

A Story of Mystery and Crime

BY ACHMED ABDULLAH

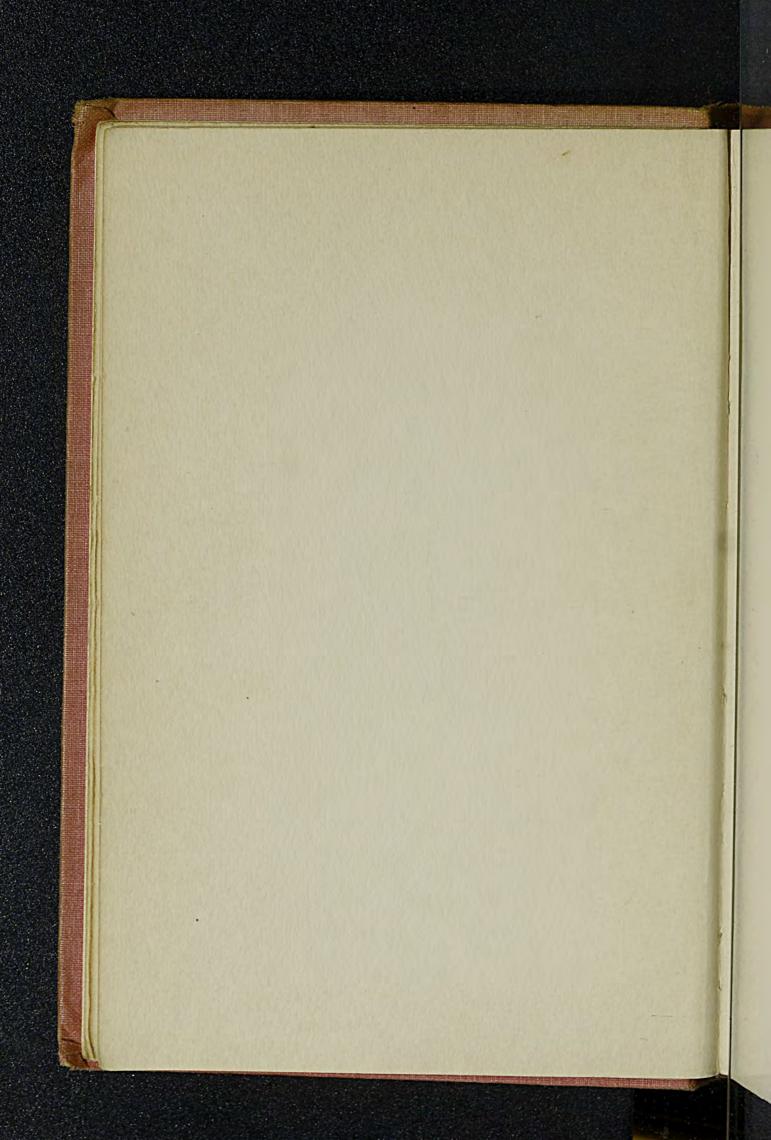
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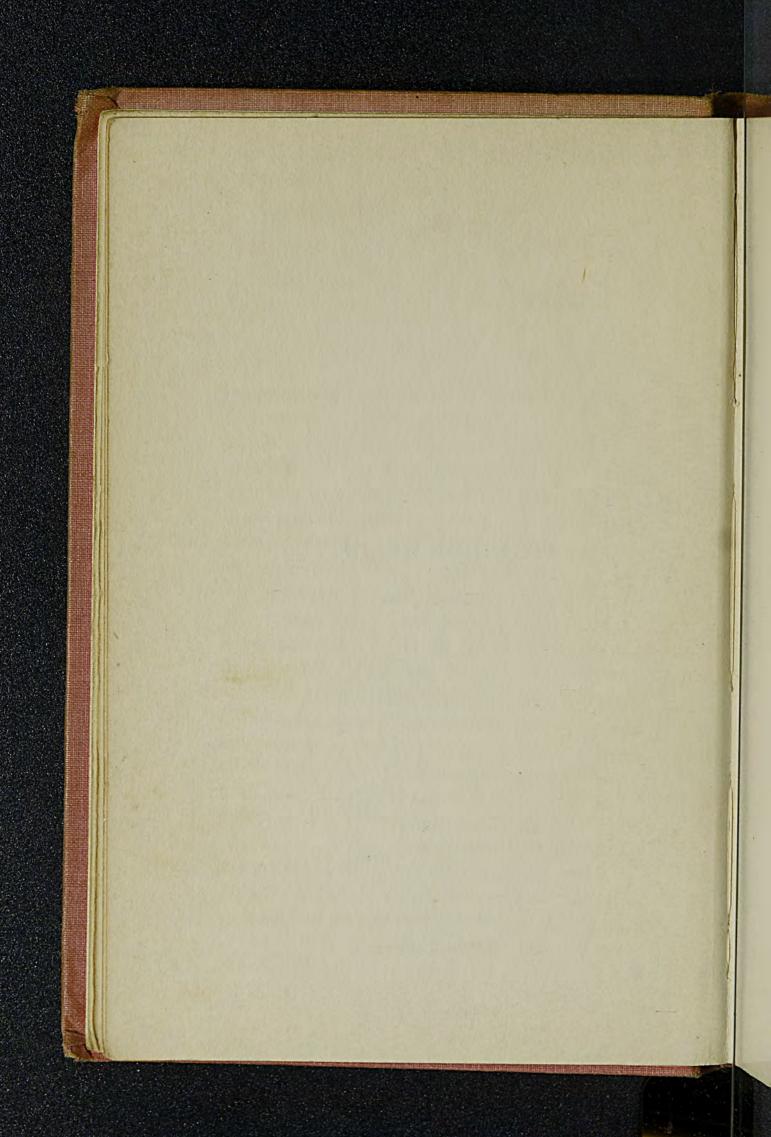
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T

N Thursday, the ninth of December, at nine P.M., I was looking forward to a pleasant evening. I was then dressing for the Great Ball with which our President wanted to inaugurate the Era of International Peace and Good-Will, which, according to everybody, would follow after the close of the European War. With the rest of the newspaper-reading public, I believed in the splendid promises of the coming epoch. We were all so infernally sick of the clank, the acrid smell of battle and strife. We were all ready to turn our swords into plowshares and our submarines into racing-cars. And this ball, at which for the first time since the signing of the Peace Treaty, the whole diplomatic corps would once more meet on a friendly, social footing, was said to come as a fitting apotheosis.

Thus, on Thursday, the ninth of December, at nine P.M., I was putting studs into my favorite pleated evening shirt, and looking forward to a pleasant evening.

On Friday, the tenth of the month, at halfpast two in the morning, I was tangled in the web of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms.

I've no idea how it will end. I am still dancing to a tune of Hussain Khan's piping. But presently, with the help of God, I shall do the piping, and Hussain Khan the dancing.

At times I think the whole thing is foully unreal, like the forgotten lore of a dim, gauzewinged *Ashtophet* of lust-worshiping Egypt. Then comes to me the vision of the scarlet mark on the forehead of the unknown assassin, and the mystery of Hussain's double alibi, and I realize that the thing is real; crassly real.

To me at least (though the head of my department in the Foreign Office calls me a specter-seeing fool) it all commenced with a remark which I overheard as I was passing by a group of Oriental diplomats in the corner of the ballroom. Kobo Takahira, the Buddha-faced Japanese ambassador, was addressing the Chinese minister, speaking in Manchu. (That's how I happen to be in the Foreign Office: I am familiar with the Orient and with two or three Oriental languages.)

"It is always at the Season of the Cold Dew that the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms makes sacrifices to the Great Mother. War has been declared!"

What the deuce did he mean by this? The European Wholesale Murder was over. The world was breathing freely. The victorious Powers had been moderate in their demands. Trade was booming. There wasn't even a cloud on the political horizon. So I dismissed Takahira's remark as a jest which I had misunderstood as I was ignorant of the conversation which had led up to it.

Two minutes later I saw Takahira leave his seat and walk up to Mrs. Kuhne, the Senator's wife. He bent over her hand, touching it with his lips in the Viennese style. It was a charming sight, in more than one respect. For only the day before the Senator had made a rabid anti-Japanese speech in the House. Thus this hand-kiss was like a peace offering.

Takahira even inquired after the Senator. But Mrs. Kuhne explained that her husband was detained. He was expecting a visitor at a late hour. Something rather important, she guessed.

The ambassador murmured his regrets.

"Ah . . . too bad . . . a visitor . . . "

And afterwards I could have sworn that, as he said it, he glanced meaningly at Hussain Khan, who stood near him.

The ball was a success.

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We all felt so infernally good. What with champagne and the talk of the new era which was looming up for the world at large, international friendliness and tolerance fairly oozed from our psychic pores. Even the younger diplomats talked freely. You heard that the whole universe was about to be enfolded in a mantle of justice and kindness. England was going to give self-government to India, America to the Little Brown Brother; rumor credited Russia, now the mistress of an ice-free port on the Mediterranean, with the intention of returning the Primorskaya Province to the Celestial Empire, and France would follow suit with Indo-China, Britain with Hong-Kong.

Thus ran the talk at the buffet. And with every glass of champagne the international promises and prophecies increased in size and strength.

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Only Hussain Khan sounded a jarring, harsh note. But then we all knew him for a cynic, a scoffer at things American and Eu-

ropean. But nobody minded it. For the man himself was so perfectly Westernized that he could not possibly mean what he said.

After the war there had been quite an invasion of Orientals to Europe and America. They were neither diplomats, nor traders or students, but wealthy gentlemen of leisure. And everybody said that this influx was another sign of the coming Millennium, of the exchange of ideas which would pacify and sanely reconstruct the whole world.

Hussain had come to Washington with the best of introductions. He was rich, a splendid linguist, witty, and as handsome as a tiger. Everybody liked him. But I . . . well . . . I was ashamed of the prejudice I had against the Central Asian. But somehow his handsome, clear-cut features brought to me a vision of cruel, obscene things. But then he was a success in our national capital. And was not world-wide good-will to be the slogan of the new era?

He was toying with a glass of champagne, just toying. For he was an orthodox Mohammedan and never touched wine. He listened smilingly to all the exuberant prophecies of our crowd.

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He spoke slowly, carefully choosing his words.

"Quite so. Quite so. I know that just now all you Americans and Europeans are jolly well reeking with the oil of international love. I have heard all this talk of giving back to Asia what belongs to her. And yet . . . and yet . . . " here his eyes flashed fire and his fingers snapped the thin stem of the champagne glass. "And yet there are still Californian orators of the Sand Lot School. There are still labor outbreaks in Oregon and British Columbia against peaceful Hindu laborers. There are still Republican standpatters in this country who foam at the mouth when they hear of the Democrats' intention to give to the Filipinos a chance to use their brains, their own brains. There are still Britishers who call us Asians 'niggers,' and who say that the Viceroy will rule India for the next thousand years. There are still members of the Grand Dukes' Party in Holy Russia who laugh at the thought of giving up the Primorskaya which they have stolen, and who speak instead of peaceful . . . yes, peaceful . . . penetration into Outer Mongolia, backed by soldiers and railroads . . . and vodka . . . and Bibles."

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We were all rather embarrassed. And it was Takahira who smoothed the thing.

"You are wrong, my dear Hussain. I suppose as a diplomat I should not mention names . . . names like Senator Kuhne. But permit me to do it this once. You see, all what Hussain Khan has said is perhaps true, but true only on the surface. These things, like the Senator's speech, are only storms in a teapot. You, the people of the West, are the pot, and we of Asia the water which the pot contains. Somebody comes and takes off the lid and blows hard. And then the very foolish water in the foolish pot bubbles and gurgles and it seems like a storm." Here he looked hard at Hussain, who turned red. "But suppose that same somebody is . . . I was going to say removed . . . but I mean, gets tired blowing . . . there would then again be peace in the pot, would it not?"

We laughed and applauded, and Hussain applauded with the rest and apologized handsomely for his loss of temper. The mantle of international good-will was about us once more.

Later on, together with John De Wenter, Mrs. Kuhne, and Hussain, I was having

coffee at a small table near the conservatory.

Hussain sat across from me, and I thought that I had seldom met a more extraordinary The most striking features about him man. were his eyes, greenish-brown in color, wide apart as the true thinker's, and quite opaque, masking a soul with a thousand guises which never opened its secret inner cell to the world. But there was a gleam behind them, like the red fire at the heart of a black Australian opal, and that gleam was the gleam of a great enthusiasm, a great fanaticism. It made me think of long-forgotten tales, of Attila, and Genghiz Khan, and Tamerlane. That red gleam gave the lie to his perfect English, his correct American evening dress, and the red ribbon of the Légion d'Honneur which was in his buttonhole. That gleam was the voice of Arab and Tartar . . . but of course I am prejudiced.

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He was in his most irresponsible mood that night. His paradoxes were worthy of Wilde, and his wit was a thousand splintering lance points. He flirted outrageously with pretty, golden-haired Mrs. Kuhne. And so our little party was jolly. There was just that cosmopolitan flavor which

makes Washington society so delightful.

But I must cut this short. I'm not trying to write a novel according to Schedule A, with plot and atmosphere well proportioned. I am just jotting down for future reference the points which I think of importance in the solving of the mystery which is in the air. I shall analyze these points crass and stark, as material for future investigations.

And right here two stand out with great clearness.

One was that Hussain suddenly said he had an engagement at twelve, and would somebody tell him the time, as he had forgotten his watch. I told him it was after eleven, but he didn't seem satisfied, and asked De Wenter, who sat next to me. De Wenter told him the same.

Then (and this is the second point), somehow or other he switched the conversation to the technique of piano playing. He was a clever amateur, and he said that, as a vain man, he regretted that to play the piano he had to keep his nails cut to the quick. He spread out his hands for our inspection, and, indeed, the nails were very short, so short that the rounded flesh protruded beyond

them. He gripped my hand in his two, and said in a joking manner:

"I've been told that you liken me to a Bengal tiger. See, I have no claws. I couldn't scratch you even if I wanted to, could I? Still I'm strong, eh?"

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And he gave my wrist a final squeeze, showing the steely strength of his thin, nervous hands.

Then he rose, very abruptly, and excused himself. He bowed to Mrs. Kuhne, but returned a second later for his cigarette case, which he had forgotten. *Again he asked the correct time*, and both John and I told him. It was then a quarter to twelve.

I left half an hour later. About one o'clock in the morning I was sitting in my room, in front of the open fire, warming my toes, smoking one of those excellent cigarettes which Dmitrieff imports from Russia, and if the truth be told—dreaming of rapid promotion in my chosen profession. Dreams, after all. For I hold certain theories which have condemned me to be *persona non grata* in the Department, and only my familiarity with out-of-the-way lingoes has so far saved my official neck.

My dreams were rudely interrupted.

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There was a short, angry ring at the bell, and a moment later my sleepy-eyed nigger showed Johnson into the room. Johnson is the Chief of Police and knows my connection with the Foreign Office. There had been several cases (diplomats are not always entirely diplomatic in their everyday affairs) when my knowledge of Oriental matters, customs, and languages had been of valuable help to the police.

So his first words did not catch me unawares.

"Dress! Get a move on! I want your help, Vandewater!"

I am a phlegmatic chap, and I dislike intensely to butt around in the doldrums of impatience and hurry. But the Chief has the soul and the oiled heart of an automaton. He threw coat and trousers at me, or rather threw me into coat and trousers (he is six foot four, and his early chapters had something to do with Northern logging camps), and I was ruffled, to say the least. But he hurdled over my half-voiced objections with another brass-buttoned bellow.

"Kuhne of California's been murdered!" I kicked then. Of course I knew the Senator. But there are few deaths, not even the

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most violent ones, for whose sake I would interrupt a perfectly good siesta. I told the Chief so. But he pushed me out of my room, speaking as he followed me.

"One of your Oriental friends turned the trick."

He would not say another word, but hustled me downstairs, into his waiting motorcar, and up we whizzed to the Senator's house.

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Let me pass over the next few minutes as quickly as I may. I am not a writer of detective stories, and I am not trying to lay down a stock of local color. Nor am I trying, for the sake of art and "copy" at three cents a word, to make literature out of the jargon of the police courts and the patternized crime theories of cub reporters.

This is simply a record for myself . . . and for anybody else who may be called to finish my work if it should get me before I finish it. Remember what I said about my subconscious feelings.

But never mind that. I am not a babe to shudder at dancing, black shadows. I know there's a lantern about somewheres. There always is.

Here then are the simple facts.

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The dead Senator was sitting at his desk. His eyes were glassy, the face a mottled purple, the chalky hands twisted and birdlike, the stiff fingers expressive of intense agony. The whole thing was beastly, and there was none of that Dignity of Death which poets prattle about. But I do not want to dwell on the wretched sight. I have always had a strictly limited sympathy for the gray side of the painting called Life.

I turned from the scene with an exclamation of disgust. But Doctor McArthur (another man like the Chief, and the latter's Fideus Achates, with an inordinate love for medical criminology) asked Johnson and me to step up and have a close look. That doctor made me sick. He behaved like a spieler at a side-show, proud of the contents of his tent, who asks some gaping rustics to step up and look.

#### "Any clew?" the Chief asked.

"Well, it doesn't need a Sherlock Holmes to see that he has been strangled to death. But look here." He pointed at a peculiar ragged breaking of the skin just below the right ear. "One of the murderer's finger nails was broken. Look at the wound. You can see the pressure of the fingers and the

place where the broken nail lacerated the skin."

And that beast of a doctor commenced prodding the little wound with his second finger. He reminded me of a bloodhound whining and snuffling for a victim. Altogether very objectionable, and I told him so. But he never answered. He just kept on prodding, and presently he straightened up.

"See here, Vandewater."

"Yes, doctor."

"Can you smell anything?"

I conquered my rising nausea and bent over the swollen, bloated neck.

"Yes . . . a sour sort of smell . . . blood, I guess."

"No. Poison," the doctor whispered, and I hope I am not doing him an injustice when I say that there was a consciously dramatic thrill in his voice as he pronounced the unclean word.

A moment later he looked up with a shout of triumph. His fingers were groping behind the dead man's right ear. Then he stood erect, holding up a small object.

"Gad, Chief, the murderer left his mark behind him . . . one of his finger nails. Remember the laceration? It's just as I told

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you. He evidently strangled the Senator from behind, pressing on the Adam's apple with his second and third fingers, and at the same time pressing behind the ears with his thumbs . . . and one of his nails broke in the wound. Here it is."

The doctor was positively indecent in his professional glee. But instinctively I reached for the object.

It was the paring of a I examined it. thumb nail, broken, jagged, and covered with a thin layer of shiny black. I held it up closer, and there rose the same sour smell which came from the wound, only sharper, more distinct. And then a sensation of indescribable dread stole over me. I knew the smell. I knew the poison. I knew the little purple pods whence they extract and distill it. I knew the land where the pods grow. And the sour, fateful smell carried me back in my imagination to India, ten years back, to the court of a small up-country Hill Rajah whom I had known at Harvard, and whom I was visiting at the time . . . and who had had some trouble with his womenfolk.

I thought of the Chief's cryptic words that an Oriental friend of mine had turned the trick. The little nail paring was in my hand

like a live coal. I dropped it. And I whispered, as if to myself:

"Dhaturyia. . . . "

The Chief whirled on me.

"What's that?"

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"A poison used in the Orient, the most deadly of poisons. It isn't even known to Western science."

"That's so," grumbled the doctor, who was bending over, picking up the piece of nail.

The Chief whistled between his teeth.

"Very well. A second proof. It's a cinch."

"Proof of what?" I was growing irritated. I am a nervous man, and I said before that I dislike morbid things.

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"Proof of the murderer's identity. It's evident. Though Heaven knows his reasons for doing it. If a Jap had done it . . . well, I could have explained it. The Japs hated him, naturally. But, Good Lord . . . Hussain is outside of that yellow mix-up . . . he's as near white as they make them over there. . . ."

Hussain Khan? Hussain Khan? Surely the Chief was having a little joke at my expense. I told him so. But he only grinned. He sent for the butler.

The butler, a dignified, elderly man, came into the room. He knew me. I had been a frequent visitor at the house, and there was an apologetic expression in this perfect servant's face, as if begging my pardon for the whole beastly affair, the bloated face of his dead master, and the presence of those two professional bloodhounds, McArthur and Johnson.

The Chief walked up to him.

"Look here, Blake. I want you to tell Mr. Vandewater everything you told me before . . . about the Senator . . . his visitor . . . and everything else you remember."

The butler bowed.

"Very well, sir."

And he told us.

It seemed that the Senator had asked the butler to see that a good fire was in the library around midnight, as he expected late company. He had left the house several hours after his wife had gone to the Ball, and had returned at midnight, together with his visitor.

"Are you sure it was midnight?" the Chief interrupted him.

"Yes, sir, I am positive. The church bell struck the hours just then, and I regulated

my watch. And at that moment the Senator and the other gentleman came in, sir. He never rang the bell, sir, always using his own key."

"Who was the other gentleman, Blake?" "Mr. Hussain Khan."

The Chief looked at me triumphantly, and I gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, sir. Quite sure, sir. I heard the Senator address him by name. And also, I've seen Mr. Hussain Khan frequently. He always comes to Mrs. Kuhne's Wednesdays, sir."

"When did Mr. Hussain Khan leave the house?"

"I couldn't tell to the minute, sir. But it can't have been more than thirty minutes later."

"And when did you enter this room?"

"Shortly after Mr. Hussain Khan left. I came in to attend to the fire, and then I found this. . . ." He pointed with a shaking finger at the grim, stark figure. "Well, sir, then I phoned to the police, and you came."

"Did you hear any raised voices, any angry exclamations?"

"No, sir. The gentlemen seemed very friendly-like."

"That's all. Thank you, Blake."

The butler turned toward the door. But there was that in his face which caused me to stop him and to butt in. Butting in is my specialty.

"Were you going to say anything else, Blake?"

"No, sir. No, sir. . . Only. . . ."

He hesitated and stammered. The Chief turned on him. But I knew the blustering old hyena, and I determined to be the ship's rudder for once. I spoke quickly.

"Tell me, Blake. Don't be embarrassed. We know that you are an honest man."

He sighed.

"Very well, sir. But I'm afraid you'll think me a silly old fool. It's only this. When Mr. Hussain Khan came into the room he took off his hat. . . ."

"Damned peculiar," jeered the Chief. But I told him to keep quiet if he could, and asked the man to continue.

"Yes, sir. He took off his hat, and just then . . ." His voice trembled a little. "Just then, on his forehead, between his eyes, I saw a bright red, round mark . . . as if

The Chief waxed very impatient.

"That's got nothing to do with his murdering the Senator. God knows why he painted that mark on his forehead. May be a heathenish sort of evening dress where he hails from. You ought to know, Van. You're bugs on the Orient."

He laughed and told Blake once more to leave the room. But I knew that the butler had a reason for mentioning it. I insisted that he tell us. It was like drawing out a tooth with spreading roots, but out it came finally.

"Begging your pardon, sir, for speaking of it. But a good many years ago I was valet to the young Earl of Bradwardine, and I went to India with him. And one day, in a town called Benares, he took me into a temple . . . he was very affable and democratic-like, sir . . . and he showed me a horrid heathen god. And there were priests in the temple, and the god as well as the priests had that same red mark on their foreheads. And the Earl told me that the god's name was *the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms*, and that many years

ago, before us English taught them civilization, those heathen Hindus used to make human sacrifices in honor of that god's mother, whom they call the Great Mother. And he also told me that the Great Mother means all Asia, sir. That's all, sir."

He rushed out of the room, red to the roots of his white hair. He must have felt the ridicule in the Chief's eyes.

Johnson turned to me.

"What do you make of it, Vandewater?" "Of the red mark . . . of the God with the . . ."

"God, no. What's that got to do with it? I mean the murder . . . Hussain's motives for murdering Kuhne . . ."

"I'm not at all sure that Hussain is the murderer."

"Say, you must be nutty!" He fairly sizzled with indignation. "Look at all the evidence against him, the butler's story, the broken finger nail smeared with that devil's own poison which you yourself tell me is one of those lovely Oriental specialties. I tell you, man, our Asiatic friend is going to swing. That's why I called you in. You take such an interest in these chaps and their doings."

"But what about the red mark on his forehead?"

"Forget it, Van. Red mark! That's a hell of an alibi. What is the matter with you?" He paused. "I am going to interview the gent right now. Want to come along?"

"Have you arrested him?"

"You bet. I sent Macdermott and Holzberger to keep him on ice. They're keeping him company at the hotel. Mac phoned me. Said Hussain wasn't a bit surprised, seemed sort of expecting them. That's another link for our chain, eh? I told them to wait till I came."

It was then that I spoke about Hussain's conduct at the Ball, how exacting he had been to know the correct time, how he had left the room at a quarter to twelve sharp. I also told him the episode about the finger nails, how he had drawn attention to the fact that they were very short; how he had grasped my wrist with his powerful fingers, and the remark he had made at the time. The Chief grinned.

"More evidence."

"Rot, Johnson. More evidence to a cutand-dried police mind. But to me there's

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such a thing as too much evidence, as evidence defeating its own ends. A man wouldn't be such a fool as to manufacture hanging evidence against himself, would he?''

"He didn't. On the contrary! He had an engagement with Kuhne. He was aware that Blake would see him and recognize him. And he did forget his watch. But he meant to murder the Senator that night. He was intent on it. So he waved precaution to the winds and asked you the time. Then, on second consideration, he decided to manufacture some evidence in his favor, and he let you and the other people at your table have a good look at his finger nails. Cut to the quick, were they? All right. That's the alibi he depends on, mark my words. Asking you the time was a mistake on his part. Even the cleverest criminals make such mistakes. That's how we hang them. I don't get your reasoning at all. What do you mean ?"

"I mean that Hussain knew about the murder, but that he did not do it himself. He purposely manufactures two conflicting evidences . . . one, when he asked us the time, to cause his arrest, and the other, that one

about his finger nails, to establish his innocence. There's yet a third: the man he was going to meet. If another man was with him at twelve o'clock, how can he have killed the Senator at the same time?"

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Johnson laughed.

"I lay you odds he will be unable to produce the other man. No. Hussain is as good as convicted and executed right now."

I tried to reason with the Chief. Somehow or other I thought of Takahira's words, of the butler's reminiscences, of the scarlet mark. Dread gripped my soul. I was afraid to find out, afraid of what I would find out. But I felt it my duty to try. I asked the Chief how he explained the broken finger nail which we found in the wound.

"That's dead easy. The man had his nails cut short. He does play the piano a lot. All that's genuine. But, for the love of Mike, can't a man cut off his nails, keep a bit of the paring, soak in that devilish Indian poison, and then press it into the other man's neck?"

"No. That's just it. The doctor proved that the murderer used his second and third fingers to press against the Adam's apple.

So how could he hold such a tiny, delicate thing as a nail paring with the thumb alone ... and on top of it press sufficiently deep into the skin to cause the wound which we saw?"

The Chief bellowed with rage.

"What about Blake's testimony?"

"He said distinctly that the man he saw, though an exact double of Hussain, had a red mark on his forehead."

Johnson looked at me in a pitying sort of way.

"A red mark? A red mark? As if a man can't paint a red mark on his forehead! I tell you, this case's going to be tried on its merits. Blake saw Hussain. There's your corroboration about the time he left the White House. That's a thick enough net to catch the gentleman, and to hang him. Damn the finger nail, and damn the red mark!" He picked up coat and hat. "I'm going. Coming with me?"

"Yes."

As we walked out he ridiculed once more the existence of the unknown party Hussain was going to meet at midnight.

"I just bet you a good dinner he can't produce him."

"All right. You're on."

We left the house and entered the motorcar.

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During our short ride to the hotel I was a prey to conflicting emotions.

In a way I wished that the Chief would be able to prove his theory, that Hussain would pay with his neck. For I hate that Asiatic with a peculiar hatred, which is neither racial nor religious. For I am not a very tolerant Christian, nor cursed with an extra-dose of "White Man's" conceit. Besides, Hussain, though a Mohammedan and an Asian, is as white-skinned as the fairest woman. Only, whenever I meet him, chiefly when he touches me, I pass through that peculiar anomaly of the mind which seems to force us to remember, and in vain, forgotten incidents of a former life, and which puts us upon the verge of remembrance and leaves us there. And when I am in the presence of Hussain, I tremble upon that verge of remembrance. I feel as if my consciousness had receded into the past, many centuries ago, and as if I were one of the French knights who broke lances on the battle-field of Châlons, and he one of the yellow-skinned, cruelmouthed horsemen of the Scourge of God who

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rode out of Central Asia to subjugate Europe.

Call of the blood? What do I know? I know it is there. And so, just because of it (for I pride myself on my American sense of fair play), I must not deduce any inferences against him with dead certainty.

Also, I knew that his guilt and subsequent death would not dispose of the mystery which I scented, the speech of Takahira about the storm in the teapot, his remark about the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms, the double alibi, the red mark on the assassin's forehead. I shuddered when I considered how little it takes to change Hinnom into Gehenna.

Hussain, seated between the two detectives, received us with his usual charm of manner, and with great volubility. But the Chief cut him short.

"Cut out the gab. Everything you say'll be used against you, and so forth. I guess you know the formula. You're under arrest for the murder of Senator Kuhne."

"Quite so." He pointed at Macdermott and Holzberger. "These two gentlemen have already told me."

"Come along, then. Get a move on."

Hussain rose slowly and yawned . . . rather affectedly I thought.

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"But, my dear Mr. What's-your-name ... Johnson . . . oh, yes. My dear Johnson" and I must confess it did me good to see the angry flush on the Chief's face—"seeing that my friend Vandewater is with you, and evidently acquainted with the details of this unfortunate murder with which you are trying to connect me, can it be possible that he has not told you that I had an engagement with a friend of mine at the very time of the murder?"

"Go ahead. Produce the guy." The Chief grinned derisively. "Come through with your alibi. Who's the chap you met? Where is he now?"

Hussain smiled.

"I suppose you won't take my word for it, Johnson?"

"You're dead right there. You got to show me."

"I don't think I can just now. He went on an automobile trip directly after he left me, I don't know where to. I've no idea where I could send him a wire. But never mind. He'll be back in a week, he told me. Meanwhile," he led the way toward the door, "I'll

go along with you. I've always been anxious to see the inside of one of your American jails. I am also keen to find out what your famous Third Degree is. Be sure you put me through it, won't you, Johnson?"

The Chief was black with rage. He fairly howled.

"You bet I will, you black-hearted murderer. Alibi? Friend? Automobile? Back in a week? Hell . . . who is he? What's his name? You just give me the guy's name and I'll get him by wire, right enough."

Hussain laughed a melodious, low laugh.

"Never mind, old chap. No use disturbing the poor beggar. He'll be back in a week. And meanwhile I don't mind saving a few days' hotel bill. I am quite ready, gentlemen."

He picked up coat and hat and left the room, closely guarded by the two detectives. The Chief turned to me.

"Of all the brass-bound nerve!" He laughed. "Anyway, you lost your bet. You pay for the dinner. I told you that friend of his was a stall."

I was the last to leave the room. I turned to switch out the light, when I saw a picture which had fallen on the floor. I picked it up

and looked. Then I gave a quickly suppressed shout of surprise.

It was a photograph of Hussain, but in Oriental dress, with a huge turban tilted over his left ear, a row of large pearls encircling the throat, and a circular mark painted on the forehead.

I looked at it more closely, and then, on sober second thoughts, I decided that it was not Hussain. The features seemed less rounded, the cruel lips even more thin. Yet the likeness was extraordinary.

The Chief's voice roused me from my reflections.

"Come on, Van. Can't you find the switch?"

"All right, Johnson. I've got it."

And I hurried from the room. But I slipped the picture into my pocket.

Back in my apartment I studied the photograph intently. It did not afford me a single clew on which to hang a convincing theory. But I shall put down its salient points. They may come in handy later on.

It was made by a firm of photographers in Benares, and was a dead likeness of Hussain, and yet, the more I looked at it the more I became convinced that it was the

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picture of another man. And this dissimilarity was not entirely due to the Oriental dress, or to the mark on the forehead. It was deeper than mere externals. At the bottom of the picture was written Majma' al Bahrain, which means "Where the Two Seas Meet," and which is the title of a poem by Sheik Nasif ibn Abdallah al-Yazyieh, an Arab poet of the last century who was very much mixed up with political Derwish in-This instruction was written in trigues. mushakil Arabic characters, that is, the style of writing with the vowels left out . . . the sure sign of a literatus, an educated gentleman familiar with classic Arabic.

Written on the back of the picture, also in *mushakil*, I read *Mithl akhras fy zaffah*, which means "I am like a dumb man at a wedding procession," and is an Arabic simile for absolute secrecy.

The mark on the forehead was doubtless identical with the one of which the butler had spoken. I looked it up in the Congressional Library, and in Sir Mountstuart Mac-Gregor's book on Benares I found a complete description of the temples there, the rites, the statues of the gods, the priests and their caste-marks, and the human sacrifices which

formerly took place in honor of the Great Mother. Sir Mountstuart added in a marginal note that "in spite of the closest supervision of the British authorities, it is a positive fact that even to this day human sacrifices are made there from time to time." Then he gives a list of natives and Englishmen who disappeared and whose movements were traced to the vicinity of the temple.

What then had Hussain, a Mohammedan, to do with the heathenish rites of puranic Hinduism, and what was the connection of Takahira, a modern, Westernized Japanese, with this ancient, lust-scabbed Brahmin god? Why had Takahira spoken about *the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms*, and why did Hussain choose to go to prison, if, as he said he could, and as I felt sure he could, he was able to prove an alibi by an unknown third party?

Some day I shall find out.

Johnson dropped in on me on the morning of the third day. He was white, nervous, and irritable. I asked him if he had been sick. But he only answered:

"Third Degree!"

Then he fell into a chair and reached mechanically for the sandalwood box in

which I keep my Russian cigarettes. There was something extremely comical about his attitude of utter dejection, and I made it worse by saying, a trifle sarcastically:

"Oh, yes. The Third Degree! He confessed all right, didn't he?"

It was a sadly subdued and meek Chief who answered.

"He confessed like hell! I've tried it . . . for three days and the better part of three nights. I took personal charge of it, I myself. And you know what an expert I am at the game. And instead of getting him . . . he got me!"

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"How so?"

"That Oriental devil has no nerves. We plied him with questions. We interrupted his sleep. We bullied him. We threatened him. But no use, no use! He sat there like a cursed stone statue . . . just looking into the distance . . . with a thin smile on his lips . . . his eyes glassy and perfectly expressionless. Never said a darned word. Never twitched or moved a muscle. Just sat there and stared. He stared through us. Man, I tell you he stared through us! Lord, I can't understand it. It's beyond me."

I smiled. It did me good to see that cutand-dried police mind so absolutely flabbergasted. He had always poked fun at me when I had told him that the nerves of an Oriental are constituted entirely different from those of an American. I tried to explain to him.

"That was just an ordinary Oriental trick, Johnson. They call it introspection over there. His thoughts were far away from you, and he . . ."

He interrupted me.

"How could they have been? I tell you, we bullied him. We shouted at him. We tried everything, everything, and you know I'm no slouch at that game. And in the end," there was a pitiful smile on his strong red face, "in the end he got my nanny. Got it good. Got it for keeps." He lit another cigarette and continued a little more cheerfully: "But never mind. Just wait till the case comes up for trial. He can't get away from the evidence."

Then I thought of something peculiar.

"Tell me, Johnson, how does it happen that there isn't a single word in the papers about his connection with the murder? A United States Senator foully murdered . . .

and the papers don't even bring one solitary clew about the man who did the deed!"

"That's easily explained. Hussain still sticks to his fairy tale about the unknown third party who can prove his alibi for him. Says he doesn't want his name in the papers. Says if the other gink doesn't show up by the end of the week, there's still plenty time to tell the press."

I looked at the Chief.

"And also, if the papers do bring Hussain's name now, and if the third party does exist, said party will read it in the papers and come home post-haste and free our friend, eh?"

"But there is no such party! I simply keep the papers in the dark for the time being because . . . well . . . it amuses me to play with that Oriental devil for a few days. He thinks he'll be able to make a getaway within the week, and that if he does, I'll quash the whole evidence against him so as to save my official face. He thinks that'll be easy for me since the papers aren't wise to him. But he's mistaken. He won't make his get-away. He's in a nice, cozy little steel cell. He won't break out. I don't get you at all. What the devil would he want

to lie in jail for, during a whole week, eat prison fare and be bullied, when he knows all the time that the mysterious third party can prove a perfect alibi for him? Sure you don't believe that impudence of his about wishing to see the inside of a prison and become familiar with our Third Degree methods? No, the very fact that he doesn't want the papers to bring the news makes it a cinch that there's no third party at all, and that he's figuring on a get-away."

The Chief left me then, after promising to phone me as soon as there were any fresh developments.

To me it was more and more evident that Hussain was shielding the real murderer, that he was playing with the Chief of Police, and the whole United States judiciary, like a cat with a mouse. I thought of the photograph I had picked up in his room, and about the marginal note I had read in Sir Mountstuart MacGregor's work on Benares. And then, vividly, with dread, stark suddenness, I seemed to see Hussain's opaque, greenishbrown eyes, and the gleam of enthusiasm and fanaticism which burnt at their heart.

Human sacrifices? The Great Mother? Asia? The God of the Invincibly Strong

Arms? And had not the Senator, with his speech against Japan, insulted Asia, the Great Mother? Was his sacrifice any less cruel and bloodstained because it had taken place in Washington, and not in the unhallowed temple of Benares?

No. Hussain was not the murderer. He was only fighting for time, holding up the course of justice a sufficiently long time to allow the murderer to escape. And that was the reason why he did not want to give the name of his friend who had met him that night, and why he did not want him to learn of his plight through the newspapers.

And in a way events proved that I was right. For two days later the Chief called me up and told me to come around to Headquarters at once.

When I entered the Chief's private office I found him in violent altercation with Captain Fortescue, one of the best-known menabout-town of our Capital, a retired cavalry officer, and a nephew of the President.

He was laying down the law to Johnson, but as soon as he saw me he whirled on me like an angry bobcat.

"You're another one of those damned fools, Vandewater."

I didn't care for the phraseology of this greeting, and I tried to tell him so. But the angry warrior did not give me a chance.

"Here I've been on a week's motor trip. I return to-day, and go round to call on my friend, Hussain. And I'll be hanged if right there in front of the hotel that fool detective of a Macdermott," he pointed at Mac, who was trying to hide his huge bulk in a corner of the room, "doesn't tell me, quite coolly if you please, that Hussain has been arrested for the murder of Senator Kuhne. I chase around here to Headquarters, and, by the immortal Jingo, I find that Macdermott has spoken the truth. Then the Chief tells me that the Senator was murdered at twelve o'clock on Monday night . . . and by Gad, sir, I tell you that I myself was with Hussain from a quarter to twelve till after one. We met in the entrance hall of the White House, rode up to my apartment, and talked there for an hour. My servants will tell you the same."

The Chief tried to expostulate, to explain. "But Mr. Hussain Khan himself didn't want to . . . "

"I don't give a tinker's curse, you big, meddling idiot! And that applies to you as

well, Vandewater . . . you interfering jackass! You know Hussain. And you don't say a word. You let him go to jail. Send for Hussain. Immediately, immediately, sir!''

It was no use trying to reason with the furious Captain. Nor was it possible to hold Hussain with such a witness testifying as to his whereabouts at the time of the murder. And so, two minutes later, Hussain entered the room and was warmly greeted by Fortescue.

The Chief told him that he was free, exonerated.

The Asian smiled and bowed gracefully, and drew his arm through that of the Captain. He walked with him to the door. There he turned and spoke to the Chief.

"Don't worry, Johnson. Very unfortunate mistake on your part. But I'll see to it that the thing is kept quiet, and that it doesn't break you. After all, I didn't mind seeing the inside of your prison, and your Third Degree was amusing . . . very, very. . . . Good afternoon, Johnson. Good afternoon, Vandewater, old chap."

And he was gone.

Then I made a mistake. I tried to interest

the Chief in my own theory about the murder, about Hussain, the red mark, the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms. But Johnson fairly bellowed me out of the room.

"Go to the devil. Leave me alone. Once bitten, twice shy. I want nothing more to do with your Oriental friends, red marks, gods, or any other hop-dream . . . not even if they murder all the Senators of the United States of America. Get out!"

I did.

But I did not abandon my purpose. And when, a week later, I saw in the papers that Hussain Khan was booked for Europe on the *Mauretania*, and that John Loomis, the President's Confidential Messenger, was sailing on the same ship, I telephoned to the Cunard people, and asked them to book me on the same steamer, but to keep my name from the passenger list.

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## THE TEMPLE AT MARLY-LE-ROI

HAD a week before the Mauretania sailed.

Of course the first thing to do was to acquaint the chief of my department in the Foreign Office with my suspicions, and with my intention to follow up the faint clew which I scented.

But I have never been *persona grata* with old O'Ryan. I have only held on to my job because I have a really thorough knowledge of the Orient and of Oriental languages.

He thought me rather a useless sort of a chap. He never did have any respect for people who tipped the scales at less than a hundred and seventy-five pounds in the buff. He belonged to the old sort of know-nothing politicians who believed that brawn is the same as brain, and that ignorance of foreign affairs, foreign politics, and foreign ambitions stamps a man as a true-blue American patriot.

George Washington's political testament

seemed to him the Gospel of a self-contained democracy. And even the international rubbings which followed the Spanish-American War and the conquest of the Philippines left his case-hardened political convictions unruffled.

He was the sort of small politician whose horizon reaches from Peoria to Yonkers, and who considers the late John Hay a bad and bold buccaneer.

Still, I thought it my duty to beard the lion in his den, and beard him I did.

And his answer did not come altogether unexpected.

"You're crazy, man! You and your hopdreams of Asian conspirators, and Gods with Invincibly Strong Arms, and Human Sacrifices! Been reading too much Poe and Conan Doyle, I guess. This is the Foreign Department, and not the Fiction Department. Cancel your passage on the *Mauretania* and attend to your business, here in Washington."

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I knew that it was impossible to argue with the self-opinionated old bonehead. So I did the next best thing.

I resigned my position (which pleased him), and decided to follow the trail of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms on my

own hook, paying my own way. I am not a pauper, and I like kicking about. I made up my mind to play the game as a Free Lance.

Then came six days pregnant with forebodings . . . at least so I read them.

To the newspapers they were only a matter of routine, of beating the other dailies to it, of headlines, and snappy phraseology. The public read in the same spirit. They were too busy making money on the wings of that tremendous, feverish commercial activity which came to America with the close of the great European war. They would not, and could not read the Mene Tekel Upharsin which the invisible hand was graving on the wall. And so, when within four days there came the news that Roland de Miaz had been murdered by an unknown assailant in the streets of Paris, that Horst von Pless had been shot in his own house at Hundekehle near Berlin, and that finally Sir Timothy Rivet-Carnac had been blown to pieces through an infernal machine which had been sent to him while he was on leave in England, everybody read these events simply as events, and promptly forgot them when the next sensation boomed along.

But to me they stood out in bold, stark relief, not as *events*, but as portentous, grimvisaged *signs*; and a vague feeling of dread and despair took hold of my faculties. It seemed that Horror and Fatality were walking abroad in Europe and in America, that a living, throbbing, cruel-mouthed Power was at the back of it . . . and that it was up to me to stalk it and run it to earth. And I have never laid special claims on pluck.

I could not forget the cryptic remark of Takahira, the Buddha-faced Japanese ambassador, about war having been declared. I could not forget Hussain's strange conduct at the time of the Kuhne murder. I could not banish the image of that blood-smeared temple in Benares where in former years scarlet-daubed Brahmin priests made human sacrifices before the altar of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms. Thus came to me the vision of Asia as a brooding, leering Thing, born under the red glare of Saturnus, and in its slimy, crooked, yellow fingers the purblind nations of the West . . . like gray corpses with leaden weight tied to their feet.

My chief had accused me of seeing specters in broad daylight.

But when I read of the three murders in

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Europe, all within the same few days, I remembered several things. I remembered that Roland de Miaz had long been the leader of the Imperialist Party in the Chambre des Députés, and had lately been advocating an aggressive French propaganda in parts of China, mainly in Yunnan, Szenchuen, and Hannan. His efforts were about to be crowned with success. He was on the eve of being appointed Minister for the Colonies . . . and then he was killed. It was similar with Horst von Pless, who had been actively connected with German railway schemes and mineral concessions in Shantung. Success was within his grasp, too . . . and he was killed. Then came the death of the Englishman. He had served two terms as Governor of the Madras Presidency. Before that he had been confidential adviser to Lord Curzon of Kedleston, during the latter's term as Viceroy; and he had been the man who had advocated so eagerly the splitting of Bengal into two distinct governmental units, so as to weaken both the Hindu and the Moslem factions and to drive another wedge into that nascent feeling of Indian solidarity and unity which is the greatest danger with which the British have to reckon in India. Lately he

had been advocating the same clever policy for Madras. He had begun by suppressing the seditionist native press and by arresting half a dozen Brahmins notorious for their disloyal utterances. It was said that the Crown liked his plan, and were going to give him plenary powers. Then came the infernal machine.

Truly, Fatality seemed to be stalking the men who were dancing on the Asian volcano. And when I thought of John Loomis, of John Loomis' mission, and of the fact that Hussain Khan was sailing on the same ship with him, my heart failed me.

For I knew that recently a small but powerful inside faction of the Democratic leaders, who had formerly enthusiastically advocated Philippine independence, had suddenly switched, and that there were negotiations between this country and England, having for object an exchange of Jamaica for our Asian possessions. It was said that Loomis was the bearer of the final written American proposal. All this was an open secret to those on the inside: and it was the intention to finish the whole business as rapidly and quietly as possible. For Government was afraid that when the Filipinos found that in-

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stead of their cherished independence they would only receive a change of masters, there might be unrest and possibly bloodshed.

When I booked passage I had asked the Cunard people to keep my name from the list. Afterwards I reconsidered. Hussain was bound to find out my presence on board, and the very fact that my name was not down on the list would arouse his suspicions. I am not a detective of fiction, and so I can't use false whiskers, an artificial stoop, or other childish disguises. I am not a detective at all. A detective discovers crime, while I am trying to prevent it, to prevent the blackest crime since the making of history.

I had no idea how I would do it. I was in for a mad chase. And I failed. But even in the moment of heart-breaking failure I smelt the sweetness of success, the beginning of victory. For it brought me to that Athletic Association at Marly-le-Roi near Paris, and it threw Cajetano Maria Mascasenhas, the Goanese half-caste, into my path.

I saw even on the day of departure that my sober second thought had been a wise one, and that I had done right in boldly flying my own colors, and not to play a pussy-footed

hide-and-seek or a foolish game of masque. For the first man I met on board was Hussain Khan, urbane and immaculate as ever, Burlington Arcades and Regent Street from head to foot . . . all but his eyes, his short-cropped Mohammedan mustache, and his high cheekbones. The moment he saw me his opaque eyes opened wide. Then the pupils shrank into glittering points, and a veil seemed to fall from his face, leaving it crassly expressive . . . of something . . . and yet inscrutable.

He came toward me with sinewy nervous hand outstretched in friendly, cordial greeting. But something took my breath away. For he addressed me in rolling Pushtu, his native tongue. How the deuce did he know that I spoke Pushtu?

"Going across, Vandewater? Bad season for an ocean trip . . . bitter, as we say at home, bitter as the fruit which grows near the *Bahretlut*."

It would have been useless and silly to deny my knowledge of the language. Hussain must have known. He was too clever a man to make such a shot at random. He looked faintly amused, and continued.

"A bad time of the year to go to Europe,

my friend. Better go West, to California, to the sunny lands, and enjoy the pleasant late summer, the *Sayf Rumman*, the 'Pomegranate Summer' as we call it in the tongue which you and I speak so well." Then he turned to go. "But you must pardon me. I have a very foolish servant hiding somewhere, a man from my own country . . . dumb, stupid cattle, not conversant with the English language."

He was off down the gangplank, and disappeared in the crowd of farewell-wishers who had gathered there.

My mind was tuned up sharply to the key of suspicion and discovery. I was like a mottled otterhound nosing my slippery quarry along the sodden river banks. Even the faintest scent spelt "View-Halloo" and "Death" to me. And here was that talk about his servant.

I had been a frequent visitor at his rooms in Washington, and I knew his former servant, an old negro who had come to him with my recommendations. But two days before the *Mauretania* sailed, Harris, the darky, had asked me for another recommendation. He told me that Hussain had dismissed him with a month's wages. I had asked casually

if Hussain had engaged another valet. But Harris had told me that he had not.

"No, sir. I reckon as he's going alone. I had to pack all his things, even his suitcases, before I left, and I'm sure he wouldn't have had me do it if he was going to get another man. And yesterday I went back to the hotel to fetch a coat I'd forgotten, and Mr. Hussain Khan himself opened the door."

So when I heard the Asian's remark about the servant whom he was expecting, who could not speak English and who had yet managed to find his employ after Harris had left, the valet who had *not* packed his trunks. I thought it mighty strange. But then I repeat that I was keyed up to a tense, grating key of nervous expectancy. And when, five minutes later, a tall, loose-robed Oriental came on board, with his turban pulled down to his nose and his cloak covering his shivering frame to above his mouth, I forgot my suspicion. Hussain had evidently spoken the truth, and the new servant had lost him in the crowd on the pier. He looked about him in a helpless manner. But with the help of gesticulations and well-meant shouts, a steward directed him to his master's suite

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. . . one of two rooms as I had seen in the list.

Shortly afterwards I went below stairs to send off some telegrams with the pilot, and when I returned on top-deck, Hussain was there, engaged in a keen conversation with John Loomis, the Confidential Messenger (of whom it was said in Washington that he had *danced* his way to White House grace and a job).

I shook hands with Loomis. Then Hussain turned to me. His first words were about his servant. Afterwards I thought this odd. We are always so confoundedly wise after the events have shaped their swing of destiny . . . or fatality . . .

"Fazl Ali . . . my valet, you know . . . did finally come. Poor old beggar! I fancy he'll be perfectly useless to me all the way across. He always gets seasick the moment he comes on board, and stays so until we dock on the other side."

"... usually gets seasick ...." And yet Fazl Ali was a new servant who had just taken employment with him, since Hussain had used Harris as a valet during his year in Washington. And Fazl Ali could not be an old and trusted family retainer. Other-

wise he would not have left his master ... not for a day, and certainly not for a year. But then all these wise reflections came afterwards. Had I thought of them that day, John Loomis would not have disappeared, and Manila would not have crimsoned with the blood of American men and women ... and little, lisping babes!

I'll not give a minute description of the pleasant days which followed.

For they were pleasant: with a glassy sea, and a blue sky of day followed by rose-andorange evenings with feathery clouds trooping together into the height of the heavens, like oxen on a summer's day.

Hussain was his charming self. If he stood for an evil thing, I thought that an evil thing is not made better by meddling with it out of season. The best I could do was to sit tight and watch: and there was not much to watch, after all. If he really had designs on John Loomis and on the papers which Loomis carried to our embassy at the Court of St. James, they were so far below the surface that I could neither see them nor guess at them. He was never alone with the Confidential Messenger, and he never even tried to be. It was only by an occasional flash-like

remark that I caught a gleam of his real nature. To the others, many of whom had known him in Washington, these remarks were only more amusing instances of that cynicism of which he was master. But I read them as outbursts of fanaticism which burst suddenly through his acquired veneer of Western culture. I have always thought that a man with a mission, even a hidden mission, cannot disguise the object, the soul of that mission, for ever, try as he may.

The first time I saw the crack in his veneer was one evening in the salon, when he had an argument with a well-meaning old lady from the Middle West who was preaching Christianity to him. Loomis was in our crowd, and one or two other people. And the Asian's reply stung me like the back-lash of a black-snake whip.

"Christianity? Why, your famed Christianity isn't a religion at all. It's only an artificial, social structure . . . less strenuous than polo, and not nearly as effective as an afternoon of auction bridge."

And when the old lady from the Middle West left, her feelings hurt to the quick, Hussain turned to me with a sneer.

"It is not pleasant to hear the truth, eh, Vandewater? It is not pleasant to hear that Shem may outlast Japheth, and that Mecca will survive Manchester."

He seemed to be carried away by the fluting of his own mind, and started a philippic about what Asia would do when the time came. But suddenly he checked the flow of his words with a conscious effort. He must have noticed that I was all ears, and that he had better hide the weak spot in his armor. For when I pressed the point, when I asked him for something more distinct and telling than hollow prophecies, he laughed and spoke in Arabic.

"Is-subr miftah il-faraj . . . 'patience is the key of relief.'"

And he proposed a walk on deck, drawing his arm through that of John Loomis. I followed, unasked, instinctively, like a faithful and rather involuntary Damon (for I never did care for Loomis personally), and Hussain looked me up and down, laughing and showing his white teeth.

"Do you think I'm about to kidnap Loomis?" he whispered into my ear as we passed out of the door, three abreast. Then he laughed again, mockingly, and I blushed

like a child that has been discovered in the act of exploring the maternal jam-pots.

And all the time the pendulum of dim things was vibrating with a deeper, crasser meaning.

Meanwhile I had nearly forgotten about the servant who had followed Hussain on board. At first I had imagined that here was a possible clew for the Kuhne murder, that Fazl Ali was the assassin, and that my wily Asian friend was using this method to smuggle him out of the country. But then I considered that Johnson, the Washington Chief of Police, for all his bellowing and blustering, was a very clever man and not a myopic fool, and that he would surely see through a simple stratagem, the more so as he had suspected Hussain once as the murderer and had even put him through the Third Degree. I sent him a wireless, to make sure, the first day out. But the answer was convincing and reassuring.

"Sifted Hussains movements month back was not contact any Orientals except diplomats servant clew no good thanks Johnson."

It appeared also that Hussain had spoken the truth when he had told me that Ali Fazl

would most likely suffer from seasickness all the way across. Indeed, the servant was never visible. He never attended his master on deck, and was evidently tied to his cabin, suffering and helpless.

Yet there were two suspicious circumstances connected with this mysterious valet.

One was this, and I happened across it by a mere accident. I heard two garrulous stewards converse outside my cabin door one evening, as I was dressing for dinner.

"Stroike me pink, Bill, but this 'ere servant of Mr. Hussain Khan's a rummy old cove, wot? Never appears for a moment."

"Right-o. Rummy's the word, bleedin' rummy, I calls it. Why, blime, 'is master won't even let me stroighten out 'is room for 'im, nor serve 'is meals, the servant's, I mean. Does it all 'is bloomin' self. I puts the tray outside the cabin door, and the guv'nor tykes it and pops back into the room jolly prompt. Sez 'is servant is a bit delirious and can't stand strynge fyces. Doctor called once, but the guv'nor sez No, 'e'd attent to 'im 'imself. Rum, I call it . . . bleedin' rum!"

They passed down the corridor and out of my hearing. But they had put a new edge

on my prick of suspicion. Here was that servant, Fazl Ali, evidently a newcomer, since Harris, the darky, had valeted Hussain during his year in Washington; and yet Hussain waited on him with his own hands, even bringing him his meals and making his bed. I would have understood it if Fazl Ali had been a very old and faithful retainer. For the Oriental is the soul of kindness to old, trusted servants. But this man was not old. I knew it. I had seen him come on board, and he had walked with the springy step of the jungle-bred. Nor could he have been a faithful family retainer from Central Asia. For Hussain, who spoke so readily and glibly about his servant the day of departure, would certainly have mentioned such an interesting little item. And finally, to come back to my mutton, faithful old family retainers, and chiefly Orientals, do not lose sight of their masters for a whole year.

It was indeed "bleedin' rum," as the steward had appropriately phrased it, and it worried me.

And through worrying I happened on the second suspicious circumstance in connection with the elusive Fazl Ali.

Ever since overhearing the two Cockneys,

I had begun to haunt the vicinity of Hussain's suite. Several times I passed by, and stopped for a few moments, directly after Hussain had entered it. Twice I happened along when the steward came with the tray for the seasick servant. And never once did I hear any voices come from the stateroom. And the two times that I watched the steward pass in the trays, I did not hear the faintest clinking of glass or china.

But then I forgot my suspicions again when I noticed more and more that there was nothing, absolutely nothing queer in the relations between Hussain and Loomis. Hussain was the same to him as to me or to any other of his old Washington acquaintances who were on board.

I was quite reassured when we made Cherbourg. Just an hour before the ship landed I saw Loomis, gay, whistling to himself, and, if the truth be told, altogether unlike a man who was a Confidential Messenger (hang these dancing parasites who cling to the skirts of our officialdom!), and certainly not like a man who was doomed to pass through any disagreeable experience. There was the usual bustle of packing and leave-taking. And if Hussain Khan had really any designs

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on John Loomis he had missed his chance. There were too many people about now to try anything underhanded. I even saw Loomis enter his stateroom.

I went to mine to put the last touches on my bags, and I was glad that the danger was past. Hussain was going ashore at Cherbourg, to catch the boat-express for Paris, and so was I. John Loomis was going straight to London, to deliver the papers, and in a few days all the preliminaries for the transfer of the Philippines into the keeping of John Bull would be finished, the Islanders would stand facing an accomplished fact, and the moment for unrest and bloodshed would have passed. I breathed more freely, and in my heart I asked Hussain's pardon . . . at least for this one wrong suspicion. . .

Hussain was the first to step ashore, and this time I saw his servant again. There was no doubt that the man had been very sick. His face was hidden as before in turban and cloak. But the bit of skin that was visible was ghastly, greenish-pale: and he had the weak, swaying gait of a man who was dazed and suffering. Hussain was assisting him very tenderly and gently, and I was glad that the kindly French railway officials gave

him a separate compartment for himself and Fazl Ali.

It was a pleasant, short trip across the snow-bound fields of Northern France. There was that in the fluting and the piping of the wind which whispered, if not of success, at least of the lack of failure. Whatever Hussain's secret, whatever the links which connected him with Takahira, the Chinese minister, the assassins of the three Europeans, and Heaven knows whom else ... whatever the ghoulish meals of *the God* of the Invincibly Strong Arms . . . I knew that Loomis at least was safe, and safe those papers whose divulgence would mean black trouble in the Philippines.

I had another glimpse of Hussain at the Paris station. His servant was still weak and tottering, and Hussain was bundling him into a cab. Five minutes later I was at my old hotel in the Faubourg St. Honoré, and rapidly changing into black cloth and fine linen. I had decided to reward my inner man for the worries of the ocean journey. And what better place in all the world than Vatel's, just a few blocks from my hotel?

I ordered a menu at which even the stoical headwaiter bowed with professional appre-

ciation. And over a preparatory glass of Amontillado I fell to thinking sanely and quietly of the whole fantastic thing, the Kuhne murder, the assassination of de Miaz, von Pless, and Rivet-Carnac, and of my sudden, mad chase to Europe on the trail of a visionary conspiracy. Perhaps they were just isolated crimes, after all, I thought, with no connecting links. Perhaps my dream was only a nightmare. Perhaps O'Ryan was right, and there was no mystery, no worldthrottling peril.

And just then little Henri Sabarthier came in and saw me. He greeted me with that over-acted lack of demonstrativeness which is the hallmark of Young France (for it is extremely *chic* in Paris to be ultra-British). He took a seat at my table, and ten minutes later my peace of soul had fled and suspicion was once more gray in my soul.

I had mentioned casually the Paris Apaches: and Sabarthier, as a true Parisian, proud not only of his native town's charms, but even of her black sins, smiled delightedly.

"Oh, yes. Those brave Apaches! You have heard, I take it, of the murder of Roland de Miaz?"

I looked up. I was startled.

"Yes. Of course. But what's that got to do with the Apaches?"

"Eh bien, mon vieux, it was an Apache who killed him!"

De Miaz murdered by an Apache! Why, that proved that my mad theory was only a theory after all, a fruit of my own imagination. Killed by an Apache! There was, then, no lodge of Asiatic assassins, linked together to make war on those White Men who would toy with Asia's destinies. I lit a cigarette, and asked for particulars.

"C'est tout-à-fait très rigolo. Je vais vous conter cela. You know of course how this poor de Miaz was found in his library . . . strangled! . . . Imagine, then, the consternation, the sensation, the . . . oh, the crimson excitement of this very dear old town when the old servant of de Miaz tells the police that his master had received a visitor the night of the murder; that he, the servant, had discovered the murder immediately after the visitor had left . . . and that he had recognized the visitor! And this visitor . . . ah, you will not believe me . . . was a gentleman who had no known guarrel with the dead Député, an educated, wealthy, charming man who was not even a Frenchman."

For the moment I was stunned, speechless. Then I asked a question, and I knew and feared the answer even as I asked.

"You are right. But how in the name of all the ten thousand little blue devils did you guess it? The man whom the servant accused was indeed an Oriental, a certain Rai Bahadao Chatterjee, a Hindu of the highest standing. We all know and like him."

"But what about the Apache?"

"Ah, wait! This is the joke . . . c'est à rire. . . Our Hindu is clapped into prison, and kicks but little. He is stoical . . . ah, the true Oriental! For seven days he remains in prison, and then . . . ah, but was it not dramatic, tense, magnificent, worthy of Sardou! . . . comes suddenly a man, a well-known French gentleman who was with Chatterjee at the very hour when he was supposed to have strangled de Miaz, and who had been away at the time of the arrest, and had only just heard of it. Of course the alibi is perfect. The authorities apologize profusely to the Hindu, and release him."

"But what about the Apache? Have they arrested him?"

"Not yet. But soon they will, very soon,

mon vieux. For afterwards, that very great and unspeakable donkey of an ancient servant tells the police that, though positive that the visitor, the murderer, looked exactly like Chatterjee, yet there was one thing . . . ah, a little thing of nothing . . . which gave the real clew to the murderer, and this clew pointed dead away from the Hindu . . . even without the alibi. For the mysterious visitor had a bright scarlet mark painted on his forehead! And then the detectives decide at once that this scarlet mark must be the very childish and very wicked tribal insignia of some gang of ruffians of the Outer Boulevards . . . Apaches, in other words."

I walked back to my hotel, my heart heavy with consideration. Once more the dread of the unknown lifted its flat, venomous head. Here was Sabarthier's tale of the death of de Miaz: and in every particular, from the strangling to the red mark, it was the duplicate of the Kuhne murder. Coincidence? Oh, yes, it's a favorite word, a regular creed with skepticists and mongers of cheap philosophy. But when Coincidence makes it a practice to murder prominent Americans and Europeans, and to smear on its forehead the unclean caste-mark of a Brahmin vampire

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god, then I think it time to throttle that selfsame Coincidence.

The next day was not a pleasant one. I was prey to fear and indecision, to helplessness. For what was I to do? What was I to do?

Here was my self-imposed task, made even more pressing by what the Frenchman had told me. Here was all my pride of race nailed to the crucifix of that unspeakable mystery. Here were threads enough to make the everlasting reputations of half a dozen "criminal investigators" of fiction. But did any of these threads help me to weave a fabric of the whole? Could I go to Lepeletier, the Chief of the Paris Police, and say to him, "Arrest this man and that, for this and that crime has been committed"?

And even suppose I had gone to Lepeletier, and told him my tale and my vague, dread suspicions! What would have happened then? He would have received me with Gallic politeness. He would have listened to me patiently, with the calm serenity of a mitered cardinal. He would have dismissed, very civilly of course, both myself and my tale, as something entirely fantastic. And then, after I had bowed myself from his

suave presence, he would most probably have descanted to his secretary about "That crazy specimen of a twice crazy Yankee," and would have put me under police surveillance to guard the public against any possible violent or homicidal outbreak on my part.

I went for a walk in the afternoon, thinking the crisp, wintry air would clear the cobwebs from my numbed brain. I strolled to that ancient part of Paris which still reeks of feudal fury, and which has so far escaped the tourist in his search for local color and cheap souvenirs.

I was walking along the Quai d'Horloge, and I stopped in front of the Conciergerie. The grim grayness of that old pile seemed to fit my own gray mood. A dirty, whining bundle of rags, whom I took for a beggar, was leaning against the walls, and he seemed to give the final touch to the picture which my mind was conceiving.

For I was a searcher after uncanny and deadly mysteries, a searcher after an awful Indian divinity whose many arms meant Death to the White Men who crossed his path. And here was an old, gray edifice which could tell of more mysteries than even Sue had ever dreamt of. There were damp cells in

the bowels of that ancient pile which had held prisoners . . . Robespierre, the Du Barry, Madame Récamier, Maréchal Ney . . . and some of them had left it only to feel the tooth of the Red Widow, the Guillotine. . . .

Pleasant thoughts. . . .

And then the old beggar detached himself from the wall against which he had been huddled, and walked up to me with an unsteady gait, and touched my arm, tremblingly, shiveringly. I drew back, instinctively. And then the beggar spoke to me . . . in English . . . he called me by name . . . and his voice was the voice of John Loomis.

I am proud of the minutes which followed, very proud indeed. For I asked never a question. I did not consider the crowd which was beginning to gather. (For Loomis suddenly burst out crying like a hysterical woman.) I did not say a word, not an exclamation of surprise. I simply motioned to the next cab that was ambling by. I took that sobbing, whining bundle of rags into my arms, lifted it into the carriage, and told the cabby to speed it up to the Hotel St. James in the Faubourg St. Honoré.

When we arrived at the St. James, I pulled

Loomis' hat deep over his eyes, and steered him rapidly through the gaping crowd in the lobby and past the solicitous clerks and porters. I murmured something about a countryman of mine who had had a motor-car accident, gave an order to a passing waiter, and rushed Loomis up to my room.

He fell into a chair, head forward, legs and arms like nerveless jelly, his whole body like a limp, empty bag. He looked at me with eyes yellow like the bones of the dead, and there was nameless fear in the quiver of his lips. I never liked him. But when I saw that pet of Washington Society sitting there, stripped to the skin of his soul, and shivering in the naked coldness of fear, I felt infinite pity . . . and a touch of clammy horror. Good God, I thought, what had happened to him, happened in twenty-four hours and in the most civilized town in the world, to change this debonair clubman into the likeness of a madman?

The waiter brought the brandy, and I made Loomis drink it. He seemed to fall into a heavy sleep. Then, suddenly, he jumped up with a sharp, throttling cry. His lips tried to shape words, and tried in vain. It was a very nasty and very pitiful spectacle.

Of course I could not call in a doctor. So I did the best I could think of. I undressed him. I gave him a hot bath and massaged him from head to foot. I forced him to swallow some food and a little champagne. Then I gave him a sleeping draught and sat by his bedside, watching. Late at night he awakened, and he seemed to have regained control over his senses and his speech. And then he gave me more or less rational answers.

How did he get to Paris? Had he been in London? He didn't know. The last thing he remembered was saying farewell to Hussain *in the latter's cabin* at Cherbourg. The next thing he remembered was my face. He also recollected coming up to me, and how I had bundled him into a cab. No, he did not know what had happened to him. Not the faintest idea. Oh, yes, now that I reminded him, there were some vague dreams, hazy and entirely crazy. Suddenly he gave a sharp cry.

"Good Lord, Van, the papers, the papers! . . . They're important, what has happened to them? Have I been in London? Did I deliver them?"

He searched through his pockets, fran-

tically, feverishly. And then, with a shout of relief, he drew out a long, blue, officiallooking envelope and slammed it on the table.

"Thank God, they're here! Good Lord, if I had lost them! If anybody had stolen them! If anybody had read them!"

I picked up the envelope. He made as if to take it away from me. But I told him I Had known them in knew their contents. Washington. He needn't worry that he was giving away any secrets to me. I examined the envelope carefully. It seemed intact, and the seal was not broken. But what did that signify? The men who were clever enough to drug Loomis, and to steal his papers, would certainly be clever enough to fake an official U. S. seal. But I did not mention my suspicions to Loomis. He evidently did not suspect Hussain Khan. He simply thought that he had suffered a lapse of memory. Now, he said, he must hurry to London. He had only lost a day after all; and here were the papers, safe, intact. It would be all right.

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To me of course it was evident that Hussain Khan had drugged him. It was suddenly clear that the mysterious servant never did exist.

In a way it was amusing. For Hussain

Khan, that Asian of Asians, had worked with that characteristic cunning of the turbaned lands which, after the trap has been sprung and the end accomplished, suddenly appears in the light of almost childlike simplicity. It reminded me of a saying I had heard in India, years ago:

"He lies exceeding well. For behold; he lies like truth."

Hussain Khan had simply left the ship for a matter of ten minutes; had slipped into Oriental garb somewhere in the vicinity of the Cunard pier: had then returned on board under the guise of his own non-existent servant. When the ship made Cherbourg he had managed to drug Loomis, and to take him ashore as another incarnation of this disappearing servant, sufficiently disguised by burnous and turban. Thence the weakness, the tottering step, the half-dazed condition of the mysterious "Fazl Ali" at the Cherbourg dock and the Paris railway station.

I didn't say a word about it to Loomis. I thought it best to let him stick to his belief that he had temporarily lost his memory: that somehow he had gone ashore and up to Paris, that nobody had read his papers

and that it was still time to run up to London and deliver them there, as originally arranged. If any harm had been done, it was now too late in the day to mend it, and as for my future operations against Hussain Khan and the dread Power whom he served . . . well, a dancing paragon of "The best Southern Society" of Washington would not be much of a help in that sort of a man-hunt!

But when he mentioned the hazy, vague dreams he had had during his blank period, I encouraged him to speak freely. Perhaps he had *dreamt* something in the nature of a clew for me. So I told him that I took a deep interest in that sort of psychic phenomena. By this time he was more or less his old, conceited self. He rather fancied himself a bit of a hero with a startlingly unusual experience. He was pleased at my curiosity.

"You see, old man, I don't remember how the whole dashed thing started. There was good old Hussain saying good-by to me. Did I tell you that we had a little farewell dram in his stateroom? Well . . . then a blank, a perfect blank. I've a hazy idea that I was walking, then riding in a cab, and then I seemed to be in a strange room with barred windows, undressed, on a couch, and people ar

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all about me. Damned queer beggars, those! Some looked like Japs. Others like Hindus. And there was a tall old guy who looked like Then I seemed to see good old a Manchu. Hussain! Funny, isn't it? I even dreamt I called him by name: but somebody forced a liquid down my throat. Well . . . shortly afterwards I had another dream. And what I saw struck fear into my heart . . . yes, sir, regular, shivering black fear. For I was in the middle of an East Indian temple, the sort you see in photographs . . . and there were priests moving about, with green turbans and red marks on their foreheads . . . and all sorts of Asiatic chaps coming in and out, and chattering like so many dashed monkeys. Then again everything seemed dim and vague. Gross blots of darkness seemed all around me, swelling and dwindling. And they frightened me. For they were alive . . . these blots . . . they respired and pulsated and wavered and bloated . . . like images in a pool of water. Then I thought that somebody was bending over me, a Jap by the look of him: and other Japs crowded round: and they all talked very excitedly, evidently wondering how the devil I got there, and what the devil they should do with me. One

of them was an old man with a scraggly white beard, and a wrinkled yellow face, like a photo of some old Buddhist abbot. And he seemed to take a particular exception to me. For he kept pointing at me and repeating the same word over and over again. I didn't know what the word meant. But, by Gad, it didn't sound good to me."

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"I should say so. He said it over and over again. . . . Hitogoroshi . . . hitogoroshi . . . hitogoroshi . . . dozens and dozens of times. Well, all at once he drew a short. wicked dagger and made a pass at my throat. And even in my dream I remember trembling convulsively. And then . . . just think what crazy dreams a fellow can have . . . I saw Hussain. I saw him just as clear as you're sitting there. He stopped the bloodthirsty old Jap, and said in English . . . in English, mind you, with that same old drawling voice of his: 'Never mind, never mind. He is a senseless pig, harmless, and not worthy to be sacrificed.' . . . Imagine old Hussain calling me a senseless pig! . . . Now what the deuce can you make of such a dream?"

The next morning Loomis left for London. I promised him I wouldn't say a word about

the affair to anybody. He would deliver the papers at the embassy and cook up some sort of tale to explain the delay.

If the documents had been read they had not been used so far. For there wasn't a word in the cable news about trouble in the Islands, as there would have been if the story of the international bargain had leaked out and had been communicated by Hussain and his associates to the Filipino Nationalist *juramentados*.

I thought over Loomis' "dreams," and the more I thought of them the less I could make of them. Part of them seemed rational enough . . . for instance the stuff they poured down his throat (more drug, of course), the presence of Hussain, and the shout of the old Jap with the dagger . . . hitogoroshi . . . hitogoroshi . . . which I knew to mean Kill, Murder, in Japanese. But how account for the priests with the scarlet caste-marks, and for the Hindu temple in Paris? Yet Loomis had seen the temple in his "dreams," and it was evident that they had been about to sacrifice him when Hussain, for a reason of his own which I understood later on, interfered and saved his life. But a temple in Europe, and of all towns, in

Paris, where the police keep the closest tab on anybody who looks or acts suspicious! I made careful inquiries at one or two tourist agencies if such a thing as an East Indian place of worship existed in the Gay City. But they told me No. Had never heard of it. Were positive about it.

The next day Loomis wired me that he had delivered the papers at our London embassy. Then two more days passed, and on the third came the news of that frightful blood-bath of the second of January, which crimsoned the streets of Manila and staggered the whole world.

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It seemed that the whole Filipino nation was running amuck. Americans, men, women, and children, were slaughtered like dogs, from Luzon to Ilo-Ilo. The soldiers had been overwhelmed as by an avalanche. The Governor had been crucified in front of his own palace. The army was being rushed from the Presidio, from Seattle, from Honolulu. Every naval vessel was hurrying across the Pacific.

The bargain with England was off, naturally. John Bull would not exchange a peaceful, prosperous island for a turbulent dependency in the throes of rebellion. Then

the radical papers clamored for peace. Let the Filipinos alone! Withdraw Government and Army! No bloodshed! They had seen what war had done to Europe. They were sick and tired of the clash of arms. Give the Filipinos their cherished independence, and be damned to it!

I understood then why Hussain had spared Loomis, and I marveled at his cleverness. Hussain was a judge of character. He had guessed that Loomis would somehow regain his bearing and find the papers intact. He had also rightly guessed that he would think first of all of his official skin, rush to London, and turn over the papers without a word about his strange adventure. Hussain had carefully waited until the papers had been delivered. Only then had he given the signal to his associates in the Philippines. So, if there was talk of treachery at all, it would be evident to Government that it had been committed after the transfer of the papers. So what was there to point the finger of guilt at himself or at any other harmless Asian gentleman in Europe?

But I was rent to my soul.

Waking and sleeping, I seemed to see a Trinity of awful, obscene Hindu gods, sit-

ting motionless and erect . . . and presiding over them the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms, perhaps Vishnu himself, in his four hands the conch, the mace, the discus, and the lily . . . brooding on the smoking holocausts of the crimson past, and suddenly awake again to new murders, new sacrifices . . . serving him, priests from all Asia, with scarlet caste-marks . . . not only in India, but even in Europe, even in America . . . prying and listening and watching, and ever sharpening the dagger which kills, and tightening the rope which strangles!

The deaths of Kuhne, of de Miaz, von Pless, and Rivet-Carnac had only been a foretaste to prick the tongue and set it longing. Now, in the streets of Manila, and in every town and hamlet of the Philippines, there were mountains of dead White flesh, a sacrifice to the secret god. And this flesh would lift up a warning cry that would ring over the world, and leave behind it eternal echoes of gray, choking horror!

More horrors would follow. Asia would continue to exact toll. That much I guessed, no . . . I knew. But what was I to do?

For a moment I thought of taking the law into my own hands, of killing Hussain. But

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then I saw the futility of trying to wash out blood with blood. And Hussain was evidently only a unit in an army. There were others. So what good would the death of the one do?

It would have been easy enough to find and kill him. He made no secret of his visit to Paris. The Society columns of the press recorded his movements. He was well known, not only in the Foreign Colony, but also in the exclusive sets of the Faubourg St. Germain.

I met him the day following the Manila Massacre.

I was standing at a kiosk on the corner of the Boulevard and the Rue Rougemont, reading the headlines of the Paris *Herald*. He saw me, stopped, and asked me what was interesting me so. Then I did a rash, indiscreet thing. I lost my temper. I pointed at the headlines, *More Americans Murdered*. *Horrors Grow Every Hour*, and I said:

"Here's what is interesting me. This wholesale killing has those small affairs beat a mile, don't you think?"

"What small affairs?"

"Oh, you know . . . Kuhne, . . . and de Miaz . . . and . . ."

He stared at me. A shock seemed to pass through him, a sudden leap of many passions. It passed and left no trace, except a certain nervous twitching of the eyelids. And then, because he despised me, because he thought me a fool and a weakling who had stumbled on dangerous knowledge, he made the first mistake, the mistake which led me to the Strange Club at Marly-le-Roi, and to Cajetano Maria Mascasenhas, most valuable of aids.

He laughed, showing his white teeth.

"You know what we say in the Arabic: Idhkur idh-Dhib wahayay lahu il-hadil . . . "if you think of the wolf, get ready the stick for him.""

"Yes, Hussain, a corking good advice. But where shall I find the wolf . . . to hit him . . . to kill him?"

Hussain was still intent on showing me his contempt, and instead of checking himself, he continued:

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"Where, my friend? I don't know what you are driving at. But take care, take care!" His voice sank to a harsh whisper. "Somewhere there's a temple . . . and in that temple there is a god . . . a god with long arms . . . arms which reach . . . arms

which strangle . . . arms of All Asia. . . .''

I interrupted him, speaking slowly, deliberately.

### "Invincibly Strong Arms?"

He laughed, loudly, riotously.

"Yes, my clever American friend . . . invincibly strong arms indeed. . . ."

He made me a bow, and hailed a passing taxicab, while I walked back to my hotel, repeating to myself, over and over again: "Somewhere there's a temple . . . somewhere there's a temple . . . ."

Well, I thought, I had to find that temple. That was the first item on the programme.

How I would accomplish it I didn't know. I only knew that I must deracinate that occult and nauseating evil. Somewhere there was a foul, blood-smeared temple, where the destinies of four hundred million White Men were concentered. Mine own duty to find it!

It was then that I apologized for all the ridicule which I had been wont to heap on the detectives of fiction. For I decided to emulate their seasoned precepts. I would shadow Hussain until I had discovered how and where he passed his time. And I started that very night. I knew through the papers where he lived. With the help of a faked

telephone call I found out that he was at home, and I seated myself in a café across from his hotel.

I didn't have to wait long. Ten minutes later he came from the hotel, and with him Komoto, a lecturer in Japanese at the Paris Oriental Seminary. I was shocked to see him. For I had known him during the years I spent over my Oriental studies. He had formerly been a bonze of the Nichiren sect, had made the sengaji pilgrimage to the thousand shrines, and was one of the foremost exponents of Buddhism. And here was this follower of the most peace-loving Buddhist sect banded together with a fierce Central Asian Moslim, whose faith was the sword and the torch. And could it be possible that these two adherents of opposing faiths were bound for a temple of that Hinduism which they both hated by the right of race and tradition?

I shadowed them, carefully keeping at a safe distance. At the Seine they boarded one of the steamers which ply continuously up and down that river of light. I followed. They didn't see me.

They got off at Marly-le-Roi (it was then nearly midnight) and turned north, through

the sleeping streets of the suburb. I was nervous and frightened. The streets seemed to echo upon my passage with a ghostly, warning jar, and I was afraid they would turn and see me. I knew that Hussain would not stop at murder. I was unarmed, and no match for his steely strength. But that night Providence was rooting for Stuart Vandewater.

They stopped in front of an old villa, surrounded by a garden wall about seven feet in height. The gate was opened immediately, a sure sign that the lodge porter was on the lookout for them. The gate closed behind them, and I stepped quickly into the inky shadow of the opposite villa, as I heard footsteps up the street. Half a dozen men were approaching, and I could see their features clearly in the rays of the wintry moon.

The first two looked like Khivans or Sarts. The third I knew. It was Dhihal Singh, the notorious Bengalee seditionist, who, driven from India, was editing a revolutionary sheet in Paris. I was startled when I saw who was walking by his side. For it was the young Rajah of Fattehpor, England's most loyal son, Oxford-bred, a former member of the Sussex Eleven, more British than the Beef-

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eaters in the Tower, and a much heralded example of what European education can do to an Oriental if you catch him young. But here he was, arm in arm with a venomous Babu whose very sword-arm ached at the sight of the Cross. The fifth was another "Westernized" Oriental, an Osmanli Turk who had lived abroad a lifetime, and who was famed for his faultless French.

I didn't know what to make of the last Dark-skinned, smooth-complexioned, man. he was evidently also an Asian. But there was something about him which seemed less East-of-Suez, less racially repellent and hostile-to call the child by its proper namethan was the case with the others. Suddenly I knew what he was: he was an Eurasian, probably a Goanese of mixed Portuguese and And knowing the sharp line Hindu stock. which these people draw between themselves and the natives, I marveled at the strength of the occult Power which seemed to draw together not only Moslim, Buddhists, and Hindus, but even the devout Christians of Portuguese India, who for centuries have proudly clung to their pitiful shreds of Aryan racial pride and customs . . . including the respectable prejudices.

I waited for an hour in the shadow of the wall. But no more came, and I thought it safe to leave my post. I strolled slowly down the street, wondering by what subterfuge I could see the inside of the villa, and frightened to my soul at the very idea. At the corner I met a friendly gendarme. He was in a communicative mood and answered my casual inquiry.

"Ah, you must be a stranger at Marly-le Roi. That villa is a club of Oriental gentlemen. They call it 'L'Association du Bras Invincible.' Ah, these Orientals and their flowery language. It's an athletic club. They box and wrestle there. And so they call it the association of the invincible arm!"

He walked off laughing, while I returned to the villa, smiling at the grim humor of these Asian murderers who had named thus the temple of *the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms*, and had officially registered their infamous lodge under a lying mask of stark truth.

I studied the house carefully. It was dark, with the exception of a long, thin slit of yellow light from a second story window, broadening at the base, like a pointed finger. It was evident that a blind was partly open,

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and that if I could get on a dead line with it I would be able to see the interior. I made a quick decision. Just in front of the window stood a gaunt pine tree which planted its black, lank arms sharp against the sky, like a herald of evil.

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I am fairly athletic, and it didn't take me long to get over the wall and up the tree. There was a stout branch at a convenient angle toward the house. I sat down, quite comfortably, and looked.

There were a dozen men in the room beside Hussain, Komoto, and those I had seen in the street. Some looked like Hindu, Algerian, and Arab students. Others I remembered as attachés of the various Oriental embassies. They were conversing animatedly, and so far there was nothing strange about the gathering. It seemed indeed like a club. The only odd thing was that there were no tables, no chairs, not even a divan. They were all standing up.

At the farther end of the room a huge, black curtain descended from ceiling to floor.

I sat in the tree for several minutes, and I was getting tired. Then that happened which made me forget my stiff limbs.

For from somewhere in the bowels of the

house came the deep-booming, ominous sound of a Chinese gong. Four times repeated, it bristled the hair on my neck and set my very soul on edge.

With the first rubbing of the gong, every man in the room, Hindu, Moslim, Buddhist, Christian from Goa, and what-not, dropped on their knees before that infernal curtain and prostrated. Was this then really a temple? Was Loomis' "dream" an actual occurrence?

The gong sounded again, more strident, more ominous. A door in the wall to the left opened, and a tall, bearded man, dressed in black robe and black turban, entered, followed by two others, robed in scarlet. And scarlet also were the caste-marks on their foreheads.

The head-priest, for such he seemed to be, walked up to the curtain and drew it aside.

And there, in that little villa of peaceful Marly-le-Roi, in the heart of civilized Europe, I beheld a giant, black basalt statue of *Doorgha*, the dread Indian goddess. There was no doubt of it. I had seen its twin at Benares. Here were the same thick, bloodred, sensuous lips, the same ghastly, cruel smile, the same glaring, fiendish eyes, the

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same choking, strangling fingers . . . here was the same beastly Emblem of Obscenity and Lust and Destruction! Here was that unspeakable Representation of the Mysteries and the Cruelties of Life which the Hindus are pleased to call Religion, Religion!

I saw the lips of the priests move as in an incantation, and a shiver seemed to pass through the worshiping crowd.

It was all over in a minute. The priest pulled back the curtain and the men filed out of the room, their heads on their breasts, as if in deep meditation. Only Hussain Khan and the Goanese remained.

I sat there in my tree, trying to believe that I had seen this thing with my living, waking eyes: that it was not a foul nightmare. Had I really seen it? Had I seen men from all Asia, of different religions and races, Moslim, Goanese Christian, and Buddhist, do worship in front of a heathen Hindu goddess? Was it possible? Good Lord, was it possible?

And if it was, what was the occult Power which forced such a chain around their necks? For I knew Hussain for an orthodox Moslim, and Komoto for a devout Buddhist. I knew the "Westernized" Osmanli to be a jeering

agnostic of the blackest dye. And here I had seen them kowtowing before Brahmin priests!

I had indeed discovered the temple for which I was searching. But the mystery was only made the deeper, the more inscrutable.

I was about to descend from my tree, when I saw the men come from the house, pass through the garden, and up the street, by twos and threes.

Hussain Khan and the half-caste were still in the room. Hussain Khan was speaking in a careless, nonchalant manner. I could tell by his lazy gestures, by the slow movement of his jaws. And the Goanese was looking at him.

I did not like that look. I liked it all the less when I remembered that the man was a Christian, and half, perhaps three-fourths, white. For it was a look of most abject, cringing fear. And when Hussain Khan turned to go, the Goanese bowed low from his waist and kissed the other's hand.

I stifled an angry exclamation. I know the Orient . . . a little. I know that White should not bow to Brown.

Then Hussain Khan left. A minute later

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I saw him come from the house, pass through the garden, and walk up the street.

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The Goanese was alone in the room.

First he looked at the door which Hussain Khan had closed behind him. He lifted his clenched fists high above his head, in a terrible threatening gesture. Then he spread out his hands, to close them again, slowly, slowly, strainingly, with a horrible clutching gesture as if strangling an unseen, hated enemy. A deep light welled up in his eyes.

But suddenly the old look of fear came back again. His hands unclenched and dropped weakly, nervelessly to his sides.

He opened a little cupboard and took out a broom and a dust-pan. He commenced sweeping the room. It was evident that he was the caretaker.

When he came in front of the black, leering statue of *Doorgha*, an insane shiver passed through the man. He dropped broom and dust-pan. He clutched at his shirt, his hair, his eyes with tearing fingers. And then he shrieked . . . on the top of his lungs. My Lord, how he shrieked! It went through me like a knife.

Then he backed away from the statue, shielding his face with his arms. . . .

It was then that I did a strange thing, obeying a strange impulse. Often since that night I have thought that it was a fine, sweet white impulse. Often since that night I have thanked the Master-Hand which forced me to do what I did: which used me as an instrument.

But first let me make a little confession.

I have never been a very religious man. I am of church-going ancestry, and somehow I have kept up the habit. But it was only a habit: like shaving, or using a toothbrush. As to religion as such? . . . I am afraid that I swallowed it as a man swallows the pills which the doctor prescribes: without troubling much about their contents. And so the Cross, that sacred, central emblem of our Faith, has never meant more to me than an appropriate bit of church decoration, of ecclesiastical ornament.

Still . . . I suppose that in the hidden stratum, the soul stratum of every man, there is the shadow of the zealot, of the missionary.

And there, before me, I saw a Goanese, a Christian, a man half White, trembling in abject fear before a cruel, lust-scabbed, Manmade Hindu idol.

I was shocked, shocked deep down in that soul stratum of mine. There was that residue of missionary zeal in my heart. Also I felt pity.

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I remembered what the Goanese are. I thought of their racial pride, their pitiful endeavors to act, to speak, to think, and to be thought All White. I also remembered that, since the day on which the Portuguese first set foot on the Indian Peninsula, their Goanese descendants have been the bulwark and the farthest outpost of Christianity, devout Christianity, in Asia. Thus I guessed that even in the soul of that renegade whom I had seen doing worship at the feet of *Doorgha*, there must be a residue of ancient racial prejudice, saving prejudice, like the golden bead at the bottom of the blackened crucible.

And mine to find it! Mine to touch his petrified soul!

The Cross, I said to myself; the Cross of our Saviour; the Cross which the Portuguese brought into India. . . .

Again I looked into the room. Still the renegade was shielding his eyes from that dread heathen idol.

Then I acted, quickly, quickly.

I broke two long twigs from the branch of the tree which supported me, and, with the help of my scarf-pin, fastened them together in the shape of a cross. Carefully I slid along to the very end of the stout branch; I flung myself up and over to the broad sill of the window which looked into the room. It was a bit shaky up there. But luck was with me that night.

The Goanese was still in the same position. I tapped at the glass. Once . . . twice . . . three times . . . a low, insistent tapping.

He looked toward the window. He turned his back to the statue of *Doorgha*.

Then he saw the Cross, the rude cross which I had bent together from two twigs and fastened with my scarf-pin. But he . . . he saw it as an emblem, not as an object manmade . . . the emblem he had been silently, chokingly praying for, perhaps.

It stood out against the glass in bold, stark relief. For a low moon was hanging in the sky, like a crimson, bloated paper lantern: and it suffused the cross with an eerie, unearthly light.

He did not see me. He only saw the cross. And slowly he came toward it, as one who sees the white light of salvation shining in

a dark house. His hands were lifted high in supplication.

He was near the window.

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Again I tapped. I pressed my lips to the glass. I spoke.

"Open. Open, brother."

His hand reached up, with a peculiar, rigid, automatic gesture, as if propelled by a force which was not of his body. He opened the window.

I dropped into the room.

I put my left hand on his shoulder, while my right held high the cross. I spoke in a low voice.

"We are White men, You and I, brother. White men we are, and Christians . . . both of us . . ." I continued loudly . . . "BOTH OF US."

It was then that he realized that I was not an apparition. He touched my coat, my hands; he looked at me. Then his hands went up to the cross. He whispered.

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"White men . . . Christians . . . both . . . both of us." He turned the least little bit away from me. "White men . . . Christians . . . you . . . and I . . . ." again, so low that I could hardly hear it: with a pitiful, questioning inflection, "and I . . . I . . .?"

He turned still more away from me, to the right. And suddenly he saw that black, leering idol of cruelty and lust and destruction at the farther end of the room. He ran to it. He shrieked.

"No . . . no . . ." He threw himself on the ground before the statue. "Doorgha . . . Doorgha . . . thou great Mother. . . ."

The man was in a paroxysm of fear. Foam flecked his lips. I decided on heroic measures.

I walked up to him and touched him with my foot. I laughed.

"Playing comedy, old man? Theatricals? Cheap slapstick stuff? What the devil's the matter with you? Cut it out."

I stood up between him and the idol. I laughed again.

"Nasty, ugly, meaningless lump of stone ..." I took out my cigarette case, selected a cigarette: then I struck a match, nonchalantly, on the shining black legs of the statue, and lit my cigarette. "Have one?" I held my case out to him.

He looked at me. First there was a film of fear, horrible fear over his brown-purple eyes. A sacrilege, a sacrilege! Fear gave way to surprise, and suddenly . . . I shall

never forget the sound of it . . . he broke into laughter . . . mad, mad, ringing laughter. He pushed me to one side. With one jump he was up on the knees of the goddess. There he stood, waving his arms into the air.

Then he shouted.

"Nasty, ugly, meaningless lump of stone ... nasty, ugly, meaningless lump of stone. ... Ugh. ...."

And he spat straight into the thick, sensuous mouth of the goddess.

There was deep silence for a while. Finally he dropped to the ground. He clasped my hand in his, nervously, convulsively.

Then he spoke, with a low, choking voice.

"We are White Men . . . Christians . . . both of us. . . ." He paused for a moment, and continued with a strange, pitiful thrill of pride. "Yes. I also am a Christian. I also am a White Man."

It was thus that I met Cajetano Maria Mascasenhas, Goanese, White Man, Christian, for all the Hindu blood in his veins.

And it was with his help that I drew nearer by a step in my quest after the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms.

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#### THE LIVING CORPSE

THERE are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told, and which, if they be told, leave the heart of the listener sere and palsied, shaking the naked skeleton of his soul like loose pebbles in a bag.

Of such a fabric was the tale of Cajetano Maria Mascasenhas.

An incredible story? . . . Possibly so. . . .

But then Mascasenhas was from Goa, with a good many drops of Hindu blood in his veins. And I myself have lived in the Orient too long to doubt what I cannot understand or explain away. I know that the fantastic, mind-clogging stories which are whispered in the tortuous bazaars of Benares are often truer than the simple, gray-and-pink tales which are told beneath the Evening Star of cooler, sweeter lands.

That night, when I met him subsequent to my discovery of the Temple at Marly-le-Roi, which is the Holiest of Holies to the "West-

ernized" Asians who are waging a secret war of murder in Europe and in America, I was elated. I had not prevented the kidnapping of Loomis, nor the massacre of Whites in the Philippines which followed it. But I had found a grain of success. I had discovered the Temple, and I had successfully bluffed the Goanese into a realization of what he owed to his Portuguese name, to his White blood. He had responded to the call of the blood and of the ancient, swinging centuries. He, the renegade, had clung to my hand when I had spoken to him of the ties, the traditions, the responsibilities, which rightly or wrongly go with the Occidental heritage.

I meant to forge him into a weapon with which to fight *the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms.* And so I was anxious to hear from his own lips why he should play the renegade, why he obeyed slavishly the commands of Hussain Khan, the Central Asian, the Moslim fanatic, and why, being a Christian, he should make worship to *Doorgha*, the black-faced goddess of destruction, and kowtow before the scarlet-marked priests who sacrifice to her.

He told me. And ever since I have been

groping about in a nebulous luster of clammy, unspeakable things.

I was for taking him to my hotel in the Rue St. Honoré then and there. But he shivered with abject fear. He looked about the garden (we had left the temple by this time) with fright-yellowed eyes, as if the lank, stark branches of the fir trees had ears.

"No, no," he whispered. "I do not dare. Give me your name and address. I'll write to you."

I was insistent.

"Why not to-night?"

There was the palsy of terror in his answering voice.

"No, no . . . there's Hussain . . . Hussain Khan. I am afraid. Give me your name and address. Hurry, for the sake of the Madonna. I must be off. The others will miss me . . . they will suspect . . ."

I had also thought of the other conspirators who, ignorant of my presence, had walked ahead. But still I hesitated. Could I trust him? Had I any reason to trust him? Would not his new-found Christianity fly away again as soon as he left my side, as soon as he came once more under the baneful influence of the Central Asian? He read my unspoken

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thoughts. He continued, and the words seemed to choke him.

"Do not be afraid. Hussain is the master over my body . . . over my soul, may the dear Madonna of Guadalupe intercede for my salvation! But I hate him. I tell you I hate him. I would . . . I would . . . I cannot put my hatred into words, into thoughts." His voice came with a terrible, earnest, suppressed throb. "Every night I pray to God that there is a Hell . . . so he will go there, Hussain Khan, for all eternity." He paused, then he continued quietly: "You can trust me."

I did. I gave him my name and address. And three days later, days of impatience and drab worry, I received a letter from him.

"Come to me to-morrow at three in the afternoon. I live at the house of Madame Lajeunesse, No. 12a Villa des Ternes, near the Boulevard of the same name.

"CAJETANO MARIA MASCASENHAS."

I was there punctually at three. The Quartier des Ternes is just a pleasant half-hour's stroll from the Rue St. Honoré; and so I left

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fairly early. I enjoyed my walk. I have always had a great liking for that grave old quarter which smells reminiscently of the Restoration and the Second Republic, of Alfred de Musset and the birth of the new Romanticism.

The Villa des Ternes proved to be a street of old villas surrounded by tangled gardens, opening from the boulevard. It was roared about on all sides by the high tide of the newest Paris; but was itself steeped in the gloom of the dead years . . . like the lavender scent of a bit of age-yellowed Mechlin lace.

The lady of the house opened the door. She was very evidently a Provincial; and just as evidently the widow of a burgess in genteel but slightly reduced circumstances.

"Monsieur Mascasenhas has not yet returned. But please go to his apartment. I know that he has given you rendez-vous."

She showed me up to his room, opened the door, and pointed at the furnishings with a certain pride.

"They're all his own. Ah, he is a gentleman of wealth and taste. Il est bien, tout-àfait très bien."

She bobbed a curtsey in the manner of the late seventies, and left me to my reflections

and to the contemplation of the Eurasian's taste in interior decorations.

And in a way I was glad that Mascasenhas was not there. For I had time to look about the apartment. And what surer clew to a man's character than an intimate look at the milieu he affects and the books he reads?

There were many piled on the center table, and they showed a soul in travail. For, cheek by jowl with an Urdu edition of the Lila Shastra—most infamous of East Indian books—I found a copy of Voltaire's "Zadig" and that noble German drama, "Nathan der Weise." There was Houston Stewart Chamberlain's work about the Aryan races, and next to it an ancient hand-written copy of the Vedas. There was Syyed Ameer Ali's volume on the Spirit of Islam, rubbing shoulders with thin pamphlets from the pens of Clavijo, da Castro, and Victor van Tricht, all of the Society of Jesus.

A crazy mixture of reading matter . . . but they were all well thumbed, their margins covered with notes in a cramped handwriting. They had been read and re-read, and they indicated a neurotic, nervous, uncertain temperament . . . yet a thinking temperament.

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And the furnishings were as the books. They also were expressive of the curse of the half-caste, the man who is a renegade to whatever cause he espouses . . . renegade to one-half of his blood whatever way he turns.

It was a great apartment, looking on the tangled, flaunting gardens of the Villa des Ternes with four tall windows, and joined by a curtain-screened doorway to the next The walls were hung with peacockroom. green silk, and on the floor was a magnificent Royal Bokhara rug . . . a poem in deep browns and orange and old rose. So far everything seemed in good taste, in keeping with each other, and even the furniture of heavy, inlaid, carved Chinese tulip-wood was not out of place. But then my eyes lit on a majestic, severe Quattrocento mantelpiece of tinted marbles . . . a crass, discordant note . . . and worse still were two low English chairs, of an Adam pattern, covered with flowered chintz.

It was indeed a fit milieu for a half-caste, its warring styles rising flush with the warring strains of blood in the man's veins.

I pulled aside the curtains which screened the doorway and looked into the other room. I drew back with a little shout of surprise.

Judging from the luxury of the front room I had expected to see a luxuriant sleeping chamber. But here was just a common lodging-house bedroom, with green baize to the windows, the regulation bureau, the heavy stoneware basin and pitcher, the gray, lifeless mirror, and white-enameled, iron bed.

I stepped inside. There was a crucifix over the bed, and below it a flail, such as I have seen in Rajputana . . . a short, stout, wooden stick, and tied to it a thick piece of rhinoceros skin, shaped like a huge hand, and studded with sharp brass nails.

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I shuddered when I looked at the infernal thing. I took it from its nail and examined it . . . and it was clotted with blood, fresh blood. . . .

I don't know how long I looked at the beastly thing, I was so deep in thought. But suddenly Mascasenhas stood beside me. He took the flail gently from my hand and put it back on its nail. I murmured a confused, embarrassed apology. But he smiled.

"No, no. Do not apologize. Why shouldn't you look about my rooms? You are my guest. What is mine, is yours."

He bowed courteously, in the old-fashioned

Portuguese manner, and, as he did so, the Hindu seemed to drop away from him.

He held the curtain aside.

"Come into the other room, and make yourself comfortable. . . The little flail interests you? . . . You saw the blood on it? . . . Ah, I shall satisfy your curiosity. . . . I shall tell you everything . . . everything. . . . "

We sat down. Twice he cleared his throat, about to speak. But every time something seemed to choke him, and there was a haunted look in his eyes which moved me to pity. When words came to his mouth at last, they were calm, conventional . . . not a very good beginning, I thought.

"I'm so sorry I've kept you waiting."

He offered me his cigarette case. There was a tense, heavy silence. I was getting angry. I had an idea he was trying to hedge. So I made a random shot.

"You just come from Marly-le-Roi?"

"Yes."

"Another meeting at that temple of iniquities?"

He didn't answer. He seemed terribly ill at ease. His lips twitched. His eyes narrowed and widened in turns. Fear and

horror and bitter regret passed over his features in waves. He kept on looking around, as if he were afraid of listeners. It got on my nerves.

"For heaven's sake, Mascasenhas, stop your squirming and fidgeting. There's nobody listening."

And I walked over to the window and pulled the curtains wide apart.

"There's nobody . . . just the garden . . . and a few sparrows."

The man was positively uncanny. He clenched his hands, opened them again, passed them across forehead and eyes, while his teeth chattered and clicked. He whispered:

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"He can hear . . . across the distances . . . there's nothing hidden to him . . . nothing . . . I am afraid. . . ."

The situation was becoming unbearable. The man wasn't all White, and here was that residue of Hindu blood and Hindu superstition raising the devil within him. I had to do something. I had to get that story out of his system by fair means or foul. I tried the fair means first. I took the bull by the horns.

"Look here, old man, and pardon my

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American directness. But when two men ... two White Men ... " and I laid a meaning stress on the two words, "meet as you and I have met, on the verge of a great mystery, a great crime, the greatest in the world's history, then it's up to us to forget the usual cant we are burdened with, to drop that useless ballast of so-called manners and circumspect politeness. I'm going to talk straight. And you can't bluff me with any make-believe dope . . . any stinking, rotten superstition like that last one you tried to pull on me . . . about somebody listening to you across the distances, as you put it. You can't bluff me. I call your hand."

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"You're a renegade, and you know it. But then I met you. Maybe it was Providence. Anyway, I met you, and I asked you to remember that you're a White Man. All right. You remembered. You gave me this rendezvous. And so I'm here, and I want your help. I want you to tell me all you know about that gang of Oriental criminals to which you belong."

He looked at me intently.

"How much do you know?"

"Enough to justify the blackest suspicions,

more than enough to justify my questions. I know that Senator Kuhne was murdered by an Asian the night after his anti-Japanese speech. I know that de Miaz was killed in exactly the same way, by an unknown assassin who had a scarlet caste-mark on his forehead. I'm convinced that Pless and Rivet-Carnac were done away with by the same agency, for the same reason, and presumably in the same fashion. I know that Hussain drugged and kidnapped Loomis, and that he gave the signal for the outbreak of the Filipino rebellion. Then I went on the trail, and I found your Temple at Marly-le-Roi. I hid in a tree and watched some of the ceremonies. To my consternation I saw a statue of the goddess Doorgha, and adherents of fine, clean, one-God religions, Moslim and Buddhists, kowtowing in front of that cursed Hindu idol, bending their knees to priests who were smeared with the scarlet mark of the most cruel and most exclusive Brahmin sacerdotal caste. I saw all this, and I said to myself that, after all, these men were Asians, every one of them, and in spite of their different races and creeds, banded together to wage a private and secret war against those Europeans and Americans who

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try to interfere in the destinies of Asia . . . men like Kuhne and de Miaz . . . or like Loomis, the President's Confidential Messenger who carried the papers which spelt an end to the Filipino dream of independence. All that I can understand in a way. But then I find you, a Christian, a man more than half White, a man of European traditions . . . I find you linked to this same fraternity of assassins. And I want to know the reason why."

Mascasenhas lit a cigarette. He inhaled deeply.

"I shall tell you. I shall answer your question. And the answer is the story of my life. And you will not believe it . . . the story of my life . . . from the day I first met Hussain . . . to the day of my death."

I interrupted him with a laugh.

"Not so fast, old man. You aren't dead yet."

He looked straight at me. There was dull, gray seriousness in his voice as he answered:

"I am dead. I have been dead these four years."

I rose from my chair. I made a gesture of annoyance, of disgust. I spoke harshly.

"Look here. What sort of opiate vapors are you giving me?"

He smiled, slowly, gravely.

"I warned you that you would not believe me. But do not interrupt me. Let me tell my own tale in my own way. Then you can draw whatever conclusions you wish.

"You called me a White Man. You are right. My father was a Mascasenhas . . . Leopold Aloysius Mascasenhas. His mother's father was a Mercado; my mother's father a Lyon-d'Sousa . . . honorable old Portuguese names, every one of them. I know that there is Hindu blood in me . . . a few drops of Ghuzheratee, a few of Mahratti . . . I have cousins by the name of Sen-Gupta and Nowajee. But still . . . you would never guess it, would you? I look All White, do I not?"

I looked at him, at his smooth, umber skin, his purplish-black eyes, his thick, inky hair. Then I lied.

"Of course you do. What a question!"

The half-caste smiled a smile of childish satisfaction.

"I went to school in India, then in Portugal and in France. Then to Berlin, to the Friedrich Wilhelm University, to study chem-

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istry. I was lonely there. There were a few Indians attending the same classes. There was Syyed Ghulam Achmed, and Shar Mahomet Zubair . . . both Moslim . . . and there was also Krishna Pathmanathan, the Brahmin. But I am from Goa, a Portuguese, a good Catholic. I could not chum with these brown men. So I went to live with men of my own race, with White Men, in a pension in the Dahlmann Strasse, near the Charlottenburger Bahnhof. A widow kept the house, a Mrs. Grosser . . . and men of many European nations boarded there. There was Dr. Pugnia from Turin, and McKerr-Kaston, the Scotchman, and a number of Russians, and a few Americans. But it seemed that they did not like me." He smiled a pathetic, reminiscent smile. "Perhaps as I thought the Indians too brown for my taste, so was I too brown for these Europeans. . . . Once one of the Americans called me nigger."

He looked at me, and I was rather embarrassed. I could feel for the unknown American: but, on the other hand, I could also feel for the half-caste. So I said nothing. Mascasenhas continued:

"Finally Hussain came to Berlin, and to my pension . . . via India, Eton, and Oxford . . .

a fine, tall man . . . but you know him. You have seen him. The others . . . the . . . the Europeans . . . even the Americans . . . did not seem to object to him, as they did to me. And yet, I am of Portuguese stock, and he . . . he's a pure-bred Asiatic . . . a Tartar . . . a Mohammedan . . . an infidel. But they liked him. And I believe . . . yes, I believe they were afraid of him."

I nodded. I know the feeling Hussain inspires in strangers. He does not look like a man whom it is safe to slight or to insult.

"Then came happy days for me. Hussain befriended me. He took me everywhere. He taught me many things. I thought him wonderful, and he *was* wonderful. Like a god he seemed to know all things and all sensations, but to have suffered nothing. There was no scar on his soul. And I gave to him my heart. I loved him. How do the Hindus say?...'I cherished him as Paracarika cherished Sakha, the god of ruddy color.'"

He rose, and walked up and down. I did not answer a word. What could I say? I myself knew the terrible fascination which surrounded the Central Asian, like a dangerously sweet, lascivious perfume. C

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Mascasenhas sat down again, and resumed his tale.

"I told you that he was popular with the people at the *pension* Grosser. It was the same with everybody he met. He would take me to the cafés in the west end of the town, where he hobnobbed with Germans of all classes, with Europeans of other nations, with Americans. They treated him as their equal . . . and as more than their equal. Yet the same men looked down on me, me, who am more than three-fourths White. I asked him for the reason. And he told me.

"He said: 'If you want a White Man's respect, you must knock him down first. You are in a better position to argue with him when your heel is grinding into his face. Such was Attila's way of arguing.'

"He laughed as he spoke. But he meant it. He lived up to it. He rode over them roughshod, with the spurs only and the sharpness of the whip. He admitted none of their claims to racial superiority, to hegemony of culture. He hurt their feelings . . . as they had hurt mine. He lorded it over them with a black, sneering coolness. He jeered at all the Occident's ideals and endeavors and ambitions. Yet nobody seemed to mind it.

They would fight back, good-humoredly. But always he'd come out victorious. There was nothing . . . good God, there *is* nothing . . . not to-day, not to-morrow . . . never will be . . . which Hussain cannot carry to a shining termination, against the heaviest odds.

"I was a young man then, impressionable, self-searching. My mind was pregnant with the toil of many disturbing questions, and doubt was besieging my soul. But he solved them all for me. I fell under his spell, completely, hopelessly. My heart was in his keeping. For he had not only touched my intellectual needs, but he had also engaged and enslaved my imagination. Yes, my heart was indeed in his keeping. And he . . ." Mascasenhas crumpled his cigarette into a ragged ball ". . . he took my heart and crumpled it up and destroyed it, as I destroy this bit of paper. He mastered my body and my soul . . . until I became his shadow, his slave, his unthinking chattel . . . and even now he is my master . . . even now . . . though I have been dead these four years. . . .''

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I was wishing he would cut out this nonsense about his being dead. It made me feel

so damnably uncomfortable. There was something in the atmosphere of the room which wound itself about my soul like a sodden, pulse-clogging blanket. It was then that I was glad to see those two chintz-covered chairs. They did look so uncompromisingly, comfortingly, stolidly British and real; sort of safety valve.

"From the very first, Hussain talked to me of Asia, of her past, her future. He was an enthusiast, and the flower of conviction blossomed on his lips. To him Asia was a concrete whole, and he ridiculed the differences of creed and caste and race which split it. They were a mere nothing, he said, a sand-grain in the desert of Gobi. He was all for the Whole, for the Great Mother . . . so he called Asia . . . and he would weave a glittering fabric of words, and tell me what Asia had done . . . and what she could do . . . what she would do. . . .

"Look,' he would say, 'there's France in Tonkin and reaching over into China. There's England in India, and Russia in Manchuria and in the Khanates. But what of it? Presently we shall wake up and kick them out, every one of them. We . . . Tar-

tars, Moors, Arabs, Osmanlis, and Turks . . . we've conquered them before, and we shall conquer them again. We shall give them a land hissing with blood, and the scimitar when it is black with gore.' I remonstrated. I told him that I myself was a White Man, a Portuguese from Goa, a Christian. But he roared with laughter. 'You a White Man?' he would ask me. 'Then why do the other Whites here ostracize you? No, my friend, your skin is brown, and half your cousins have Hindu names.' Tell me, Mr. Vandewater, was he not right?''

He lit another cigarette. He was perfectly calm and collected. All his nervousness had left him. He continued:

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"Yes, he conquered me. He mastered all my wishes, even my secret thoughts. There was only my religion, my devout Catholic faith which stood between me and complete subjugation to his will and his nefarious schemes. For even in those days, he was dreaming of a war of revenge, a war of dagger and rope and dynamite. I would argue with him. But who was I to convince him? He seemed to be right, right in everything he said. And even to-day, though I hate the man, though he has seared my soul to its last

quivering cell . . . yes, even to-day, I think at times . . . when my Hindu blood talks to me at nights . . . that the man is doing right, that he is working for the cause of justice . . . justice to Asia! I remember one Sunday morning at the *pension*. Everybody was in a talkative mood. Hussain had mentioned some of his favorite theories, and they were not flattering to European self-conceit. I believe it was Dr. Pugnia who finally interrupted his torrent of wit and sharp abuse, with a remark that it had remained to the West, to the West only, to recognize the Rights of Man, to develop a sane ideal of democracy.

"You should have heard Hussain's bellowing laughter.

"Democracy?' he jeered. 'Democracy? Why, man, to give democracy to Europe would be as wasteful as to give perfumed hair oil to a pig-faced woman. It is we, we men of Asia, who have understood and enforced the real democracy, the only democracy worth while, the democracy of despotism. For with us, any man who has the genius and the strength, can hack his way to power. You, you apostles of mediocrity, you have had only one such man: Napoleon!

And how long did he last? . . . But look at Asia. There Siwajee-Maharaj, a brigand, became the mightiest of the Mahratta sovereigns. Tamerlane, the rough plainsman, founded a dynasty which lasted five hundred years. A goat-herd founded the dynasty of Baroda, a slave the monarchy of Scindia, a corporal the kingdom of Mysore, and a captain of cavalry became the ruler of Hyderabad! . . . Democracy? . . . By the red pig's bristles! If you are democratic, then a leper is a jessamine-scented bridegroom!' "

It had been slowly growing dark. The black end of evening was beginning to filter through the windows, with now and then a thin, haggard shaft of twilight. But Mascasenhas did not seem to notice it. The pall of remembrance was heavy on him.

"So he conquered my intellect . . . and then he commenced to enslave my soul. For, look you, though I am White, Portuguese, Christian, I am yet of the Orient. Things which you ridicule and doubt, I believe in . . . and I am afraid of them. And he, Hussain, he must have noticed it. He had spent a year in a Derwish lodge in the Eastern

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Sahara, where they practice magic, unspeakable, incredible, both the lesser and the greater magic. And he spoke to me of the hidden things they do . . . and he even showed me some of them . . . some of them. . . ."

He stopped. His face grew pale to the very lips, and there came a blackness about his eyes. The smoke of our cigarettes rolled and bloated in swirling wreaths.

"I was alive not only to the substances of terror . . . who is not, after all? . . . but even to the very shadows of terror, the shadows which I imagined, and the others . . . which he projected unto the mirror of my soul. And steadily he continued his work. To-day I know, but then I did not . . . he did it to conquer my soul, to enslave it, to suck it dry, like the vampire he is. . . ."

His voice fell to a hoarse, grating whisper. I am not a nervous man. But the thing was getting on my nerves . . . and then that confounded, yellow-black half-light. I rose with a murmured word of apology, and turned on the electric light.

"He saw the grain of superstition and terror in my soul, and he turned it on the wheel of his cunning as a potter turns and shapes a new clay vessel. His unholy craft forced whatever hereditary superstitions there may have been in my heart into fullest germination. But he did it cleverly, discreetly, cunningly. He did it so cleverly that my dread of the unknown, unknowable things seemed to rise from my soul, free by itself, with absolute spontaneity, without any trace of suggestion on his part.

"It was at that time that he took a sudden interest in hypnotism, and naturally, he asked me, his friend, to assist him with his experiments. Why shouldn't I? You see, I loved him. I never thought then that he would use me . . . as he has used me. . .

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"I remember the first time he did it successfully. I had been very nervous all day. I had swallowed a dose the doctor had given me . . . some brome preparation . . . but it had not helped me.

"Hussain laughed. 'You see, your Western science is not good. Let me try the ancient Asian medicine. Let me hypnotize you into well-being.' I was willing. He passed his hands before my eyes . . . and presently

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... it did not seem very long ... the film of my unrest seemed to float away. My nervousness left me, and then came peace, Lethean peace ... and a deep, full, white sweetness. His hypnotic cure was a success ... and so I let him do it often. I got used to it, as a man gets used to the hypodermic needle.

"Thus, slowly, surely, he became the Master, and I the instrument. His strength of mind drove me as the wind drives a thin sheet of flame, relentless, resistless. There was only my faith in Christ and in the dear Saints which he had never conquered. Today I know that this faith saved me then from complete engulfment.

"At the end of the term he made up his mind to return to Asia for a year or two. He booked on the *Semiramis*, and he asked me to go with him. I was glad to do so. My studies were over. I had passed my final examination. I would be lonely without him. Also I wanted to see Goa, the blue mountains of Goa . . . and my father, my mother, my little sister. What better traveling companion than the dear chum whom I loved with all my heart?

"We took ship and sailed for India. At

Calcutta we went our different ways, I to Goa, he to his far home in Central Asia.

"I was happy those first few days at home; happy to see my family; happy to breathe the air of the homeland where the warm hillwinds sweep down, laden with the sweet scent of the sesamum flower and the crimson asoka.

"But a week passed, three weeks, seven weeks . . . and my heart cried out for Hussain, the friend of my soul. Without him I seemed weak, timid, helpless, like young birds flocking over the stubble before their wings have gained strength and confidence. As long as I was with him, I had seen everything through the prism of his understanding. Now the prism was withdrawn, and I was like a blind man bereft of his staff.

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"Then he wrote to me. He asked me to come with him on a journey through Central and Northern India, and to meet him at Agra. I was glad to go, happy in the thought of once more seeing his face, of once more listening to his voice. He was the well of my affection, the stone of my contentment.

"So we met. At Agra we met, and it was as it had been in Berlin. I became his shadow, and he was to me as a light shining in a dark house. I cared not that he was a

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Moslim, and I a Catholic. For Heresy and Orthodoxy stood both behind the screen of our friendship.

"He had many friends in Agra, Moslim as well as Hindus, and Jains and Sikhs. They would talk in whispers for many hours. I did not know what they were talking about. But always he seemed the leader, the master. Wild hill-men, rude Pathans, cringing Babus, dignified Sikhs, sneering Brahmins . . . before him they were all alike . . . they would listen and answer softly and kiss his feet.

"Also my old nervous headaches came back to me at times. And every time he would pass his hands across my forehead and hypnotize me, and take away the film of pain and unrest.

"He knew many Brahmin priests, whiterobed priests, with the scarlet mark of Shiva above their eyes. And I wondered that even they bowed before him, though he was a Moslim, and in their eyes a cursed infidel, an eater of holy cows. But I did not wonder very long. For I knew the strength and the fascination which emanated from him.

"Once . . . he had hypnotized me the day before, and my mind was still slightly dazed . . . he took me to the temple of Shiva, the

god of many forms. I saw there Shiva Mahakala whom they call the Destroyer. I saw Shiva Mahadesh whom they call the Great Deity. I saw Shiva Bhaivana whom they call the Terrible. There was a press of worshipers thronging the temple, and they shouted and danced and did *bhajan* before the many images. And madness was in the air, tugging at my heart-strings . . . and twice I rose, about to leap in and join the heathenish dance. But each time my hand clutched instinctively the splinter of the Real Cross of the Saviour which I carry around my neck in a little silver locket . . . and so I was saved from the great sin.

"It seemed to me that Hussain was closely watching me . . . but he did not say a word. And I . . . I . . . you see, I did not distrust him then. How could I have guessed that he wanted to steal my faith and my soul, and forge them into an instrument of destruction for himself, for his own wicked plans?

"So we came to Benares, the town of the thousand and one temples."

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Mascasenhas was silent. He closed his eyes, his face looked gray and weary and drawn and suffering. Finally he continued,

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and his voice trembled with the tension of subdued excitement and fear.

"We came to Benares. There we lived at the house of one Rathnasabapathy Nath Cursetjee, a Brahmin, and a friend of Hussain. He received us with hospitality and friendship, as the honored guests of his divan. And he introduced to us a young Brahmin from the South who was also staying at his house. I liked this Southerner, Asoka Kumar Mitra. For he was a pleasant lad, well-mannered and of a mild temper.

"We spent a happy week in the house of Cursetjee. Then men from all Hindustan commenced to troop into Benares, pilgrims all, carrying banners and begging bowls. And I remembered that the festival of Doorgha-Puga was drawing near, and so I asked Hussain to leave town before it commenced. For it is the festival of madness and blood-lust, the celebration of the obscenest and most secret Hindu rites, and it is not good that a Christian should be in Benares during the plague-spotted week of devil worship . . . unless he be an English saheb. But Hussain laughed and called me narrowminded and intolerant.

"'Live and learn,' he said. 'All this is Asia, our Asia, the Great Mother, mine and yours. A kaleidoscope of many colors and many emotions. Shall we be afraid of her, the Mother?'

"But I was insistent, and finally he agreed to leave the night of the first festival.

"That night our host prepared a great feast. Of course Hussain and I, not being Brahmins, ate at a table apart from the others. Asoka, the young Brahmin from the South, fell to the floor in a fainting fit, toward the end of the dinner, and was carried out. Shortly afterwards I also felt certain symptoms of weakness about my heart, and a violent, splitting headache. It was my old nervousness coming back again, I thought, and so I begged Hussain to help me, to cure me as he was in the habit of doing.

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"He took me to his room, and he did as I bid him.

"Immediately I must have fallen into a deep sleep, into a deep trance. Then I seemed to waken. I opened my eyes . . . to close them again at once. I must still be asleep and dreaming, I said to myself. For I imagined that I was in the temple of

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*Doorgha*. I seemed to be dressed like a Brahmin, and so was Hussain who was next to me. And he had the scarlet mark of Shiva on his forehead. So I closed my eyes again, thinking to drive away the mad, unclean dream in fresh sleep.

"But a rough hand gripped my shoulders, and I heard the voice of Hussain. There was no kindliness, no friendship in his voice, and for the first time I felt the ring of the master in his words, and in my own sudden fear the cringing of the slave.

"Wake up, you fool, and keep your wits about you, or we'll both be killed." I asked him where we were, in a dazed, helpless manner. He laughed. 'You'll see in a moment.'

"Still I thought that I was dreaming . . . when suddenly a wild clash of cymbals and a hollow beating of drums shook me into complete wakefulness. I opened my eyes wide, and looked.

"And, as I looked, as I understood where I was, my heart suddenly turned as still as freezing water, and my soul was black with fear and dread, as is the heart of a babe in the dark. Then I must have become hysterical, partly insane. For mad laughter rose

to my lips, like a deadly sickness, and tears came to my eyes as acrid as spilt blood drying on the dusty ground.

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"Instinctively my hand touched my forehead . . . and I drew it back in a palsy of horror. For there, on my own forehead, I felt a sticky, fresh-painted caste-mark . . . the caste-mark of Shiva!

"I was in the temple of *Doorgha*, during the festival of the Doorgha-Puga, in a throng of thousands of Hindus, dressed as they were, marked even as they were . . . I . . . a Christian . . . a man three-fourths White! . . . And a word from my lips, a careless gesture, the very gesture of crossing myself as a protection against evil, would mean instant death, to me as well as to Hussain, the Moslim.

"And even then, even then, I did not blame Hussain. I did not lose faith in him. Such is the strength of friendship and love. I imagined that he had played a practical joke on me during my hypnotic trance, that he had dressed me, and painted the scarlet castemark on my forehead . . . to frighten me a little, and because he always said that I should see with my own eyes that I was narrow and intolerant. So I prepared to make

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the best of a wretched situation, and looked about me with more calm.

"The huge temple was lit by a thousand red-glowing lamps. But the smoke which swirled up from the golden incense-burners darkened the air with a solid, bloated shadow, and everything seemed shapeless, veiled, wreathed in floating vapors.

"I caught a glimpse of the gigantic, black statue of *Doorgha*, at the farther end of the temple, and her fiendish yellow eyes seemed to look straight into mine and to drill into my brain with a red-hot iron. Little manycolored spots danced before my eyes . . . and I fell deathly sick.

"All about me the worshipers prayed and chanted and groaned. Some were half mad with excitement, and every once in a while a man or a woman would jump up with a throaty, high-pitched yell, swing into the center of the temple with a whirling, gyrating motion, and dance before the jeering, black statue with horrible gestures. Then the priests, whom I could dimly see standing at the feet of *Doorgha*, would break into abominable songs . . . and over all the sullen, palsying din of the drums and cymbals and tomtoms . . . and the red, floating, swirling

wreaths of incense smoke from the golden censers.

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"The incense was like an accursed, poisonous thing. It dried my mouth. It bulged my eyes. It touched my quivering spine with hands of cruel softness. A quiver of excitement seemed to run through my body, from head to toe, to electrify me. It was partly fear, partly an incredible, trembling, unclean elation. It seemed that the hands of my astral body were beating at the enormous portals of mad, mysterious, unknowable things . . . begging to be let in . . . and in my soul, fear gripped the slime-cold hand of awe and superstition.

"Twice I jumped up. Twice my fingers clawed at my clothes, to tear them off. My legs and hands began to move in rhythmic gyration, about to join in the devil-dance. But I caught myself in time. I murmured a quick Latin prayer to my Patron Saint . . . and I sat down again, saved for the moment.

"Suddenly a bright red light shone forth from behind and to the left of *Doorgha*. A veiled priest stepped before the goddess, and immediately absolute silence enveloped the temple like a pall.

"The priest bowed low before the statue of *Doorgha* . . . then he chanted:

""We come to thy feet to-day, thou goddess of a thousand names! For as a destructress thou art Kali...."

"Here the crowd jumped up in a solid mass, like one man. They took up the name of Kali like a mad refrain, an echoing chorus . . . in high-pitched, quivering voices . . . swelling and decreasing in turns, dying away in thin, quavery tremolos, again bursting forth in thick, palpable fervor . . . just the one word . . . KALI . . . . KALI . . . . KALI . . .

"The priest turned, lifting his hands in an angular, straight up-and-down motion. The crowd was quiet again. He continued his chant.

"As a reproducer thou art symbolized by the Yoni. Thou art the Mother of the Universe, in the holy reincarnation of Jagan-Matri. As Parvati, thou dost protect the hillmen, and thou art also Sati, Tara, and Bhaivana herself, the consort of Shiva . . . Shiva . . . Shiva! . . .'

"Again the crowd took up the name in a mad, whirling chorus, and again the priest lifted his hands to command silence.

"' 'But as a malignant being, the Goddess

of Fear, delighting in blood, and the acrid smell of Death, thou art Doorgha . . . Doorgha. . . .'

"Here, in a solid mass, the many thousand worshipers prostrated themselves, their foreheads touching the ground. And I . . . may the Holy Virgin have pity on my soul . . . I prostrated myself with the others. There was complete, terrifying silence. Then, suddenly, all the lights went out, and it was dark in the building, as dark as a moonless night. The silence was a sodden blanket, choking my heart. There was only the labored breathing of the awestruck crowd to tell me that life was still about me.

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"Once I regained control over myself. I looked cautiously about me, into the inky darkness, until my eyes got used to it, and I could dimly make out the contours of the main portal, where a thin shaft of light filtered in from the outside. I tried to crawl away, carefully, noiselessly, on my hands and knees. But I felt Hussain's iron hand clutching my shoulder and jerking me back. . .

"Suddenly the darkness and the silence was cut as with a knife. A wail of drums and cymbals and tomtoms and reed-flutes rose shrilly, in maddening waves of sound.

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At the same time a greenish-opalescent light came from the left of the statue of *Doorgha*. Gradually it changed into a crass, vivid, luminous scarlet, and then . . . from nowhere it seemed to my numbed sense . . . a tall priest, a high-priest, stepped forth, a bearded, huge man, with the scarlet castemark, and followed by two others carrying silver-handled yak tails with which they fanned him. The two lesser priests were dressed in flowing white robes and black turbans. But the high-priest was entirely nude.

"In his right hand he bore a short, gleaming sacerdotal knife, and in his left hand, swinging from a black rope, an open basket, filled with coiling, venomous snakes.

"At this sight the mad fervor of the crowd seemed to swell and bloat. The cries rose to a hideous, soul-freezing pitch. The men groaned, the women screamed and screamed and screamed . . . and a hundred dancing girls, with painted faces, their arms and legs covered with rubies and emeralds and pearls, whirled into the center of the temple, their gyrating limbs bathed in the red glare. They broke into song . . . song, did I say? . . . it was as if a hell of unclean, cursed, cruel sounds was reverberating from

floor to ceiling. It was like the voices of all the lost souls in Purgatory . . . like the spirit of lust and cruelty in the last, sharp, shrieking agony of travail!

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"The high-priest stood silent, motionless. Only the basket swung like a slow pendulum, and every once in a while a coiling serpent would lift its flat head above the rim of the basket, and look into the crowd with cold, opaque eyes.

"Then the priest broke forth into a chant . . . between singing and speaking, with a horrible, insane fervor of excitement, which chilled my blood and paralyzed my spine.

"'Hail, Mother! Hail, three-eyed Goddess of horrid form, around whose neck hangs a string of human skulls, a precious pendant! Hail, malign image of destructiveness! Listen thou to my Mantra!""

Mascasenhas was silent. He shuddered at the remembrance. Then he continued, with a calmer voice.

"But I will not tell you the whole of that horrible incantation. You tell me that you've been in India, that you know the Hindus and some of their bestial rites. You can imagine

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what the priest prayed for, and the answering prayers of the crowd. They prayed for blood and torture and sufferings unspeakable . . . the blood of their enemies, the enemies of the Great Mother. And Hussain, the Moslim, the infidel, was one of them in that mad hour. Not that he lost his head. Not he! Not for a single moment! But he came close to me, whispering into my ear:

"See, Mascasenhas . . . all for the Great Mother, all for Asia. What matter then if we be Hindus, or Moslim . . . or Goanese Christians?"

"I did not answer. What could I answer ... there, in that temple of lust and cruelty, caught like a rat in a trap? Could I rise and protest, as a Christian, as a White Man? It would have been heroic, magnificent, worthy of the Cid of old! But I am not a hero. I am a coward. I said nothing. A hungry belly has no ears, and a cowardly mind has no conscience.

"I just squatted there, and tried to make myself so small, so small. Then I imagined that everybody around me was watching me, and so I commenced to bow and sway and yell with the rest. But in my soul's soul, I was praying fervently for the hour of de-

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liverance. I vowed to offer one hundred candles on the altar of my Patron Saint, St. Sebastian of the Arrows, if he would but help me to escape . . . out into the streets, into God's clean, good sunlight. Let me but see once more the friendly khaki of a British soldier . . . let me but hear once more the rough, manly word of a bearded Afghan shouldering his way through the crowded bazaars!

"I closed my eyes, trying to shield my soul from seeing that which is evil. But suddenly a shriek cut through the heavy air, as a Rajpoot blade cuts through fine silk . . . an agonized, terrific, appalling shriek . . . of death, and of the fear of death . . . not a short, quick, merciful shriek, but a succession of long, horrible wails. . .

"I opened my eyes. I had to look, even if the eternal damnation of my soul should be the punishment!

"In front of the altar was Asoka Kumar Mitra, the young Brahmin from the South, who had been my fellow-guest, at the house of Cursetjee. He was naked to the waist, his head sunk on his breast, and he was still dazed as he had been at dinner, when the attendants had helped him from the room.

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He looked slowly around, with unseeing eyes, as a man in a trance. The high-priest stood behind him, singing his abominable chants. Suddenly he gripped the short, sacerdotal sword, and drew it across the lad's throat with a quick, swishing jerk.

"Do not ask me to describe the scene which followed . . . it was blood, blood . . . a thick, acrid dream of blood . . . everything, everywhere . . . squirting, a horrible fountain, up to the very statue of *Doorgha*. . . .

"A SACRIFICE . . . A SACRIFICE . . .' shouted the crowd. But ever above it all, drowning the yells and the clash of cymbal and tomtom, I heard those long-drawn, agonizing wails. I tried to see, to feel where they came from.

"And then, suddenly, I noticed that the priest had abandoned the basket of snakes, which had swung from his hands. And the vision of it all burst upon me with stark, crass reality.

"Directly at the feet of the goddess, a man was stretched out on the black marble flags, writhing and twisting in impotent, senseless fury. For he was tied hand and foot. He was a White Man, an English soldier. His rent tunic and bleeding face bore witness to

the struggle which had preceded his capture. And coming toward him, from all sides, were the snakes which had been released from the basket. They moved slowly, inch by inch, and with every movement of their glistening, scaly bodies, the Englishman shrieked. Holy Madonna, how he shrieked!

"Hussain laughed a loud, bellowing laugh. He whispered into my ear:

"See, my friend, see! Thus may be the end of them all . . . all who defile Asia, the Great Mother!"

"Then he jumped up, waving his arms like one possessed, and addressed the crowd with a voice of thunder.

"A sacrifice, brothers, a sacrifice! A White sacrifice to *Doorgha!* May his blood smell sweet in the nostrils of the Great Mother!"

"They took up the shout, yelling and laughing and groaning . . . and closer and ever closer the scaly, creeping things moved toward the victim . . . and his shrieks rose louder and louder. . . .

"Then I must have lost consciousness. . . . For when I awakened it was broad daylight. I was back in the house of Cursetjee. I was weak and dazed, and in a dripping perspira-

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tion. A scent of many drugs was in the air. By my bedside stood Hussain and the Brahmin.

"First the palsying thought took possession of me that I would be the sacrifice for the next night, that they would cut my throat, and wet the lips of *Doorgha* with my blood. I tried to move, to rise on my elbows. But I was so weak, so weak. I only just dragged the upper part of my body from the bed, and I kissed their hands and the hems of their robes, imploring them to save me. I am a coward, a coward.

"Hussain looked at me intently. He whispered a word to the Brahmin, who smiled and left the room. Then Hussain bent over me, gently laying his cool hands on my forehead.

"Mascasenhas, my friend,' he said with a caressing voice, 'you are sick unto death. You are even at the point of death. You may live ten minutes, or twenty minutes, but assuredly not longer than half an hour. Would you want to see a priest?'

"I've told you that I am a coward. All my life I have been afraid of death. I fear it as a concrete thing, a thing to dread. I felt weak, horribly weak. And I begged Hussain to help me, to send for a doctor. He

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watched me with a shade of sympathetic interest. Then he continued gently, his hand still touching my forehead:

"Just a moment ago the doctor was here, Hakim Soltan Mohridin, the great doctor who studied in Paris. There is no greater Hakim in this city of Benares. He gave you one more half-hour to live, at the utmost. Tell me, do you want to see a priest, my friend?"

"I implored him again, by our old friendship, by the memory of the years we spent together. Let him send for another doctor . . . an English doctor, over to the barracks. My father was a rich man. He would pay. But Hussain answered that it was useless. Everything had been tried; tried in vain. He walked to the door, saying he himself would go for the priest. At the threshold he turned. He came back to my bed.

"Mascasenhas, if I should know of a cure to save you, to make you a present of that life which the Hakim says is forfeited, will you swear to submit to whatever cure I prescribe, regardless of its nature? Will you bind yourself by a solemn oath?"

"I said that I would. Anything, anything at all! Let him only save my life! And he

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dictated to me the form of the oath. I have repented this oath with sobbings, with horrors at myself, but in vain repented. An oath is to be the utterance of the truth of God; and the oath he forced *me* to take was the utterance of the truth of the devil. But did it hold me any the less?

"So I swore. And then Hussain said to me:

"'See, my friend, inside of a few minutes your spirit will depart from your body. You will be dying. You will be dead. Now I have learned in the Derwish lodges of the Sahara that even at that supreme moment of death, a strong mind, well versed in the secret science of hypnotism and soul-craft, can infiltrate part of his own strength into the dead body, thus giving to it a semblance of life . . . no . . . an absolute reality of life, which will last as long as he keeps the dead body under his hypnotic trance. But as soon as the master-mind gives the word which breaks this trance, then the strength of the living soul will once more leave the body, and the body will once more lose the senses and the sensations which are Life.' He was beginning to pass his hands over my forehead with soft, rhythmic gestures. 'See, Mascasenhas,

even now you are dying. Can you feel the icy hand of Azrael, the black-winged Angel of Death? It is the final dissolution, my friend. You are dead, dead.' His voice seemed to drone from across illimitable distances. 'And now I, the master-mind, take part of my mind, of my strength, of my soul, and I send it into the empty husk which is the dead Mascasenhas. . . .'

"My body stiffened out. I was asleep. I was dead. But still, as from behind a veil of murmured sounds, I could hear Hussain's voice. The next moment the film of my physical reason departed, and I was suddenly electrified into the most vivid realization of existing, of living, of knowing. It was at that moment that the spirit of Hussain Khan passed into my dead body, and gave to it once more the semblance and the sensations of life."

The Goanese was silent. I did not say a word. He walked up and down. Finally he sat down again and resumed his tale.

"Ever since then, now four years ago, I have been the slave of Hussain. . . . Let him but break the spell, let him but unchain the

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thunderbolt which overhangs me, and I am dead again. I am his slave, his instrument. I do what he bids me do. Look at me close, Vandewater, at my eyes, my nose, the shape of my lips. With a little touching up here and there, with the help of artificial light, chiefly at night, under the electric globes, do you not think that a man who has seen Hussain Khan only a few times would take me for him?"

I looked. And suddenly the similarity of which he spoke struck me with peculiar force. The half-caste smiled.

"You remember the murder of Senator Kuhne? You remember how the butler said he had recognized Hussain as the murderer, but how Hussain later on proved his alibi, showing that he was in an entirely different part of the town at the very hour of the murder?"

"Yes . . . yes. . . ."

"Do you still wonder? It is but a short trip from Paris to Washington. I am the murderer. I am the scarlet-marked instrument of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms, I and several others. Wherever my master sends me, there I must go. Where he tells me to kill, there I must kill. For I

am but a part of Hussain Khan. His soul has entered my soul."

I remembered the dingy bedroom behind the curtain, the crucifix, the flail on the wall. I spoke of it.

"Ah, the crucifix . . . and the flail. . . . You see, I still pray to the Blessed Virgin . . . for forgiveness. I lift my bloodstained hands to the dear Cross of the Saviour." He broke into a hysterical sob, and rushed over to the curtains, pulling them apart. "And the flail, the flail? . . . Ah, you shall see. . . ."

He tore the flail from the supporting nail. He stripped off coat and vest. He clawed madly at his shirt and collar, and they came off in ribbons. And then I saw that his back was covered with welts, one close to the other, some healed, some raw, some still bleeding.

"The flail!" he yelled. "It is to chastise my body, to purge my soul . . . which is a piece of the soul of Hussain Khan. . . ."

He was about to bring the wicked rhinoceros whip down on his bare back with the strength of mad despair. But I jumped at him. I wrenched the foul thing from his hands.

"Fool!" I shouted. "Fool and madman!

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Do you think you can atone for the crimes you have committed by hurting your body? Will these welts bring Senator Kuhne back to life . . . and God knows how many others? Can you wash out blood with blood? Do you seek salvation in the blood of your own body . . . as do those infidels who worship to *Doorgha?* He, Hussain Khan, he and the monstrous heathen idol whose ministrant he is, he has enslaved you, he has mastered you, he has defiled you." I paused. I continued in a gentle voice. "A murderer you have been, Mascasenhas, a renegade, a traitor to your race and faith. And yet . . . there is salvation even for such as you."

He looked at me. He flung himself down, kneeling in front of me, kissing my hands.

"Tell me . . . tell me . . . "

I lifted him up to his feet. I put my hands on his shoulders.

"See, my friend, I am fighting Hussain Khan. I am fighting the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms whom he serves. I fight him with every ounce of strength I possess, with every cell in my brain, with every cent of my poor fortune. Come to me, Mascasenhas, fight with me, help me. Thus you will atone for your crimes. Thus you will find

salvation." I looked straight at him. "Together we can win . . . you and I. . . ."

He looked at me for a long time in silence. Then he grasped my hands. There was a deep, ringing note of sincerity in his voice.

"Yes. Together we can win. Together we will win."

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### IV

# THE MILLION FRANCS GOLD

# "C'EST la tout', tout', tout' p'tit' chose, C'est la chos' qui nous aguiche,"

Mayol was drawling in that inimitable way of his as he danced across the boards of the Scala. Sergius, Rose la Rosse, and a bevy of lanky, fuzzy-haired chorus girls took up the arrogant refrain as the drop descended on the finale of the first act.

It was a gala night, the première of the new Scala Revue On En Rigole, and I was glad that I had let the night porter of my hotel persuade me to purchase a ticket at a slightly enhanced rate.

I needed recreation: needed it bad.

The mad tale which Mascasenhas, the Goanese renegade, had told me that afternoon in his apartment of the Villa des Ternes, had played the very deuce with my nerves. I was loaded up to the Plimsoll mark with uncanny, goosefleshy expectations. To be sure, I had seen the half-caste since

then. He had promised to stick by me, to assist me by every means in his power. But more and more I understood with what forces I had to contend.

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Perhaps my imagination was a bit out of focus. But I read a sinister meaning into the two cable dispatches of the day before: Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, had been assassinated by a Brahmin priest who escaped: and a train which carried a certain fire-eating Congressman from Alabama and four officers of the Engineer Corps on their way to Hawaii where they were going to inspect the new fortifications at Pearl Harbor, had been derailed near Salt Lake City. Nobody had been killed. But there were indications of a peculiar nature along the tracks.

It seemed to me that the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms was living up to his name. I knew that Hussain Khan, the suave Central Asian who was the master spirit of that organization of Oriental "patriots," would strike at me as soon as he found out that I was an enemy worth reckoning with. I had had several indications in the past that he suspected me of knowing more than was good for him . . . or for me.

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And I was afraid: miserably afraid.

After all, I was fighting in the dark, ignorant how and at whom I should strike, burdened with a brooding secret which I could not communicate to any sneering, baldheaded diplomatists without being considered a harmless lunatic. I was alone, with nothing to protect or guide me but Chance, the blind Madonna of the gambler and the detective. Hussain, on the other hand, had an organization at his beck and call which would strike me when and where he gave the word. There would be a cheerful little cable item in the American papers that Stuart Vandewater, of Washington, D. C., formerly a clerk in the Foreign Office, had been murdered by Paris Apaches while on a slumming tour to the Rue de Venise. . .

I didn't relish the prospect.

So I was in the position of a man who has just filled into a big inside straight, and is up against the dealer's pat hand . . . and that dealer a man who used to perform card tricks on the Big Time: or, as my friend Joe Carter of the Larchmont Yacht Club would express it, I was like a nervous skipper on a dark night, with a lee shore close at hand, and no bearings to steer by.

Well . . . here was at least an hour's respite from worry. I blessed Mayol, Sergius, and the other lambent exponents of French wit, and gave them a good hand.

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I had a fair enough seat in the parquet, well to the front, and up against the wall. The stage box rose directly above me, sheltering me with its gilt Louis Quinze curves, so that I was invisible to its occupants.

When the curtain descended, there was a momentary silence over the house, that usual interval between the last sporadic handclappings and the silken rustle of the women rising to take a turn in the foyer.

A voice from the stage box above me cut through it like a knife.

"Europe bases her imperialistic, her conquering programme on brilliant strokes of diplomacy, on sudden, clashing feats of arms. But we base ours on the fanatical support of our whole people, on our common mystic faith in our racial destiny."

Ex pede Herculem . . . it was the voice and the sentiments of Hussain Khan, and I was neither startled nor surprised. He was as much a social lion in Paris as he had been in Washington, and it would have been strange had he missed a Scala première.

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Judging from the voices, there were two people in the box beside the Central Asian. One was doubtless a Frenchwoman: the other a man who talked splendid French, but with the peculiar, metallic accent of the Levantine. I listened for all I was worth. And I thought that the Levantine's voice, though bland with suave innuendo, held a quiver of nervous fear.

When the curtain rose on the darkened house, I quietly left my seat and hurried to the upstairs promenoir, where I had a perfect view of the right-hand stage box. My opera glasses were up and focussed the moment the drop descended on the second act.

There was Hussain, as I had expected, and a good-looking Frenchwoman. The other man was unknown to me. He was a large, fat, sallow-skinned man, with a mouth like a gaping sword wound, lecherous, saturnine eyes, and a neck that would have disqualified a yearling ox. His face was vaguely familiar to me, from newspaper cuts, I suppose. But I could not place it at the moment. A casual inquiry, reinforced by ten sous, gave me the information I was after.

"The big gentleman in the stage box?" the programme girl asked. "Why, that's Mon-

sieur Alcibiade Baltazzi, the great Baltazzi. I thought everybody knew him."

The girl was right. Everybody did know him. His was a name to conjure with in certain circles: nor the meanest circles at that.

I studied him through my opera glasses. So that was Baltazzi! I had never seen him face to face before.

Many years ago he had come out of Africa, and he had taken an immediate spotlight on the gay stage of Paris. For he had bought, cash down, the ill-famed marble palace in the Quartier d'Europe which Fürst Trachenberg-Hatzfeldt, the Silesian "coal milliardaire," had built for Madame Lavedan. There was talk of silver bath tubs, and doorknobs studded with precious stones. When the Lavedan had finally ruined the young German, Baron Doria, the Portuguese, had bought it for Madame de Pugy. There had been more scandal, another noble name dragged through the slime of disgrace. Then came Baltazzi's turn. There were of course some croaking ravens of ill omen, willing to lay odds that the new proprietor would travel the road of his predecessors. But in the course of the years all such talk ceased.

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Baltazzi, instead of being ruined, quadrupled his fortune at the time of the first boom in Shortly afterwards he the Kaffir market. went into partnership with Lucien Perquel. son of the wealthy agent de change, and commenced to make financial history, both on the stock exchange and on the coulisse. There was no doubt any more of his financial stability, his huge resources, his steel-ribbed honesty. And, though the Faubourg and the Diplomatic Corps had frowned at first on the social aspirations of this adventurer with the nondescript Levantine name, they had speedily taken him to their bosoms when his daughter married Prince Roland Bonaparte, "Le Prince Sandwich" as he was called . . . for decidedly unsavory reasons.

But every once in a while you would hear a whisper of the gray old tales which had floated to the surface when he first set foot on Paris soil.

That had been in the days before Stanley and the Belgians beat the Congolese Arabs into obedience and chastened manners.

Of course people had made fortunes in Africa since the days of Carthage. But Baltazzi's fortune was too bloated, too indecent, too sinister in its bulk.

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There was talk of evil-smelling deals in "black ivory" down the Chari, the Tchad, towards the Ubanghui, and the lower Congo. There had also been whisperings of a White Chief of the Baketes, of his treachery toward his adopted tribe, and of his subsequent leadership of the Bassundis, when the latter came out of the North and raided and burned the Congo as far as Comba: as far as Brazzaville even. It was said that this mysterious White Chief had made an alliance with Mabiala Minganga, "the great Mabiala," that black Napoleon who had his Maréchal Ney in his nephew Mabiala N'Kinké, "the little Mabiala." And when M. Laval, the French administrator of the hinterland, was murdered, nailed to a cross in front of his official residence, it had been told by a Senegalese tirailleur who had escaped the general massacre, that the White Chief had given the command for the foul murder. Finally there had been a revolution by three of the lesser chiefs, Fulambao, Lilamboa, and Makabendilu: and the White Chief had disappeared . . . with about four thousand Loango porters, each laden with a hundred pounds of ivory and gold dust. He had made toward Bornu and Timbuktoo, where he had treach-

erously sold his Loangos into slavery to the Tuaregs, and had then left the African stage.

But nobody knew for certain. And if the French Government had more precise information, they kept it shelved. After all, Baltazzi was a rich man, a powerful factor in financial circles: and in the late war he had shown his love for his adopted country.

Of course there was no reason in the world why Hussain should not know him, or why he should not be his guest at a Scala première. But I had more than what is vulgarly known as a hunch. I could not forget the nervous tremolo in Baltazzi's voice when he spoke to Hussain, nor the latter's remark about "the mystic faith of Oriental people in their racial destiny." Hussain, dangerous as a snake, had also the snake's one virtue: he never struck without giving warning, even if the warning was a little indirect and obscure.

He was up to some deviltry. Of that I was reasonably sure. But for a while it seemed that my hands were tied, that I was powerless to discover or to circumvent it. I could not march up to Baltazzi and give him warning of a fantastic danger the very nature of which was unknown to me. Nor could

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I rise in my seat and bawl aloud to the audience that there was a mysterious Asian in their midst, about to choke one of Paris' leading financiers in his coils. I simply stood there, in the promenoir, watching through my opera glasses, and wishing for a dictaphone. I practiced resignation . . . and I practiced it as a man takes physic: with a wry face.

When the curtain rose on the last act, I suddenly made up my mind. I did one of those mad, impulsive things which are so typically American, both collectively and individually, and which, historically speaking, have done us so much good . . . and so much harm: commencing with Concord's "embattled farmers" and ending with the sleight-ofhand trick which created the republic of Panama.

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The night before there had been a charity performance at the Scala, for the benefit of the orphaned children of the Champagne country, the province which had borne the brunt of the fighting in the first phase of the war. There were still a good many flags and tricolor pennants and bunting wound about the pillars and the railings.

I watched my moment carefully. When Mayol danced on again, with another rip-

roaring song, and everybody's, even the blasé ushers' and programme girls', attention was centered on the stage, I snatched rapidly at a lot of red-white-and-blue bunting which decorated the pillar directly behind me. About six foot of it came off. I rushed down the staircase. Opening my coat, I festooned the giddy stuff around my waist, in the manner of the French commissioners of police when they are on official duty. Then I buttoned my coat again, and walked leisurely through the parquet.

I came up the small stairway which leads to the stage box. The attendant stopped me promptly with a demand for my ticket, and I, just as promptly, opened my coat and gave him a glimpse of my usurped badge of authority. It had the same thorough and rapid effect which the flash of a deputy sheriff's brass star has in our own West. The attendant collapsed. I told him in a quick, severe manner to show me to a place where I could watch the box of the Baltazzis without their knowledge. He complied at once. Two seconds later, I was stationed in a small closet-like room, to the right and in back of the stage box, with two narrow openings, one toward the stage and the other toward the

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box itself. I don't know what its real use was. But it answered my purpose perfectly.

The woman in the box was taken up with what was happening on the boards. But the two men talked feverishly, earnestly. I listened, catching a word here and there. I strained every nerve in my center of hearing. The blood was pulsating in my ears like brook water drumming into a still pool.

At first the words came indistinct, hazy, chopped, meaningless. The din of the orchestra at my feet, rising in waves, drowned the beginnings and the ends of the sentences. There was of course my own imagination to supply a missing link. But it hindered, instead of helping me. For I was intent on the one subject which was uppermost in my mind: thus prone to pounce on a half-intelligible phrase and clothe it with wrong meaning.

Finally I thought of an old trick of mine. I used to be very fond of the violin, and, during my years in Washington, I attended religiously all the symphonic concerts. In the course of time, I trained my ear to follow the melody and the intricate variations of the first and second violins through all the ge

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mazes and arabesques of the accompanying instruments. It would take me a few moments before I could disentangle the skein of those two lonely violins. But I always succeeded, even with Strauss and Debussy. Now I did the same thing with the voices of Hussain and Baltazzi.

The first complete sentence which I caught came from the lips of Hussain Khan.

"We must have the entire amount by Thursday night. No use hedging, my friend."

Baltazzi's answering basso boomed out with a low throb of choked, impotent fury.

"I tell you it's impossible. One million francs in gold! *Pensez-vous?* in gold . . . it cannot be done. Gold is scarce. It has been scarce ever since the end of the war. All the world is clamoring for the precious metal . . . the United States, Australia, the Argentine. . . ."

Here a riotous clash of drums and braying of brasses and reed instruments surged up from the orchestra and drowned the two voices.

Once I heard Hussain's voice . . . "Mabiala Minganga" . . . just the two words. I recognized the name of the black Napoleon

of the Congo who was said to have been one of the Levantine's associates.

When next I heard Baltazzi's voice, it was steely, truculent.

"What of it? The French Government has forgotten and forgiven."

"Possibly. But what about the other dainty things? What about the murder of M. Ponel, the mutilation of adjutant de Prat? What about the little contretemps which happened to the Genil expedition . . . south of Brazzaville . . . in ninety-five?"

"All forgotten! To-day I am Baltazzi, of Baltazzi and Perquel, a power in the land. My very name is changed."

The Levantine laughed: a cold, free laugh of relief. He seemed to feel that he was holding the whip-hand. For he continued in an arrogant manner:

"No, no, my dear Hussain. If that's all you know, the little blackmail scheme of yours won't bear fruit. Vous ne me ferez pas chanter, mon vieux."

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"Do not be too sure of it!" The other's voice came sharply, with a staccato inflection, cutting like a dagger. "And suppose I tell you that your real name is De Lara? Suppose I send a little cable to the *Côte d'Ivoire*,

and tell a certain Loango friend of mine the new name and address of the man who sold those four thousand porters into slavery? How long do you think it would take one of these black gentlemen to reach the Coast ... then to Marseilles ... on to Paris ... to a little marble palace in the Quartier d'Europe? And how long would Monsieur Alcibiade Baltazzi live then?"

I had my eyes glued to the narrow opening. Under the haggard shaft of light from the stage I saw Baltazzi turn as gray as a dead man's bones. He tried to look indifferent. But it was a springless, puttyhearted foppery of make-believe indifference. It did not deceive me: nor did it deceive Hussain Khan. I was sure that the man was caught. Hussain had shown his hand, and it was all trumps.

Just then the woman turned and engaged the two men in conversation. Shortly afterwards the curtain descended on the last act, and they left the box. The attendant was helping the woman on with her wrap, while Hussain Khan and the Levantine stopped for a moment, directly in front of the little closet where I was hidden.

"Thursday night at eleven o'clock,"

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Hussain whispered. "Don't fail me. I shall send one of my servants. He will be dressed in the robe of a Brahmin priest . . . a little fancy of mine." He laughed. "And to make sure of his identity, he will have a scarlet mark painted on his forehead. Pay, my friend. It's the cheapest thing you can do. Another thing, Baltazzi. Set no trap. Send your servants away. Any pretext will do. But you will be alone in the house."

He turned to the woman, speaking in a louder voice.

"Pardon me, madame. I know it's wretched manners to talk business after business hours. Mais, enfin, que voulez-vous? Les affaires sont les affaires."

He offered her his arm, bowing deeply: and they walked on, Baltazzi following.

Thursday night at eleven o'clock, at the house of Baltazzi in the Quartier d'Europe! I would not forget the date nor the place.

It was now Monday night, nearer Tuesday morning. I had barely three days ahead of me to do . . . what? Good Lord, what was I really to do?

There was exactly one thing which stood out in crass relief.

Baltazzi was going to pay one million

francs in gold. I knew Hussain to be a wealthy man. He was generous with his money: indeed lavish. He was what is commonly called a good spender. But even the best of good spenders is hardly ever in a situation where he needs a couple of hundred thousand dollars on the spur of the moment ... and in gold. Of course some vices are expensive. But Hussain was most decidedly not a sensualist, a voluptuary. Rather the opposite. He was one of those sneering ascetics whom Islam has bred through the centuries; a latter-day Wahhabi, with a purity of personal morals which John Knox might have envied.

So it was reasonable to deduce that he needed this money for a particular object. The fact that he was going to send a servant dressed in a Brahmin robe and with the scarlet mark of *the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms* painted on his forehead, made his purpose doubly clear . . . and doubly sinister. He needed the money for the furtherance of the fanatical schemes which were more to him than the breath of his nostrils. But the amount was huge. The date for its receipt was sharply defined. He had stipulated gold.

Here were three points which proved to me that he needed this big lot of cash for a crime which would be expensive: which had to be finished on a certain date: which (for otherwise he wouldn't have stipulated gold) would be executed by people afraid of drafts, bank notes, or any other legal tender which is easily traced.

Even crime costs money. And big crime costs big money. One million francs! I began to wonder, to figure out how many human lives such an amount would account for!

Early on the following morning I communicated with Mascasenhas. We met, as usual, in a little *laiterie* of the Bois de Boulogne. It was such an innocuous little place, open to the eyes of all the world; the very thing for a clandestine meeting.

In a few words I explained to the halfcaste.

He shook his head.

"I don't know anything about it."

"Was there no recent gathering at the temple of Marly-le-Roi?"

"To be sure. We always meet twice a week. You know that, Mr. Vandewater."

"That's so. But can't you think of any-

thing . . . no suspicious features whatsoever?"

"Well, there was just one thing. Three nights ago, at our last gathering, after the usual ceremonies were over, Hussain, Komoto, and Abderrahman Idryssieh el-Touati, a new arrival from Morocco, had a private meeting in one of the smaller rooms. They asked me to wait. Afterwards Hussain gave me a letter. He told me to deliver it at a certain address. There would be no answer. I did as he directed me."

Here was a possible clew. I asked Mascasenhas if he remembered the name and the address.

"Why, yes. But I imagine it was only some private affair of Hussain's, invitation to dinner, or the theater, or something of that sort. You see, the man I gave the letter to was Admiral Segantin."

I asked the Goanese to meet me again at the *laiterie* in the afternoon, at half-past five. Then I hailed the first passing taxi and offered him double fare to speed it up to No. 34 Faubourg Poissonière. I remembered that the largest and most efficient Press Clippings Bureau in Europe was located there.

The manager was less surprised at my re-

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quest than I imagined he would be. There are so many political currents and undercurrents, even in army and navy circles: there are so many conflicting interests and factions, ranging from the free-masons all the way to the Society of Jesus; there is so much spying going on in this beautiful land of France, spying and counter-spying, beginning in the very kindergartens and winding up in the Élysée Palace, that my order did not strike the manager as odd or suspicious.

He bowed and smiled.

"Very good, sir. It will be easy. You said anything of a nature regarding the Admiral Segantin?"

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"Yes. Personal and official and semiofficial stuff. All gossip and rumors. Anything at all. Not only in the Paris papers, but even the provincial dailies. And don't forget the little weekly papers . . . the . . . oh, you know. . . ."

The manager winked at me.

"I understand perfectly. You mean les journaux des maîtres-chanteurs, hein? . . . the little blackmailing sheets . . . the mongers of scandal. . . ." "Exactly."

"Very well. You shall have it . . . shall we say about a week from to-morrow?"

"No. I give you exactly three hours." The manager lifted his slim, white hands in a gesture of genteel despair. But he changed countenance when I gave him a look at the inside of my pocketbook. "Name your own price, my dear sir. But I must have the clippings at my hotel inside of three hours."

They were there on time. It took me nearly two hours to glance through them to sort and tabulate them. Then I got busy with pen and paper, and here is the result:

# Matters concerning the Admiral Segantin of the French Navy:

1. Son of Roland Segantin, Cabinet Minister under the Empire, and his wife Héloïse, née De Lubersac, of the old nobility.

2. Rapid and brilliant naval career. Has invented a new torpedo, also steel net to protect battleships against submarine attacks. Is an expert on high-power explosives.

3. Married to Mademoiselle Angèle Ducastel. Divorced. Has had several notorious affairs. One, five years ago, with Ma-

dame Ottilie Defresne of the Folies Marigny is said to have crippled him financially.

4. Threatened with court-martial, came near being cashiered from service because of debts. Family paid them.

5. Saw service during late war, acquitted himself splendidly. Chiefly at naval battle of Pola. Received the Grand Cordon of the Légion d'Honneur. Returned from war, sort of national hero.

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6. Is an expert on Moroccan affairs. Is said to speak Arabic fluently, and to have many friends amongst the natives.

7. His flagship is the Waldeck-Rousseau.

8. Was appointed Admiral-in-Chief of both the transports and the naval vessels for the expedition to Morocco which Government has decided to send.

9. Invented new explosive very deadly even in smallest quantities. Government has taken it up, will use it in Moroccan campaign. Explosive will be stored on board the flagship.

10. Fleet and transports will sail Friday at noon. Admiral in ill health. May not go with fleet.

11. Had recently affair with Madame \*\*\*. Scandal threatening. Said to have con-

tracted enormous debts for her. Has played for huge stakes at the Cercle Richelieu. Won several million francs. Received payment. Suddenly talk that he had cheated at cards. Monsieur \*\*\* threatens exposure unless money is returned to him. Several blackmailers on inside of affair.

12. Scientific American has article by Compton Morse, the great Canadian chemist, in which he claims that the new explosive of Admiral Segantin is positively too dangerous, that it can be touched off even at long distance through contact with certain waves, such as wireless waves. Segantin ridicules and denies this. Government upholds him. Explosive will be stored on the flagship.

13. Segantin finally obtained sick leave. Lepeletier to command in his place. Explosive, guarded and protected, has been stored on board the flagship. Figaro eulogizes Segantin because, in spite of ill health and being bedridden, he is in continuous contact, by wireless telephone and wireless telegraph, with the flagship of the expedition.

14. Besides Lepeletier, flagship will have on board the Generals D'Amale, Paoli, Lesueur, Macdonald-Dubois, the Minister for the Colonies, the First and Second Assistant

Secretaries for the Colonies, and the entire staff of the army of occupation. Everything points to the fact that Government expects to settle the Moroccan question once and for all.

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15. It is rumored that Monsieur \*\*\* of the Cercle Richelieu, and the professional blackmailers who are on the inside of the card-cheating affair, have given Admiral Segantin until Friday forenoon to pay the amount which they claim, and that this amount totals up to one million francs.

The whole thing was startlingly clear. It was simple, ingenious, and fiendish. It bore the earmarks of Hussain from first to last.

There was the date, Thursday evening, on which Hussain would receive the one million francs. On the following day Segantin would have to turn over the identical sum to Monsieur \*\*\* and the blackmailers: or else stand disgraced in the eyes of France. On the same day the fleet of naval vessels and army transports would set sail for Morocco. Segantin, who remained, would be in constant wireless communication with the flagship which carried the explosive. This explosive, according to the article in the *Sci*-

entific American, was in danger of being touched off through contact with wireless waves. Finally, as an afterthought came the fact told me by the Goanese, that at the last gathering in Marly-le-Roi, a newcomer had made his appearance, Abderrahman Idryssieh el-Touati, from *Morocco*. And the flagship carried those military and civil officers on board whose strength of purpose and craft would spell the end of Moroccan independence.

I did not stop to sermonize to myself about the moral turpitude of the Admiral. *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*. And who was I to judge?

I simply made up my mind to drive some sort of spoke into Hussain's wheel.

It was clear that Segantin would not touch off the explosive until Friday morning, after he had received the money. The night before, Hussain would send one of his associates to the house of Baltazzi, presumably in a motor-car. For one million francs in gold weigh a good deal. It was up to me to sidetrack the amount between Thursday night and Friday morning.

A warning to the authorities would be useless. There was absolutely nothing but my

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bare word to implicate Hussain. And if the fact that Baltazzi had actually withdrawn the indicated amount in gold from the bank corroborated my suspicions, they would only point at Baltazzi. And Hussain would laugh up his sleeve.

I found Mascasenhas waiting for me when I returned to the *laiterie* in the Bois de Boulogne.

I did not take him fully into my confidence. The man's nerve was utterly broken. Hussain had seen to that. The only living thing about him was his unquenchable hatred of Hussain, and the blind, pathetic belief that he was All White, that his Hindu blood was in abeyance. It was none of my business to disillusionize him. On the contrary, the more firmly he was convinced of the responsibilities which he owed to his father's race and blood, the more secure was my hold upon his loyalty.

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Still, I was not going to give him a chance to ask me any embarrassing questions, nor to permit the yellow streak in him to get the upper hand. I went straight to the point.

I asked him to procure for me, just as soon as he could, the regulation costume of a Brah-

min priest, from head covering to leather socks and sandals.

"I'm in a deuce of a hurry," I added. "I've no time now to explain. But I need it, I tell you. It will help me to fight that evil influence which threatens the best and finest of our race . . . your race and mine. I need it to fight Hussain . . . the man whom you hate."

A murderous glimmer came into the halfcaste purple-black eyes.

"Hussain Khan . . . the man I hate . . . the man who has stolen my life, and sent my soul to eternal damnation!" His voice choked into an inarticulate gurgle. "Never fear. I shall send the costume to you . . . to-night, or to-morrow morning. There are plenty of them at the temple of Marly-le-Roi."

True to his word, he sent it to me the next morning. Then I went out and bought a little tube of scarlet paint and a fine brush.

The plan which was germinating in my brain was desperate. But it needed a heroic effort to slide to base.

I was rather pleased with the completeness of my preparations. I seemed to have thought of everything. Suddenly I remem-

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bered with a laugh that I had forgotten the most vital part: an associate whom I could trust; a dead-game sort of a sport who wouldn't be afraid. Chances were that the messenger would come alone. But suppose he didn't?

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And whom could I take into my confidence? Mascasenhas was out of the question. For a moment I was wishing for a Magic Lamp. I would have liked to rub it, and to transport to Paris certain denizens of New York, from around Hell's Kitchen. There's where I would have found a fit instrument, for the matter of a drink and five dollars in cash.

I dressed carefully and walked over to Voisin's, where I had a leisurely and very excellent dinner.

The next day would see me in a desperate venture, playing leap-frog with Fate. I would need all my strength and ingenuity. So why stint the inner man the night before? I remembered an old saying I had heard in India: "That which binds the heart is a span of fat." I saw to it that in my particular case the span of fat should be of the very best, from the Purée Mongole to the duck à la Rouennais.

At an advanced hour I rose from table: too late to take in a show. So I strolled along slowly. It was a perfect night. Spring was in the air, and the pavement of Paris was calling me out. Very well! Let to-morrow go hang! To-day was another day.

The thought amused me, and I laughed out loud. A man who was walking a few feet ahead of me turned and looked me up and down.

"Espèce d'idiot! Espèce d'Américain mal foutu!" he murmured, and then he spat through his teeth in a carefree, nonchalant manner, showing his contempt of all foreigners, chiefly crazy ones who laugh out loud with no reason, at night, in the streets of Paris.

I looked at the man.

He was a typical Paris Apache, from his high-peaked cap, pushed back on his round, close-cropped skull at a rakish angle, to his peg-top trousers which tightly encircled the ankles. The pointed shoes gave the finishing touch of effeminacy to this parasite of Society.

I hurried on. He stopped, gave a halfturn which brought his back against a building, and watched me, suspicious, alert.

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The fitful shafts of the electric light overhead gave me a fairly clear view of his features.

He was decidedly not prepossessing. It was evident, from his protruding jaw to the shifty eyes and low forehead, that he had been conceived and born in a circumambient and all-penetrating ether of crime and vice. Here was the original Abysmal Brute, with the morals of a hyena, the acquisitive instincts of a pirate, and the compassion of a Bengal tiger.

I kept on coming nearer. He stood quietly watching me. A few minutes before I had wished for one of the denizens of Hell's Kitchen. I wondered if this was a tip, straight from the Makers of Providence.

When I came abreast of him, I offered him a cigarette . . . a never-failing calumet in Latin lands. He accepted, lit up, and tried to screw his vicious features into a semblance of geniality.

"Eh bien, bourgeois?"

His clipped words carried less curiosity than a direct challenge. He knew quite well that well-dressed strangers do not rub acquaintance with the scum of the Paris underworld without ulterior motives. It was clear

from his semi-friendly manner that he would listen to a reasonable proposition.

I suppose my first question was rather a foolish one. It would have been perfectly proper with one of the Knights of the Round Table. But with this Pride of the Outer Boulevards . . .?

This is what I asked.

"How would you like a little adventure?" He stared at me.

"Tu plaisantes, citoyen." His tone was villainously familiar. "Pour ma part, je préfère l'aventure à l'amour."

Here he winked at me in a scandalous manner. Then I plunged right in. I had not too much time to spare.

I held his attention from the first. Inside of the next ten minutes he had fifty francs of my money in his pocket, with a promise of ten times the same amount on the following Thursday night . . . under certain conditions, to which he agreed with a laugh.

"Rien de plus facile, mon petit bourgeois. Yes . . . yes . . . three doors this side of the Palace Baltazzi. . . But to be sure, I know the building! . . . At a quarter to eleven? . . . Very good . . . I shall be there!"

I asked another timid question, and again he laughed.

"Qu'est-c'tu penses? I'd croak fourteen specimens of vile citizens for half the amount. And him . . . why, you only want him beat up a little bit, and kidnapped and gagged for the matter of a few hours. It is a little bit of nothing. Never fear. I shall be there and earn the money. . . . Gentle? . . . But yes . . . I shall be gentle . . . so very gentle. . . ."

He insisted on shaking hands with me, winked at me once more in his shameless manner, and slunk off into a side street with a genial—

"À demain, mon bougre."

The next morning I was up and about and busy with the first peep o' day.

A Parisian friend (may the Lord forgive him for the unjust suspicions which lurked in his smile!) helped me to find and rent a little *pied-à-terre* near the Conservatory of Music.

I hated the smirk on the fat landlady's face when she assured me that she was not the one to ask indiscreet questions. Why, yes. She understood perfectly. There were so many costume balls, so many gallant adventures . . . and, *bon sang*, if I wanted to

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enter the flat dressed as an inspector of gendarmerie and leave it as a dead image of the Archangel Gabriel himself, she did not care one little snap of her fingers. A million sincere thanks for the money! Monsieur was most generous. It was indeed right and proper that young gentlemen should amuse themselves. She herself . . . when she was younger. . . .

Finally I got rid of her.

I unpacked my suitcase and changed. I studied myself in the long cheval glass. A perfect stranger seemed to stare at me from the shining surface. The long, flowing folds somehow added inches to my stature: and the turban lent a certain somber and austere dignity to my countenance which would have surprised my friends at home. I gave a little involuntary shudder when, with paint and brush, I applied the scarlet mark of Shiva on my forehead. I felt more at ease when the unclean thing had dried, and I had hid it from view by a downward pull of my turban.

I had still plenty of time. So I sat down, to smoke and to think.

To tell the truth, I felt certain qualms of conscience. Not that I had any scruples about fighting a vicious, mysterious, hidden

foe with weapons which were, to say the least, illegal. What other weapons could I have used? When a man hits you below the belt, it doesn't do any good to slap him on the wrist. But here I was about to knock a man on the head, to gag and kidnap him . . . and to do it all by proxy. I had hired a professional ruffian, a gangster, a bravo, to do my dirty work for me. Of course I never did consider myself a Bayard in courage and heroism. But then I had never imagined myself to be more of a coward than the average man.

Decidedly unpleasant thoughts! And I am inclined to be a little self-conscious anyway.

Finally I absolved myself. Even given the necessary moral and physical pluck to attend to the thing myself, I simply could not afford to run the risk. I had consecrated my life, my energies, my strength, and my knowledge to fight Hussain and the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms whom he served. I was certain that the ends justified the means. Minor considerations did not count. I had the right, I had the duty to use the tools closest at hand.

When I left the house I turned due south. The hour was near when Baltazzi was ex-

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pecting the messenger of Hussain . . . and when incidentally my Apache friend was expecting the same person.

At first I felt uncomfortable and conspicuous in my borrowed plumes. But luckily Paris is used to figures which would cause a riot and a call for the reserves on Broadway. Paris is the metropolis of all the world, the Orient included: and the same Oriental who, while in London, will out-English the English in stern, sober correctness of garb, will play understudy to a rainbow and a goldflecked Himalaya butterfly when he strikes the pleasant banks of the Seine. The reason for this metamorphosis may be found in the smile of the Frenchwoman.

At all events, there are not only the picturesque figures of the French-Colonial native levies flitting about the streets, Spahis, Turcos, Senegalese, and Tonkinese; but also Hindus, Arabs, Sinhalese, and grave, contemptuous, hawk-featured Moors . . . and many of them in their native costumes.

So I passed along quietly enough, endeavoring to imitate the quick, shuffling gait of the man used to wearing sandals.

When finally I was within sight of the Palace Baltazzi, the whole situation flashed

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on me with the sudden force of a revelation. It was all so fantastic, so incongruous, so un-American.

Spring had come early, and the silver of the full moon was dancing about the bursting foliage of the trees in fleeting arabesques. Through their tracery I caught a glimpse of Baltazzi's marble palace, cool and white and gleaming; pagan in its simple Greek simplicity, like the glad old days when the world's heart was young with laughter, and big-eyed children danced to the fluting of Pan. Inside the house was a Levantine adventurer, a former slave trader, an ally of acrid, murderous Galla chiefs. I imagined him sitting there, in the library of that cursed mansion which had ruined two great families, and staring at the sacks filled with gold which he must pay out at the soft crook of another man's fingers . . . because of the burden and the palsying fear of former crimes. And here was I in the street, hiding in the welcome shadow of a portal: a decent young American, of fair education and excellent family; dressed in the robes of a Brahmin priest, the scarlet mark of an obscene Hindu deity smeared on my forehead . . . and further down the street (we had seen each other

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and had exchanged the prearranged signal) a Paris Apache, the stinking refuse of the Outer Boulevards . . . and my paid accomplice!

The thing was fantastic enough to please the author of the craziest Grand Guignol melodrama. But it was real, real, real! And my heart seemed to plump into my shoes when I saw the face of the full moon look down at me from the heavens with a haggard, sarcastic surmise.

Punctually at eleven o'clock, a limousine whirred around the corner, a white-robed, turbaned figure at the wheel. I looked rapidly up and down the street. Luckily it was empty.

The car curved up gracefully to the entrance of the Palace Baltazzi where it stopped. The driver stepped out.

Even I, who knew what was coming, could hardly make out the exact sequence of the events which followed.

Suddenly a lithe, black shadow seemed to detach itself from the wall. There was a jump, a low, stifled outcry, the quick screwlike movement of the garrote when it is executed by an expert; and the next moment a lifeless bundle was thrown unceremoniously

into the tonneau of the car. Two seconds later, my Apache was at the wheel, as if he belonged there by right of service. He motioned me to come on.

I looked in. The Hindu was on the floor, gagged and tied, and breathing with difficulty. His turban had become loosened in the struggle, and I could see his shaven head, and the baleful caste-mark of Shiva on his forehead. I paid the five hundred francs to the brave.

"Merci, citoyen. To-morrow morning I shall release him. Any particular time?"

"About noon."

"Good."

"And listen. Hurry up and bring this car back as soon as . . ." hi

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He interrupted me with a laugh.

"The car? . . . Tu rigoles donc, mon vieux! No, no, no. I shall not bring it back. I shall keep it as a little tip. Monsieur is most generous."

He was off and around the corner before I could stop him.

Here was an ugly contretemps which I had not foreseen.

All along I had been somewhat undecided as to what I would and should do once I

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found myself in the presence of Baltazzi. I had thought first of playing the part of the Brahmin messenger straight through to the end, of taking the money, loading it into the motor-car, and using it for the purpose of fighting the very organization which it was meant to serve. There was a suggestion of grim humor in this which pleased me.

There was the other alternative of appearing to the old Levantine in my true colors, and counting on the man's gratitude, using him as a valuable confederate in my future battles with Hussain Khan. Not only that. It was also clear that Baltazzi was afraid for his life, afraid of Hussain's threat to send an avenger of the Loangos on his trail. I would persuade him to join forces with me. All the time I had been wishing for a confederate whom I could take fully into my confidence. And here was the very man.

But I knew that, whatever my decision, the motor-car should be in readiness and waiting on the street outside. How did I know that Hussain himself, anxious because of the huge amount of gold and the colossal plans involved, might not patrol the neighborhood, and even assist the messenger when it came to taking the gold away. Two hundred thou-

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sand dollars in gold! I made a rapid calculation. It would weigh nearly a thousand pounds.

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The more I thought of it, the clearer it became to me. The fact that Hussain Khan did not call for the gold himself, but sent an associate, proved that he would be in readiness somewhere to lend a helping hand. Perhaps he was afraid that the Levantine, with the courage of the cornered jackal, might show fight after all, might spring a trap. So here would be his Hindu servant to fight in the first trenches.

Now the car had disappeared. Hussain Khan would smell a rat, when he passed by. He would feel convinced that Baltazzi *had* sprung a trap. He would get into the house...

The only thing I could do would be to finish the whole thing as quickly as possible.

I hurried up the steps and rang the bell.

Baltazzi himself opened the door. He glanced at me, then, motioning me to follow, waddled ponderously up the stairs. On the second floor he opened a door. He pointed inside.

"In there," he said. "Wait." I entered.

It was the sort of room I had imagined I would find: dark, massive, rich, imposing. An Anatolian silk rug in claret color shot through with palest blue and tawny orange covered the floor. The walls were hung with ancient, priceless Cordova leather; and the chimney-piece was covered with exquisite glazed tiles from Turkish mosques.

A fit milieu for a Prince of Finance, I thought. Suddenly a flash and gleam from the left-hand wall riveted my attention. I looked closely; and I was amused at what I saw.

It is said that there is a morbid curiosity which forces the murderer to view the place of his crime. Some psychic reason of the same sort may have caused the Levantine to decorate one of the walls with a shimmering, cruel mass of African curios, sjamboks, assegais, knives, and knobkerries. They looked strangely out of place in the midst of the splendid, old-world furnishings; and they told their own grim tale.

Two minutes later, Baltazzi came softly into the room, through a small, tapestrycovered door which I had not noticed before.

He looked at me in silence. He took me

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all in, from my flowing robe and my sandals, to the scarlet mark of Shiva on my forehead. A gleam of uncertain, writhing evil was in his saturnine eyes.

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Without speaking a word, he touched a button to the left of the tapestry-door, and, quickly, noiselessly, the wall split in the center and rolled away to both sides, like a sliding door.

In its stead there was now a huge, shining steel door, with an intricate lock: his private vault.

He turned his back to me, and busied himself with the manipulation of the lock. The heavy steel door swung open. He touched a button. An electric light flared up; and there, inside of the vault, was a row of sacks. He touched one with his foot. There was the bell-like clank of minted metal.

He turned to me. When he spoke, his words were harsh, low, grating.

"There . . . there . . . take the stuff away."

He was a beaten man. Beaten for the first time in his life, I imagined. And I could not help feeling pity and even sympathy for the blood-stained old sinner. There was a certain grim dignity about him. I could well picture

him in his former rôle . . . the uncrowned, self-made satrap of wild, uncharted lands; ruling with flame and sword and gibbet; a leader in that brooding, black Africa which, since the beginning of things, has been prey to a gigantomachy of passion and brutality and bloodshed.

"There . . . there. . . ." He pointed at the gold in the vault.

I did not answer. He spoke again, raising his voice.

"Don't you hear me? There's the cursed stuff." His voice gurgled into a savage shriek. "Take it, damn you, take it!"

When afterwards I remembered the scene, I called myself all manners of weakling and idiot. But I simply did not know what to do or what to say. Should I take him into my confidence? Or should I telephone as quickly as possible for an automobile, and carry off the gold? It would be a precious and welcome war-chest.

Meanwhile the seconds were swinging past, and Hussain Khan might be near. . . .

I did not know how to decide. I walked over to the row of gold which stood there, just inside the vault. I opened one of the sacks. It contained paper-wound rolls of

gold pieces. I stooped over as if to count one of the rolls . . . just to gain time. . . .

Baltazzi was looking at me with stony, opaque eyes. The silence was like a sodden pall . . . unearthly, unreal, clogging. You could have heard the breath of a hummingbird, the dropping of a loosened poppy petal.

And still the precious minutes were slipping past.

My mental attitude was puzzling. Here I was on the very threshold of substantial success. A decision, one way or the other, would mean my first real triumph in the fight against the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms. All I had to do was to make up my mind. And I stood like a schoolboy caught in the act of smoking a cigarette . . . not only tongue-tied, but absolutely mind-tied, unable to think coherently.

I had risked a good deal to get here; and suddenly my cursed weakness, my inability to decide, piled up before me like a mountain. I felt like a man transferred without warning from the familiar milieu of New York to the environs of Pekin.

A sharp, savage ring at the front door bell, twice repeated, jerked me into conscious-

ness, into realization of the situation I was in. Baltazzi rose. I remembered Hussain Khan having stipulated that there should be no servants in the house. The Levantine would go downstairs and let him in.

It was then my power of speech and thought came back to me.

"Mr. Baltazzi!" I spoke feverishly, earnestly. "Listen. I am not a messenger of Hussain's. I'm an American. My name is Vandewater, Stuart Vandewater."

I looked at the banker. He had fallen back, into a great Florentine armchair. He sat immobile, like a statue, his head a little to one side. It was as if all his muscles had suddenly been frozen taut, into icy rigidity. It startled and frightened me.

But I heard another savage ring at the front door bell. Again and again the bell sounded: arrogant, challenging, threatening. A moment later there came the sound of an angry voice. I continued hurriedly:

"This gold . . . if I can save it for you. . . ."

The Levantine was still sitting motionless. But at my last words a look of gray, cold contempt came into his staring eyes; and there was a demoniac grin curling his broad,

thin lips as on a Tibetan devil mask. He spoke in a peculiar, thick, staccato voice.

"Gold? The gold? . . . what do I care . . for . . . the gold . . .?"

His words snapped off in the middle of a rising, questioning inflection, as if a sharp instrument were cutting into his larynx.

"Yes, yes." My words tumbled over each other. "I know what you mean. Call it gold, or call it power. Call it a big man's hatred of being beaten, held up."

There came a crash of breaking glass from downstairs. The sound of a body coming through the window of the ground floor. Hussain Khan! He was coming up the stairs. I spoke quickly, my words tangling into each other. I gave him a rapid outline of my situation, of Hussain Khan's fanatical plans, of my own plans, of my reason for being here, in his house, disguised as a Brahmin priest. . . .

"For God's sake, Baltazzi . . . stick to me

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The Levantine was still staring at me. There was a strange expression on his masklike face. His eyes seemed to have lost their luster. His right eyelid drooped oddly. His arms twitched, and his mouth sagged in a

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pitiful, downward curve. I cursed him in my heart for a yellow-blooded coward. I said to myself that whatever the next minutes would bring, I'd have to fight through them singlehanded.

Then the door was pushed open. Hussain Khan entered.

He stepped quickly into the room, a magnificent, fighting figure of a man, every nerve and muscle ready, tense, steely for swift action. He saw that fat, amorphous mass in the Florentine armchair, quivering like a jellyfish on dry ground. He took a step toward it.

Baltazzi tried to rise from his chair.

"Hussain Khan . . . Hussain Khan . . . you . . . you, . . ." he spoke with a curious, choked effort. His words seemed to draw themselves out of his mouth as if some strange power was trying to hold them back. "I . . . I . . ." His words died in his throat. His head fell on his chest.

Hussain Khan glanced at him, with a curious, impersonal look.

"Paralyzed, eh?" he said.

He looked at him again, in that same cold, impersonal manner. Asia does not know the feeling of pity. And Hussain

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Khan was the quintessence of the spirit of Asia.

He turned to me. His first words showed that he had not yet suspected me, that he still believed me to be the Hindu messenger.

"What's the matter, Chatterjee? Where is the motor-car? And what . . .?"

Suddenly he stopped his flow of words. A phantasmal film seemed to pass across his keen, brown eyes; as of wonder, amazement, doubt. He stepped up close to me. Instinctively I backed up against the wall, and just as instinctively I raised my arms. But he was too quick for me. He jerked off my turban which fell to my shoulders in loose, writhing folds.

"Vandewater!" he shouted. "May the hand of Ali protect me. . . Vandewater. . . . So you know . . . you know. . . ."

There was such an expression of startled, incredulous amazement on his face that I could not restrain my laughter.

"Yes, yes. . . ." I was half hysterical. "I know . . . you and your precious god . . . the god who is invincible . . . invincible. . . ."

I laughed again.

It was the last straw. He forgot every-

thing: his carefully laid plans, the stake for which he was playing, Admiral Segantin, the flagship stored with deadly explosives, the gold . . . everything, everything. The only thought in his soul was hatred . . . hatred and the desire to kill the man who had stepped across his path.

He came on with the rush of a maniac, arms wide open, fingers crooked and ready to clutch my throat. I gave a quick, imploring look at the helpless mass in the armchair. But the man was paralyzed. No help there!

Then my old knowledge of the noble art of self-defense came back to me. I was in for the fight of my life. I knew that. I drove viciously with right and left. It stopped him. I danced back to the wall, ducked, guarded with my right, while my left swung straight from the elbow to the point of his chin.

He dropped, but was up again in a jiffy. I tried to stop him as before, alternating my swings with vicious short jabs to the ribs. But I had not reckoned with the man's terrific physical strength, with his incredible ability to take punishment.

On he came like a Jagganath, relentless, resistless.

Suddenly he was upon me. He ducked. Just as my right arm was descending on his head, he caught it near the elbow with the open palm of his left hand, at the same time placing his right leg behind my left. I tried to jab with my other arm, when suddenly he ran his free arm under mine, drew it up around the right side of his neck, and back to the upper vertebræ of his spine. At the same time he let go of my right elbow, pressing his free fist into my kidneys.

It was all the work of a second. It was a master-trick of *jiu-jitsu*.

He pushed me back against the wall, steadily increasing the leverage on my left arm and the pressure on my kidneys. I saw stars. My eyes bulged. My throat felt parched. My temples throbbed and ached. I was gasping and choking, like a drowning man.

I knew that I was near death.

Yet it was death itself that saved me.

For suddenly there was a shriek. Not exactly a shriek. A gurgling, rattling noise, climbing up to a hellish, sharp, high note and then cut off, in mid-air as it were. It was an eerie, unearthly sound, as if from beyond the grave.

It shook even the Asian's nerves . . . those

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tough piano wires which the Oriental has in place of nerves.

He released his grip. I jumped away, rushed to the opposite wall, and seized one of the murderous African assegais the financier had brought from the Dark Continent.

Hussain Khan walked over to Baltazzi, calmly turning his back to me. The man was without fear.

He looked at the sunken mass in the chair.

The Levantine was dead. That wailing shriek had been the last shriek . . . the agonizing protest of the body cut away from the soul.

The dead man's staring eyes were turned on Hussain Khan. I shall never, never forget the gleam in those unwinking eyes . . . the cruel, mocking, satanic gleam.

They seemed to look beyond Hussain Khan, through Hussain Khan, and at me. Were they trying to flash a message into my brain? Was Baltazzi's soul still fluttering about the room, trying to send into mine some of the cunning and craft it had possessed while still it throbbed within that fat, amorphous body?

A message from Beyond the Grave?

I listened . . . listened. . . .

Then I walked over to the open door of the vault.

Hussain turned away from the dead body. He looked at me. He saw the assegai in my hand, and burst into roaring laughter.

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"Preparing to sell your life dearly, eh?" he jeered. "My friend, a second ago you stood on the threshold of ultimate oblivion. It was the death of that stinking, unclean dog over there which saved you. But even now I could kill you. See . . . " he opened his coat. I saw a heavy revolver strapped to his waist. "I could kill you. It would be a small matter. A matter of nothing at all." He sat down, lit a cigarette, and continued with utmost calm. "But I've decided to let you live . . . for the present. You may live a day, a month perhaps-who knows? half a year. But assuredly not longer than half a year. You see, my friend, you amuse me. I shall play with you a little before I kill you. There is no hurry at all. Not at all."

There was a short, tense pause. He yawned. Then he spoke again.

"Also I do not kill without preparing well the killing. If I kill you now, the chances are that the little matter of your death might

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be traced to me. The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms leaves no traces. I shall arrange for your death presently. Do not be impatient. For the moment you are safe." He laughed. "And so, my American, my Caucasian, my Christian, my White, my very, very clever friend, will you kindly leave this room at once? I have a little work to do. Take that gold away, you know. . . ." He pointed lazily at the sacks of gold inside of the vault.

I was furious. His cold arrogance had maddened me. Perhaps I was also a little afraid. I shouted.

"No . . . no . . . you shall not have the gold . . . no. . . ."

He laughed again. He took up the telephone which stood on the desk in front of him. With his left hand he drew his gun, covering me.

"Stay there . . . do not move. I shall telephone to my friends. It may be that they will not be as gentle with you as I am."

I looked at the staring eyes of the dead man. Again they seemed to flash a silent message. I turned square to Hussain, at the same time backing yet more against the open door of the vault.

"Very well, Hussain Khan. I shall go away."

"You swear it?"

"I swear it."

"Very well. I believe you. I have known Christians to keep their word."

He let go the telephone, and dropped the revolver into its holster.

And then, suddenly, with all my force, with all my energy of despair, I threw myself against the door of the vault. I threw myself against it with every ounce of my weight. The door moved. It slid, snapped, locked, settled into place.

I had won. I had put the gold beyond the reach of Hussain Khan, beyond the reach of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms.

Hussain Khan had jumped from his chair when he heard the steel door clang into place. Now he stood perfectly still. The man was magnificent. A splendid loser.

"Oh, yes," he drawled. "Presently I shall arrange for that small matter of your death."

My success had emboldened me.

"Unless I kill you first," I mocked.

"Even that is possible. Who knows? It says in the Koran that what is sown is sown,

and what is fallow is fallow. Azrael, the Angel of Death, has his rope round the heels of all of us . . . and at the appointed time he pulls. Indeed it is possible that you may kill me. . . And what of it?" He walked to the door. "My friend, even from beyond the grave you would hear from me. Even from beyond the grave I would kill you. The matter is assured."

And he was gone.

#### THE MISSING SYLLABLE

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THE telephone bell cut through my revery with a jarring twang.

Lazily, half reluctantly, I turned from the open window which overlooked the busy, happy scene of the Ochotny-Rjad Square. It was such a long, still, pleasant summer afternoon; the orange-flaming sun hanging down in the utmost northwest; the intoxicating scent of early Russian summer in the air; that peculiar, attractive mingling of leather, heavy perfumes, dried mushrooms, and sour beets which is as characteristic of Moscow, as that of sandalwood, stale opium, and fried pork is of Canton. I had filled my lungs with it. Deeply inhaling the fumes of my blonde Bostanioglo cigarette, I had dreamt of this city which is Russia, Holy Russia, Real Russia. For, to know it, to feel the soft fascination of its Slav soul, one must get away, clear away from Petrograd. The true Russia is centered in Moscow, the Premier Capital, as they call it. 202

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## THE MISSING SYLLABLE 203

Petrograd is only a lifeless bundle of bald statistics, sprinkled with English music halls, French dancers, Italian orchestras, American drummers, and German and Jewish *cocottes*. But Moscow. . . .

Dr-rr-rrrr . . . came the telephone bell again, with an impatient accusing note. I walked over to the desk. I took down the receiver.

"Hello."

"Hello, hello," came the voice from the other end of the line. "Is that you, Mr. Vandewater?"

I sat up with a start. My right hand clutched the hard rubber stand of the desk telephone convulsively. It was Mascasenhas speaking; the half-caste renegade from Goa, Hussain Khan's slave and chattel, whom I had shamed into a realization of his position, of what he owed to the *White* blood in his veins, to his Occidental traditions, his Christian faith.

"Yes, yes, Mascasenhas. What is it?"

His voice was faint, distant, blurred. I could not understand. I spoke again.

- "What is it? . . . Hello . . . Mascasenhas . . . Mascasenhas . . . hello, hello. . . . "
- Sudden silence. There was a sharp, nerv-

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ous wait. Crossed wires; or Central butting in.

"Get off that line, Central. Please do get off. This is important."

There was the retort courteous: Central's drawling voice advising me in the Muscovite vulgate to keep my hair on. A whirr and metallic snap. And then again the anxious, high-pitched voice of the Goanese.

"Listen! Listen carefully. You know ... at the ball... to-night... can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes. What ball?"

"The ball at the *Kreml*, in the Alexander Newskij Hall. . . . For the love of the Madonna, listen. There is danger, do you hear? . . . the very gravest danger. Hussain Khan . . . "

"Is he in town? Here, in Moscow?"

"Yes. He's going to play trumps to-night . . . trumps, I tell you. . . . "

"Come to the point. Do come to the point."

"Later in the evening there will . . ." Again there was a whirr, and a noise in my ear as the roaring of a sea-shell. Then once more the voice of Mascasenhas worked itself free. ". . . it's up to you to prevent

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it . . ." Then, as from a great, hazy distance . . . . "Beware of the bon . . . the bon . . . ."

I heard him smash down the receiver hurriedly. It did not take much brains to guess that he had been interrupted. Perhaps Hussain Khan himself had come into the room.

A dozen thoughts crowded in upon me.

Foremost was that Hussain Khan had followed me to Moscow. That night, three months ago, in the little marble palace of the Quartier d'Europe in Paris, when I had spoiled his blackmailing game with Baltazzi, the Levantine banker, when I had saved to France a heavy toll of lives, circumstances had forced me to show my hand. I had proved that I was thoroughly familiar with the dire plans of that secret organization of Oriental assassins, who pray to the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms; whose hired, fanatic hatchetmen ply their nefarious trade dressed as Brahmin priests, with the scarlet caste-mark of Shiva daubed on their foreheads. I had shown that I knew Hussain Khan to be the master-ministrant of the cruel-mouthed, lust-scabbed Hindu divinity . . . for all his Moslim name and ancient One-God faith.

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I had won that night. For once, my American, my Western quick-mindedness had outmatched his crass-sharp, acrid Oriental cunning. I had not been able to save the life of Baltazzi. The excitement of the moment had brought on a heavy paralytic stroke; and death had come. His fat, amorphous body had stiffened into stark oblivion. But his death, while dramatic, was after all only a side-issue. The main thing was that I had kept those sacks of gold from falling into the hands of Hussain Khan, who needed this war chest for the furtherance of his schemes.

Thinking over the whole affair, I had decided to approach the French Government with the tale of my discoveries. At first they had doubted me; had ridiculed me in a polite, Gallic manner; had treated me as a harmless lunatic who had read too many of Eugène Sue's, Leroux', and Gaboriau's fantastic novels. But I had insisted. I had quoted chapter and verse. Then they had listened more carefully. They had investigated. But when I wanted them to act, they had shrugged their official shoulders, and had declared that they were helpless.

"For France . . . yes," they had told me in so many words. "But for the whole world

... enfin ... let the world look after its own interests. France was too busy filling the stockings which the great European War had so sadly depleted."

Only M. Duval, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, understood the seriousness of the situation. He had given me a letter to Hector de Longueville, French Ambassador in Moscow.

"Go and see him, mon cher monsieur," he had said. "Since the end of the war, the policies of Europe are being arranged in the Russian capital. Apply there ... at the fountain-head."

So I had taken the express train, Paris-Berlin-Alexandrovo-Moscow. Hence my presence in the ancient capital of the North.

Of course I knew straight along that Hussain Khan would easily discover my whereabouts, follow me, sooner or later, and get me if he could. There was no doubt of it at all. Nor was there any doubt as to his ability for "getting" people. So Mascasenhas' message, at least that part of it which told me that he and his master were in town, did not come altogether with the thump of surprise. What startled me was that the Goanese had not given me a *personal* warn-

ing, but had spoken about the ball at the Alexander Newskij Hall. Did he mean to strike at the Tsar? Preposterous. Impossible. His Majesty was too well guarded.

But what then *had* that half-caste meant? My thoughts ran in a circle.

For again: would it really be impossible? Had anything so far been impossible to that organization of Asian assassins? The Viceroy of India, the Governor of Madras, Senator Kuhne of California, Horst von Pless, a dozen others, high-moving factors in the destinies of the Western world on both sides of the Atlantic, had paid the toll of *impossibilities* with their lives.

Nothing was impossible. Nothing is ever impossible to the massed, sharp-cutting energies of a nation, a Continent in ferment. Here was hidden combustion, dark-smoking and unluminously smoldering. Here was Asia, the picked brains of all Asia, making private, ruthless war: gathering strength like a shoreless ocean of rolling eternity. To say that anything was impossible to them would be but a foolish denial of the palpably existing. It would be like trying to shut out the glaring of the inevitable with a veil of canting fear.

Impossible? Why, isn't it always the impossible which happens in history?

It was impossible that the lean, desertbred Arabs, converted to the faith and sword of Mohammed, should overrun half the world, like locusts, eat it up, conquer it. When Louis of France hunted in the forests of Fontainebleau, when the gentry and the nobility played at Watteau groups in the glades of Versailles, it seemed impossible that, a decade hence-hotly fermenting, ominously glooming-red-handed Quartier Antoine would sweep through Paris with aristocratic heads fastened to the ends of their pikes. King George, when he sent his Hessians across the Atlantic, would have sneered at the impossibility of the brown, horny, toiling hand of Democracy brushing aside the Tory Quality-cobweb with a short, impatient gesture.

And something just as *impossible* was going to happen this very night.

So, with a mixture of fear and pride, I prepared to match my square, heavy Western power of reasoning against the algebraic cunning of the Central Asian. I remembered a saying I had heard, years ago, in India: Only a fool tries to attach a handle to an

egg. Very well. I would be that fool tonight.

"Beware of the bon . . ."

What was the meaning of this maddening half-message? It was exasperating. At once a veil and a revelation; at once inaccessible and near.

Was then this might of the Western world but a dream? Was all our famed strength only a gossamer Colossus with feet of cloudy vapor which the breath of a missing syllable could blow away?

I walked up and down, troubled, nervous. One thing stood forth in harsh outlines. I must attend the ball.

I turned again to the telephone. Two minutes later, I had the Chief of the Administrative Police on the wire.

"That you, Volkhanskij?"

"Yes."

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"This is Vandewater talking. Look here. I must attend the ball to-night . . . at the *Kreml*. See that I get in. . . ."

"But . . . but . . ."

"There is no But. Remember your orders."

There was a note of resignation in the soft, purring answer.

"Oh, very well, little father. Very well, little dove. I'll see that you get in."

Of course I knew that when I called him up; when I mentioned the orders.

These orders had been the outcome of a memorable interview of two months ago, which I had obtained with the help of the letter given me in Paris by M. Duval.

Only two months ago! And it seemed like an eternity.

I thought of it now . . . the big square room looking out on the *Wosskressenskaya*, in the gray pile of the Russian Foreign Office. The meeting. And how I had talked, talked, talked; giving figures and dates.

What a scene it was in my memory! That hush of perfect silence after I had finished talking!

Prince Kokoshkine, second in power only to the Tsar, sat ponderously thinking. Sir James Thomson, the burly, red-faced Lancashireman, was tugging viciously at his bushy beard. Hector de Longueville had stepped to the window, looking out on the sun-bathed streets of Moscow.

To me the afternoon had marked a personal triumph; the taking-up, or at least the official recognition of my feud with the God

of the Invincibly Strong Arms by France, Great Britain, and Russia. It was incense to my vanity that I, an ex-clerk of the American Foreign Office, should thus confer with the leaders of Western Europe.

There had of course been a lengthy correspondence, meetings, investigations, and deliberations. I had convinced them of the truth of my story. And they had asked me to accept their and their Governments' thanks . . . perhaps a gaudy decoration or two to sport with my evening dress. They had told me in so many words to step aside gracefully, and to let them finish the job. I had refused to do this for two reasons: First of all, I was afraid that the clumsy wheels of their official machinery would not be able to adjust themselves to the sharp, dangerous delicacy of the enterprise. And then, the fight was to me a personal one: my brains pitted against those of Hussain Khan. West against East.

So, at this final interview, I had thrown away every shred of modesty I had ever possessed. I had refused to be intimidated by their titles and king-made dignities. I had stuck to my point. Bluff? Possibly so. But it worked. And now, after I had finished my

lengthy harangue, it seemed that the three European statesmen, the greatest of their time and countries, were ranged about my feet like so many lesser divinities around Inscrutable Gautama Buddha in a jingling Burmese pagoda.

A similar thought must have occurred to Thomson. He had turned a shade more purple, if that was possible, and had addressed me in his arid, pinchbeck Lancashire manner:

"Everything you told us is true. We know that. These murders . . ." he shuddered slightly. "Yes, Mr. Vandewater, you have traced these murders to a Society of Orientals which has its net all over the world, and its central organization in a Hindu temple at Marly-le-Roi. All very true. And of course we are duly grateful to you. Shall speak of it to your Government. But I'm hanged if I like the cure with which you propose to fight the evil."

"Yes." Prince Kokoshkine came out of his revery. He smiled at me in his melancholy Slav manner. "You demand carte blanche, implicit obedience to your orders from every police authority in Europe. Rather a tall order, I am afraid."

"Quite so, quite so," bellowed Sir James.

"This is the Twentieth Century. So why not fight with Twentieth Century methods?"

I remembered how I had laughed in his face. My answer was sharp, derisive. I was playing for a big stake.

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"Twentieth Century methods? . . . Oh, yes, Sir James. I know them: swords and bullets and war-making ships; raw words of power and subtle phrases of diplomacy; railroads and whisky and missionaries and peaceful penetration. Once in a while the matter of a small war against ill-armed natives. I know your methods, your code. But how will they help you to fight an enemy who refuses to acknowledge your precious code? Hussain Khan and all he stands for, all he controls? You are choked in the hard wrappage of that shallow levity which you call European traditions, and you can't see beyond it." I was getting heated, angry. "You are fools, myopic fools! Your Twentieth Century methods are strong enough to cope with Twentieth Century wrongs, I daresay. But this is a diabolical wrong out of the womb of Asia. You will not find it enuamongst your parchment-laws. merated Can't you see beyond the ends of your noses? Can't you see this sinister power . . . stand-

ing naked, flashing in on you, awful, unspeakable? . . . Good God, man, can't you understand that you will wreck your ship on the peak of a submerged world?"

There was no budging Sir James. Every pound of British beef which had contributed to the making of his strong, muscular body objected to the American novelty, the Transatlantic unorthodoxy of my plans. He stuck to his own plan.

"But what do you propose to do?" I demanded.

"Good old British advice: let's straight at the beggars and knock them flat."

I expostulated.

"That isn't possible, my dear Sir James. If you approach . . . let's say, the Japanese, the Afghan, or the Chinese Government with what I have discovered, they will either deny all knowledge of it; or they will say that they cannot be held responsible for individual crimes of their subjects abroad."

Prince Kokoshkine lit another cigarette. He turned to me.

"Why not arrest the whole lot at Marlyle-Roi? Why not strike a blow at the central organization?"

"Yes," chimed in the French ambassador.

"We can issue the warrants. We have your own testimony, as well as that of the Goanese half-caste we heard about. We can put our trained detective force on the trail and obtain all the corroborative evidence we want."

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"Oh, yes," I smiled. "You would certainly arrest them under the law. But that would mean publication of the facts in every newspaper; which would mean the outbreak of the most horrible wave of public indignation the world has ever heard of; and a wholesale lynching of every Oriental in Europe and America. That, in turn, would mean war . . . war against all Asia, and revolution and massacre in every European colony east of Suez. And we do not want war. We never again want war. We have had enough . . . for all eternity, enough. . . ."

Thomson was walking up and down, impatiently.

"If war must be, it must be. It cannot be helped. We cannot let these Asiatic Nihilists do away gradually with every prominent statesman in Europe. To-morrow it may be I; and the next day you, Prince Kokoshkine."

I was leaning forward in my chair. I

pointed an accusing finger at the Englishman.

"And why not you, Sir James? And why not Prince Kokoshkine? . . . Or any other European statesman? I've shown you a way out of this maze. But no. You refuse to shed that tinselly wrappage which you call tradition. You would rather buy a new aceldama, a new field of Judas, with the blood-bribe of the people whom you rule. You would rather fatten the glebes of the battle-fields with the bodies of those whom you are supposed to guide. And all because you can't see; because your fat, greasy mind pines and chokes stagnantly in thick, stinking, mildewy obscuration. You and your Twentieth Century, your damned, perverse humanitarianism! You . . . you . . . .''

I stopped short. I considered that it was a mistake to let my temper get the best of my reason. I was drifting away from the main issue; and Thomson was obstinately holding out against me, simply because of his personal dislike of having to take my advice, the advice of an ex-clerk of the American Foreign Office.

I had finally regained my equanimity. So once more I had explained the stark, dire

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portent of the whole affair, and the comparative facility of the scheme which I had proposed.

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I had wound up with a bit of healthy American bluff.

"Take it or leave it, gentlemen. But my idea is the right one. Hussain Khan is fully aware of the fact that I know what he and his organization stand for. He will try to do away with me. If he finds out that others beside myself are on the inside he will strike at the others as well. The thing to do is to limit the number of those who stand in immediate danger of being assassinated. I'm willing to limit that number to one: to myself. But I demand one thing from you. After all, I'm fighting your battles."

Twenty minutes later I had left the Foreign Office, and in my pocket was a letter signed by His Excellency Prince Kokoshkine, Prime Minister of the Russian Empire, instructing the Chief of the Administrative Police to obey me implicitly and promptly in anything I asked. It was a *carte blanche*; an absolute *carte blanche*.

And it had insured my presence at tonight's ball.

This ball, a masquerade affair given at the

Kreml, was intended to mark the crowning event of the epoch. Ringing down the old, it was meant to ring in the new.

The ball on the eve of Waterloo had preluded, harsh-clanking, the bloody spectacle of embattled Europe. But this ball was prophesied to strike the high-note of a different overture . . . the overture of goodwill, peace, international friendship and understanding amongst the Christian peoples of the world.

Conceived in the scholastic brains of our President, supported by the moans of a torn, wounded world which had suffered, bled, *killed* its thorny path to the quick-clear, irrefragable logic of Peace; it had finally been crystalized into shape, into breathing, pulsating life by that mystic dreamer who sat on the throne of the Romanoffs.

This man, grayed, aged, mellowed by the events of the last year, had thrown aside the ambitions of his youth, of his early manhood; his pouting, petting, thin-petulant ambitions of Conquest which blazed into disastrous flame in the war against Japan. He had ceased from mumming his brain and his soul into the speciosities of that farce-tragedy which is Might of the Sword.

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So he had risen from chaos, a new man, a proud, strong man, whose proud, strong hands should no more be gyved by a warshouting, arrogant, clanking military aristocracy; whose proud, strong soul should no more be muzzled and fettered by the rotting packthreads of narrow nationalism. He was going to write the world's new epic, a vision lit with fine, white prophecies . . . clear, clear away from the braggart, false, selfworshiping imperialistic legend, from bigot craft and power, blood-cemented. He would heal the body of the world from the stinking bruises and ulcers of war, washed in blood and caked with the sweat of suffering.

So he had taken up the world's pitiful cry for Peace and the Blessings of Peace. Sharp-cutting, crass-powerful, but ever suffused by the light of mystic visions, he had gone his new, sweet, clean way . . . talking, writing, conferring, arguing, traveling from country to country, with the Message ever on his lips.

Like a keen sword, the sword which cuts not its own scabbard, he had flashed his mind to the Victories of Peace.

There was his famous speech of the month before:

"The Hague? . . . The Hague Peace Tribunal? . . . I say: let us have a Hague in every land, in every city, in every village, even in the farthest loneliest *isbah* of the North. It will be the end of war. God Himself will fight our battles then: the battles of justice and fairness."

Finally the man's terrific earnestness and tragic sincerity had triumphed. The nations had come together. Even bald-headed, sneering diplomats had been shamed, first into silence, then into enthusiastic support. Peace and good-will was the thought, the slogan, the talk, the fixed idea of nations and individuals. No more international bickerings, no more jingoism, no more bloodspurting jealousies, was the cry of the multitudes.

Of course numberless treaties would have to be signed.

Even the Millennium must have the approval of Parliament sitting in solid, buckram burgess state, and of silken-breeched ambassadors and special envoys inking their pens and signing emblazoned parchments. Even the achievement of a divine ideal demands trapping and tinsel and mummery.

The Tsar knew this. Himself a romantic

figure, romantically thinking and reasoning, he had thus arranged a splendid masquerade ball at the *Kreml*. Everybody of note would be there. But the spotlight would fall most strongly on the ambassadors of Europe and of the Americas who had come to Moscow to sign the international treaty of amity and peace.

It was a charming idea, conceived in the mind of a beauty-worshiping artist.

Consider:

A ball, a masquerade, gay with motley costumes, flashing in colors and gold and jewels; strains of soft music; a banquet; a feast worthy of the Romans. Everything, in short, appealing to the five senses which mean life and the enjoyment of life. Then, sharp with the stroke of midnight, the Emperor, accompanied by the foreign envoys, would adjourn to the small audience chamber. There they would sign the treaty.

Then the Emperor, surrounded by the envoys, would step out on the broad terrace which had specially been built above the wall of the *Kreml*, overlooking the streets of the *Kitai Gorod*, Moscow's ancient Chinatown. There he would proclaim to the assembled

multitudes that the New Era had been ushered in.

At the same time all the bells of that City of Churches would ring. From the top of the *Ivan Velikij*, built by Boris Godunoff, the usurper, the *Tsar Kolokul*, the "Emperor of Bells," recently mended and set up again, would boom forth. Everywhere the message of the bells; from the Blagowjechtsenskij Cathedral to the little painted chapel of the Tchudoff monastery, that old pile which is still redolent of Dshany Beg, great amongst Tartar Khans.

It was a colossal thought. Staged by a master-hand, it would stand forth in the annals of future history as something gigantic, something unforgettable.

And on this night of nights, Hussain Khan, that evil genius out of Asia, was going to "play trumps."

My task to stay his hand.

But what could I do? If only Mascasenhas had finished his warning message! If only he had finished that one broken word, had given me that one missing syllable!

Of course I could have instructed the Police to arrest Hussain Khan. Thanks to the thorough Russian system, which forces every

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foreign or out-of-town visitor to present his passports and register at the nearest police station on the day of his arrival, he could be located within the half-hour.

And what then? Hussain Khan's cunning mind was certain to have foreseen and discounted this possibility, certain to have arranged for an avenue of escape and success of some sort. He had spies and helpers in every large city. His might was that of the many-headed hydra, a hydra looking on the writhing, strangled world with clay-cold, opaque, almond-shaped eyes . . . the pitiless eyes of Asia.

There was another reason why I did not want to have Hussain Khan arrested.

I had never so far caught him *in flagrante* delicto, in a criminal act which would justify me, legally and morally, to take the law into my own hands . . . to kill him, in other words. Here then was my chance. If tonight he should attempt murder . . . and what else could the half-caste have meant by "playing trumps"? . . . if I kept my eyes open, my wits sharpened to the flash of the moment; if I succeeded to save whatever life he would endeavor to take; if I stepped in at the right time, I could kill him. I would

rid the world, the Western world, once and for all of this new Attila, this new Scourge of God.

Furthermore, I figured that, with Hussain Khan near me, my own life wouldn't be worth even an optional purchase. He would not leave Moscow without striking at me. And his strike was that of the hooded cobra: instant death. Yes. He would strike at me . . . unless I got the drop on him.

Still, I could not stalk and kill him in cold blood, out of hand, as he would stalk and kill me. Question of race and racial prejudices, racial traditions, I guess. I am an American, a White Man, with more or less of that conscience-bred pity and love of fair play which, according to Nietzsche, will some day ruin the Western world. He, on the other hand, was an Asiatic, a man whose moral conduct and prejudices were based on the exactly opposite theorems. A crow will not become a swan by bathing in the Ganges, I was told in India. And I could not justify, purify an action which I knew to be wrong, by a process of whitewashing sophistry.

I would kill him quick enough. But the reason, the cause for the killing must be clear

to hand. And perhaps it would come to my hand this very night.

It was a foregone conclusion that Hussain Khan would attend the ball. It was to be assumed that he would not act alone. It was, furthermore, a certainty that he and his associates would come in costumes and masks known to each other.

Then I started reasoning backward.

I tried to fit my mind into that of this sharp-thinking Asian who always thought of every loophole, of every possibility and impossibility.

"There will be a huge variety of costumes," Hussain would think. "Might it not thus be within the limits of possibility that somebody else, unawares, might choose the very costume which I and my helpers decided on?"

A password, a sentence of recognition, would be the logical outcome of such reasoning. But how could I discover it? An impossible task. Yet I decided that I must try.

I telephoned again to the Police. I told them what I wanted.

Fifteen minutes later Vassily Volkhanskij called me up. He told me that Hussain Khan and two other Orientals had taken a suite

of rooms at the Grand Hotel on the Bolschaja Lubjanka, not very far from the Kreml.

"All right, Volkhanskij," I answered. "Please send round to the hotel, and arrange that I am shown into the room which is next door to their sitting-room. Post a couple of your best men there. Let them see to it that I get into the room without the slightest commotion. It is essential that Hussain Khan should not know that I am there. If Hussain Khan and his friends leave the hotel have them shadowed."

When I arrived at the Grand Hotel, one of the detectives, Fedor Narunyin, told me that Hussain Khan and both his friends had left there ten minutes ago. He was having them shadowed; he had just received a report over the wire that they had gone across the street to the Ermitage Restaurant. They had ordered an elaborate and lengthy meal, and would therefore not be back for at least an hour.

So there was nothing I could learn by playing the eavesdropper just then.

But suppose I had a look at their rooms. Chance might be good to me and give me a clew. At least I would be able to discover what costumes they would wear to-night.

For it was clear that they would have their own costumes; they would not hire them at a theatrical costumier's, and thus, in case they attempted and succeeded to commit whatever crime they had planned, give the police an extra trail to follow up.

The detective went to see the manager. Two minutes later I was in Hussain Khan's suite.

My first look was for the costumes.

I did not have to look very long. There were three of them in plain view, thrown across a couch. They were not new. Though clean, with that scrupulous, religious cleanness which is so typical of Central Asia and India, they held also that strange, not unattractive aroma of the yellow lands: a mating of musk, tobacco, rose oil, opium, and sandalwood. They were exactly alike: loose, white, toga-like robes, gay-colored leather socks, sandals, and turbans; the correct garbs of Shiva-worshiping Brahmin priests. There were also three ordinary black-face masks.

It was like Hussain Khan's colossal, grim arrogance, I thought, to appear, ready to "play trumps," ready to commit murder, dressed as a priest of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms. I examined the costumes

carefully for any slight mark of identification known only to the wearers, a tiny mark which might escape the eye of the casual observer. For I decided, then and there, to attend the ball in the same costume. There would be four, and not three Brahmin priests gracing the Alexander Newskij Hall that night. But I found no marks, nothing to go by, though I examined the robes and turbans stitch for stitch.

Then I searched every nook and corner of the suite, assisted by Fedor Narunyin, who was a very efficient detective. But there was nothing even faintly resembling a clew to Hussain Khan's plans. There was nothing but that indefinable scent of the Oriental.

God knows what I expected to find, what I could have expected to find. After all, it was only a blind, unthinking hunch I had obeyed in entering and examining the apartment. And now I felt the least little bit discouraged, damped-down for the moment. What a hopeless, what a gigantically hopeless task I had tackled, I said to myself! And no help, no help anywhere. Should I choose the easiest way, have Hussain Khan and his associates arrested?

No, no. There was no way of proving any-

thing against them, of holding them. They would be set free on the morrow. They would at once return to their plans. It would only be a delay at the best. To-night was my chance to play the game . . . to win the game.

But what could I do? My courage and determination were suddenly like a leaf that lies rotting in moist winds.

Reluctantly I turned to go, when I passed again by the center table, where a book was lying open. I had seen it when I came into the room; but I had paid no particular attention to it. Now, casually glancing at it, I noticed that it was written in the square, stiltified characters of Sanskrit. I looked closer. Yes, it was written in Sanskrit, a language with which I am fairly familiar, thanks to my Oriental studies.

The book proved to be a copy of the Kata Upanishad, that Aryan work of poetry and legends (not to mention racial conceit) which holds the sum-total of the Hindu Vedanta, the entire Hindu system of religion and philosophy.

The volume had evidently been forced open in such a way that the pages remained flatpressed at the place where they had last been read. Examining the book, I discovered that

while the hand-written pages were yellow with age, the binding was new and stiff, and that a man, to cause the pages to remain spread flat as they were, must have pressed them down with considerable force. I became interested. I examined the pages carefully. Then I noticed the imprints of a henna-stained finger right below the lines of one of the verses. It was very evident that somebody had used the lines, perhaps recited them, perhaps memorized them, to emphasize a special point. Reading them over and over again, he must have followed the lines with his finger. Here was the mark, the mark of a henna-stained finger. I smelt The acrid scent of the drug was still it. noticeable, fresh, unmistakable.

Who had used the book, and why? I could not guess. As a religious book it meant nothing to Hussain Khan, who was a Moslim. Why then this book of Hindu faith in his room? Why the flat-pressed, open page? Why the finger-mark beneath the lines of the one stanza? Perhaps Hussain Khan had read the book as I would read a book of French philosophy, and had been struck by the beauty of this one passage. But the finger-marks were colored with henna.

Hussain Khan was a Central Asian, and the Central Asians do not use the drug. They think it unclean. Oh, yes, his two friends. They were Hindus. But then a Hindu, jealous, intolerant of his faith, would most decidedly not read the Kata Upanishad, the most secret, most basic document of his ancient faith, in the room of a Moslim, an infidel in his eyes. Rather a hopeless tangle.

I thought rapidly. I read over the lines:

The hard-to-see, the mystery-hidden, Heart-dwelling, cave-abiding, old . . . He who by brooding o'er his inner self Sees him as God escaped both joy and grief.

Then an idea came to me. I took out my fountain pen and my little memorandum book, and carefully copied the lines.

A scheme was shaping itself in my brain; a scheme with a solid enough foundation, though the crowning edifice which I proposed to erect on it was still rather weak, dubious, shadowy; like a delicate, tinselly filigree vase, ridiculously propped and buttressed with rough, blunt masonry.

I left the Grand Hotel and turned away from the Bolschaja Lubjanka, toward the

Mochowaja. But even while I was stepping into the shop of a theatrical costumier, I tore down some of the selfsame, very solid foundations. I had originally intended to add a fourth to that trio of Brahmin priests at to-night's masked ball.

Now I reconsidered. I changed that part of my plans. Even suppose I discovered the password of these Asian assassins (and I had an idea that I would discover it presently), it would alarm Hussain Khan to see a fourth man, dressed in the sacerdotal robes of the dread deity to whom his organization made blood-stained sacrifices. I thought that, after all, I would have to leave something, a great deal in fact, to blind, sporting chance, to the adventurer's Madonna. There would be, could be no progress along definite lines to a definite goal. I'd have to rely on chance to build a house for me; on the driftwood of accident to float together into the making of a stout-riding ship wherein to sail my hopes of success.

I walked back to the Grand Hotel. One of the detectives was still there.

"Tell me," I said, "what are these two Asians like . . . the friends of Hussain Khan?"

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"Medium-sized men . . . about your size . . . and . . . ."

"Thanks, thanks," I interrupted. "That's all I want to know."

I hailed the next droschky.

"To the Administrative Police building," I directed him. "Just as fast as that old nag of yours 'll go."

I leaned back comfortably, lit one of those long-tubed, bully Russian cigarettes, and chuckled to myself, as the cab whirred round the corner. "Medium-sized men . . . about your size," the detective had told me. And Hussain Khan was an exceptionally tall and broad-shouldered man. Here was the first trick turned down in my favor.

Five minutes later the *droschky* stopped at my destination. I entered the large, squat, gray building, a relic of the simpering baroque period, doubtless designed by one of those many German architects who swarmed over Russia in former centuries: for the façade was decorated with paunchy cupids and with those Germanic Venuses whose anatomy bulges at the wrong places. I had never ceased to wonder by what ironic mischance it housed the police headquarters at this latter age.

Vassily Volkhanskij received me immediately. That *carte blanche* order which Prince Kokoshkine, the Prime Minister, had signed and given to me had turned this buckramlined, stiff-souled incarnation of Russian bureaucracy into a model of devoted obsequiousness. He behaved in my presence with the unctuous ceremoniousness of an ancient Hebrew prophet face to face with the *shekinah*, the Ark of Testimony.

His greeting was typical.

"Ah, little father, you honor me."

He tried to kiss me, Russian style, on the shoulder. I resisted. And finally I accepted a handful of his lovely blond cigarettes as a compromise.

On the few occasions in the past when I had used the Prime Minister's *carte blanche* orders, Volkhanskij had done my bidding without hesitation, without superfluous questions, and—best of all—without indiscretions.

So it was this time.

He listened carefully to my rapid instructions.

"Let me repeat your orders, little father," he finally said. "I do not want to make any mistakes. First of all, you want me to shadow the three Orientals to-night until they

reach the Alexander Newskij Hall. Whatever means they may employ to gain admittance to the ball, you do not want me to interfere."

"Correct. Go on."

"As they pass up the staircase which leads to the main hall, the new story which His Gracious Imperial Majesty designed lately to have erected . . . as they pass up this staircase, together with the crush, you want me to have some of my detectives separate one of the two smaller ones from his companions, and to hustle him, quickly, silently, and without creating any commotion, into a safe room."

"Look here," I interrupted. "Can that be done?"

He smiled.

"Of course, little father. I have the very man to do it. The very man. It's a beautiful trick. It is handy, useful. I remember, two years ago . . . a little meeting of students at the university . . . a little trouble . . . a little shooting . . . ah, and then a little knouting." He smiled reminiscently. "I remember how we had received orders to separate one of these foolish young students from the crowd . . . a great name he bore . . . it was

not good that he should be knowted . . . and so . . .  $\ref{eq:solution}$ 

I interrupted his flood of anecdote. I was in a hurry.

"Tell me some other time. Go on with your orders."

"Very well, Mr. Vandewater. You further ask me to have this man bound and gagged, and to notify you as soon as it is done. Very well, sir. Now tell me. How shall my men recognize you? What costume are you going to wear?"

I thought rapidly. It would be best to wear nothing very distinctive, for the sake of Hussain Khan. There would be lots of Russian gentlemen there, and no doubt a good half of them would come in the ancient garb of the *boyar*, the country gentleman.

"I shall be dressed as a *boyar*. There will be many others dressed the same way. And so I shall carry my fur hat in my right hand, and fan myself with it continuously. That should be good enough, don't you think?"

"It will do perfectly, Mr. Vandewater."

I left him and hurried back to the OchotnyRjad Square, to my hotel. It was getting late in the afternoon. I had to dine (and I am

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one of those chaps who have to feed rather heartily if they want their nerves to be in working shape); then I had to change; also to think over the situation a bit more.

I stopped at the theatrical costumier's. I had no trouble about obtaining a *boyar* costume. As I surveyed myself in front of the cheval glass, in the shop, I was rather struck by my own appearance. It gave me a certain, bold Muscovite air of reckless abandon which tickled my vanity.

My dinner was not the success I had meant it to be. The gray Molossol caviare seemed too salted, the *borscht* soup too sweet, and the Château Yquem too sour. It was the fault of my mental condition. For all the time my mind kept pondering on Mascasenhas' telephone message:

"Beware of the bon . . ."

The bon—what? . . . All my thoughts, all my thinking, reasoning, guessing faculties seemed glued to the dead cerement of that one missing syllable. I knew that this one word, cut in two at the psychological moment, held the answer to the whole choking, threatening mystery.

Frequently, while I was dining, and, later on, when I changed from braided cutaway

and striped trousers into the velvet coat, loose trousers, and high, soft-leather boots of a *boyar*, I consulted the memorandum book where I had written down the lines from the Kata Upanishad, which I had found in Hussain Khan's sitting-room.

I read them over and over again until I knew them by heart.

The hard-to-see, the mystery-hidden, Heart-dwelling, cave-abiding, old . . . He who by brooding o'er his inner self Sees him as God escaped both joy and grief.

I had a pretty good guess where the knowledge of these ancient Aryan lines would come in handy. A random shot? Perhaps. But eventually this random shot was destined to hit the black.

I was ready to go. I wanted to be among the first arrivals.

I shall never forget the drive to the Kreml.

Earlier in the afternoon the sky had been black and threatening, pregnant with lowhanging, sweeping rain clouds. A thunderstorm rolled out of the north. Crimson

flashes rent the quivering, brown air. But a counter wind came up about six o'clock from the south, and swept the heavens clean again. Now it was soft and warm and pleasant. A good omen, must have been the thought in the hearts of the happy crowds which thronged the streets and the cafés.

The town was *en fête*. Flags waved from every roof. Not only the Eagles of the Imperial Russian Standard, but the Tricolor of France, the Black-White-Red of Germany, the Red Cross of England, the Stars and Stripes, and all the other motley emblems of Europe and of America. Rugs and tapestry hung from the windows, and around them were garlands of flowers and of electric lights. Moscow was as a bridal chamber prepared for the bridegroom's coming.

The crowds had commenced to gather at an early hour. The whole district in the neighborhood of the *Kreml*, not only the comparatively newer boulevards to the west of the Red Market, but even the ancient twisted streets of the *Kitai Gorod*, right up to the walls of the *Kreml*, were a solid phalanx of humanity. All Russia was represented in that throng: White Russians and Little Russians, Letts and Finns, Poles and

Ruthenians, Jews and Buddhists from the southern steppes, Turkomans and Armenians, Georgians from Tiflis and Greeks from Odessa...

The gala carriages of every foreign ambassador were cheered and cheered and cheered. Laughter was an echo without ends. For was not to-night the Night of Nights, the night of promise and fulfillment? Tonight would see the signing of the international treaty which would change Gehenna into Paradise.

It was surprising to see how few military uniforms were in the crowd; here, in Moscow, a great garrison town. Perhaps the officers and soldiers knew that they would have been out of place on this night which was destined to herald the coming of eternal peace and friendship. Uniforms? . . . In the future they would only mean the last tatters and fibers of old, warring Feudality; to be preserved in museums as future mementoes of dark barbarism.

As my carriage neared the *Kreml*, the crowds became ever more bunched, and ever more animated. It was as if a light-hearted Gallic sprite had descended among these melancholy burgesses of the North. There

was a pleasant, gay ripple and hum of talk. Once in a while an enthusiastic shout. Again tears and suppressed sobs. For there were women in the crowd, . . . women in deep black, who thought of the Might-Have-Been.

Eyes were lifted to the broad terrace whence the Tsar was going to address the multitude at midnight.

"Look," the crowds seemed to say, "look well at that terrace up there. For it is there that our Tsar shall preach to-night his New, Imperial, International World-Embracing Jacobinism. It is there that he shall wave the triunal standard of Peace, Love, and Justice."

But my heart did not laugh and make merry with the crowd. I seemed to feel graylipped sorrow kiss my cheek; and before me towered the enormous portals of gloom . . . and mine, mine the weak hands to open them, to batter them in.

Hussain Khan! Hussain Khan was going to play trumps to-night!

And, as I looked at the gay-laughing crowds, their merriment was like a rainbowcolored spray, playing foolishly over a darkswirling, bottomless cataract.

My carriage turned, through the West Gate, into the Kreml.

I was one of the first to arrive at the Alexander Newskij Hall. Vassily Volkhanskij himself was there, waiting for me. He passed me in.

"I've eight of my best men posted about the building," he told me, as we walked through the lower entrance hall. "There will be no trouble about doing what you told me to do." He stopped; hesitated for the fraction of a moment; then he looked squarely at me. "Mr. Vandewater, I've never doubted you. I've never hesitated to do your bidding since that day on which you presented to me Prince Kokoshkine's written instructions, have I? . . . I've been discreet, silent. . . . But . . . to-night . . . I would like to . . .

His voice wavered. I put my hand on his shoulder.

"To-night, Volkhanskij, is the night on which I hope to justify your Prime Minister's confidence in me. Keep your eyes and your ears wide open. Help me when you see that I need help. Trust me. Stick to me." I whispered in his ear. "It goes for the life of the Tsar."

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"The Tsar . . . the Tsar." His voice was low, broken, hollow. Then he held out his hands and grasped mine. "I trust you, Vandewater. And I know that you will succeed." He swallowed hard. "May God help you!"

Tears came to my eyes. That buckramlined Muscovite official, that incarnation of Russian bureaucracy and Peter the Great's famed list of precedence, that shaggy giant who looked like a *Jötun* of Norse mythology, had a heart after all. He trusted me. There was infinite confidence and sincerity in his firm hand-clasp, his low voice, his pale-blue eyes. It encouraged me. It was stimulant I needed. Suddenly a wave of gayety surged through me.

"Let's look about a bit, old man."

The great banquet hall had been made ready for the dance. Furniture and carpets had been removed, until there was nothing there but the hard-shining parquet floor.

But a fiery hand seemed to have brushed caressingly through the apartment.

For high up against the vaulted ceiling, and covering all the walls, diaphanous silk had been stretched, puffed, and pleated; silk in the delicate spring tints of a rainbow, and

illuminated by thousands of hidden electric lights. Then the decorators must have ransacked the bird cages and the insectaria of the Zoölogical Garden. For hundreds of birds and butterflies and tropical moths were flying about behind the silken screens, dimly discernible, rolling a pageant of tropical colors through the gossamer of the puffed silk. There was a whirr of plum-blue wings, and of wings like dusk-purple and scarlet flecked with silver and ultramarine; again peacock-green, violet, rose, and tawny orange spotted with heliotrope and deepest black . . . a crazy clash of colors, as of sea foam spraying up to the golden moon. It was Russia. The rich, barbaric beauty of Russia.

I looked and marveled. A festival of color and light, I said to myself, a fitting, splendid apotheosis for this night which was meant to herald the coming of the true light for the Western World.

Then my old despair surged over me again, in gray, leaden waves.

Light? A light, did I say? Why, to me it was but a dim fuliginous half-light, grimmed by the black, portentous shadow of Hussain Khan. A Jagganath of Destiny he appeared to me; crushing the broken bones, the broken

flesh of Europe and America under the crunch of his pitiless wheels.

I felt Volkanskij's hand on my arm. I heard his voice. On the instant I braced myself. I would win! By the Lord, I would win!

"Look up there, Vandewater." He pointed to a broad Norman staircase swinging up to the upper hall in a majestic curve. "There's where the Tsar and the foreign ambassadors will take up their stand. The crowd will pass through this hall, up the stairs, salute him, and then down again over there." He pointed to another staircase at the farther end of the apartment.

Meanwhile the guests had commenced to arrive. Everybody of note in Moscow was there; Petrograd, Odessa, Kazan, and the foreign capitals had also sent their full quota. Diplomacy and finance; army and navy; aristocrat and burgess and workman and peasant; medicine and law; theology and commerce; literature and art; all the classes of Society were represented. And they came, black-masked, in the costumes of all countries, of all ages. Useless to enumerate them. They were a kaleidoscope of the world, of twenty swinging centuries. The women vied

with the men in variety of color and cut of costume. All were masked. All were laughing and chatting gayly.

When finally I saw Hussain Khan and his two companions moving through the crowd, dressed as Brahmin priests, I felt perfectly collected. My hands were steady, my nerves steely. It was Occidental brain against Oriental cunning. And I had made up my mind that the brain would win.

Suddenly there was a silvery bugle-call, twice repeated. The talk and laughter ceased. All eyes lifted up to the broad Norman staircase. The Tsar, surrounded by the foreign ambassadors and envoys, had stepped into the upper hall.

Court chamberlains and marshals filed through the crowd, directing them to pass in ceremonious review before the Tsar. Soon the staircase was a mass of swaying humanity. Hussain Khan and the two other Orientals were among them.

Then a thought came to me. Could it be that I had overlooked the most essential? Could it be possible that right at this moment, while passing by the Tsar, while bending his knee to him, Hussain Khan would deal out death, would shoot His Majesty?

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Rapidly I considered. But I decided to the contrary. I knew that it was part of the plans of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms never to show his hand. He fought with hidden weapons, with the dread of hidden weapons. Always the assassin escaped. That was a main consideration. And escape from this crowd would be impossible.

So I calmly watched him pass up the stairs. I tried to see how the detectives would separate and kidnap one of his followers. But the crush was so heavy that I lost sight of them. I waited below, my fur hat in my right hand, fanning myself continuously, according to the prearranged signal. I did not have to wait very long.

A gaudy cavalier of the Seventeenth Century walked past me.

"Follow me, Mr. Vandewater," he whispered.

I turned, followed him through the hall, and down the stairs which led to the lower entrance hall. There were soldiers on guard, some in the white and green of the Viborg Regiment, others in the old-rose of the Don Cossacks. At a word from my guide they let us pass.

A minute later I found myself in a small

room. The gaudy cavalier took off his feathered hat and his black mask, and displayed the homely, honest features of Fedor Narunyin, the detective who had assisted me in the search of Hussain Khan's room.

He pointed to a corner.

I looked. One of the Brahmin priests lay stretched out there, a helpless bundle, gagged and tied. I had Narunyin remove the gag. For a while I surveyed him in silence. Should I talk to him? Should I try to make him speak? Should I employ threats or cajoleries? Should I endeavor to bribe him? Or should I employ Third Degree methods?

Futile plans, all of them. For there was that in the dim-glowing opaque eyes which I could never conquer. Call it fanaticism. Call it resignation. Call it even patriotism, if you wish. But it was there, harsh, calm, invincible. And I knew it.

I told the Hindu to take off his clothes. He knew that it was useless to resist. He obeyed without a word. I took off my gaudy *boyar* costume. I drew on leather socks and slippers. I wrapped myself in the voluminous folds of the white robe. I crowned my head with the tight skull cap, draping around it

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the swaying layers of the turban cloth. Then, from a little box of pigment I had brought with me, I daubed on my forehead the scarlet mark of Shiva.

The Hindu's eyes blazed fire when he saw me thus desecrate his caste. I turned to him. I did not intend to kick a man who was down. But I could not resist asking him one little, mocking question.

"Will I do, my Brahmin friend? Will I pass for yourself with your associates upstairs?"

The Hindu looked me up and down. His answer was typical of his land and race.

"The camel turned to see his own hunchback . . . and broke his neck." He spat. Then he resumed in a passionless voice, "It is also said that the frog once mounted on a clod, and said he had seen Kashmere."

I laughed. I tied the black mask over my face. Then I turned to Fedor Narunyin.

"Stay here with my friend until you hear from me."

"Yes, Mr. Vandewater."

I returned to the hall.

By this time most of the guests had filed past the Tsar. A stringed orchestra had

commenced to play, and already gay, venturesome couples were turning and twisting to the rhythm of the music.

I looked for Hussain. Then I saw him. His towering form was head-high above the crowd. He had returned to the lower hall. He was leaning against a marble pillar, and was chatting nonchalantly with another mask, dressed as a Greek mountaineer. Presently he turned away from his companion with a light laugh. A minute later I watched him swing a dainty little Sèvres shepherdess into the mazes of the dance.

Then I saw the other Hindu retracing his steps from the upper hall. He stopped repeatedly; peered into the crowd, evidently anxious, disturbed.

He saw me. Quickly he came toward me. My nerves felt tuned up to the expected shock. The second trick of the evening. Would I win it? Would I turn it down in my favor?

My guess at the meaning of those hennamarked lines in the Kata Upanishad! Had I memorized them aright? Did I know what they meant to convey? Or was I chasing a phantom?

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Another step brought me face to face with the Hindu. He stopped. Waited for me to speak. Suddenly, in low, rolling Hindu, he addressed me:

" The hard-to-see, the mystery-hidden, Heart-dwelling, cave-abiding, old . . . "

Then he stopped; and without hesitation, without a quiver in my voice, I finished the stanza:

"He who by brooding o'er his inner self Sees him as God escaped both joy and grief."

The Hindu gave a little exclamation of relief:

"By Shiva, brother," he said. "But thou didst frighten me. Everywhere I looked, and I could not find thee. I feared the worst."

Right then I thanked the stars of my former life, the kind little stars under whose aura I had spent several years of my youth in India, learning both Hindu and Sanskrit. I answered with a jest of the bazaars.

"There are those, blind puppy-dogs of ten-

der years they, who see a firefly, and think it is a conflagration."

He laughed at my jest. It emboldened me to try a random shot.

"Tell me, brother, where . . ?" And I pointed to the upper hall where the Tsar was talking with the foreign envoys.

His answering voice was low.

"Hast thou forgotten so soon, brother? Then listen. It will be at supper time: immediately when the dessert is being served. It is then that the Tsar and the foreign envoys shall pass through the crowd on their way to the terrace whence he will proclaim peace . . . peace!" He laughed a grim, cracked laugh. "The master will act just before. And even as they go on their mission of peace and life, they will carry in their bowels the germs of slow, writhing death . . . these infidels, these cannibals of the holy cow. Thou must watch yonder," he pointed, "near the second pillar. I shall be at my appointed place, near the master." I tried another random shot.

"But the danger . . ."

"Coward and fool! Dastardly and unbeautiful son of three thousand gray-hearted and specially accursed hyenas!" His voice

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boomed out choking, angry, staccato. "There is no danger. How can there be danger? We will be far away by the time the poison takes effect."

The next minute he had left me.

So Hussain's weapon was poison! Poison! And at supper time, when the dessert was being served.

That meant, of course, that he would poison the sweets which would be served to the Tsar and to the foreign envoys. Perhaps he even intended to poison the food for all the guests; to sacrifice thus a smoking holocaust to the lust-scabbed *God of the Invincibly Strong Arms*.

But it was preposterous.

If Hussain Khan had spies and associates in the Imperial kitchens he need not have risked an appearance upstairs, at the ball. On the other hand, if he meant to poison the dessert as it was being brought to the tables he would have to do the trick in presence and full view of everybody; he would have to interfere boldly, openly with the servants who served the dishes. Which also was impossible.

There was a third alternative. But what was it?

I only knew that it was contained, hidden, in that missing syllable, that unfinished word of Mascasenhas' warning:

"Beware of the bon . . ."

I also knew that the Tsar, the envoys, all of us, would be safe until the end of supper. I consulted my watch. It was half after ten. I stopped Volkhanskij who was passing. I asked him a question.

"Supper will be served in half an hour," he answered. "The dance will then stop. Small tables will be arranged from one end to the other of the banquet hall."

"And where will the Tsar sit?"

"His table will be in the very center. He will sup together with the Tsarina and the foreign ambassadors."

I studied the room carefully. The second pillar, the place which the Hindu had indicated as my post of observation, was just about ten feet to the left of the center, and in a direct line with the place where I judged that the table next to the Tsar's would be placed. That was all right.

It would enable me to be quickly on the spot, to prevent . . . what? . . . Good Lord, what was I going to prevent?

I thought and thought and thought. And

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there was no explanation, no solving of the mystery, the mystery of that one missing syllable which contained the warning.

I turned again to Volkhanskij, who was watching me anxiously.

"I shall take a seat on the table next to the Tsar's, the one on the left. You must see to that. You yourself must be at the table directly to the right of the Tsar's. As soon as I leave my seat, you must leave yours. You must then step up close to the Tsar. Watch me close. As soon as I raise my left hand you must succeed . . . in a casual way, mind you, without creating any commotion . . . to whisper a few words into His Majesty's ear."

"And what are these words?"

"They are: 'Poison. Do not eat.'"

"Very well, sir."

I danced once or twice, half-heartedly.

Then there was another bugle-call. Again the chamberlains and marshals moved through the crowd directing them into the adjoining salons. Supper would be served.

An army of servants hurried into the banquet hall. Tables and chairs were brought in. Quickly the tables were covered with

snowy linen, silver, gold, and cut glass. The oysters and cold entrées were being served.

Another bugle-call. And the Tsar, leading the Tsarina, walked in. The foreign envoys followed. The guests took seats wherever they could. It was a democratic affair, democratically meant; and so there was no list of precedence enforced.

I walked quickly from table to table, as if I was hunting for a friend next to whom I wished to sit. When I came to the table to the left of the Tsar's, a woman sitting there motioned to me gayly.

"Here, my friend. Hurry; I am trying to keep this chair for you."

The woman was of course one of those many brilliant female detectives employed by the Russian Administrative Police.

I took the seat she had indicated with a word of thanks.

The next three-quarters of an hour were a century of agonizing suspense. I could not eat, but I forced myself to swallow some of that execrable, honey-sweet champagne which is so dear to the Muscovite palate.

I thanked God when the dessert was finally being brought in. At least I had my cue now. I could act, for better or for worse.

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I rose with a murmured apology. I caught Volkhanskij's eye.

From a table farther down the hall I saw Hussain Khan approaching, followed by the Hindu. The Hindu stopped near the staircase. This did not create any surprise, as many guests were moving and chatting from table to table, with that delightful informality which is the greatest charm of Russian dinner parties.

Hussain stopped in front of the Tsar's table. I moved up quickly to the other side of the table so that I stood facing him. Vassily Volkhanskij came casually sauntering along, exchanging a joke here and there with people he knew, until he was directly behind the Tsar's chair. Then he stopped.

Hussain Khan bowed deeply before the Tsar. Then he stood up straight. He loosened the voluminous folds of his robe. It dropped to his feet. He kicked it away, standing clear of it. Then he bowed again with a clear, ringing laugh. And the crowd, watching, curious, craning their necks, joined in the merriment.

For Hussain Khan was covered from neck to ankle with little paper tubes, fastened to a suit of scarlet tights. I looked intently.

Each of the paper tubes contained a piece of candy. There must have been hundreds and hundreds of them.

The Tsar laughed more loudly than the rest. He spoke.

"Ah, my dear sir, you are not satisfied with the food from my kitchen. You have brought your own dessert, I see . . . your own little bonbons. . . ."

And then suddenly I understood the warning of Mascasenhas; the mystery of the missing syllable. . . .

He had spoken about bonbons. He had warned me against bonbons. They were poisoned, poisoned!

The Emperor was leaning back in his chair. He was still laughing.

"Yes, my friend, a most charming idea! ... A Russian, are you? ... Come, take off your mask. Permit me to see the features of the man who has thus caught the gay, festive spirit of this night ... this night of peace and happiness and laughter."

Hussain Khan bowed deeply. He took off his mask. The light from the many hidden electric lamps threw his features into sharp relief: the light-olive skin, the delicate, quivering nostrils, the cutting, purple-black eyes,

the curved nose, the high cheek-bones. Not a muscle moved in his face. The man's nerve was magnificent.

"Ah, an Asiatic." The Tsar continued: "One of my own subjects? . . . Perhaps from Bokhara . . . from Khiva . . . from Samarkand . . . or perhaps from Merv?"

Hussain smiled.

"No, Your Majesty. An Asian I am. But an Asian from the free lands; a Mohammedan from Central Asia." His voice was low and caressing. "But I bring to you the good wishes, the greetings, and the blessings of the outer lands, the free lands. You know the custom of Islam, Your Majesty, the custom of breaking bread and tasting salt. Will you not be gracious enough to break bread with me, to taste salt with me . . . in sign of friendship from race to race, from faith to faith . . . the friendship of Peace which you will proclaim to-night? And may this bread be the sweeter, may this coming peace be the sweeter since it is symbolized by the sweetness of these bonbons."

There was a fine, deep, gratified smile on the Tsar's lips. He was about to pluck one of the little paper tubes. I caught Volkhanskij's eye. Quickly I raised my left hand,

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according to our prearranged signal. At the same instant Volkhanskij dropped his cigarette. He stooped to pick it up. And as he did so, coming close to the Tsar, he whispered into his ears the words which I had taught him.

The Tsar turned white. His hand dropped. The whole situation was swinging by a rotten, thin packthread. To-night was the night of peace, the beginning of that Peace for which the West was clamoring. I thought quickly. I must save the situation.

I stepped up close to the table. I took off my mask. Hussain Khan saw my features, but he did not wince. Then I bowed to the Emperor. I spoke.

"An ancient custom indeed, this custom of Islam, to break bread, to taste salt together. But it is also the custom of Islam that he who offers bread and salt should first partake of it himself."

I walked up to Hussain Khan. I took one of the poisoned bonbons from its paper tube, and held it out to him.

I had thus sentenced the man to death. I knew it. I was glad of it. The Western world would forever be rid of this evil genius of destruction. The fight would be over. He

must eat the poison. There was no way out of it, I thought.

But even then, even there, at the very quivering threshold of final oblivion, Hussain won the last trick.

He smiled. He spoke to the whole table.

"This gentleman is right. Such is indeed the custom of Islam. But behold. This is a Christian land. Let me then pledge my fealty after the manner of Christian lands. You know that fermented spirits are forbidden the true believers, the followers of the prophet Mohammed . . . on whom be Peace and the Blessings of Allah! Yet, bringing the words of peace from Islam to Christendom, I shall break the law of the Koran, and pledge you in the forbidden drink, the fermented liquor of the Christians."

With a splendid gesture of finality he took the champagne glass from in front of the Tsar and drained its foaming contents.

He bowed once more, and slowly walked to the entrance stairs.

At the same moment the bells from the *Ivan Velikij* were beginning to boom out the hour of midnight. Faint shouts, swelling in

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volume, were drifting in from beyond the walls of the *Kreml*. The crowds were clamoring for the Peace message the Tsar had promised them.

The Tsar rose. He motioned to the foreign envoys to follow him.

"Let us sign the treaty, gentlemen." His words were slow and measured. "Come with me."

And he preceded them up the Norman staircase.

I followed Hussain Khan to the entrance hall.

He saw me. He stopped. He turned squarely to me.

"You won to-night, Vandewater. But do you think you have conquered me?"

I permitted myself the luxury of a mocking smile.

"It looks like it, Hussain Khan."

He laughed.

"And yet I am free. My hands are unbound. They dare not meddle with me. They are afraid of that great Asia which stands behind me. Mine is the future. Mine is the fortune." He walked to the door. There he turned again. "See, my friend. They say in my own country that *Fortune conquers* 

the wise and crafty no more than a straw; the elephant, whose cheeks are streaked with the marks of passion, is not fastened by the filaments of the lotus." And so he left me.

#### VI

## THE LUMINOUS DEATH

S I sit here by the open window and see that same eternal great sun dwindling and blending into the nightly frame of clouds on the horizon; as my tired mind dwells on the memory of the world I have left behind me beyond the Atlantic; as the strange, incredible adventures of the past year come trooping back to me like a drift of seaweed, lazily tossing in the tide of remembrance, it seems dramatically fitting and appropriate that this last encounter of mine with the dread forces of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms (and will it really be the last) should have begun in a tossing sea of flames, red and blood-stained like the passions of a slaughtered soul, and should have ended in pale-glowing, luminous death.

No thought of the end was in my heart that night, when I heard the deep, booming, sonorous clang of the fire bells; then the shouting and running of men and women, the opening of doors and windows, the shrill questions and exclamations.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

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The waiter came rushing toward me, upsetting my *demi-tasse* in the agitation of the moment, and waving his napkin like a signal of distress.

"Voyez donc, monsieur . . . quelle conflagration . . . oh là là . . . mais c'est énorme, énormement énorme!"

He pointed at the brown evening sky, and at the lapping, swirling ribbon of scarletshot pink which curled up on the edge of the horizon.

I simulated surprise and excitement.

"My check . . . my check. . . . Hurry up."

I gave a sigh of relief. It had come at last.

The next moment there was the dull, staccato thumping of hoofs and the jarring crunch of broad wheels on the wood-block pavement . . . and the engines, the ladders, and all the rest of the fire-fighting paraphernalia whirled madly around the corner; the drivers, with wide-open urging arms, bending forward in their seats, like charioteers in a Roman arena; half-dressed firemen clinging on behind, on the sides, wherever they could find an inch of support.

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The pink glow on the edge of the heavens was darkening into ruby and ensanguined orange. Behind the stiff, lanky poplars and fir trees a high-blazing fuliginous mass of smoky flame was licking the clouds.

I paid my check to the excited waiter of the little café whose cuisine and château wines were the pride of Marly-le-Roi. I rose from my seat. I had taken an early boat from Paris to the little suburb. I knew what the night would bring.

The waiter bowed and gave me hat and stick.

"Merci, monsieur."

He pocketed the tip; and, with a hurried word of apology and explanation to *Madame la Patronne* who sat high-throned behind the cash register, he was off, his long white apron trailing behind him like a pennant.

I followed leisurely; toward the red glow, toward the funeral pyre of that titanic organization of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms, which had so long terrorized the Western world.

Here, at the peaceful little Paris suburb of Marly-le-Roi, had been their headquarters, their temple. Here they had worshiped *Doorgha*, the grim, lust-scabbed, many-

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armed goddess of merciless destruction. Here Hussain Khan and the other "Westernized" leaders of Asian thought and ruthless Asian daring had conceived their plans of murder. From here had gone forth the orders which had killed Senator Kuhne of California, Horst von Pless, the Viceroy of India, the Governor of Madras, and a dozen other prominent White men who had endeavored to meddle and play with the destinies of Asia.

Thus it was good and right and proper that this central place, this blood-stained temple, should go up in flames.

There would be no stopping the conflagration. There *could* not. I myself had been present at the interview between the Paris Chief of Police and the Mayor of the little suburb.

The Mayor had expostulated; in vain expostulated. The Chief had smiled, benignly, patiently, and a little sarcastically.

"It is not necessary that you understand, my dear sir," he had assured that anxious, pompous provincial official, proud in the dignity of the tricolor sash which is so dear to the heart of French bureaucracy. "It is the order of the Government. You will obey, and you will be absolutely discreet. You will

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not say a word . . . not even to your wife." He had laughed. "Also, if you do exactly as you are told . . . who knows, mon cher monsieur." He had tapped him lightly on the chest. "Who knows, I say. I may speak a little word to the Minister of the Interior, and the Minister of the Interior may speak a little word to the President, and there would be a narrow red ribbon conferred upon you. It would go well with that splendid tricolor sash of yours, don't you think?"

The Mayor blushed. He lifted up his hands.

"But I don't understand."

"So much the better. It is simply that there will be a fire at a certain house of your so charming suburb. And we wish this fire to consume the building in its entirety. The house stands detached, by itself. There is absolutely no danger to any of the neighboring villas."

"But what excuse shall I give? How shall I explain? *Enfin, bon sang, monsieur,* it is I, I, I, who am the Mayor!"

"Oh, yes. You are the Mayor. You must explain. C'est bien vrai cela. Alors écoutez. This afternoon I shall send down some of my detectives. I believe that your water sys-

tem is part of the greater Paris system, not so?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Excellent, most excellent. Therefore my detectives shall come attired in that so becoming uniform of municipal water inspectors. They will examine your water main, your pumping stations. Perhaps they will turn a screw or two . . . they will fool with the pipes the least little bit. What do I know, I? Que voulez-vous? It is not I who am an engineer. I remain in profound and regrettable ignorance of the mechanical details. But I do know that there will be a fire, and I also know that there will be no water for an hour . . . ah, those dirty, incompetent asses of Paris water inspectors! Then the water main will be fixed . . . after an hour or so . . . the water will spurt forth again . . . those brave firemen of Marly-le-Roi will do their heroic duty as citizens of this great French republic, and spray a little water on the smoldering embers. Is it understood? Bien. . . . Good afternoon."

So it was done.

As, following the trail of my fugitive waiter, I reached the outskirts of Marly-le-Roi, the villa which had housed the temple

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and the black statue of *Doorgha* was a roaring furnace. The official incendiaries had done their work well.

The flames had burst through the front door. They had eaten, with popping crash of heat-splintered glass, through the windows of the first floor; like speckled, blotched snakes; like those very cobras, stony-eyed, cruel-eyed, which writhe their death trail toward their White victims during the festival of the Doorgha-Puja, in the far mothertemple of golden Benares. Speckled, blotched reptiles of flame . . . with dripping lips, stained with the blood of sacrifice . . . with forked tongues of fire . . . up, up through the windows! Up and burn your way to the lust-scabbed idol of black basalt which sits enthroned on the floor above! Embrace her with the destroying heat of your flamecoiling bodies! Crumble her into dark, dry dust!

The smoke, blue, black, gray, rolled on and up in gloomy, grotesque, sinister garlands.

The firemen were working madly at their pumps. But there was no water.

Whence excitement. Whence the easy, light-hearted, swiftly forgotten despair of

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the Latin. Also a crowd muttering in anger, in abuse.

"Alors, quelle saleté ..." "... only this afternoon they were here, these precious inspectors from Paris ..." "... c'est inouï ..." "... ah, these impossible types of Parisians ..." "... these specimens of filthy ignorance ..." "... the asinine big-town know-alls ..."

Pump, pump, pump again. With bulging, laboring chests, the air whistling through the lungs, mouths wide open in supreme effort, taut-smarting muscles of arm and leg. But not a drop of water . . . while the flames gather fresh volume and strength . . . while the speckled, blotched red reptiles creep ever close and closer toward the second floor, toward *Doorgha*. . . .

"... c'est infecte ..." "... c'est ignoble ..." "... these crocodiles of municipal inspectors ..." "... there's a specimen of graft for you ..." "... graft? But you joke, my friend. It's theft, damned theft ...." "... ah, la belle besogne ..." "... these incompetent Parisians ..."

Suddenly the flames burst up in an effort, a supreme travail of crimson-glowing

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strength. Up to the second floor; hissing, sputtering, thundering, roaring. . . Down came the ceiling in places, loud-booming, like the black crack of doom . . . still the blaze spread up, twirled up, forked up . . . scarlethearted, blue-tipped, yellow-frayed . . . as loose powder under spark.

Yet that room behind the third window, where *Doorgha* brooded in state, dreaming of smoking blood-sacrifices, still held. She fought well, that lust-scabbed goddess of iniquity.

And then, suddenly, with the moaning of all purgatory, the whole side of the house gave way, came tumbling down in a mad, twisting, writhing, smoking, burning heap. The temple was belching forth its cruel entrails of ensanguined murder and gangrened superstition and worship.

I caught sight of the black statue of *Doorgha*, the shiny, horrible body, the leering mouth, the twisting many arms. I caught sight of it behind the shifting curtain of popping, hissing flames. Up they came, lapping the idol's sensuous stone lips with hideous, caressing tongues.

I turned away. Not for me the sight of that terrible mouth . . . a-drip with quiver-

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ing, human flesh . . . the flesh of the victims which had been sacrificed to her.

Then there was a crash. I turned. I looked up. The ceiling had finally given way completely. The statue had tumbled down; had disappeared in the smoky sea of flames. She was gone like the reeling, tremendous dream of a giant madman, blown into shivering nothingness by the cold, gray hour of awakening.

The same moment the water had found its way back into the pipes. The pumps worked. Up came the water, sputtering, singing. It rose in sharp flashes of silver and gray and white. It played on the smoldering embers.

It was the end. The temple was gone forever. *Doorgha* had crumbled into stinking, black powder . . . and where once whiterobed, scarlet-marked priests of Shiva chanted unclean songs before the goddess of destruction there was now a golden sea of flames, slashed with purple and black and orange, and furrowing into amethyst and pearl where the hissing water steamed up in vapory clouds.

I looked at the crowd.

To me, though they did not know the foul, secret history of this temple, based on bloody

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idolatry, cemented with murder and crime, and now blazing up into a red whirlwind of wholesome, salutary, cleansing fire . . . yes: to me there came a wordless message of hope and sympathy from that massed sea of staring faces . . like the resounding, manytoned harmony of infinite peace and concordance; a soft sphere melody, a soft *racial* sphere melody . . . to me, who had first discovered this temple, whose hands and mind had helped to destroy it, to lay it low.

And then the thought came to me of Hussain Khan, and of his last, gigantic attempt, twisted into gigantic failure. It had been the salient-point of the Western world's deliverance.

For when two months ago, during the Masquerade Ball given at the Moscow *Kreml*, Hussain Khan had attempted with the help of bonbons to poison the Tsar and the foreign envoys who had gathered in Russia's Premier Capital to sign the international treaty of peace and amity; when, thanks to the message which Mascasenhas, Hussain Khan's half-caste servant, had sent me over the telephone, I had stayed the Asian's murderous hand on the very threshold of success, it was clear that, whatever the risk, whatever

the cost, we must chop off that yellow claw which was reaching out of Asia with ruthless, pitiless strength.

Enough blood had been shed. Enough crimes had been committed.

And when I remembered that Hussain Khan had first killed in my own country, in America, I was doubly firm in my resolution to pit my square Western power of reasoning against his Oriental, swift-shifty, sharp-crass cunning in one last attempt: an attempt to the death.

I had not been able to suppress a certain feeling of admiration for this daring Asiatic who had appropriated, who had tellingly enacted the maxim which had been Danton's:

"De l'audace, encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace."

But I had made up my mind to fight him with every ounce of strength in my body, with every cell in my brain. I must revenge those murders of my own race. He had surrounded the altar of the dread Hindu deity whose chief ministrant he was (and he a Moslim, worshiping the One God Who Has No Equals!), with a barrier of white corpses. And from the grewsome, rotting pile a claycold, shriveled, clutching hand seemed to

point at me accusingly . . . in pale, stark rigidity: the hand of Senator Kuhne of California . . . pointing with a *de profundis* demand for revenge . . . for the bitter price of blood!

Thence had come a meeting in London, in Downing Street. The Chiefs of Police of all the capitals of Europe had been there.

Together we had gone over the whole history of the organization, of all the crimes which had been committed in the name of *the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms*. Then we had talked of the dangers of the future. The Tsar last week! What would the next week bring, what the next month?

It had seemed to me that these pompous, brass-bound police moghuls did not appear able to come to any conclusion. They had picked at each other like angry poultry during moulting season. They had spoken well; uncommonly well and fluently. But they had not developed a single idea, a single remedy worth while. All they had done was to tear each other's propositions into shreds with splendid flourishes of rhetoric in fourteen assorted languages. A Chaos as well as a Babel. And finally I had considered that it was up to me, an American, a representative

of the melting-pot, to new-shape that inorganic dust of Chaos-Babel into some sort of working scheme.

I had developed it right then and there for their benefit and approval.

"We must fight deceit with deceit. We must choke quackery with dupery," I had concluded. "It's the only way. What do you say, gentlemen? How do you like my scheme?"

They had liked it.

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It was a good, safe scheme, if I do say it myself. It had several advantages in its favor.

First of all, it was eminently suited to the peculiar talents of the Continental police, who are acknowledged experts and all-world-champions at that charming game which is played with the use of *Polizeispitzel, agents* provocateurs: a sort of polite, and very, very official stool-pigeon with a bit of reverse-English in his method.

Secondly, my scheme steered us clear away from that one danger of which we were all afraid. Namely, that a public knowledge of the facts in the case, the facts that there existed an Asiatic organization plotting murder, making private, secret war against every

man of note in Europe and America, might via the trail of newspaper headlines, public indignation, and lynchings of Asiatics abroad, embroil Europe in war with all the Orient. And Europe was still weak and dazed and white from her last fratricidal strife.

So the police had gone to work.

They had thrown wide their steely net. They had tagged every Oriental in Europe who had ever been seen near the temple of Marly-le-Roi, and then they had proceeded to draw the net tight.

Some were arrested on trumped-up charges, with a dozen policemen swearing to their everlasting guilt. Others were framed up in a manner which would have made New York blanch with impotent envy. There were currents, and wide-eddying side-currents. But the total result was that, inside of two months, everybody who was in the least tainted by the breath of suspicion, was in jail . . . some as pickpockets, others as second-story men, others again as burglars, fences, and what-not.

The jails of Europe had swallowed them, eaten them up. At the expiration of their various sentences there would be more

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trumped-up charges, more frame-ups, more official perjuries. They would be promptly re-arrested, re-tried, re-sentenced, and back they would pop into prison . . . and again and again.

Never would they leave prison except for the court room, and never the court room except for prison. Such had been my scheme. They would never return to Asia. They would never again see the yellow, turbaned lands. Never be able to speak to their friends and relations at home, nor to write to them. They would *die* in prison; silent, inarticulate, harmless; snakes with their fangs drawn.

They had reaped the whirlwind.

The Paris police had used especial care in watching the temple of Marly-le-Roi, including the boats which ply there, coming up the Seine. They had arrested every Asian who showed his face in the neighborhood. Their net had been of finest, deadliest mesh; until the gray old villa, which had once been the secret meeting-place of those assassins, was deserted; and until *Doorgha*, the grim, black goddess of destruction, was alone with the palsying memories of the past.

Then had come the question:

"Shall we search the building? Now that all the members of the club are under lock and key? Perhaps we shall find evidence, incriminating evidence."

But I had decided against it. I had convinced them that they would be playing with fire which might burn their hands.

"See," I had told them. . . . "You do not want to find incriminating evidence. Let sleeping dogs lie. God knows but what the papers you'll find there, in the temple, may force your hands into that very life-anddeath struggle with all Asia which we are trying to side-step. Discretion is the better part of valor."

"But what will we do with the building? The owner may sell it . . . let it to somebody. Somebody may find the papers . . . if there are papers . . . blab about them, publish them. . . ."

"Destroy the villa. Fix up some sort of accident. Give it over to the flames."

Hence the fire. Hence the broken water main . . . and the statue of *Doorgha* crumbling into dry, dark powder at my feet.

I looked at it. I thought of the things it had stood for in the past; the mad, unspeak-

able things . . . immeasurable, dusky-glooming, born of black, evil Night.

And automatically my thoughts turned to Hussain Khan, who so far had escaped the police net; who, together with his servant Mascasenhas, the half-caste, had disappeared.

The police were sure that he was in hiding in one of the great cities; always the safest place for a fugitive from justice. Perhaps even in Paris itself. The trains and steamships, the highways, the garages, and the very aërodromes were being carefully watched. It was evident that he was still in Europe.

I was worried. Not only for my own life. Not only for Mascasenhas, who had served me faithfully ever since I had shamed him into a realization of what he owed to his ancient Christian faith, to the strain of White blood in his veins; and who was now helpless in the power, the steely web of this master-criminal.

I was even worried for Hussain Khan himself.

I did not like the picture of him hunted, trailed, dogged by the police. He was a figure apart from those other Orientals who

had been roped in by the wide-flung police net of the Continent. He was to me a personal foe, whom I wanted to fight, to bring down with my own personal weapons, singlehanded; strength against strength, craft against craft. He was mine own enemy; and being my enemy, I respected him in a way.

I had known him in Washington, when I was still a clerk in the Foreign Office during the day, and playing the dancing social game at night. I had known him then as a charming Oriental polyglot; good-looking, extremely well-bred, with the manners of an Eighteenth Century Seigneur, interesting, a first-class polo player, and superlatively Since then Fate had willed that I witty. should encounter him as a merciless Destroyer of the things the White Man honors and holds high; the things I honor and hold So we had fought. Sometimes I had high. Sometimes he had won. The honors won. were fairly even. His weapons had been the cruel, merciless weapons of his race and faith.

But with all that I could not help feeling that, in his own wild heart, the man was only trying to realize an ideal, evil though it seemed to me; that, in his own wild heart,

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he imagined he was doing high service to Asia, the Great Mother as he used to call her; that, in his own wild heart he was a patriot, a patriot every bit as much as Marat, as the *septembriseurs* who washed the streets of Paris with aristocratic blue-blood during the Reign of Terror, and who forced Marie Antoinette to gaze at the stark head of her friend, the Princess Lamballe, stuck on a pike.

Always I had the subconscious feeling that the fight would ultimately narrow down to where it had started: myself against him. And I was not sorry that he had escaped the police. Strange to say, though I loathed the man, I could not help a sneaking feeling of admiration for him, who out-Heroded Herod with steel of daring, who was a Leonidas in the tocsin of his eloquence, a Robespierre in his sincere, savage, incorruptible ruthlessness.

And here was the organization which he had built up as a strong-buttressed basis of his ruthlessness, smoldering into flameblackened ruins.

The fire was under control. The crowd was beginning to drift away. I too turned to go.

And then I saw him.

He was standing a little apart, his head sunk on his chest; glaring from below his heavy brows with purple-black, cutting eyes.

The same moment he saw me. But he did not move. He just glanced at me casually. A blue-coated policeman, busy with voluble directions to the homing crowd, came into Hussain Khan pointed at him the focus. mockingly, meaningly, fearlessly. And then a smile curled his lips; a thin, pale, tragic smile.

I wondered what mystic voice had called to him through the night, and had brought him here, to behold the funeral pyre, the flame-grave of his savage, daring hope.

I had no idea of turning him over to the gendarme. For again I thought of Mascasenhas. Also I considered again that the fight must narrow down to his hands against mine, his strength matching mine. I bowed to him, as one saying Good-by, and I turned on my heel.

I walked down a dark, tree-sheltered side street which leads to the landing-stage of the Seine boats. It was late. I wanted to catch the little penny steamer back to Paris. Then I heard a quick footstep behind me.

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A hand was laid on my arm. Instinctively I drew back. I jumped into a position of defense.

Then came Hussain Khan's soft, drawling voice out of the dark.

"Do not be afraid, Vandewater. You spared me back there when a word from your lips would have called up those police dogs. I shall not attempt to take your life. Not here. I am a Moslim. I know honor. I play the game."

I believed him. I walked on. He fell into step beside me. Once he stopped to light a cigarette. I could see his face illumined through the red glow of his cupped hands. His face was stony, without a quiver. His hands were steady. He had no nerves. He was an Asian.

When we neared the embankment of the river, he stopped, and detained me with a gesture.

"It is you and I," he said slowly. "You against me, and I against you. As was the beginning, thus will the end be. You hate me?"

The question was so naïf that I smiled. But I answered truthfully.

"Yes, Hussain Khan, I hate you."

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"So do I hate you. It is Fate. And I am an Afghan, and it is said of my people that we have the bowels of compassion of a tawny Bengal tiger. It is rightly said, my friend. Thus you will kill me, or I will kill you. There is no other way. It is a blood feud, to be washed out with blood. It is written."

It was over a year since I had taken up the battle pledge. For over a year I had played with him a deadly game of hide-andseek. His life or mine. Yet the cold way in which he stated his intention of killing me startled me.

"A fight to the death?" My voice quavered the least little bit.

He looked at me in silence for a minute. When he spoke, his voice was the cold, passionless voice of Fate.

"Yes, even so it was written on the day of Allah's creation. Your life or mine. See. I shall come to you out of the dark, dressed in the robes of a Brahmin priest, and on my forehead the scarlet caste-mark of Shiva."

The caste-mark of Shiva! And he a Moslim, a man who believes in the One Indivisible God, the faith of Islam as interpreted by the Prophet Mohammed! Was he then consciously playing the part of a grim, blood-

stained clown in this tragedy of East and West? Was he polluting even his ancient faith for the sake of black racial hatred?

Impetuously I asked him.

"You are a Moslim. Why then the castemark of Shiva? Why back there," I pointed in the direction of the ruined temple, "the idol of the Hindu faith which you hate and despise as pagan and blasphemous?"

He smiled.

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"A logical question, though tactless. I will answer it, though you will not understand the answer. I will answer it, because we both stand with one foot on the threshold of the portal of death; because Azrael, the angel of final oblivion, is hovering about us: because the shadow of his black wings is falling on you and me-on both of us." His eyes blazed up, with a dim-gloaming, sulphurous light which seemed to shine up from the nether pit of his soul. But his voice was as cold and even as ever. "You have been in Asia, my friend. You know how Asia hates and despises the White Man. Multiply this hatred a million times, and you will not even near the shadow of the threshold of my hatred for you, for your race, for your land, your faith, your ideals, your vices . . . and

even your virtues. It is a hatred which chokes me. For the sake of it I have allied myself with this bloodiest of Hindu sects. For the sake of it I spit on the ninety-nine Holy Names of Allah, the One, the King of the Day of Judgment. For the sake of it I shall daub on my forehead the scarlet castemark, that your departing spirit may recognize it."

He was silent. So was I. I could not speak. Something tense was in the atmosphere: tense, and dramatic, and still-gray. Was it the shadow of Azrael's wings, the angel of death, of whom he had spoken?

Hussain's calm voice shook me back into consciousness of my situation.

"Yes, my friend, I shall come to you even as the Destroyer came to Senator Kuhne, to Horst von Pless, and to all those others who have been sacrificed to *the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms*. Thus, with the castemark of Shiva on my forehead, I shall come to you out of the dark. Thus shall I kill you. No other way! No other way! Remember that! And yet," my heart pulsed madly as I heard the same warning he had given me once before, "yet it is possible that you will kill me. Who knows? That also may be written

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on the last page of the book of my life. But this I know: even if your hand brings death to my heart, even then I shall kill you. Even from beyond the grave I shall kill you. It is an assured thing."

"Are you not afraid? You will have to cross the town . . . to show your face in the streets of Paris. The police might see you."

"Did they catch me to-night?" He laughed. "Gray-minded owls they! Blind and most objectionable puppy-dogs, sired by dogs and dammed by dogs!" It was odd to hear how suddenly the man's Oriental blood came out in his phraseology; how he reverted to type through all his polite English veneer. "The police will never find me. Find me? By the face of the Prophet of the True God . . . can you sound the ocean with a jackal's tail?"

He turned to go. I put my hand on his arm.

"Tell me, Hussain Khan . . . about Mascasenhas . . . is he . . . "

"Safe?" Again he laughed. "Yes. Quite safe. I shall not touch him. I shall not bother him. I shall not kill him. I have used him. Now I am through with him. He worked against me. He worked for you. I

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know that now. But I do not care. No, I shall not touch him. The tiger does not paw the hyena's refuse. He is my slave until I die. You see, I am luxurious. I cannot dress or undress myself." He laughed again, a harsh, demoniac laugh. "Also, my friendand this will interest you-he is an expert at mixing the scarlet pigment which I daub on my forehead when I hunt for Shiva. So I need that dog of a Goanese. But after my death he will be free. Such is the law of the sacred Koran. And I am a good Moslim. Also . . . what is he to me? Do I fear him? My friend, an elephant is not afraid of fishes. Also it is said that if a mouse be as big as a bullock, yet it would be the slave of the cat." He turned to go. "But count not on his help. Not this time. I have clipped his wings. Au revoir, mon ami. To-morrow begins the hunting of Hussain Khan."

He was off into the dark with a wave of his hand.

I took the next river boat back to Paris. I was awake for a long time after I reached my hotel in the Rue St. Honoré! I thought and thought and thought. So the final feud was on, the last chapter. Beginning with tomorrow it would be a merciless feud;

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strength against strength, craft against craft.

I wrote several letters, one or two to former college chums; a long letter to my mother in Washington, D. C. I wrote home, to my lawyer. Then I went carefully over the manuscript of these memoirs, gathered all the chapters which referred in any way to the organization of assassing, called the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms, and sent the bundle of typewritten sheets by registered letter to the American Ambassador in Paris, asking him to read and forward the manuscript to the Foreign Office in Washington, unless I came to claim them myself within two weeks' time. I made a short extract of the same chapters of my memoirs, and, with similar instructions, sent it to the British Colonial Office.

I knew that if Hussain killed me, he would sooner or later gather another organization around him. Let the British and American Governments find a successor for me, in case of my death.

I wrote assiduously until nearly lunch time. I knew that I would be fairly safe by day, quite safe in fact. For he had told me that he would kill me, dressed as a Brahmin

priest, with the scarlet caste-mark of Shiva daubed on his forehead. There was no doubt that he had told me the truth. To him my death was not plain killing, but a ritual. Thence the caste-mark. Therefore he would strike me at night. And I considered that, if a heavy-limbed, bungling burglar can climb up a porch and through a window, why not a desperate assassin, a fanatic, with the steely, feline strength, the steely, feline cunning of the Oriental?

Call in the police? Hire a bodyguard? Catch the next steamer home to America? No, no. It wouldn't be playing the game. Hussain Khan had played the game the night before, when he could have killed me in the dark. I would let no Asiatic out-Don-Quixote me.

Then I remembered one thing he had told me. Mascasenhas was still with him, as his servant, as his slave. He helped him to dress and undress. He was an expert, Hussain had told me, at preparing and mixing the scarlet pigment which he daubed on his forehead in the form of Shiva's caste-mark, at night, when he came out of the dark, a Destroyer.

If I could only communicate with the Goanese! But I had no idea where and how

to find him. If Mascasenhas could only communicate with me! He would know that murder was in the wind when his master asked him to prepare the scarlet pigment. He would warn me if he could. But Hussain Khan had told me that he had clipped the half-caste's wings.

I was in a brown study. Again and again and again I considered the same two points: Mascasenhas acted as his valet, dressed and undressed him, and prepared the pigment; and Hussain Khan would attempt my life, robed as a Brahmin priest, with the scarlet mark of Shiva on his forehead. I looked at these two points from every possible angle. I moved them about like Queens on a chessboard.

An idea came to me, a ray of hope and light. But without the help of Mascasenhas it would avail me nothing. Without his help it would be a weak, unfeasible phantom; a phantom—glimmering, pallid, doubtful, bewildering.

The fear of death was heavy-clogging on my soul. Hussain Khan would come to me out of the dark. He would strike at me, as he had struck at all the others; quick, sharp, like the hooded cobra. His was a devilish

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leger-de-main way of dealing out death; death sneaking in pussy-footed, voiceless, jungle-stepping.

I would not hear his sinister approach. Of that I was certain. I would have to see it. That was my only hope. But a wan, unfeasible hope, without the help of Mascasenhas . . . and his wings were clipped. He could not communicate with me; nor I with him.

Yet the same idea was uppermost in my mind. I may not have a chance to utilize it. But at all events I would prepare it. So I left the hotel. I went to a drug store and made a small purchase. I put it into a tiny flat envelope and slipped it into my pocket, ready to hand.

Craft against craft? Very well, I would find out.

I lunched at the Café de Naples. Then I returned to the Rue St. Honoré to my hotel. I knew that I must not sleep nights. I knew that the sunny hours were the safe, sweet hours. It was only at night that danger loomed up, grim-visaged, iron-hearted, deathdealing.

I decided to sleep all afternoon. I stopped again at the drug store and bought me a heavily opiated sleeping potion.

I turned into the Rue St. Honoré. At the entrance to my hotel a crowd of shouting, laughing, gesticulating people attracted my attention. I walked up, curious to see what was happening. I looked, and was about to turn away again. It was only a street fight between two newspaper *camelots*.

These boys have divided Paris into legal and executive wards as sharply defined and as jealous of their individual Constitutions and State Rights as the sovereign commonwealths which compose the United States of America.

Heaven help the adventurous and predatory newsboy who invades the *arrondissement* to which he is not duly accredited.

Just as I turned into the entrance of the hotel, two more *camelots* joined the fray, to chastise the hardy interloper, the pirate from the foreign *arrondissement*. It was a beautiful exhibition of the ancient and noble French art of self-defense . . . an upwards, mule-like kick with the strength of a sledgehammer . . . then run away as fast as you can . . . duck . . . fall on your hands, and lash out sideways, like a polo pony helping its rider to pass the ball. . . .

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But this afternoon I had no time to admire the *savate*. I must go to sleep.

Just as I turned, the predatory and adventurous interloper, who was being badly punished, caught my eye.

Now I am one of these obvious Americans. There is no doubt about my nationality. I do not have to have a passport, not even in war time. A foreigner, including a German policeman, has but to look at the toes of my shoes, the cut of my coat, the tilt of my hat, and my upper lip, to classify me correctly. The eagle screams about me sartorially.

As soon as the newspaper boy saw me, he shouted:

"Enfin c'est assez, sal' voyoux . . . I know them, the rules . . . but the monsieur there . . . the American . . . he has asked me to come and see him . . . not so . . .?" He raised his voice, and looked at me with a peculiar, questioning look, and the same questioning accent was in his voice as he addressed me direct. "Monsieur Vandewater, hein?"

I caught the cue.

"Why, certainly. I have been expecting you." I walked into the thick of the crowd and pacified the other *camelots* with a few

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francs. "A matter of business, my friends. He's not trying to steal your trade."

I led the ragged little lad past the staring desk clerk, into the elevator, and up to my room.

There I turned to the boy, to ask him what he wanted. He lost no time in coming to the point. He gave me one of the newspapers which he carried under his arm.

"Here, monsieur . . . read . . . on the second page . . . there is a message written for you. . . ."

I opened the paper. On the margin of the second page there were a few lines in the handwriting of Mascasenhas. I read:

"Am prisoner. Can't leave, telephone, or write letters. Hussain watches me closely. Ties and gags me when he leaves the house. Am helpless. Only this boy. Brings morning and evening papers. I have paid him well. Hussain does not suspect him. Send answer by him. Don't know how I can help you. But shall try."

I told the boy to sit down. "Do you know what this is about?" "No. The gentleman who gave it to me,

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he also gave me money. The other gentleman he is tall and dark. He says that this one . . . you know, the one who wrote those lines on the newspaper, is sick . . . very sick . . . cannot go out. Then he turns his back to find some money in his bedroom to give to me for the papers. And at once the sick gentleman writes these lines and gives me your name and address and a lot of money. This evening I return there with the newspapers. Is there an answer?"

"Yes, there is. But you must be very careful. Under no conditions must you let the tall, dark gentleman see or hear what you are doing. You understand . . . it is a little intrigue. . . ."

The boy grinned shamelessly and winked at me.

"Woman . . . hein? I thought so."

"Exactly. That's why you must be discreet and careful. Wait two seconds."

I took the small envelope from my pocket. I opened it to see if the contents, the little box I had bought in the drug store, was intact, slipped it back again, closed it, and wrote a few words on the outside.

Then I gave it to the boy.

"Here you are." I gave him a fifty-franc

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note. "See that he gets this without the knowledge of the other gentleman. You won't have to say a word. Just slip this package to him."

"Merci, monsieur . . . merci bien. . . ."

A moment later he was gone. I telephoned to the office to call me at six o'clock. Then I undressed, took my opiate, and went to bed.

My nervousness had left me completely. I had made all the preparations I could make. Everything hinged now on Mascasenhas, on the little package I had sent to him.

My sleep was troubled by dreams.

I dreamed that I was in the temple of *Doorgha*, during the festival of the *Doorgha*-*Puja*, in the far city of Benares. All around me roared an invisible chorus, shouting *Kali* 

. . . Kali . . . Kali. . . .

I tried to move, but could not. I was tied . . . a victim, a White Sacrifice at the feet of the dread, black idol. Death, in the form of writhing, hooded cobras, was creeping towards me . . . the temple was dark . . . there was only the cold, opaque, stony gleam in the eyes of the snakes: and beyond it a huge, pale-blue, phosphorescent light . . . in the shape of the caste-mark of Shiva! It seemed to be suspended in mid-air, by itself,

cut off, like Mohammed's swinging coffin in the legends of Islam.

Even in my dream I thought this strange. The caste-mark had been scarlet, scarlet. And here it gleamed silvery-blue, phosphorescent!

A nightmare. Fear clutching and squeezing my soul like a slimy hand. And the snakes creeping nearer . . . nearer. . .

 $Dr \ldots rrr \ldots rrrr \ldots$  there came the cold, clean ring of the telephone. I jumped out of bed. I took down the receiver.

"Hullo . . . hullo. . . ."

"This is the office, Mr. Vandewater . . . six o'clock, sir . . . you left a call, sir. . . . "

"Oh, yes. Thanks. And, say . . . send to the café, and tell them to send me up a large pot of the strongest, blackest coffee they can make."

I made every preparation to keep wide awake during the night. I proceeded mechanically. Ten minutes' stiff setting-up exercise. Then a cold bath; not a quick dip, but down into the water again and again, till all my nerves tingled and my skin was aglow. A rub-down with alcohol. By the time I had finished the waiter brought my coffee. I drank every drop of it.

Then I went for a short stroll in the cool of the evening.

Eight o'clock sharp found me back in my room. I locked neither the door nor the windows which gave out on the balcony. If I had had only the intention of saving my own life, it would have been a fairly useful, a fairly reasonable thing to do. It would have been at least a barrier, if not a very steep one, between myself and Hussain Khan. It would at least have retarded his deathdealing. But then it was *not* the question of my own life. My life was but a pawn in the game. It was the question of Hussain's death. I wanted to kill him. It was my sharpdefined duty to kill him. And I could only kill him by giving him a chance to get at me.

For exactly the same reason I turned out the electric light. He would not enter my room if he saw a light in it from the outside. It would show him that I was on guard. Perhaps he would even reckon that I was not alone. It would frighten him away. I would lose my chance. To be sure, he would come again, try again . . . but I wanted the whole thing finished soon, soon. There is a limit to a White man's nervous staying power. I had nearly reached it.

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I saw to my revolver. Oiled it; reloaded it. I twirled the chambers. They rolled smoothly, obedient to the lightest touch of my finger. I kept the revolver in my hand, weighing it. I liked the cool, comforting touch of the steel. Then I moved the bed to the farthest corner of the room, the darkest corner. I stretched myself on it full length.

I was not afraid that Hussain Khan would try any gun-play. He would be afraid of the explosion, the noise, the certainty that he would be caught. He would come as a Destroyer sacrificing to the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms, the dread power of killing which leaves no trace behind. He would rely on his cunning and on his strength. I knew that as to physical strength I was but a baby compared to him, though I have played 'Varsity football. As to cunning . . . I would see . . . it depended on Mascasenhas, on the message and the little envelope I had sent to him by the hands of the camelot.

By ten o'clock it was pitch-dark outside, a bitter, stormy night. Banks of clouds were curtaining the moon. An advantage in favor of Hussain Khan, who would doubtless come through the window and the balcony. He would come dressed as a Brahmin priest. So

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he could not come through the lobby of the hotel.

I have fairly good ears, but I had no illusion that I would be able to hear him, even though I was wide awake. This may seem strange, incredible to the average Westerner. But I know Asia. I knew that Hussain Khan was jungle-bred. He could walk, run, move, even jump, like a tiger, on soft-padded feet. I was resigned to the fact that I would not hear him.

There was of course a very fair chance that I would be able to see him step through balcony and window, in spite of the black night. But what then? How would that profit me? Could I risk a random shot at a dim figure moving in the dark? Perhaps I would only wound him. And then he would either beat a hasty retreat; or—for he had the vitality of an elephant—he would locate me by the flash of my gun, and be at my throat in a jiffy . . . and then . . .

No, no. I had made certain preparations. I had made the only preparations I could make. I must abide the issue.

I lay there wide awake, straining ears and eyes. I never heard a sound. Everything was perfectly still.

My mind ruminated on forgotten schoollessons . . . Asia and Europe . . . White man and Brown. Always the Brown man had come out of Asia, an avalanche on horseback, sweeping over the face of the earth, South, East, North, West. The Persians and Medes; Hannibal, the Phœnicians; later on Attila, Moors and Arabs, Tamerlane, Genghiz Khan . . . and now again . . . only they had found new weapons, stealthy weapons of assassination . . . and Hussain Khan was the spirit of all Asia, calm, serene, merciless . . .

Suddenly I thought that a black shadow was outlined momentarily on the balcony. I was not sure. Perhaps it was only an illusion. It had been so quick, so fleeting. It might have been the shifting cloud-bank rolling away from the face of the moon.

But I left nothing to chance. I got a firmer grip on my revolver. If it was Hussain, if Mascasenhas had received my message and the little envelope, I would know in a second.

Only a second. But the sensations of a lifetime were swinging in toward me, as a flaring-in, a roaring of Tophet and the Abyss. Thus came my memories, like a volcanic lava flood. But my spirit was as a thing apart.

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All my faculties were wide awake. My hand firmly gripped the gun.

The next second—was it the next?—I saw again that silvery-blue, phosphorescent castemark of Shiva which had haunted my dreams. But this time I was awake. As in my dream, it was swinging in mid-air, cut off, without support. The caste-mark of Shiva! Not scarlet, but luminously blue!

Still I waited motionless. I was going to make sure of the end.

Always, in front of me, that pale-blue, phosphorous light, shaped in the likeness of Shiva's caste-mark. Now it began to swing away from the window, slowly, noiselessly, portentously. It was drawing nearer.

My nerves were taut, like newly stretched piano wires. My hand was steady. I raised my revolver until the knuckle of my thumb was in a dead line with the middle of the phosphorous light.

Then, in the passing, timeless flash of a second, I saw the gleam of the Asian's white teeth, a thin, satanic smile curving his lips . . . the tightly stretched olive skin over his high cheek-bones. . . .

I fired.

There was a short, tearing scream; choked

off, ebbing into a moan; silence. Then the thump of a heavy body.

I jumped out of bed. I turned on the electric light.

And there, between the window and the bed, lay the body of Hussain Khan, Moslim, Asiatic, Hater of the Whites.

My bullet had hit him square in the forehead, puncturing that dread caste-mark of Shiva. His dark blood flowed lazily across his cheek to the floor.

I looked at him for a long moment. The lips of the dead man were open, drawn back over the gleaming, white teeth in an eerie, unearthly grin; like the fangs of a wolf who sees, smells the victim, jumps, then finds himself in a trap . . . finds death in the trap, in the moment of killing. . . .

The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms!

.... Like a giant orchid of evil, grown from the seeds of murder and superstition into terrible stature, terrific articulation, threatening all the Western world. . . . Here, in that grinning, bleeding, yellow death mask of Hussain Khan, the Central Asian, the merciless dreamer of merciless dreams, he lay prostrate. . . .

I looked at my dead enemy, thinking

deeply, without hatred, without the sweet feeling of triumph. Then, reverently I drew the folds of his turban across his face.

Perhaps I prayed.

I had won. But I was not glad of my victory.

Strength matching strength. Craft matching craft! And it was craft which had carried the day for me.

For in that small package which I had sent to Mascasenhas by the hand of the *camelot* were a few ounces of phosphorus, and on the envelope I had written:

"If you are faithful to me, Mascasenhas, if my life means anything to you, you will stir this drug into the pigment which Hussain Khan uses to daub on his forehead the scarlet caste-mark of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms."

Thus ended the affair of the luminous death.

All this happened months ago. As it happened, so I wrote it down in these memoirs.

I have won. I have destroyed.

And yet . . . always the dread thought comes back to me of Hussain Khan's warning:

Even if your hand brings death to my heart, even then I shall kill you. Even from beyond the grave I shall kill you. It is an assured thing.

And here I sit and smoke. The gray dawn of morning comes leering through my open windows.

What dread mystery does the morrow hold forth?

THE END

