects. He could buy the ship and dig a lake to float it in without a serious dent in the heaped-up lacs of rupees in his treasure vault.

With him, besides his secretaries and servants, were his rani, a son, and a daughter. The latter had been to a high-walled school in France, and as her father was an enlightened king, she was permitted to sit in a deck chair beside her ayah with her face uncovered. The second day out, Jim strolled by and saw her there.

It sounds trite to say that Jim did not believe his eyes, but it was literally true. She was native, undoubtedly—her dress proved it—but not a whit darker than himself, and one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen. Until then he had held stanchly that prettiness in girls was largely confined to the U.S.A., with maybe a sprinkling in Paris and Vienna.

To make sure he had not been taken in by her picturesque dress and bridal-like veil, Jim strolled by again. Pretty! Good gosh, that wasn't even the word! She had happened to glance up and he had seen her eyes.

I can sympathize with Jim. The eyes of a real Indian princess are a revelation in human anatomy to older and tougher men than he. He had never dreamed there were such eyes this side of the angels. And he could not understand how things so black and soft could be so bright. And big! Why, they lighted her whole face!

But it needed no lighting. I once saw that face myself. Oval-shaped, with small features delicately carved, and a mouth red and sweet-looking as a

child's. But it was her hands that got him, hurling him off the deep end over his head. He had never known there was anything so beautiful in all the world!

Do not laugh at him. He was no clod, this young Galahad from Kansas, and his eyes were much clearer than older, more cunning eyes. The hands of the daughters of the kings of India are hardly less than miracles. He groped about in all the oratory he had ever learned for something to express his feelings about them, but the best he could do was:

"Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar."

He himself could love such hands.

He strolled by the third time, and now he got the whole picture. She was only about sixteen, with tiny feet and delicate ankles filling out gradually to the lovely, lithe swell of her hips. She was hardly five feet tall. He guessed her weight at a hundred pounds, and maybe only ninety, although her small form was curved all over in a beautiful way. When he kept looking at it—and he couldn't stop—he seemed to get short of breath. . . .

He wished he could meet her! What did he care if she was native? He would dance with her, if he got the chance, and be the proudest man on the ship. And the idea of holding that small body in his arms, her breast pressed close, and her childish mouth so near. . .

But he hadn't even met her yet, and did not see just how he could manage to do so. Probably it wasn't proper to introduce oneself to an Indian girl.

Definitely it was not proper. Nor was he mistaken in his other deductions. The Princess Lira Kiranpalla was the fruit of the beauty-breeding of thirty centuries. The daughters of the kings of India are quite possibly the most beautiful women in the world.

He tried not to think of her during deck tennis, but he lost three straight sets. At tea he roamed about trying to locate her, but although he spotted the maharaja at table with some English passengers, the girl was not in sight.

He looked good-natured, Jim thought, even if he *was* a kind of king. He'd probably be glad to have his daughter meet some of the young people aboard the ship. Why shouldn't a man wait his chance and put it up to the old gentleman?

You needn't look pale. He didn't do it. But that he even considered it makes the sweat come out on my forehead.

Just before dinner Jim saw the girl again, walking the deserted sport deck with her ayah. And then something happened that shot electric sparks up and down his spine.

Not that it amounted to anything really, he warned himself. Queer that it should seem so exciting and important! From an American girl, it would mean just nothing. As he passed her, her eyes changed expression—made one lightning dart into his eyes—and the corner of her mouth nearest to him and away from the old woman curled in a quick smile.

He started to turn back and speak to her—surely she wasn't afraid of that old native woman—but he decided to wait till she was alone.

She did not appear at the maharaja's table at dinner, nor was there any sign of her on the dance floor or the decks. Apparently she had retired to her stateroom, a sin and a shame on a night like this. There was a young moon, and an enormous star about to jump on and ride, and glisten-glisten all over the soundless floor of the Mediterranean. Jim wished he had the nerve to send her a note. . .

The American and English girls on the dance floor did not attract him that night. They seemed either too old or too young, not old as the stars and young as spring both at once. They were pretty enough, and good sports, but they were so—sort of—obvious, and they were built like boys and talked like them.

He got out his passenger list and read her name again. The Princess Lira Kiranpalla. He could dismiss the title, he thought—the native kings were just figureheads under white man's rule—yet she was the image of his childhood conception of a princess, breathing and warm and alive. And her first name fitted her just right. It made him think of a musical instrument. He noticed that she was in Suite B on the promenade deck.

Whistling, he promenaded back and forth past her windows, and once he thought the curtain moved just a little. But the night wore on; people were clearing out for their staterooms, and still he had no sound or sight of her, and still he lacked the nerve to push a note under her door. After midnight the light in her window went out.

But just as he was about to hit for the hay and forget all about her, a slim form in white came out the companionway and moved off down the deck.

It was she. No one else could so float in the moonlight. She did not glance at him or appear to see him but, when she mounted the stairs to the boat deck, he hastened in pursuit.

He found her beside one of the lifeboats. And she looked at him, the moonlight on her face, without a trace of feigned surprise, just as though this place and time had been set beforehand. Indeed the Princess Lira Kiranpalla quite likely believed it had been appointed since the moment of their nativities.

He had meant to give her an easy greeting, but his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and she spoke first.

"I am glad you waited. I could not come to you before."

He was too excited to notice the song of her voice or her quaint accent. But later it would echo in his ears and sound all through his dreams.

"Oh, I'm glad too. It's wonderful."

She understood. He needn't be afraid to say anything that came to his lips.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"James Carpenter. You can call me Jim."

"Jeem Sahib." She laughed in a marvelous way. "Do you know my name?"

"Yes. Lira."

"Who are you? Where did you come from? Where are you going?"

At this point they both began to talk rapidly. Time was so short, they could not begin to tell each other all that they must know. Yet there were long silences while they watched together the lights of the Sicilian shore, and such a moon as they were sure had never shone before!

He did not even touch her hand. He only looked at her, and said:

"You are so beautiful."

"You are also."

"I? Beautiful?"

"You are like Krishna the Well-Beloved, tall and smiling and shining-eyed."

He had forgotten that she was an Indian. For a moment, he tried to keep it on his mind, lest it be a lawful barrier between them. Then he looked at her again, and staunch, cleared-eyed youth that he was, he never doubted again his amazing fortune.

"Krishna?" he echoed, puzzled.

"I had forgotten you are an outlander and a heathen. But I am not so bold as to tell you who he is."

Jim did not urge her. Nor was he embarrassed that she had compared him to a pagan deity. He rather felt like one himself, just then.

But she must leave him. Her ayah might waken and miss her. However. . . tomorrow night. . .

"I'll see you before then," Jim declared. "I'm not scared of ayahs. Why, Lira, I want to spend every minute——"

But his words died away when he saw her eyes shining with terror in her pale face. "Don't you understand? You must not speak to me. You must not even look at me, or smile, or give any sign you have ever seen me before."

"Good heavens! Do you mean they'd punish you in some way?"

"Not only me. For me it would mean"—she stopped, staring—"but if I told you, you would not come again."

"I'd *have* to come, Lira."

"No, you are a sahib. You would deny Krishna when he calls, in fear for me."

"But if this is dangerous for you——"

"Then it is true! You sahibs have stones for hearts, and offer human sacrifice to your strange, cruel gods."

He was twenty-three—she barely sixteen—but he could only gape at her, a child before the Sphinx. "What gods?"

"I do not know their names, but they are more cruel than our Kali."

"But what do you mean by 'human sacrifice'? You've got some mistaken notion, Lira. Christians don't do that."

She smiled, and her hand moved as though aching to caress him. Still he did not understand. But one appalling truth had finally registered on his

mind. For some unimaginable reason, it was dangerous for Lira to meet him here.

She saw the trouble in his face. “Of course nothing serious would happen—to me,” she said. “But I’d be kept in my stateroom the rest of the trip.”

Jim heaved a sigh of relief. “If that’s all, why shouldn’t we take a chance?”

But she gazed out and far. Yes, it was a strong god the sahibs worshiped. Her little lie was not enough.

“For me that would be all,” she said at last, “but not for you. Listen to me, Jeem Sahib, and believe. You are going to India. The English law you trust is only a shadow. If it becomes known that you and I have met here in the darkness, your life is not worth two pice.”

He appeared to hesitate. Her heart must have almost stopped beating. She was East, and he was West, and how could she know that he did not answer only because he was too thrilled to make a sound?

But at last he had to disillusion her—and himself. “Someone’s been kidding you, Lira,” he told her in fatherly tones.

She uttered a little cry. “Jeem Sahib, if you do not believe me, I can never meet you here again.”

It seems that at that moment the first inkling of the truth sank home to Jim. At least she saw his eyes widen very strangely. “And if I do believe?”

“I cannot meet you anyway because you will not come. You would be a fool to come. It is all over. Good-by.”

But for Jim an arm rose out of the Mediterranean—clothed, if he remembered rightly, “in white samite, mystic, wonderful”—and held up Excalibur. He seemed to reach down four decks and clasp its jeweled hilt. And in the moonlight his new white linen suit could easily be mistaken for shining armor.

“Good-by? Guess again! Lira, I’ll be here at eight bells. And I’m the luckiest fellow in the world.”

When Lira had gone he tramped till moonset over the ship, but neither that exultation or six hours in the quiet of his stateroom let the whole truth burst on Jim Carpenter’s eyes. He knew that something marvelous had

happened to him, but of its enormous ramifications and its possibilities for major tragedy he had hardly a glimmer.

The next day he walked around in a kind of rainbow haze. He no longer envied the motion-picture star, or even the famous explorer. And although he did not speak or sign to Lira, he kept her in sight every possible moment, drinking in her beauty with an avid thirst.

Midnight came at last. Ten minutes later came Lira, up the deck steps, floating through the moonlight, straight into his arms. And after that first kiss, they were stricken with remorse for the time they had wasted last night.

And it *was* their first kiss, in the truest sense. Lira had never in her life felt a lover's lips, and Jim's experience had been casual in the extreme.

"Again," she whispered. "Jeem Sahib! And again!"

And then, it hardly seemed a moment, two bells clanged over the ship, and Lira's time was up. I doubt if they had exchanged more than a dozen words.

The third night he gave her his fraternity pin. "No other girl has ever worn it," he told her solemnly, "but I want you to keep it always."

She accepted it, without a glimmer of its meaning save what she read in his eyes and voice, and opening her blouse, pinned it inside. "What do the letters mean?" she asked.

"I can't tell you that. You see, there are some things a man's not allowed to tell anyone in the world."

If there are spirits of the air and the deep, as Lira so firmly believed, it would be interesting to know if they heard the words, and wrote them down for future reference. But Jim felt no whisper of premonition, only Lira's lips rapturous on his own, her slim arms about him, and her heart beating against his.

Lira could not come the fourth night. The ship stood at Port Said, and there were eyes in every passageway. And the worst was not their present loss, but their first clear vision of the future. Only seven days remained of the journey.

They did not speak of this when they met the following night. But they held each other very close, and whispered each other's name.

Another night their ship's wake had washed the bleak banks of the Suez Canal and was making long oily swells far in the swelter of the Red Sea. Jim sat on the deck in the shadow of a lifeboat, Lira curled up in his arms.

No raucous ship's bell doled out their minutes tonight. Lira had at last found a way to assure her ayah a long and sound night's sleep. Jim was vaguely shocked—drugging one's chaperon was new to him—but Lira explained it was a charitable act. The old woman doted on the little brown pills, meat and drink and blissful dreams in the East, and tonight she enjoyed them without cost.

"Anyway, I would kill her rather than miss one hour with Jeem Sahib," Lira informed him cheerfully.

But more was to come, that historic night.

"Some morning I will give you one of those brown pills, so you will regain some of the sleep that is lost," the girl went on. "Jeem Sahib's eyes look hollow in the moonlight."

"I'm getting plenty of sleep," he answered, "now that I haven't a roommate to break in on me at all hours."

Her eyes burned into his. "Did you say—you have no roommate?"

"Why, yes. He got off at Port Said."

"Oh, why didn't you tell me last night? It would have been an hour stolen from the years."

Jim breathed out something, but she did not even hear.

"We love each other," she told him. "When the gods offer the full loaf, must we be content with the crust? Come quickly, Jeem Sahib, and do not make any noise."

Four midnights more Lira came on ghostly tiptoe down Jim's corridor, while he waited in the shadowed doorway, afraid of nothing in the world but that she would not come.

Even on their last night together, no sound of a girl's weeping passed the door. They said their good-bys in whispers. For the ship would dock in the morning, and even Jim had given up all hope. It seemed the end of his supreme adventure and his story.

Yet he made one final protest: “Why can’t we have each other always? The good Lord didn’t mean it to be this way. Let me speak to your father, tell him I want you for my wife.”

He did not understand the gentle mirth that rose to her wet eyes. “Only you would say that! Jeem Sahib, don’t you even now understand? My husband is already chosen. The very rich and powerful king of the neighboring state of Shandor. He is fifty years old and has had three other wives, but divorced them because they did not bear him sons.”

“Good God, Lira!” He was gazing at her in horror.

Quickly she touched his lips with small fingers. “Do not be grieved, Jeem Sahib. It is not so terrible a fate. We have had these nights together—cheated the years and the gods. And the husband waiting for me is truly a maharaja, schooled in the West, gentle and kind.”

It was a long time before he could speak. “You say he’s waiting for you,” he muttered at last. “Can’t we see each other even once more?”

“Never in this world. The bridal dress is made and waiting. It is the end.” And then, forgetting her own grief to comfort him, “And some day you will forget in the arms of a mem-sahib.”

“*Forget?*” He sat up, his eyes burning.

“Forgive me, Jeem Sahib. Neither of us will forget”—and then, forgetting that he belonged to another world—“not in this life—or all the lives to come—until Brahma ceases to dream, and earth and heaven pass away. We entered the garden side by side, when the morning dew was on the grass, Krishna, my beloved.”

I believe that at that moment Jim passed from youth into full manhood. Certainly understanding was breaking on him in great lightning flashes. And she looked at his new stature and was afraid.

“You will not try to see me, Jeem Sahib?”

“No—for your sake alone.”

“If there had been a whisper of this, I would not only have been kept in my stateroom. My lips lied that night, for my heart’s sake. Instead—but I will not tell you, because even now you would not believe.”

She did not mention the danger to him. “For your sake alone,” he had said.

“I’ll never write you, or speak of you, or go near you.”

"When you must journey through native territory, especially in my father's kingdom or the kingdom of Shandor, will you pass quickly without leaving the train?"

"If you say so, Lira. Still, no one even suspects——"

"Remember, for my sake. Good-by, Jeem Sahib. And remember also—when you take a mem-sahib at last——" He started to protest, but the prophetic light in her eyes awed him to silence. "Remember you are only a loan to her, and I—I hold the bond. You are mine—*until Brahma ceases to dream*—and I am yours."

A moment later she had gone.

Jim parted with Lira late in October. Nothing worthy of detailed record happened to him until the following July.

There are in existence certain reports of his activities during this period. He was living quietly in Calcutta, selling life insurance. In the latter occupation he was surprisingly successful.

He had given up his idea of organizing a Sigma Alpha Epsilon Alumni Chapter in Calcutta, and never mentioned fraternities to anyone. As far as he knew, Lira still had his pin, and he did not want any native spy to put two and two together. Once he had thought this a foolish precaution, but not now. He had learned a great deal about India since that long-ago night off the Sicilian shore.

Still, he never really doubted that Lira's and his secret was safe. The girl's marriage to the Maharaja of Shandor had gone off with aplomb—the papers had been full of it. And although he had since read of the comings and goings, tiger shoots and levees, twenty-gun salutes and noble works of her illustrious husband, all sign and sight of Lira seemed lost. Once or twice in the summer months, he had an uncomfortable feeling he was being watched and followed, but dismissed it as a figment of his imagination.

But there was never a night that Lira did not visit him in dreams, and the Indian moon never shone without her flitting toward him along the silvery deck of a phantom ship. He would go on, work, ultimately marry, but life had an entirely different tone and meaning, words and music, because she had happened to him.

The July night on which his fate moved again found him making a business journey from Calcutta to a city in North Central India. His train carried him through a corner of Shandor, but he had passed there before, and Lira's warning hardly flicked across his memory. Anyway, the hour was late,

and he had no intention of leaving his compartment until he was back on British soil.

As he was starting to undress, the train stopped at a small, dimly lighted station. There was a knock at his door, but when he looked out the window and saw a typical Bengali in the uniform of an assistant train guard, he threw open the door without an instant's suspicion. The man muttered in Hindustani something about a ticket, and climbed into the compartment.

An instant later he stepped into the doorway of Jim's bathroom and leveled a pistol at his breast.

"Sit down on the seat, sahib," the Bengali said softly. "And if thou wouldst taste food again, do not speak or move."

Jim obeyed. Nothing more was said till the train pulled out. And then Jim asked quietly, "What does this mean? If thou dost want my purse——"

"Nay. Now rise and slowly close the shutters of the windows. As thy servant, I am sorry I cannot relieve thee of the task."

The little black eye of the pistol looked steadily at Jim as he made the rounds.

"And now I will show myself thy servant," the man went on. With one movement of his free hand he cast off his train-guard jacket—Jim saw it had been made in two parts—and stood in the costume of a bearer. "Yet if I may still give thee advice, as is permitted of an old servant to a young sahib ——"

"Cut that drivel," Jim said sharply in English, "and tell me what I am to do."

The man's whole manner changed. "Your pardon, sahib. At the next station thou shalt leave the train. But I beg that thou dost make no outcry. It is ordered that I walk behind thee and shoot thee if thou dost disobey in one word, and sahib, it shall be done."

Although it was only a fifteen-minute ride to the next station, Jim had time to review all his past and anticipate an infinite number of futures. Yet he was not conscious of any great fear. His awe at the infallible sweep of destiny left little room for other emotion. And anyway, he wore armor still unrusted.

The train stopped at another dim wayside station. Jim was ordered to get out.

Instantly four natives closed in upon him. Neither coolie dress nor the dim moonlight concealed their pale color and highbred features. “Come with us quickly, lord,” one of the four told him, “and do not make any noise.”

And striking back from the past came Lira’s voice, ushering in their bridal adventure. “*Come quickly, Jeem Sahib, and do not make any noise.*” If every man’s fate is a wheel, a conception dreamers mulled over long before the pyramids, Jim’s seemed to have completed one revolution.

While other men rushed out his baggage, Jim was led to a waiting automobile. A few seconds later all his known world was fading behind him.

Sunrise the next morning found Jim sitting in a luxuriously furnished room in what appeared to be the country house of a native king. He had been treated with utmost deference, and finally had been left alone. But only for a moment. . .

A middle-aged native wearing a decorated tunic and a jeweled turban entered the room. After one glance at his ivory-colored, fine-featured face, Jim rose politely to his feet. He had seen enough photographs of the Maharaja of Shandor to recognize that illustrious prince in the flesh.

“Sit down, won’t you, Carpenter Sahib?” his Highness asked in English.

“Thanks, Maharaja Sahib.”

“A drink? Cigarette? I want you to be as comfortable as possible. And please take for granted my apologies for the necessity of bringing you here.”

“Why have you brought me here?” Jim asked bluntly.

The maharaja took a seat and lighted a cheroot. His face was still as the gold face of one of his gods, but Jim noticed that his jade lighter trembled in his hand.

“It’s rather delicate business. Still, I think we should dispense with the amenities and get it over as soon as possible. You probably know that last November I married Princess Lira Kiranpalla, daughter of the Maharaja of Bakratan.”

Jim nodded.

“This marriage was in a way a last hope for me and my people. None of my previous marriages had produced an heir to my throne. If I die childless, the throne will pass to my cousin, Prince Jankoji Holkar. It is no secret that

this is regarded as a calamity not only by my people but the British government."

Jim nodded again. He had heard the scandal connected with this name. Jankoji Holkar was the worst type of native prince, savage, degenerate, insanely extravagant.

"A few months ago a wave of new hope swept my kingdom from one border to another," the maharaja went on. "The word had gone out that the queen was with child."

Maybe you can imagine how Jim's heart stood still. My own imagination falters. But he met the burning eyes and made no sign.

"But my own hope, faint from the first, has been shattered by certain investigations I have had made," the king continued very quietly. "These investigations and the reports of the queen's physicians present evidence that the child soon expected is not mine."

"I can't imagine," Jim said stalwartly, "what this has to do with me."

"I am sorry to say it has a great deal to do with you. Proof has reached me that before her marriage to me the princess visited your stateroom when you were together on the ship. I shall be blunt with you, Carpenter Sahib. For reasons I need not go into, I want your confession of that fact. If you give it to me, you will be safely returned to British India. If not, you will be killed."

For all the paralyzing shock of the disclosure, Jim's brain was working with incredible intensity. He did not doubt that the proof against him was absolute. Why, then, did the king want his confession? Probably to justify divorcing Lira, the daughter of an equally powerful king, and casting out her baby.

Anyway, the maharaja wanted it and meant to get it. There was no bluff in those burning black eyes.

"I am waiting, Carpenter Sahib," the king told him, "for your answer."

"My answer, Maharaja Sahib, is for you to go straight to hell."

His Highness kept his temper. There is no doubt that he was every inch a king. Thinking that Jim might be trusting to some false hope, he explained the situation very carefully. Jim was many *kos* from English law. His abduction had been skillfully planned and carried out: the English police, reporting to the American consul, would have unquestioned evidence that he had left the train of his own accord in a city in British India far beyond the

borders of Shandor. If he refused to confess, no one would rescue him or ever know his fate.

"Do you deny the charge?" the king demanded.

"Absolutely."

"Do you understand that I shall have you killed by native methods, which are many deaths in one?"

Jim turned ashy white, but there is no record that he bowed his head. "I still deny the charge."

"You are young, with your life before you. I shall employ means to save you from your own folly. I am sorry that they must seem cruel, but you will thank me for them in the end."

To spare your feelings, it is best to skip over the events of the next two hours. Mark you, the date was late July, 1935, not some tragic year of the Middle Ages; but the facts are just as hard.

At the end of two hours Jim lay gasping, semiconscious, on the floor, with marks on his body he would carry to his grave, but he had not confessed.

Three days passed. Save in his heart and spirit Jim had suffered no more pain, but he was to be strangled in less than twenty-four hours.

On the night that was to be his last night, a door of Jim's room that had been securely bolted opened stealthily, and an old native woman crept through.

"Come with me, sahib," she whispered, and started back through the door.

Jim came. He had nothing to lose, everything to gain. She led him through dark corridors, then stopped him at the threshold of a dimly lighted apartment.

"Enter here alone," his guide told him. "There is one—two—who would see thee." And then, in so faint a whisper he was not sure that he heard, "Be brave, sahib."

Jim had no time to think of the significance of this last. Drawing aside a curtain, he stole into the room. Lying on the carved teakwood bed was Lira, and in the cradle beside her lay his son.

Lira turned her head. Their eyes met. No man will ever know what their eyes said, their testament and their pledge, but their lips did not utter one sound.

There had never been and never could be anything in heaven or earth as beautiful to him as her face on the pillow, drawn and pale from the travail of his love, but he did not run to take her in his arms, and she did not even hold out her hands to him. She only gazed at him a few seconds, then asked in Hindustani:

"Art thou the doctor sahib?"

"Nay," he answered instantly. "I am a prisoner of the maharaja, held on a false charge, and seeking escape."

"Art thou he? I have heard whispers of this. And have I not seen thy face before?"

"Yea. I was on the same ship with thee. Now I ask thy help."

"Speak softly, lest my babe waken and cry. See, he stirs already."

Even clasped in each other's arms, on their last night together, they had not been so close as at this moment. He understood instantly that she was giving him a chance for one glance at his son's face. He tiptoed nearer and looked down into the cradle.

If he ever had any doubt, it was over now. The small wrinkled face was slightly darker than his own, darker than Lira's, but it was the face of his son.

He did not even touch his baby, but turned away. "He sleeps. A good child. Now tell me where to go, quickly."

"There is nothing I can do—*or say*—to save thee."

His eyes assured her he knew it, and begged her to be comforted. But he said aloud, "Then the old woman has brought me here for nothing?"

Before Lira could answer, a shadow appeared in an inner doorway, and the maharaja stepped into the room.

It was no great surprise to Jim. He had realized almost at once that this meeting with Lira and his son had been cunningly staged, to betray his and Lira's love. But the visage of the man did surprise him. He looked old and tired, but there was exultation in his eyes.

“Not for nothing, Carpenter Sahib,” he said quietly. “You have been on trial, and now stand acquitted of the charge against you. It may be that this sleeping one is your son,” the maharaja went on. “If so, he is the son of a true sahib, who has shown tonight he can keep his secret sacred at all cost.

“But I speak of this for the last time.” The king squared his shoulders and lifted his head in dignity and pride. “It is not well that Prince Jankoji Holkar rule this land. The child shall bear my name.”

Jim would have liked to answer but no words came.

“You shall give me your oath never to lay eyes on him or his mother again, or speak one word to either of them, or take one step to keep them in your life or remain in theirs. Then I will grant you your life and freedom.”

Gravely Jim nodded.

“And also, Carpenter Sahib—my regret, my sympathy, and my salaam.”

And a moment later Jim went out the door, without a backward glance.

“There is no border nor breed nor birth. . .”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

Some pages of advertising from the publisher were excluded from the ebook edition.

[The end of *Love Stories of India* by Edison Marshall]