



JIM GRIM



2 Complete Novels of Adventure by

TALBOT MUNDY

Edited by Ron Hanna

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Part One--The Reincarnated

Chapter One

"As the light is against the darkness, so are you and I against each other."

It was one of those sun-drunken days in spring for which the South of France is famous. There was the usual nondescript crowd at Notre Dame de la Garde--tourists, beggars, women selling candles and rosaries--a few citizens of Marseilles in love with the view--a few youngsters in love with each other. In the distance the Chateau D'If stood grimly silent in a sapphire sea. The funicular railway kept disgorging passengers, too lazy or too wise to make the climb on foot, and I envied them. I never could see why Jeff Ramsden will insist on walking when there are easier ways to get there. Churches don't particularly interest me, and I would rather look at Times Square on a warm night than at all the views in Europe. I was wishing myself on a chair at a cafe window watching the crowd in the Canabiere, although the street is overrated and the beer is beastly. But it is no use arguing with Jeff.

He is a tank of a man--one-eighth of a metric ton of bone and muscle that can go through anything on earth and come out mildly wondering why other people got excited.

James Schuyler Grim was studying the view. I don't know why. He stood on the steps of the church of Notre Dame de la Garde--in a tweed suit and a tourist hat--looking like fifteen frontiers and a wind howling over the snow. When you looked at Grim you felt you'd got to go and buy a ticket to somewhere comfortless, where unexpected but important things are bound to happen. And they do.

No matter which way Grim was looking, if anything happened within the range of his vision you might bet your boots Grim saw it. There are two booths, one on each side of the church door, in which sisters of the sacred order that has charge of the church sell souvenirs and candles. Grim was talking to one of the sisters, making jokes that she was trying to pretend she didn't understand, and trying not to laugh at, when he suddenly turned away from her and glanced toward the platform at the top of the funicular railway, where an iron railing protects the curious tourist from the fate he probably deserves. Grim moved so quickly that Jeff and I followed him down three steps and gazed in the same direction. It was worth watching-- if you like that kind of thing.

A man in a pepper-and-salt suit, not exactly shabby, but looking as if he had slept in it, and wearing a brown derby hat that looked as if he might have found it in an ash-can, suddenly jumped as if shot. He was lean; he had an Adam's apple as big as your fist and a collar two sizes too large; his gestures were pantomimic, and he seemed scared out of his wits. What seemed to have frightened him was an Arab, about sixty years of age, wearing a sea-captain's blue jacket with three gold stripes on the sleeve, who had evidently come toiling up the steps as we had done, and who had paused on the top step but one.

The pepper-and-salt man seemed to try to run three ways at once. He actually did start in our direction, as if the church door suggested sanctuary; but either he thought better of it or else his lean legs got the better of his brain. At any rate, he vaulted the iron railing; and before a sergeant de ville and two uniformed employees of the funicular railway could lift a finger to prevent him he jumped. I don't know how many hundred feet it is from top to bottom; plenty, at any rate. The sergeant de ville and the other two leaned over to watch, and their shrug when he hit the roof of the descending car and

bounced off was as eloquent as things French usually are; it is always easier for me to understand their shoulders than the things they say. The sister in the booth leaned as far as she could over her counter to ask Grim what had happened. A woman fainted. Almost everybody else rushed to the railing to witness a horror that they would have paid money not to see if they had stopped to think a minute. But the Arab sea-dog smiled and came straight on toward the church door.

We three stood back to let him pass, and I noticed that he eyed Grim rather strangely, as if he half-recognized him, but he said nothing. He stopped to buy a full-sized candle from one of the sisters, and with that in his hand he strode in. Then Grim spoke, sideways, through the corner of his mouth, his lips not moving.

"Recognize him, Jeff?"

"Yahudi. Haroun ben Yahudi."

"That was his vessel below in the harbor--the lateen rig by the old wharf--did you see it?"

Grim followed him into the church. We followed Grim. It is a strange scene in there--stranger then because that sea-scarred Moslem lighted his fat wax candle and set it on the iron bracket in front of the Virgin's statue along with thirty or forty others already burning there. From the roof-beams and against the walls hang scores of marvellously fashioned models of ships, set there by sailor-men of fifty generations; as you look upward at them they seem to be afloat in air. And on the walls are countless slabs set up by mariners acknowledging indebtedness to Notre Dame de la Garde for perils on the high seas by her favour overcome. As I think I said, I don't as a rule care much for churches; but that one got me by the throat; it got Jeff too, who is a sentimental giant. I don't know whether it got Grim; he was watching the Arab. It got the Arab harder than it did me.

He was evidently not a convert to the Christian faith. His grim face with the windy, deep-set eyes seemed scornful of much that he saw, and when a priest went by I thought scorn changed to anger. He would have spat, but remembered his manners. He ignored the altar and he made no genuflections; he seemed rather to stiffen himself, as if pride obliged that. Nevertheless, there was reverence in him for something that he felt, though his eyes might not see it, and one could almost share the emotion with him, it was so heartfelt, simple and intense. He showed no surprise when Grim touched his elbow.

"Hey, you, Jimgrim," he remarked in English, "you are like the storms of these seas. There is no knowing whence you will blow next; and there are always shoals to leeward. What now?"

"Pleasant voyage?"

"Now, by Allah's mercy, some men might have thought so--such as like tales at a fireside. But I made my landfall. I suppose you are one more difficulty. I will overcome you also."

He strode past us, bought another candle at the church door, came back, lighted it and stuck it on the bracket near the first one.

"I will overcome you also, Jimgrim. What now?"

"Why pick on me?" Grim asked him.

"Flint picks on steel, and steel on flint," said Haroun ben Yahudi.

Grim laughed. "Maybe I'd better buy some candles. I saw you overcome that other poor devil just now. You did that very neatly."

"That one was afraid," said Haroun.

"I am not afraid."

"Then why candles?"

"Mash-allah! Jimgrim, for a wise one you ask foolish questions. For a thousand--aye, two thousand years, and longer, seamen have known the spirit of this place. Look around you. Do you think that none but Christians make vows? Wallah-hi! And are only Christian vows on record? In the Name of Names I ask you, does a compass only work for Christians? Does the North Star change its station in the sky when Moslems set their course? I know a Moslem keel or two that avoided shoals where fish are spawning in the hulks of broken Christian ships."

"You and I were friends once," Grim said quietly.

"Good friends. And I wonder at the way of the Almighty. He, whose Prophet wrote in plain words all the length and breadth of wisdom, leaving nothing but its depth to be plumbed by our understanding, did a strange thing, Jimgrim, when He set you on one side and me on the other. Now, were you on my side you might be a very great one, Jimgrim. And I tell you, the great in this life become greater in the next, where many, who thought they knew what greatness is, are learning otherwise--too late!"

"Who said I'm against you?" Grim asked.

"I did. As the light is against the darkness, so are you and I against each other. And God pity me, I wonder at His ways, who brought this thing to pass; because you are another whom fear is afraid of, and such men are too few."

Then, at last, he acknowledged Jeff's existence. Their eyes met and Jeff smiled at him, showing short teeth in an iron jaw. You can tell

from a glance at Jeff that if he lets his beard grow three days it will look like chiselled bronze; the substance of a beard seems always there, although he blunts good razors on its shadow.

"What port did you clear from?" Jeff asked, for the sake of politeness. But when Jeff is trying to be polite he tries too hard. He is only lamblike when he expects to have to use his muscles presently on several times his weight of adversaries.

"Basra." But Haroun dismissed that fact as unimportant, from which I gathered either that it had extreme significance or he was lying. "Bullram! Born on the cusp of Aries and Taurus! How does Jimgrim ease your sheets when the gusts of anger glow, I wonder? Lo, a bull's heart in a mountain's hide--a ram's eye for a distance-- and a ram's nose for an enemy! I would that you, also, were on my side. Who is this one?"

The sensation was of being suddenly stripped naked by a connoisseur in anthropology. I was conscious of every weakness I possess--and of Jeff's tremendous loyalty--and of Grim's mercurial alertness. It was not good.

"Excuse me," said Grim. "Major Robert Crosby--Captain Haroun ben Yahudi."

"One of us," Jeff added. It was the first time he had mentioned that in my presence. I felt better.

The old sea-dog eyed me for a moment longer as if he were studying shoals and tides and changing winds. Then he turned to Grim: "I, too, have shipped such. My mate--I found him in a Baghdad brothel, drunk and sickening from hunger. And I have a seaman whom I took off the beach at Koweit. Some do well--some otherwise. I shipped that weakling whom you saw just now scared to hell. Not that this is as

that one. This one--Crosby do you say his name is?--is of the sort that terror stiffens, though it makes him stupid. Major, you said? He is young for his rank. They promote babies nowadays; and what airs they give themselves! Born, unless my eyes deceive me, under Libra. Too much judgment--ever weighing this with that and hesitating lest he put the wrong foot foremost. However; it is no light matter for two such men as you to find a third one. Were not two of you enough--aye, two too many?"

"Why did you ship that scareling?" Grim retorted.

"Why are you against me, Jimgrim? Why did you come here looking for me? Hay-yeh, when the vultures gather in the sky I know their purpose."

"You were the last man I was thinking of," Grim answered.

"Yeh-yeh--you were thinking of life and death; and of why we come into the world, and why we leave it. And then I came. I, also, was thinking the same thoughts. Then I saw you. And I said to myself, as doubtless you said also: The Almighty does not set two such men by chance upon the self-same threshold of the Life to Come! Therefore, before one or other of us dies--"

It was the first time I had ever seen Jeff go into action. He was quicker than a lightweight; it was incredible that he could show such speed, with all that bulk and so much Herculean muscle. The eye hardly followed him. He seized the Arab's right wrist in his left hand, jerked it backward, and a big, broad-bladed sheath-knife clattered on the stone floor.

"Not here, Haroun--and not yet!"

"Very decent of you, Haroun, to have given warning," Grim remarked.

He picked up the knife and Jeff returned it to its owner, who thrust it back into the sheath under his blue serge jacket.

I led the way out and the three of us stood on the concrete paving below the church steps, where we could just see the two lateen-rigged masts of Haroun's ship. Beyond it, nearly in mid-harbour, a French warship lay to her mooring—one of those old-fashioned cruisers with funnels in pairs spaced wide apart.

"You have the right of it," said Haroun. "That was neither time nor place. Doubtless God was displeased by the sacrilege, or else the knife had struck home. That would have saved you, Jimgrim, from a worse fate. Dorje--"

"Oh, are you taking Dorje's orders?"

"Dorje has a saying, that they are fortunate who die before the game begins."

"You let his name slip, didn't you?"

"It is on all men's tongues."

"Yours let it slip, though. What have you to do with Dorje, Haroun?"

The Arab's answer froze on parted lips. A flash of bluewhite lightning seemed to leap out of the cruiser's hold, so vivid, that it hurt the eyes even at a distance. It was instantly followed by billowing smoke; and in the midst of that we saw a deck lift and the masts fall two ways. In less than a tenth of a second the cruiser broke in half amidships. And then thunder, as the two ends sank, their swirl obliterated by the smoke of the explosion.

"Remember the Maine," said Jimgrim.

Almost, it seemed, before the thunder reached us boats were racing toward the scene of the disaster--motor-boats plying for hire, some filled with passengers--yachts' launches--ships' boats--tugs. We could see the floating debris and what looked like men's heads.

"Come and lend 'em a hand," said Jeff, but it would have taken us at least twenty minutes to reach the harbour-front.

We were stormed by a swarm of loiterers and tourists asking us what had happened. Jeff answered them politely, so they backed away from him, believing he suspected them of having sunk the cruiser. I watched Grim for a hint of what he meant to do. He spoke, but I could not catch what he said because of the noise the crowd was making. However, I did hear Haroun answer him:

"Mash-allah! That was also not the time and not the place. But it was simple. To be King of the World, you, Jimgrim, it is necessary to be simple--and as one-two, one-two as the Word of God."

Chapter Two

"I am an old man, Jimgrim. Help me."

Haroun glanced at each of us in turn, then walked away.

"He will go to the women," said Jeff. "That's Haroun's one weakness."

"He has another," Grim answered. "He can't resist the impulse to crow before sunrise. That's why Haroun still commands about two hundred tons of dhow instead of being rotten with money and having his own way. I suppose I must tell the Prefect of Police about him. Come on to the Prefecture."

We descended in the funicular, to save time.

"I should think the Prefect of Police will be down near the scene of the accident," I suggested, and Jeff answered irritably because the elevator made him nervous.

"You would think that. But French Prefects of Police know their business. The place to look for a Prefect, in a crisis, is where he can be reached instantly by everyone who has to be told what to do."

The French police have a flair for recognizing the value of irregular procedure on occasion and we were admitted at once to the Prefect's inner sanctum. But the Prefect--a neat man with a brown beard, who looked like a naval officer--went on listening to the telephone, giving curt answers in a quiet voice and making swift, precise notes on a sheet of foolscap paper. Three men in uniform stood at the other side of the Prefect's desk; one of them drew near us, I suppose, to listen.

But there was an interruption. The door opened and two detectives entered, escorting Haroun, looking sheepish.

"Eh-h, you, Jimgrim!" remarked Haroun. There were no handcuffs on him. One could not guess whether he had been arrested or merely "invited" to call on the Prefect, who glanced at him once, swiftly, and made one more pencilled note between abrupt communications over the phone.

"Quick work," said Grim.

Then Haroun spoke in Arabic: "You, Jimgrim, you and I were friends once."

Grim nodded.

"And a knife is merciful. By Allah, they would have slain me, had I slain you, and the account would have been fair between us. But is it merciful to throw a man such as me into prison, where there is neither sun nor sea nor wind? May the All-merciful deal with me as being guilty of it, if I would have thrown you into prison--though I would have slain you--yea, and why not? You, who lay in wait to trap me, should I not strike? Would you not have drawn steel, had I trapped you?"

"What do you ask of me?" Grim demanded. "Pardon?"

"Nay. Insh'allah, I will die needing no man's pardon. May Allah pardon me, in case I need it. But a bargain, Jimgrim, is another matter."

Then Grim made one of his characteristic bold strokes, that his friends sometimes recognized as bluff, but that his enemies mistook as a rule for a sign of omniscience.

"There is no midway between us two," he answered. "You are either friend or enemy. Which is it?"

"Wallah! Do you bid me choose now?"

"Now or never. Choose between me and Dorje."

Haroun hesitated. Grim--and he must have been guessing--probed for the source of hesitation.

"Is forgiveness one of Dorje's habits? Will it please him to hear of that cruiser--blown up--in the wrong place, at the wrong time?"

"Who shall protect me from his anger, Jimgrim?"

"Not I, at any rate, unless you tell the whole truth. Who am I that I should try to sail in two ships? And can you do that?"

Mash-allah! One ship is enough for me. But which one? If I had known, Jimgrim, that you were in league against Dorje, I would not have done his errand."

"Nevertheless, you did his errand."

"Haida sahad. Truly had I slain you, all might have been well yet, Jimgrim. But that big ape Ram-is-den perceived my knife. And now I begin to perceive in all this the hand of Allah. None can fight against Him. Nevertheless, if God wills, and I tell the truth, will you put me in prison, Jimgrim?"

"This is not my country. I am no keeper of prisons in this place," he said.

"Nay, I know it. But for what did they arrest me, save for drawing steel at you? So if you, and those others, say I did not draw steel--?"

"There will then remain only that cruiser to account for! Surely that is nothing!" Grim suggested.

"Min jadd! Jimgrim, as God is my witness, I did not do that; nor was it of my contriving, or by my will that it was done."

"Will they believe that? Or will Dorje believe it?"

"As Allah is my witness. I perceive I have no chance at all, unless you believe it, Jimgrim."

Grim thrust home then: "Chance? What is it? If you say you see the hand of Allah, how can you talk of chances in the same breath? Can you trim your sails to two winds?"

"This has been an ill wind, Jimgrim."

"No," Grim answered, "but a wrong course. Haroun, when a wise man sees the shoals, does he change his course or carry on?"

"You will have me on your side? But at what price? I am a man of honour, Jimgrim. Death is no great matter."

Grim shrugged his shoulders. "It is no affair of mine," he answered; and there was silence, for possibly sixty seconds. It was so noticeable that the Prefect looked up from his writing-paper.

"Send for an interpreter," he commanded.

A man left the room and Haroun tried to hide his nervousness; but he betrayed it by shifting his feet. Then he began to strike his colours, gradually.

"What did he say, Jimgrim?"

No answer. Grim began to speak to Jeff in undertones. "You have missed your tide," Jeff answered. "Lie to your own anchor."

"Nay, I will not! Tell him I need help. In the name of Allah, tell him I demand help."

"What about your bargain? You spoke of a bargain," Jeff retorted.

"Say then, I will tell him all I know. But he must save me from the prison."

Grim, without moving his head, spoke to the Prefect quietly, in French:

"He will talk. He will tell all he knows."

The Prefect seemed to speak into the telephone. It probably needed more civilized eyes than Haroun's to detect that his beard interfered with the mouthpiece.

"So I gathered," said the Prefect. "I learned Arabic in Aden."

"May I promise him liberty?"

"Yes, yes. He can easily be shadowed, and he might commit illuminating indiscretions."

Haroun almost shouted: "Jimgrim! In the Name of Names--"

The Prefect interrupted, laying the receiver on its hook: "I'll give you the latest information, gentlemen. Seventeen survivors, all in hospital or on the way there--thirty-seven dead recovered-- three hundred and eleven missing. Divers are already on the scene. A terrible disaster. Or an unspeakable atrocity. It remains to be revealed, which."

Grim faced Haroun. "What was that you said?"

"I am an old man, Jimgrim. Help me."

"Truth helps him who speaks it. Will you tell all you know?"

"I will tell you, face to face, as one friend to another. To these others I will not speak. What am I to them, or they to me? And they would twist my words against me."

Grim caught the Prefect's eye. He nodded. "Very well," said Grim, "if you will tell me all you know, and answer questions, I will make no charge against you in the matter of that stabbing."

"But this other matter, Jimgrim? It was not my doing."

"If you tell me all you know, and if I believe you not guilty, I will do all I can to help you."

"But the prison, Jimgrim?"

"For the present, if you tell all you know, you shall go free."

"All? But I will only speak in your ear, Jimgrim. No spies! No listeners! Your word on that?"

Grim caught the Prefect's eye again. He nodded. Grim spoke in English. "All right, Haroun. We will talk where nobody can overhear."

The Prefect ordered a man in uniform to lead Haroun and Grim into the next room, "where there have been many tales told that newspapers will never print and judges will never hear," he added drily.

Chapter Three

"I am always Baltis."

It was as clear as daylight that the Prefect did not suspect Haroun of having sunk the cruiser. He had on his desk the cargo manifest of Haroun's dhow--dates, hides and scrap-brass. All except the scrap-brass was consigned to reputable merchants; but the latter was invoiced to Haroun himself, marked on consignment for sale at local market price. As scrap it had been entered by the Customs duty free, and no one seemed to know after that what happened to it; however, Grim might elicit the information, and if not Grim, then someone else. Meanwhile, it was probably unimportant--merely something to be checked up on the principle of examining every minute detail.

A list of Haroun's crew was also on the desk, and all except one were

accounted for. Two were in jail for a midnight brawl in the redlight district. The cook had shipped east as a deck-hand on an Italian brig engaged in coral-fishing. Two men were in the seamen's hospital with boils described as serious. The remainder were reported standing by the ship, and, having spent their pay, offering themselves "without enthusiasm" for "long-shore jobs on any terms whatever. The one man unaccounted for was an Italian-Greek-Frenchman, on the manifest as Guido Georges Marie de la Tournee, rating carpenter and super-cargo, wages two pounds ten a month, a cabin to himself and "captain's rations."

"Interesting," said the Prefect, "on a dhow of two hundred tons. There is a body in the morgue--However, I must ask you gentlemen, if you please without consulting one another, to write down, each of you, as fully as you can remember, every detail of today's events as you observed them. You may set down what was said to you, and what you said, and what you overheard. I invite you also to state frankly why you are in Marseilles and why, with evident collaboration, you arrived at this prefecture together, or almost together, at a critical moment. The formality will be observed of separating you from one another while you write your statements, to avoid collaboration, however unintentional that might be."

At a nod from him men in uniform escorted us to different rooms, where they supplied us with writing materials, and I heard the Prefect hurry away in a car with the exhaust wide open. My statement, naturally, did not take long. I signed it and went to stare out of the window at a sordidly uninteresting street until someone should come and get it. The official who escorted me into the room had said "no smoking," so I lighted a cigar in the hope he would smell it and come back sooner. However, he did not, and I began to be abominably bored until a private limousine drew up outside and a woman, unescorted, opening the door herself, stepped out of it and entered

the prefecture.

I tossed the cigar through a broken window-pane as somebody ushered her into the room I occupied, quietly closing the door behind her and, unless I was much mistaken, locking it. I don't know much French, but I do know that French officials, and particularly the police do nothing without purpose and premeditation; so I fell on guard as tensely as if I had had a rapier in my right hand. She stared at me. I stared at her. And she was well worth looking at.

She was a sort of symphony in jade-green and Chinese yellow. Her long skirt made her look taller than she actually was. Her tightly fitting green hat with yellow lining framed intriguing features. She looked vaguely Chinese, but her mouth and her chin might have been Irish; they would have made her fortune in the movies, except for a slight scar on the upper lip that changed its line and added a sinister touch that rather spoiled her smile. Her nose was agreeably impudent-coquettish; and her eyes, although they did not slant perceptibly, contained in them the mocking, curious intelligence of all the Chinese women in the world. She was wealthily dressed; she had a jewelled purse that had probably cost at least three thousand dollars; there were jewelled buckles on her patent-leather shoes, that had Chinese-yellow heels; and she was wearing a jade necklace that almost bankrupts me to think about. I know jade. Not even "the Old Buddha" ever had a better string than that one. She did not sit; she stood and stared me out of countenance, until suddenly she smiled and came toward me.

"Are you Jeemgreem? Oh, I have so much wished to meet you."

"What made you look for me here?" I retorted.

"Eentuition!"

"May I know who you are?"

"I am the Princess Baltis."

"Wasn't Baltis the name of the Queen of Sheba?"

She nodded. "I am always Baltis. Each time I am reborn I am Baltis."

"And always a princess?"

"Always."

I suppressed an impulse to enquire what Solomon was doing now. She had the information at her finger-tips, as transpired later, but for the moment I judged that was dangerous ground. As "Jeemgreem" it behooved me to be circumspect and to elicit other, less controversial, statistics that might forearm Grim. From the moment she spoke I had no doubt whatever that her purpose was to trap Grim in a net of some kind, or else to deduce him along a blind trail. Intuition sometimes guides me also, but not always.

"Why are you here?" I asked her, trying to imagine how Grim would have brought motives to the surface.

"Jeemgreem, someone told me you are in Marseilles."

"What of it?" I was painfully aware that "Jeemgreem" would have managed her more subtly; however, I am a very unsubtle person and can do no better than my best in an emergency. "Why do you trouble yourself on my account?" I said that because her perfume, and some sort of mental allurement that she exuded, stirred in me the self-defensive instinct that is usually impolite. The words sounded crass in my own ears. However, she appeared to misinterpret bluntness as a sign of superiority to ordinary conversational methods. She came

straight to the point:

"Jeemgreem, you and I can help each other--now as always. We have always helped each other. When I was Baltis Queen of Sheba, were you not my great ambassador? You know that, don't you? Certainly you know it; you, too, have the psychic memory. When I was Baltis, concubine of Cyrus, were you not my lover? Did you not die in the execution ash-pit rather than betray me? When I was Baltis, who danced and sang at Cleopatra's court, did I not help you--the Roman Publius Carfax--to corrupt her army until it surrendered to Octavianus without a blow? When I was Baltis, dancing girl in attendance on Suraj-ud-Dowlah--and you were Major Eyre Coote commanding Clive's infantry--did I not, for your sake, undermine the allegiance of Suraj-ud-Dowlah's generals, so that Clive's little handful of troops defeated him at Plassey? You know all this, Jeemgreem. And there were dozens of other occasions. Always, in every life, we have helped each other."

"You seem to have come down in the world," I suggested.

"You, too, Jeemgreem! You were a general of Genghis Khan. A hundred thousand soldiers rode like whirlwinds at your nod in those days. But you know what Shakespeare said: There is a tide in the affairs of men . . ."

"I agree with Shaw," I said, "that Shakespeare is overrated. I don't understand poets."

"You never did! No, nevaire. You were always inartistic. That is why you have always needed me; whereas I need your pragmatism and your power of concentration. Jeemgreem, our tide is turning-- yours and mine. Destiny has kept us separated until now, in this life, because now is the propaire moment. I have come to warn you not to interfere with Dorje--as I warned you when you were Sir Francis

Weston, and I was Ann Boleyn."

"Didn't you say your name is always Baltis?" I suggested.

"Always Baltis. I have always known myself by my own name. But I have sometimes kept it secret. The real reason why Henry the Eighth of England caused me to be executed was that in a foolish moment I revealed to him my real name, telling him that I was once the Queen of Sheba, whereas he was nobody in those days. He grew jealous. He made charges against me. And they were partly true. Yes--why not? I did not love him. But I did love you, Jeemgreem. In those days you were vairee handsome, when you were Sir Francis Weston. And if you had listened to me, you would have r-r-run as you will r-r-run now, if you listen to me."

"Do you think me a coward?" I asked. It was difficult to think of appropriate remarks to keep the conversation going. Her apparent sincerity was a bit bewildering.

"A coward? I would r-rather call myself a pr-r-rude!" she retorted with withering scorn. "Is a tiger a coward, who r-r-runs from a cage when the door is open for him? Jeemgreem! Solomon the Wise has been reborn into the world, to be King of the World. I tell you what all the East knew long ago--that the King of the World is coming! The King of the World is Solomon reborn. He is known as Dorje! Dorje the Darling! Dorje, before whom presently the kingdoms of the world will bow their necks!"

I nodded. It seemed the only thing to do. Then, suddenly, I thought of another line of questioning:

"Wasn't it a rather strange coincidence that someone should tell you of my arrival in Marseilles the day after I got here?"

"Coincidence?" She spluttered with laughter. "Jeemgreem, I have hunted for you during three whole years. I have spent more--much more than a quarter of a million francs to find you. When I learned you were in Tibet I set men to watch all the passes by which you possibly could recross the mountains. Even so, you escaped me. Then, at last, I heard you were in Berlin--then in Paris--then that you had booked your passage from Marseilles to New York, on your way to Callao. So I came to Marseilles. This morning an informant told me you were at L'Eglise de Notre Dame de la Garde, where you spoke with Haroun ben Yahudi--that fool-- Dorje was a fool to trust him, half-Jew, half-Arab. Dorje trusted Haroun because in ancient days he was the captain of the fleet that brought cedar down from Lebanon when the Temple was building. Even Dorje makes mistakes."

She paused for breath. She stared into my eyes and seemed in doubt whether to take me into her confidence or not--then suddenly threw caution to the winds:

"There are no witnesses. Jeemgreem--then that terrible--that horrible, atrocious mistake--that cr-ruiser blown up too soon! And with my own eyes I saw them capture Haroun. I learned that you came to the prefecture. So I came also. Jeemgreem, you must get Haroun out of here before he tells secrets. I know what they will do to him. They will place his thumbs in the jamb of a door, and they will squeeze until he tells every single word he knows. Jeemgreem--I have been to such great pains to find you--will you do that trifle for me? Will you use your influence--your wits-- your resourcefulness to get Haroun out of these men's clutches?"

I nodded, knowing what Grim had already arranged.

"I may depend on that? It is a promise, from you to me? In all our lives on earth, whatever happened, we have always kept faith, Jeemgreem."

I nodded again. "He shall not be tortured. If you watch, you shall presently see him go away from here."

She let a sigh of almost exquisite relief escape her, narrowing her eyes as she felt its full surge through her system. Evidently Haroun had given her anxious moments.

"And now I must go, Jeemgreem, because if that Prefect returns he will recognize me, and that--how soon will you come and see me, Jeemgreem? Listen--I have no card--write this: I am staying at the apartment of Madame la Comtesse de St. Etienne sur Saone, Place de la Croix des Templiers, Marseilles. You must come soon. You must come sooner than soon. Within one--two hours--not later! I will be there waiting for you. It is number eighteen. Stop your taxi-driver at the corner of La Rue des Capuchins and let him suppose you are going to déjeuner at the restaurant. Then, after he has gone away, walk to la Place de la Croix des Templiers. The apartment is up one flight of stairs. You will be there?"

"If I may bring my friends," I answered.

"Jeemgreem, you and I must talk alone together."

"Then I won't come."

"When will you leave off being obstinate! Oh, man's man--you were always such a cautious fool with women! Life after life, I have seen you miss your opportunities because you would not trust me until you had learned too late that I am wholly to be trusted! Very well then, bring them. I suppose you will bring that big oaf Ramsden?"

"Him and Crosby."

"Who is this Crosby?"

"He may surprise you. I have known him quite a long time."

"Warn him that he deals with danger! I am not one to be deceived, even by your friends, Jeemgreem!"

As she turned away from me she glanced back in a way that would have brought thrills to the spine of a brass god. Then she walked to the door and scrambled on the panel with her gloved fingers, making almost no sound. But it opened. She whispered to someone and walked out. Several seconds later I heard her limousine drive away. Then, I, too, went to the door. It was not locked now at any rate. A man in uniform stood outside the passage.

"Why did you show her in here?" I demanded, in the best French I can muster.

"But, Mo'sieur Grim, she said you wished that."

"All right," I answered. "I have written out my statement. You may take it." It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him I was not James Schuyler Grim; but on second thought it seemed more tactfully neglectful not to. "Who else knows that she has been here?" I demanded.

"Nobody, mo'sieur."

I gave him one hundred francs, on sheer impulse. If anyone had asked, I could not have answered why I did it.

Chapter Four

"I'll take this case."

Bureaucracy, of course, inevitably strangles itself with red tape sooner or later. Mere efficiency becomes the end aimed at, instead of the means by which ends are attained. However, subject to that limitation, the speed and accuracy of the Marseilles police dragnet was almost incredibly good. Perhaps an hour had elapsed since I was conducted into that room to write my statement. In addition to I don't know what else, the police had meanwhile managed to identify the body in the morgue as that of Guido Georges Marie de la Tournee. They had a full report, all ready for the Prefect, of how he had committed suicide by leaping from the summit of the funicular at Notre Dame de la Garde. They had, furthermore, identified him as a former Czarist spy of no particular attainments; and they had dug up a record of his having been deported from India, Cuba, the Argentine and the United States. He appeared to have had French citizenship papers and to have served two short terms in prison, for assaults committed while under the influence, once of absinthe, once of hashish, against former employers who, he said, had insulted him.

His medical report was interesting. He had been set down by the prison doctors as "not insane enough for detention" but as evidencing signs of persecution-mania. One doctor, probably with time on his hands, had filled up two sheets of foolscap about him. As a surgeon I was allowed to see it, and I formed the opinion that, if I had been the prison doctor, the man would have been certified as probably incurably insane. However, there was another report about him, and it was more to the point:

A detective had traced his movements since he left an establishment in the red light district early that morning. He had got into a fight with a French sailor on shore leave from the cruiser anchored in the harbour. He had taken a mild thrashing without doing much damage in return, and he had not seemed to resent that particularly; but two waiters sweeping the front of a cafe had noticed that what the sailor

and his companions had said to him afterwards as he slunk away had stirred him to almost maniacal frenzy. According to one waiter, he had shouted, "You shall all of you pay for it-- all of you!" But the other waiter had reported him as saying, with a savage oath in borderland French-Italian, "You are blow-flies out of one bottle. I will destroy all of you, bottle and all!"

He had then gone to a cafe, where he drank two stiff glasses of cheap brandy. After that he went to Haroun's ship, where he disappeared through the hatch that led to the cabins below the poop-deck. Emerging presently, he loafed around until he found a warrant-officer about to return to the cruiser in a small steam-launch, whose owner had offered to take him gratis. Guido Georges Marie de la Tournée was seen to give the warrant-officer a package wrapped in newspaper and tied with tarred string. He was heard to ask him kindly to deliver the package to one of the cruiser's engineers, saying, "I don't know the officer's name but he left this at Madame Reuben's."

Immediately after that he jumped into a taxi; and the next that was known of his movements, he had committed suicide. The detective added, however, that someone (name not given) told him that the explosion on the cruiser took place within two minutes of the arrival of the launch alongside and that the departing launch only escaped destruction by a miracle. He wound up the report with his not unreasonable conjecture, that there might be some connection between Guido Georges Marie de la Tournée, the package he had handed to the warrant-officer, and the explosion on the cruiser, although he remarked, too, on the obvious impossibility of wrapping in one small package a sufficient quantity of explosive to wreak so much havoc. It was a good report, not shown to us, but read aloud over the phone by an official, to someone at the military barracks, so that I got the gist of it.

Then Grim reappeared with Haroun, and by the look in Grim's eyes, and in Haroun's too, it was easy to see there had been revelations, but neither of them made any remark. Jeff Ramsden came in, with one folded sheet of paper, just as the Prefect returned. The Prefect had walked. There was mud on his shoes. He appeared excited, and he was rather out of breath. He laid on the desk, on top of the pile of reports, a small brass object that looked like a section of one-inch pipe with an irregular shaped plug screwed into either end. He raised his eyebrows at Grim, who nodded. Haroun stared at the brass thing on the desk as if he recognized it. The Prefect beckoned Grim and Haroun back into the room they had just left, closing the door, and I heard the key turn on the inside.

"What's that thing?" Jeff asked; and before anyone could prevent him he had picked up the piece of brass tubing, which appeared battered and too light to contain anything, but I had time to notice that one of the plugs was only partly screwed into the end that Strange held in my direction, before a policeman sharply ordered him to put it back on the desk.

"Might be a bomb," Jeff hazarded. But I shook my head. It was too small, and not heavy enough.

We were then ordered to sit on chairs with our backs to the wall, doubtless to prevent any further unauthorized investigations. We sat silent for a long time with nothing whatever to entertain us except our own thoughts and frequent interruptions of them by the telephone, which was answered by the Prefect's secretary. Then suddenly the door opened and Haroun walked out, apparently a free man; the Prefect appeared in the doorway, said something sotto voce to a man in uniform who stood guarding the door opening into the passage that led to the street, and once more closeted himself with Grim. Haroun, not seeming to glance in our direction, made straight

for the street and was let go without comment.

However, he was not so free as he perhaps supposed. He had hardly time to reach the street before the Prefect's secretary 'phoned to someone in the building to follow and not lose sight of him; reports of his movements were to be 'phoned to the Prefecture every half-hour. Ten more minutes passed before Grim came out, still talking to the Prefect, who walked to the desk, thumbed over the papers, picked up the piece of brass tubing, shook it, tried to unscrew the plug that looked loose, failed, screwed it in instead, set it down again on the pile of papers--and addressed us:

"I thank you, gentlemen. It will take time to study your statements. There appears to be no need to detain you any longer. Should your presence be required, I will send for you."

He bowed to Grim, signed to the man at the door to open it and pass us out, picked up the piece of tube again, examined it, set it down once more and gave an order rather irritably:

"When do they ever clean these windows? Bring my magnifying glass, and turn on the electric light."

Before we had time to reach the door the light over the Prefect's desk was turned on and he made a sudden exclamation that made us turn to see what caused it. As we did so, a fuse blew and the light went out. Less than a second later the piece of tubing on the Prefect's desk turned whitehot--set fire to the papers--and appeared to burn up with them. A revolver went off in a drawer-- six shots almost simultaneous. There was a fusillade of pistol shots as apparently every cartridge in the building went off and a box of cartridges exploded in a cellar with a din like a machine-gun battery. There was shouting and a great noise of hurrying feet. Then the wooden desk itself caught fire. The sudden heat was so intense that the Prefect

backed away into a corner and when a man came rushing in with a fire extinguisher he could not get near enough to make proper use of the thing. It was Jeff who put the fire out. He is afraid of nothing except cats and elevators. He found another extinguisher and a man's overcoat out in the passage; shielding himself with the overcoat he charged in close and sprayed a stream of fluid right into the heart of the fire. It was out then; of course, in a moment; but the overcoat had caught fire; Jeff threw it on the floor and stamped on it while the other man sprayed it with the few last drops of his extinguisher. Jeff burned his trousers and his eyebrows, but was otherwise not hurt.

Then the Prefect examined the desk, or rather what remained of it. He let no one else touch it--made us all stand back. There was something he saw that he seemed unable to believe--or, perhaps, that he thought no one else would believe unless he took every possible precaution against interference.

"Bring a camera," he commanded. "Camera and flashlight."

A man came in with a large, old-fashioned instrument and exposed a dozen plates from different angles; it took several minutes because he had to reload his flashlight apparatus each time he used it. The smoke of the last explosion of magnesium powder had hardly reached the ceiling when what remained of the desk collapsed into a heap of charred dust.

"And not a trace left of that brass tube," said the Prefect. "Not only are all my records of this case destroyed, but that brass has vanished. You may come and look now, all of you. Observe, please, that the locks and screws are there, among the ashes, but there is not even one fragment of that piece of tubing."

The locks seemed to have been fused by the terrific heat and several

of the screws had become stuck together. A shapeless lump of metal that I thought might be the brass tube turned out to be the fused wreck of the telephone instrument.

It was Grim who suggested that the ashes should be analysed, weighed, and their metallic contents separated.

"Dorje has invented something new, that's all. Where did that brass tube come from?"

"It was part of Haroun ben Yahudi's cargo," said the Prefect. "Invoiced as scrap brass. This piece was found in his cabin."

"Where is the rest of it?"

"That is what we hope to discover. That is why I let him go. He is being watched. I hope he will show us where it is."

"He said," said Grim, "that Guido Georges Marie de la Tournée sold it to an absolute stranger for cash."

"Did he produce the money?" Jeff asked.

The Prefect shrugged his shoulders. "He showed money. But whence he had it--?"

Someone ran in from the switchboard to say that the Prefect was wanted at once on the 'phone.

"Who is he? What does he want?"

"It is Eighty-one. He says that Arab who just now walked out of here has been murdered!"

"Did he catch the murderer?"

"He says, no. A man ran from a side-street and plunged a knife into the Arab's heart. Several people saw it. Eighty-one has held two witnesses. But the murderer ran back up the side-street and vanished."

The Prefect walked into another room to use a telephone. It was on the tip of my tongue to tell Grim, there and then, about the Princess Baltis. But Grim drew Jeff aside and whispered. Then the Prefect returned.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must invite you to write those statements again. It embarrasses me to put you to so much trouble, but you see, everything was burned up--everything. A devastation. It will be necessary to reconstruct this problem from the very beginning and your statements may be of some assistance. However, I need not ask you to stay here and write them. Have the goodness to write them, if possible, without consulting one another and I will send a messenger for them to your hotel this afternoon. Meanwhile, please preserve silence. Let me emphasize that. Silence, gentlemen, I pray you. You are men of experience, who will readily understand the paramount importance of a most discreet silence in such matters as this. In fact, if you were men of less--shall I say distinction--it would be my duty to take routine measures to prevent you from talking with anyone."

He bowed us out; and for a man who must have been half-distracted by the day's events he showed exceptional sang-froid.

As we passed into the street Grim smiled. It was a sour smile. There was discontent behind it. "Without meaning to, I make men like Haroun trust me," he remarked. "Do you realize that I sent Haroun to his death? If he had not appealed to me, he would be in a police cell this minute, alive and safe. It isn't that the brave old fellow had to die.

Death's nothing--and anyhow, Haroun killed his dozens. What hits me between the wind and water is that Haroun depended on me to protect him."

"He had no right to," said Jeff.

Grim glanced at him and smiled again: "Who wants his rights? To hell with rights! They're only relative at best. The only thing a decent fellow asks is friendship and a clean death, standing up."

Chapter Five

"Imagine what would happen if--"

In the taxi I told Grim about the Princess Baltis. He interrupted before I was half through with my account of her: "She's no more a princess than I'm a Hottentot. She's a French citizen, born of Franco-Siamese and Chinese parents--educated at the Sorbonne-- wealthy--older than she looks--she must be thirty-two or thirty-three, and looks twenty-three--but at that age she was already the best spy the French Government ever had. She was a spy at seventeen. The Germans sentenced her to death in Belgium, but she escaped; one German officer was shot and one got life imprisonment for letting her slip, and at that they very likely had nothing at all to do with it. She's clever, and no one knows how she escaped."

We lunched at the hotel, where I finished my account of the interview. Grim added:

"If she is in league with Dorje, we've a clue to work on. She's the only spy in the French service whom they haven't ever suspected of double-dealing. They think the world of her. They give her anything she asks for. Not the slightest use reporting her; they simply wouldn't

believe it, and she'd frame up a charge against us as quick as winking.

"Haroun said," he went on, "that his secret orders were to obey Guido Georges de la Tournee until he docked in Marseilles. Guido drove him almost crazy. He said he lost his wind a hundred times because Guido insisted on keeping at least five miles away from any ship that was big enough to have electric light on board. Can you believe it? He sailed that dhow 'round by the Cape to avoid close quarters in the Suez Canal. By the time he docked he was so fed up with Guido that he threatened to destroy his dhow, in exchange, I suppose, for the insult. What do you deduce from that?"

"Guido put that brass thing in Haroun's cabin," I suggested.

Jeff said: "And when he saw Haroun coming up the steps at the top of the hill he supposed Haroun had found him out. So he jumped rather than face Haroun's knife."

"Or he may have thought," said Grim, "that the dhow was already destroyed and Haroun was out for vengeance. It's obvious that Guido climbed the hill to watch the cruiser blow up. He evidently knew it would blow up as soon as that brass thing was delivered on board. Did you notice that nothing happened in the Prefect's office until the electric light was turned on? Then a fuse blew, and the thing went white-hot, and every cartridge in the place exploded. Add that to the fact that Guido, on the voyage, was afraid to go near ships that had electric dynamos--and we get what? Some new kind of energy-converter. And it must be extremely simple, or Dorje couldn't manufacture it in quantity and ship it as scrap-brass. Apparently electric current leaps toward it, becomes changed in some way, sets off any explosive within a certain distance, but destroys the thing itself. Imagine what would happen if they could distribute a few thousand of those things, close to arsenals, for instance."

Jeff summed it up: "An automatic fire-bug that destroys its own evidence. Nice for the insurance companies!"

"Grim," I said, "you've got to go and see that Princess."

"No," he answered, "you go. Take Jeff with you. Go and be Jimgrim until she finds you out. I leave this evening by plane for London, where they'll probably give me information and perhaps carte blanche."

So Jeff and I went in search of her, not relishing our job. "Tell me more about her," Jeff demanded as we strode along together.

"She considers you a great oaf and she believes I'm wonderful."

"All right, let's play that hand," he answered promptly. "She dealt it."

"Any man can make a smart woman think him a fool," I objected.

"Play the fool with her and make her think you're clever," he retorted. And that was all the advice I could get from him. As we approached the address she had given he shoved one fist into his pocket and strode along beside me as if we were off for a day's fishing. Even when we entered the apartment hallway and started up the stairs he was whistling softly to himself, whereas I was alternately hot and cold with nervousness. I did not in the least relish the prospect of matching wits with a woman said to be the cleverest spy in Europe. Nobody minds getting stabbed--shot--strangled in a good cause; but who likes to appear ridiculous!

We were admitted by a middle-aged, dull-looking French maid into an apartment furnished in the late empire period--style that always makes me irritable for some incomprehensible reason. There was a long corridor, with windows on the left hand looking into a garden,

and on the right hand was a row of gilded doors with heavy brocade curtains. A tall grandfather clock ticked solemnly. There was an atmosphere of old-world peace, belied by an equally evident tension; it was too quiet; one's footfall was smothered in three-pile carpet, so that it felt like walking into ambush; and at the end of the corridor there was a gilt-edged mirror that aroused my suspicions--as it turned out, justly.

The corridor turned to the right. We were ushered into a room beyond the wall on which the mirror hung and I noticed at once that there was a big ornately decorated cabinet against the wall within the room, at exactly the place where the mirror hung outside. It was particularly noticeable because the cabinet seemed out of balance with all the other furniture; it needed shoving three or four feet further to the left, where its bulk and ornate grandeur would have seemed less prominent. Another thing I noticed was that the cabinet was the only modern reproduction in a room that was otherwise filled with what were apparently genuine period pieces.

The Princess rose out of a gilded chair to welcome us. She had changed her costume and was now dressed in peach-coloured silk, with a turquoise necklace, and I think she looked even younger than when I had seen her earlier that day. The windows were all curtained and the light was so dim and diffused that it was difficult to see the small scar on her upper lip; it was even difficult to tell the colour of her eyes, that looked like pools of languid mischief. She contrived to create the impression of a rather bored woman who invited, even challenged, us to entertain her.

"So you have come, Jeemgreem. And you have brought your famous and inseparable R-Ramsden. Introduce him to me."

Jeff shook hands with her, as his way is, bluntly.

"You are like a siege-gun," she remarked, "safe and reassuring until you go off. I do not wonder that Jeemgreem takes you wherever he goes. And where is the other one--Cr-rosby, did you say his name is?"

"Doctor Crosby has gone to London," I answered.

I thought I detected a change in her eyes, but she recovered instantly and the tone of her voice was agreeably bantering:

"Ah, well--if Jeemgreem thinks so much of him he must be wonderful, but I must have patience until I meet him. Do be seated. Jeemgreem, what a surprising man you are. You do not in the least look like the hero of a thousand thrills! Your reputation thrills me, but you look like a shopkeepaire."

"Can't help my looks," I answered.

"R-Ramsden, on the other hand, looks just as one expects. One would say to him--or rather, one can imagine Jeemgreem saying to him 'Smash that obstacle,' or 'Slay these men'; and one can see it done as soon as spoken. Of all the wonderful things I have seen, I find it hardest to believe that this great R-Ramsden so worships you as to follow you even into Tibet."

"No one asked you to believe it," I retorted.

"Yes," she said, "I must believe it. Because oth-air-wise"--her voice changed slightly--"my confidence might prove to be misplaced. I make mistakes--not often. Those that I make, like the surgeons and the doctors, Jeemgreem, I provide with funerals at someone's else expense. Did Haroun leave the Prefecture?"

"Yes," I said, "and your man killed him."

She was taken off-guard, but recovered instantly.

"Was it not quick? Jeemgreem, does that not suggest to you that it is very unwise ever to trifle with me?"

"It suggests," I said, "that you and Jeff and I don't play the same game. We play ours straight."

"And was that not straight? Straight from the shoulder? Haroun ben Yahudi had disobeyed. He had permitted de la Tournée to steal for his own use two of Dorje's weapons. Two were missing from the barrels in which they were delivered. One caused that warship to blow up. And now they tell me that the other set on fire the Prefecture. Let me assure you that Dorje believes in swift discipline as well as in obedient daring."

I managed to catch Jeff's eyes and I saw that the big man was growing restless. Probably he considered I had blundered, and I, too, suspected I had. The Princess was altogether too cocksure of her own upper-hand; she was daring to give me information that would hang her unless I kept it secret. We were evidently in a trap of some kind.

"Don't let her move," I said to Jeff; and with an air of huge relief he went and stood between her and the window, close enough to pounce on her if she should make a sound or movement.

I walked over to the cabinet that I had noticed when I came in. For a few moments it puzzled me. There was nothing in front that would come open. However, I examined the side nearest the door of the room and found a small sliding panel, which opened easily. Inside, the cabinet was black; and there was an arrangement of mirrors, which included the large mirror on the corridor wall outside. The latter was made of "peephole" glass; that is to say, it was transparent

toward whichever side happened to be brightly lighted; and since the windows in the corridor provided plenty of light, and the cabinet was black-dark, it was possible to look into the mirror facing me and see reflected in it the whole length of the corridor and anyone who might be entering through the front door. Doubtless the Princess had watched us enter, just as, now, I watched the interesting movements of five men.

There were five doors in the corridor. The doors stood ajar; and there was a man in every one of them. First one and then another would stick his head out. They appeared to speak to one another, but only a few abrupt words at a time. And the startling thing was, not that they were there but that they looked like gentlemen. If they had been thugs they might have been just as dangerous, but not nearly so alarming.

Over my shoulder I told Jeff what I saw. Then I turned the key in the door. I set a heavy piece of furniture against it and I piled another piece on that; against that barricade I shoved a heavy, brass-inlaid table. Then I returned to the cabinet to make one more survey of the ambush and noticed that one of the men was wearing, under neat civilian clothes, the boots of a French infantry officer.

I told Jeff. He beckoned me, and I stood guard over the Princess. Jeff went to the nearest window, threw the curtains back, forced the window open, tearing out two long nails with which it had been secured against just that contingency, glanced outside, and grinned at me.

"All right," he remarked. "The road's clear. Now, let's talk to her."

But I had acted "Jeemgreem" just about as long as I could stand the strain, so I passed the buck to Jeff:

"You carry on. I'll watch the corridor."

I returned to the cabinet, where I could glance into the mirror and detect the slightest movement of the ambushade without missing what Jeff and the Princess said and did. The ambushade was patient and apparently not expecting to be summoned into action just yet; I saw one man produce a small blackjack and slap the palm of his hand with it, but he tucked it out of sight again; then he produced a cigarette case, but another man gestured to him not to smoke, so he put that away too.

The Princess spoke first: "In every life that I have lived on earth, that I remember, R-R-Ramsden, you have made your clumsy and ridiculous attempts to interfere with me. And you have always suffered for it. Will you nevaire learn?"

"It is you who learn slowly," Jeff answered, so promptly that I almost suspected him of believing her absurd claim to remember the details of dozens of previous lives.

"That r-remains to be seen," she retorted. "What will you do now?"

I could not have answered the question. We had no weapons. We could not escape by way of the corridor. If we should climb down from the window into the garden we would be exposed to pistol shots and there would still be the high wall to negotiate. It seemed extremely probable that at least one of the Princess's accomplices was a French army officer, and I had proof that at least one of the police obeyed her orders. Even the Prefect might be her accomplice, or at least her dupe. If she was such a trusted spy as Meldrum Strange said she was, attempts to expose her would only meet with blank official incredulity, whereas, she could frame up any charge against us that she pleased. However, Jeff seemed genially undisturbed.

"I don't have to do anything," he answered. "Grim does the fancy

work. My share is merely the manual labour."

"I don't think your Jeemgreem is such a genius," she answered. She seemed perfectly at ease, and as far as I was concerned she had a perfect right to be. As "Jeemgreem" I felt I had shot my bolt and I could have cursed Jeff for passing the buck back to me. He noticed my embarrassment and his next remark was plainly meant to calm me as much to annoy her, although it actually made me even more nervous and left her scornful:

"I know what is going to happen. You haven't known him as long as I have."

"No?" she answered, lowering her eyelids. "I have known him fifty million years. Is that a slight acquaintance? But I am frankly disappointed in him. He stands staring in that mirror like a fifty-franc-a-day detective; whereas, if he were his true self, he would have known what to do before this. And he would have done it. Jeemgreem, I am afraid, is paying for some weakness of former lives by being a man of straw in this one--a man with a reputation greater than he can sustain in a real emergency."

"We'll wait and see," said Jeff.

She nodded. "I am in no hurry."

"Grim never is," he answered.

I supposed he was giving me time to think. However, the only thing that I could think of was the open window. It might be possible to gag and tie her without making any noise, and then to escape by way of the garden before the men in the corridor suspected anything. But if we should do that, it would ruin Grim's chance of making use of her in any way. I kept silent, hoping that Jeff would drop some hint that I

might act on. Then suddenly I noticed a movement in the mirror. Jeff, observing my changed expression--he said afterwards that I looked as if I had won a Derby sweepstake; began talking to the Princess to distract her attention. "Reincarnation is rot," he announced, which surprised me, more than it did her, because I happened to know he believes it. "If you know so much about your former lives, come on now, tell me what Jimgrim is going to do. You ought to be able to guess that from experience."

I was too busy watching the mirror to hear her answer, although I remember the tone of her voice was mocking and coolly confident. There were no sounds from the corridor but I suppose the front doorbell rang. The middle-aged, unpleasant-looking maid appeared and the men vanished, closing the doors, although the man in military boots left his door ajar about half an inch, so that he could listen. The maid opened the door and in walked the Prefect of Police in uniform. Grim followed him; and hard on Grim's heels came six policemen, the last of whom turned and closed the door but not before I caught a glimpse of two more men in uniform outside.

I think the maid screamed, although I could not hear her. I saw her lips move, and the one door that was ajar was promptly shut tight. At a sign from the Prefect, two of the policemen seized the maid, the door opened again, and they almost hurled her through it into the arms of the two who waited outside seeming to expect that. Then again the door closed. One policeman went and stood on guard in front of each door in the corridor; he at the door that had been ajar tapped on it, several times, with increasing vehemence. I heard Jeff say:

"I never knew Grim to do anything anyone thought he would do."

And I heard her mocking answer: "I can tell you what he will do this time. He will choose between death and obedience."

The door that was being rapped on opened gingerly. The policeman entered. The Prefect, with a nod to Grim, followed and the door closed. Grim came forward along the corridor, apparently so perfectly at ease that I felt like shouting to him to be on his guard. However, I contrived not to do anything as ridiculous as that. I went to the door and dragged away the barricade that I had built up.

"What is that fool doing?" asked the Princess. I unlocked the door and swung it open.

"Jimgrim!" I announced.

And Grim walked in. I closed the door behind him.

Chapter Six

"How many wives had Solomon?"

"Destiny!" said the Princess.

"How d'you do?" said Grim.

I walked back to the cabinet to watch the corridor. It had occurred to me that the Princess might have unexpected forces in reserve and Grim would probably be grateful for a timely warning. The Princess had sprung to her feet. She stood confronting Grim with an expression that baffled analysis as, probably, her emotions did, too.

"So you are Jeemgreem! Yes, yes, yes--of course you are! And I have made myself ridiculous by being taken in by that one! I will not forgive myself." She tossed a scornful glance in my direction. "But I will not forgive him, also!"

"Let's waste no time on trivialities," said Grim. "Be seated, won't you.

I am here to talk to Dorje."

Jeff drew up a chair and Grim sat down in it, facing the Princess, not six feet away from her; but Jeff continued to stand between her and the window, watching her gestures. If she had produced a weapon and if she had been as quick as a leopard, she would have had no chance to use it. I think she realized that; from subsequent experience of her I feel sure that she had a very deadly weapon concealed in her dress, but she gave us no excuse at that time for submitting her to search or any similar indignity. Neither did she give the least sign of curiosity as to how Grim had entered without opposition from her accomplices, although it must have puzzled and even bewildered her. She was outwardly all self-assurance, whatever her inner feelings might be.

"Jeemgreem, you are as handsome as you always were, in all your lives," she remarked. "You have not one straight feature, and not one weak one. You have understanding eyes. What experience you must have had with women!"

"About Dorje--" said Grim.

"I am another woman--one more, Jeemgreem. I have had experience with men."

"About Dorje--" Grim repeated.

In the mirror, I saw the man in military boots led out handcuffed into the corridor, but the Prefect remained in the room for a while. The policeman led his prisoner to the front door and handed him over to someone outside, then returned and I saw him knock on another door.

"As long as you and I have known each other, Jeemgreem, so long

we have both known Dorje, although we have not always known who he is. Dorje has been ripening, as it were, through very many lives, developing his gr-eat wisdom and r-rounding it out. When he was Solomon he made many mistakes, of which one was idleness, due to a sort of conceited pacifism. When he was Karl Marx he had to suffer in comparative obscurity, because he was laying his mines at the r-root of the social structure, making possible the r-ruin of civilization that is to take place now, so that Dorje may be King of the World. Without him as Karl Marx, what could Lenin have accomplished? What could Stalin do now? But they-- those two are little nobodies compared to Dorje, who makes use of them and will presently destroy what they have done, that he may rebuild. Dorje has chosen you to be one of his captains, Jeemgreem."

"How did he hear of me?" Grim asked.

"Smoke, won't you?" He produced his cigarette case. "Have one of mine."

"Yes, let us all smoke. Let me order some liqueurs, yes?"

"No," Grim answered,

By that time the Prefect had come into the corridor and was giving orders with gestures imposing utmost silence. In response to repeated knocks the doors had opened and all except one of the men I had seen had been searched and handcuffed. Only one door remained closed; the Prefect ordered it forced and the policemen did that very cleverly and quietly. Two of them went in and dragged a man out by the shoulders, quite dead; he appeared to have poisoned himself. The Prefect sniffed his lips. I imagined him saying "cyanide." The prisoners were marched out through the front door, two policemen dragging the dead one with his heels deep in the three-pile carpet. Then the Prefect and one policeman began examining

the rooms.

"How did he hear of me?" Grim repeated.

"How could he have helped that, Jeemgreem? Did not you, before you went to Tibet, delay and annoy Dorje by arresting many of the men in Palestine--in Syria--in Arabia--in Egypt--in India--who were Dorje's useful tools and sometimes even Dorje's agents?"

Grim answered: "In those days I had never heard of Dorje."

"Nevertheless, you compelled him to hear about you. And Dorje has a psychic memory that is even more remarkable than mine. He thought about you and remembered you in many past lives, weighing this and that peculiarity of yours and studying your merits and defects. It is of paramount importance to him that he shall choose none except excellent men for his actual council. But do you not see the advantage possessed by Dorje over those who are opposed to him? Which of the kings and generals and presidents opposed to him can choose their captains and confederates by studying them in the light of their behavior in former lives? Those who are not themselves incompetents and blind fools--do they not choose rogues and fools who betray and obstruct? Even as Karl Marx--so recently as that--Dorje had not developed psychic memory. But as Dorje he has it. He remembered me. He has remembered you. And when he learned that you had gone to Tibet he suspected you had gone to meet those men who know the psychic laws, so he supposed you would return ten times as proficient as formerly. Therefore he commanded me to find you, which was for me an agreeable task, because I, also, remember you, Jeemgreem."

"Are you Mrs. Dorje?" Grim asked--and she almost shrieked with laughter.

"How many wives had Solomon?" she answered when her breath came-- or perhaps when she had taken time to think behind that screen of possibly assumed amusement.

"Are you one of Dorje's wives?" Grim asked her.

She laughed again. "What were Solomon's wives except hostages and a machinery for intrigue with foreign courts?"

"Are you afraid of Dorje?" Grim asked.

"Jeemgreem, I have never been afraid, in all my life, of anything-- and of a man least."

In the mirror, I saw the Prefect bring out a chair into the corridor and sit down making notes in a pocket memorandum-book. The policeman continued searching room after room.

"Very well," Grim answered. "Since you're not afraid of Dorje--"

"Oh-*la*, *la*! I know what comes next! Jeemgreem, you believe you have me at your discretion--is it not so? You are too obvious, Jeemgreem. I suppose you have had this place surrounded by some very stupid gentlemen in uniform. Therefore, you will now say: 'Betray Dorje, Madame, and assist me to destroy Dorje and to r-ruin all his plans, or go to the guillotine!' It does not need a genius to guess that, Jeemgreem."

"I am not in command of the French police," Grim answered, and she stared at him for a moment. Expecting a threat, she was rather nonplussed by not receiving one. However, she held her own line:

"Look at me, Jeemgreem, and use your imagination."

Jeff Ramsden grinned and so did I. We both supposed she was

going to try to hypnotize Grim, and it would be almost easier to do that to a locomotive. Any human being can be hypnotized, of course, given the right circumstances and provided he is inexperienced and not on guard. Grim looked at her. And he always uses his imagination; no need to tell him to do that.

"Do you see this scar on my lip?" she asked him. "I was born with it. It is a memory mark. It is something like the stigmata that certain people have, except that this does not bleed. It is the mark that shows where I was shot when Bismarck ruled Prussia and I was spying for that poor incompetent Napoleon. But see this--"

She leaned forward, turning her shoulders to show him the back of her neck.

"Do you not see that mark? Is it not distinct and unmistakable? That is the mark of the headsman's sword. When I was Ann Boleyn they had to bring him in great haste all the way from Calais, because I had the right to be beheaded with a sword, not with an axe, and there was not in England one swordsman who could do it, though my neck was so little. I died laughing, Jeemgreem, then as always. You were Sir Francis Weston, and you loved me--then as always. That time, you died under the axe--not smiling, I believe, since you were always a serious person. And besides, they tortured you."

"What is your point?" Grim asked her.

"That the guillotine could not terrify me."

Grim lighted a fresh cigarette and tossed the butt of the smoked one through the window.

"I don't see that it matters whether you are scared or not," he answered. "My point is, that I can link you up with the explosion on

that cruiser--"

"Can you, Jeemgreem? Can you even link me up with Dorje? Could you put me in prison? If you should succeed in doing that for one day, could you keep me there? I will tell you at least three reasons why you could not."

"Shoot," said Grim, at his favourite game, getting someone else to do the talking and, as usual, not to be hurried.

"I know too much about too many people, Jeemgreem, and if I should be thrown into prison there would almost be a stampede by important personages to get me out again. Furthermore, although you may have drawn a leetle net around me, I have agents who will draw a better one around you and your friends. You also know too much about too many people. If you should suddenly die would Downing Street or the Quai D'Orsay command that crepe be hung on lamp-posts?"

"Would they mourn you?" Grim suggested, and she laughed back gaily at him.

"They would be made to mourn. Because Dorje, who is ruthless toward traitors, avenges his friends. If any government should kill me--well, you know what happened to that warship; and you saw what happened to the records at the Prefecture. We have a weapon, Jeemgreem, that no government can guard against!"

Grim sat silent, tempting her, I think, to continue boasting. So far she had said nothing that a lunatic could not have said, and her claim to remember incidents of past lives was no pronounced symptom of sanity. In the mirror, I saw that somebody had rung the doorbell; the Prefect himself answered the door. A man in uniform gave him an envelope. He closed the door, frowned at the envelope, shook it as if

it might contain something dangerous, hesitated, and then suddenly opened it. He read what it contained and, I thought, did not look disagreeably disturbed, although he raised his eyebrows and made an extremely eloquent, though enigmatic, gesture with his shoulders. He looked almost amused as he copied the message into his memorandum book. Then, returning it into the envelope, he came forward and flourished it toward the mirror. He evidently knew all about that cabinet.

I went to the door and opened it. He handed me the message without showing himself in the doorway. I closed the door and handed it to Grim, to whom it was addressed. Grim read it, as he always reads everything, with one swift photographic glance, and handed it to Jeff, who studied it for sixty seconds and then passed it back to me. It was addressed to Grim in care of the police and marked "Urgent. Please find him." Its contents were brief. The signature was O and I don't know who "O" was--some confidant of Grim's. It was dispatched from Geneva. "My office and all its contents have been destroyed by a fire of unknown origin. The secret, confidential and other records are a total loss. This is irreparable. Perhaps you will now believe that Dorje is what I told you."

I returned to my observation post. Through the open window we could hear newsboys at the top of their lungs announcing special editions about the warship disaster. It seemed to me highly improbable that the Prefect would remain indefinitely in the corridor while excitement in the streets gained headway, and since he knew about that mirror he might wish to signal to us through it--perhaps to beckon me outside for instructions. However, he was betraying no impatience, beyond that he glanced once or twice at his watch; he sat examining his notebook, rocking his chair on two legs, tapping his teeth with a pencil.

Princess." Grim seemed to have made his mind up what to do, and I think she realized it because her attitude became vaguely less relaxed and insolent. "If I wished to get you out of the way, I would not take the trouble to bring you to trial. I don't understand French criminal procedure, and I do understand that you have what is known in the United States as 'pull.' But a pull on a trigger-- you understand me?"

"You would shoot me? You have not the disposition. You are too moral. I am not in the least disturbed about your shooting me."

I thought, and I could tell by his face that Jeff did too, that Grim had gone off on the wrong foot. Certainly the Princess thought so. She looked triumphant again and rather scornful. Grim looked at his wits' end and as if he were trying to hide the fact.

"I don't have to pull triggers," said Grim. "There are plenty of others who would do that quite cheerfully. I have decided, however, to save your life--on conditions."

"You? Save my life? You are cr-razy! I do not need to move in order to kill all three of you this instant!"

"So I thought," said Grim. "Let's settle that first. Jeff, do you mind watching her while I--"

He turned his back to her and walked toward the south wall of the room, the wall that she sat facing. He had been able to watch her eyes from where he was sitting; she had glanced in that direction once or twice too often and too obviously carelessly to escape Grim's omnivorous eye for detail. I watched her face while Grim walked straight toward the wall. She and I appreciated at the same moment that Grim, by talking like a mere dime-novel blow-hard, had tempted her to crow--and sneer--and give away a secret that she would have given perhaps all she had to keep from him.

"Stop!" she said. "I surrender. What do you wish me to do?"

However, Grim went forward. There was a mirror facing him--one of those half-globular abominations in a gilt frame that distort whatever is reflected in them. He had raised his hand to feel the panel on the wall beside it, when the wall moved--outward, toward him. There was a secret door there. To protect himself he stepped behind it as it swung open. Out came three men, one an officer in uniform. They were armed, or at any rate one of them was; I could see the bulge of a revolver on his hip. Grim glanced at me.

"Vache!" I think the officer in uniform said that, but it may have been one of the others. I was on my way to the door. I opened it and beckoned the Prefect, who summoned the man who was searching bedrooms. The two came and stood in the doorway, the Prefect smiling to himself and the other man making a rather nervous exhibition of his automatic.

"Colonel Zalinsky," said the Prefect. "Monsieur Albertini. Monsieur Hugo. You are under arrest. Colonel Zalinsky, you will receive an escort to the barracks. Monsieur Albertini, Monsieur Hugo, you will accompany me." He approached the two men in civilian clothes and asked them for their weapons, speaking to them very civilly. They hesitated, glancing at the Colonel, who merely scowled and scratched at his moustache, so they handed them over-- two pistols, and the Prefect laid them on a settee. Jeff unloaded them. The Prefect went to the secret door and opened it wide; there was a nicely ventilated closet in there, provided with a window in the outer wall and with a cushioned bench that could have seated half a dozen people. He examined the place and then ordered his man to make use of the 'phone in the corridor:

"Request a prisoner's escort for Colonel Zalinsky, who is under

arrest."

Then Grim, with a gleam in his eyes that always reminds me of John Paul Jones' retort "I haven't started yet!" approached the Princess.

"Did I understand you correctly to say you surrender?" he asked.

"I did not say that. If you had stopped, yes. But you did not."

"Very well then, go with these men. Monsieur le Prefect, I regret that I can be of no more service to you. It appears I was mistaken when I said that the Princess Baltis, who is so notoriously of the secret service, probably was employing her talents to uncover a grave conspiracy. Knowing how a secret service sometimes operates without taking the local police into confidence, I presumed on your very flattering familiarity with my record, and you were kind enough to permit me to ascertain whether or not the Princess is on the same dangerous and important mission as myself. I have even presumed to send a telegram to Paris to a certain Major Bonfils, with whom I have worked in Syria. I have put him to the inconvenience of travelling here by aeroplane, and I shall have to apologize to him also."

He was talking, rather obviously, to give the Princess time to think; and she was thinking furiously, behind an almost Chinese mask of inscrutability. Colonel Zalinsky glared at her, his lips moving but no word coming forth; the sort of threats that he intended would be, in any event, more convincing if suggested. Spoken words so often steal the thunder of a thought. The other two men scowled and tried to whisper to each other, but the Prefect courteously stepped between them.

"Of what am I accused?" Zalinsky demanded suddenly, and Albertini echoed him: "We also, we demand to know that!"

"Of conspiracy against the Republic," said the Prefect, "and of acts of commission and of omission that were contributory to the explosion on the cruiser L'Orient."

"Ludicrous!" Zalinsky looked maliciously relieved. "You have not one scrap of evidence. Who accuses me?"

But his relief was short-lived. Grim's acid had eaten through the immense assurance of the Princess Baltis. Even in defeat, however, she was debonair and changed sides with the gesture of a reigning beauty bestowing prizes at a carnival.

"Moi, J'accuse!" Then, in rapid French that it was very difficult for me to follow: "It is true, and this Jeemgreem is altogether too astute! I have brought these traitors to the door of justice-- and, I suppose, those others also, who were out there--you have arrested them, yes? I have wormed my way into their confidence, and I will tell all I know. Nevertheless, I assure you that this Jeemgreem by impetuously interfering has upset many calculations and has brought exposure too soon. You have caught moths--flies. Eagles you have let go. Wolves--lions--tigers remain at liberty! I am forbidden to name the source of my instructions, but you force me to speak! If you had arrested me--mon Dieu!--that would have given warning to so many people, that--"

There was a knock at the door. The Prefect's man opened it.

"Major Bonfils."

The Princess Baltis stood stock-still. I watched her closely and neither her face nor her eyes showed the least trace of emotion. She even breathed steadily. But it is hardly an exaggeration to say that there vibrated from her something like the magnetism of a leopard that sees sudden danger.

Chapter Seven

"No longer Number Seventeen?"

I can read and write French fluently; and I can speak it so that Frenchmen understand me when they genuinely try, which is not often. But to follow closely a four-cornered, quickfire exchange of verbal thrust and counter-thrust interspersed with professional argot and the latest idioms and catch-words, is beyond my powers. So I can only give a resume of what happened after Bonfils came in, and the greater part of it is summarized from scraps of Grim's subsequent conversation. Jeff talks better French than I do, but even Jeff was a bit bewildered by the speed, and it took both of us weeks to extract all the details, as a rule one detail at a time, from Grim, who can be as laconic as a stone jug and who hardly ever fully realizes that others are not so quick as himself to pick the fine points from a maze of irrelevant suggestions, hints and purposely confused statements of probable fact.

Looking back, it is easy enough to summarize. The main point was that the Princess Baltis, having thoroughly established herself in the confidence of the French secret service, had done what almost all spies do eventually, and that Bonfils knew she had been playing false. But it was also true that she knew a lot too much about too many important people; and in peacetime it is no simple matter to dispose of anyone entrenched in that position, since a secret service never courts publicity, and, ever since the Dreyfus scandal, the French have been particularly touchy on that point.

But there was another complication. Bonfils and Grim had been intimate friends and they had helped each other in the Near East, although employed by mutually suspicious governments. They understood each other's methods almost perfectly, and Bonfils knew

that Grim has very little personal use for nationalism. Bonfils, as a Frenchman, would have liked to see France recognized as the paramount power in the world and he habitually employed his talents toward that end. Grim--a citizen of the United States-- ex-major in the British Army--decorated by five governments and trusted, as a rule, by all of them--has never had the slightest interest in what he calls "parish pump politics" and rather agrees with Doctor Johnson of dictionary fame, that patriotism is the last resource of the scoundrel. Grim is the deadly enemy of so-called patriots who ruin other countries that their own may flourish, and then rob their own for the sake of self-importance. He holds that vice and virtue know no boundaries, but that the world is at the mercy of the ignorant, who think they do. He also holds, that in all countries, at all times, there are conscienceless individuals, possessed of a certain psychic sense, who understand how to manipulate crowd-opinion and who never hesitate to do so, in order to make brave and decent men act damnably in the name of patriotic common-sense.

So Grim is not easy to deal with, from the point of view of a secret service bent on snatching credit for itself and for its own nationals. But on the other hand, Grim was already involved; he understood the situation of the Princess Baltis; he already knew the nature of the problem to be tackled; and his first words, in French, as Bonfils entered the room, amounted, in the circumstances, to a statement of his intention not to expose the Princess but to use her as an ally, subject of course to Bonfils' approval.

"Congratulate the Princess. She has netted a few of the small fry very neatly. She offered now to help us catch the big ones. Can you spare her?"

Bonfils smiled engagingly. He was a rather small man with a big man's shoulders and a poet's way of using them, so that one word

conveyed an essay on things unsaid.

"Cordially!"

Bonfils' smile had malice--meant for the Princess, and she knew it; however, he had the subtle courtesy to pretend it was meant for Zalinsky. He turned it on all three prisoners, and the two civilians looked embarrassed, but Zalinsky showed his teeth under the long moustache that almost hid the ferocity of a telltale upper-lip. I did not catch Zalinsky's words; he spoke sotto voce and extremely rapidly; but it was a threat, as obviously as a rattler's warning is. I learned from Grim, that evening, that what it amounted to was a promise to create a much worse scandal than the affaire Dreyfus. Bonfils made no audible answer. Then the military escort came; Zalinsky was informed that a car awaited him; he swaggered off; and hardly sixty seconds after that the two civilians were not so courteously hustled downstairs to a motor-van provided by the Prefect.

Then the fun began--genuine fun, in which Bonfils vied with Grim, and the Prefect competed with both of them, in efforts to force the Princess Baltis so to compromise herself that she would never be able again to escape from the toils they intended to weave around her. And she broke their toils as swiftly as they wove. She was like Penelope, who baffled all the suitors in Odysseus' absence. It was surprising that she did not claim to have been Penelope in a previous life, but that was about the only argument she did not use; and probably the only reason why she did not use it was that it would have suggested Dorje as Odysseus and herself as being faithful to him.

Taxed with having admitted to Grim, and to Jeff and myself, her sympathy for Dorje and her complicity in Dorje's plans, she retorted reasonably that she had supposed we were Dorje's agents and that she had therefore assumed that attitude in order to tempt us to trust her and reveal Dorje's secrets. How should she know we were

authorized agents of the French Government? And since we were nothing of the kind it was obviously impossible to find fault with her for not knowing it. Besides, were we not intimates of Meldrum Strange? And had not she herself been sent by Bonfils to extract from Strange's files a document considered scandalously anti-French? If Strange was an abominable person, why were we, his self-confessed friends, not equally fit subjects for her genius, forever ready as it was to labour diligently for the sake of the Republic?

Taxed with interference without orders into an intrigue that she had neglected even to mention to her superiors, she retorted with the most marvellously impudent alibi that even a secret service ever listened to. She hinted--so adroitly that she avoided compromising herself, and yet so convincingly that the thrust went straight home--that the secret service itself had been corrupted by Dorje's agents, so that she had not felt justified in making a report until she knew to whom it could be made without risk of playing into Dorje's hands.

She herself turned cross-examiner. Did Bonfils not know--or had he not at least suspected for two or three years--that someone by the name of Dorje was attempting to destroy civilization in order to get the entire world into his own control? Did he or did he not know it? If he did not, what kind of an espionage officer did he consider himself? If he had known it all along, by what right had he virtually shelved herself, who had never failed him? Why had he not at once sent for her and assigned her to a task for which she was much better fitted than anyone else in the service? And since he had not sent for her, was she not justified in wondering whether he, too, had been won over by Dorje's agents?

Bonfils told her why she had been dropped from the list of active agents during the past year or so. "You are too notorious. Too many people recognize you. To employ you is to advertise that we are

conducting an investigation."

She exploded--ridiculed him--mocked him: "Nevertheless, you have the impudence to tell me that I worked without your knowledge? If I am so obvious to other people, how is it that you say you did not know I had employed myself in this affaire Dorje? Furthermore, was it not you yourself who embraced me and commended me because, in the affaire Habibullah, I acted without waiting for orders? Mon major, you are inconsistent."

She put up an equally vivid defence against the Prefect's charge that she had guilty knowledge of the presence in Marseilles of those strange instruments that did such damage. Had she warned him, he could have captured them before they were distributed and hidden. She accused the Prefect of having interfered and ruined her last chance of discovering what had become of that shipment of "scrap-brass." She almost blamed him for the warship disaster; she entirely blamed him for the fire at the Prefecture that had destroyed so many valuable records.

"You, too! Do you dare to say you did not know me? After what has been said by Major Bonfils, have you the effrontery to declare that you did not suspect me of being engaged on an affaire outside your province, in which it would be an impertinence for you to interfere unless invited? Why did you not consult me? Why did you not assure yourself before you came crashing into my delicate plans, with your long nose and your big feet and your drove of idiots whom it pleases your conceit to call detectives?"

Grim was the only one she spared. She misunderstood Grim. First and last she feared his malice, all the more suspecting it because no trace of it appeared. As a matter of fact, his lack of malice was his greatest strength and weakness; keeping him clear-visioned and able to weigh one set of circumstances with another, misleading

many a rash opponent into one rash step too many. But those to whom he had a right to look for support in a tight place left him in the lurch for fear he might desert them. Too many people think that malice is an essential ingredient of courage. Certainly the Princess Baltis thought so, and she was on perpetual watch for it in Grim, undoubtedly believing he possessed a brand of it that would bowl her over should he loose it.

Me she roasted mercilessly, calling me a keyhole peeper. She insisted that my permanently bloodshot eye was ruined by the draughts from keyholes and that my knowledge of French was picked up in unmentionable places. She demanded to know why she should not have suspected me; and, since flattery is the best weapon to use against all defectives, why she should not have flattered me by pretending to mistake me for Jeemgreem? She roasted Jeff, too. She called him a buffalo--Jeemgreem's elephant--a monster, tearing out the nails from window-frames--a "Type" who should be showing off his strength for centimes in the streets of Paris. Every word of that abuse was hurled at us with intent to suggest by inference that Grim was a bird of a totally different feather.

Then she turned again on Bonfils, perfectly aware by that time that if he could find a way to avoid exposing her he intended to do it. Her tongue and her very mercurial mind had probed the situation. Bonfils was not afraid of her, but others were, of whom some were Bonfils' seniors in the service. Bonfils had hardly hinted at a tenth of one per cent of what he knew; but then, neither had she. And what both of them knew, in addition to numberless dangerous secrets, was that Dorje's scope was world-wide; he was not in France or even on French territory; no pursuit of him, no check on him was possible without co-operation among many nations, difficult to attain in principle and much more difficult to put in practice. Every possible weapon would have to be used against him. To throw her into the

discard might prove fatal to success, as well as disastrous to dozens of people whose secrets she knew. She led her ace, defiantly:

"Enfin--s'il vous plait, me mettez aux arrêts!"

"You insist?" asked Bonfils--coolly enough; he was not easily bluffed into showing his hand.

"Why not? You accuse me. You insult me. You invade my domicile. You have submitted me to forcible detention in my own chair while you amuse yourselves at peep-holes. Then let l'affaire Dorje wait while you prefer proper charges against me--in secret. My improper friends will have the impropriety to disregard the secrecy; but what does it matter who else is implicated, or on whose neck falls the axe, provided Number Seventeen is punished for the crime of having acted without orders from those who had condemned her to inactivity and oblivion, not--no, no, not from jealousy--but because she had served France too often and too well!"

It was a masterpiece. It would have been a simple matter for the authorities to accuse her of treason and try her in secret. But if, as she suggested, she had friends who would avenge her by revealing scandals, of which every government on earth has plenty that it would be suicidal to make public, then Bonfils was in a predicament. And she was right, too, about the paramount importance of a campaign against Dorje. If Dorje was what he appeared to be, then her own importance could be measured solely by the value of the information she could produce against him, no matter what her own previous complicity might have been. The question was, could she--would she betray Dorje? Was she any longer to be trusted?

With an eloquent motion of eyes and shoulders Bonfils beckoned the Prefect and Grim outside into the corridor for a consultation leaving Jeff and me to watch the Princess. I was feeling a bit irritated by her

remarks about me, so I kept my distance. On the contrary, Jeff seemed to have enjoyed her criticism; he urged her to be seated and himself sat for the first time, facing her near the open window. Jeff is the last man in the world whom one would suspect of delicate intuition, but as a matter of fact he helps Grim far more by his diplomatic skill than by his physical strength and courage, which are sometimes a source of embarrassment. Unerringly he had spotted the lady's weakness, although I don't know how. Perhaps his own prodigious loyalty to Grim enabled him to do it, since loyalty--like love between a man and a woman--is a spiritual force that stirs and strengthens understanding.

"Would you like a tip from me?" he asked her.

I was standing where I could see her very clearly in the bright light from the window. For the first time, I thought she showed genuine terror, although she did her utmost to conceal it. Jeff exudes good nature. It had touched her, and like an animal at bay she saw an opening but suspected it because it looked too opportune. Jeff looked almost too guileless.

"Advice costs the giver nothing, but when was it not expensive to take?" she retorted.

"You're right. I wouldn't take advice from you," said Jeff, "if it cost me a fortune not to. But I thought you might be more astute than I am."

"That is quite true. I am more astute than you are."

But Jeff appeared to have lost all interest. "Then you don't need my advice," he answered.

"Tchutt! You talk like a woman. What is it? If I listen to you, need I do what you say?"

"I have changed my mind," Jeff answered. "Why should I advise you?"

"Because I ask it! Are you so ungallant that you can see me, in what must look to you like an extremity, and yet withhold from me whatever you think might help me?"

"It was a mere idea," said Jeff.

"Ideas are the source of actions. Tell me then, what is it?"

"Put your faith in Grim, that's all. Fool anybody else, but don't play tricks with him; there's neither fun nor money in it."

"Phooh! You think your Jeemgreem is a paragon perhaps--a reincarnation of all the strength of all his former lives, and all the weaknesses forgotten? A dangerous man to deceive?"

"I don't have to think about that," said Jeff, "I know it."

That was a typical Jeff Ramsden statement. When he praises Grim he has no more use for modesty than a buffalo has for a bicycle. However, underneath exaggeration Jeff moves subtly toward his objectives; he was aiming at her strangely erroneous fixed idea that Jimgrim packs a deadly species of malice among his equipment. And even I, who am not a connoisseur of such matters, could guess that she, to put it mildly, had not yet dismissed the desire, and perhaps the intention to make Grim love her. She was not by many a dozen the first ambitious woman to conceive that plan or something like it.

"Bah! He hates me," she said suddenly.

"I never knew him to hate anyone," Jeff answered. "Grim likes

people. That's why he understands 'em. That's why the worst crooks trust him."

"Yes, and then he betrays them to the police."

Jeff laughed. "I have seen Grim eat with murderers and sleep with rebels. He doesn't consider it his business to bring them to justice, and I'll bet you Grim has saved more criminals from gun and gallows than any other ten men living. But he can protect himself--none better."

"Then you advise me I should trust him?"

Jeff nodded. Grim came in then, leaving the door slightly ajar, and we could hear Bonfils and the Prefect talking rather noisily in the corridor. I think the Princess was intended to understand that neither Bonfils nor the Prefect had an ear to a keyhole. Grim walked straight up to her.

"You'll have to go to Paris," he said, offering her a cigarette and lighting hers and his with one match. "A lot depends on you, of course, but probably they'll overlook things if you undertake to help us run down Dorje. You will leave by 'plane, this afternoon, with Bonfils."

For as long as sixty seconds the two looked into each other's eyes and neither spoke. Then Grim said:

"Dorje has lost the fight on this front. Nobody knows yet where the rest of those brass gadgets are, but they'll be traced. You can probably help. I advise you to give them a list of everyone you know who is in sympathy with Dorje or in any way connected with him."

"But I have no list," she answered.

"All right, tell the names you can remember. After that, your usefulness in France is at an end; and even if it weren't you would be shot or stabbed as an informer. So you join my crew and work with me. Is that agreeable?"

"You mean--you send me against Dorje?"

"No. I will lead you against him."

"Jeemgreem, if I swear to you--"

He interrupted, flicking the ash from his cigarette. "Oaths," he remarked, "are ashes--of emotion. Nobody was ever bound by one. A fellow does things, or he doesn't; it depends on the fellow himself. Dorje probably will do his best to scupper you for having joined us, but you must take your chance of that. We shall all be taking chances."

"Jeemgreem--do you realize--what terr-r-iffic chances?"

"Probably not. Thank heaven, few of us do realize the long odds that we're up against or most of us would quit before the game starts. But let me make a few points just a mite more clear to you."

I was afraid he was going to threaten her. She was just of the type that instantly responds to threats by seeming acquiescence and by secretly swearing to teach the threatener a lesson. She, too, thought he was about to threaten and her face assumed a sweetness that disguised a very different emotion. But Grim took us all by surprise.

"I know that Dorje has the jump on us, and that it is going to be very difficult to checkmate him. I regard you as the most important member of my crew. I'm going to have to look to you for information and advice. I can't waste time mistrusting you. You will find when you

reach Paris that a body not unlike yours has been found in the river, removed to the morgue and identified as that of the Princess Baltis. There will be a verdict of suicide-- a verdict comprehensible to anyone who knows anything about your recent doings. It may possibly reach Dorje's ears. Let's hope so. It releases you from momentary danger, and it saves the face of the authorities who might have a hard time otherwise in explaining to one another why you are not under close arrest. You are dead. You are no longer the Princess Baltis."

"Am I not--no longer Number Seventeen?"

"No number. Find a new name. Get a passport--Bonfils will attend to that. Meet me in Cairo at Brown's Hotel."

"You leave at once?"

"No. But you do. They won't want you in Paris a minute longer than they have to keep you there. Go straight to Cairo, hold your tongue, and wait for me."

He took no notice of her excitement; she was as breathless as a caught fish. He turned to Jeff and, taking Jeff's arm, walked to where I was standing.

"You two fellows mind going to Cairo? I'll take a 'plane to London. Whoever gets to Cairo first waits for the rest. Are we all agreed? Then so long." But he turned again toward the Princess Baltis. "Madame Anonyme--au revoir. J' espere que vous etes bien re-encarnee encore une fois."

"Jeemgreem," she retorted, "vous etes incroyable. Mais je commence de le croire, quand-meme que tout le monde le dit!"

Chapter Eight

"Am sadist. Masochism to the devil!"

"Am most absqueamous babu."

It was a full, rich baritone, outside the door of Jeff's bedroom in Brown's Hotel. I did not recognize the voice, but evidently Jeff did, for I heard his answer:

"You fat rogue, come on in. I'm glad to see you."

I followed, having fretted for more than a week in Cairo with nothing to do except wonder what was keeping Grim in London. Jeff had remained almost incommunicado all that time, because people know him and they know that where he is Grim will presently appear. He preferred not to answer questions. People don't know me, so I had wandered about a bit; but I don't care much for Cairo or tourists, and I had not gone far for fear of missing Grim's arrival, so I was rather naturally bored.

"Am squeamish, so abstain from politics--verb very sap. This babu greets you, sahib. You should see my passport. Red ink-- green ink--certifying me as almost abstract personage, so guileless and incompetent--so useless as to be above suspicion. Let me show you."

"Datum your passport. You may have forged it for all I know, and who cares? Why are you here?"

"Jimgrim cabled me from London, one word--'Cairo.' Here I am, delivered right side up, in one piece. What next?" He was wearing a black alpaca jacket and beneath that the rather sketchy orthodox Bengali costume that revealed enormous hairy legs. He was

immensely fat. His feet were encased in new red Damascus slippers, which he kicked off as he passed the threshold. He had a huge head and large alert brown eyes that viewed me with suspicion. Jeff introduced him:

"Babu Chullunder Ghose--an old friend."

I had heard of him. Who has not, who has heard of Jeff and Grim? But it seemed incredible that this mountain of obesity could be the brave man who had scaled the passes into Tibet and had brought Jeff's journal back with him. He looked incapable of walking five miles. He was sweating and his feet looked fat and useless. But he was a good-looking man, with a buttery ivory skin and rather heavy jaws blackshaded with the roots of whiskers.

"No use asking how you are," said Jeff. "You're broke, of course, but otherwise--"

"Am worse than broke. Am indigent."

"But otherwise top-chop. What's going on in India?"

"Simonization process, sahib. Spraying worn-out car of Juggernaut with juice of observations made by Royal Commission. Have you ever seen an old Ford held together by the new paint? Let us hope much. Let us not be too prophetic. Did you mention whisky?"

Jeff ordered drinks. Chullunder Ghose sat cross-legged on Jeff's writing-table like a big fat Buddha. Rolling his handkerchief into a ball he tossed and caught it in his bare toes. I decided that his feet were neither fat nor useless.

"How did you get here?" Jeff asked.

"Flew. Never again! This belly of mine contains no gyroscope. Lost one stone, five pounds, seven ounces. During a number of hours lost also all belief in Providence, under whatever name. Nevertheless, recovered somewhat after landing. But I still need whisky."

"How did you find me?"

"Came here first, naturally; Rammy sahib's habits are as spots on leopard--changeless. Clerk at desk, without looking in register, said no Jeff Ramsden staying here. Dam-liar. Had you not been here, he would have looked in register. I told him greatest art is lying, therefore he should marry and study art. He told a Sudanese to show me to the front door, but I had already seen that. So, since they would not let me use the elevator, and since I had seen a letter addressed to you in a pigeon-hole numbered 118, I walked upstairs. In all the universe, I wonder, is there any sweeter music than the melody of cracked ice in a tall glass? Strange, that whisky should be vilified by almost all religions except this babu's. A Hedonist with epicurean tendencies. After you, sahib. Yes, please--just above the pretty--quite a bit above it--and now fill her up-ah! Sahibs, may the world not lack the crazy men we need to keep us crazy also!"

That was talk. He only sipped his whisky, eyeing me over the top of the glass. He seemed to be waiting for Jeff to hint I might be trusted, before asking questions that perhaps I had no right to hear.

"Jeff, sahib, did you ever almost die of curiosity?" he asked at last.

"Don't doubt I died of it lots of times," Jeff answered.

"That's what kills us all and gets us born again. Crosby is curious too. He'll listen in."

The babu bowed in my direction with the gesture of a Buddha

bestowing benison. "Am flattered. May your honour not regret same. Who is the Princesse Chalawan de Sitlab en Siam?"

"I never heard of her," said Jeff. "Why?"

"It is the why-ness of things that brought this otiose babu through space, like Arjuna's arrow--air--sick--very. Why Cairo? Why should Jimgrim wish to see me? Why should a polylinguistic princess by the name of Chalawan de Sitlab, occupying semi-regal suite in this hotel, suborn its servants to inform her instantly when visitors approach your honour?"

"How the devil do you know that?" Jeff asked.

"Am blameless. Devil that resides in Jimgrim urging, this babu was victim of impulse. Never yet has Jimgrim sent for me to kiss me. Inference is obvious that Jimgrim is again on war-path, meaning that this babu will work and not get paid for it--except, of course, as stipulated--stipulation not yet argued. Have wife who thinks money is only proof of masculine fidelity. Am sole support of seven married sons, whose offspring suggest astronomical figures, and whose contempt for this progenitor increases in proportion to his debts. Consequently, must please Jimgrim. So, when was approached in corridor by negroid lackey asking if I visit one-eighteen, lied instantly--quicker than trigger of automatic. Walked full length of corridor looking at numbers on doors, turned at the end of corridor and saw said individual considering me from mat in front of door of Suite A squatting on it. Naturally, went at once to Suite A which is at opposite end of corridor. Screen in front of door. Door open to admit draught--maybe--possibly--perhaps; but it is easier to hear when door is not shut. Do I bore you, sahib?"

"Bore ahead. We're listening."

"Must please Jimgrim, same being easy if you give him all he wants; but that is less easy. Jimgrim asks three questions and expects to be told everything from A to Z and from Einstein to twice two, all in form of telegram of ten words. Demanded to be told, accordingly, who lives in Suite A! Sudanese outpost on mat, probably unable to pronounce suborner's name, instructed me to go to hell in Arabic. Stepped around screen, announcing self in tone sufficiently immodest to avoid arrest for burglary. Was confronted by Syrian maid, who told me name of her employer. Said employer, radiantly visible in mirror through crack of door of inner room, spoke rapidly to maid in Arabic, to this babu in Hindustanee, to someone else invisible in French. Unless mirror lied (as I did) she is lovelier to look at than a daffodil in lotus-coloured lingerie. She asked me, was I from Jimgrim? Naturally, I answered No, since truth is deadly and a half-truth even more so. So she asked me, did I come from Dorje? To which I naturally answered Yes, not knowing Dorje and being curious concerning everything to which I am ignorant. Then she summoned the maid and slammed the door. Plenty of time for observation. Noticed locked trunk. Name Baltis rather heavily obscured by red paint. Baltis--Sitlab backwards! Syrian maid--mystery--mystery--her Highness will be pleased to speak with me--alone--this afternoon--at four-fifteen. Thus mystified, this babu departed thence and hied him hither. Rammy sahib, in the name of all the devils in the universe, is our Jimgrim after Dorje?"

Jeff nodded.

"Oh my amiable aunt! Have you seen the papers? An explosion on a warship--a fire in Marseilles--a fire in Parisa--fire in Geneva-- an explosion of a magazine in Toulon--a fire in Lisel--a fire in Brest--a fire in Toulouse--and then silence!"

"Censorship," said Jeff.

"And Jimgrim--leads us against Dorje? Oh, my infinite emotions! Yes, please. We shall not drink many before Dorje gets us."

"You said you don't know him."

"Rammy sahib, who does? More--twice that much--fill her up with soda--thank you. Who knows who or where he is? All Asia brags that he is just beyond the skyline--coming--always coming. The King of the World is coming--they have said that for a hundred years--for a thousand years. Dorje is the genius who saw his chance to capitalize on all that advertising! It is what I myself have often thought of doing--would have done same, only I lack romantic appearance. There is something about me that makes men doubt my heroism. Doubters are not good diehards. Furthermore, I am afraid of consequences. Dorje is afraid of nothing."

"How do you know all this?" Jeff asked him.

"Oh, for God's sake! Have I not been wooed by a woman who said she was one of Dorje's thousand concubines? Did she not tempt me to be one of Dorje's million mouths? This babu has mouth which eats, I told her. May I eat for Dorje? But she requested me to feed her, saying Dorje expects help from every man. She ate my dinner--and then told me that I may speak for Dorje or be silent; but that if I speak against him silence will descend upon me with a permanence suggested by a death certificate."

"Why should they pick on you?" Jeff asked him.

"Why not? Is this babu not notorious for helping everyone except himself? Am form and substance of Gray's Elegy--am mute inglorious Milton--personage called goat in U.S.A.--embodiment of hope eternal, which is but a pseudonym for Sisyphus or back-seat on a bicycle built for two. Such pitiable optimists as this babu build all the

empires--and then die in agonies of unrewarded zeal. That is why Dorje picked on me."

"Do you mean that Dorje personally picked you?"

"Why not? Winning consists in being won for. Verb sap. So if Dorje cannot pick winners, kites and crows will presently be picking Dorje. Self am best bet in the universe, provided quid pro quo is adequate. But there were too few quids and too much quo."

"Have you a room?" I asked him.

"Not yet, sahib."

So I went down to the desk and had a chat with Dougherty, who used to run a Raines Law joint in New York and is familiar with several angles of the hotel business. He made no bones at all about letting Chullunder Ghose have a room that has been used scores of times for some of the more refined and guileless diplomatic interludes. "It is the end room on that corridor and seems utterly above suspicion. On the one hand is a public lavatory, and on the other a sort of butler's pantry and some linen-closets. Anyone might talk in there until doomsday without being overheard, if it were not for a narrow passageway between the closets and the outside wall that was once used to connect that room with the next one along the corridor. The passage has been boarded up at one end. The holes in the boards are usually plugged up, but not always. I myself had used those rooms in 1916 to discover a medical secret that was thought important to the Allies."

"I suppose you were seen to enter this room?" I suggested, when I had told Chullunder Ghose of the arrangement.

"Yes, sahib, not improbably--although I told that Sudanese that he

was wanted inside, and I locked him in, not wishing him to mind my business. I was in here before they could summon anyone by bell to let him out. But he who brought drinks--"

"Suliman," said Jeff, "has worked for me at intervals for fifteen years. I don't think he would talk about what goes on in here-- not unless someone bribed extremely high and scared him at the same time."

Babu Chullunder Ghose began to grow excited. Again he pulled out his handkerchief and caught it between his toes repeatedly.

"Tell me about this princess, sahibs! Tell me all you know about her. Then find someone who will summon her to visit me in that room."

So we told him all we knew, and that took less time than one might suppose. His vivid imagination leaped from one fact to another with such rapidity that we could hardly keep up with him. He cracked his toes. He cracked his big fat fingers. He blew his nose--and wiped his face--and threw his handkerchief--and caught it with his foot--then suddenly resumed his Buddha-like composure along with his normal air of what he calls Uriah-Heepishness.

"Am failed B.A. Calcutta, lynx-eyed examiners having prevented this babu from using most ingeniously folded notes. Am failed promoter of so many enterprises that I suspect the akasic record has forgotten half of them. Am so well used to failure in all personal affairs that I could write a book about it. But its publishers also would fail. Am a merciful man; why bankrupt publishers? Paradoxically flat broke, am physically fat, not flat. Nobody loves fat men. Nevertheless, what woman but confides in them? They love but never trust the lucky lean ones. They trust but never love us solidly embowelled drums of wisdom. Failure, am I? Sahibs, set me in a room with all the lovely women in the world--and I will tell you all their secrets quicker than a bird can pick the teeth of crocodiles!!"

The problem was to get him into that room unseen by the Princess or her servants. The more we could tell Grim about her, the better for Grim and the worse for her, if she were contemplating treachery. But she was no fool, and she undoubtedly knew which rooms we occupied. If she should learn that Chullunder Ghose had visited Jeff's room, it would be all up with any hope of getting her to confide in him. We solved it by going ourselves to call on her. We told the servant on the mat--humiliated and suspicious from having been locked in-- that there was a box of flowers for her Highness in the lobby. He made the mistake of being insolent, which gave us an excuse to kick him downstairs; and that gave Chullunder Ghose any amount of time to get into the end room unseen. Then we knocked and the Syrian maid took our cards but said her mistress could see nobody that afternoon. After that I went down to the desk and arranged with Dougherty to send word to the Princess that the gentleman from India would receive her at four-fifteen in room 195. Then we hid in the passage between the linen closets and the wall; it was tight quarters and abominably hot, but there was just room for the two of us to peer through the holes in the wooden partition.

As a matter of fact, my prejudices at the moment were in favour of the Princess. I could not help remembering her remarks about my being a keyhole peeper, and although Jeff's bulk made the discomfort in that narrow passage almost unendurable, the fact that he seemed to have no compunctions about what we were doing was the only relief to the strain of my self-respect. Knowledge that she was a crook of unimpeachable impudence did not compensate for the distasteful nature of the job.

However, almost from the moment she entered the room that aspect of the situation vanished. I was glad I was listening. So was Jeff. We ceased even to be conscious of the stifling heat, although sweat

streamed into our eyes and our joints ached with the strain of keeping still in awkward attitudes. We could see fairly well, and hear almost perfectly because Chullunder Ghose had thoughtfully set two chairs between us and the window.

"Why should I come to see you?" she demanded. "Why did you not come to my apartment?"

I could not have answered her as Chullunder Ghose did. She was too beautiful and too regally dressed to be treated with anything less than politeness, by anyone not incorrigibly hard-boiled. But the babu was boiled in India, where insults are the salt of diplomatic conversation.

"Fortunately you obeyed me," he answered. "What have you to say for yourself?"

She retorted: "I don't know you. Give the password."

"It has been changed," he answered, "since you failed--and deserted your post--and brought this situation on us. If there is any reason why you should not die before you do us any further injury, I am commissioned to hear it."

"But who are you?" she demanded.

"Your judge. Sit down and say what you have to say; I will listen unless you take too long about it."

She sat down facing him. Chullunder Ghose assumed an expression of placid indifference. If she looked beautiful in his eyes, he contrived perfectly not to suggest it.

"Give me proof," she demanded. She seemed a totally different woman to the one I had seen in Marseilles. Then she had been, if

anything, over-confident. "How did you find me here? How did you know I was coming?"

"I am not here to answer your questions," said Chullunder Ghose, "but to receive your answer. Have you anything to say?"

She made up her mind. She sat back relaxed in the chair.

"If you are who you pretend to be, you may tell Dorje I have changed sides. As for you, if you think you can kill me, try it. I have met a man who is greater than Dorje." Then, lazily, as if she no longer cared for anything, she let her eyes wander around the room; they dwelt on the papered wooden partition, behind which Jeff and I lurked, for perhaps a second longer than on any object. "Dorje," she said, "has elements of greatness, but he won't last. He never did finish anything. When he was Solomon, the wealthiest king in the world, he went to pieces. As Karl Marx he could only sow seeds. He has sown them again. And another will reap. Tell Dorje that."

"May I tell him who is this paragon?"

She appeared to weigh this carefully, as if she felt tempted to name the individual before whose rising splendour Dorje's destiny had waned. However, she smiled at last, as if enjoying what she foresaw:

"Dorje will know soon enough. As for you, let me out of this room before I lose patience with you."

She had the gift of absolutely regal insolence, but Chullunder Ghose had the equally great one of sublime cheek. Smiling as if fifty murderers were at his beck and call, he got up, bowed to her and started toward the door; but before he opened it he could not resist one Fat Boy shot to make her flesh creep:

"Sad, that one so beautiful and talented must die so horribly, and so soon. How pleased I would have been to modify at least the method, even though your life is forfeit."

She sneered as he opened the door for her. "You sound," she said "like one of Dorje's agents! He invariably uses sentimental fools who forget the countersign!"

We gave her time to reach her own apartment and then joined Chullunder Ghose. He was wiping his face with a towel, comically forlorn but as shrewd as ever.

"Sahibs, if I were Dorje I would drown her, because if Dorje were King of the World she would look for someone to defeat him. If I were God she would never have been invented, so the world would be less interesting. If I were you, I would go now back to Rammy sahib's room and wait for what she does next, because she will do it swiftly. And if I were Jimgrim, I would not believe her when she says she is now against Dorje, any more than she believed me when I told her I am Dorje's agent. Furthermore, she knew there was someone behind that panel. Oh, I like her! This babu is once again a slave of Hanuman, who is a god of fortunately futile love-affairs. I hope she dies in torments before she disillusions me. Am sadist. Masochism to the devil! But make haste, sahibs, because she is not lethargic like a cobra or a mongoose or electricity. The speed of light lags like a hearse when she thinks. And take my word for it: if she were off with the old love Dorje, she would not have hinted at the new love Jimgrim; she would be too anxious to guard Jimgrim from Dorje's anger. Did I not say I would pick her secret like a pop out of a weasel? And the whole world for a battleground--oh, why was I not born into Jimgrim's shoes!"

Chapter Nine

"Emperor Jimgrim--how does that sound?"

When we returned to Jeff's room there were two Arabs seated on the mat outside the door. They were dressed for the desert and looked as hard-bitten as two dry bones. Their faces, framed in the flowing headgear that would make a Sphynx out of a tailor's dummy, were further obscured by the gloom, but Jeff seemed to recognize one of them. I supposed it was one of his multitude of rag-tag and bob-tail acquaintances, so I went on in and left Jeff standing there. Chullunder Ghose came in presently and asked me who the men were.

"It would be just like Rammy sahib to invent excuses for a trip on camel-back from here to Baluchistan. It stands to reason that if Dorje is in Cairo we should go to Tashkent, and by the most uncomfortable means."

"Why do you think Dorje is in Cairo?" I demanded.

"I don't think. I know Dorje is not here. If he were here Jimgrim would be here too. I am afraid we leave from here by camel, for parts unknown. I am afraid we are tertium quids, like husbands in Reno, U.S.A. I think our Jimgrim uses us as generals use heroes; he sends us off in one direction to deceive the enemy by getting blown to smithereens, while he performs strategic retreat. I think he wants Dorje to believe he is in Cairo. And at the same time, I am damned if I know what I do think, except that camels are an anachronism."

Jeff came in and the Arabs followed. He unstrapped his travelling rug and spread that in a corner for them. They sat down like two roadweary veterans who dourly mistrust civilization; and when they had studied the furniture frankly, and us secretively, they relapsed into meditation. Jeff did not go to the trouble of introducing them, so I supposed they were old acquaintances who had come to ask a

favour, although it was a mystery how they should have known he was in Cairo. Chullunder Ghose whispered to me:

"Those two are from the Princess. Watch them."

He had hardly finished making that remark when the Princess herself entered. She had sent her servant in advance to knock on the door, but the man made no attempt to come in with her. Jeff dragged a chair up but she remained standing:

"It is about that man." She nodded toward the babu, who salaamed without betraying reverence. He seemed intent on aggravating her. "He is a dangerous fool, who just now boasted to me that he comes direct from Dorje."

Chullunder Ghose suddenly strode toward her, scowling straight into her eyes:

"If I am not Dorje himself, who am I?" he demanded.

"Is he a madman?" she asked.

"Very well then, never mind who I am. Dorje is in this room. Which is he?"

She glanced at the Arabs and shrugged her shoulders.

"Did you see that, sahibs? She knows Dorje by sight."

"Did you send this man to spy on me just now?" she asked Jeff. "I shall go away at once if I am to expect this kind of thing. Where is Jeemgreem? Here in this boring place I have waited patiently--stagnating--doing nothing--"

She paused and Chullunder Ghose nudged me. His mild brown eyes

were masking, I thought, hurricanes of inward laughter.

The Princess stared at each of us in turn and then continued:

"I have done nothing--nothing, while I might have helped you against Dorje, as I promised Jeemgreem I would."

"Na'am," remarked one of the Arabs.

"Who are those?" she demanded.

"No one in particular," said Jeff. "Just friends of mine."

She looked at them suspiciously, then curled that scarmarked upper-lip at Jeff and me:

"You are incompetents. It is useless to hope to work with you. Dorje is making his moves to be King of the World, while all you do is loaf in bedrooms and submit me to humiliating espionage."

"Na'am," said the Arab again.

"Does he understand English?" She turned on the Arab and tongue-lashed him in fluent Arabic, but he took no notice of her.

"Wrong dialect," said Jeff. "He isn't from the Fayoum."

"No matter." She shrugged her shoulders again. She seemed exasperated almost to hysteria.

"You see," said Jeff, as gently as he could with that great growling voice of his, "you don't know Grim yet. When--"

"Know him?" she retorted. "I am weary of him! When I make promises I keep them. I promised help against Dorje--"

"Na'am," said the Arab, and I thought Chullunder Ghose would burst. He was sweating with excitement about something.

"Yet what can I do?"

"You have done all you could," said the Arab. "I have never had more help from anyone."

She behaved perfectly, not pretending not to be astonished, but controlling herself perfectly. She was at her best when suddenly alarmed, or in sudden emergency. It was Chullunder Ghose who threw all restraint to the winds, let go a roar of delight and actually danced, like a big fat devotee of Siva, among the chairs and suitcases.

"Jimmy sahib! Jimgrim!" he shouted. And there were tears in his eyes. "This babu knew you! Dammit--did I sit still? Dammit-- did I talk like son of sucking-pig from Sodom and Gomorrah just to keep myself from giving college-yell of University of Hook-or-Crook? Oh, Jimmy--Jimmy--Jimmysahib! Jimgrim! This babu says salaam up from cockles of his being!"

"Cheerio, Chullunder Ghose," Grim answered. "Come and shake hands."

"Sahib, this is Fountain of Youth! This old babu is young again!"

Grim smiled, and anyone could have picked him out then from a thousand men. Without ceasing to smile, and with the babu's hand still working his up and down like a pumphandle, he said suddenly:

"Lock that door, someone, and give me the key."

I was just in time to prevent the Princess from escaping, although

escape is hardly the proper word. She had moved toward the door as those rarely great actresses can who are on or off stage before anyone knows it. There was so little suggestion of flight that I felt like a clumsy hoodlum when I intercepted her and turned the key.

"You remind me," she said, "of a pig on its way to the trough at feeding-time."

I tossed the key into Grim's lap and offered her a chair, but she took another one. Chullunder Ghose hove himself up on to Jeff's writing-table and squatted there, still chuckling at Grim, who was talking now in undertones to the man on the mat beside him.

"Oh, beg pardon," he said suddenly, "I haven't introduced you, have I? This is Colonel Howard McGowan--Madame la Princesse Chalawan de Sitlab en Siam--Jeff Ramsden--Bob Crosby--and Chullunder Ghose. Colonel McGowan is of the British Army--special service."

"I vote we drink. Will the Princess join us?" asked McGowan. He was a man of Grim's height--taller, that is, than the ordinary, but not so tall as to attract attention. His face looked almost exactly like an Arab's, hooked nose and all; but for his Scots name I would have guessed him as being of Hebrew ancestry and his eyes, too, had the Hebrew liquid intelligence that seems to make so many of them linguists and Jacks of any trade. He was a man whom you could no more help liking when he looked directly at you than you could have helped wondering at the way he and Grim dissolved themselves, apparently at will, into men of the wind-seared desert-- and then reasserted Western breeding at a moment's notice.

By the time the drinks came--champagne, at McGowan's suggestion--we were all feeling pretty keyed up and expectant, but the sense of strain had vanished and even the Princess had entirely recovered her poise, which was what I think Grim wanted her to do, it being one of

Grim's extraordinary maxims that even an enemy at his best, can be depended on, whereas an enemy in dire straits is likely to do something unexpected. He claims, for instance, that when Saladin sent a horse to Richard Coeur de Lion, so that Richard might fight on equal terms, Saladin was merely wise, not chivalrous. He touched glasses with the Princess.

"I depended on you to get in touch with Dorje's agents here," he assured her, smiling. "Thanks to you, we caught Tassim Bey--among others--among others," he repeated. "I was in Cairo before you were. Fooled you by that cablegram that made you think I was still in London. What makes you think Tassim is so important?"

His disarming manner of having just laid down a bridge hand and discussing it unnerved the Princess far more than, I think, arrest or terroristic tactics would have done. No spy of the genuine cosmopolitan variety has any sense of loyalty whatever, but they all have gamblers' instincts and a sense of sportsmanship that far transcends mere bravery. Their strength is delight in danger. Their weakness is vanity. Their genius consists in almost superhumanly skilful opportunism.

"Tassim is a weakling," she answered. "Dorje will kill him if you don't. I suppose that person"--scornfully she turned her eyes toward Chullunder Ghose--"saw Tassim in my room. Perhaps he heard Tassim talking; and I know he saw me in the mirror. What of it? Did I not say I would help you? And how could I have helped you without intriguing with Dorje's people?"

"True," said Grim, "you couldn't have. I acknowledge your help. We could hardly have managed without you. But wasn't it a trifle drastic to propose to burn this hotel? True, that might have killed Jeff Ramsden and Bob Crosby, but--"

"You accuse me of that?" she demanded.

"I don't need to. Your Syrian maid is the source of the--shall I say rumour?"

"And you, with your experience of Syrians, believe her?"

"Why not? She was chosen by Colonel McGowan, for the same reason that you engaged her--because she had served you so well once before. That time you were working for the French and she was set by the British to watch you. This time--"

"Tassim talked of firing the hotel," she answered.

"Is that why your locked trunk had this in it?" Colonel McGowan asked her.

From under his voluminous robe he produced a piece of brass tube that had plugs screwed into both ends. One of the plugs was not screwed home; he took hold of it as if about to give it a turn or two. I saw her wince, but she controlled herself.

"How many turns does it need," McGowan asked, "to make it dangerous?"

"Just one," Grim answered, "but it's all right, go on, turn it if you want to. Even the elevator isn't running. The hotel folk have turned off the juice at the main switch."

McGowan held it toward the Princess. "Turn it for us," he suggested naively. "You know how."

She refused. "I have nothing to do with it--nothing."

Jeff Ramsden stepped into that breach. "May I see it?" He held it

close to the Princess, taking one end between thumb and finger as if about to apply force. "Which end do you turn--this one?"

Then she yielded, but without panic. She spoke quietly:

"That end. But if you turn it--and if there is current turned on in the next building--or in the next but one--and if there is anything explosive within quite a wide radius--you will be sorry you turned it, that's all."

"Thank you," said McGowan. "That is just what I wanted to know. Who hid the dynamite in this hotel?"

"Tassim Bey," she answered, "said he thought of doing it."

McGowan studied me a moment. "I wonder if you'd lend me a suit of your clothes. Shoes, too. Can you fit me?"

I gave him the key of my room, telling him to help himself.

"If there is dynamite," he said, "I'll find it. But I want to search without starting talk. The likeliest place is the storeroom. I'll give my right name and say I think a package belonging to me got in there by mistake."

I locked the door behind him and returned the key to Grim, who was examining the brass tube. Suddenly he looked up at the Princess.

"You'll find it hard to believe," he said, "but I actually didn't know you had any of these in that trunk. You were watched so carefully in France after the Marseilles incident that, clever though you are, it seemed impossible for you to hide anything from us. But I know now how you did it. Changed trunks, of course. Swapped them in transit. Was there anything in this trunk that you personally need?"

She nodded, too alert to trust herself to speak.

"It is being gone through by McGowan's men," Grim went on. "You may have back anything that doesn't interest us. This"--he tapped the brass tube with the door-key--"was made in the railway workshops--from memory; I'm flattered that it fooled you. We found several real ones; but they were all destroyed in making tests. There was one bad accident. The censorship was clapped on. Some of them appear to have reached the United States; there was an unexplained explosion in New Jersey that killed more than a hundred people. The new motor-ship Dido has sunk in mid-Atlantic. Maiden voyage. Seen to blow up suddenly. No survivors. Nearly three thousand people missing. One or two of these things may have been on board the Dido; almost anyone could hide one in his luggage, and not a ship on the sea is safe from them until we find the source of the supply."

Jeff made a gruesome suggestion. "Any good mechanic could fix up clock-work mechanism that would turn that screw at the end of any given number of hours or days. Ship a trunk in the hold of a liner-- no need for Dorje's man to be on board."

Grim stood and looked at the Princess. When he spoke, there was not a trace in his voice of criticism:

"So you see, we must catch Dorje. And I need your help again."

"You--you need no help from anyone," she answered. "You, the devil."

But Grim did not look like the devil. I drew the conclusion that either she loved devils or else that she did not think Grim was one.

"What will you do if you catch him?" she asked.

Grim took thought before he answered: "I will know that then."

Chullunder Ghose suddenly slapped his fat thigh a resounding thwack that startled all of us and voiced stark-naked nonsense:

"Am immoralist. Am weaned on theory that right and wrong are two sides of self-same silly nonsense. Can do--that is sole test of what anyone should do. Can get through to Tibet? Do it. Can take your goods? Do it. Can be Caesar and Napoleon plus Alexander? Do same. Why not? Why did God make little apples? Nobody knows, but wise men eat same, not asking questions. Were I Jimmy sahib-- beg his pardon, were I honourable Jimgrim, having at my mercy most astonishing Princess who wears orchid lingerie and whose infinite variety is soul of wit etcetera, would take same--stay not on the order of my taking, either! Exquisite emotions notwithstanding, then would positively out-do Dorje. Slam-bang--go right to it! Dorje's game is obvious--down with everything and up with Dorje! Dorje is doing it. Opportunist policy is obviously do in Dorje and seize reins of Dorje's power! Emperor Jimgrim--how does that sound? And such a woman to share one's throne--oh, is the champagne finished? I would like to drink to that thought--Emperor Jimmy Jimgrim--Empress Baltis--Banzai, as the Japanese say!"

The Princess stared at him, then spoke in a rather strained voice:

"Did I call you a fool just now?"

"Your mistake," he answered.

Grim astonished me. Unsmiling, serious, he turned to Jeff and asked him:

"How about that? What do you say?"

Jeff astonished me almost more than Grim did: "Who wants an emperor's job? Chullunder Ghose is right; a man should do what he

can. But can you?"

"Someone must," Grim answered. "Dorje has laid his plans too well; he has got to blow up every arsenal and warship in the world, and who can stop him? The damned things seem to suck up electricity and turn it into a vibration that sets off all explosives within a radius that depends on nothing but the strength of the current. Destroy all warships and ammunition--then what? The man with a sword is master, isn't he?"

"And I can love you, Jeemgreem," said the Princess. "Dorje I do not love. Few do."

Grim caught my eye. "What do you think?"

The babu interrupted: "Treason against governments that plot against each other! Treason against kings and dictators and parliaments and congresses that never yet have thought of anything except how to exploit the unorganized! Dorje is right! The only thing wrong with Dorje is that Jimgrim is better. It is treasonable not to vote for Jimgrim. Am not treasonable person."

"Dammit, Jim, go steady," Jeff urged.

"Jeemgreem," said the Princess, "I will show you Dorje. I will lead you to him. You, not Dorje, should be King of the World. Forgive me, Jeemgreem, that I worked against you. It was a very bad mistake. From now on I am for you, heart and soul."

Grim smiled at her. "Why should I trust you?"

"Smile at me! Smile like that at me! Look into my eyes, Jeemgreem--read there what is in them!"

There came a knock at the door, and when I turned the key McGowan walked in, in a suit of my clothes. The Princess's hands were on Grim's shoulders and she was talking to him in undertones; Chullunder Ghose and Jeff, in equally low tones, were arguing over by the writing-table.

"What's going on?" McGowan asked. "Yes, found the dynamite--in tin cans--in a case marked chicken soup. But what's up?"

"Grim is considering taking Dorje's place," I told him.

"High time, too," he answered. "Someone must. Reuters have just announced that three of our cruisers blew up in Portsmouth Harbour. We're afraid that Woolwich Arsenal may go next. Can't turn off a whole world's electricity. We know there's a plot here in Cairo to blow up the Citadel. Armstrongs--Vicker's--Maxim--Nobels-- Duponts--all the makers of explosive in the world are at their wits' end what to do. It's a sure thing that Dorje will put all our armies and navies out of existence in less than a week. Then what price India? What price China? What price Egypt, the Sudan, Arabia? What price you and me if someone doesn't kill Dorje and seize control, Grim's the man--can't beat him!"

"Jeemgreem," I heard the Princess say, "you and I died because we loved each other, when you were Sir Francis Weston and I was--"

But I had heard enough of that stuff. I approached Jeff Ramsden, but as I did so he spoke past me at Grim:

"If you and Chullunder Ghose are right I'll eat my hat, but damn you, do as you like, Jim. I'll stick."

What could I do? A man can't niggle when the world seems at a madman's mercy. I said, "All right, I suppose I'll stick too. But I think

Grim's crazy."

Chapter Ten

"Dorje! Dorje!"

It was I who was crazy. Anyone who knew Grim might have known that he was merely fooling Baltis. Jeff's reluctance justified her in believing Grim was serious. Mine confirmed her opinion. Jeff was acting a part. I was not; but nobody except the Princess, and perhaps Grim, believed I was not, and my genuine friendship with Chullunder Ghose dates from that moment when he leaped to the entirely false conclusion that I had acted the part of conscientious objector simply to convince the Princess that I knew Grim was in earnest.

"Sahib," he said to me afterwards, "this world is full of wise men who are big fools. It takes a fool like me to be wise on the spur of a moment. But even when said spur pricks this babu to hilarious hocus-pocus, what use would cosmic wisdom be without such genius as yours, that acts like prohibitionist asserting booze is banished from the U.S.A. and looks as if he means it! Spur of moment is supreme test. But for you, that woman would have doubted Jimgrim. Now, however, she doubts nothing except whether ex-Queen of Sheba is suitable person to overthrow Solomon-Dorje."

"Does she believe all that junk about her previous incarnations?"

"Certainly she does. That is why she is also able to believe that Jimgrim would like to be King of the World. Sahib, all of us have heel-of-Achilles hidden somewhere in our anatomy. Some think they can buy paradise with money. Rammy sahib thinks that difficulties were made by God for us to smash and that only infidels avoid them. This babu is satisfied of ultimate futility of all things; nevertheless, am

chaste voluptuary, fearful of extremes and yet pursuing them because there seems no end to anything and why grow weary of the middle? That woman, otherwise sane as an icicle, thinks she was Baltis Queen of Sheba, and Ann Boleyn and God knows who else; so she can be caught in snares that would not fool even a politician. And I know Jimgrim's weakness, but I will not tell that. Yours is lack of imagination, but I will not tell that also--will merely make note of same for future purposes."

I suppose he was right. I could not imagine, for instance, why Colonel McGowan had shown no trace of hesitation in accepting the idea that Grim should dethrone Dorje and seize world-dominion. It had shocked me. Why should it not shock him, a British officer on British territory? Surely the first impact of the idea should have made him hesitate. And why should he trust me, a stranger, so unreservedly? He invited me to go with him around Cairo, to look the situation over, as he expressed it, and we went together to his quarters where he changed into his civilian clothes. There, something of the doubt in my mind probably escaped into the conversation. At any rate, he enlightened me:

"Grim is a wizard at picking the right line and the right man. He has taught me more in one week than I had learned in twenty-five years. As a matter of raw truth, we are absolutely up against it, and it's much worse than is generally known. We don't know what the deuce to do. The troops are almost out of hand; you see, we hardly dare to let them have a round of ammunition; one--just one of those damned brass gadgets is enough to blow 'em all to Kingdom Come if there's an electric current within a mile of 'em. We're taking no chances of that, let me tell you. We're evacuating the Citadel, reserve ammunition and all. No electricity out in the desert. Then if Dorje's men fire the city, we can march back with our ammunition, instead of being caught like rats in a trap. But come on, let's get busy."

Cairo was in ferment. Reuter's cablegrams announcing the sinking of British cruisers, following on a series of similar disasters in France and explosions all over the world, had set all Europeans and all the educated Egyptians by the ears. The London Stock Exchange had suspended business; almost every other bourse, including the cotton exchange in Alexandria, had followed suit. There was a rumour backed by enormous clouds of yellow smoke in several directions, that the warehoused cotton crop was burning-- and now, on top of all that, the most alarming certainty of all, that the troops--the hated, irritating, guardians of British overlordship--were on the march, evacuating Cairo, with their ammunition wagons hurrying southward ahead of them.

Rumours--rumours--rumours--of a war in the Sudan, of an invasion by mutinous Sudanese, of a sudden invasion by Italy at war with France and England--a proclamation posted in the streets forbidding the use of all private electric installations until further notice-- motorcycles roaring through the streets because the telephone was discontinued--another proclamation, misspelled and with the ink still wet, issuing warning that as an emergency measure Cairo would have no electricity until further notice but that kerosene had been requisitioned by the Government and would be rationed for use in oil-lamps. Crowds, volatile, inflammable, afraid, so swarming in the streets and around the mosques that it was almost impossible for a car to get through. Then an idiotic story, put in the form of a question by a frenzied storekeeper who jumped on the running-board and yelled in McGowan's face, that the Abyssinians were marching down the Nile a million strong.

"And what the hell can anybody tell 'em?" asked McGowan, when we had got rid of that man.

Someone else was telling plenty. Someone was making rumours by

the hat-full and spreading them through the bazaars and back-streets. There was a story of an air-raid on the way, made plausible by the roar of the planes of the Royal Air Force circling over the city in groups of three with the laudable object of restoring confidence. But worst of all, there was a tumult gathering in the throats of narrow lanes and an increasing growl of "Dorje!" that occasionally swelled into a mob-roar--"Dorje! Dorje!" and grew low again. It appeared to be checked by the sight of bayonets, and armoured cars, and two tanks; but whether or not those street patrols had ammunition or were merely bluffing nobody could guess.

"We know," McGowan told me, "that about a hundred of those Dorje-dingbats are in Cairo. And it's probable that they've an electric-light plant hidden somewhere. Start that up, and turn the plugs on a few of those things--might as well shoot the men beforehand as let 'em get caught with ammunition in their belts. Dorje has won Cairo. Can he hold it, that's the question."

I asked McGowan about his own automatic; I had seen him put one in his pocket.

"Oh, we take chances at our trade," he answered. "That's different. The troops, of course, are mad-angry. They think they are not being trusted. But believe me, they're too valuable just now to be risked against a mechanical enemy that can kill 'em all at one turn of a switch. No, Dorje has won Cairo--for the moment. And the devil of it is, we don't know Dorje from a hole in the wall. We don't know where he is, nor who he is, nor how many other cities he is attacking at this moment."

"Do his gadgets blow up gasoline?" I asked.

"In certain circumstances, yes, apparently. The Air Force reserve supply tank burst into flames at half-past nine this morning. They say

the petroleum wells are all on fire at Baku."

"For once then the Soviet Government isn't under suspicion?"

"Hell's bells, no. They would hardly burn their own wells to annoy the universe. As a matter of fact, they're as rattled as we are. They're suffering worse. There's an unconfirmed message in code to the effect that the Mujiks have all gone Dorje and are proclaiming a new dispensation with Dorje as King of the World. And India--Jee-
rusalem! The cable is silent. Figure for yourself what that means."

I would not have believed that a city could change its hue, and almost its identity, so suddenly as Cairo did that day. It was not only the smoke from the burning cotton barns, or the din of the angering crowds in public squares and down the stenching side-streets. Chaos struck the place, changing it under our eyes, as if it were a new Pompeii being blotted out by a new Vesuvius, only with this difference, that nobody knew where to run and the mob was possessed by a weird, unexplainable spirit of waiting for something to happen. The city was already at their mercy, and they waited--waited. Every plan, perhaps theirs also, if they had one, had been rendered useless by the fact that electricity and all explosives were out of commission. A man with a stick in his hand was as good as the next. But who knew whose stick was a hollow thing that held a brass tube? And who knew that the troops were without ammunition?

"Dorje!" The growl of the word kept gaining above the tumult, and the King of Egypt's mounted bodyguard, parading near the palace with a fine air of fearless discipline, retired in front of it sullenly, until the King and his entourage had time to crowd into about a dozen motor-cars and stream away southward. Then the bodyguard fell back on the palace and sat their horses looking sulkily ready for business--or almost ready--almost. They, too, seemed to me, if I can read men's faces, to be expecting something that had not yet shown up--possibly

a leader?

"Dorje," I said to McGowan, as we began to drive at greater speed at last through quieter streets toward the hospital, "must have been at this game quite a long time. This is a prepared situation. Seems funny to me that the secret services of six or seven powers couldn't run him down and stop this before it happened. How is it you didn't find him?"

"Give me your guess," he retorted.

I suggested, "There ain't no such person," and McGowan rather resented it, or seemed to.

"Too damned obvious," he answered. "Nearly everybody said that Ulianoff and Bronstein were nothing—not worth giving thought to—until they blossomed forth as Lenin and Trotsky. This bird has studied their game and has gone them one better, that's all. There isn't a major government that hasn't files and files about the Oriental rumour of a King of the World who is likely to come at any minute. It's a cult. It embraces all religions. We have all of us known for years that even the Mahometans were listening to it. And we have all known there was something more than communism at the bottom of the unrest that has run like a rot through Asia. But lay our hands on Dorje? Fine-tooth combs catch fleas, but Dorje—no, sir."

"There ain't no such person," I repeated. "I will bet you all the dollars I own against the middle of a doughnut that Dorje is a myth invented by a committee."

Luckily for me he did not accept that bet. Not another word passed between us until we reached the new public hospital and left the car in charge of McGowan's orderly. I had no idea why he had brought me to the hospital. The European and Egyptian members of the staff

were standing by in good shape and there was no evident symptom of panic except for what one can only describe as atmosphere; that, for lack of a better comparison, suggested the incidence of a baffling epidemic. There was none of the orderly hurry of war-time, when everyone knows what to do and there are only too few individuals to do it. Here there were plenty of individuals, all resolute--baffled--mystified.

We were informed, before we had asked a question, that the operating rooms were reserved for emergency cases only, owing to the lack of electric light. But that did not interest McGowan, who was abrupt and uncommunicative. He gave my name, not his, and led me as fast as I could follow him upstairs into a small room at the end of a corridor. The window-shade was down; he jerked it up. A nurse was in the room; he ordered her out. A screen was around the bed; he removed it.

"See what you make of that," he said and turned away, as if he had already seen more than enough.

I looked down at a woman swathed in bandages. She appeared to have been burned; the nature of the dressings suggested that. But her face was uninjured. And except that her face was white and tired by agony, it so resembled that of the Princess Baltis that I thought, for at least a minute, it was she--herself--the Princess lying there.

Chapter Eleven

"Stole my name. Says she is Queen of Sheba, I am."

There was even a scar on the upper-lip. I looked at the scar closely and decided it was not a birthmark; it might even have been inflicted recently, and it seemed slightly larger as well as slightly higher up

than that on the lip of the Princess.

"Name? Nationality?" I asked, and McGowan answered without turning his head. He was standing over by the door with his hand on the knob.

"Came from the Cape by way of Kenya, Nile steamer, and by train from Khartoum. British-Indian passport bearing evidence of having been forged in Warsaw, but visas for almost every country in the world apparently okay under the microscope. Name given as Baltis, Maharanee of Chota Korinpore, which is a small state in the northern part of the Central Provinces of India. Domicile given as Chandalia, which is the capital of that state. Cabled India, of course, at once; but no reply--yet."

"Haven't you other means of checking up?" I asked him.

"London--India Office. No record there of a Maharanee by that name. Reply, in code, asks whether we are not confusing her with Baltis understood to be French secret agent."

"Injuries caused--?"

"One of those damned brass tubes. Suspected, without proof, of having brought in dozens of 'em in her luggage. Luggage, of course, searched thoroughly; nothing found of the slightest significance."

"Staying--?"

"At Mena House Hotel--out near the Pyramids."

"Where did it happen?"

"Nobody knows. She was found lying in the garden of an unoccupied villa belonging to Tassim Bey, who is under arrest but swears he

knows nothing about her."

"Why me?"

"Want your opinion."

"Has she said anything?"

"Not one word."

I decided the woman was listening. It was impossible to be quite sure of that, but I was almost sure that she was not unconscious.

"No use guessing," I said. "I shall have to examine her injuries. Call in the nurse."

McGowan stepped outside and closed the door. He returned in a minute and said the nurse was busy at the moment but would come as soon as she had helped another nurse with bandages. He had obviously not spoken to the nurse, knowing I would not have dreamed of removing those excellently applied dressings without the permission of the doctor in charge of the case.

"An anaesthetic," I said, "is out of the question. And unfortunately in a case like this the agony is excruciating. But if I'm to help her there is nothing for it but immediate examination. Tell the nurse we shall need two or three others to hold her. Oh, hello."

She had opened her eyes. Her lips moved. "Let me alone. Let me die."

She seemed unable to move her head, so I drew up a chair and sat where she could not see my face but where I could watch every trace of emotion in hers. Suddenly, outside, not far away, there was a thud

like the shock of a howitzer going off; it shook the building; then came the shuddering blast of three explosions one close on another, followed by the high-pitched uproar of a crowd in panic.

She smiled. I have seen many people smile like that on death-beds, and especially criminals. Some drunkards do it, and some drug-addicts. It suggests a peculiar vanity; and I have been told that when a clever cross-examiner detects that smile on the face of a witness he can usually extract the information that he wants by using artfully half-hidden flattery.

"We have caught your twin sister," I said, "and she tells us that your Dorje is only one of a committee, that her Dorje is the real one. Your Dorje, she says, is a traitor who has spoiled everything by being ambitious for himself."

"Am I dying?" she asked.

"Undoubtedly. You can't possibly live."

"Are we alone?"

"We shall be in a moment." I turned to McGowan. "Leave the room, please, and close the door after you. Then stand outside and see that no one interrupts us."

He opened the door, closed it again and drew near, making less noise than a cat. He placed a hand on my shoulder to steady himself and we both leaned as close as we dared, he listening from behind me, but it was difficult to hear what she said. She mumbled, with only occasional spurts of quite distinct speech; and even so, she said nothing at all until I jogged her memory.

"You can talk now. He has closed the door behind him. Your sister

said--"

"Bitch! Liar! Younger than me--I am one hour older--stole my name--says she is Queen of Sheba--I am."

I jogged her memory again.

"Your sister says that you don't know the real Dorje."

"He will kill her. Dorje loves me. I will say to him, 'She says you are not real!'"

"How will Dorje get the message?"

Silence, in which I heard McGowan's wrist-watch ticking out of step with mine. I was afraid I had asked the wrong question. McGowan nudged me, but I waited, not daring to add to her reluctance to speak. At last her lips moved:

"Where is Tassim?"

"I will find him," I answered.

"Who are you?"

I drew a long bow at a venture: "Haroun ben Yahudi."

"Haroun?" Instantly she spoke in Arabic and I missed some of what she said, but McGowan got all of it. "What are you doing here? Find Tassim. Command Tassim to tell Dorje that woman lies about him. Dorje loves me. He never did love her. Say that to him, Haroun. Make him do it."

Silence again. Then suddenly: "Haroun, where is your ship? Can you put me in it? Take me to him, Haroun."

She was more than half-delirious now. The effort to speak was burning up the dregs of her vitality. She mumbled and neither of us could distinguish a word of it. Then, suddenly clearly again, in Arabic: "Haroun, bury me at sea if I don't reach Dorje. But sail swiftly, Haroun. If you reach Karachi Dorje will come to me,"

She tried to sit up then, but the words she would have uttered turned into an almost soundless scream as agonies of pain shot through her, and she died before McGowan could summon the nurse, who eyed us two as if she thought we had done murder. Possibly we had. I don't know. She might have lived another hour or two without our interference.

"Tassim next," said McGowan. "He is locked up and he hasn't said much yet. With this to go on--"

"No," I answered. "Grim next. Tell Grim and let Grim cross-question Tassim."

"Right you are. About all we've got is Tassim and Karachi, so far."

"Plus," said I, "the fact that Dorje is one man and not a committee."

"Think so?" he answered. "I doubt it now. To me it begins to look almost probable that those two women have been dealing with different men, and neither knew it."

"We see Grim first?"

"Right you are. Grim sees Tassim."

However, Grim thought otherwise, and at that we had to spend two hours looking for him, in a city that was more like Dante's hell than Cairo. Strange sects seem to spring into existence almost in a

moment whenever anything cataclysmic happens. The mob lacked nothing now but leadership to make it murderous. Plundering was already beginning. There were outbreaks of fire in a dozen different directions--obviously incendiary fires, because Cairo is not a city that burns readily. Where the smoke was thickest and the tumult worst there were weird processions of mystics chanting that the end of the world was at hand--Copts--Moslems--all sorts. One long procession of men, women and children were all stark naked. The police were a bit pathetic, sticking gamely to their posts but not in the least knowing what to do; I saw one of them arrest a naked woman and then let her go because he saw the futility of it.

We were in no way molested, but officers in uniform were having a hard time of it dodging sticks and stones, and around the jail there was a big mob, composed of the worst elements of the city, held at bay by scared policemen and a small contingent of British infantry, who displayed their machine gun much more openly than they probably would have done if they had had any ammunition. A British officer was shouting at the mob in Arabic, imploring them not to compel him to fire on them. It was about the only thing he could do.

"They can have the jail the minute they make up their minds to take it," was McGowan's opinion. "Once some of the tough ones are out of that place there'll be real trouble."

Grim was not at Brown's Hotel but had left a message for us. We found him at the High Commissioner's residence, where Chullunder Ghose was enjoying an argument under the portico; he had got the goat of one of those rather old-fashioned British subalterns who still believe that hauteur is the correct attitude toward inferior races, and the subaltern's neck was beet root colour. Grim, still dressed as an Arab, and indistinguishable from one, came out and talked to us; he told us Jeff had recognized a man who might prove to be important

and had gone after him. Before we had finished telling him our story Jeff brought in his victim, an enormous man, who looked like a Dervish and who appeared to have made the egregious mistake of offering resistance. Jeff was holding him by one arm, but the arm seemed painful. They were both of them smothered in dust. Jeff grinned, as is usual when he has had, or expects to have, a genuine chance to use his muscles.

"Had to carry him part of the way, but he's good now."

He led his man straight in to the High Commissioner, which was, to say the least of it, an unusual proceeding. Grim, apparently in haste to join Jeff, made one of his abrupt decisions. He said to me:

"You go with Chullunder Ghose and turn Tassim inside out."

He asked McGowan to keep out of Tassim's sight, and me to do no more than play up to the babu. Then he talked to the babu alone for about two minutes before hurrying into the house to interview Jeff's prisoner.

So the babu, McGowan and I got into McGowan's car and drove half across Cairo again, to a place where prisoners can be kept for a day or so without the publicity that might be caused by putting them in the regular jail. It looks not in the least like a prison; it stands in the midst of a garden and thousands pass it daily without suspecting its real purpose. The entrance to it is through a deserted-looking building used by the police for storing all sorts of odds and ends, and along a path between stone walls that are hidden by trees and shrubbery.

We were admitted by a one-armed Sudanese who wore five or six medal ribbons on a non-military smock that looked as if it had been taken from the lost-and-found rubbish bin and then washed threadbare. He saluted McGowan like an automaton and relaxed

immediately afterward into an attitude of deferent familiarity. McGowan remained in the passage with him, talking a dialect of Arabic totally unfamiliar to my ear; but Chullunder Ghose and I were led by another Sudanese to the door of a small room facing on an even smaller inner courtyard. He opened the door and locked us in.

Tassim Bey stood up to greet us. He had been seated on a trestle cot, there being nothing else in the room except the floor, on which he could sit. The cot was beneath the only window, which was iron barred and devoid of glass. There were no windows in the other three walls of the courtyard, and only one small door that looked as if it had been locked for half a century or so; there was a short flagged path leading from that door to a well, above which a rusty iron wheel was still hanging from a wooden beam.

Tassim Bey looked to me like a typical upper-class modern Egyptian of the semi-political, travelled, alert, intellectual type. As he stood up he polished his finger nails on the cuff of his smartly cut jacket. He had bored eyes with a slightly simian expression caused by their being set too close together and by their perpetual search for something in which there might be something good for Tassim. Lean, but with a tendency to stomach. Stooped, but with an air of stooping merely because it was the distinguished attitude. Rather pale faced, only slightly olive coloured. A nose like Abdul Hamid's, probably betraying a trace of Armenian ancestry.

No one could have looked more sympathetic than Chullunder Ghose.

"This babu makes obeisance. May your honour very soon receive reward of merit. And may you have vengeance on your enemies. That is my humble prayer."

"I don't know you," remarked Tassim.

"Naturally not. Also, in said sad circe your honour's icy incredulity is highest form of hot-from-pot good judgment. I admire same. Never mind me. Doubt me all you like--until I tell you."

"Who is listening?" asked Tassim.

"No one, except this man." A bit scornfully he jerked his head in my direction.

"Who is outside the door?"

"No one--on my honour. If I could open same, would prove it to you. But let us speak in low tones."

Tassim sat down, with his hands on his knees.

"I have nothing to say to anyone, except this: I am unlawfully imprisoned."

"Sahib, same here," said the babu. "This man and my most respectful self are prisoners as much as you are--held without warrant on charges so unprovable that same are secret."

"You mean you are both prisoners along with me?"

"Verb sap."

"And you don't know why you are imprisoned?"

"Oh, yes. Why is one thing. Justice is another. It being essential that your honour should escape, this babu was ordered to effect same."

"Ordered by whom?"

"Now, by Jiminy, I don't know. Am too lately from Karachi, having

come as supercargo on dhow running cargo of contraband. Your honour doubtless will permit me not to enter into details--must not speak too plainly in front of this person; venial very, and to a certain extent one of us, but only partially trusted because we have goods on him. Get me? Nod is good as wink to blind horse."

"Man or woman?" Tassim asked him.

Seeing I was supposed to be a prisoner, and having promised to play up to Chullunder Ghose, I assumed an air of bored resignation and sat on a coconut fibre mat with my back to the wall. Chullunder Ghose remained standing. "I understand you perfectly," he answered. "It is, however, forbidden to repeat countersign in this person's presence. Nevertheless, there are two women, if you are asking for information."

"Damn!" said Tassim. "Do you speak Arabic?"

"Unfortunately, no. Am very ignorant babu."

He talks Arabic better than I do, and he knew I could have followed the conversation in that language; but I understood the method behind the prevarication. Such men as Tassim, loathing all things English except money, speak the English language spitefully, which is to say indiscreetly.

"Two women?" said Tassim, lowering his eyelids.

"Both named Baltis."

"And both of them ordered you to effect my escape?"

"May I sit down?" asked the babu. Evidently the pace was too fast even for him; he was inventing lies at random.

"My God, no," he answered at last when he was squatted in his favourite position. "Two women--same age--same name--just as much alike as two fleas in an ear. One says one thing, one the opposite. One says learn from Tassim Bey where to deliver the contraband, then kill him to keep his mouth shut and here are pounds Egyptian fifty. See them."

He dived into an inner pocket and produced the paper money, flourishing it in Tassim's face. "Said the other release Tassim, he is necessary to me. Might as well tell me to build new pyramid without straw. But there you are; she said it. Fortunately, he said otherwise, or this bewildered babu might have relapsed into state of oh-my-God-ishness, no use whatever."

"He? Who?" asked Tassim.

"Lord high-halleluiah head man; and you know who that is, so don't ask me. Trouble is, that this babu delivered contraband from Karachi as per orders. But now where is it? Nobody knows except Tassim Bey, who is in hands of hated English, who also don't know whereabouts of said stuff, but who intend to torture Tassim. But he tells."

"Bah! They would never dare," said Tassim. But he did not look as if he believed his own words.

Men given to inventing atrocity stories end by convincing themselves, if no one else. He had turned a shade paler.

"Bah-bah black-sheep! Same is kid stuff, proving nothing. Why are you in this place and not in jail?" Chullunder Ghose retorted. "British, scared stiff, mean to find that contraband. Pragmatically minded secret service experts, reasoning with candour logical in said circes, argue what are agonies of one man compared to destruction of

Cairo and all explosives belonging to British Army of Occupation including Air Force? Can be managed secretly, and Tassim, if too seriously injured or if uncommunicative, can be dropped down disused well in courtyard and covered with stones. There is courtyard. There is well--through window. Obvious."

"How do you know this?" Tassim asked him.

"Person name of Baltis overheard same. Heard Jimgrim say it. Have you heard of Jimgrim?"

"No. Who is he?"

"Swine, devil, U.S.A. American; in pay of British and in love with Baltis who is making big fool of him. She will stick him in gizzard doubtless, or let us hope so. However he said, and I need not say who he is: Tassim deserves fate of rat in trap for daring to get caught. Something in that, too, come to think of it. Nevertheless, important point is present whereabouts of said contraband, known to Tassim only."

"Why to me only?"

"Because certain idiots went and killed themselves by making an experiment. It is true, they blew up Air Force gas tank many other people and an ammunition wagon. But of what use is that, since no one now knows where remainder of cache is hidden? Therefore, he said, making use of Solomon-like logic: go to Tassim and let him tell you whereabouts of cache with absolute exactitude. If Tassim tells you, good. If not, not good--at least for Tassim, whom the police will torture crudely but efficaciously. Nevertheless, if he tells you, and word reaches me, not only will he not be tortured; because the cache will be in my hands and the British will very soon know it--very soon; very soon indeed they will know it. And not even the British torture

people when there is nothing to be gained by it. But furthermore, said he, if Tassim tells you, then I will rescue him before the night is over, although I will never forgive him for having been caught. Henceforward Tassim may consider himself dropped and utterly unknown to any of us."

"Oh, thank God!" said Tassim.

But he was not yet unsuspecting of the babu, who understood that perfectly.

"If you are a prisoner, how are you to get word to him?" Tassim demanded suddenly. "And how do you come to be a prisoner--you and this man?"

Chullunder Ghose assumed his blindest air of impudence.

"Am automatic penny-in-slot astrologer, oh, yes. Can answer all questions on all subjects. But one at a time. And we have so much time to waste before the police bring in their whips and little bits of wire and God knows what else. However, I will tell you since you are curious. This babu is not unknown to notoriety as expert prestidigitator, if you know what that is." Chullunder Ghose kicked off a slipper and began his favourite trick of catching his handkerchief between his toes. "Am also expert opportunist. This man"--with a gesture of contempt he indicated me--"is malpractitioner of disrepute but some skill. Lost his ticket. Got caught selling opium to undergraduates at college where he was teaching how to perform Caesarean operation. Hard up--betted, gambled--lost, of course, and presently wrote someone's name on back of note. So you see how he got into our hands. And he can pull teeth very expertly, so I brought him along, because I happened to know that Sudanese ex-sergeant-major without pension who guards this place has painful abscess. So--you get that?"

Tassim nodded. He seemed to be trying to remember whether or not the Sudanese had a toothache. Chullunder Ghose continued, giving his imagination full rein now that he saw Tassim really weakening.

"Sudanese at gate was uncommunicative about everything except his bad tooth. Told him this man is debtor to me, who am exasperated creditor and will oblige him, for sake of humiliation, to pull tooth gratis. So he admits us inside gate. Am prestidigitator as aforesaid. While disgusting operation takes place, key of this prison discovers itself as if by accident in my hand. Easy. Open door and walk in. However, along comes British officer in uniform who bangs at outer gate. Strict orders--very strict orders to admit no one, you being what is known as incommunicado. What shall Sudanese do? Damn poor devil without pension drawing miserly pay from secret service fund, likely to lose job, sees starvation staring at him, naturally pushes him and me in here and returns to talk with officer, excusing delay on ground of accident to mouth and spitting blood in proof of same. So you see how we got here. We will get out by being let out, after officer is gone and, also, doubtless, after being searched by Sudanese who will appropriate my pounds Egyptian fifty, which is why I said there is no justice when I first entered. Having got out, I will tell him very extra damn quick just where contraband is hidden. Then, before midnight, or not much later than that, you also will find yourself out of this place. So make haste before the Sudanese comes and tell me where the stuff is."

Tassim Bey took his heart in his hands and told abruptly, in the same sort of way that a scared man takes a header into ice cold water:

"In the new tomb east south east of Gizeh--the last one opened, in which nothing was found."

"Very well," said the babu. "And the other Baltis woman, what about

her? Why did you not meet her in the garden of your deserted villa?"

"I was afraid of her," said Tassim. "She looked too much like the other woman. It was uncanny. It made me creepy. But I did go to the garden, because I was afraid not to. And in the dark she looked so like the other woman that--well, I remembered that the electricity never had been disconnected at the main switch, which is in the gate house. So I turned it on. And she screamed and a fuse blew--and I saw her drop something that was white-hot."

"Yes, and--"

"That is all. I went away."

"You let her lie there?"

"I did not know she was lying there. How should I know it? I could see nothing. My eyes were dazzled, and it was dark. I tell you I saw nothing."

"When did you go to Brown's Hotel?"

"This morning."

"Did you tell the other Baltis?"

"No. I tell you, I saw nothing. What was there to tell?"

Chullunder Ghose got to his feet. He bowed to me.

"Let us go, sahib. Am eloquent and unscrupulous person, but words fail me. Kindly kick that door--make much noise; my own slippers are ineffectual. Be good enough to summon keeper swiftly before I forget my immorality and slay this reptile. Did you hear him? He admitted it! He left her lying there."

As the door opened and we passed out he turned and hurled a Parthian shot at Tassim, who sat goggled-eyed, hardly even yet realizing how completely he had been tricked.

"You are not even a mean white. You are not even mean. You are a maggot. May you reincarnate in the belly of a leprous jackal, which is to say, in English, damn your dirty soul to hell!"

Chapter Twelve

"Delphic-oracally minded babu spilling noncommittal verb sap."

The army's precipitate flight from the scene had been strategic. As we threaded our way across Cairo again to find Grim detachments were re-entering the city from several directions, someone had taken the responsibility of letting the men have rifle ammunition, and we saw one volley fired over the heads of a mob that immediately took to its heels, and I think that was the only volley fired that afternoon.

We found Grim at the High Commissioner's in a big bay-windowed room where sunlight formed a golden pool on the enormous Turkey carpet. In the midst of it sat Grim. The High Commissioner was not there, but his secretary was, and so were the legal members of his council. There were also three Egyptian officials of high rank and a British Brigadier-General who was trying to disguise for Grim under an air of professional incredulity. As we were ushered into the room I heard him say--

"Of course, sometimes an amateur does contribute something useful."

McGowan, ahead of me, gritted his teeth, and I saw Jeff Ramsden

turn the slightly deeper mahogany shade that forebodes trouble. Introductions were perfunctory and a trifle hostile. I took a chair beside Jeff. So did McGowan. Chullunder Ghose sat on the carpet close to Grim and I heard him murmur about a dozen words in Pushtu, which was a pretty safe language in that company for an interchange of confidences. Grim made no response and the Brigadier took up the cudgels again.

"I don't see that we've got any information of value from Mr. Ramsden's prisoner. It was an absolutely illegal arrest--"

"Hear, hear," said an Egyptian.

"Who arrested him?" Jeff answered. "I didn't. I did no more to him than I would do to you if you should so far forget yourself as to say to me half what he did. I accosted him. He called me a gross name--I'll repeat it for you if you wish--then struck me in the face and tried to run. So I invited him to run the same way I was going, and we had a difference of opinion on that point. I prevailed. And as for getting nothing out of him--"

The Brigadier interrupted.

"Nothing of any value, I said."

"Yes," said Jeff, "I heard you. We all heard you. And you heard him admit to me that he received his orders from a woman--"

"Who is dead, in the hospital," the Brigadier objected. "He didn't make one definite statement that's of the slightest use to us."

"Keep that personal," said Jeff. "If you mean no statement of the slightest use to you I'll not dispute it. He knows at least of the existence, and perhaps of the exact whereabouts, of a big supply of

those infernal machines."

"Rot-tommy-rot and nonsense," said the Brigadier. "They had a few and used them. If they had had more--and if they had a leader and a definite plan, they would have wiped out Cairo."

Jeff talked on stolidly.

"His boast that plenty more of the things will reach Egypt and other countries without the slightest risk of detection probably means that he knows they are smuggled in small sailing craft. We know of one consignment that reached Marseilles by dhow. Any number of dhows could discharge contraband along the Red Sea coast line."

"Not from now on," said the Brigadier. "Not an unsearched dhow will reach the Egyptian coast. We'll stop that little game. It's stopped already."

"Too late," Jeff answered, "if the stuff is already landed and carefully hidden."

The Brigadier snorted. "It isn't. It's a mare's nest. In the first place, we haven't a scrap of proof that these infernal machines actually exist. I know you think they do; but there's nothing easier than to make even experienced men think they see what they don't see."

"No explosions anywhere?" Jeff asked him.

"Yes, there have been. My opinion is they were caused by Communists, acting more or less simultaneously on orders from Moscow. Dorje? Another chimera--probably invented by that Baltis woman--as imaginary as her own title of Princess. A discredited French spy-- sent here for us to prosecute and save the French the inconvenience and scandal. I object to doing France's dirty work. I

say, send her back to France and let's try using common sense for a change."

Grim was not listening to him; he and Chullunder Ghose were carrying on a conversation sotto voce, probably in Pushtu. The Brigadier suddenly grew aware of that and lost his temper.

"If there's a dump of these mysterious gadgets anywhere in Egypt, show me!" he exploded. "I'll give you two days. After that, Major Grim, you may rely on my determined opposition to your methods."

The Brigadier got up and stalked out of the room. The Egyptian officials followed him, at no pains to disguise their imitation of the Brigadier's contemptuous ill-temper. Instantly then Grim faced McGowan.

"Do his worst at once? That's what I played him for. If he wants to deport our Princess, can he do it?"

"Why not?"

"Can she be forced to return to France?"

"Not if she pays her own fare. But that fool can send an official cable to wherever she does go and she'll be held up at the port of entry."

"I have heard of cablegrams that never reached their destination," Grim suggested. McGowan nodded. "He will deport her to annoy me. See that she goes anywhere she pleases. Now--do you know someone who would lend us one of those Army searchlights in a truck? Could they pick us all up, say, at the hospital? Good. Sorry to seem to use you as an errand boy, but I would do the same for you--I think you know that."

The only one of us who really understood what Grim was driving at was our babu. When he appears to read thought I believe he is exercising an extraordinary logical faculty that enables him to reason like lightning. He has absolutely no respect for anybody's alleged ideals, conventions, prejudices or appearance, but looks beneath those for the actuality and, having recognized it, knows how that type of person will think and behave.

Grim must have told Chullunder Ghose that he would like Jeff's prisoner released. Obviously, to have asked that Brigadier to release the man would have produced the exactly opposite effect. The Brigadier was jealous. And McGowan was helpless, in that instance, because the Brigadier was his senior and might invoke the rules of discipline. But neither discipline, nor seniority, nor red tape was of the slightest use against the audacity of Chullunder Ghose.

It appeared that the prisoner--Mahdi Aububah by name, a Somali of sorts--had been turned over to the red-faced subaltern for safekeeping pending a decision as to what should be done with him. As we passed out to the portico that subaltern approached us, evidently hell-bent on another altercation with Chullunder Ghose; he had probably thought up lots of things that he might have done. He was haughty, hot-tempered and ignorant of the fact that Grim was not an Arab; and he made the crass mistake of thinking that Chullunder Ghose was an obese, unwarlike person suitably to be admonished with a kick. Personally I would rather take my chance of kicking a champion wrestler, who might be all beef and no brains.

As a non-Egyptian Arab he might be expected to get out of the way of a British officer in uniform. At any rate, that youngster expected him to. There was a collision in which the subaltern had the worst of it, although Grim was polite in fastidious Arabic which the subaltern did not understand. Chullunder Ghose, noisily chatting to me about

nothing as an excuse for not looking where he was going, bumped into the subaltern, who lost his balance and fell backward into a flower bed. Chullunder Ghose did not apologize. The subaltern got up and kicked him. Grim was just in time, with a word in Arabic, to prevent Jeff Ramsden from interfering, and Jeff's out-thrust arm stopped me.

Chullunder Ghose, who is nothing if not a surprising person, slapped the subaltern, suddenly, noisily, shamefully, straight in the face; and all the inflammable indignation of about a dozen generations of English squires, now concentrated into one young, peppery descendant, burst into action. "Did you see that, by God--he hit me!"

The second kick missed. Chullunder Ghose--portly, enormous, ridiculous, but remarkably swift in short spurts, as an elephant is or a hippopotamus--took to his heels, and the subaltern after him. With a judgment of speed worthy of a race-course jockey he timed his spurts so as to keep the subaltern exasperated but encouraged. And instead of making for the main gate he elected to follow a path between shrubbery and flower beds toward a building that looked like a garage. At one end of it four Egyptian soldiers stood on guard before a door that seemed to have been left partly open for ventilation, since the room into which it opened had no windows. The subaltern shouted to the four soldiers to stop the babu. They hesitated and then ran toward him. One of them tripped him by shoving a rifle butt between his legs, and all of them, babu included, went down in one whale of a roughhouse.

Gardeners, servants, chauffeurs, grooms, all sorts of people came on the run from everywhere, but kept their distance when they saw the subaltern in charge of operations. And behind the screen that they formed, Mahdi Aububah, Jeff's erstwhile prisoner, slipped through the partly opened cell door and rather casually trotted through an open

gate to the highway and freedom. I don't know whether or not Chullunder Ghose had shouted to him, but I think not: I believe the man had been watching his chance and took advantage of it when it came.

That subaltern was almost precious as a maker of mistakes. Jeff Ramsden, who can out-sprint me by almost two to one, was in time to prevent him from trying to thrash Chullunder Ghose with a stick that he snatched from a gardener. He almost struck Jeff, he was so beside himself with temper. But Jeff's deep voice and quiet manner had a somewhat soothing effect.

"Dammit, he hit me in the face--didn't you see him? I'll have him--"

"No, no, no," said Jeff. "Too many witnesses. Look to your prisoner. He's gone. You'd better catch him."

The rest was merely pitiable. The youngster tried to save his face by abusing the Egyptian soldiers in astonishingly bad Arabic, and two or three minutes were lost while they talked back to him. By the time he had come to his senses and hurried them off in pursuit of the prisoner there was no longer a chance in a thousand of overtaking him, and not one in a hundred even of learning which way he had gone. Chullunder Ghose, limping and rubbing his shin, returned along the path toward where Grim was standing. Jeff turned to me.

"Tell Grim I'll join you at the hotel. I'll overtake that young fool and see if I can't save the day for him. He doesn't deserve it, but if I don't he'll make trouble for us. He'll get court-martialled, and he'll accuse the babu. We'll get called as witnesses. No percentage in that. I'll tell him Mahdi Aububah had not been legally arrested--no warrant, not even a verbal order--so he can't be court-martialled for letting him escape. He probably can be; but if he thinks I'm a possible friendly witness he'll think twice before he sticks a spoke in our wheel."

Grim had not budged from where he stood observing the whole episode. He made no remark, either to me or to the babu, when we got into the car that McGowan had left for us, and he was silent all the way to the hotel, which he entered by a back way as if he were one of the hotel servants. He said nothing whatever for nearly an hour as we sat in Jeff's room with the door ajar while Chullunder Ghose rubbed salve on his injured shin and pitied himself because neither of us took any notice of him.

"In former incarnation this babu was Jeremiah. Specialist in lamentation. Pessimistic optimist, infliction of pain is solitary purpose of omnipotent province. Nevertheless, work head off trying to escape same. What annoys me most is prophetic accuracy of that ignorant child-soldier. Called me bloody babu. Do I not bleed? Yow! I also hurt like agonizing damned in Dante's paradise."

Grim appeared not even to be thinking. Even when Jeff came in and the springs complained as he threw himself on to the bed, Grim seemed to take no notice of his first remarks:

"That boy's in bad. Too many people saw him act as an officer shouldn't. Mahdi Aububah has vanished."

Grim came instantly to life then.

Chapter Thirteen

"I have ordered sandwiches and claret."

Grim glanced at me. "Do you mind getting the Princess? No hurry, if she's in a mood for confidences, but bring her in here as soon as you can."

The Princess herself opened the apartment door. She appeared, I thought, rather relieved to have me call on her, but she was such a magnificent actress and such an opportunist that she may have been merely concealing disappointment. At any rate, she instantly made up her mind to take advantage of me, and as she had a low opinion of my intelligence amounting almost to contempt she made a rather bad beginning. And because I had been annoyed by the way Grim ordered me around, I made a good one.

"Ah," she said, "you notice, don't you, that my trunk is missing. What does that mean?"

I answered:

"I don't know, unless it was true that McGowan's men went through it. I have come to say good-bye. I'm off home."

"You are disgusted? Come--sit down and tell me." Then, suddenly, as I sat beside her on a comfortable lounge, "Of course, Jeemgreem sent you to extr-r-act my se-crets?"

"No," I answered. I began to invent lies as wildly as Chullunder Ghose. "The truth is that he wanted me to come and pump you, but I'm fed up. I'm not constituted so that I can keep on mentally torturing a woman. I would have had you guillotined, hanged, imprisoned--whatever is coming to you. Grim won't do that."

"Tell me, why not?"

"He doesn't tell anybody why or why not."

"Then you don't know what all this means?"

"All what?"

"So many things. They take away my trunk. If they have opened it, they have found three of those--those things. You know what I mean? Will Jeemgreem--will that man McGowan hand me over to the police, or to the military? There is martial law, is there not?"

"Yes," I said, "there's martial law. I dare say they could take you out and shoot you, after a secret trial in which you wouldn't have a dog's chance. Such things happen. But I think McGowan took the trunk in order to prevent that. As long as he hides the evidence, they can't convict you."

"Then what does this mean? There is a Brigadier-General."

"Yes, I know him. Go on."

"To me he came, to ask me about Jeemgreem, and about all of you. Day before yesterday he came to me, secretly, in civilian clothes, giving his wrong name; but my servant discovered his right name. He said there is a cablegram from London about Jeemgreem, and about you others, and about me. He more than hinted that I am beautiful and that he is gallant. Do you see? A threat in one hand, and what he thought was persuasion in the other."

She paused, wondering, I suppose, how stupid I might be. As a matter of fact, I was thinking nobody could blame the Brigadier for feeling a bit gay in her company; her magnetism had a way of stealing on the senses, aided by the perfume she used. Presently she continued:

"That Brigadier-General told me that unless I appreciate on which side my br-read is buttered someone will certainly look up my record. Therefore I knew he had already done that. It was evident that he intended blackmail.

"Presently he became gallant, like a goat but not so engaging. And he asked me where is Jeemgreem. I did not know, but he did not believe me. He said I had better find out or he will have me deported. What does that mean?"

I said: "It looks as if you will be leaving the country. Pretty soon, too. Military deportations are about as swift as telegrams."

"Does Jeemgreem--does he do that to me?"

I nodded. "Seems so."

"Do you agree with it?"

"I was not consulted."

"Do you understand that he is throwing away pr-r-riceless assistance? That he is acting dishonourably? Let him think--let him say what he likes of me--he struck a bargain, did he not? He snatched me away from my environment, at a time when I could easily protect myself. Now will he send me back there, to be at the mercy of men who have had time to cover up their guilt, of which I then had knowledge? Am I to return discredited? I tell you, I will sooner kill--myself."

I think she intended to say she would sooner kill Grim, but changed it. Perhaps I betrayed what I thought. At any rate, she produced a small phial of cyanide capsules, taking good care not to let me get hold of it.

"You will let him do this wrong thing?" she demanded. "Do you hate him?"

"I can't prevent him," I answered.

"Where is he? Do you know where he is? Then come with me to him and help me to persuade him. Do that, and I will always be your friend--always, whatever happens."

I fell in with the suggestion, but not too eagerly, lest she should suspect that was just what I wanted. She rushed into her bedroom put on lipstick, rearranged her hair and changed into a yellow frock as quickly as an actress touching up between cues.

"Now we are friends," she said, "you and I. We help each other. You shall learn what a friend I can be."

She took my arm and we walked along the corridor together, her perfume hinting what her eyes and lips left unsaid.

"If you have offended Jeemgreem, I will help you to be friends with him again--yes?"

In her day she had probably bamboozled scores of men by that quick trick of hers of sex-suggestiveness. But she never once impressed me as a woman who actually was free with her favours; her genius lay in suggesting possibilities and she was clever enough to know that the lure of the unattained is usually lost or lessened in attainment. Not that there was any limit to her tactics, with a goal in sight or danger to be out-maneuvred.

Grim greeted us quite casually, although Jeff seemed nervous, as if they had been discussing a plan that Jeff thought too far-fetched. The smile on the face of the babu confirmed that impression; he loves sheer madness; I believe his heaven will be a place where fat adventurers can skate for all eternity on thin ice.

"Jeemgreem--" she began; but Grim interrupted her.

"Have you a turban? Green--yellow--red--it hardly matters. Thirty or forty yards of narrow silk would be about right. Can you? Would you mind bringing it?"

I supposed he was making an opportunity to speak to me, so as soon as she left the room I began to tell him what had happened. However, I had guessed wrong.

"Afterwards," he said, "if you don't mind. She might come back too soon and overhear."

Not one of us spoke again until she returned with a whole piece of purple Lyons silk. She was gone three or four minutes and during all that time Grim studied his own face in Jeff's shaving mirror. When she came in and gave him the silk he passed it to Chullunder Ghose.

"You do it. Shall I sit here?"

The babu stood behind the chair and began binding the turban on Grim's head.

"Jeemgreem--what means this about a deportation order?"

"What do you think it means?" he answered.

"You get rid of me?"

"You are no use--as the Princess Sitlab."

"Is that a kind way--a proper way--a wise way to dispose of me?"

"I can't think of a better. Can you?"

His coolness seemed to disconcert her even more than the dread of deportation did. The babu, with a face like a Sphinx, went on twisting

away at the turban, arranging each fold with exact precision; and Grim's face seemed to change into some other man's as he sat there staring at it in the shaving mirror.

"Jeemgreem--I will rather die than go to France."

McGowan came in, in uniform, sweating and wiping his face on a dripping-wet silk handkerchief. But under cover of the handkerchief I saw him pass a small package to Jeff, who gave it to Chullunder Ghose, who slipped it into Grim's pocket.

"Hotter than hell," he remarked. "Good evening, Princess. Well, it's all right. Tassim had a French governess for his latest lady-love. She's decidedly out of a job, and she hasn't been paid for so long that she's flat broke. Anything to get home to France. A free third-class passage looks to her like a gift from Providence. I'm giving her your trunk, Princess--that big one that we filched from your apartment--saved trouble--it has your name on it. She'll keep the underwear--the poor girl needs it. Soon as the deportation order comes my men will put her on the train and lock her in; one man will go with her to Port Said, where we have a berth all ready for her on a French boat, which waits for the train and leaves directly afterwards. She can tell her own tale to the French authorities. The Brigadier--"

"May go to the devil," said Grim. "If he discovers the trick he'll be too late anyhow."

Baltis stared at him: "Jeemgreem--what do I do?"

"Change your frock," he answered. "Put on something much less noticeable. Then come with us."

"Come where?"

"I intend to show you. Between now and midnight we take a long chance. You, too. You have fifteen minutes. I have ordered sandwiches and claret."

Part Two--Messiah of Tinsel

Chapter Fourteen

"Is it the key to Dorje's cypher?"

Believe me, Cairo burning kerosene and candles is a very different place from Cairo lighted up. Brown's Hotel was like an old-time monastery; even the shadows on the walls leaped with a sort of restraint that reacted on people and made them move stealthily. The suggestiveness of that subdued men's voices, and a feeling of awe, not far from horror, very soon ensued.

Outside, the streets were in almost darkness, although the starlight helped the dim lanterns of the pickets and patrols and there was some light oozing through the cracks of doors and shuttered windows. The authorities had clapped on a curfew regulation and it was working with the surprisingly sudden efficiency with which most things British do function when the first, invariably contemptuous scorn of the unexpected has yielded to common-sense.

No cars were allowed in the streets, no pedestrians, no traffic other than deliveries of food protected by written permit or provided with an escort. We were stopped at least twenty times by men whose bayonets shone in the lantern-light and though McGowan's uniform was sufficient passport, more than half a dozen officers demanded to know our destination before they would let the car proceed. McGowan gave a different one each time. If reports were actually turned in and coordinated, our behavior must have looked a bit bewildering next day.

Of course, anyone who has his wits about him and is not limited by

scruples or under actual restraint can laugh at any restrictions if he cares to. There is no way to hog-tie intelligence. No form of human government can regulate even a tenth of the population, all the time, against its will. I don't doubt there was plenty of lawlessness under way along those dark streets and in the narrow, polyglot alleys, but there was an astonishing control of the surface of things. Under pretext of protecting them the politicians had been silenced and the men who talk less about liberty, but who do more to preserve it, had once more demonstrated that peace sleeps paradoxically on the points of bayonets. The strategy, so close to panic, of evacuating all the ammunition and then, too soon for the mob-rule maniacs, re-entering the city had succeeded. But I would dearly love to see the official cablegrams that flashed over the wires of the world that night and during the days that followed.

I would like, too, to have been able to read the thoughts of the Princess, who sat beside me on the rear seat of McGowan's car. She was wearing a hooded cape of striped silk—one of those astonishingly simple adaptations that the French make from exotic models, suggesting without defining Oriental inspiration. She had pulled the hood low over her forehead, so I could hardly see her face, although we sat close because Chullunder Ghose was jammed into the same seat on my right hand. Jeff and Grim were on the folding seats in front of us. McGowan sat beside the driver. After a long silence the babu nudged me and said:

"Sahib, difference between ecstasy and torture is merely poetic distinction and poets are crazy. Am passionately tortured by ecstatic blue funk mixed with curiosity and would not swap with Dorje himself. Feel my emotions."

He thrust his wrist into my hand. His pulse was going like an airbrake piston. Then the Princess whispered to me:

"I hope we all get killed in a ter-riffic climax. I am so excited, I can hardly sit still. Where is Jeemgreen taking us?"

Then Grim, turning suddenly, spoke out of the corner of his mouth:

"To see your sister."

I could feel the rigour with which she suddenly controlled herself. If Grim wanted her rattled he appeared to have succeeded. He may have purposely prepared her for a shock, because of his theory that people at too great disadvantage almost never do the thing expected of them. Whether he expected her to behave as she did when the actual shock came, I don't know. I can only report what happened.

In almost total darkness near the hospital two military trucks were waiting for us, one containing a powerful searchlight driven by a gasoline engine and the other jammed chock-a-block with men; their officer was waiting for us on the hospital steps; he saluted McGowan, who gave him directions; he and the trucks vanished.

Then, McGowan leading, we invaded the hospital, where flickering candle-light cast spectral shadows on the white walls. There was someone screaming, in a room at the end of a passage, which enhanced the effect--mystery--gloom--horror. We were in single file. The Princess walked in front of me. I saw her shudder.

"This way," said a surgeon.

They were ready for us. A nurse unlocked a door as we approached and turned her back as we entered. She had been told we were not to be recognized. The surgeon came in with us, but there was a screen in front of the door and he stood behind that with his hand on the key--obviously a man whom McGowan trusted, but who preferred not to know too much about what was not his concern; he was a

cadaverous-looking North-country Irishman, overworked and melancholy.

The room was lighted by two candles, one on each side of the head of a bed, on which was laid out, very beautifully cared for, the body of the woman with whom McGowan and I had talked not very many hours before. In death she resembled our Princess even more closely than she had done in life, but perhaps that was partly due to the candle-light, which softened the lines of suffering. Only the head and shoulders were visible, with dark hair arranged on the pillow a bit too regularly to suggest sleep.

"Dead?" The Princess's voice suggested the clash of engaging bayonets. Silence then, for I dare say thirty seconds.

"Dead," Grim answered.

"Why did you bring me here?"

"To Prove to you that she is dead."

"You recognize her?"

"Yes." Silence again.

"What is your purpose, Jeemgreem?"

"At the moment, to learn whether your statements agree with what she said in the presence of witnesses before she died."

"She was always a liar. And she hated me. She was my twin sister, and we fought from the day we were born. She hated me because I was the elder. She stole my name Baltis. When I befriended her during the war, because we two so resembled each other that she could pretend to be me and I could seem to be in one place when I

was actually engaged in espionage somewhere else, she betrayed me to the Germans. Then, believing I was executed, she found her way to Dorje and again pretended to be me. She made that scar on her lip to heighten the illusion. For a time she deceived even Dorje. And when Dorje found her out, he laughed. 'A too significant coincidence,' said Dorje, 'to be treated according to rule.' So he did not kill her. He gave her a chance to redeem herself into his favour by doing exceedingly dangerous work."

Grim turned suddenly and looked into her eyes that shone in the candle-light like fiery jewels, but of no sort known to commerce.

"How do you know it?" he asked her.

For about ten slow seconds she answered his stare. Then: "Dorje said so."

"When?"

"Not long ago."

"Where?"

"Everywhere! What Dorje wishes one to know, one knows I tell you."

Suddenly she looked away from Grim and turned toward the bed, approaching it almost on tiptoe as if reverence for death offset resentment and she wished to make some sort of farewell gesture. From where I stood it even seemed as if her eyes were closed and that her lips moved, as if she were saying a prayer, as she stooped over the dead woman's face. I saw her draw a very deep breath, as if sighing. And then the light went out. She had blown out the candle and had flattened out the other with her right hand.

"Keep the door shut!" That was Jeff's voice.

"Shut it is," said a voice at the screen.

Then McGowan: "Dammit, where's my flashlight?"

I produced my lighter. It refused to work. I could hear the babu groping on the floor and did him the injustice of supposing he was so scared as to try to get under the bed. Not a sound from Grim. And apparently not one of us had matches. I groped blindly, reaching for the Princess and expecting to be met by a revolver shot. But I clutched Jeff's arm; he was doing the same thing, and expecting the same.

She could have shot us all easily. But suddenly the babu grunted and exclaimed, "I have it!" He had found McGowan's flashlight on the floor. He switched it on. The Princess was standing quite still near the head of the bed.

Then Grim struck a match; there had been a box in his hip-pocket all the time. He carefully re-lit the candles, smiling to himself. Chullunder Ghose laid a hand on his heart and bowed profoundly:

"Princess sahiba, this babu makes semi-absolute salaam. It should be absolute if only you had not let fall that flashlight when you took it from McGowan sahib's pocket. Self am sleight-on-handist in excelsis, plus and then some, as U.S. Americans say with native modesty. Am personage whose praise is priceless. For a female woman that was not bad. Ma'am to you. None but a prestidigitatoress of much promise would have caught it on her instep when she dropped it, to prevent noise. Ma'am I adulate you. Kicking it under the bed was also very verb sap--no end top-hole, I assure you."

"Nom d'un imbecile, you nudged me," she answered, smiling--but the

smile was tart and boded malice. "Strange--strange how women never love me," sighed the babu. "Even wife of my own bosom is indignant with me when she is caught in act of reprehensibility-- not seldom, too, believe me."

Grim looked carefully at the bed-clothes and McGowan turned the flashlight on them, nodding. Even so, it was several seconds before I noticed they were slightly disarranged; they had been moved during those seconds of darkness and rearranged so deftly that only a skilled eye would have noticed it at first glance.

"Wasn't this what you wanted?" Grim asked; and he held out the package that I had seen McGowan pass by way of Jeff to Chullunder Ghose at the hotel--the one that the babu dropped into Grim's hip-pocket while he was twisting on Grim's turban.

The Princess nodded. "Maybe. You humiliate me purposely. What is it?"

"See for yourself."

She opened the envelope. Inside was a small cardboard box of the kind in which druggists send pills to their customers. It contained what almost anyone would bury with its owner--what even a prisoner would be allowed to retain--a cheap bronze chain about a yard long and extremely thin, to which an amulet was fastened; and the amulet looked like a wad of paper very tightly pressed into a leather bag of the sort in which some people carry their watches.

She turned toward the nearest candle as if to examine and perhaps identify the thing. And she was quick. But Grim made a signal to Jeff and Jeff was even quicker; he caught her by both elbows; and Chullunder Ghose filched the thing out of her hand. He tossed it to Grim.

"Why burn it?" Grim asked.

She showed a stiff lip--defiant. But she was hanging on to herself, I could see that. Almost any kind of medical practice equips a man for judging how near a person is to the borderland between hanging on and letting go, and my practice has been peculiarly educative in that respect; but, of course, what is unpredictable is the strength of that last quantum of resistance. And I could see that Jeff was pitying her, as I was also. One by one Grim stripped away the shreds of her own self-valuation:

"It can't be an identification tag. Dorje isn't such a fool as to label his agents."

"It is a talisman," she answered. "There is a mantram written on it. A man from India gave it to me, and my sister stole it."

Grim ignored that obviously lame lie. It might turn out to be ingenious, but it limped. Its value was that it proved she was weakening; but he knew that already.

"And it can't be anything you need in order to do Dorje's work, or you would not have been willing to burn it."

"I am no longer doing Dorje's work," she answered. "Must I strip my heart to you before these people?"

He ignored that, too, not giving her the slightest hint as to whether or not he believed her.

"For the same reason, it can't be anything you need in order to work against Dorje."

"It is nothing," she said. "I told you: it is merely a mantram."

"Then why go to all that trouble?"

"It has sentimental value."

"Then why burn it?"

Because I know it by heart. And it is after all something sacred. I did not wish it to fall into irreverent hands."

"Mine, for instance? Are there--were there ever any duplicates of this?"

"How should I know!"

"You say you know it by heart. And you are against Dorje."

"Yes. But how shall I ever make you trust me, Jeemgreem? You are blind when it comes to women. Men, yes. But a woman--you are without passion--and that is, without understanding. You do not understand me. If you were not so blind, you would see that I truly am in love with you. And when I love, I idolize. And how else shall I make you love me than by proving to you that I am necessary to your very being; because what is your being, Jeemgreem, except doing? Oh, I know you. You and your love and your work are the same thing. Can you not read in my eyes that I adore you?"

"You have just told me how blind I am."

"Jeemgreem, in all other matters--oh, what is the use of talking? I must prove it to you."

"And if your trick had succeeded and you had burned this, you could prove it more easily?"

"You are cruel."

"Because you know it by heart. And if it were burned I might have to depend on your memory?"

"A mantram. What if I know a mantram? What good would that do?" she asked.

"It would be more than good," said Grim, "it would be excellent if it should happen to be the key to Dorje's cypher."

She was silent. "Is it?"

"It is a mantram."

"Is it the key to Dorje's cypher?"

"You are talking nonsense."

"Nevertheless, this babu--being high degree initiate of nonsense--notices that Princess sahiba's fingers twitch like bally tearing into tatters said absurdity! Am destitute; but will bet pounds Egyptian fifty that Jimmy Jimgrim sahib has hit nail on apple of its eye! Oh, whoopee! That is U.S.A., American for Let's Go, Gallagher. Am individual who decoded cypher despatch from German G.H.Q. to Indian revolutionary council--and was locked up afterwards for six months to prevent me from bragging of same, such is gratitude. Krishna! Let me see it!"

It was psychologically perfect--one more instance of the babu's genius at playing into Grim's hands by making himself ridiculous. He touched off her temper. She turned on him.

"Animal! I hope you try to solve it. This time they will lock you in a mad-house!"

He laughed.

"Goal of my ambition! Everybody talking nonsense at same time, free from obligations, debts, responsibilities and labour--three meals daily. Nevertheless, I bet you pounds Egyptian fifty I can solve same."

"Then you with your ape's brain will be cleverer than--" She checked herself and Grim opened the amulet, gingerly unfolding it under McGowan's flashlight. It consisted of parchment-like paper about four inches square with heavy writing on one side of it, done with a brush and Chinese ink. He read aloud:

"Forty-five minus forty-five equals forty-five."

"Obvious," said the babu. "I knew that one."

Grim continued: "Underneath that it reads, 'Bible, McClaughlin's Dictionary, Encyc. Brit. Eleven.'"

"Mantram--poetic--sacred!" said Chullunder Ghose.

"And beneath that: 'One to twenty-eight equals circle. Nine, ten, eleven are one, two, two-two.' That's all."

"Yes, that is all," said the Princess. "It is supposed to be a magic formula."

"Why in English?" Grim asked her.

"It is the most-spoken language."

He smiled.

"In which Dorje publishes commands to his subordinates all over the

world?"

She flared up, possibly because the babu picked up one of the candlesticks and held the light so that he could see every movement of her face and she could not avoid seeing his mischievously triumphant smile.

"You are crazy! I have told you what it is. Why do we stay here? Are we to attend a funeral?"

Grim passed the paper, chain and leather sheath to McGowan:

"You've had it photographed?"

"Yes, here in the hospital. Did it while she was unconscious-- gave it back to her before she died. We've two copies for you-- one enlarged. Are we ready?"

"Not quite," Grim answered. He stepped up to the Princess and Chullunder Ghose held the candle between them. "Is it the key to Dorje's cypher? If not, why did you challenge Chullunder Ghose to solve it?"

"It is not."

"How do you know it isn't?"

"Oh, very well, I don't know."

"I will give you your choice of three alternatives," said Grim. "You may return to France, remain in Egypt as a military prisoner charged with high treason, or cooperate with me. Choose now."

"Do you mean I am to interpret that or--"

"Is it the key to Dorje's cypher?"

"Very well. It is. I won't interpret it."

"I wouldn't trust you to interpret it."

"Jeemgreem, if I thought you would trust me--how shall I make you?"

She stared at him.

"Prove up," he answered. "Are we ready? Let's go."

Chapter Fifteen

"The Lord Dorje, the Daring--the King of the World!"

McGowan drove, letting the chauffeur act lookout, as we went at top speed along the tree-lined road that leads southward toward Gizeh. It was almost totally dark between those trees. The car lights were switched off. Grim sat facing the rear of the car with his elbows on the back of the folding seat, speaking rapidly, economizing words.

"Now the long chance. Jeff's friend--Mahdi Aububah--bad bird--fanatical--stupid--almost sure he brought a dhow-load of Dorje's gadgets overland from the French Somali coast and cached 'em near here. Probably has a tough gang. Tassim told Chullunder Ghose and you, Crosby, that the cache is in the last tomb they opened. We know where that is. It's surrounded now by troops, and if the stuff's there we'll find it. But that's a mere detail. We want Dorje."

"He is not in Egypt," said the Princess.

"No. But you are. And there are not more than ten quite dependable people who know that your sister is dead. Mahdi Aububah had

orders to report to her, and he has no way to know she is dead. In the dark you look exactly like her."

"I don't know him," she answered.

"But he knew her. He had spoken to her. He had given her at least one of those gadgets. At least that's probable. If she had brought the one that killed her all the way from the Cape, it's likely she would have been more familiar with it and wouldn't have got killed. And it's equally probable that Mahdi Aububah is not in command of his party."

"He is too big a fool," Jeff agreed. "I used him once on safari to Kilimanjaro from Dar-es-salaam. Good in some ways, bad in others. No good without someone to keep after him. Taciturn, faithful, brave, persistent--but a damned fool."

"He was allowed to escape," said Grim, "because he almost certainly had nowhere else to go but to his captain."

"Was he followed?" I asked.

"He was. While you three chased that subaltern I sent a good man of McGowan's to keep close on his heels."

The Princess chuckled--maliciously. It was her first chance to get back at Grim by shattering his self-assurance.

"And you drive into the desert, by night, to find that one man? Well--we will have a nice ride. You are lucky, Jeemgreem; but not so lucky as all that."

"The luck was, that McGowan had left a good man at my disposal," he answered. "He has already sent back word by motorcycle from the outpost near the Minah Hotel. We know the general direction to take."

He will be on the lookout for us."

He leaned closer to the Princess and, at a whisper from Chullunder Ghose, I lighted a cigarette so that the flare of the lighter let him see her face better. There was so much wind at the speed we were making that I had ample excuse for flashing on the light at least a dozen times.

"Let us understand each other," said Grim.

"Can you?" she answered. "I understand you. But you me--?"

"You're what might be called a criminal," he said, "but definitions don't mean much. I could have had you guillotined in France, or shot here, and I can hand you over whenever I please to what is known as justice. Some people would criticize me for not having done that already. However, your peculiar genius may prove useful. So I am going to give you a chance."

"What then?"

"You are once more Baltis, but not the same one. You are now your sister. And if you meet Dorje tonight--"

"I tell you, he is not in Egypt."

"No? Well, if you meet him, tonight for instance, remember which woman you are."

"Alors--what else?"

"Who knows?" he answered.

She was silent for several minutes. But the atmosphere was vibrant. Nobody knows what thought is, although science comes closer day

by day to grasping the principle behind thought-transference. But as I sat between her and Chullunder Ghose, and facing Grim, with Jeff's broad back toward me, such a flood of suggestions poured into my brain that my own long-standing prejudice against almost all metaphysical theory was forced on the defensive. I could almost feel Grim's alert neutrality. I could almost equally feel Jeff's arrogant reliance on Grin's genius. I felt sure that the babu, on my right hand, was speculating as to what he would do if he were the Princess; and for the sheer, stark fun of living he was hoping she would do it. She, I knew, was turning over bargains in her mind and was intensely puzzled by the complex knowledge not only that Grim almost never made bargains, but that she herself almost never kept them and that Grim knew it. Presently she said:

"Of course, your information may be accurate. It is possible that you do know where Dorje is. If we meet him tonight, I shall choose between you."

"Very wise. Choose Dorje," Grim advised her. "Because he looks like winning."

"Now you make me wish to choose you, Jeemgreem!"

"Reserve your judgment."

"Jeemgreem, I tell you, if you meet Dorje tonight, you are done for. You can never defeat him--nevaire--without my showing you how."

"Never," said Grim, "is a long time."

I don't think another word was spoken until we drew up near the Minah Hotel. The Hotel was in absolute darkness; not even a candle-light was showing in the windows. On our left the huge form of the grandest and the oldest building in the world loomed utterly unearthly,

against purple night--the other two pyramids dwarfed into insignificance by its majesty more than its size. Gizeh is either the weight of proportion and silence, or the silence of time in the face of eternity, fashioned in stone; I can never decide which. A man who looked like an Egyptian, but who turned out to be a Cockney Englishman, thrust his tarbooshed bullet-head as close to Grim's as he could reach and began whispering, but Grim told him to speak up, so that McGowan could hear from the front seat.

"Followed 'im all the way 'ere, sir. 'E rode a bullock-cart part o' the way, and part o' the way 'e ran like 'ades. Then 'e jumped another bullock-cart. 'E's in the pyramid--the big one."

"Where are the sheikh's men?" Grim asked. He referred to the Bedouins whose claim to guardianship of the pyramid is more or less officially recognized.

"Gone, sir; and it takes something more than a kick or a threat to shunt those blighters. The police 'ere at the station 'aven't been relieved since trouble started. They're grey-gilled and don't know much. Their telephone ain't working, and instead of answering a feller's questions they do nothing but ask. But one of 'em told me the pyramid Bedouins got scared o' ghosts and 'ooked it."

"What do you think?" Grim asked.

"Well, sir, I know them Bedouins 'as scooted; and I know there's more than jus' Mahdi Aububah in there, although the police say not."

"How do you know?"

"I was up close, nigh an hour ago. I seen two, in the entrance, keepin' watch; and I heard 'em speak to someone inside."

"All right. Follow us, and if anyone bolts keep after him. Any sign of the army?"

"Sure. They've drawn a cordon, but it's awful wide. Camel and horse and infantry. They're prob'ly patrolling the river, too, in motorboats but that I can't say. If somebody 'ud offer me a ten-pun note to get through that cordon 'most anywhere, I'd make it easy. It's a joke, sir, if you asked me."

McGowan drove on, up the pyramid road that is white as a bone in moonlight, but on a moonless night like that one it is merely a river of dreamy mystery so dim with gloom that one can barely trace its curve from fifty yards away. A long way from the pyramid he stopped and we all piled out. Grim drew Jeff Ramsden aside; McGowan listened to them while they whispered. Presently Grim beckoned Chullunder Ghose and I was left alone with the Princess.

"Does he think that Dorje is such a fool as to let himself be taken in that trap?" she asked me. Then, since I did not answer because I did not know: "If Dorje were in there, it would mean it is the deadliest possible trap for trespassers. But I think he is not in there. I think Jeemgreem is making us all ridiculous."

It occurred to me that Grim does nothing without motive. He would have asked me into that conference unless he wished me to keep an eye on Baltis. My actual impulse at the moment was to seize her by the back of the neck and shake her, I wanted her scared--as scared as I felt. Fear is very often at least nine-tenths of the substance of discipline; and while I have almost never known Grim's system to fail, as he applies it, I have also almost never trusted it--until afterwards. I agreed with her, only I would have put it more strongly; in my judgment we were going into a blind trap and personal loyalty to Grim was the only excuse for following him. If she should prove disloyal that might be the end of us.

But to use physical violence would have been a bit too emphatic, although I am almost sure she was the kind of woman who is loyal only to a man who thrashes her. My problem seemed to be to trick her, somehow, into cooperation with Grim during the next few, probably intensely dangerous, minutes.

"I hate to be made ridiculous," I said. "If Grim had sense he would confide in you."

"That is it," she answered. "How shall I make him listen to me?"

"Well," I said, "I'll tell you what I think. For tonight it's very likely neck or nothing, and it's too late to turn back. But Grim doesn't trust you. I believe he actually counts on you to try to betray him. And he trusts himself to turn the tables on you. That's his way of finally convincing you that he's the head man; and if he once does that you're done for, he will simply use you as a pawn in his game forever after, just as he uses me."

"Yes--like an err-rr-and boy!"

"I want to see him win this game," I went on, "and I don't believe he will win it without your assistance. The thing for you to do is to convince him that he can trust you, especially if you get an opportunity tonight to do the opposite. Surprise him by your apparently blind obedience. If we all get killed, no matter. If we don't if we get out of this alive--he will have changed his attitude toward you, and after that I'll be able to help you to steer him along the right line. Personally, I think you have more brains than he has."

"I think--a leetle bit you like me?" she suggested.

"I think you're the most intelligent woman I ever met."

"You, too, you have intelligence," she answered. "Good, I do it. Afterwards we help each other. But I think we go into a trap. How gorgeous if we all get killed in one sensational affaire! I adore to die that way."

Then Grim beckoned us and we all went forward in a group, Jeff leading. He looked like a factory owner on a surprise visit of inspection at the new plant, with his fist in his right hip-pocket and his air of deliberate, punchful personality. Chullunder Ghose drew back beside me:

"Did you annoy her? Same was indicated as proper prescription. Always, sahib, always irritate a woman in any emergency whatsoever. She emerges forthwith. Verb sap. Very. Shakespeare, who I was in previous incarnation, should have said, 'Oh woman in our hour of ease, you're no good on a lover's knees; but angry you're a lil--and how! So do get angry--do it now!' Am terrified. A kind of yellowish-purple funk with spots on it is melting me. That is why I quote immortal poetry. Nobody treats a poet seriously. I do not wish calamity to treat me seriously. Is calamity a person? I believe she is a female. Are females persons? Let me get at that one. Let me irritate her."

She was overtaking Grim. He followed, I close on his heels. He pushed past her roughly, although there was plenty of room on the road. She resented it:

"Cochon d'un Indien! Vache!"

"French," he retorted, "is diplomatic language--very! Damn French! Damn you! You are interloper! You imagine you will scheme your way into Jimmy Jimgrim's confidence and make him hate me! Bah! You haven't brains enough! In previous incarnation you were Delilah who

shaved Sampson. But Jimmy Jimgrim wears no whiskers. I bet you think, tonight, you make him love you. I bet you can't! Pounds Egyptian fifty. Take me?"

"Silence!" Grim commanded.

The authorities have made it very easy for the tourist to invade the pyramid. There is a ramp and a system of steps, by which one reaches the opening, about fifty feet above the level of the ground on the north side. As we approached I saw somebody drop to the ground, not by the steps but by using the huge stone courses as a stairway. I don't think he saw us, but he was in a tremendous hurry; the moment his feet were on the sand he took to his heels and ran southward. He was a big man wearing a white smock tucked into a pair of cotton knickers, but it was much too dark to identify him. Grim, quite casually, turned and stared into the darkness behind us. Almost instantly, not more than fifty yards away, there was a sudden flick from someone's pocket flashlight. It was repeated a moment later twenty or thirty yards farther southward. McGowan's Cockney had given chase. Grim resumed his interest in the pyramid.

In another moment we were observed from the pyramid opening. Fifty feet above us I heard voices and someone challenged, in a low voice, as if visitors were expected. The challenge was repeated in several languages--Arabic, Hindu, two that I did not recognize, and at last in English:

"Who are you?"

To me the voice sounded something less than confident. However, there was no time for speculation; Grim pulled me into the deep gloom at the base of the pyramid and whispered:

"Go up with them. Your job is to be mysterious and say nothing.

You're the unknown quantity. Smile, look confident, do nothing, and don't speak."

There was a stone missing from the second course; he pulled himself up into the gap and sat there, perfectly invisible from a distance of two yards. It was no use asking questions. I followed the others, overtaking them just as the challenge from above was repeated:

"Who are you?"

Jeff pushed the Princess forward, holding her by the arm, and she answered:

"Baltis!"

"You come late. He is waiting." The words were English, spoken with a turgid foreign accent. Jeff nudged her and growled something in an undertone. She spoke again:

"I send someone."

Before there was time for the man above to answer her Jeff went on up alone, important looking, as if he meant to buy the pyramid provided it was up to sample. He climbed as if there were no such things as rifles or automatics. The darkness in the mouth of the opening was of the sort that the ancients used to sell in sealed jars to the tourists of those days, and the silence was of the same quality; one's own heartbeats were like the noise of marching men and a wristwatch ticked like the clangour of cymbals. Looming up there against the astonishing starlight Jeff looked twice his natural size until he strode into the opening and vanished.

The Princess stepped nearer to me and I think she was going to whisper, but McGowan prevented her; and then Jeff reappeared,

both hands in his pockets this time. He spoke louder than necessary, I suppose to make sure that Grim should hear him:

"All right. Come on up."

McGowan stayed. "Might be recognized," he whispered. He was only there to make sure that the Princess did not turn aside and hide in the impenetrable shadows. She, I and Chullunder Ghose made the ascent, in that order, and I could hear the babu daring her to try to rob him of Jimgrim's confidence. Halfway up, when she paused for breath, he changed his tone and pleaded with her, wiping the sweat from his face in a way that almost suggested tears:

"Am lamentable babu. Sorry I spoke roughly. Please don't steal all my credit. Give me some chance!"

She ignored him. When we reached the small level space at the mouth of the opening Jeff bowed as if he were her dragoman, and led the way in. I went last then. There were no lanterns. It was darker than death and stifling. I know that entrance intimately, but I had to grope like a blind man, and was not reassured by a hand in the small of my back that held a knife for all I knew, and by a thin voice like a eunuch's that mewed in my ear:

"Longesa--juldee--sita--kabadar--go on--all right--I shove--ham poosh dioonga!"

I despise being "pooshed" from behind but Grim's injunctions had been strict and permitted no speech, no resistance. Fervently, not for the first time, I cursed Grim's *modus operandi*. With the sweat running into my sightless eyes, that hand at my back and that voice in my ear, my nerves seemed all short-circuited, and the noise that the others made, clambering along ahead in pitch blackness, making preposterous echoes, revived a dread of the unseen with which

destiny cursed me the day I was born. Nowadays, almost always, I can conquer it; but not that night. Only they who suffer from the same form of hysteria can gauge what mental effort it cost to climb that ascending passage and arrive at the foot of the ramp of the Grand Gallery in fit condition to remember, let alone obey, Grim's injunctions.

That damned old pyramid invariably reduces me to speechlessness. Perhaps that is why I did obey, although I think I really had myself in hand again. At any rate, I controlled myself when someone pushed past me from behind, although the temptation was almost irresistible to hit out at him, and the next sixty seconds were a nightmare. Then suddenly someone switched on an electric lantern and the strong light caused those incredibly marvellous walls to seem to leap forth out of darkness. Even a premonition, that the man who had pushed past me might be up to deadly mischief, vanished. It always seems to me like sacrilege to stand in that place; and the sight of the names of the swine who have carved them on the immortal granite makes me capable of mayhem. The name of John Smith was about three feet away from my eyes. I turned away from it and brought up face to face with the most extraordinary person I had ever seen.

He was not more than five feet tall. He had an enormous head with a bulging forehead and deep-sunk eyes set wide apart. He had a thin neck that looked incapable of supporting all that weight; a big torso, with a huge stomach and extremely long arms; short, fat legs and enormous feet. He was sweating, and because of the stifling heat in there he had discarded almost all his clothing. His stance was insolent. His upturned nose, with negroid nostrils, indicated a colossal self-esteem. The glance he gave me did more to restore my nerves than anything else could have done. It made me ache to pick a row with him. He and I hated each other instantly, and he sniffed like a dog as he turned and faced the Princess.

We were all in a group--we, that copper-bellied monster and seven others, including the leathery-looking mongrel Swahili-Somali-Hindu who had pushed me from behind. The remaining six were rather dignified-looking men and three of them might be Persians; the other three had decidedly Mongoloid features. He who had shoved me up the passage was the only one who showed a weapon, but that was a shuddersome, wave-edged knife with two blades and an ivory handle. There was no sign of Mahdi Aububah, so I supposed he was the man I had seen scramble down from the entrance and take to his heels.

In a language that I could not identify the copper-bellied captain of that strangely assorted crew angrily ordered the man with the knife to return to the entrance, and he went as if dogs were after him. I remembered to smile, and when the monster stared at me again I thought he looked vaguely disconcerted. Once more he faced the Princess.

"Baltis! Where d'yew get that garments? What-a you been doing all this long time? All gone wrong--we waiting and no message! What-a yew been doing?"

Instantly Chullunder Ghose spoke up. He gave her no time to invent a story of her own that might have upset Grim's calculations, whatever those were. He lied like lightning, prodded by the twin horns of necessity and inspiration:

"Chupp! Be silent, you abominable bungler! Damn fool! She has had orders from Dorje. Let her tell it."

"Dorje?" Copper-belly staggered for a moment. "Dorje is not in Egypt." He glared at me again. I remembered to smile. He lost a part of his arrogance. His companions looked actually scared. He stared

again at her: "You bring me cock or bull tale?"

I only wish I could tell what passed through her mind. Completely mystified, but certain that Chullunder Ghose had spoken as Grim had told him to, and left now to her own resources, there was nothing she could do but, as it were, follow suit. She let her lip curl.

"Bungler!" she retorted. "Where is Dorje? We were to meet Dorje here, in this place."

He of the copper belly backed away from her. "Who has fooled yew? Yew go mad, eh? I am Dorje's man here."

"Where is Dorje?" she repeated.

"Yew not know, eh? Dorje get him a new woman!"

He backed farther away. I saw Jeff's muscles tighten for a scrimmage, and I was getting awfully tired of smiling like a wise fool. I saw copper-belly make a signal with his left hand, and then out went the light. The Princess did not scream, but I heard Jeff close with someone and there was a thud as his fist hit someone else. Then a voice--up aloft at the top of the ramp--said sternly:

"Turn that light on!"

It was so sudden and dynamic that it stopped the scrimmage. It was Chullunder Ghose who answered, loud and high:

"Who are you?"

"Dorje! Turn that light on!"

It was I who found the lantern in the dark and snatched it from its owner. Luck, that--he was making for me. I switched it on. Jeff had

copper-belly in a strangle-hold. Chullunder Ghose had dragged the Princess twenty feet away along the floor of the Grand Gallery to keep her out of mischief; she was struggling, not knowing who had hold of her. She had drawn a long, thin knife. The lantern saved the babu by a fraction of a second.

At the top of the ascending ramp, as calm and cool to look at as if he were the spirit of the genius who built the place--with his back to the gloom of the low arch leading to the Great King's Chamber--incredible, because there was no hint of how he got there-- turbaned, thinly smiling and alert, with folded arms, stood Jimgrim!

"Dogs! Blunderers! Idiots! I am Dorje!"

It was touch and go then. It depended absolutely, solely on the Princess. Staggered, admiring, amused, aware that for the moment the ace of trumps was in her hand, she seemed to hesitate, prolonging the suspense, enjoying it. The others stared at her. She knew; none else did; she was Dorje's woman. Then at last:

"Lord Dorje, you are greater than even I believed. Greetings! Down on your knees, you reptiles! Bow to him--the Lord Dorje, the Daring--the King of the World!"

Chapter Sixteen

"Can't make brain empty. Can't listen."

Dared by Grim and nagged by Chullunder Ghose; perhaps, too, with my argument at the back of her mind, Baltis had reacted perfectly. Grim's gamble--a throw of life's dice in the dark--was too bold and too suddenly done not to delight her.

When, on the spur of that moment, she acknowledged herself as her dead twin sister, and acknowledged Grim as Dorje, she did it recklessly, thrilled by the danger and almost drunk with the daring of the idea. The drama of it had us all by the throat. Grim--turbaned, laconic, inscrutable--suddenly seen in the glare of an electric lantern standing at the top of that agelessly ancient ramp in the heart of Gizeh, would have astonished almost anyone into at least momentary obedience. Grim had gambled on the possibility that Dorje's men had never seen their master; although, when he explained it afterwards, that part of his strategy turned out to have been closely reasoned and at least in line with probability. Baltis almost exactly resembled her sister and Dorje's men had no conceivable reason for supposing she was not the woman who, to their probably certain knowledge, did know Dorje intimately. Grim had gambled on her convincing them. She might have wrecked Grim's chances by denying him before those men, but the really deadly risk Grim took was that he made her the key to the future. If he was going to pretend to be Dorje, Baltis would be in a position to betray him whenever she pleased. She fully realized it. And she showed it instantly by trying to humiliate and score off us.

"Down on your knees, you reptiles!"

Dorje's men did not obey the order, I suppose because I held the light steadily on Grim and as long as I did that the rest of us were in almost total darkness. Grim spoke again:

"Baltis! Come forward into the light!"

She obeyed. I have seen nothing, anywhere, more graceful than her movement as she stood near the foot of the ramp and bowed to him with outstretched arms. I think the feel of that splendid shrine had hold of her and she was acting as Bernhardt used to, her imagination for the moment making real the unreality she played.

"Lord Dorje," she began.

"Silence! Every order I have given has been ignored or bungled in the doing. I blame you."

It was crafty. Inflection of voice and attitude were indescribably suggestive of a swordsman's way of tempting an opponent into indiscretion. She realized it, as he intended that she should. No word, no gesture indicated that she was not his real target. One sensed rather than perceived an invitation to the others to join in and blame her for everything that had gone wrong. He of the monstrous head and copper-coloured belly went into the trap without a second's hesitation, swaying forward into the stream of light; I let him have its full strength, leaving Grim for the moment dimly outlined by the outer rays that made him look more like a ghost than a man.

Torrents of words, in a language I did not recognize. Eloquence killing its own effect by too much emphasis that conjured hollow echoes from the womb of Gizeh and changed it to cavernous sounds like a thunder of waves in an underworld. Stopped by Grim's voice, like a cracked whip:

"Dunderhead! Speak English!" He pronounced the words as if he were using a familiar but not his own native language.

"Lord Dorje, I wished only you to understand!"

"Since when do your wishes overrule mine?"

"Then I speak English. Yes, she is wholly to blame. She has bewildered us. She left us here--huh--so long time in this place-- and no water--none here--none now left. So I sent Aububah. And he came back; and he said she is making love in Cairo. Huh! Kill her! Say it. I

wring her neck!"

It became evident that Grim had assumed the rights and title of an autocrat as absolute as Bluebeard, although the secret of his sway was not yet uncovered. Knowing Grim by that time moderately well, I doubted that his strategy could possibly succeed. He is almost the last man whom one could imagine dealing out sentences of death for disobedience. Determination personified, he is, nevertheless, no killer. Men used to a bloody tyranny are the first to revolt when death and disobedience are no longer synonymous terms. Either they would know he was not Dorje because cruel discipline was lacking; or they would believe Dorje had weakened. Either way Grim was in peril. However, he carried a high hand thus far. His quiet, cold voice was much more effective than vehemence might have been:

"You, who have failed to carry out my orders, dare to advise me whom to spare and whom to kill?"

And then Chullunder Ghose, before the copper-coloured individual could answer:

"Slay the right ones at the right time. Do we follow the Lord Dorje because he is either fierce or merciful? Or because he is wise and daring?"

"Light!" Grim commanded. "You--set a light in the Great Chamber!"

Hesitating--slowly, because he feared some ghastly fate awaited him--the copper-bellied man advanced up the ramp, feeling his way through shadows cast by the light behind him. When he reached Grim he went on his hands and knees and crept through the low opening into the Great Chamber where the so-called sarcophagus stands. There was long silence until light at last streamed and vanished into it. Then copper-belly came on hands and knees and called down:

"He says everybody come!"

Jeff sent Baltis first. I followed last, behind the last of Dorje's men. But I had not taken two steps up the ramp before I heard a sound behind me. It seemed to come from the so-called Queen's Chamber, which is reached through a narrow opening that turns off the ascending entrance passage before it reaches the Grand Gallery. Lantern in hand, I turned back to investigate.

I looked into the so-called Queen's Chamber and explored the entire length of the passage, drawing a blank, before turning back at last to see what Grim was doing and to help if I were needed.

In the Great Chamber Grim was standing with his back to the stone cistern which antiquarians insist on calling the sarcophagus. It does not resemble one; it never was one; it was never intended to be one. Dorje's men had used it as a tank to hold their drinking water, and that, at any rate, was something more like its original purpose than the use that the word sarcophagus suggests. In fact, allowing for different costume, and for the absence of the wood-wind music that was probably essential to the rites, the scene as I saw it may not have been so vastly less impressive than it was in the days when they initiated priest-kings in the same room—five, six, seven thousand years ago.

To my mind, that is the most solemn and the grandest place on earth. It is not large, but its proportions are so perfect that the actual dimensions don't much matter; and the workmanship is so simply magnificent that no human hand has ever been able to equal it anywhere. Light from a dozen candles, set in a circle on what looked like a nail-keg in the middle of the floor, cast velvet shadows on the smooth, red granite walls. Baltis, still wearing her hooded cape in spite of the heat, was standing facing Grim. She might have been a

priestess seeking the hierophantic blessing. Most of Dorje's men stood stripped to the waist, with their backs against the wall on Grim's right, although the copper-bellied man was on his left hand. Chullunder Ghose had shed most of his clothing and looked exactly like a priest of some occult religion, albeit a fat priest given to not too much austerity. Jeff Ramsden in his shirt-sleeves stood near the entrance. Until I came in and stood beside him Jeff was the only genuinely modern touch, because Grim, in that mood and that turban, might have stepped out of a Persian picture; leaping shadows, warmed by the granite background, dimmed the outline of his suit until he might have fitted almost any age and any setting.

Copper-belly spoke: "It is good yew come. She ball it all up. Can't get messages."

"Why not?" Grim demanded.

"How? How get them? Too much worry! How make brain blank, and all that excitement? Sit still--sit still--sit still--nothing!"

Said Grim: "What is worse than a fool?"

"Nothing," the man answered. "Nothing."

Then, although I did not realize it at the moment, Grim took hold of and began to follow up the thread that was to lead to all the information he needed:

"You accuse her. But you are a fool, and I know she is not one. Answer now--and don't let me catch you lying. Have you forgotten the general orders?"

"No, no. I forget nothing--nothing!"

"It is easy to say that. Prove it."

"Lord of men, he said--"

"Who said?"

"Lung-ten Rim-po-che, your councillor. He came to me and said--"

"Where did he come to you? When?"

"In Baghdad. Now it is nearly four months since he came to me, in the house between the shops of Gabriel de Sousa and the Parsee Jamsetjee. He came by night. He said: Now! He who calls himself Mahdi Aububah takes a dhow-load of the thunderbolts and--"

"Whence? From what port?"

"From Karachi, All-wise. Whither, I know not, but some place north of Bab-el-Mandeb. The meeting place, he said, is this place. Huh. Me, I am to wait for others, who will come and obey me. But I am to obey her. Huh. Because she knows it all. Huh. Orders-- he said shall come as usual to me. But I am to tell her. Huh. Obey her. Huh. Couldn't get orders. Couldn't hear um. Huh. She said--"

Grim made a sign of impatience. "She shall speak for herself in her turn. I perceive the fault is yours. Have you been drinking?"

"Water. Hot. Too little. Out of that. We filled it half-full. Huh. All gone now." He pointed at the cistern.

"You say you can't get messages?"

"Huh. I said, too much disturbance. Can't make brain empty. Can't listen."

Grim took another long shot in the dark: "There is no disturbance. This is the best place in the world. What is the matter with you? Have you forgotten the key?"

"No."

"Are you ill?"

"No."

"Have you not had enough training?"

"Huh. That may be. High there--low here. Hear it all in mountains."

"Couldn't you hear in Baghdad?"

"Not much."

Then the longest shot of all. It was a shot that saved civilization:

"I will have you tested. If the fault is not yours, then you shall be employed on other business. Otherwise--"

The man was trembling. "Lord Dorje--"

"Go to my place."

"Which place?"

"Perhaps I had better rid the earth of such an idiot!"

"But how--Huh--how I get there? Officers all on lookout--Bombay? No chance. Karachi? No chance. Sikkim? Bhutan? Nepal? Huh. Not a rat get by--not now--not now this happened. Huh. How you get there?"

"Do you question me, you bungler!" Grim pointed with his forefinger at Jeff Ramsden. "You will go with that man. He is not suspected. He will take you through all barriers. He will protect you; and you will show him the road to my place."

"Huh. I don't know it."

"What is the nearest to it that you do know?"

"Chak-sam."

That is at the crossing of the Tsang-po, on the way to Lhasa. Go there. I will send word. You will find a guide awaiting you. Give him the signal but answer no questions and ask none."

"Which signal?"

"The same that I have been sending you, these days past, and that you say you can't hear! You dog, you have forgotten it!"

"No. Huh. How could I forget that?"

Grim smiled scornfully. He glanced to his right at the others, who were standing with their backs against the wall. They were frightened. I think they would have backed through the wall if they could. "You are all bunglers! It begins to seem to me some bungler chose you. Do you know anything? Which of you knows the signal?"

Each man made a different gesture of assent. They all knew it, but none betrayed it. I thought Grim was stumped. But I was reckoning (as Grim was not) without Chullunder Ghose. The babu piped up:

"Humbly this devoted servant makes salaam--and ventures to remind your Mightiness that the signal was recently changed. Perhaps these miserable people only know the former one. That might account for

much of all this thussness."

Jeff Ramsden, with a subtlety that one would hardly have expected of him seconded Chullunder Ghose.

"It is against the law to give the signal unless there is need!"

Grim nodded. "It is a wise law. I will not change it. However, there is need now. I command it. Let them give the signal."

"Which way?" demanded copper-belly, and Chullunder Ghose stepped promptly into that breach:

"Mightiness! This babu bows! Wisdom of sparing this individual was not apparent until now to anyone except the All-wise! But I now perceive what you did--that he has an element of merit, since at least he guards that signal! He is not like the fool who betrayed it to--"

He stopped abruptly, staring at Baltis, who looked too innocent not to be up to mischief. She was standing naturally, with her hands at her sides, not smiling.

"Thought so. Old signal! Look here!" He held his hands exactly as the Princess held hers, with his left thumb touching the palm of his left hand. "Four-eh?" He moved his right hand, thumb in natural position, merely to call attention to it.

"Five, eh? Now reverse it. Right hand, four--left hand, five. Then reverse it again--left hand, four--right hand five. I said it was old stuff, didn't I? Forty-five, minus forty-five, equals forty-five. They have been making that old signal during last five minutes. Now let us sing hymn 'Bicycle built for two,' which is appropriately up-to-date!"

Grim smiled at the Princess. "You, too, Baltis? Are you using the old

signal?" I don't believe he knew, or she either, whether she had done it deliberately in order to help him or half-unconsciously from force of habit. But he was so pleased to have learned it that he offered her a chance to lead into his hand again. She did it.

"Dorje," she answered, "don't show these blunderers the new one. They are too stupid. Send not one, but all of them to Chak-sam."

Grim nodded. "Nevertheless," he said to copper-belly, "when you reach Chak-sam, use the old one. It will serve your purpose."

Chapter Seventeen

"Harlem!"

We all have our besetting sins; and almost all our sins, except the cowardly ones, are simply more or less distorted virtues. My one predominant obsession, that has got me into endless difficulties, is a craving to row a bit more than my weight. I don't know how to await my turn, and stand aside, and let the other fellow do his own job unaided. For a man of my temperament it is not easy to learn to do that. But it sometimes happens that a vice turns inside out and becomes, for the moment, a qualified virtue. It did that night.

It occurred to me to patrol the pyramid interior again, and discover what McGowan might be doing at the pyramid entrance. There was not going to be any fight in the Great Chamber and I was simply wasting time there as a mere spectator. Besides, Jeff Ramsden could probably lick that whole crew single-handed, to say nothing of Grim and Chullunder Ghose, who are resourceful experts when it comes to rough-house tactics. Baltis, furthermore, appeared to me to be playing Grim's game loyally at last, so that she did not need any more watching than Grim and Chullunder Ghose could devote to her

while Jeff stood sentinel over the only exit from the Chamber.

So I took a flashlight that Jeff had seized from someone, slipped out, not doubting that Grim would notice me, and groped my way downward toward the entrance. It was a good thing that I am no believer in discarnate entities who haunt this earth of ours; it would be easy for a superstitious person to go crazy, alone, inside that pyramid. The light served perfectly to stir such shadows as not improbably gave birth to all the legends about ghosts and demons, and it seemed to multiply the silence as well as to destroy all sense of earthly time and space. Before I had gone twenty paces down the great ramp I had begun to feel like a dead man in another world. It seemed like an eternity since I left the others in the Great Chamber. I could not hear their voices. My mental picture of them was as dim as of the half-remembered scenes of years ago. Bats added to the weirdness, flitting past me so closely that I could feel the wind they made. I had to remind myself repeatedly that I don't believe in "spirits"; but I only mention that because it helps to explain what condition of mind I was in before I was halfway to the entrance.

I hurried, not at all sure I was not hurrying for fear of that dreadful darkness and the solemn echoes of my footfall. Sounds ahead startled me. I switched off the flashlight and slipped it into my pocket to leave both fists free. I had almost reached the point where Al Mamoun's men dislodged a triangular limestone block a thousand years ago and thus discovered the ascending passage, which is still blocked by a tremendous granite plug. Al Mamoun's men quarried around that through the softer limestone, so that the passage makes a forced turn and the going is not particularly easy. There I waited, irritated by the ticking of my wristwatch because it sounded to me like the beat of a hammer on brass. I could hear footsteps.

One by one--there is no room for two at a time--eleven men, each

one with a lighted taper in his left hand and a wave-edged dagger in his right, came stealthily around the turn and paused before beginning the ascent. Although I was close to them I was probably quite invisible unless the light from their tapers should gleam on a stud or a button. I closed my eyes as much as I could do and still see, to prevent my eyeballs from reflecting light. And I tried to examine their faces; but that is not easy to do by smoky taper-light that makes incalculable shadows leap and intermingle in the Cimmerean throat of Gizeh.

I thought I could recognize one as the man who was sent by copper-belly to the entrance; and another, I was almost sure, was the man Aububah. If it was he, he knew Grim by sight and probably by name; he also certainly knew Jeff; and though he might mistake the Princess for her sister, it was impossible to imagine him not denouncing Jeff, and Grim too the moment he should set eyes on them. There is no other way out of the pyramid--no possible escape. We were like rats in a trap. I could see the butts of revolvers protruding from more than one cummerbund. And I had no weapon.

Flocks of thoughts occurred to me, including the exactly accurate, unwelcome one that I was scared stiff. I could not imagine why McGowan had left the place unguarded, or why Grim had not ordered that motor-truck with its officer, searchlight and squad of infantry to keep within hail. Excepting the two faces that I thought I recognized, the others all looked like those of Afghans, or at any rate of Northern Indians; and the only half-likely guess I could make was that these were the guards of "thunderbolts," to whom Mahdi Aububah had run when we first approached the pyramid. The man whom copper-belly sent to watch the entrance might have gone instead to bring Aububah back; these others might have insisted on coming also. But if so, where was McGowan's motorcycle Cockney?

The men at the rear began to talk impatiently, obviously urging the others forward, although their words, in a strange tongue, reached me in a jumble of echoes. I had to stop them somehow. It occurred to me that most of them were probably as scared as I was, and they had no means of knowing I was unarmed.

"Ya ashab, min di?" I demanded. "Ho there, who are you?" I made my voice as solemnly portentous as I could--not too loud, but sepulchral. And I suddenly remembered the silver case in which I always carry a few concentrated drugs for use in emergency. I snapped the lid. It sounded like the click of a revolver being cocked. Nine of them, in panic, promptly fled around the corner of Al Mamoun's quarry-hole. However, the other two came forward, which was not so satisfying.

It was not Aububab. It was not the man whom copper-belly sent to guard the entrance. I had never seen either of them. Holding the flashlight out at arm's length, so as to remain almost if not quite invisible, I switched it on full in the eyes of the first man. He was no Oriental, although he was dressed in a cotton amami, smock and loin-cloth, and his skin looked almost butter-coloured. His features were negroid, but a lot too intellectual and too nearly like a white man's not to suggest something other than jungle and desert. His resemblance to Aububah was vague after all; it almost vanished in strong light. His eyes, I thought, were used to spectacles, although he wore none at the moment. I could see one gold tooth.

"Harlem!" I said abruptly. Then, before he could answer, and forgetting for the moment that there are tough men where I did not doubt he came from: "Put that rod down butt-first on the floor where I can reach it!"

He was scared, or I should have died that instant. But he was as tough as they come. Instead of obeying he pulled his weapon and

emptied all six chambers at me. All six bullets clipped the stone within inches of where I crouched. The din in that narrow passage was terrific and I suppose that scared the wits out of the man behind him, who fired too. His first shot almost winged me. His second shot smashed his companion's backbone. He fired a third shot that seared the skin of my right fore-arm and went out through the sleeve at the elbow. Then he turned and ran. I could hear all ten men scampering like frightened animals toward the entrance. But I could also hear hurrying footsteps behind me. I seized the dead Negro's revolver and reloaded it with shells that I found in the roll of his loincloth. A man leaped out of the dark. I almost shot him. It was McGowan. He laughed. "I saw those fellows coming, so I hid in the Queen's Chamber, hoping to surprise them from the rear. However, it can't be helped now." We went together to the entrance, but there were a million pitch-black shadows. Any number of men could have hidden within fifty feet of us in the gaps of the pyramid courses. It was several minutes before we dimly saw dark forms hurrying across the sand toward the second pyramid.

Then Grim came, in a hurry. "Are you hurt? Sure? Put some stinkum on it, anyhow. Who did the killing?"

I told him. He seemed to be listening to me, as it were, with one ear and with the other to be alert for footsteps. But suddenly he concentrated on me.

"Listen, Crosby. This is my fault. I ought to have made things clearer to you. I wanted those men in here. That's why we left the entrance unwatched."

I objected. "How could you have tackled them? Eleven armed men--and on top of that other gang?"

"Easy. They'd have had to duck to get into the Great Chamber. Jeff

would have disarmed them one by one. If they had turned back they would have had to deal with McGowan behind them."

"What if they had tackled McGowan first?"

He shrugged. "Still easier! Mac would have acted bellwether and led 'em straight into the trap. Was Aububah among them?"

"No," I said, "but that was what I feared. He might have been, and he'd have recognized you. He'd have told them you're not Dorje."

"That might have been a good thing. When that copper-bellied fool discovered what an ass he'd made of himself he might have blabbed all he knows. He hasn't told it all yet, by a long shot, but we have the signal, and we know as much as he does about Dorje's headquarters. We can get to Chak-sam on the Tsangpo without his help. I know now how Dorje transmits his orders, although we've work to do on that yet. And we have the key to his code. But I need to find out whether his agents can communicate with Dorje, and if so who does it, and how."

"Doesn't Baltis know that?" I suggested.

He nodded.

"Yes, undoubtedly. But what a chance for her to get the whip hand, if I had to depend on her!"

"Then why not let her go to prison?"

"Because I count on her to do the wrong thing at the right time, and to give us the break that we'll need as thirsty men need water."

I sighed.

"Then we're off for Chak-sam?"

"Yes. The authorities can deal with Dorje's agents easily enough. They're fine-tooth-combing Cairo now, and the same thing is going on in a dozen countries. We go after Dorje."

"Then what are we waiting for?"

We were gazing through darkness that was the shadow of the pyramid-- ponderous--seeming almost as heavy and solid as Gizeh herself. Beyond that zone of gloom the desert was made vaguely luminous by starlight. Away in the distance there were what looked like enormous fireflies, of which, however, there are none in that bone-dry land. The long cordon of troops was at ease; men were lighting their pipes.

Grim did not answer, so I asked again: "What are we waiting for?"

"For those men, who just now ran from you, to do something. I don't think they will dare to leave that dead man lying there; they'll want to bury him or dump him in the Nile. And they won't dare to wait until morning. If we've any luck they'll send Aububah to investigate. And if we're awfully lucky--just plain dog-lucky and my hunch is right--the man they may have come to meet may possibly be on his way to meet them."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. But I suspect it could hardly be that copper-bellied fool, who I think was chosen for his job because he has a certain sort of mental receptivity."

"Shush!" said McGowan. "Here comes someone!" And we ducked back into the total darkness within the entrance.

Chapter Eighteen

"Eight-six-four-one-nine-seven-five-three-two."

It was not Aububah. It was someone in the pink of condition, who could spare the breath to whistle softly to himself as he climbed in the oppressive heat radiated by the pyramid. It was someone who knew the way perfectly, to whom almost total darkness presented no obstacle whatever. And it was someone either utterly devoid of caution or else so sure of himself as to feel that caution would be out of place.

The moment his head reached about the level of our feet Grim flashed a light full in his face, but he took no notice of it. He was a white man, wearing dark, smoked spectacles. He had a short brown beard, carefully trimmed, and was very neat in his whole appearance. His hands were in the hip-pockets of a suit of tussore silk, well tailored. Except for the spectacles he looked like one of those athletes who refuse to grow old and retire; a man of means, perhaps, who delighted in mountain climbing, or perhaps an explorer. He looked like a man whose self-assurance was the result of the achievement.

"Bertolini!" McGowan whispered.

Everyone who knows Egypt at all has heard of Walter Sandro Bertolini, the blind antiquarian so cordially hated by the dealers in antiques because he could tell the age of things by touch; well hated, too, by Egyptologists because of his irreverence for their opinions, and because of the intolerant originality of his own. There is hardly an important newspaper in any country that has not printed his vitriolic comments on the findings of men whose judgment is regarded as authoritative. His own book on the pyramids of Egypt has been

condemned by almost every important critic in the world. The sort of man who would rather be wrong all by himself than right in good company, and yet who had the mortifying gift of being right so often that it was impossible to ignore him. He had never told how he was blinded--never mentioned it--resented questions on the subject--prided himself on being able to dispense with eyesight. Certainly he had abnormally sharp ears; he heard McGowan's whisper.

"Yes," he said, "Bertolini. Forty-five years old this morning."

Grim answered him: "So that forty-five years ago you were--"

"Forty-five!" he remarked. "What silly piffle! If you know who I am, why go through all that rigmarole? I'm Bertolini. Who are you?"

"I'm Number One," Grim answered, "sent to warn you. However, put me through the rigmarole. I might be a spy."

"Very well. How do you count nine?"

"Eight-six-four-one-nine-seven-five-three-two," Grim answered, "and the date being the thirtieth, the key is two-two."

"Which would that be?"

"Second volume of McClaughlin's Dictionary."

"All right. Who is with you?"

"Baltis--among others."

"She is dead. I know it. Died in hospital. Not hearing from her I naturally supposed there had been an accident. I made my own enquiries. They were so secretive at the hospital that I knew she must be in there. I got the story from the nurse, who used to be a friend of

Isidore Toplinsky, who works with Rothov."

I always carry a pencil clipped to the edge of my handkerchief pocket. I felt McGowan reach for it and I heard an old envelope crackle as he wrote down both names.

"I told her to tell that story," Grim answered. "Let me get my hands on you," said Bertolini.

Grim pushed me. I stepped between them. Bertolini fingered me with the uncanny supersensitive blind man's touch that suggests a portrait painter's stare and a surgeon's exploring finger-tips combined in one.

"H-m! Medical? Military? What name?"

Grim, from behind me, rested his chin on my shoulder.

"Major Robert Crosby," he answered.

"I'd have known if you'd given your wrong name. But what does it mean? I advised Dorje to let the military alone. The time to undermine the armies is when the panic sets in. Army men always go off half-cocked. I suppose it's you who brought on this wretched fiasco in Cairo. I warned Dorje to let natural unrest take care of things, and let the Communists--reds--radicals take the blame. Has Dorje lost his wits? Here's Egypt rotten with nationalism-- India seething--China committing suicide--the Kurds boiling over and being massacred by Mustapha Kemal so thoroughly that all Persia will go hysterical--Mussolini with a million Italians in prison-- England, Germany, the United States with millions of unemployed-- native unrest in South Africa--religious strife in Malta--civil war in Brazil and Bolivia--Russia reducing bread rations in order to buy machinery with which to stave off absolute bankruptcy-- Australia flat broke--Japan so worried by internal politics that she's even willing to reduce her Navy--Spain on

the edge of a revolution--the French war party, Poland and Yugoslavia abetting them, itching to thrash Germany before Germany gets too strong-- all Germany drilling under the guise of athletics--an almost perfect situation, not quite ripe but ripening faster every minute. And that damned fool Dorje spoils it by this penny fireworks policy of blowing up cruisers and burning a bit of cotton in a warehouse!"

Grim pushed me aside, which was a relief. There is something horrible about fencing with a blind man; it was made worse, not better, by his confidence that no one would do him violence, and by the obvious fact that some of his faculties were amazingly developed.

"I was sent," said Grim, "to call a halt. The signals have not been coming through."

"Stuff and nonsense! They have. I've had 'em all," he answered. "I've relayed 'em. Effectively, too. Do you know of the riots in Alexandria? Caught the authorities napping--perfect! Scores of young students all over the world are learning to pick 'em up better and better. You say Baltis is here? Let me talk to her."

Grim nudged me. "Do you mind bringing her?" But Bertolini heard that and objected.

"None of your inspired conversations, thanks!" He pushed past Grim and vanished into the dark passage, going much faster than a man with eyesight could have done; he evidently knew every inch of the way intimately. McGowan remained in the entrance. Grim and I followed, hurrying with the aid of the flashlight; but we did not overtake the blind man until we found him kneeling beside the dead body of the Harlem Negro. He spoke as if he could see us with his shoulder-blades.

"Who killed Honey Foxman? Shot in the back. What had he done? Scared you? Good tough nigger, and no harm in fifty of him! I could handle Honey like a pet dog! Counted on him, too, to do a lot of good in the United States; he was the sort that can start a riot in no time. Who shot him?"

"I did," Grim answered. "He was bragging too loud about his friend Bertolini."

"Is that so? Mentioned me by name? I wonder how he knew my name? He had never seen me. He knew me as the spirit of Rameses. I never spoke to him except in a dark room."

"How did you know it was dark?" Grim objected. "You can't even feel light."

"Idiot! There aren't windows in a tomb! Why do you suppose I've preached, day in, day out, for years, that there isn't a tomb worth hunting for on the site of Cairo? I've a marvel of a place. I'm the voice in the tomb. I had Honey Foxman studying to be Master-magician of Osiris, reincarnation of Hamarchis and Captain of the Cohorts of the King of the World in the United States!"

Grim took one of his intuitive long shots: "Too many people know about that tomb. Honey Foxman bragged about it--one more reason why I shot him. I could walk right to it."

"Smart, aren't you!"

"Yes. It's my job to be. You were blaming Dorje just now. I'm not sent here to blame anyone, but to straighten out this mess if it can be straightened. Blame will be apportioned afterwards. Is there room for fifty people in that tomb of yours?"

"Fifty? Five hundred."

"All right. Take my man there. He's a greater expert than even you are. There's no co-ordination. You're running one department--someone else another--and so on. Send out a call for your men--I mean the head men, not the rank and file. We'll have a conference. Does Mahdi Aububah know the place?"

"That idiot? No. Baltis was supposed to get in touch with me, so that I could tell her to tell him where to deliver the thunderbolts. They should have been in my place long ago. If they had been, there would have been none of this premature rot and nonsense."

"How are we to get them in there now without being caught?"

"I don't know," Bertolini was fingering the dead man's body. Grim was watching him. "Perhaps after all we'd better blot out Cairo and have done with it."

"Maybe," Grim answered. "Let's find out first what Dorje has to tell us. Dorje sees things on a big scale."

"All right." Bertolini had found what he was looking for. It was in the dead man's amami, which is a sort of turban. Whatever it was, he slipped it into his pocket. Then he started forward. He had not gone more than a dozen paces before Grim said:

"Half a minute, there's blood on you, off Foxman. Take your coat off." Grim pulled the coat down over his back by the collar so that his arms were pinioned. "No, it's not blood after all--mere innocuous dirt. Go ahead." He jerked the coat back in position.

"Damn you!" Bertolini remarked, without emphasis but with a coldly vicious intonation. "I will have you understand I don't like being

touched!"

"I sympathize," said Grim. "I hate it, too. But blood on your coat, at a time like this--"

"You have picked my pocket!"

Bertolini faced us, livid with indignation. I turned the full light in his face but he seemed not to know it. Rage changed his entire expression; he was no longer a handsome man; he looked like a maniac, and he thrust his lower jaw and neck so far forward that almost a hump appeared between his shoulders.

"Hand that thing back!"

"What thing? Perhaps you dropped it?" Grim held what he had toward the rays of the flashlight, so that I saw it, too. It was a tiny, blue memorandum book of the kind that expensive jewellers give away as an advertisement. There were only a few words on each page in fine Italian handwriting; but beneath them, and sometimes over them, Foxman had scrawled other words in pencil.

"I never drop anything!"

"If it's important I advise you to go back and look," Grim answered. He pulled out his own notebook and I held the flashlight while he copied the entries, doing it as swiftly as some illustrators draw. And Bertolini, needing no light, retraced his steps fretfully, stooping to feel the granite floor with fingers that were as good as another man's eyes; it took him several minutes because he left no inch unfingered; Grim had finished copying before the blind man reached the corpse. He passed the memorandum book to me. I followed Bertolini and said: "There--is that what you're looking for?"

"What? Where? Where is it?"

I dropped the little book on to the dead man's back (he was face downward), and at the same time made a noise on the stone with my foot so that his ears should not catch the sound of the book falling. Then I told him what I saw. He pounced on it--fingered it.

"Hot!" he remarked. "You had it in your fingers!"

I answered: "I would have, if I'd seen it first. What is it?"

"None of your business!" he snapped and turned back toward where Grim waited for us. But he did not pause when he reached Grim. He hurried forward, muttering, and because he knew the way so well he soon outdistanced us, so that Grim had opportunity to whisper:

"Now we're all set! That's a list of the names and addresses of nineteen people. French--Greek--German--Italian--English--Egyptian. Bertolini seems to be the kingpin; Foxman was his messenger, among other things. Have you got that gun? Whatever you do, don't shoot Bertolini. We need him."

Grim whistled--three notes on an ascending scale. The babu, carrying a lighted candle and looking like a pot-bellied Roman senator, came waddling down the grand ramp and met Bertolini midway. He was an utterly impassable obstruction and exceedingly polite about it:

"Salaam, sahib. You are King of England, doubtless. How is Her Majesty? Yes? No? Thank you, I am very well. And if, as your Majesty says, I am damned, I am at least damned pleased to meet you. No, am obesity made manifest and cannot make room for you or anyone. No, you are mistaken. I am not that fool who is the temporary tenant. I came to count the money in the gas-meter. It was not there. I suspect

Queen Cleopatra of having come to life to collect more revenue for one of her gentleman friends. Are you the landlord?"

One can always count on Chullunder Ghose to clown through anything to gain time. He has been known to hold up the Bombay-Calcutta train for an hour in order to prevent a Maharajah from keeping an appointment with a banker; he got thirty days in jail for it, and in the jail he made the acquaintance of a man with whom he cheerfully agreed to bomb the Viceroy; so that the Viceroy is still in the land of the living. He gave us plenty of time to overtake Bertolini. And then:

"We would like to talk to the Princess," said Grim.

Bertolini objected: "No, no. I will see her alone." But Chullunder Ghose had already grasped the essentials of the situation; he had turned and scurried back ahead of us, and Grim said:

"Careful, Bertolini! Watch your step. There's been some oil spilled here and the ramp's as slippery as ice. Let me walk ahead of you."

"Oil?" he retorted. "Nonsense! I could smell oil fifty feet away if there was any."

But, as luck would have it, there had been some cooking done and someone actually had spilled oil within smelling distance. Bertolini sniffed, detected it and became a shade more gracious.

"No, no. I don't need help. Don't touch me. I tell you, I hate it."

However, he let Grim go ahead of him and Grim went slowly. By the time we reached the head of the ramp Chullunder Ghose had had ample time to use his fertile imagination.

As those who know the pyramid will not need telling, at the top of the

Grand Ramp there is a low passage about three and a half feet high that leads into a small ante-chamber, from which there is another short, low passage into the Great Chamber. Bertolini, negotiating the slippery summit with the ease of a cat, ducked exactly at the right moment without groping, stood upright the moment he reached the ante-chamber, crossed it, ducked again without groping and passed through the second passage. Grim remained in the ante-chamber, motioning to me to follow Bertolini.

The candles were all lighted, and someone had produced two oil lanterns as well. Jeff, with his back to the wall near the entrance, jerked his head to call my attention to two men who were not in the Chamber at the time I left. There could only be one possible explanation of that. Above the Great Chamber there are so-called chambers of construction, very difficult of access by means of notches cut in the south-east angle of the Grand Gallery. They must have been in hiding up there; and the fact that Jeff now had two revolvers, one in each hip-pocket, was good enough evidence that he had disarmed them as they entered. They looked like Hindus, and they were filthy with bat manure. One wore spectacles; the other was dressed as a European; and they both looked like young intellectuals of the kind who make the rounds of the universities before returning to India to envenom politics in the name of spiritual vision. Excitable but not excitingly attractive men.

Baltis, sick of the heat and tired of standing, was on the floor, on her own folded cloak, with her back to the wall, close to where Jeff stood. The others, except copper-belly, were all leaning against the wall; he leaned against the cistern, with his elbows on it, rolling his great head sideways to watch first one, and then another. Chullunder Ghose had already squatted on the floor at the right hand of Baltis, close enough to her to whisper, although I doubt that he could have done that without Bertolini's keen ears detecting it. Bertolini went straight to

her, exactly as if he could see.

"Are you Baltis? Why didn't you come straight to me?"

"I have Dorje's orders."

"And a fine mess you've made of them!"

I could see Chullunder Ghose touching her shoe with his fingers; she kicked his hand away irritably. It may be that the momentary irritation, added to the insolently domineering manner of Bertolini, prevented her from playing her own hand. Anyhow, she craftily protected Grim by admitting that she did not know who Bertolini was, and then intentionally blundering to bring an awkward climax to a head. She was quite capable of doing that. I believe she still cherished the thought of finally betraying Grim, for the sheer mischief of asserting her own genius, and it would not in the least have troubled her that she must die too, if she could only make her end dramatic and sensational. Perhaps she thought that opportunity not sensational enough.

"One would think you were your sister," Bertolini went on, snarling. "How many times have you told me what a treacherous fool she is, obeying her own inclinations instead of orders. And now you do the same thing! Why the devil didn't you come to me?"

That stung her. There had plainly been a more than common jealousy between those twins. It made her hate the man who spoke of her sister's criticism. But she needed a clue as to how to answer him, so she still sparred for an opening, and I held my breath. I think we all did.

"Do you wish me to tell you in front of all these people?"

"Who are they?"

"Ku-sho and his company."

"That fool! Useless idiot! Skin him alive! I asked you, why didn't you come straight to me?"

If she had thought for a week she could not have imagined a retort more suitable:

"I was ordered to investigate you before trusting you. Dorje is far from pleased. Reports have reached him. The reports seem false. So I will come and see you now. But if you are wise you will make me a full report of all your doings."

"Oh." He turned livid. His tyrannous temper so changed his expression that I thought for a moment he would seize her throat and try to throttle her. However, he mastered his facial muscles, and in a moment there remained only a smile of malignant cunning that he probably supposed was pleasant.

"Very well. Come now and see me. Come to my place. I will show you everything."

"Tomorrow," she answered. "I am too tired now. I must sleep."

"Where?"

Chullunder Ghose spoke up for her. "The sahiba will go to Brown's Hotel, Suite A."

Bertolini nodded, obviously memorizing the room number.

"Who are you? Are you the fat fool who got in my way just now?"

"Am fat wise man. Am expert who invented formula that, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one make forty-five; and one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine make also forty-five; and by subtracting one from the other we have self-same figures in another order, namely, eight, six, four, one, nine, seven, five, three, two--which once again is forty-five; and we have key to code which puzzles unintelligence departments of lots of governments. Therefore speak to me respectfully. Am Ph. D. of University of Guile. Am pundit plus."

"Are you the tinker who is to come to my place to advise me?"

"No, the thinker! Am appropriately learned expert to do any emergency job whatever. If the boss says Sizzle on a hot plate, this babu invents asbestos anti-sizzlum pad, like camouflage on top-side lid of Tophet, and squats as per invoice. Did the boss say, Do it?"

"Yes. Get a move on. I came here on donkey-back. You'll have to walk."

"Am good guesser. I guess I won't walk--not all that distance! Hercules was penny-ante charlatan compared to this babu. Hercules was what U.S.A. Yankees call sucker. Self am reincarnation of Adam, who let Eve pick apple, ate same and did not give her any."

"Nonsense!" Bertolini answered. "I and my donkey are well known and can get by sentries unquestioned. You will get through, too, if you walk beside me."

"I don't wonder you need an investigation!" said the babu. "Which of you manages Dorje's business--you or the donkey? How do you suppose a big fat man like me, who can be seen from a mile away, would come to a place like this, on Dorje's business, without as good credentials as the King would have if he were travelling incog.? I am supposed to be--in fact, I am--a trusted agent of the Indian

Intelligence Department. Do you think Dorje employs only nit-wits? Do you think you could have escaped police investigation if there were not more than one important Egyptian on Dorje's secret list? I envy you your naive vanity! You believe yourself a crafty king-pin, which must be very pleasant; but you are actually only a little piece of the machinery, under observation, and replaceable. I came here by motor-car. So did this lady. We go back by motor-car. And so do you. We drop her at the hotel. Then we go to your place. And if you think you are the only guileful conversation salesman who can get through a line of sentries, you are going to learn something. You are safer with me than I with you."

"My donkey--I can't leave it here," said Bertolini. "It would be recognized."

"Can it ride in motor-car? You need your brain investigated, not only your behaviour! Your donkey shall be brought to you tomorrow--unless someone needs it for another purpose. Now let us go to your place. Come on!"

Out-bullied, the blind bully smiled malignantly, stared all around him as if he could see, turned suddenly, and walked out, stooping under the low entrance without using his hands to feel his way. Baltis went next, hustled by Chullunder Ghose, who was in a hurry to get a word with Grim. But Grim was no longer in the antechamber.

Chapter Nineteen

"So I will bring on all of us a tragedy, unless--"

As I have said more than once, that ramp is slippery. Baltis-- small blame to her--collapsed from the heat and sheer weariness I had to carry her down the ramp, in no way aided by the irritating dance of

the electric lantern that Chullunder Ghose held as he hurried to overtake Bertolini and to find Grim. Bertolini, of course, was unaffected by light or darkness; leaping and bewildering shadows made no difference to him. I believe that I, too, could have done better in absolute darkness, since I knew the way almost as well as he did. Jeff's shout, from behind me, did not help matters.

"Look out for yourself, Crosby!"

Jeff, as I learned afterwards, had entered the antechamber, on his way to the step at the head of the ramp, where he hoped the air would be more breathable. He intended to remain there and to keep Dorje's people inside until Grim should decide what to do with them. But as he ducked through the opening into the ante-chamber, both those bat-fouled Hindus doused the lights and rushed him. He collared one. The other scrambled out between his legs, but Jeff caught him by the foot and held on. Everything would have been all right if panic had not seized the crew that remained in the Great Chamber. They had been fooled and had betrayed their master; they may have hoped, in one mad rush, to undo the betrayal by destroying us. Or, they may have been suddenly seized by an animal impulse to fight their way out of a trap and abandon everything--escape--hide--vanish.

At any rate, they rushed Jeff. It possibly occurred to them that the very last thing he would do would be to use the two revolvers he had taken from the Hindus. If so, they guessed rightly. Probably no man ever lived who was more dependable than Jeff in a matter of that kind. He was so utterly loyal to Grim that he would rather be killed than put a hitch in one of Grim's plans. Grim needed time to send Bertolini away with Chullunder Ghose. Bertolini must not be alarmed. And God knows there was noise enough without revolver shots.

But how to describe that fight in total darkness! It is impossible. I can't

even remember the order in which incidents occurred, any more than one can remember details of a nightmare. It was almost as quick as a nightmare--nearly as confusing; and the psychological effect of fighting in the very womb of Gizeh, overwhelmingly outnumbered by men whose organization and plans were still almost as mysterious as the origin and purpose of the pyramid itself, must be considered before I am blamed for a hazy account of what happened.

I had a flashlight in my pocket. To reach it I had to set the Princess down and before I could use it the whole scrambling avalanche of hysterical humans was on top of me, with Jeff on his back in the midst of it. Two men's teeth were in his right arm (but I did not know that until afterwards). His left fist, though men were hanging on it, was going like a piston. So were his legs, though men were clinging to those too. As a matter of fact, before he reached me, there were three men out of action, one dead, with his skull crushed on the edge of the granite step at the top of the ramp. That dead man was Ku-sho--copper-belly-- but none of us knew it. Jeff was giving them plenty to keep them occupied, and he was using head as well as muscles. He had thought of the revolvers.

Naturally, every single one of those scrimmaging madmen had thought of them too. That was one reason why they were all on top of Jeff together. But he had thrown the revolvers away; one slithered past me, down the ramp. One man, who had a wave-edged dagger, was so eager to grab the revolver that he forgot his own weapon until about the moment when the scrimmage reached me. When he did remember it he drew and plunged it to the hilt between the shoulder-blades of the Hindu who wore spectacles, where it stuck tight. But that was another thing learned later on.

Instinct governed me. I picked up Baltis to protect her. Down I went--down under them, as the weight of all those scrambling humans

struck my legs, and I clung to my burden as we used to hug the ball on the football field, wishing to God some unexpected referee would blow his whistle. Fighting never did amuse me, anyhow. I believe Jeff likes it. Someone smashed me in the mouth, and I declare it was Jeff, although he says it wasn't, because if it had been I would have no teeth left and it only loosened two. It felt like an eternity before we brought up, all in a pulsating heap together, at the wall at the foot of the ramp.

Then Jeff's prodigious strength had something firm to use for leverage. He was like an earthquake. I suppose I helped him, although I imagine not much; I was almost half out from the shock of that blow in the teeth. He hove that mass of humans off him something in the way that blasting powder heaves off debris. And he had his wind left, which was more than I had.

"Where's your flashlight?" he asked.

The flashlight answered him. I had dropped it when I went down under. I suppose it slid down with us. One of the Mongolians had picked it up and now he used it, directing the light straight at us, to his own undoing; Jeff's fist struck him like a hammer on the jaw and he crumpled, but the flashlight crumpled with him-- smashed to smithereens as it struck the stone floor.

However, that brief flash of light was actually all we needed and we were safer in total darkness once we had the lay of things. Baltis was as limp as a corpse and I supposed she had suffered internal injuries in spite of my efforts to protect her. Jeff was bleeding. I knew I was, although nothing to matter. But the enemy were in a bad way. That one glimpse of them was as encouraging to us as reinforcements would have been. Jeff's fists and feet had done terrific punishment, and they were not the sort of men who thrive on that stuff; whereas the more you hurt Jeff, the more deliberately gamely he fights and the

keener his sense of strategy, which sometimes does not fully wake up until he is rather hard pressed.

"Into the passage!"

He shoved me with his elbow. He admitted afterwards he would have knocked me into the passage if I had as much as hesitated; and it is a fact that he once saved Grim's life by a punch in the jaw that knocked his head out of the way of an Afghan's tulwar. If there's fighting, you either jump when Jeff says jump, or you get moved on in spite of yourself, your self-esteem and your opinions. He takes full charge of operations. And he grins immensely afterwards, if you should waste words on remonstrance.

There was nothing whatever for me to do but to back away into the darkness, carrying Baltis who was not particularly heavy and who was beginning to show symptoms of recovering consciousness. Jeff backed down the passage after me and we retreated step by step until we had passed the entrance to the so-called Queen's Chamber. There Jeff halted and I heard his fist swat someone like a pole-axe; whoever he hit crawled into the passage toward the Queen's Chamber and lay there calling to his friends; I think two, or perhaps three, of them followed him, and Jeff let them go by because they were as good as out of action in that low, narrow tunnel.

And then Grim came. "Are you fellows hurt? You've saved our bacon! I was afraid Bertolini would hear the rumpus, but Chullunder Ghose clowned a panic and made enough din to drown yours. He almost carried Bertolini to McGowan's car. They're waiting for Baltis. Is she all right?"

He had a flashlight but did not use it. I heard her murmur, "Jeemgreem!" and I think she threw an arm around him.

"Jeff and I will do the rest of this," he said. "Get her to the car and on your way back tell McGowan what has happened."

So I don't know just exactly how Grim discovered that copper-belly was dead. I only know that between them they drove all the rest of that gang into the Queen's Chamber and that Grim got a clip on the forehead that made the blood run into his eyes.

My head was a bit woozy, but by the time I reached the entrance and the fresh air I felt almost fit to carry Baltis back to Cairo. I believe I would not have minded trying! I defy anyone to hold that woman in his arms and not like her, to put it mildly. In attempting to tell this story as it happened, I have probably not done her justice. Idiot and malignant little traitress though she was in some ways, she was wonderful in others. I laid her on one of the pyramid courses and wondered whether it would be safe to strike a light in order to look through my pocket kit of first-aid remedies.

There was no sign of McGowan. I could hear what sounded like a motor-truck, but it was impossible to judge its direction or how far away it might be. Baltis, as most normally healthy people do, had begun to recover the moment that decently breathable air reached her lungs, and it is one of my heretical theories that nature, once stirring, is best left to her own devices, so I put back the kit, proposing to give her about two minutes before carrying her further. However, I overestimated her need. She sat up without help and spoke low but audibly, which was a very certain symptom of returning strength.

"Where is Jeemgreem?" (I answered her.) "Do you think he will trust me now? I could have betrayed him. I could have caused you all to be killed. I could have escaped with those men; and I could have done much work for Dorje elsewhere. Now--do you think--will Jeemgreem trust me?"

I answered, I was sure he trusted her. But I did not say he trusted her to get the breaks for him by trying to betray him. However, I believe she understood me. I was probably not in such good shape myself that I could talk without giving my meaning away.

"What do you do with me now?" she demanded.

I told her: "To the hotel."

"You tell Jeemgreem I am not so simple as he imagines. I love him. You say that. And because I love him I will help him as no one else can."

I said: "He counts on you to do that."

"Yes? But does Jeemgreem count on me to help him for philosophic reasons? I am as pragmatical as he is! Furthermore, I am as ruthless! If you have true affection for him you will tell him what I say."

I promised.

"Very well. Then, say this: he is winning--just this little skirmish, and that makes me love him more than ever. But the big fight comes, which he shall not win unless he loves me also."

It was a strange time and place to discuss the strategy of love, in which some idiot has said that all is fair. But she seemed on the verge of revelation, and although Chullunder Ghose was waiting and probably half frantic with impatience, I cast about in my mind for an answer that might tempt her to indiscretion. However, there was no need. She continued:

"He may think that he can leave me here in Egypt. He may think that

he can silence me by shutting me in prison. And he is ruthless enough. But I also, I am ruthless. I enjoy to die dramatically, as I always did do, in every life that I have lived-- and there are plenty of future lives in which to love each other. It would be too tame if there were no tragedy once in a while. So I will bring on both of us a tragedy unless he--"

Interesting, but not important, as I saw it at the moment. Threats nine time out of ten amount to nothing. So I picked her up and carried her as fast as I could toward where we had left the car. However, when I told Grim afterwards about that conversation he took it seriously and said he would not dream of leaving her behind, and always after that he treated her with a shade more show of confidence than formerly. I say, show of confidence. From first to last he never once confided in her; and he never once accepted as a fact one single scrap of information from her except such as she revealed in her efforts to win the whip hand over him. So far, she seemed the only really capable agent Dorje had. The others, the moment danger showed itself, seemed to run around like ducks with their heads cut off. But all conspiracies are like that; there are never more than half a dozen, if as many, dependable desperadoes--all the others merely follow those if they succeed--desert them if they fail.

For the moment Baltis, who was a genuine desperado, had Chullunder Ghose to deal with; and he was as full of exasperation as a boiling kettle, having Bertolini on his hands and being anxious to get away before Bertolini could learn what a trap he was in. The chauffeur was a thoroughly reliable old-timer of McGowan's, stupid enough to take no interest in anything but food and wages, clever enough to seem more stupid than he was in order to avoid mistakes; so there was no anxiety on his score. But there was an awful risk that some more of Dorje's men might appear at any moment and give the game away. Bertolini was perhaps not exactly suspicious, but he was

puzzled and as I drew near the car I heard the babu say to him:

"As to that, we will see what messages we get when we sit quietly in your place."

The moment I opened the car door and began to help Baltis in, the babu turned on me and damned me like a criminal to help bolster Bertolini's growing doubt of him.

"You keep this important agent waiting while you philander in the darkness! Just because you heard me say I will investigate him you forget that he is the head man here until or unless removed by direct order from headquarters! I will report you to the Lord Dorje himself as one who grows slack at critical moment!"

Then he nudged me by way of apology, as if that were necessary, and turned his tongue loose on Baltis, who was much less likely to endure his impudence, her sense of humour having had a hard siege.

"Damn you!" he exploded. "You women! You keep everybody waiting, always! If the King of the World succeeds in spite of women he will work a miracle! I have told him that not once but many times! If he fails, it will be because of a woman--I have told him that, too!"

She perfectly understood that he was merely talking for Bertolini's benefit; and the importance of keeping the blind man deceived until we had uncovered his secrets, must have been equally clear to her. It is not likely, either, that she had forgotten Bertolini's comments on her own shortcomings and she probably understood she was in danger from him. But she could not resist her natural impulse to annoy the babu and, if possible, to make his blood run cold with foreboding.

"Yes," she retorted. "Dorje's fate is in a woman's keeping ever since he announced himself! Yours, too!"

"What is that--announced himself?" Bertolini demanded. But then the car moved off and I was left standing, wondering what new dilemma was in store for our ingenious babu. I wished I had kept Baltis with us. She could have ridden the donkey. If she had happened to get killed, we could have spared her, it seemed to me. I had already forgotten I felt sorry for her.

Chapter Twenty

"It's only being caught off-stage that actually hurts."

Like most successful men of action, McGowan had a genius for choosing his assistants. If a less efficient and alert man than Lieutenant Allison had been in command of that motor-lorry with its searchlight and squad of infantry, that night would probably have been our last on earth. However, I must explain what had happened.

After listening to learn what line Chullunder Ghose would take with Bertolini, and having assured himself that copper-belly and his gang were not being troublesome, Grim left the ante-chamber and hurried for a conference with McGowan at the pyramid entrance. There he yielded to McGowan's protest that it was unsafe to neglect those visitors who had fled when Honey Foxman was shot in the back. They agreed to signal for the motor-lorry, and to do that McGowan had had to make a circuit of the pyramid, which takes time.

He did not dare to signal from the entrance, because of the risk of being seen by Dorje's men, and there was the added difficulty that he did not know exactly where the lorry was in hiding. So, as I say, he made a circuit--and then climbed the pyramid--no mean feat in total darkness. From the summit he had only dared to make three or four quick flashes, but he had been answered instantly, and by the time he had got to the foot of the pyramid Lieutenant Allison and the lorry

were almost within hailing distance. However, he did not dare to hail them; Dorje's men might be lurking anywhere in the shadows.

He took the lesser risk of walking out to meet the lorry, getting in its way and hoping rather than expecting not to be shot by some keen-eyed riflemen. Luckily, Allison spotted him. So McGowan got into the lorry, and from that moment there began to be action that would have satisfied even old-time movie patrons.

I am not quite sure that McGowan had not lost patience with Grim's peculiar tactics, although he never dropped a hint of it, that I heard. At any rate, with or without Grim's concurrence, he had decided on a clean-up; and one of the most marvellous things I have ever seen was the instantaneous, mechanically perfect response of the cordon of troops from the moment the lorry went into action. Someone--I have no idea who--not only had trusted McGowan implicitly, but had imposed exact cooperation in a plan that must have been decided on, in almost no time at all, at a conference during the day's confusion.

As the lorry approached the south side of the pyramid McGowan ordered the searchlight turned on. It flooded all the lower courses of the masonry with a white glare in which hardly a snake could have hidden. It was answered instantly by a revolver shot from one of Honey Foxman's gang lurking somewhere in a gap in the broken masonry; he probably aimed at the lens in the hope of smashing it, but he hit the driver of the lorry, whose crew cut loose with a machine-gun while Allison himself took the wheel and two men picked up the wounded man. Then the lorry came on again, spurting rifle and machine-gun fire and wiping out the shadows with its roving eye. One moment there was a broad path of light in front of it; the next it was sweeping the pyramid; and there must have been twenty-five or thirty men in hiding, every one of whom aimed at the light and tried to

smash it with revolver fire. Each shot from the pyramid courses was instantly answered by a belt or half a belt from the machine-gun, and in the glare from the light I saw several men come tumbling headlong.

Two thoughts worried me. One was, whether the car containing Chullunder Ghose and Bertolini was already far enough away to permit the babu to invent a plausible enough explanation of the firing, which the blind man's sharp ears could not fail to detect. The other was that the searchlight could inevitably sweep in my direction in a moment. There was nothing to distinguish me as friend or enemy--no cover where I was at the moment--nothing for it but to walk straight forward, wondering what the next world looks like, if there is one. And sure enough, about fifty bullets clipped the macadam road on either side of me before McGown spotted who I was and yelled to me to come and attend to the wounded driver.

Unless you have steady light and instruments, there is not an awful lot that you can do for a man with a revolver bullet in his shoulder, especially in a crowded motor-lorry that is bumping over sand and broken masonry. However, I stopped the bleeding. By that time there was no more shooting from the pyramid; they were turning the searchlight in every direction and potting at fugitives. I had time to observe what the cordon of troops was doing.

Searchlights--I would never have believed there were so many in all Egypt. They were advancing ahead of the troops in a wide arc with one end extended toward the pyramid and the other, away to the south of us, curving around toward the Nile. They did not, of course, at one time make a perfectly unbroken zone of light in front of them, but there was not an inch of ground that those searchlights did not sweep, and it was impossible to see beyond them except for moments when two lights diverged and one could glimpse between. One could only imagine the supporting troops, converging like ribs of

a fan. I wondered what would happen if that tremendous quantity of active electric current should disturb the as yet uncovered cache of Dorje's thunderbolts. What would happen, for instance, to the ammunition in the men's belts? I did not know they had none.

Meanwhile, there was another of our men hit and McGowan himself was half-stunned by being pitched off the back of the lorry when we struck a lump of limestone masonry that lay covered with blown sand; so I had my hands full, although McGowan recovered rapidly and very soon took charge again. They maneuvered until they had the searchlight turned full on the pyramid entrance--that is to say, at a considerable upward angle, and to do it they had to back away about a hundred and fifty yards, so as to avoid impenetrable shadow on the few flat feet where there is standing room.

The maneuver made the lorry an almost perfect target. A mere handful of Dorje's men, instead of following the others across the sand and being shot down, had climbed to the higher courses and now kept up a determined, long-range fire with their revolvers in the hope of putting the searchlight out of action; they could have escaped then pretty easily toward the Nile, where they would at least have had a slim chance, although there was undoubtedly a whole flotilla of boats on the watch. They were clever; they never fired twice from the same spot, and it is not easy to aim upward; they had acres of irregularly broken masonry in which to hide, and they only needed one lucky hit to smash the searchlight or put the power-plant out of business.

Allison solved it. He suddenly switched the searchlight off, as if it had been smashed, and the din the engine made before they throttled it helped out the illusion. Even above that din we heard one man shout to the others from higher up. I caught the word homar (donkey). I told Allison where Bertolini's beast was standing tied to a lump of broken

granite; it was a fine white Muscat mare as capable of speed as any animal of that size can be; to the imagination of a desperate fugitive, particularly if he happened to be wounded, it probably seemed like lightning on four feet.

I had signed the donkey's death warrant, but she never knew what hit her and she had company into the next world, if that was consolation. Pausing, directing the searchlight, counting seconds, calculating how long it would take those men to scramble down the courses, Allison suddenly switched the light on. He gave no order. The machine-gun stuttered. Five men and the donkey went away from this world with the suddenness of shadows caught by sunlight--only that these left their shadows in a graceless heap behind them. I heard a sergeant:

"Lad, y're learning! You may buy beer on the strength o' that. I'll drink wi' you!"

Then Jeff--gigantic--he bulks like a barge in darkness--standing in the entrance, shouting down to us to prevent a hail from the machine-gun. The searchlight, swerving upward, caught him and reduced his size as if he had been re-focussed.

"We've prisoners as soon as you can spare some men!" 'Allison went in, and six men after him. McGowan stayed in charge of the lorry; he spared me one man and I went to see if there were any wounded among the machine-gun's victims. I found three, of whom one was almost dead. The second one we came on--he was lying on the second--lowest course of masonry--struck upward at me with a wave-edged dagger and had to be held down by the rifleman while I improvised a tourniquet to prevent him from bleeding to death. The third man fired his last shot as we drew near; it clipped about a third of an inch of skin and hair from the side of my head but did no other damage. He had a smashed leg--it was almost shot off--but he tried to hide himself among the shadows, and when we did what we could

for him he bit the soldier through the hand.

We had to return and get help, and even so the utmost we could do was to carry those three wounded men and lay them on the sand where they could be found by an ambulance crew later on. We had water for them, from the riflemen's bottles, and there was a first-aid outfit on the lorry that provided temporary bandages; beyond that and a few cigarettes they had to take their chances, which were nothing to feel cock-a-hoop about. We had no time to search them or the dead for clues about Dorje just then. Grim came, looking like a serious casualty himself because of the cut on his forehead; but he took one look at the semicircular cordon of advancing searchlights and then spoke to McGowan:

"Signal, if you don't mind."

"O.K. Signal," said McGowan.

Up went the searchlight skyward and described a circle three times, then descended and was switched off. That was twice repeated. There was sudden darkness. Almost exactly together the advancing searchlights were switched off, one only, away to the rear, continuing to send a long pencil of light toward the sky. It was possible then to see the troops behind the searchlights; companies and squadrons had closed in on one another until they looked like one sickle-shaped brush-stroke painted rather deeper than the midnight gloom around them. They were grimly mysterious-- ominous--almost impossibly silent.

"Shall we go?" said Grim.

McGowan left two men in charge of prisoners and wounded. Jeff climbed into the lorry and demanded antiseptic for the bites in his arm, so my attention was again occupied, but I did not miss much.

We jolted forward slowly without running lights, skirting the second and third pyramids and narrowly avoiding open tombs that were hard to distinguish from shadows. Grim whispered to me:

"This looks like catching a mouse with a herd of elephants, but wait and see. If Dorje's cache is where we think, they might have got through to Cairo with enough dingbats to destroy the city. They're desperate. I should say we've one chance in a million."

I asked the obvious question: "Why not wait for daylight?"

"Too many people got the wind up," he answered. "The politicals want Cairo cooled off, if it should leak out that there's a cache of these thunderbolt things in the desert. We're lucky there's a red-hot general commanding; he doesn't believe a word about the cache, so Mac says, but he's giving us full rope to prove our theory or eat crow. He's all right. But he'll try to make us eat crow at the show-down. Why not? Who wouldn't? So I think there'll be fireworks."

"Then we start for Chak-sam?"

"Not unless we're right on this hunt. If there's no cache where we're looking for it, they'll remind me I'm a United States American, to whom a visa to visit India cannot be granted just at this time for fear of the danger to my health and morals. However, they play fair. They don't like us outsiders on the team. But if we pull this off they'll give us *carte blanche*--almost."

We had passed the third pyramid and swung on south by east on bumpy ground. McGowan ordered one flash from the searchlight then, to show our whereabouts, and it was answered by a zig-zag movement of the beam of light behind the troops. We began to go slower. Suddenly we stopped. Allison switched on the running lights. McGowan's motorcycle Cockney leaped out of a shadow and came

running toward us, exposing himself to the light for fear he might be shot unless recognized. He was out of breath and unable to talk in a low voice; his speech came in gasps, so we all heard what he said, although McGowan jumped to the ground to talk with him":

"Sir, you're close up! There's nigh on fifty of 'em, scared desperate, all 'iding in and around that tomb. Them that couldn't crowd in dug a funk-'ole for 'emselves in the sand what come out o' the tomb. They've killed Mahdi Aububah with the butt-end of a rifle, maybe thinking it was 'im who brought the troops down on 'em. They've got lots o' firearms, but I couldn't get near enough to tell what kind."

"Did you overhear anything?"

"Yes, sir, but not much. One man said in Arabic that they'd better die there than be hanged like dogs on a Christian gallows."

"How far away are they?"

"'Alf a mile. Maybe a bit less. Maybe a bit more. I dunno. I've 'oofed it."

"Where's your motorcycle?"

"Busted. Pitched 'ead-first into a open tomb and cut my 'ead; it's all bloody."

So I had one more job of bandaging, but I heard what followed. McGowan, Allison, Grim and Jeff went into conference, as the business bosses say at tea-time. They agreed to signal to the general. Up went a beam from the searchlight and McGowan, with Grim agreeing word by word, dictated to Allison, who wrote the message down and then dictated to the sergeant-signaller, who jerked a little gadget and made Morse code flashes on the sky.

"Cache believed discovered. Reported held by more than fifty riflemen. Distance about half mile. May we wait for daylight?"

It was nearly five minutes before the answer came dash-dotted by the searchlight at the army's rear:

"Send demand for unconditional surrender, failing which within sixty minutes action will ensue without further warning."

"Orders are orders," said McGowan. "He can't say afterwards he wasn't told. He doesn't believe in the thunderbolts."

"He never will," Grim answered. "Some men can't believe what isn't in the books. However, he's a good sport. We can't grumble. Who goes?"

"You do," said McGowan. "You're likeliest to be able to talk them into unconditional surrender."

"I would like a witness," said Grim.

"Yes, of course. All right; Allison, you go with him."

"And the guide would save time. Is he fit for duty?"

"Me, sir? That ain't duty, it's a pleasure! My 'ead's as good as gospel--'tain't broke--only shook up!"

"And a bodyguard," said Grim.

"Make haste then--pick your own."

"Care if I take my own crowd?"

"Course not."

So there were four of us, including Jeff and me, who followed that excellent Cockney through the darkness with nothing but his sense of direction to guide us. He was as keen as a terrier hunting rats. He was one of those men whose passion it is to pull out chestnuts from the fire for other people, well contented if only his beneficiaries make the utmost use of what he finds. A priceless man, impossible to bribe or frighten.

A handkerchief was too small, so we fastened a shirt to a stick and took two flashlights to illuminate it. Grim took the flag. He divided us:

"No use all getting shot."

Twenty paces to his right went Allison--Jeff twenty paces to his left. I followed, twenty paces to the rear. And the Cockney led, like the fellow who carries the drag for a crack pack, that is to say not thoughtful for our comfort. He took an almost straight line, and the going was so evil that we took a full eleven minutes to negotiate that scant half-mile.

We arrived breathless in the bottom of a hollow like the trough of a wave, caused by wind having whipped out the sand; and for a minute we all lay there, breathing deep. Then Grim moved, and the Cockney said:

"Straight up ahead of you, sir. Not an 'undred yards now."

So we climbed to the top of the sand-wave, where Allison and Jeff switched on the flashlights and Grim stood bathed in light with the white flag waving slowly as high over his head as he could hold it. I counted ninety seconds before at least a dozen heads showed fifty yards away and a harsh voice shouted:

"Di e di?" ("What is that?")

"Arba'in Khamseh!" ("Forty-five") Grim answered.

The entire conversation took place in Egyptian Arabic, and there was not a great deal of it.

"Sixty thousand dogs!" came back the answer.

"That is the true word, but who told it to you?--and who are you?"

"Have you heard of Jimgrim?"

It was a reasonable question. He is so well known by that name from end to end of the Near East that it was hardly likely that at least one of them would not know him by reputation.

"Curses on his religion! What does he want?"

"I am Jimgrim. I have come to advise you to surrender."

"What is offered?"

"Nothing. Dorje's cause is lost. Unless you surrender unconditionally --and at once--you will be wiped out."

There was a long pause, probably for consultation, but we could not hear voices. Grim's voice broke the silence:

"I make no promise except that--if you surrender--I will do what I can for you. Probably only those who have committed murder will be hanged. I advise those of you who have killed no one to compel the others. I will count one hundred, slowly. Wahid--itnein --talateh--"

The answer was a savage howl of laughter and three rifle-shots. Out

went the flashlights and we all ducked below the sand-hill, except young Allison, who rolled over and over. I had to grope for him in total darkness. A hail of bullets swept over our heads and I estimated more like a hundred than fifty rifles. Then there was sudden silence and a voice yelled:

"Curses on your religion, Jimgrim! If you are afraid to see ten thousand dead men, take away your army!"

Then another storm of bullets swept above us. Allison was hard hit. Jeff carried him, and as we crawled away over the rim of the hollow. I saw the army's searchlights all come blazing into action. There was a roar from the distant motors as the cordon closed in on the cache, at high speed, flooding the sand in front of them with flowing light. Ahead of us we could see McGowan's searchlight racing forward, tossing its rays as the lorry wheels bucked over ridges of sand. We hurried. There was no guessing what would happen, or what surprise those fanatics had in store; our cue was to beat it as fast as we could. Something not remotely unlike panic lent us wings, and if Jeff had not had to carry Allison and we had not waited for Jeff, we would probably have lowered the world's sand-track record for a quarter of a mile.

Finally Jeff's wind gave out. We lay down and I tried in the dark to feel where Allison was hit. He died as I laid my hands on him-- as decent a young officer as ever stopped a blackguard's bullet. Then the thing happened that has been so variously described, since it was seen by many thousand men and no two witnesses ever see or remember anything exactly as it happened. My account is very likely no more accurate than scores of others. I can say what I remember, that is all.

The cordon of searchlights closed in, in an almost perfect segment of an arc. McGowan's lorry bumped and thundered past us. And then suddenly I felt something that I can't describe. It suggested static,

although I don't know how or why it did, and it made one's skin tingle and one's teeth and ears ache. All sound ceased instantly --or seemed to--as every searchlight went out at the same moment and every truck came to a standstill. It was almost as if the universe had gone dead. A plane, that I had not even noticed circling in the night, crashed within three hundred feet of where I lay. As nearly as I remember, at about the instant when that happened and when six or seven other planes were falling in all directions, there began a white-hot glow at the place where the cache was supposed to be hidden.

It was next thing to impossible to watch it, it increased so rapidly and its glare grew so prodigious. For a moment, but only a moment, it showed the hues of decomposing metals. And it only lasted about a minute--perhaps less. I believe I saw human figures fleeing from it, caught in its heat and instantly cremated; but they were gone like swift shadows, and that may have been imagination. I can only say that when I think of it, and close my eyes, there is a very vivid mental picture of human figures leaping in the white-hot glare of the hell of the Fundamentalists.

For a minute or two, when the glare died, we were all blind. It was as if we had stared too long at lightning. I was almost deaf, too; I could not make sense of Grim's remarks to Jeff, although he was close beside me. Jeff picked up Allison, not knowing he was dead, and carried him toward McGowan's lorry. Our flashlight was out of action; Allison, of course, had dropped his, and the one Grim took from Jeff was so hot that it burned him and he had to throw it away. Dorje's infernal machines had absorbed every atom of electricity anywhere near them in the act of destroying themselves and Dorje's men.

Dazed, I followed Jeff, who groped his way toward McGowan. Grim was on ahead of us. The first words I distinguished clearly as the vague paralysis left the region of my ear-drums, were McGowan's:

"Maybe he'll believe us next time!"

"No," said Grim, "he'll say it was a meteor or an earthquake."

McGowan laughed. "Perhaps he'll say we planted it to make ourselves a reputation! Anyhow, the old boy broke a record as well as his planes and dynamos. I'll bet you that's the first time an army left its ammunition on the desert and advanced behind a screen of unprotected trucks. Say that for him! Who's that? Who's gone west? Allison? Oh, damn! I'd rather have lost--"

He did not say whom he would rather have lost, but his next phrase was a bit suggestive:

"Grim, I'd trade you any six brass hats on earth for Allison. That boy had brains and guts too."

"Allison won't kick. He died up front," Grim answered. "It's only being caught off-stage that actually hurts."

Chapter Twenty-One

"What has our babu done to them, I wonder?"

Once, when I was younger, I used to believe the official reports of events. Medical training, of course, taught me that almost no one ever knows the real reasons why people do things or refrain from doing them; but I did believe official blue books, and it always seemed to me that Lincoln's theory, that you can fool all of the people some of the time, conceded too much. But I think now that people prefer to be fooled until so long after the event that the actual truth takes on the hue of fiction. And I know that numbers of extremely competent men are so peculiarly credulous that in the face of facts they will believe

anything whatever except the true explanation.

That general was a case in point. I never met him, never even saw him. Grim did, and privately, afterwards, he and McGowan laughed with Jeff, Chullunder Ghose and me about the conversation they had with him under the stars while the army engineers waited for a destroyed tomb to grow cool enough to be examined.

But it would be very unfair to give the general's name. He failed in nothing except imagination, and his handling of the troops that night was patient, resolute and ingenious. He did not believe in the existence of Dorje, or his "thunderbolts"; but he played fair and gave us every opportunity, his only mistake having been that he risked quite a number of aeroplanes and lost them along with their crews. Not one member of the air force employed that night survived to talk about it. Every electric device within a mile and a half of Dorje's cache not only fused but was made irreparably useless. Even motor vehicles whose engines were not running at the moment were put out of action by the exhaustion of their batteries, which occurred with such sudden violence that the batteries were wrecked. The only reason why the army was not wiped out was that every round of ammunition had been left under guard on the desert five miles away.

But the general maintained his disbelief in Dorje's thunderbolts, and in Dorje also. There was not a trace of them after custodians had in all probability turned the plugs on dozens, perhaps hundreds of them, in the hope of escaping just before the critical moment and then watching the army blown to smithereens by the explosion of the ammunition in the men's belts. But they were probably ignorant men incapable of estimating how much electricity so many searchlights would develop or at what range it would become effective. Anyhow, they were caught; and the immeasurable heat--as intense, perhaps, as that developed by a meteor in contact with the atmosphere-- that

entirely consumed the brass tubes, did more than incinerate those men within its radius. It dissolved them into gas, bones and all. There was not a trace of them discovered.

So there was no one to be questioned after the event, and there was no tell-tale evidence except a hot hole in the ground that looked volcanic and that might have been caused by a meteor or by a terrific bolt of lightning. There had been a tomb there, but now there was none. Stone weighing tons had vanished. Something new in thermodynamics had been invented. Someone had discovered how nature converts vibration into heat and dissipates the concentrated heat into another vibration that has other characteristics and effects.

But the general declared it was the Communists and that a cache of some kind of explosive smuggled in by agents of Moscow for the use of Egyptian malcontents had gone off. He accounted for the absence of noise by suggesting that the shape of the tomb might have had the effect of a silencer. The effect on batteries and magnetos he ascribed to shock. And you know what the newspapers said. They had their information from official sources.

"It's probably some new sort of explosive," the general admitted. "Or they may have rediscovered Greek fire. No one knows what that was; no one knows what its explosion would have done to electrical instruments because there was no electricity in those days."

And because no traces of them could be found he denied that all the guardians of the cache could have been killed. He was sure that most of them escaped, so all the troops were promptly put to work to find them, with the result that scores and scores of said-to-be suspicious characters were rounded up and thrown in prison, where, being wholly innocent, they accused one another and gave birth to fabulous stories about Communist activities. Some of those tales are still going the rounds.

But he was a courteous general, and though he considered Grim a visionary and Dorje a mare's nest, he thanked Grim for his "opportune assistance" and provided us with camels, since there was not a car or even a motorcycle whose ignition was not completely ruined. He sent an Egyptian orderly along with us, too, to take charge of the camels and return them.

It was almost daybreak when we entered the city and were challenged by a sergeant in charge of a guard at a street corner. We had been given no password, and McGowan had stayed with the general; moreover, the sergeant was bored and wanted news, so he accused us of stealing army camels, which our orderly thought was a fine joke, so the orderly said nothing. Bruised, tired, sleepy and craving a bath before anything else, we were not in a mood to solve problems by the exercise of humour, or even to realize that this wasn't a problem and that the sergeant was only joking with us. However, Grim amused him with a yarn about the searchlights having quit because the army swore too badly about working overtime; and Jeff borrowed a cigarette from him, which is always an excellent way to open negotiations.

"Our Indian friend has mine," said Jeff, and the sergeant stared at us again by the light of a kerosene lantern.

"Were you gentlemen the friends of Maharajah Gautama Sri Krishna Hanuman Asoka Sahib of Bengal? I think that was the name."

"We are his worshipful admirers," Grim answered. "What has happened to him?"

"Sir, he has the Maharanee with him, and they'd blind Bertolini the archaeologist in the car. Is one of you gentlemen Major Grim by any chance? Well--he left word that his chauffeur would pick you up at

Brown's Hotel; and he said it would be all right for you all to come to breakfast without shaving."

"Had he the password?"

"No, sir. But he was riding in a service car and it was Colonel McGowan's chauffeur, so I let him pass without argument. My orders are not to interfere with anyone who can give a decent account of himself. That one was a prince all right. I wish there were a few more like him. Affable? He told me, any time I go to India he'll get me transferred to his own corps of lancers-- says the pay's about double what we get and the chances of promotion A1. Took my name, too-- had the Maharanee write it for him on an envelope."

We rode on, bidding baths good-bye. The only conceivable meaning of "breakfast without shaving," was that Chullunder Ghose needed us in a hurry. McGowan's car was waiting near the hotel; as soon as the camels were out of sight we piled in; and before we had slammed the car door we were off, the chauffeur treating us to an exhibition of fancy driving that was too impetuous to be based on mere desire to get his night's work done and go to breakfast. We fairly flew toward the region of Nile-bank villas where the better class of houses stand in walled gardens.

There was no name on the gate of the house where we drew up-- nothing to distinguish it from a score of others that had gardens sloping to the Nile, except that the shrubbery topping the wall was a bit more dense and the house was invisible through the bars of the iron gate because of a turn in the drive which curved around some sort of outhouse screened by a clump of bamboo. For a blind man's house the grounds looked too well kept. There was an atmosphere of wealth and good taste. Yet we knew it was Bertolini's house because his donkey's hoof-prints were deep in the dust outside the gate, and there are not many people living in that kind of house, even in Egypt.

whose donkeys use the front entrance.

The gate opened mysteriously, pulled by someone unseen, and the chauffeur drove in without ceremony, down a drive along which, on either hand, Egyptian statuary alternated with well-kept palms. Dawn was breaking; the place looked clean and peaceful in the early light and there was a pond in which a group of flamingoes preened themselves with an air of never having been neglected or disturbed since Noah left the Ark.

It was a big white stucco house. All the blinds were drawn, and behind two of them, on the ground floor, there was candlelight. The front door opened as we drew up under the portico, and a Chinaman dressed in good black silk stood bowing to us, shaking himself by the hand.

Grim spoke low, hardly moving his lips, so that the chauffeur should not hear him. "Remember now, no shooting! We're ditched if we do. Bertolini knows there's something wrong; and he's crafty, or he wouldn't be Dorje's agent. He'll argue that if we're enemies we'll shoot on provocation. Then we can be charged with murder or attempted murder--no bail--and he'll have time to cover up before we can prove anything. It wouldn't surprise me to discover he's been warned by some Egyptian official that we're on Dorje's trail; if so, he'll know we have no warrants-- no authority. If he thinks there's half a chance we're 'us' he'll play the old game--get us foul of our own net."

The Chinaman in the doorway seemed a bit disturbed about our lack of haste. He came forward and opened the car door, smiling blandly but looking displeased when Grim ordered the chauffeur back to the hotel to wait for McGowan. However, the chauffeur was gone before the Chinaman could protest.

"We're filthy," said Grim. "Can we clean up?" Instead of hurrying, he

grew deliberate. He paused in the hall to admire Egyptian antiquities, with which the house was as full as a museum; he lingered to examine scarabs in a glass case: "May I have a candle? Light's too dim. I can't see."

"No, no, not now," said the Chinaman.

"Why not?"

"Lavatory this way."

He led and we followed, but we took a long time in there, washing blood off our faces and tidying up. The Chinaman stood watching us, as obviously irritated as a disturbed owl, and as silent and outwardly still. We had to ask him for towels. Grim took off his turban, examined it and decided to re-bind it with the outside in. He asked the Chinaman to help him.

"That take too much time. You use hair-blush."

But apparently Grim had no sense of time. He bound the turban on as carefully as a woman getting ready for a fancy dress ball.

"Baltis here?" he asked.

No answer. Grim repeated the question.

"You come soon. You see."

"You're garrulous!" said Grim. "If you want me to hurry, come and help me with this."

So the Chinaman stood behind him to put a hand on the folds at the back and to guide the silk as layer carefully was added above layer. Jeff, done spluttering in the basin, rubbing his stubble-black face with

a towel, watched the mirror--noticed Grim's expression--saw the movement of his eyelids. So did I, but I did not know just what it meant. Jeff, on the way to his jacket that hung on a hook on the door, had to pass behind the Chinaman. He turned suddenly. His left hand clapped the towel over the Chinaman's mouth; his right arm, descending, crushed the Chinaman's to his sides and pinned him helpless.

"I'd a hunch to wear this thing," said Jimgrim, and removing the turban he used it. It was vastly better than a rope. I helped him, and between us we bandaged the towel in place besides trussing the Chinaman's arms and legs until he was as immobilized as a mummy--almost. He could still breathe. We could still investigate his pockets, of which he had several in the lining of his loose black jacket. Jeff pulled out a pad made of medical cotton and gauze, well folded in a linen handkerchief. I found a sealed glass flask containing about a pint of some colourless liquid. It might be chloroform. There was no cork; it had been sealed by melting the neck of the flask in a Bunsen-burner, and the only way to get the stuff out was to break the bottleneck.

"Don't open it," said Grim. "It's possibly as new and deadly as the thunderbolts."

He went on searching. Tucked in the waistband of the black silk pants he found a Yale key; it was wrapped in a scrap of paper and enclosed in a small leather purse that fastened with a snap.

"Master-key." The letter M was stamped on the metal. "Look at that, will you." He held the scrap of paper toward the candle in a sconce near the mirror. Scrawled on it in heavy pencil were the words "Sweet A." Stooping again to continue his search he kept up a running comment while his fingers felt the seams. "Sweet Adeline is rather far from home. Suite A is the number of Baltis' apartment at the hotel.

Oh, hello--here's something."

He stood up again to examine his find in the candle-light. It was a token made of gold, no larger than a dime and beautifully done by hand. In high relief on one side was a Tibetan Dorje-- the short lamaic sceptre with a crown at each end. On the reverse was a pyramid composed of forty-five stars.

"Stowed in the seam of his pants' leg. This man may be Bertolini's boss, disguised as a sort of confidential butler; else why the gold token and why the air of authority? If he had been obeying orders he would never have let us keep him waiting all that time. Whoever gave him the orders would have come to see why the delay? But you can't make a Chinaman talk--not his sort; so let's leave him."

Grim pocketed the token and blew out the light. Jeff locked the lavatory door and pocketed the key; then he opened the door of a room in which we had seen candle-light at the edge of the window-blinds. The candles were still burning; there were fresh cigar-butts--nine of them--on ashtrays spaced around a table made from slabs of cypress looted from ancient tombs. There were nine chairs of the same material. The other furniture was all museum-stuff and no doubt priceless, if you like that kind of thing. I would as soon live in a pawnshop. There was a mummy, up-ended, naked, with a sheet of plate-glass covering its coffin, at the far end of the room.

Grim merely looked in, counting the cigar-butts.

"Ten then, unless Bertolini smokes. Not many blind men do. Two others kept a lookout--see those chairs displaced beside the window-- twelve then. What has our babu done to them, I wonder?"

Grim's movements were almost leisurely, although he made almost no sound as he walked, so he may have been listening. Jeff pulled up

the blinds and we left the door of that room open for the sake of the light that it admitted to the hall. Then Grim led quietly along a passage to the right and stood still.

I was following so close I almost stepped on his heels. There were three doors at the end of the passage, one at each side and one facing us. They all had Yale locks, of the sort that snap shut when you close the door and that can be opened from the outside only with the key, unless the latch is held back by a sliding button that manipulates a pin. As silently as possible Grim tested one door, then another--the one facing us; it was unlocked; it opened into a small square waiting-room, in which there was an electric bell and a numbered indicator.

Facing the door was a cushioned bench. Above that was a shelf containing Chinese books in paper bindings. On the right hand were a plain chair and an equally plain wooden table. On the left hand was a papered wall, entirely bare except for a gilt-framed reproduction, three by two, of Botticelli's Graces. The frame was heavy and securely fastened to the wall with screws at top and bottom.

Grim let out a low whistle.

There was a lighted candle on the table. Grim took it and examined the picture. He tinkered with it--tried to push it sideways-- downward--upward--but nothing happened. He clapped his ear to it-- listened and seemed encouraged--tried again, feeling the wall with the palms of his hands. Then suddenly he handed Jeff the candlestick and whispered:

"Have you matches? Blow that out then if you see this even looks like moving."

I shut the door. It was as stuffy in there as a bear's den and there were smells such as only a Chinaman knows how to brew--no

window and no ventilator. Grim resumed his efforts, until at last his fingers found a small lump on the edge of the frame farthest from the door. He pressed it, and found that the picture and glass moved inward on a hinge. Then Jeff blew out the light.

Chapter Twenty-Two

"Play this as you would your last ten dollars in a poker game!"

The entire wall slid sideways--a mere screen that concealed an "icebox" door a pace or two beyond it. Light shone through a small round aperture in the door and we all stepped at once as close to the door as we could crowd ourselves to avoid being seen. After listening for about a minute Grim raised his eyes to the level of the hole and peered through. We could hear voices, but there was apparently no one on guard at the door. Grim put his arm through the hole--groped--tried to move a bolt of some sort-- failed and whispered to Jeff to try it. Jeff succeeded. The door swung inward on hinges that had been oiled quite recently.

We descended a stairway of plain deal boards into a vestibule of ancient masonry, that led into a gallery, which overhung an ancient burial chamber. On our way we passed the guardian of the door, apparently a Greek with a touch of Egypt in him, lying dead on his side with a knife between his shoulder-blades. He had been dead less than an hour--perhaps less than thirty minutes. He had been slain with his own knife, drawn from the sheath in his red cotton sash.

In the midst of the floor beneath us there was a round hole through which the top of a ladder protruded. Evidently Bertolini's "tomb" had been excavated on more than one level. There was a masonry stairway, very narrow, leading to the gallery and it appeared that if we only had some weapons we could hold that stairway against all

corners. It curved sharply on itself; no one on the way up would be able to use a revolver until within four steps of the top, and then only with his left hand. It was like one of those stairways built into the walls of the Tower of London.

One man sat still on a lump of broken stone beneath us, slapping the palm of his hand with a blackjack eighteen inches long. There were numbers of lighted candles set in niches in the rock walls and the light from those threw the gallery into deep shadow, so that though he glanced up he did not see us. Probably the slight sounds we had made were over-balanced by the noise of argument and scuffling that came through a rectangular opening in the wall directly facing us.

"Who killed that guard?" demanded Grim, in Arabic. The man sprang to his feet. Then he answered in English: "I did. He was on the death list. He admitted a police spy." Then suddenly: "Who are you? Who let you in here?"

"I am Dorje," Grim answered.

The man staggered. He almost fell backward in his effort to peer through the shadow in order to see Grim's face.

"The lord Dorje?" Arabic again. "May peace descend on you and bless your--"

"What have I to do with peace?" Grim answered. He touched my pocket. I passed him the flask I had found on the Chinaman. Then he whispered to Jeff, and Jeff motioned to me to follow him. "What are those fools doing in there?" Grim demanded in a loud voice. As I followed Jeff I heard the answer:

"There was a trial and they tortured a man. He talked about our plans to strangers. It is the rule of this lodge that each of us must torture him

in turn, after which he is let down into this hole to die when Allah pleases. We are a very faithful lodge--"

Jeff was in haste, so I heard no more of that speech, and Jeff said nothing until we had gained the butler's room. "More flasks!" he said then, starting in at once to hunt for them.

"Grim thinks they're probably deadly, and so is the gang we're up against." He shook the table--tipped it--set his knee on it and strained until the muscles cracked and one half of the top came away in his hands, revealing ten flasks like the one I had given Grim, only that five of these were twice the size. We filled our pockets. Each of us took one in either hand.

"I'll bet that Chink is one of Dorje's head men--perhaps Bertolini's boss," said Jeff. "Why else should he be the keeper of this ammunition--if it is ammunition? Come on--Grim may need us."

Grim did. He was keeping himself back, in shadow. Beneath him, the chamber seemed to swarm with men, although that was due to movement and to semi-darkness, someone having put out more than half the candles. Their actual number was not more than a dozen, of whom the leader was a Chinaman with the loose-looking shoulders and physical strength of a Shanghai longshore coolie. They were all armed. Knives--revolvers. One man had a sawed-off shotgun. Jeff took his stand at the head of the stair. I went and stood near Grim, taking advantage of the shadow by stooping as much as I could without cutting off my view over the stone front of the gallery.

The Chinaman spoke insolently, in a language totally unknown to me, although I caught the word Dorje.

"Wants to look at me," Grim whispered. "Says he knows Dorje by sight. Stand by for trouble."

Through the opening in the wall that faced us two men dragged in one between them—one who still lived, tortured, gagged and with his arms bound. They dropped him feet first down the hole in the midst of the floor, and the Chinaman laughed. Then he spoke English:

"If you are Dorje, come down. Let us see you."

"Bring Bertolini," Grim answered.

The Chinaman laughed again, but under cover of that he gave an order to the man nearest to him. I warned Jeff in a whisper that there were four men edging toward the stairway. The Chinaman pulled another man forward by the arm to act as interpreter—a man who might be a Sicilian, but who spoke with a Chicago accent:

"You're not Dorje. How many are you? How did you get in?"

I repeated my warning to Jeff.

"I ordered you to bring Bertolini," Grim answered.

"Heard you the first time! We've put Bertolini on the spot. He's no good. This man's chief now." He glanced at the Chinaman. "Bertolini gets his when the bell rings."

"Sneaking up the stair," Jeff whispered; only Jeff's whisper is more like a watch-dog's growl. "Shall I wait for the word?" The man with the Chicago accent talked on, obviously to gain time, and the Chinaman took advantage of it to back away toward the opening in the far wall.

"We're all sick o' being told nothing and kep' idle. You ain't Dorje. You ain't cops, or you'd ha'--"

Suddenly he drew an automatic. And he was quick on the trigger. Six

bullets chipped the rock behind us as Grim and I stepped sideways into other shadows, just as Jeff said calmly: "Here they come, Jim."

"Let them have it!"

I saw Grim hurl his own flask at the Chinaman. Mine hit the Chicago spokesman on the shoulder and broke into fragments. Jeff hurled two flasks down the stairway. It is difficult to tell what happened then, although we lingered as long as we dared--two, possibly three seconds. Instantly the liquid contents of the glass flasks changed into a dense white vapour that filled the entire chamber to a height of nine or ten feet.

There was no noticeable smell. It was woolly, heavy-looking stuff that expanded as swiftly as steam but remained, for as long as we watched it, almost as flat as water on its upper surface. It did not put out the lights; they shone through it as I have seen candles shine through loose snow. But it appeared to smother sound. There was a ghastly silence.

"Snappy!" said Grim, and we ran for our lives until we reached the "ice-box" door and slammed it. Jeff stuffed a cushion into the round peep-hole and punched it in tight with his fist.

"I hope we haven't killed our babu," I suggested. "If he's anywhere underground--and if that stuff creeps--it may reach him through crevices--tunnels--"

"Let's go!" Grim put a flask of the stuff in his pocket. Jeff and I did the same and followed him, closing but not locking the door of the butler's room. With the pass-key he had taken from the butler Grim opened the door on our left. There was another unpainted deal stairway and Grim led the way down, but I lingered to fasten the catch on the springlock, so that the door would open readily if we should need to

retreat in a hurry. About twenty feet down in the dark a lantern burned dimly, in a niche in a very old masonry wall, into which had been fitted a modern door made of stout unpainted oak.

Grim inserted the master-key and again I made sure of retreat by fastening back the spring-bolt. There was a long passage that turned on itself and brought us to a stairway hewn from solid limestone, lighted by three candle-lanterns set in niches and by a kerosene lamp near a door at the bottom. It was more than fifty feet from top to bottom of that stairway, and it was very ancient.

At the foot of the stairs was a circular vault with the door on the far side.

"Understand," said Grim, "we've no search warrant, and no legal right in here whatever. We're not even accredited. If we make a bad break we'll be out of luck. We've no proof that the stuff in the flasks is actually deadly. If those men recover they can take us from the rear. On the other hand, if they're dead we answer for it, unless we get what we're after and prove a whole case to the hilt. So play this as you would your last ten dollars in a poker game. Each watch the others. And remember: what we need is evidence, not dead men for the undertaker."

He inserted the key. And once again I made sure of retreat by fastening back the spring-bolt.

Chapter Twenty-Three

"Now! Go the limit!"

The smell of coffee greeted us. There is no need to tell an old campaigner what that means to men who lack food and sleep. We

were like tired horses sniffing crushed oats. There was a well-tanned horse-hide curtain at the far end of a twenty-foot passage, and beyond that was warm light, which turned out to be from many lanterns and from the glow of a charcoal fire in a big copper pan on a tripod.

Grim parted the curtain and strode in, motioning to us to keep behind him, so I had to look over Jeff's shoulder, because Jeff's breadth almost filled the passage. I was backed against the curtain and I dare say its movement suggested there might be a number of people behind me. That may possibly account for our immediate reception. No one started to his feet and no one fired at us, though there were several revolvers in the room.

The place looked like a mortuary chapel, but it was much less evenly proportioned than, for instance, the passage by which we had entered. A natural cavern had been hewn out and adapted for the purpose, leaving the roof and some parts of the walls in their original condition. The entire floor had been hewn to such depth as to leave what may have been an altar or a bier in the center; and at the opposite end from the door there was a platform contrived in the same way, occupying the entire width of the chamber—twenty-five feet, more or less.

At the right-hand end of that platform, which had a depth of eight or nine feet, there was a natural protrusion of the rock wall which had been carved into a throne as grand as anything that Rodin ever chiselled. Its proportions perfectly suggested all the majesty and ponderous insolence of olden priesthood. On that sat Bertolini. He was no longer wearing spectacles; his eyes were closed; he looked like a scholarly anchorite in meditation; even when he moved there was the same effect of spiritual calm suggested by the drooping eyelids; outdoors they were protected from the sun by goggles, so

that they were whiter than the rest of his face. But when he turned his face toward us the effect was different; he became a hater, nervously alert. Above his head, exactly in the corner of the wall, there was a natural crack in the rock, that led upward, growing gradually wider, until it spread into a hole up near the roof, as a river flows into the sea.

There was nobody else on the platform. In a semicircle on the floor around the brazier, with their backs to the wall, sat seven men on prayer-mats. There were coffee cups beside them. Facing them, not far from Bertolini, but below him, there were five more, also on mats with their backs to the wall. They were of different nationalities, well dressed. One man, in a suit of raw silk, was undoubtedly German; another looked English; three wore Arab costume, and of those one seemed to be a muallim (Moslem teacher).

Chullunder Ghose sat back toward us, also on a prayer-mat, hands on thighs, his big head sunk a little forward as if thought weighed more than muscle could support. He looked fatter than ever--enormous. He was squatting well to one side of the stone bier, in a position where he could watch Bertolini and everyone else. He had the coffee-pot beside him; it was no Turkish coffee--good United States dripped nectar; and instead of turning his head when we entered he poured some, so that the aroma reached our nostrils.

"And as I told you that he would be, here he is!" he announced. It did not occur to me at the moment that he had seen us reflected in the polished copper of the pot from which he poured.

"Who?" Bertolini sat bolt upright. "Is Titai with him?"

"No," said Grim, "but Titai, if that's your butler, sends his compliments and says he'll see you later."

Bertolini recoiled as if someone had slapped his face. "Damn that Chinaman! His insolence grows unbearable. How the devil did you get in here?"

"I passed myself in."

"Through three locked doors?"

"Why not?"

"Who are you?"

"Major James Grim!"

If a bomb had gone off it would hardly have caused more alarm. I heard two revolvers click, but the only hand that I actually saw move was Bertolini's; he let it fall between the throne and the end wall, and since he produced no weapon I concluded he had touched an electric bell-push. The other men held strained, alert, breathless silence.

"Jimgrim? Of the Intelligence?" said Bertolini.

"Does it surprise you?" Grim asked; and I saw his game now. He had given Chullunder Ghose a cue and was simply marking time until the babu had acted on it, or returned another.

"What do you imagine?" the babu asked. "That Dorje has no agents in the secret services of all the countries in the world? You must be crazy. I don't wonder--no, indeed I don't--that Dorje ordered you to be investigated!"

Chullunder Ghose had passed the buck back. Grim carried on:

"You have balled things badly. If I can save you, Bertolini--but how can I?"

Bertolini's lean right hand dropped out of sight again. I saw his shoulder move; he was pressing on something, almost certainly a bell-push. "Your credentials are lacking," he retorted. "I hear three of you. I have a hole here that has taken more than three at a time into the Nile--many more than three who could not NAME THE NAME RIGHT!" He almost screamed the last four words. Then he leaned over the right arm of the throne and there was no longer any doubt whatever that it was a bell-push he was furiously pressing with one finger after another. "NAME THE NAME!" he shouted.

"I don't need to," Grim answered. "Feel this."

He walked toward him, and to do that he had to pass between the group of seven and the group of five. There was plenty of light. He let them see the small gold token that he held between finger and thumb. I heard the hammer of one revolver click to half-cock.

"Feel it!"

Bertolini took the token in his fingers. "You could have stolen that," he answered, "Get off the platform!" With a trick of sleight of hand he made the token vanish. There was no knowing where it had gone. "Do you hear me?"

Jeff and I felt for our glass flasks, but I failed to see how we could use them without putting Grim out of business. We would have had to throw the things and beat it down the passage: even Chullunder Ghose would have been lucky to escape. And all twelve men pulled out revolvers.

"Jim's out!" said Jeff in my ear. It was the only time I ever heard him admit that there was no hope. "Beat it while you can. I'll stay and--"

I believe Jeff still thinks that I started to run but recovered in time to save my self-respect. What I actually did was to draw back the curtain a little and shout down the passage:

"Stand by for a rush, you fellows! If a shot's fired, come in on the run--no waiting!"

And I contrived to drop my memorandum book behind the curtain and to kick that skidding along the stone floor of the passage. To me it did not sound in the least like lurking men, but then I knew what it was and the others did not. It served. It raised at any rate a doubt in thirteen minds, including Bertolini's.

"So that's why my men haven't answered my summons!" said Bertolini. "Bring your men in here!"

I had made a mistake. Grim, as he told us afterwards, having observed that natural crack in the wall, had followed it downward with his eye until he noticed something not quite normal in the darkness on the far side of the throne on which Bertolini sat. He was wondering why they had made Chullunder Ghose sit where he could not see into the shadow beyond Bertolini, and why the lamps had been grouped so as to cast that shadow. There was no light near where Bertolini sat. Imagination aiding eyesight, he had not exactly seen, but sensed an opening in the wall beyond the throne, and his intention was to enter that, if necessary, and to hold up Bertolini and his gang by threatening to bomb them with a glass flask. He had counted on us, of course, to follow suit, and on Chullunder Ghose to save himself by getting behind us. I had ruined that move.

"Bring them in!" Bertolini repeated.

Grim switched plans in a fraction of a second.

"If I do," he said, "you're done for. They are your men! They're the gang you rang that bell for! They're the pretty boys who were to fix me! Imbecile! Do you suppose you can set yourself up as an independent without Dorje knowing it? And do you suppose he'll know it without sending somebody to pull your plug? What do you take Dorje for? A sort of small-town politician who swaps pork for votes?--Put up those revolvers--I'll give you thirty seconds!"

They obeyed, although the German hesitated and one Arab only stuffed his weapon under his abayi. Evidently they had had a taste or two of Dorje's discipline.

"Self," remarked Chullunder Ghose, "am under the influence of Dorje so much that am Dorje-minded, absolutely. Don't give a damn who dies, who lives. Notwithstanding which, our Jimmy Jimgrim, being of the secret service, is of much more use to Dorje than yourselves. And Dorje oils good tools. You'd better listen."

Grim was signalling to Jeff. They have a private code of not more than a dozen hardly observable gestures, indicating such essentials as "safe for the time being"--"stand by, dangerous"--"leave it to me"--"go to it." I know seven of the signals. That one meant "Now! Go the limit!" and Jeff's limit is nothing that anyone else can predict; it includes everything except cats and elevators. Calmly, almost casually, in a low voice he remarked to me:

"You'd better show 'em one flask. One's enough."

So I drew the flask out of my pocket and held it high where everyone could see it. Jeff strode forward until he reached the nearest of the group of seven. It was the German.

"You first. Lay your gun on that stone altar!"

Bertolini jumped up. "What is happening?"

"We're being sensible," said Grim. "My orders are to spare you all if possible--particularly you."

"Obey him!" said Bertolini and sat down again.

The German eyed my flask and Jeff's fist bulging in the right hip pocket. Then he got up and laid his automatic on the stone.

"Both guns!" Jeff commanded. The German drew a smaller automatic from an inside pocket. He laid it alongside the first one.

"Now your knife!"

"Wahrhavig, ich habe keine!"

"Get back there then. You next."

Psychologically speaking they were knocked out. Even the Arab who had stuffed a revolver under his abayi obeyed orders, although he called the others cowards and "worms in the bellies of dogs," in spluttering Arabic that told the whole tale of the state of his nerves. Unloading one by one, Jeff let the shells fall on the floor and tossed the empty weapons into the corner. Chullunder Ghose, who was watching Grim, did not even dodge the pistols as they curved in a long, low parabola over his head. Perhaps Jeff meant it as an inspiration to him. If it was a hint, he took it.

"As was saying antecedently to disarmament conference, at which am happy to observe that minority sentiment received magnanimous consideration, am expertly dubious about your understanding of the secret code. Am otherwise at loss to explain how such mistakes have happened. Will resume interrogation."

"Have I gone mad?" asked Bertolini.

"That is what this committee of investigation wishes to discover," said the babu.

Bertolini almost staggered to his feet. He stood swaying, pressing both hands to his blind eyes. He was a madman if ever I saw one--incurable, with egomania embittered by a consciousness of creeping weakness of the will. One reason why we had disarmed that crowd so easily was that they had already lost faith in the blind despot; they could see the sick will waning even faster than the outworn body and nerves.

"Repeat to me the cypher. Then explain it." said the babu. "I bet you I will spot the mistake in half a jiffy. Who knows it? Potz-blitz-Donnerwetter, you first!"

"None of us knows it," said the German. "Only he does. We must come to him for--"

Sounds interrupted him. There were footsteps approaching along the passage by which we had entered.

Chapter Twenty-Four

"Gad, what a team she'd have made with her twin!"

Grim signalled it was my job. Fully expecting that the men we gassed had come to life and at last were answering Bertolini's electric bell, I parted the horse-hide curtain and stepped through swiftly. No use hesitating. There was no one in the passage. I saw the door at the end shut silently. So it was all to do over again, and I was in doubt whether to creep up and spring the latch so that no one could enter,

or whether to take all chances.

There was perfume in the air--faint, but it stirred memory, and in some strange way it stopped the skin from crawling up my spine. I did not realize how scared I had been until I suddenly felt less scared. I decided caution was as useless as guesswork and went straight ahead--jerked the door open--and then wasted no more time whatever. Baltis--with her throat in a Chinaman's fingers! He had her down on her knees and her hands were wrenching at his wrists. He tried to turn on me. He could not free himself. He went down like a steer under the pole-axe when I hit him. Then, before I even thought of stopping her--I was watching to see whether the Chinaman was actually out or not--she did something to the bracelet on her left wrist, knelt, and struck him with it on the neck. While I helped her to her feet she readjusted the bracelet.

"It is for myself I wear this. Where is Jeemgreem?"

"Poison?" I asked.

She nodded. "Where is Jeemgreem?"

"Give that to me. You might use it on Grim."

"It is for myself I keep it. Where is Jeemgreem?"

She was rubbing her throat with her right hand; the man had almost torn her muscles out, and her voice was hoarse-choked. But she had the vitality of an animal, and the pluck of one besides; in addition, she had taken some sort of stimulant since I last saw her. Her eyes betrayed that. She could stand unaided, so I turned to push open the door into the passage. It was locked. I suppose when I opened it I had accidentally released the pin that held the bolt back.

It was hard to know what to do then. If I should hammer on the door, of course, Jeff or the babu would come and open it, but that would leave only two to handle thirteen men and well might be the signal for a stampede. On the other hand, if I waited that might worry them. I might be badly needed in there.

I decided to wait. That would give them, at any rate, opportunity to take their own time about coming to look for me.

"How did you get here?" I demanded. I took her arm and led her toward the hanging lantern, to examine her throat. The skin was lacerated by the man's long nails, and it was likely the bruises would swell, so that she wouldn't be able to talk much presently. It seemed a good idea to get her to talk while the going was good. Mercurochrome was all I could do for her; I had a phial of that in my silver pocket-case and I used lots of it.

"You laugh at me?"

In that uncertain lantern-light the red stuff made her neck look comically ghastly.

"Yes," I said. "I see you really were Anne Boleyn. You've the headman's trademark. But how did you get here? Weren't you at the hotel?"

She glanced down at the Chinaman and I stopped to examine him. He was stone dead; whatever poison she had in that bracelet was as quick as cyanide, but there was none of the characteristic crushed-almond cyanide smell.

"Tell me," I said, "or I'll take that bracelet from you."

"Yes, I was at the hotel. That fat Indian left me there. I went to Suite A.

I was filthy. A hotel servant, staring very much, unlocked for me the door. I bathed. I drank champagne with cognac." (She had also taken something stronger, but that was her affair.) "I went to bed. I could not sleep. So I got up again and dressed myself, wondering what I should do. And in my mirror I saw that Chinaman. Through the window he entered, very silently. There was a glass flask in his hand."

"This Chinaman?"

"Yes, that one. And I guessed that flask held some of Dorje's stuff. So I knew they think I am my sister and someone--Bertolini very likely--has said 'Kill her!' That stuff turns into fluffy vapour--no smell--no noise. It kills. It leaves no mark--no trace. It vanishes. And then the doctors say 'Heart failure,' or perhaps 'A blood clot'; because its effect may differ, although its action is always the same."

"You have seen it used?"

She nodded. "In the war, but not often. There is very little of it. Even Dorje can only make it in small quantities and it is dreadfully expensive. It is known as Catalyst A--because it is the catalyst that causes death most swiftly to combine with anything that breathes. I knew what that Chinaman had in the flask. And he knew that I had seen him in the mirror. So he stepped back, and his foot slipped on something outside, so that there was a moment before he could recover. Then he threw the flask and smashed it on the bedroom floor. But by that time I had reached the door, and was outside in the sitting-room, where I had time to snatch this dress out of a closet; and I put it on out in the corridor. I hoped the Chinaman would think I was dead."

"Did you summon anyone?"

"Of course not. If I had made a fuss they would have kept me there

answering questions and I could not have found Jeemgreem to warn him; I decided if I am on Dorje's death list there is no longer the least doubt in my mind as to whose side I am on. So I left the hotel to look for Jeemgreem. It was already daylight. I saw Colonel McGowan's car. The chauffeur recognized me. I ordered him to drive me to wherever it was that he had taken Bertolini and that fat Indian. He obeyed, driving very swiftly."

"How did you get in?" I asked her.

"The gate was shut and no one opened it, although I rang the bell. The chauffeur wished to drive me away again, saying he must return at once to wait for Colonel McGowan; but he also told me that Jeemgreem and you and Jeff Ramsden are somewhere in this place. So I sent him away. I did not wish him to see me climb the wall. And then I could not climb it, so I did not know what to do. And that Chinaman came and found me vainly trying to lift that great gate off its hinges."

"Did he go for you?"

"Not he. I think he thought I did not recognize him. He unlocked the gate. I went in with him. He was very civil. He unlocked the house door. And he told me to wait in the hall while he went for someone. He looked first in one room--then another--then another. Then he went upstairs. So I, too, began opening doors. I found my way down here. I had opened that door. I was listening in the passage from behind a leather curtain, when that Chinaman came on me from behind and seized my throat. He put a hand over my mouth. I bit him, but I could make no sound; and he dragged me out here, where he tried to kill me. That is all. Then you came."

Jeff opened the door abruptly. "What's up?" He stared at Baltis, thinking the mess on her neck was blood. "Better carry her in here.

Seen McGowan?"

"Where is Jeemgreem?" She went ahead of us into the passage. Jeff looked worried.

"Bertolini," he said, "has cracked badly. If we don't look out his brain will go completely before Grim gets him to explain that cypher. Chullunder Ghose is almost at the bottom of his bag of tricks. It's, a blank wall."

Baltis heard him. She waited for us and demanded to be helped, but refused to be carried. She put a hand on Jeff's shoulder. From behind I put my hands under her arms, but she shook me off. The passion, that had made her stab the Chinaman in the neck like a she-cobra, was still raging in her and she struck at whatever irritated; it was probably lucky for me that she had covered up the deadly fang of her bracelet.

"Jeemgreem learns the cypher, does he? Bertolini tells him? And they put ME on the death list!"

Physically she was weakening. Emotionally she had flared up, and there was no guessing how far that indignant heat would carry her. When we had passed through the horse-hide curtain she tried to stand alone but had to cling again to Jeff's arm, and in the stronger light her face looked ghastly; cunning and desperation fought with almost overwhelming weakness.

"Jeemgreem!" she said--and then stared at the crew who were still on the prayer-mats with their backs to the wall. One by one she studied them, until at last her eyes sought Bertolini and she clung to Jeff's arm with both hands as if to economize her strength and have plenty to launch at the blind man. She reminded me of a beaten boxer saving himself for the clang of the bell and hoping to land meanwhile

with one venomous punch. Instinct governed her. "Jeemgreem, if you wish to understand that cypher, let me speak with Bertolini."

Grim nodded. Jeff passed her to me, his instinct, habit, training keeping him at his post as guardian of the exit. She protested, but she could hardly stagger unaided, so she took my arm and I led her toward the platform. Bertolini was muttering like a drunken man, with his chin on his chest, and Grim was listening but evidently making nothing of it.

I had to lift her to the platform; there was no step. As I did that I tried to get her bracelet, but there was no pulling it off over her hand and Grim shook his head when I held out her wrist toward him.

"Poison," I explained.

"Yes," he said, "most snakes have that."

The sneer enraged her. He added insult: "It's all they're good for."

Chullunder Ghose sprang to his feet and backed away toward where Jeff stood near the entrance.

I suppose I was standing too close to her to see the signal she made; my attention was divided, too; I had noticed what Grim must have seen when he first approached the platform--a square hole in the wall no higher than the seat of Bertolini's throne; one could only see it by looking around the throne, and I may have been doing that. At any rate, I did not see her signal, but Chullunder Ghose did and he divined its purpose instantly.

Out went a light with a crash as the German smashed it. He wasted no time at all; he charged straight for the horsehide curtain, kicking over another lantern on his way and lowering his head to butt Jeff in

the solar plexus. Jeff took care of him of course; but he knocked him sideways; the German crashed into the babu, who was caught off balance, and the two went down in a flailing heap together, punching at each other.

It was as quick as a bar-room roughhouse. Light after light went out. The man who rushed me trod on a revolver cartridge and did a split like a comedian so that my fist missed him by several inches. As he fell he grabbed my leg. Another man knocked me backward and I fell in Bertolini's lap and experienced all the sensations of instant death; imagination made me absolutely sure that the glass flask in my right hip-pocket had struck the stone arm of the throne. That it did not break was one of those things that make a man want to believe in miracles.

Then someone got me by the throat, and there were two men hanging to my left arm. Underneath me Bertolini struggled like a fish in a net. All the lanterns were out except one; I could see one somewhere. And the harder I used knees and feet and right fist, the nearer my right hip-pocket approached the arm of the throne.

Grim had the lantern. Presently I saw him. It was his fist that felled the man whose fingers clutched my throat. I saw Baltis, too, on hands and knees, quite near me. I believe it was she who helped to pull me clear of Bertolini; and then, for a few seconds, Grim and I had to fight with our backs to the wall at the back of the platform, and the brunt of that business fell to me because Grim had the only lantern and to save that seemed almost as important as not to break the glass flasks in our pockets.

It was too dark to see what Jeff was doing. The place sounded like a shambles when a wounded steer has broken loose. But Jeff is such a coolly calculating and terrific fighter that he probably could have held that exit almost indefinitely if Baltis had not been there, and if

Chullunder Ghose had held his tongue, and I mine. Small blame to him, the babu hates fighting and prefers to use his wits. He had kicked a man in the stomach and then busied himself throwing the empty revolvers down the passage to prevent the enemy from getting them. But he kept one; and two or three cartridges came kicked along the floor toward him, of which one fitted.

"Jimmy Jimgrim sahib, shall I shoot?" he called out.

"NO!" Grim answered. He and I had got the best of it at last at our end and to shoot, if you are winning, is to shoot your evidence as well as add hysteria to what is bad enough already.

"Come and get these flasks out of our pockets!" I shouted. "Then protect those with your pistol."

Baltis had not known until then that we had those flasks. I felt her snatch mine from my pocket at the moment when a punch-drunk Levantine rushed me for one last effort to crack my head against the wall. I side-stepped him and grabbed her. Grim's fist downed the Levantine and in the same second Baltis tried to hurl the flask against the wall. She dropped it. Grim caught it--tripped on the legs of the man he had knocked down--fumbled it (he had the lantern in one hand)--and sent it spinning into the square hole in the wall beside the throne. I heard it smash. Then Grim fell and the lantern went out.

"So now we all die!" Baltis said calmly. "It is not a bad death."

"Out of here!" Grim shouted. "Hurry up, Jeff-grab the babu!"

He seized Baltis and said quietly to me, "Bring Bertolini;" so I dragged him off the throne and hoisted him like a sack. It was pitch-dark. I had to scramble from the platform to the floor and then head for the noise where they were fidgeting to be first into the passage. I

tripped on a man's legs and staggered on to a cartridge, fell and lost sense of direction. I had thought Grim was ahead of me. He was not. It was his hand that helped me up again. Jeff's voice gave direction:

"This way! This way!"

Then the babu fired his pistol to give us a flash to see by and we entered the passage all together with the battered survivors of Dorje's gang fleeing ahead of us. Jeff had picked up three who could hardly stagger and had shoved them toward safety. The last one slammed the door in our faces, but as there was no way of holding it on the far side and the lock was toward us they gained nothing by that. They were met by McGowan descending the stair with a flashlight in one hand and his automatic in the other; and behind McGowan was a view of the putted legs of armed men. I was holding the door for Grim; he was a long time coming; I almost turned back to look for him, fearing he had been caught and overcome by the fumes from the flask. However, he came at last with Baltis in his arms, and in the mixed light from the hanging lantern and McGowan's electric torch both of them seemed to be laughing.

"Hello, Mac." He set Baltis down, letting her slide slowly to the floor, where she sat with her back to the wall. Then he glanced at Bertolini, whom I had laid not far away. "What's wrong with him?"

"Dead," I answered. On his neck above the jugular, there was a puncture that might have been made by a snake with one fang; by the lantern light it was hardly visible, but it was plain enough when McGowan turned the torch toward it.

"Baltis' bracelet," I whispered, and Grim nodded:

"Gad, what a team she'd have made with her twin!"

McGowan did not hear that. He interrupted:

"What killed twelve men in the other cavern? We got in by a tunnel from the garden and broke down a door. They're as dead as mummies, and not a sign of how it happened."

"Gas," Grim answered. "You can have some for analysis." He passed his flask to McGowan. Baltis spoke up hoarsely; her throat was swelling:

"I hope you open it! I hope your friends are with you when you do!"

McGowan took no notice of her. "There's a tunnel," he said, "that seems to lead from that cavern to this one, and there's an electric bell at the entrance. Have you seen an opening at this end?"

"Yes," Grim answered. "Gad, you're lucky!"

"How d'you mean?"

"I dropped a gas-flask in there--broke it."

"And the fun is," Baltis interrupted, rubbing her throat, "that nobody can ever prove--that there was anything--in the bottle! It becomes gas--it kills--it vanishes--it leaves no trace!"

She loved the humour of it. She appeared to wish that Grim were such another as Dorje with similar weapons. Grim ignored her as McGowan had done.

"Why did Bertolini keep such watch over the tunnel?"

"We'll give the gas time. Then we'll go, look, see," McGowan answered.

Chapter Twenty-Five

"People don't want problems. They want answers. And they want the answers wrong, I tell you!"

"Who killed Bertolini?" asked McGowan.

"I did," Grim answered.

McGowan stared, but not so hard as Baltis did. McGowan's men had rounded up the prisoners and marched them elsewhere. We were waiting down there for the gas to vanish out of the tunnel as Baltis said it would and as it already had done from the cavern where a dozen dead men lay. We had not yet dared open the door of the room we had recently left, and I don't think any of us were in a hurry to go into action again, we were so dead-weary, bruised and starved. McGowan had sent one of his men to try to cook some breakfast for us up in Bertolini's kitchen; and the Chinaman whom we had trussed up in the lavatory had been brought down and placed facing us, back to the wall with the gag removed but his hands and feet still fastened. He glared balefully at Baltis and I think he thought she was her sister. But not a word would he say.

"Am a liar too, on suitable occasion," Chullunder Ghose remarked. "But suitability seems incognito. I don't recognize it."

Grim said, looking at McGowan: "I killed Bertolini to save Baltis."

"Was she worth it?" asked the babu. "Bertolini understood the cypher. If you had left him alone in a room with me and something--say a copying press in which to crush his fingertips, I would have solved it!"

"Save her from what?" asked McGowan.

Grim's index finger traced a noose around his throat and then repeated it to make sure Baltis understood.

"They might not hang me," he suggested.

"No. Of course they wouldn't."

"But--they would--hang--her."

"And if this babu is asked for evidence, she will be shamefully and undramatically dead to all intents and purposes from moment when he takes the witness stand! Am expert witnees! Furthermore, am deaf. Yor purposes of lawful evidence, I did not hear our Jimmy Jimgrim say he slew corpus delicti."

"Yes," said McGowan, "they'd hang her all right. If I were you I'd let 'em do it. She is no more use. If she won't tell what she knows I don't see why you should shield her."

"She will tell," Grim answered, "in exchange for my telling who killed Bertolini."

Baltis looked indifferent. She rubbed her throat with both hands and took her time before she answered:

"I killed Bertolini. He had idiotically bungled Dorje's business. He had presumed to put me on the death list, which was not his business at all. I am his superior, to whom obedience was due. And there was a third reason: Bertolini was about to tell the secret of the cypher."

"Same no longer being secret," said Chullunder Ghose. "It reads this way: forty-five minus forty-five equals forty-five. And that is easy. Nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one-are forty-five. Reverse that

order-forty-five again. Subtract one from the other and we have the self-same figures in a different order, namely: eight, six, four, one, nine, seven, five, three, two. That then evidently is the order in which the numerals should read for decoding purposes. How goes the rest of it?"

McGowan spoke up: "Bible, McLaughlin's Dictionary, Encyc. Brit. Eleven."

"Undoubtedly those are the books," said Chullunder Ghose, "to whose lines and pages we must refer for the explanation of given numerals. That is also easy. What next?"

McGowan spoke again from memory: "One to twenty-eight equals circle. Nine, ten, eleven are one, two, two-two."

"Thirty-one numbers," said Grim. "Those might refer to the days of the month, the circle meaning the full moon. How many volumes has the eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica?"

"Twenty-eight," I said, "omitting the index."

"So perhaps from the first to the twenty-eighth we should consult the Encyclopaedia--volume one on the first, volume two on the second, and so on."

"I suspect it is not so easy as all that," said Chullunder Ghose. "A skunk emits a smell to stupefy his adversary. Would not Dorje do that also? How many volumes has the Bible?"

"King James version--usually one," I answered.

"Atcha, sahib. On the twenty-ninth we consult the Bible, which is oftener than many Christians do it. Self, am substitutionist with

pantheistic prejudices; one religion failing to excuse my tendencies, I substitute another--always. Am familiar with Bible, having frequently consulted same for proof of theory that nobody knows more than he can find out. What about McLaughlin's Dictionary?"

"French-English," I answered. "Two volumes."

"So we know that," said the babu. "On the thirtieth we consult volume one, and on the thirty-first volume two of McLaughlin's Dictionary. Not too troublesome. I hate French, it is such an accurate language. But we all hate something. Rammy sahib hates cats. Jimmy Jimgrim sahib has no word for how he feels regarding people who think they are better than others. Now what?"

"That's the rub," said Jeff, who likes concrete problems on which he can use force.

"Let's look through Bertolini's pockets," Grim suggested.

There was nothing much. A handkerchief--watch--keys--a little money--a new cheap memorandum book. The latter contained nothing except a folded half-page from a Cairene daily paper, from which the date was missing. Grim examined it.

"We win!" he said abruptly after half a minute. He handed the sheet to McGowan.

McGowan nodded. "Obvious. We have clerks who watch the daily papers. The agony column is always clipped and pasted in a scrap-book. We have known for, I should say, nine years that Bertolini paid for those occasional strings of numbers. But then he was known to be a crank on numerology among other things. Have you read his treatise on the Pyramid? It was just like him to publish a string of numbers without explaining them. We all thought he was warning us

in his own opinionated and obscure way about the date of the end of the world. In fact, when asked about it he admitted that. He used to say that people who couldn't understand the figures weren't entitled to the information, and that most people are idiots who will be exterminated like vermin when the end of the world comes. Bertolini was what you might call crusty."

The piece of newspaper was passed from hand to hand and reached me finally. At the top of the column headed Public Notices there were several lines of figures that resembled, for instance, a list of the numbers of bonds drawn for redemption: only there was no accompanying text. Simply the numbers, separated into groups by means of hyphens. No signature--no initials--not one word of explanation.

"He was blind. He himself couldn't read it," I objected.

"Precisely," said Grim. He glanced at the Chinaman sitting sulkily under the lantern. Then he glanced at Baltis, sideways. She understood him.

"Do you still--think--you can--manage-without me?" she answered.

"Numbers are a universal language," Grim said quietly. "Yes, I can manage now nicely without you. Good-bye!" He glanced at McGowan. "Could one of your men take her upstairs?"

McGowan summoned a man. "Escort the Princess Baltis into Bertolini's house and let her lie down if she wants to. But watch her, and call another man to watch with you. I will hold you answerable."

Baltis changed expression. I saw her hand go to her bracelet and quicker than I could cry out she had struck at Grim's neck. Jeff sprang at her. But Grim had guessed what to expect and caught her wrist.

Jeff held her while Grim took off the bracelet and passed it to McGowan.

"Interesting piece for your museum," he remarked. "I've finished with her. She can go now."

She was led away in something like a stupor and the soldier had to call another man to help him carry her up the winding stairway.

"Jail, I suppose?" said McGowan when she was out of earshot.

"No," Grim answered. "I need her badly."

"For the cypher?"

"Lord, no. That's as clear as daylight. I'll explain it in a minute. I've been watching for a real chance to get her goat so thoroughly that she'll go all limits to get vengeance. She can endure anything except contempt, so I pretended to despise her. Candidly I think she's splendid stuff. Let her go, Mac. She can't return to France. There's only one thing she can do--one man she can go to--Dorje! If she can get to Dorje, so can we."

"But how the devil can we let her go?" McGowan asked. "If we do, she will know why we do it. She will lead you on a false trail."

"I'm as easy to lead as a loose pig," Grim retorted, "and she knows we have the Chak-sam clue. She probably won't try to reach Chak-sam; she'll head for some place in India where she knows she can get in touch with Dorje. He may come to meet her, although it's hardly likely. Much more likely he'll order her to come to him; and if he doesn't have her killed in ambush on the way--and if she stands the climate and hardships--we can follow."

"But how are we to let her leave the country?"

Breakfast came--strong tea and what the soldier said was omelette. Maybe it was; at any rate, we ate it. Then, Chullunder Ghose inventing ingenious details, Grim and McGowan between them worked out a scheme. A friend of theirs named Jean Roche at the French Consulate-general was to be asked to approach Baltis and to offer her a forged passport and credentials if she would agree to escape from Egypt with his assistance and to do a little dirty work in India for the French.

"He can say he wants the low-down on the probability or otherwise of native armies joining in a revolution," Grim suggested.

And she can go by 'plane," said McGowan. "We had an application six or seven days ago from the French for permission to use our airports for a flight to Delhi. It isn't granted yet, but I believe it will be. If so, I can very likely persuade Jean Roche to smuggle her on board and make the pilot take a confidential letter to the Indian Intelligence. You'll follow--?"

"Hard on her heels. We're ready the minute we've got this cypher ironed out. Shall we all take a chance on that gas being gone?"

"Give it ten more minutes," said McGowan. "What's the secret of the cypher?"

Grim smiled at the babu. "You tell. What's the secret of the famous Indian trick of sending news without wire or signal?"

McGowan snorted. "If you know that, you know what our smartest men haven't been able to discover. It's done all right, but I don't believe the Indians themselves could tell you how it's done."

"Those who could tell, won't; and those who would tell, can't because the new words to explain it haven't been invented," said Chullunder Ghose. "Am personal antithesis of secrets. Not only can't keep one but hate to try to do it. Nevertheless, am neither Webster nor a psychiatric contortionist who can elucidate the said-to-be subconscious subterfuges of the mechanical instrument known as the brain. Same swims in thought the same as a frog in a bottle of alcohol. You stir the alcohol--the frog moves. You stir the sea of thought--and brains think--or they think they think, which shows what piffle words are. How do you suppose that Jimmy Jimgrim sahib guesses accurately six times out of seven what to do next? How do you suppose I understand him and can do what he wants me to do without his saying anything? How do you suppose a world goes mad and butchers ten or eleven million men without knowing what it is fighting about? It is because the brain is a machine that does exactly what it is told to do; and if you don't tell it, someone else will. In India we teach ourselves to use our brains as listening machines, since that is easier than hard work. Our trouble is too many people send us such perplexing contradictory absurdities to think about; and too few understand the trick of tuning in to what is worth getting. And besides, jazz stirs them to excitement, whereas symphony suggests that there are problems. People don't like problems. They like answers. And they like the answers wrong, I tell you. Now I bow and take a back seat. Jimmy Jimgrim is from Tibet, where they teach such matters. Let him tell it."

Grim did tell. Ten minutes trailed into an hour while he explained, as far as can be done when scientific words have not yet been invented for the purpose. I did not believe him. Neither did McGowan. My mind, while I try to keep it tolerant of other men's opinions, refuses to take seriously explanations that are not demonstrable by scientific method. For him to say, as he did say, that the Eastern trick consists in emptying the brain of thought in order that it may pick up other

thought deliberately broadcast or else latent in the layers of the mass mind, left too much still to be explained. His argument that orators, with nothing in the world to say, can stir men's minds by stilling thought with trickery of voice and gesture, and then fill them with emotion that induces them to go away and vote in opposition to their better judgment, seemed to me unconvincing.

But he knew what he wanted to say, and he did his best to say it, in a language that is singularly lacking in appropriate terms.

"The difficulty is," he said, "that though we are all being constantly bombarded by a perfect barrage of thoughts from all directions, so that lots of people go mad because they are oversensitive to it, there are very few who are able to train themselves to select the thoughts they wish to think and to reject the others. I believe Dorje's messages are--to use a stock phrase--thoughts sent on a certain wave-length. Trained brains intercept them."

"Is yours trained?" asked McGowan.

"Partly. I keep thinking of a string of numbers."

"So do I," said Chullunder Ghose.

"So do I," said Jeff.

"Without telling each other, let's all three write down what we get," said Grim.

He, Jeff and Chullunder Ghose wrote on leaves torn from McGowan's note-book. They passed to me what they had written. I read aloud:

"4-3-2-9-2-5-9-8-7-1."

There were the same figures, in the same order, on each sheet of

paper.

"And Jeff and I are only partially trained," said Grim.

"Chullunder Ghose comes by it naturally."

"What the devil do the figures mean?" McGowan wondered.

Grim glanced at the black-clad Chinese butler.

"They are meant, I think," he said, "for Bertolini, who could very likely get them but, being blind, could not have looked them up, for instance, in a code-book, if there is one, as I think there must be. Someone loose that fellow's legs. He has heard our conversation, so we'd better take him with us, or he might talk to the wrong man while our backs are turned. Besides, we need a man who knows to go ahead of us and make sure that the gas has gone out of the tunnel." He looked straight into the man's eyes. "If he won't talk, he shall serve us somehow!"

Chapter Twenty-Six

"Even Lenin never had the nerve to blow his horn as loud as that!"

There was no smell or sign of gas in the rock-hewn chamber where we had fought with Bertolini's gang, but there were five men lying on the floor who had died so instantaneously that their nerves had not had time to make their muscles move and register pain or even a spasmodic struggle. There was a careful autopsy performed on them, and on the dead men in the other cavern, late that evening and not a trace of anything was found that could explain why or how they had died. They were dead; the life was separated from their bodies; that was all that even chemical analysis could answer.

Nor was there the slightest trace of gas or of any detectable rare element within the tunnel leading downward from the cavern, although later in the day men came and chipped small pieces from the stone and those were crushed and chemically tested. Nobody believed our tale about the gas until a too incredulous laboratory expert opened one of the glass flasks taken from the drawer in the Chinese butler's room. That expert and his five assistants died so swiftly that the only good they did was to suggest how other unexplained deaths, in many countries, might have happened. There are nine of those flasks remaining for some genius to open, if he dares, and analyse if he can find a way to do it. And there may be others; nobody knows how many gallons of that deadly liquid Dorje sent to different quarters of the globe for the removal of objectionable people. All we do know is that Dorje's factory is now as lost forever as the secret of the means by which men built the Pyramid, of blocks that weigh eight hundred tons apiece, before even wheels were in regular use or steam and electricity were known. We know no more, comparatively, than the ancients did; their ignorance of what we know was probably not greater than our ignorance of principles they understood. And when a man like Dorje taps a new vein of the infinite resources of the universe, he leaves our ablest scientists as ignorant as cavemen gaping at a radio receiving set.

Grim was quite sure the Chinaman was Bertolini's intimate if not his master. He was equally sure, although he had no proof, that Bertolini had a code-book hidden somewhere and that the Chinaman knew where it was. But I don't think that even Grim with his inductive imagination guessed to what fanatical extremes that Chinaman would go to keep the information from us.

It was a square hole three feet high, but it formed the opening of a circular descending shaft, thirty or thirty-five feet deep, that had difficult steps cut spiral-wise around it. We had to descend with our

bodies pressed close to the wall, while a soldier lay in the square opening overhead and showed the way with an electric torch. The Chinaman seemed used to it. He went down as adroitly as a sailor and reached the bottom several seconds ahead of Grim, who came next and was racing to overtake him.

But McGowan had brought extra torches and we each had one. At the bottom with our hands free we could use them; so the Chinaman fled down a six-foot tunnel in a glare of white light and he very soon came to a standstill, realizing that he had no chance of hiding from us and that whatever he did we could see him. I believe, too, that he was stiff from being tied; his tendons hurt him. Anyhow, he slowed down, Grim overtook him, and by that time we were hard on Grim's heels.

It was partly a natural tunnel, partly hewn; the ancient burrowers had followed a fault in the rock, and wherever they came to pockets they had hewn them into rectangular chambers of all shapes and sizes, so that the passage was irregular and not unlike the Roman catacombs. There were skeletons in some of the chambers, and I paused long enough in the entrance of one large chamber to make sure that several skeletons in there were those of men who died quite recently; the flesh appeared to me to have been removed with acid. In another place there were female skeletons, two of them with long dark hair still clinging to the skulls.

There was a gap in the floor that we jumped, Grim following the Chinaman and we pursuing Grim. Jeff jumped it like a catapulted hayrick, but Chullunder Ghose seemed as light on his feet as a full balloon, although he came down on the far side awkwardly, slid, and sat down so hard that his belly shook and he dropped his flashlight down the hole. It was switched on, and it fell on something that prevented it from breaking. I turned back to help him. He and I looked down into a cave illuminated by the torch, which lay undamaged on a

pile of filthy-looking sacks.

"Come on," I said, "we can examine that hole later."

"Said the dentist to the man with toothache. Now or never, sahib. You do what you jolly well dam-choose about it!"

Down he went feet first on to the pile of sacking, ignoring rough steps hewn into the rock wall. I saw him roll off the sacking and vanish. Arguing that Grim was not likely to need me since he had Jeff and McGowan, I followed the babu, landing on the sacking heels first. Dry things cracked under my weight.

I opened one and a broken skull rolled out of it. The floor was spread a foot deep with the broken bones of human skeletons--not mummies. Nailed to the walls of the cave with iron spikes were parts of other skeletons still held together by dry ligaments that broke and let the bones fall as the babu touched them. Of the hundreds in there, some looked old enough to have been dead for centuries; but I counted ten, on walls and floor, that at the first glance I could swear had marrow in their bones.

"Look out!" said the babu suddenly.

The Chinaman came sprawling down the hole and landed on hands and knees on the loose mass of ribs and skulls and thigh-bones that concealed the floor. He was up in a second; he rushed me with his head down, clutched my jacket as I dodged him, tore it and then charged Chullunder Ghose. The babu fled.

"Come on, sahib! I say, come on, dammit!"

He switched his light out. In another second he was clambering the rough steps.

"Come on, sahib, for the love of--"

So I switched my light out too, although I couldn't see why I should run from a middle-aged Chinaman who was already out of breath as well as stiff from being gagged and tied. I could hear Grim coming, and the others close behind him. My hand touched the babu's foot. He switched his light on--jumped for the sacking again, taking me with him, and we rolled together off the sacks on to the floor. But he held his torch as if it were a gun and he were fighting. He kept it full on the Chinaman. Grim--Jeff--McGowan crashed on to the sacks. Jeff and the babu spoke together:

"Doubled on us! Ducked around a Y-shaped passage! Sahib, he has swallowed it! I guessed he did not come down here for nothing! I saw where it came from!"

I sprang at the Chinaman. So did Grim--Jeff--McGowan. He was gagging. He had swallowed something that stuck in his throat, but he fought like a bear-cat. We held him, and by the light of the babu's electric torch I tried to force him to disgorge what was choking him. He bit my fingers to the bone. It needed all the strength of Jeff's two hands to force his jaws apart; and even then, though he was dying of strangulation, he resisted and kept on struggling to swallow something that would not go either way; his will was such that he could overcome the natural instinct to disgorge, even though I used every trick I knew to make him do it.

I had no instruments. To save the man's life, if for no other reason, I had to take desperate measures, and whether I killed him or not is something that the Book of Judgment, if there is one, must determine. I got the thing out, and he bled to death. He would have strangled to death, I believe, if I had not done that; and if he had contrived to swallow what I pulled out from his throat he would

undoubtedly have died, not quite so quickly but in great pain.

It was a tube, of such diameter that it was a mystery how he had got it into his throat at all. It was three and a half inches long and made apparently of bronze—at any rate of some copper alloy, very ancient and extremely thin—so thin that at one place where it was broken it had turned up like paper and would certainly have pierced the lining of his stomach, had it ever got that far. It was screwed together in the middle and contained a roll of exceedingly thin, strong paper that had been thumbed and handled so often as to be entirely discoloured on the outside. Grim unrolled it, and his fingers trembled.

It was nearly a yard long, entirely covered on the inside with Tibetan characters, which neither McGowan nor I could read. We held the torches. Grim, Jeff and Chullunder Ghose pored over it, the babu breathing through his nose and almost squealing with excitement.

"We have him!" he shouted. "We have him!"

He danced, impiously posturing like Krishna with his flute, whereas he should have danced like Siva. The thighs of a skeleton crashed from the wall to the floor.

"Symbolic of the end of Dorje! Read it, Jimgrim sahib! Read it! Translate!"

"What were those numbers?" Grim asked.

"Four, three, too, nine, two, five, nine, eight, seven, one," I answered.

"This," said Grim, "is all divided into numbered words and sentences. The numbers are not in sequence. There's a sentence at the bottom, numbered one, that seems to be the signature. It reads 'I am Dorje the sceptre of that which shall be. I am Maitreya. I destroy that I may

rebuild. Dorje is my body and Maitreya is my spirit. I am dual and I bring forth the third, which is a new dispensation."

"Hot stuff!" said McGowan. "Even Lenin never had the nerve to blow his horn as loud as that."

"But there are lots of number ones," said Grim, "at least a dozen of 'em. The numbers seem to run from one to nine; and then from one to nine again, and so on. And the words and sentences, except that last one, don't make sense in the order in which they stand, not even if you read them in the order four, three, two, nine, two, etc."

"Omit that last one," Jeff suggested. "That's the signature. That leaves nine numbers."

"And transpose them!" The babu was dancing again--dancing on skulls and ribs and thigh-bones. "Forty-five from forty-five leaves eight, six, four, one, nine, seven, five, three, two. So we start with the eight figure. Which would that be?"

"Three," Grim answered. "Good--you're right. It makes sense. Give me a paper and pencil and for God's sake hold that torch-light steady." He scribbled. "Wait a minute. There are two twos in the figures we got, and two nines."

"All right," said McGowan, "aren't there lots of twos and nines on that sheet? Try the first two for the first; the second two down the line for the second; the first nine, and then the second nine--how does it read then?"

"Give me your notebook." Using Chullunder Ghose's broad back for a table, swearing at him irritably when he moved, Grim covered half a dozen pages. "Yes," he said at last, "we've got it. Listen: 'I find fault. Slay those who moved too soon. Those who escape, betray them to

their governments. Continue until I order otherwise to attribute blame for every outbreak and every destruction to whichever social rebels in each country are already most notorious. Continue to excite rebellion against all governments. Double and redouble all precautions concerning shipments of my lightning and my breath of anger (God, what a name for the stuff!) even to the extent if necessary of destroying those who have served their destiny by bringing these to the appointed places. Concentrate on spreading unrest and a feeling of impending cataclysm. Observe greater secrecy. Remember you are only one of many who obey me. My conquest is not hastened by your consulting with one another, which can lead only to confusion. Drink your inspiration from its source, which I am. I am Dorje, the sceptre of that which shall be. I am Maitreya. I destroy that I may rebuild. Dorje is my body and Maitreya is my spirit. I am dual and I bring forth the third, which is a new dispensation!"

"General orders!" said McGowan. "Hot and heavy! Got to hand it to him! How about those figures in the daily paper?"

"What was the date? The twenty-ninth?" Grim asked. "We can't read those, then, till we get a Bible."

The babu yelped excitedly. "Am three in one! Am most observant babu in the universe; am champion long-distance heavy-weight deductionist from Kanchenjunga to Peru; am humble servant. All three! Just a minute. I saw where Celestial sword-swallower of Dorje's predigested pilot-book abducted same! I bet you! I bet everybody. Pounds Egyptian fifty! Who bets? Wait a minute?"

He began to burrow among bones that almost filled the opening of a six-foot cavity in the middle of the end wall, tossing jaws and ribs and thigh-bones to the floor like a terrier enlarging a rat-hole.

"Torches! Torches! Why does no one bet me?"

He dragged forth an armful of bones and we flooded the hole in the wall with white light.

"There you are! I said so! Why should something so important that a Chinese swallows it be hidden here, and not lots of other improbable things? Law of improbability is only mystery that always functions! Is it likely? No. Then seek and ye shall find it! Look, I tell you!"

One would have thought he had found Dorje himself, so jubilant he was. However, what he found was all we needed at the moment—a big Bible, a complete set of the Encyclopoedia Britannica and two volumes of McLaughlin, along with a set of work-sheets done in pencil giving sets of figures evidently meant for insertion in the agony columns of newspapers all over the world. There was even a list of newspapers, including more than fifty in the U.S.A.

McGowan read off the figures from the Cairene daily paper. Chullunder Ghose transposed them, using the order 8, 6, 4, 1, 9, 7, 5, 3, 2; 8 becoming 1, 6 becoming 2, and so on. Grim decoded, turning from page to page of the Bible and jotting down the indicated words. The first number preceding a hyphen were page numbers, the next gave the line on the page, and the next gave the word. The message read:

"Men of Egypt, laugh if they say these calamities are caused by this or that. Know ye they are the deeds of him ye look for who shall rule all peoples from his high place. Therefore let each of you according to his own ability strive to bring your rulers into despair and contempt. Pay no taxes. Lend not to your rulers. Obey no laws of their making. Cause the wheels to cease turning. Answer no man. And beware ye of rash speech with one another. I am that I am."

"That smells a bit of Bertolini—lacks the Nelson touch," said Grim.

"However, now we're all set."

I suggested that such messages were hardly likely to accomplish much in civilized countries, but McGowan snorted:

"Have you forgotten our war-time propaganda? Was there ever anything less credible than that? And who didn't believe it? Why, even our own propagandists did!"

"Sink a few more battleships," said Jeff.

"Blow up a few more arsenals," said Grim.

Chullunder Ghose almost shouted. He was screeching with excitement:

"Smash a bottle of that liquid in the House of Commons--in the House of Representatives in Washington--in the French Chamber of Deputies--in the Berlin Reichstag--kill off all the politicians! And no trace of how it happened! Dorje might turn out to be a godsend after all! Am not yet convert to cause of Dorje, but I feel premonitory symptoms! If he would also guarantee to kill wife of this bosom--but that is too much to imagine!"

"We can stop him now," said McGowan. "We'll have his code copied at once, and that roll translated. We'll distribute copies to every secret service in the world. It should be easy to track down the men who insert the advertisements. They'll squeal on the others. Then what?"

"Chak-sam," Grim answered,

"Plane, of course?"

"If you can manage it. For God's sake, Mac, get word to them at Delhi not to tie us up with red tape. Tell 'em anyone may have the

credit. What we want is leave to cut loose and behave like crazy men."

"I'll do my best. But just how crazy?"

"From the hour I land in India, I'm Dorje! His technique is to be mysterious and let no one see him. I'll force his hand or bust. You fellows game?"

We nodded. "Maybe I look meek, but I'm a tough guy," said the babu. "Was in jail in U.S.A. and know all about bloody murder. Nobody can scare me, except emancipated wife."

"And, Mac, will you make sure Baltis gets to India?"

"I will. Who wants her here!"

That evening McGowan brought us secret news of the Italian disaster-- the first of three terrific ones in three days--the explosion of the arsenal near Genoa that killed a thousand men. The earthquake made it easy for the censors to exclude it from the news; and when it did leak out it was blamed on the anti-Fascisti, seventeen of whom were hanged and others sent to life imprisonment. He also told us that a big 'plane would be ready first thing in the morning, for India, via Baghdad.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

"Deify me, and I bu'st. But I bu'st you also!"

Grim was jubilant.

"Can you stay awake?" he asked us. We had had four hours' sleep on cots and sofas in McGowan's apartment. "We can sleep in the

"plane," he suggested. "There'll be nothing else to do. There'll be another big one tuned up and waiting for us in Baghdad. It's a rotten trip. Nothing to do but bump the bumps and hear the engines sing until we get to Delhi. Listen to this."

He began to read us excerpts from a pile of papers in a box marked secret that McGowan had left with him. They were decoded cablegrams received during the past twenty-four hours and they provided the first real glimpse that any of us except Grim had into McGowan's actual importance in the secret service network. There are probably not ten men in the whole world, foreign editors of newspapers included, who are kept so accurately posted as McGowan as to the details of subversive events. There was hardly a sentence from any cablegram that could have been published without causing a panic somewhere.

Unemployment and increasing discontent in England, Germany, the United States, Belgium, Spain, Austria, Portugal, Scandinavia, Australia, South Africa--the list was endless.

"Deify me and I bu'st!" observed Chullunder Ghose. "But I bu'st you also! Verb sap. Easiest way to dispose of inconvenient phenomena is to call same frauds or miracles. Diabolize or deify. It is true that Asia looks for coming of Lord Maitreya and new dispensation. Has been looking for a long time. Hope deferred maketh the heart grow more and more inclined to listen to hot-air salesman. Am same. Frequently have contemplated going into the Maitreya business--was prevented by a too keen sense of humor. Cannot laugh at self and at same time be a super-Jupiter. Am Munro-ish also like U.S.A.--nervous of competition. What succeeds by saying one thing can be house-of-cardishly upset by someone saying something else. As unimportant babu, slander is my best advertisement. But as King of the World I can tolerate neither truth nor lies nor competition. Am

intolerable. Prick me and I blow up!"

"How can you prick a man you can't find?" Jeff objected.

"Dorje's strength consists in being undiscoverable. His agents all seem to be pretty futile people, and they don't know where he is. Perhaps Baltis has seen him; but have any of the others? Probably ninety per cent of 'em don't even know they are Dorje's men."

"Exactly," said Grim. "That's how he has got away with it and how we catch him. If we don't, he has the world whipped, because he is doing what every conqueror has always done--playing on the world's ignorance and jealousy, and using propaganda of all three kinds, secret, political and religious, backed up by drastic violence. Every conqueror has had something new to sell, and Dorje has gone them all one better, this being an age of science. Dorje has discovered something they've known in Tibet for centuries: how to send out thought-waves so that other people get them. Thought wave-lengths are like radio wave-lengths, only different in degree and impulse. This wave-length reaches one kind of person--that, another. Very few guess what is happening to them. So he needs hardly any organization; he makes use of other people's.

"For instance, in Italy he can stir the anti-Fascist element. In France, the Communist. In Russia, the anti-Communist. In England, the unemployed. In India, any and every one of a dozen political and a hundred religious factions--each against the other, and the lot against the British. In China, Communist against Nationalist. There isn't a country in the world he can't reach."

I objected. "There can't be force enough in one man's brain to send out waves to all the people in the world. It needs horsepower, for instance, to send out radio."

"But," Grim answered, "if the energy is there already and all Dorje has to do is use it, what then? He doesn't have to create it. Nobody creates energy. A machine, or a gun, or a brain, or a human body is only a rather clumsy means of using the same energy that turns the world around. A so-called dynamic man is merely one adjusted by temperament or training to a certain sort of thought-wave, or energy-wave, or whatever you like to call it. He responds to and distributes that particular type of energy. That is what Dorje understands. And what I don't doubt that he also understands is what Chullunder Ghose just hinted at:

"He can't stand competition--mustn't tolerate it for a moment."

"You?" I asked him. "Do you mean that? Are you going to compete?"

He nodded. "Force him out into the open. Why find Dorje? Why not make him come and find me?"

"He will send his thugs instead, with a bottle of 'death's breath,'" I suggested.

"Yes," he said, "we'll have to take tall chances."

"Same are like tall women," said Chullunder Ghose. "They look impressive but are not so deadly as the short ones. You should see my wife--height four feet seven, but emancipated--very."

Then McGowan came, with news of Baltis. "All O.K. She'll arrive in Delhi shortly after you chaps. Dammit, I feel sorry for her. She perfectly understands she's being imshied off to India to serve as bait. She might commit suicide."

"Not she," Grim answered. "Everybody has faith in something. Hers is in reincarnation. She honestly believes she was the Queen of

Sheba, and Anne Boleyn, and all the rest of 'em. That's the crazy side of her religion. The sane side is, she'll endure anything rather than kill herself, because that would cause her to reincarnate as a foredoomed failure. No. She'd kill Dorje or me. But herself? I think not."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

"In indelible ink?"

Every tourist in the world knows what happened. While we were speeding toward Delhi in a 'plane provided for us by the Royal Air Force, McGowan and his staff were sending cablegrams in code to London giving a detailed explanation of Dorje's cypher, and London was distributing the information to all the governments of the civilized world through the embassies and legations, along with a careful description of Dorje's "thunderbolts" and the glass flasks containing his "death's breath."

Consequently tourists were exasperated by the questions they were forced to answer at every frontier they crossed, and by the minute inspection of their baggage. Drove of them were detained for special enquiries and were less annoyed by that than by the evasiveness and apparent indifference of their own ambassadors and consuls to whom they complained.

Like most emergency precautions, those were probably overdone. However, numbers of Dorje's thunderbolts were found in baggage that looked innocent, and numbers of probably innocent people were hard put to it to explain how, when and where the things were hidden among their belongings. Some of those are still in prison and extremely likely to remain there for a long time, along with the guilty, of whom many had unenviable records and were consequently easy

to convict.

But those intense and annoying precautions, though they undoubtedly reduced disaster to a minimum, did not prevent the Hull, the Essen and the Angora explosions that caused so much havoc, and the latter of which, by destroying all reserves of ammunition, prevented the Turkish army from annihilating the invading Kurds. There were also serious disasters caused by the examination of the captured thunderbolts; incautious officials turned the plugs in the thread at the end, with the result that fires were started and electric light plants put out of commission along with trolley systems, telephones and factories that used electric current. Governments were unanimous in keeping silence about Dorje. For one thing, there was no evidence against him—that is to say, no legal evidence, because the thunderbolts destroyed themselves and left no trace. It might have been much wiser to tell the truth and so unite all factions in one indignant and alert defence against a common foe; but it seemed at the moment more convenient to all the governments to blame their pet domestic adversaries. So those arrested were accused, according to the country in which they happened to be at the moment, as Communists, "Reds", Anarchists, Fascists, anti-Fascists, Monarchists, Republicans, Carlists, Semites, anti-Semites, revolutionaries pure and simple, counter-revolutionaries, Socialists or anti-socialists as the case might be. In more than one country the Pope was accused of conspiring to conquer the world by force of arms and even nunneries were searched for hidden stores of arms and ammunition.

In India there were nearly as many explanations as there are factions. Gandhi was an obvious suggestion; in prison though he was, it was simple to associate him and his followers with the awful affair at Cawnpore, where the arsenal exploded on the day we landed and a quarter of the city, along with thousands of men, women and children,

was obliterated. But the Hindus blamed it on the Moslem fanatics; the Moslems blamed it on the Hindu Nationalists; and the Sikhs blamed both or either; while a number of noisy agitators of the opportunist type accused the British-Indian Government, asserting that the explosion had been deliberately caused, to provide an excuse for drastic military measures. And incredible though that was, thousands of ignorant people believed it, and not only in India; it crept into print in a number of countries.

On the other hand, there was a saner, less sensational report that the explosion had been caused by agents of the Afridis who were then invading the Peshawar district on the North-West frontier and who were too well armed, and too well informed and organized not to be at least suspected of collaboration with powerful interests in India itself.

Delhi--or at least that part of it where the new great Government buildings stand and the official nerves of India meet in one imposing but too vulnerable ganglion--was in a state of tension such as even India had not produced since the days of the Mutiny. The Intelligence Department, normally the best informed and most efficient in the world, was as overloaded as a switch-board on the New York Stock Exchange when millions of shares are dumped on to a slumping market. The office into which we were led by a uniformed guide was as quiet as a morgue--too quiet. There were too many sentries. Officers walked much too calmly through the waiting-room and down the corridors, betraying tension by an overdone restraint. And when a voice fell on the silence it was as startling as a pistol shot in church.

We were kept waiting forty minutes before we were shown into the office of a general who was glad to see Grim but was not so cordial toward Chullunder Ghose.

"I have had dealings with you," he remarked. "You are on my black

book."

"In indelible ink?" the babu asked him, and the general nodded.

"Then please tear out the entire page, general sahib. My akasic record is already bad enough without another one in this world also. Besides, I have credentials--new ones, uncontaminated yet."

Grim gave the general a letter from McGowan in which the babu was emphatically praised and recommended. The general read it, scowled and refused to yield:

"I don't care. I refuse to take him into confidence. He has a bad record and has been in prison three times to my knowledge."

"On the other hand," said Grim, "I understand him and he understands me."

"Do you think he has reformed?" asked the general.

Chullunder Ghose gulped. "Never! Am not so contemptible! Reformers and reformed are all dishonest scoundrels. The rest are honest scoundrels, of whom self am Admirable Crichton. You put a reformer or a reformed person in your job, and see how soon Dorje, for instance, will abolish the job altogether! Respectability? I don't give a damn for it! Am last equationist. That is to say, appearances may go to the devil unless they serve my purpose; and the only problem that concerns me is, what do you or I intend to do about it? Life is a personal business. I am personally pleased to work for Jimmy Jimgrim sahib against Dorje; but for you I would not work on any terms whatever. If you feel about me as I do about you, we will both of us go to the devil; but I think the devil would receive me pleasantly, whereas your brass hat and your shoddy morals would annoy him. That is my opinion, and if I were a lawyer I would charge

you money for it."

"You may leave the room," said the general, and I saw a flicker in the wrinkles at the corner of Grim's eye. Chullunder Ghose went, waddling out importantly, and when the door had closed behind him the general continued, smiling: "That is the worst of that man. One of the best we ever had in some ways, but incorrigibly impudent. I can't have dealings with him. If you care to trust him, you must do so at your own risk and on your own responsibility."

"I think it's just a question of understanding him," Grim answered. "He's a rare bird. He would ten times over rather die than let a man down."

"Well, you manage him. As a matter of fact, Grim, if the situation weren't so serious I should have to dispense with you and Ramsden. I can't employ you. I can't put you on the pay roll."

"Do you mean you won't recognize me?"

"Officially, no. Personally you and I have been friends since the day we first met. If you go after Dorje I can't protect you or even promise to back you up in any way whatever. You must act in your private capacity with no more than my personal encouragement and good will."

"Suits me," said Grim. "Do you know where Dorje is?"

"Nobody knows."

"If he were in Delhi you would hear of it, of course?"

"Within the hour, most likely. Within the day, at any rate."

"If his presence in Delhi were reported to you, would you dare not to

arrest him?"

"I can dare anything. But what's the idea?"

"I am Dorje."

The general stared, leaned back and drummed his fingers on the desk.

"There is no other possible way to uncover him," said Grim.

"His very loose organization has got a bit out of hand and gone off half-cocked before he was ready. It's a cinch he's lying low and covering his tracks; he won't move a finger to protect the fools who made the big mistake."

"Do you suspect where he is?" asked the general.

"Probably in Chinese Turkestan. Perhaps in Tibet."

"Then how can he possibly know what has been happening during the past ten-twenty days? I can swear he has not used wireless; we'd have caught that in a minute. There's a single wire to Lhasa; I have a record of every message, both ways, since the wire was first installed. The same goes for the wire to Ladakh. Of course, the Chinese have a wire of their own from somewhere in Turkestan to Peking, but it takes about a week to get a message through and it has to be transmitted so many times that it arrives all garbled. Do you suppose the Russians have run a wire that we don't know of, over the Pamirs?"

"No," Grim answered. "Dorje is as much a problem to the Russians as to all the rest of us. Dorje is using thought-waves, of a scientifically determined wave-length, to send code numbers to individuals all over

the world who have been trained to get them. We have a book they use to interpret the numbers."

"Yes," said the general, "McGowan rushed a photostatic copy to me, in the 'plane that brought you."

"There must be another book," said Grim, "containing other numbers and another set of words--phrases--sentences, that someone--very likely only one man, or a woman--uses to send messages to Dorje. He would not be likely to entrust that to more than one or two people, even if he could find more than one or two people in the world who could be trained and trusted. Otherwise, they might start sending messages to one another. There is some one person, somewhere, who can get the world news--probably it's some one in a foreign office, or at any rate a government department--someone high up--who is sending code--thought-messages to Dorje. I believe that code book and that person are in India."

"Why?"

"Several reasons. It would be easier to teach an Indian to work the trick. In a certain degree the Indians are used to it; it would only need developing and training. Again: Dorje has not been getting all the news."

"What makes you think so?"

"His message that we caught in Egypt, ordering his agents to discontinue action and wait for orders. A ruthless devil such as Dorje must be, in receipt of information that his agents had produced major disasters in a dozen countries, would be likely to order them all to cut loose and wreak general havoc. Why not? So it looks as if his information man is hampered by the censorship. Isn't the censorship screwed tighter here than anywhere?"

"The thread might break if we took one more turn at it!"

"I'm guessing, but I think that information man is probably a rather high official here in Delhi--someone who had access not so long ago to all the bulletins, but who somehow or other no longer has it. If so, you can find him by a process of elimination. However, don't move too fast. Give him time to get word through to Dorje that there's someone here in Delhi masquerading as himself."

"Do you realize the risk?" Grim smiled--nodded.

"It would be safer to pose as the Pope, or as the Viceroy of India," said the general. "At least five hundred million people, to whom religion means more than food and drink, await the coming of the Lord Maitreya under one name or another. It's the strongest and most dangerous undercurrent in the world today, and it includes all Asia--even China and Japan. Dorje has stirred that undercurrent so adroitly that the whole of Asia awaits the new dispensation-- expects it. These political disturbances are symptoms. They're ready--on tip-toe--listening and looking for the new Messiah. Look what they did to Gandhi--almost deified him. I tell you, if Gandhi hadn't been a man of iron will and decent spirit they'd have done it! And they'd have killed him if he had lost his head for half a minute! Dorje--you play Dorje and they'll mob you. They'll demand a miracle. Fail, and they'll tear you to tatters!"

"I will take that chance if you permit," said Grim.

"I couldn't think of it. I forbid it absolutely." The general glanced at Jeff and me. "I want you all to understand me. I forbid that. I would like to talk to Grim privately, if you two excuse us."

So Jeff and I returned to the waiting-room, where I sat discouraged.

But Jeff understood the situation rather better.

"The old game," he said, grinning genially. "Now there are no witnesses, he'll give Grim carte blanche. If Grim fails, Grim can get it where the chicken got the axe. If Grim succeeds, all honour to the Secret Service! That's how bureaucracies work; their promises are so evasive that they're not worth breaking, but their hints mean 'help yourself and pass the bottle!' Wait and see."

We waited--endlessly. If we had known that Grim and the general were going over Dorje's cypher and the code book that we found in Bertolini's cavern, we might have gone for a walk and returned in a couple of hours. However, Jeff continued genially patient until Chullunder Ghose smiled his way in through a door that opened into secretaries' offices. Then Jeff became suddenly ill-tempered.

"You damned fool!" he exploded, sounding all the more violent because he kept his voice low. "Why the devil did you insult the general?"

"Sahib. I bet you pounds Egyptian fifty. Have not yet had time to see a money-changer; otherwise would bet you rupees."

"What do you bet?"

"Rammy sahib, I bet you I got out of that room very neatly, and that you can't think of any other way I could have done same and appear to have a message from the general to someone else. Am fish in water hereabouts. Know all the holes and comers. Lend me a thousand rupees."

"What for?"

"I wish to bet you handsomely. I wish to bet you that I know how Dorje

has been getting news of world events. He did until several days ago, but now he does not."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Now he knows only Indian events, unless he has another intermediary."

"Not so loud," said Jeff, "that man on duty at the door might overhear."

"Have personal old friend in this department--very friendly person--name of Hari Kobol Das--he did me out of good job once and got me sent to prison, but he never knew I knew who did it. Was at one time teacher of a class in Sanskrit, which was cover-up job for an undercover study of the Sanskrit sciences. Had to get money somehow, and it takes a long time to make dummy replicas of ancient manuscripts and substitute same for the real ones stolen from the temple libraries. Hari Kobol Das and this babu experimented with thought transmission, which is intricately but not too lucidly explained in certain ancient books. I stole them, which is how he had me put in prison, but no matter."

"Where are the books now?" Jeff asked.

"Back in the temple library. He did not have me put in prison until he had translated the books and had begun to study the translation, and grew jealous and began to fear that I might learn something. He was like a man who has discovered gold; he wanted all of it.

"Just now I went through that door. As I passed through I was halted, but I said the general sent me; and before the man could ask to whom had the general sent me, I saw Hari Kobol Das sitting all alone at a desk in a little office at the end of the corridor. So I replied that I

was sent to Hari Kobol Das, and he pretended he was very glad to see me, though he feared I came to ask a favour. So I told him I was prosperous and came from Europe; and I did not ask him why a man who knows as much as he, should be satisfied with such an unimportant place in such an office. He had scissors and a paste-pot. He was clipping items from the Indian daily papers and pasting them into a scrap-book.

"When he learned I was from Europe he began to ask me for the latest news. I pretended to wonder at that. I said, surely you have all the news in this place. He said, yes, until recently I clipped the bulletins decoded from the secret cablegrams from Europe, but now no longer; they have put me to this task, which is not so interesting. And he began to question me. But I denied that I had any news; I said the ship on which I came was not equipped with radio except for purposes of S.O.S. But he knew that was a lie, because I told him I travelled first-class on a P. & O. liner. So he reminded me that he and I are old friends who can trust each other. And at that I let him understand that I had come straight to him from the general's office. So he supposed I am one of the general's secret agents.

"Presently he hinted news is valuable. There is money to be picked up, he said, buying and selling rupee paper, which goes up or down according to the world news. If there were disasters all over the world, for instance, it would go down as soon as the news was known, and if I had advance information I could sell high and buy low. Do you know of any such disasters? Such, for instance, as this business at Cawnpore?

"So I told him he should learn that by thought-transference, and left him. But as I turned away he begged me not to repeat our conversation. And of course I said I would not. But I bet you pounds Egyptian fifty that if anyone possessed of faculties should search the

dwelling place of Hari Kobol Das, he would discover there a code book showing how he thinks the news to Dorje over thought-waves of a certain length."

Then Grim came through the general's private door. And by the look in Grim's eyes it was easy to see that what had been said in confidence to one man was as different as what had been told to three as chalk is from the cheese on tasters' tables.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

"But you must kill him!"

Grim calls his own sudden feats of induction "following the Middle way." Jeff calls it tight-rope walking. And Chullunder Ghose describes it as "the inside-out-ishness of paradox pursued to ultimate improbability, which is the essence of the quest for truth." But then, Chullunder Ghose claims he can understand Einstein.

The babu was too cock-a-hoop with his discovery of Hari Kobol Das, and a bit too pleased with his own astuteness. As we drove in the general's car to an address that Grim whispered to the chauffeur, Jeff aired his view of it:

"No one of Dorje's calibre would be such a damned fool as to trust a man of that type. If Hari Kobol Das has brains enough to wring the juice out of a Sanskrit treatise on thought-wave-lengths, and not guts enough to make himself a power in the land on the strength of it, then Hari Kobol Das is a piker. Pikers can do nothing but a piker's job, and anyone of Dorje's weight must know that. The nearer we get to Dorje, the more power you'll find his real captains have. They won't be pasting clippings in a scrap-book."

"There are traitors," said Grim, "in every camp." But it was not clear at the moment what he meant by that remark. He appeared excited. I imagine we all would have been if we had known what he was contemplating.

We went where I hoped we were going--to the Chandni Chowk--to Benjamin's, where anyone may go without exciting comment. Nineteen expeditions out of twenty buy their second-hand stores from Benjamin, and get their information from him, too, if they want it dependable. His great dim store is like a mausoleum of the memories of caravans. The smells of Asia live there. Camel-saddles, reeking with the sweat from Samarkand, lie heaped between the stacks of canned provisions, blankets, overcoats and boots. Tibetan devil-masks scowl from the walls between tulwars, spears, Persian knives and all sorts of obsolete weapons. There is a pervading smell of musk. There is some of everything, from saddle soap to coral nose-studs for Zenana ladies. And whatever you buy from Benjamin is what he says it is--exactly that. They say he is as rich as Croesus. But he is disconsolate because he has no sons, and even his son-in-law Mordecai died in a storm in the throat of the Zogi La on the way from Tibet.

Benjamin met us--old--old--bearded--in a little skullcap--red-rimmed around the eyes--wearing spectacles nowadays, down on his nose; he looked at us over them. And he was as pleased to see Grim and Jeff as if they had been his own sons returned from the grave. He almost ran ahead of us into the windowless lamp-lit office at the rear, where receipts and letters hung on long, old-fashioned filing hooks and a portrait of the Tashi Lama, looking like Elihu Root in a bathrobe, stared from an ebony frame on the wall above a roll-top desk. There he embraced them--kissed them--and then looked at me. He took no notice of Chullunder Ghost until he had examined me from head to foot, blinking as he peered at me above his glasses.

"Jimgrim!" he said. "Jimgrim! And you, Jeff! It is better than meat and drink to see you two again before I die! And who is this one? Is he one of you? Well, you know best. You trust him? That is a recommendation. And you still trust that one?"

He stared at the babu, shook his head, showed him a box in a corner to sit on and then offered us the bentwood chairs.

"Food presently--my daughter shall spread her best for us. Hey-yeh, what memories. Well, Jimgrim, what now? What is it this time? For you never come to see me unless your nose is up-wind like a lean dog's: Either you seek Sham-ba-la, or you hunt some devil. What now?"

"Dorje," Grim answered.

"Yeh-yeh, I might have known it! Seven years ago I said that Dorje must be reckoned with sooner or later--just as I told them that Mustapha Kemal would get a grip they can't break. It was I who told them that the Dalia Lama would be driven out of Lhasa. And that was Dorje's doing--I said so. I told them also about the Tashi Lama; and that, too, was Dorje's doing. But they laughed. Was I right, Jimgrim, or was I wrong? They only listen to me after it is too late. Dorje has stolen the wind in the sail of the myth of the Lord Maitreya. It is likely your last journey if you think of hunting Dorje."

"We are on our way," Grim answered. "May we camp here? May we use your subway?"

"Kek-kek-keh! Subway! What a name for it! You may use everything I own, Jimgrim. You will stay here? You will sleep in my house?"

Grim nodded. "Who are the most expert prostitutes in Delhi?" he asked.

"Hey-yeh-what now? There are three important ones. Sumroo, Damayanti and Vasantasena. But Vasantasena grows old."

"Who is Hari Kobol Das?"

"That rat? Never trust him, Jimgrim! I believe Vasantasena uses him to spy on them. And they use him to spy on her. She tells him things to say to them. They tell him things to say to her. Tss-ss-a cheap one, making here and there a little blackmail money, which he loses at the quail fight or at Ganji's gaming house. He thinks he has a system. It is based on sending thought into another's head. It was from him, they say, Vasantasena got the copies of the Sanskrit books that Babu Jamsetji translated for her--and then died, it was said, of a sting of a scorpion. But there are more ways than one, Jimgrim, of increasing a scorpion's venom. I have heard of gangrene being painted on the claws and on the sting. They say, too, that Vasantasena herself made secret copies before she surrendered those books to a temple because the priests were after her. But who knows? All I know is that she buys from me the musk that I get from Kulu, for the perfumes that her maid makes. So I took some to her, myself in person. And I am old, Jimgrim, but I am neither blind nor deaf."

Grim made no comment. He apparently knew Benjamin too well to interrupt him with unnecessary questions. And after a minute's stroking at his beard the old man went on:

"Nine. Is nine the residue of nine from nine?"

Grim nodded. "Forty-five is four and five--that's nine. And forty-five from forty-five is--"

"Eight, six, four, one, nine, seven, five, three, two," said Benjamin.

"Which are forty-five--four and five--nine again."

"You have it, Jimgrim. Nowadays Vasantasena loses customers to Sumroo and Damayanti. But there are others who come in their place. I noticed that if one should say nine to the man at the outer door in any language, he asks how many are left if nine are taken: and whoever answers nine may pass into the courtyard, where the inner guard stand--she who slew the younger son of Poonch-Terai in '17 and hid the body in a sweeper's cart, so that none knew who had done it, except those who have ears to the ground. And if he should ask such a question as how many miles has your honour come, the answer should be forty-five miles, whereat he will probably ask how many hours that journey took? And if the answer should be forty-five hours, then that person is admitted to the stair-head, where a maid asks other questions in a voice so low I could not overhear. There come strange people to Vasantasena."

"Hari Kobol Das among them?"

"Often."

"Does he come here?"

"Sometimes. He comes to spy on me. I humour him by paying him a little money now and then to tell me lies about the European news. And I tell him other lies because I know he will repeat them to a certain general to whom I do not choose to seem too well informed. They have a way, those generals, of dealing harshly with a man like me, if I should know too much."

"Could you get word to Hari Kobol Das?" Grim asked him.

"Could you bring him here without arousing his suspicion?"

"Why not? I can pretend I have secret news."

"I want him to learn that Dorje is in Delhi."

"You are mad! Jimgrim, of all the madness--"

"Call me any name you care to, Benjamin, but--"

"Jimgrim, if I say that Dorje is in Delhi--"

Strong old fingers like a sculptor's began combing at the long beard. Red-rimmed, scandalized, and it seemed to me terrified eyes scanned each face swiftly and the babu's turn came.

"Jimgrim, send that one away!"

"No," Grim answered. "Chullunder Ghose is as much my friend as you are. A general told me this afternoon that you paid the lien on the dhow of Haroun ben Yahudi, months ago, so that he could clear from Karachi, for Marseilles, with a mixed cargo, including scrap brass."

"What of it? Eh? What of it? Is my money not mine?"

"And that you sold that fleet of dhows that you used to send each year to Zanzibar."

"True. True enough. As you said, Jimgrim, I am old. It was time I should get rid of that liability. Dhows were profitable once, but not so nowadays. It is no secret that I sold them."

"But it is a secret that Dorje's thunderbolts were shipped in dhows from Karachi to the coast of the Red Sea, and to Egypt, and to Marseilles, and to other places."

"What do I know of Dorje's thunderbolts?"

"Or of Dorje--eh, Benjamin? Or of the fact that Dorje used your 'underground,' as Mordecai called it, for the transportation of his thunderbolts from Chak-sam to Karachi?"

"It is a lie, Jimgrim!"

"So the general supposes. But the thunderbolts did reach Karachi. And I have travelled by your 'underground,' so I know it exists and how carefully Mordecai planned and perfected it. If Mordecai had lived, that secret chain of hand-to-hand communication would have reached Siberia."

"True, Jimgrim. True enough."

"And the Gobi desert."

"Eh? Eh?"

"So that whatever was found in the Gobi could be smuggled either north or south? Why did you and Mordecai devise that 'underground'?"

"Before I helped you into Tibet I explained that, Jimgrim. Has the government not a secret service network, like a spider-web that reaches in all directions? And what a government can do well, an intelligent man can do better. Their system is expensive. Mine has been a source of revenue to me."

"Yes. Has been. When did Dorje steal it?"

"How do you know he stole it, Jimgrim?"

"Because I know you, Benjamin. The general told me that you are no longer a problem--no longer suspected--no longer watched, except

as a matter of routine."

"Tschuh-tschuh! Hari Kobol Das--that imbecile!"

"He remarked that since Mordecai died you have lost ambition and that you finally abandoned your 'underground,' at just about the time when he had clapped a hundred men on to the job of tracing it."

"Well? What if I washed my hands of it? What of it? There was nothing illegal, except a little matter of some customs duty now and then. But at my age should I make myself trouble?"

"Benjamin, men like Mordecai, and you and I, and Jeff, and Crosby, and Chullunder Ghose, don't quit because old age creeps on us. We die with our boots on. And if someone steals the boots, we try to steal 'em back. We don't squeal. And we don't have change of heart. And if we know of buried cities in the Gobi Desert, we don't give up scheming. But if we grow old, we possibly look for a partner. And we sometimes trust the wrong man. Why did you trust Dorje?"

"Jimgrim--"

"And when Dorje stole your system, as I have no doubt he did, why did you--yourself--in person, as you told me just now, put yourself to the humiliation of delivering musk to Vasantasena? Benjamin-- the richest man in Delhi--"

"Not the richest, Jimgrim. I have had losses."

"And the proudest--too proud to go to a general and reveal the system that has baffled the Indian secret service all these years--delivering an ounce or two of perfume to a prostitute! And memorizing numbers! Trying to trap Dorje, Benjamin? Well, so am I. And I don't betray old friends--not on any terms, or for any reason. So

if you wish, you may hold your tongue. I won't humiliate you."

"Jimgrim, if you knew what I know of the Gobi!"

"I can guess."

"Cities--cities--buried cities by the dozen! Libraries--perhaps a million years old! Sciences, forgotten when the Gobi sank under the sea! And let that secret out? Tschuhtschuh! The Chinese would pour in the burrow like rats. They would dig for the gold. They would destroy everything. No water--no food--no transportation. But that would not prevent the Chinese if they saw one golden chest that came out of the Gobi. They would overrun like rats, and die like rats; and like rats they would win in the end!"

"And you told Dorje!"

"Nay, I did not. Dorje knew it. And he has wrested secrets from the buried cities. But he learned that I knew. And he learned of what you call my underground. So he came and made a bargain with me. And as you say, I trusted him. He has the most vast intellect and breadth of understanding I have ever met. And within one twelve-month, Jimgrim, he had thrust me to the background --he had turned against me all the men who--Jimgrim! May the maggots of Gehenna crawl into his soul, and may he know that in the outer loneliness!"

"Never mind his soul. I'm here to get his body! Are you going to help--or have you lost your spirit? Is cursing all you're good for nowadays?"

"Jimgrim, I swore I would never trust another man born of a woman! But I am old. I have no sons. I think you will not succeed in finding Dorje, let alone catching him. I think that Dorje can defeat the whole world with his knowledge of things unknown to other people. But I will make this bargain with you. Kill him. And I will reveal to you the secret

of the Gobi Desert! I will bequeath that to you. It shall be yours and Jeff's--and to do with whatever you will! But you must kill him!"

"Are you going to help me?"

Benjamin nodded.

"All right. Send for Hari Kobol Das; and when he comes here, tell him Dorje is in Delhi. Then one other thing. A lady who calls herself the Princess Baltis will arrive by 'plane, perhaps tomorrow and perhaps the next day. She has French credentials and a British secret service visa. She will go to the Kaiser-i-hind Hotel, because she will be told to go there by the officer who examines her passport. Do you know a woman whom you could trust to go and meet her?"

"My daughter--"

"Splendid. I want Baltis told that the lock--of the gate of the trail--that leads to Dorje's nest--is--?"

"In Vasantasena's house," said Benjamin.

"And I thought this babu knew how many beans make five!" remarked Chullunder Ghose. "I sigh myself into a back seat. I absquatulate myself. I am gentleman named Anon--"

"That's a good one," Grim said quietly. "Ahnon Mirza--Persian merchant--you can play that. Benjamin can tog you as a Persian. Snap right into it and go and spend some money at Vasantasena's place this evening."

"I have pounds Egyptian fifty."

"You will need two or three times that much. Benjamin, cash me a draft on London for as much as a fat Persian ought to squander in a

brothel."

Chapter Thirty

"Dorje is in Delhi!"

Hari Kobol Das turned out to be a Hindu of the kind who wear second-hand London suits that have been sold to dealers by the valets of extravagant young men of fashion. He was considerably over fifty years of age and would have looked much less incongruous in one of Gandhi's cotton caps and shorts. Clean-shaven, he attempted to look twenty-five in spite of gold-rimmed spectacles and a wrinkled forehead that bulged like that of a professor from the U.S. funnies; and he wore a straw hat perched a trifle to one side that made him look more like a dark Goanese than a Hindu. He carried a cane, with which he slapped his striped pants. And he was obviously nervous.

Grim and I observed him through two knot-holes in the rear wall of Benjamin's dim office. Chullunder Ghose had been arrayed an hour ago in gorgeous silks and had departed through the back door. Jeff had gone to the Royal Air Force hangar to get news, if he could, of the progress of the French plane that was bringing Baltis. Benjamin was in a mood that Hari Kobol Das was at a loss to understand.

"You owe me money, Hari Kobol Das. Why don't you pay me?"

"Why do you speak to me in English?"

"Because you wear English clothes. You look so like an Englishman that I feel you ought to pay your debts, as all English gentlemen do."

"Is that why you sent for me?"

"Yes. It is three years since I lent you money and you have never even paid the interest. Nevertheless, you appear to expect me to keep on giving you secret news, so that you may go to your employer and pretend to be a good spy--whereas, as a matter of fact, you are only a poor pretender. Tschey-yey! You believe you can make a quail win fights by sending thoughts into its head! And you have lost my money betting on such imbecility. Pay me, if you want the secret that I know now."

"You have news? Better tell me, Benjamin, or I will tell the general some things about you that will--"

Benjamin acted perfectly. He exploded. He gave a word and gesture-- perfect imitation of an old Jew terrified by threats and tantalized by inability to get his money back. He rose out of his chair and trembled. He appeared to attempt to recover his dignity. He muttered Hebrew phrases. He began to speak a dozen times, and checked himself. He sat down, staring, scandalized above spectacles down on his nose.

"And is this gratitude?" he asked.

"Gratitude is the humiliating vice of unimportant people," remarked Hari Kobol Das, who had apparently been memorizing modern phrases. "You had better tell your news."

"But if I tell you--?"

"I will protect you. I stand very high in my department."

"Dorje is in Delhi!"

"Incredible!"

"But you must not tell anyone except your general!"

"Where is Dorje?"

"I don't know. I only know he is in Delhi."

"How do you know?"

"I saw him. I have spoken with him."

"Where?"

"Here."

"In this office?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"This afternoon."

"What did he say to you?"

"Nothing."

"What does he look like?"

That was how we got our first reliable description of the man of mystery. Baltis had given us five or six descriptions of him, each one different; it was part of her method to maintain her own value by elaborating mystery. But Benjamin believed that Hari Kobol Das had probably seen Dorje, so he described him accurately:

"He is of medium height, but looks big. He looks as if he might be Chinese, Afghan, Irish and American Indian all in one. He has big eyes that can suddenly grow small, and a small mouth that can

suddenly grow big, particularly when he laughs. He has a nose that looks as if it smells the history and the meaning of everything on any wind. And he carries his head like a woman who brings water from the well."

"That is Dorje! But how was he dressed?"

"Quite plainly, like an Englishman. But on his finger was a gold ring in the form of coiling serpents that hold an uncut ruby in their coils. And over the English clothes he wore the hood and kirtle of a Ringding Gelong Lama from Tibet."

"That is Dorje!"

"Do you know Vasantasena?" Benjamin asked.

"Yes. You know I know her."

"I advise you not to mention it to her."

"Why?"

"I don't trust her. I would tell the general if I were you."

"Would you? I don't believe you. Else, why not tell the general yourself and get the credit for it? I believe you play a trick on me. You wish to prove to Dorje that I am unfit to be trusted. I shall certainly tell Vasantasena, because if Dorje is in Delhi there are going to be some killings and I do not choose to be a victim. If you are not careful I will tell Vasantasena that you are treacherous and that you sent for me to persuade me to betray Dorje."

"No, no, no! Oh, no!" said Benjamin. "Not that! Could you be such an ingrate? That you may get some credit for yourself I tell you something--and you betray me?"

"Well, be careful. If I catch you playing tricks with me and withholding information, I will certainly not spare you, but will report you both to the general and to Dorje!"

He smiled conceitedly. He posed as a person who might tell a great deal if he chose to. But he reminded me of one of those incompetents who hang around the fringes of societies--extremely learned in the text, perhaps, of occult books but absolutely void of any occult gifts excepting cowardice, chicanery and self-esteem. When he had gone, and the door of the great gloomy shop was closed behind him, Grim and I came out of hiding and Benjamin said what he thought:

"You are crazy, Jimgrim! I have done what you demanded, but I tell you: that fool will go to Vasantasena straight away, and he will tell her Dorje is in Delhi. She knows Dorje. She has seen him. She is like all important prostitutes, she has a horde of spies, like rats, who run her errands. She is a clearing house of secrets--a schemer--a power in Delhi--and a woman of great intelligence. She will pump that fool as dry of information as a dead bat. And the next thing you know, she will be sending peeled eyes, and tickled ears, and curious noses to visit this place!"

"We won't put her to all that trouble," Grim answered. "I want a Ringding Gelong Lama's outfit. Have you one?"

"Yes. But I might as well give you a shroud! You will be detected. You will be stabbed, and they will throw you, shroud and all, into a rat-pit. What the rats leave of your bones they will probably send in a bag to the general's office with the compliments of Shiva!"

"Sort me out a Kashgari trader's kit for Jeff. He can talk that language perfectly to anyone except a man from Kashgar."

"And for Major Crosby, I suppose, a nautch-girl's costume! Jimgrim, you have lost your senses! You will go to Vasantasena? Then I bid you good-bye. You will never see tomorrow's sunrise!"

Jeff came, dropped at the front door by a hooting car that belonged to the Royal Air Force, driven by a subaltern to whom intrigue was as incomprehensible as speed and bombs were sweetly reasonable logic. Jeff had all the news he went for:

"Baltis gets here any time. The French 'plane turns out to be a record-beater. They've wirelessly that they're running short of gas and may not quite reach Delhi, but they're due, if they can carry on, about ninety-thirty. So the Air Force has a squadron looking for them, to guide them to a landing place in case they can't quite make the distance."

"All right, Crosby, you go 'as is'." Grim stared at me thoughtfully. "Your story is that Baltis is in need of medical attention. You are one of her gang. You're the doctor she trained in Paris to be sent to the United States to do a little strategic poisoning of key-men like the President and the Chief of Staff and a few of the hot men in the secret service. You were sent here to replenish the supply of vegetable poison. Go to the hotel and wait for her, but don't let her see you until Benjamin's daughter has told her Dorje is in Delhi. Then tackle her and refuse to be shaken off. The point is this: I think we're right in guessing that Vasantasena is the hook-up between Dorje and his agents, but there may be several. I count on Baltis to pick the right one."

I objected: "But suppose she heads off somewhere else. How can I let you know? How can you trace us?"

Grim laughed. "Baltis will be shadowed by the general's experts from the second she steps out of the 'plane until she gives them the slip--and that won't happen too soon. Don't show fight, whatever happens.

If you're trapped, we'll come and get you."

So I left them disguising themselves with the aid of the protesting Benjamin, whose old age had not lessened his ability to criticize, nor yet the lively skill with which he pulled out garment after garment from chests and drawers and lockers--rejecting this, selecting that--and even choosing perfumes that, as he expressed it, made them "stink like where they should be from; because the wrong stink stirs suspicion quicker than a clumsy gesture. A man from Kashgar might--yey--yey, he will unconsciously copy the gestures of Delhi but he will smell of loess dust. And a man from Tibet will smell like a yak in a shed--yes, though you wash him for a whole year. I have perfumes that suggest such characteristics, and it might surprise you to learn what prices wise ones are willing to pay to get them."

I never saw Benjamin's daughter until nearly ten o'clock that evening. Baltis came to the hotel escorted by an Air Force officer, who insisted on ordering cocktails and tried to amuse her--I suppose to give spies time to take up tactical positions; I saw none of the spies, but he took his leave quite suddenly, so I suppose someone made him a signal. Immediately after that, Benjamin's daughter turned up, looking like a middle-aged ayah. She was followed by a porter carrying a suit-case, but she took that from him when she reached the door of Baltis' room; and when she knocked she was admitted instantly, Baltis probably supposing she was someone sent by the authorities to play servant and act as a spy.

I gave them fifteen minutes to get acquainted. Then I went to the door and met Benjamin's daughter already on her way out, but without the suit-case. They had been quick. Baltis was already arrayed in Indian costume and both her hands were full of native jewellery that Benjamin had sent along with the clothing; otherwise, she would have locked the door in my face. She was as pleased to see me as a bird

to see a tom-cat, but I forced my way in, so she made the best of it, but there was murder in her eye.

She had risen to the occasion--recovered all her natural, ebullient impudence. Hope, I suppose, had sprung triumphant in her thought of being met by one of Dorje's agents with a suitable supply of clothing and the news that Dorje was in Delhi.

"Where is Jeemgreem?" she demanded. I offered to take her to Grim.

She nodded, studying herself, and I think me also, in a full-length mirror while she tried on Benjamin's jewellery--astonishing, barbaric stuff that suited her perfectly. By the time she had made her choice of necklaces, anklets, and bracelets she was like a houri of an Oriental dream; and when she had done smiling at herself she turned on me with a look of candid triumph.

"You are sent to spy on me because Jeemgreem hopes I will communicate with Dorje. So I will be fr-r-ank. I will tell you the plain truth."

I supposed a thumping lie was coming. But I was mistaken. Grim's method, I think, had undermined her self-confidence to the point where she ceased to calculate the odds but betted her last stake on one forlorn hope. And she encouraged herself by discouraging me -- or by attempting that.

"I am spied upon also by Indian agents. But I go where spies are not admitted. Jeemgreem had his chance to be my fr-r-iend. But he spur-r-ned it; and he tr-r-eated me as I do not choose that any man shall treat my offer of myself. I am against him, as he shall presently discover! As for you--you keyhole peepaire!-- I will shoot you deader than a mouton if you disobey me!"

She had stolen one of the Air Force automatics! She did not make the amateur's mistake of holding it so far in front of her that I could kick it or knock it upward.

"Before they shall have come and found your car-r-case, I will be out of that window and gone to where all the police in the world can nevaire find me!"

Benjamin's daughter evidently had brought all kinds of comforting assurance.

"My orders," I said, "are to watch you and go wherever you go. But I have definite instructions not to interfere."

She nodded. "It will be simpler if I take you with me. This is a city where a woman looks less noticeable if she has an escort. Get out through that window--down the fire-escape--go to the end of the garden--wait for me beside the door in the wall. And if the door is locked, find someone who will open it."

I obeyed. I knew she could not escape through the hotel without being followed by government spies; and I was sure she intended to shoot if I should even hesitate. Grim had most emphatically asked me not to show fight; I had that excuse with which to salve a somewhat chastened vanity.

The garden was a tawdry quarter of an acre, with a chair or two for after-dinner cigarettes and sad geraniums in red pots flanking a red-brick path that radiated stored heat like a baker's oven. I was probably seen; an Indian night has more eyes than its sky has stars; but it was nothing to stir more than idle curiosity that a sahib should use the fire-escape to reach the garden. The door at the end of the garden opened when I touched the latch. I waited, and saw the light

go out in Baltis' room.

A minute later, walking--looking like an ayah--shrouded in a cheap black sari that shadowed her face and made her look bulky and misshapen, she followed me; and I don't doubt she was also seen. But there was certainly nothing wrong about an ayah leaving by the back way, and if the secret service spotted her, and followed, then they did it so adroitly that I saw no hint of it. I opened the door in the wall and passed through ahead of her. She closed it.

"I will shoot you dead, unless you do exactly what I say!"

There was a taxi standing with its motor idling, clocking up the rupees, six feet from the garden gate. The driver leaned out and opened the door. She jumped in.

"Hurry!" she commanded. So I followed and she ordered me to take the front seat, where she could keep me covered with the automatic.

The driver started without being told and drove two or three hundred yards before he asked for orders.

"Vasantasena!"

Evidently Benjamin had left our destination undetermined to allow for Baltis having secret links with Dorje of which we knew nothing.

"See here," I said, "you throw that pistol through the window. I'm your doctor. I'm the man you trained to send to the United States, to poison Presidents and other superfluous people. I have met you here in order to obtain supplies of vegetable poison that is deadly but leaves no detectable trace. That's Grim's story. You tell it."

She laughed. "The only story you and Jeemgreem need is an

obituary notice. Your last opportunity was in that hotel room. Yes, you are quite right--I no longer need this."

To my astonishment she leaned out then and dropped the automatic in the shadow of a passing bullock-cart.

"Now disobey me if you dare!"

I think she thought the taxi-driver certainly was one of Dorje's men, and it was not my cue to disillusion her.

Chapter Thirty-One

"Grim seems to have dug up someone to ballyhoo him."

We arrived at a gate in a wall, where, even though it was almost midnight, jewellers and such-like people sat on mats through which we were observed by someone who was in no iron brackets. It was a rather wide gate, made of teak, with iron studs, and there was an iron-barred window in it, through which we were observed by someone who was in no haste to admit us. He gave the merchants ample time to pester us with offers of golden bracelets and I don't know what else, which they insisted would procure us "great consideration" in Vasantasena's salon.

I walked up to the grille in the gate and demanded, in Hindustani, in the name of nine abominable devils, why were we kept waiting; and I noticed that the merchants and their hangers-on kept at a discreet distance. There were probably government spies among them, but the spies undoubtedly already knew the rigmarole of word and counter-word; it would be impossible to keep such a formula secret from men who have nothing to do but ferret out such matters. Those who were not spies (if there is such a person in India) were careful to

avoid the appearance of trying to listen.

The individual behind the gate suggested in excellent English that if I had nine devils with me I had better leave them outside. I remarked that, if so, nine would remain to enter with me. Then I heard him unfasten the bolt of the gate, so I turned and helped Baltis get out of the taxi and we walked through, into a courtyard full of statuary, flanked on one side by the house and on two others by a garden wall. The entrance to the house was in the left far corner; but between us and that there were obstacles in the form of not less than a dozen truculent-appearing loafers in clean white clothing, who observed us with the air of watchdogs. The man who had admitted us looked worse than any of them--bigger, uglier, less willing to be done out of an excuse for fighting. He demanded the "dasturi," meaning the customary tip, so, seeing there were two of us, I gave him the equivalent of twenty dollars, which he tucked into his cummerbund so abruptly that I knew I had grossly overpaid him. However, he salaamed to us, which was something, since it impressed the others, who lined themselves against the wall as we advanced. But when we had passed them they formed themselves into a group between us and the gate, so that it seemed a simpler matter to enter that courtyard than to escape from it.

There was not a glimmer of light from the house; such narrow windows as there were presented blank teak shutters to the night. And there was no electric light, presumably because--Vasantasena did not choose to have her premises invaded by the electricians and inspectors. But there was a bright oil lantern above the house door, and beneath that stood a man who wore a Persian dagger tucked into his waist-band. He had a scar on his face, and two fingers missing; he was handsome in a picaresque way, but looked as tough as a rat-pit terrier. He, too, demanded the dasturi. He demanded the first. It began to be apparent how the expenses of such a household

are provided. Luckily I had lots of money with me.

Then he asked me whether I would mind waiting forty-five minutes. I told him we would not wait one minute. He replied:

"If I can arrange to cancel the forty-five minute delay, how many minutes would your honour be willing to wait?"

I answered "Forty-five."

He said: "Well, that will cost you forty-five rupees!"

I answered: "Get it if you can, you robber!"

He grinned. He understood English perfectly. However, then he asked, in Hindustani: "Does your honour count nine in the usual way?"

I hesitated, recalling the order of the numbers, not wishing to make a mistake; but Baltis thought I had forgotten. She piped up promptly--arrogantly:

"Eight-six-four-one-nine-seven-five-three-two! Now let us in, you whelp of forty-five dogs--you forty-five times spat-upon and cursed imbecile!"

She had a gift for doing unexpected things. She suddenly removed the voluminous, cheap, black cotton sari and stood resplendent in the lamplight, looking as native Indian as himself and lovelier than one imagines Bluebeard's women were. She handed him the sari. Under cover of it possibly she exchanged some kind of secret signal with him. He immediately bowed and thumped the door with both hands, drumming at the same time with his fingers.

The door opened. Until it closed again behind us we could not see

the woman, who had backed away behind it into a sort of sentry-box niche in the wall. She was an old woman, dressed from head to foot in crimson, rather wheezy, and extremely fussy with the lock, and bolt, and strong brass chain. She finally swung a big iron bar in place that fitted into the sockets in the masonry. There was no doubt we were locked in.

There was a short hall, then a stairway--steep--of teak--well lighted by about a dozen silver lamps with crimson shades, and carpeted an inch deep, so that footfalls made no sound whatever. On a landing at the stair-head, grouped against a gold-striped crimson curtain, there were three young women dressed as modestly as virgins. Their gestures were modest. It was their smiles, and the wordly-wise, impudent laugh in their eyes that suggested they were possibly not there to guide the righteous into church.

Baltis went upstairs ahead of me. She made signals to me to linger on the stairs and give her time to show credentials, but I ignored them. Even so, I was unable to detect the secret sign she undoubtedly made; it was possibly something she did with her lips or her eyes; and I could see no answering signal, although the pretty little minxes at the stair-head glanced at one another and became immediately respectful. Their bracelets and golden anklets clashed; their beautiful white teeth appeared between carmined lips; they fluttered with a genuine excitement, and then two of them came running down the stair to take her hands and help her to the top--an utterly unnecessary courtesy--she was at the top in a moment, whispering to the third girl, and I was too late to have a chance to overhear.

To right and left of the gold and crimson curtains there were full-length mirrors, framed in painted wood that had been carved with suitably obscene but legendary, more or less symbolic figurines in very high

relief; and I detected human eyes that peered through the dark interstices. I could hear giggling, too, suppressed as if it was intended to be heard but only discreetly noticed; it produced an atmosphere of unchaste mystery, increased by the muffled sounds of string and wood-wind music rhythmically punctuated by a muted drum. And there was a lascivious perfume.

Baltis vanished through the gold and crimson curtain, spirited away by one of the three girls. I followed, but I was held back for a moment by the other two, who stood straight in my way and laughed, not yielding until the curtain had done swaying. Then I stepped through into a perfect maze of curtains, with mirrors between them that multiplied confusion, and there was no knowing which way to turn until another woman stepped out from behind a mirror, beckoning and smiling as if I were her long-lost lover home at last with half a lakh of rupees itching to be squandered on her. She beckoned and I followed, feeling about as comfortable as an infidel on the way to be examined by the Holy Inquisition.

Not a sign of Baltis. An amazing curtain, figured with all the colours of the prism, moved on a rod and revealed a passage lined with carved wood panels, lighted by coloured lamps that gave the walls a soft, warm glow. A door on the left. My guide opened it and, when I hesitated, tried to push me through, smiling persuasively as if she thought we understood no words in common. It was a small room. There was a hag in there who had no teeth and looked as if she might have rheumatism—lockers, shelves, drawers and a couple of chests on the floor against the wall. One chair. Nothing noticeably dangerous. I went in.

My guide said something in an undertone. The hag immediately drew forth from a locker a voluminous long cloak of maroon silk lined with peach-coloured satin. She threw it over my shoulders. I was urged to

sit down. In a moment the hag had my shoes off, provided me with soft peach-coloured slippers that had pointed toes and figures stamped all over them. I was offered a turban and refused it. I was offered a fez and refused that. But they took away my straw hat, and that was the last I ever saw of it. A girl came, probably not more than ten years old, apparently as timid as a mouse but quite as acquisitive-looking, who hung two long garlands of flower-buds around my neck. I was told then in good plain English that it was time to pay the usual dasturi; and when I produced some money I could almost feel their eyes weighing my wallet, so I used a little sleight-of-hand trick that is well worth practising and stowed it away in one pocket while they thought I put it in another.

"Where is the sahiba Baltis?" I demanded.

That appeared to be the signal to induct me into deeper mysteries. My guide apparently forgot that she understood English. She resumed her gesturing, inviting me to follow her. She led me along the passage to a shut door at the far end. There was a grille. She knocked and someone opened the grille half an inch or so. We waited, and again the grille opened. Whispers. Then a sudden burst of louder music as the door swung wide into a passage that turned sharp to the left and opened without any other door into a long, high-ceilinged room.

The first person I saw was Chullunder Ghose. He looked drunk, lolling on a deep divan that faced the entrance, and he was being entertained by--rather, he was entertaining--half a dozen dancing-girls. There were two beside him on the divan; two were on the cushions near his feet; and one was bringing him a tray with glasses on it; they were laughing at his jokes, and one of them had pulled the turban down toward his eyes, which made him look peculiarly rakish and amused them almost to hysterics.

There were at least two dozen other dancing-women in the room, most of them older than those who were making merry with Chullunder Ghose, and none of them dressed more puritanically than a Broadway chorus-girl. However, they were behaving quietly; there was nothing obscene about their gestures. As I entered, half a dozen of them started a sort of group-dance in the middle of the floor; and though they were well trained, and seemed to enjoy it, there was nothing about it to make even a tourist think he was immersed in India's sin.

The music was behind a screen of lacy carved sandalwood. Around three sides of the room there were divans spaced at regular intervals, and nearly all of them were occupied by men of various races, who gave me one glance and then watched the dancing in the sort of sullen mood in which impatient people await events of more importance. There was very little conversation, although the girls were trying to start some and a group of three were closing in on one grim Afghan-looking person with the evident intention of stirring him out of his gloom.

No sign of Baltis. I recalled her boast that all Grim needed now and I too, was an obituary notice. No sign of Grim. No Jeff.

On my right, at the end of the room, was a dais, not remotely unlike one of those high beds of state on which royalty used to sleep; only the curtains were draped from a balcony that overhung the dais and extended from wall to wall. On the right hand of the dais, in the teak wall, was a door. The balcony was something like a choir-loft in a small church, except that its timbers were more richly carved, and I could see that there were two doors at the back, and one at the end, half-hidden by heavy curtains.

The strange thing was that no one appeared to object to my

presence. My guide motioned me to an unoccupied divan not far from the door and then went away, smirking a bit mysteriously but not, so far as I could detect, speaking or signalling to anyone. A young girl with an almost white skin and a perfume that suggested rose leaves in an ancient Persian jar set a small, low table before me and brought a cool, coloured drink in a tall glass. Another girl brought coffee. Then they both sat down on cushions near me and appeared to wonder what to do to entertain this barbarian. They smirked at each other and stared at me when they thought I was not observing them.

Chullunder Ghose seemed not to notice me at all, so I took my cue from him. He appeared to me to be the only person in the room, except the half-dozen girls whom he was keeping in gales of giggles, who was not waiting in impatient boredom for something to happen. A Pathan two seats away on my left seemed savagely indignant about something and when a good-looking girl approached him he sent her away with a stinging reprimand; it brought a retort from her that almost fetched him to his feet and for a second I thought there was going to be murder. However, he simmered down, and the girl joined the two who were studying me.

I counted the men in the room. Including myself and Chullunder Ghose there were nineteen of us, of whom four were gambling in a sort of alcove by themselves and two were smiling cynically as they turned the pages of an illustrated book. The only weapon in sight was a dagger; I could see its hilt protruding from the waistband of a Mongolian-looking person who was dressed like a Cossack, high kaftan and all. He sat cross-cornerwise from the Pathan and watched him; I believe it was his presence that prevented the Pathan from springing at the girl who had traded an atrocious insult for a fierce rebuke. He looked relieved when a woman came through the door beside the dais and beckoned the Pathan, who arose and followed her, swaggering in a way that suggested he was not so sure of

himself as he seemed. As the door closed behind him I thought I heard scuffling and a thud, but a burst of music almost at the same moment made it impossible to be sure. However, I noticed that the four men who were gambling glanced at one another nervously and the Mongolian-looking person in the kaftan smiled.

Not many minutes after that, Jeff entered by the same door near the dais. He looked enormous in his Kashgar clothing. He might have stepped out of an oriental story book. He thrilled the dancing-girls, who clustered around him chattering like birds in an aviary, and it was astonishing to see how perfectly he played his part--no ladies' man but an excellent actor--tipping them appropriate small sums "to say a prayer for him," "to remember him in their dreams," "to bestow on the poor in the name of gratitude for pleasant hours"--a suitable remark to each, that served its purpose. Evidently Jeff knew all the ropes. They let him alone, he having disgorged a just proportion of the overhead.

I saw him exchange glances with Chullunder Ghose. He then approached me and bowed profoundly, talking loudly in the Kashgar dialect as if he knew I understood it, but which, of course, I did not. But between the stately, sonorous sentences he interspersed plain English: "--Baltis raising hell--in there with Vasantasena-- invite me to sit down with you, you damned fool!--"

So I acted as well as I could the part of a rather patronizing British official who had chanced to meet him in the Kashgar country, and after he had gone through all the rigmarole of modestly declining such an honour he sat beside me on the divan. Then, until he was quite sure no one overheard us, he continued to lavish polite speeches on me, which I answered in a low voice in English, telling him all that had happened since I left him at Benjamin's. Jeff's voice grew more and more subdued until he, too, spoke English; but even then, at intervals

he interspersed it with louder remarks in the Kashgar dialect for the benefit of dancing-girls who kept on passing to and fro.

"My own opinion is that Grim has--buyerda tukhesutdin bilak hama nersa taledur--you can get everything here but chickens' milk-- my opinion is that Grim has balled it badly this time. He had announced himself as Dorje and demanded a room to himself where he will send for all and sundry when it suits him. Vasantasena is in a fine stew. Baltis got to her--I suppose she knew all about her before she left France--sai buida tort tufak tortilarsi kok tufak--(I found) four heifers in the desert, and all of them beautiful blue heifers--and as plain as a pike-staff she's taking a seat on the fence, so that she can jump off either way--denounce Grim or support him, depending on whether Grim endorses her or not. She gave Vasantasena nearly all that jewellery that Benjamin supplied. They're as thick as thieves already, sitting on one dais and exchanging compliments--yollgha tushgan patikdin panah berghil, Khudayim--from quicksand on the road, good Lord deliver us--"

I glanced up. I think it was Chullunder Ghose's face, across the room, that made me do it.

"Grim is probably exploring," Jeff went on. But suddenly he, too, noticed the babu's attitude and glanced as I had done toward the balcony above the dais. There had appeared a face--a face and shoulders--elbows resting on the railing of the balcony--long fingers so exactly underneath the chin that they suggested something horrible that grew where normally a beard might be. A monstrously impressive face, as handsome as the devil; no more oriental than it might be Irish, English, French, German or Scandinavian; no more European than it might be Hindu, Mongolian, Turkoman or even Chinese. It was a racial blend, made humorous, mysterious and terrible by crimson lamplight shining upward, and by shadow, and by

the suggestive, graceless grins of two Tibetan devil-masks that hung beneath it, one on either hand, on the balcony panels.

The face spoke, and it brought the whole room to startled silence. Even music ceased. The voice had a strange, dull quality, as if emotion were something long ago forgotten and only the man's will remained. But the voice filled the room and the syllables were as distinct as one, two, three. I heard my own name, mispronounced.

"What is he saying?" I asked Jeff.

"The Lord Dorje the Daring commands the immediate presence of Ahnon Mirza, Said Akhun (that's myself) and Major Crosby. Let's go. Grim seems to have dug up someone to ballyhoo him."

But I think Jeff felt the kind of premonition I did. And I know Chullunder Ghose turned gray beneath his weathered ivory skin.

Chapter Thirty-Two

"Dorje!"

There was a sensation--tension--as we three strode toward the centre of the room. The face had vanished, leaving behind the same sort of effect that a monster might produce by peering, head and shoulders, from a pond and then submerging. There were the ripples. What was it? The dancing-girls were awestruck and as suddenly quiet as birds that have seen the shadow of a hawk-- until the music resumed, and then one of them laughed and they all joined in, not knowing why. That gave us opportunity to speak. Chullunder Ghose tried to control his voice, but it came in a scared whisper, and there was sweat on his jowls:

"Rammy sahib, have you seen the garden? There is something there that the girls think is Indra's chariot. They are forbidden to look, so they have all peeped. They are forbidden to speak of it, so they told me."

"Grim got wind of it," Jeff answered. "That's why he wanted a room to himself. Maybe he has contrived to see it."

"It has neither wings nor wheels," said the babu.

"Get a move on," Jeff insisted, "and wake up, babu-ji. Let's overlook no bets."

They were already dancing again, in several groups in front of the seated men-folk, and the dance was neither so restrained nor decent as it had been. But that was obviously done to disguise a very different excitement. We were watched, as we walked to the door beside the dais, by every eye in the room. As we passed through the door and I closed it behind us there began a buzz of conversation, blended with the music and the clash of anklets and the rhythmic thump of bare feet.

We found ourselves in a low, wide passage, lighted by one lamp. There was a door in front of us and a door on our left.

"Straight ahead," said Jeff. But Chullunder Ghose, more scared than I had ever seen him, had nevertheless completely re-established self-control. His wits were functioning.

"There might be a window here," he remarked. "That business of overlooking bets is why Napoleon lost Waterloo!"

He tried the left-hand door, and being a native of that land he knew the likely ways to open it. He groped--found something--pressed--

pulled. The door moved inward, and the lamplight shone into a bare room not much larger than a good-sized closet. On the floor, face upward, lay the Pathan. He was gagged. His arms were tied. A knife—his own, it might be—stuck hilt-upward from his throat, and they had spread his coat neatly beneath him to prevent the blood from pouring on the floor.

"Women did that," said the babu. "Men would have spoiled a curtain or a carpet. But they were experts. See how the edge of the blade is upward. Amateurs strike edge-down. I am all in favour of annihilating the Pathans, but what had this one done, I wonder."

He was about to stoop over the body to look, I suppose, for clues on which to base deduction. Jeff seized him by the shoulder, too late. Before he could get that door shut, the other door at the end of the passage opened and two women stood there, smiling. One, obviously, at the first glance, was Vasantasena; she was wearing some of the jewellery that Benjamin had sent for Baltis, but even without that there could have been no doubt of her identity.

She was not young. She may have been forty-five or fifty years old. But she had the kind of ageless spirit in her that Salome may have had, that makes experience and maturity more luring and much deadlier than youth, because more interesting and alert with calculated guile. The day had gone by when she counted on mere surface charm, or even on mere familiarity with what men crave. She had become an artist.

And at that, she was no faded flower. She was a strong tree. She had the figure of a naiad. There was passion in her eyes, and humour. At the corners of her mouth there lurked that laughter at the inconsistencies which makes life tolerable; it might make even hell endurable, and heaven something else than abstract ennui.

She spoke English easily, but with an accent which suggested that she knew too many languages to speak even one of them thoroughly well. I have no idea why she spoke to me, unless it was because I was so obviously not an oriental. She looked like a woman who would inevitably tackle difficulties first.

"You mock my enemy? You admire his happening? But I prefer you should mind your own business. Yes?"

"When in doubt," said Jeff out of the corner of his mouth to me, "go forward." And he led the way. Then, aloud, to her, in the sort of guttural and toothy Hindustani that a man from Kashgar speaks: "The Lord Dorje sent for us."

"For me also," she answered. "Should I tell him it was you who slew that Orakzai Pathan, perhaps he may reward you. Who knows? Or he may take pity on the poor dead homeless one and send you to keep him company. Let us go and inquire."

She led the way, along another passage, to the right. The other woman was a mere mute sycophant with scandalized, serious eyes, who opened and shut doors and did her best to make us feel we were in the presence of might, and mystery. She was the sort that kings, queens, and presidents employ to call attention to the brilliance that might shine better without such advertising. She ushered and fussed us all into a room whose wooden walls were covered with astonishingly painted indiscretions of smiling gods and gazelle-eyed goddesses.

At one end was a dais heaped with cushions, and beyond it was a door. Above the dais was another balcony, exactly like the one in the room we had left. Shaped something like a horseshoe, and extending around two thirds of the room, its center exactly opposite the dais, was a deep lounge, also heaped with cushions. At the end

that faced the dais there were windows concealed by painted iron shutters and embroidered curtains. There were many flimsy little tables; only one bright lamp, that looked like gold encrusted with precious stones, was suspended by gold chains from the ceiling.

Grim sat on the dais, cross-legged. He was dressed in a brown Tibetan cloak, like a monk's. But it was lined with scarlet silk that rather chastened the face of austerity, and he had a golden girdle that suggested there may possibly be solaces on earth as well as abstract affluence in heaven. Benjamin had stained and rubbed his skin until it looked like leather; and if that had been my first introduction to Grim, I don't think that anything, ever again, could have made me like or trust him. He looked treacherous, proud, cruel, arrogant, calm--almost, for the moment, I believed his was the face that had looked from the balcony in the other room. Almost. Grim's was not quite large enough--not coarse enough. But the resemblance was astonishing. I could hardly recognize him.

With a gesture that was equally unlike his own he signified that we might take our places on the horseshoe lounge. Vasantasena, solemn as a priestess, set us the example, but as she led the way I thought her back suggested laughter and excitement, and I know Chullunder Ghose did.

"Sahib," he whispered, "Jimmy Jimgrim is in dutch dam--desperately now. Believe me. Go and talk to him. As European you cannot be expected to have any manners. Go now."

So instead of following Vasantasena I turned back toward the dais.

"Chief," I said aloud, "I have a message for you."

"Speak low," he commanded, in Hindustani. So I bowed toward him, whispering:

"What do you want us to do? Chullunder Ghose believes we're trapped."

"I think so, too," he answered. "They murdered a Pathan--"

"I know that. There is nothing to be done but carry on and see what happens. If you get the opportunity, tell Jeff he's not to try to rescue me. I've seen something, through a window. If I disappear, you fellows try to follow, but don't try to keep me from getting killed, or any rot like that."

I think he would have said more, but Baltis entered, through the door on the right of the dais facing the one that we had used. And she was no longer the victim of Grim's indifference. Demurely, but with confidence and laughter in her eyes, she climbed on to the dais and arranged a heap of cushions near him so that she might lie on her elbows and study his face. She spoke low, but I overheard her:

"Jeemgreem, if you love me you shall live--not otherwise!"

She was excited. She looked like a refinanced gambler staking all her new resources on one throw. The part suited her. There was something sportsmanlike as well as tempting in manner. I believe her plan was to persuade Grim to escape that minute, although she afterwards insisted that she had no plan whatever but was trusting to the inspiration of a moment. Or--she may have intended murder: she was capable of that. She began to whisper to Grim, and in his part of Dorje he could hardly object to her laying a hand on his shoulder. Had not Dorje as many wives as Solomon? And has a wife no privilege?

Vasantasena called me and I faced about. She beckoned. I wanted to make sure that Baltis should not draw a knife and drive it into Grim's heart. But there was that message to Jeff, who was seated

near Vasantasena, and he made a motion with his hand for me to come and sit beside him. Then I noticed an expression on Chullunder Chose's face--horror again. He was looking upward at the balcony, which I could not see from where I stood. Perplexed, I decided to go and tell Jeff what Grim said; and as I took my place beside him he and I together saw the face the babu had already seen.

It was the same we had seen in the first room, in exactly the same attitude. This time,--though, it did not speak; it vanished. And before I had finished giving Jeff Grim's message the door on the right of the dais opened. It opened wide. Someone in the gloom beyond the door was examining the room. A dull voice made an exclamation--one word. Then the owner of the face came striding in and someone closed the door behind him. Baltis almost shrieked; I saw her seize Grim's arms, and Grim shook himself free. Vasantasena chuckled with a sound like poison bubbling in a cauldron.

"Bow to the Lord Dorje," said Vasantasena, awkwardly, in English.

The newcomer faced Grim and smiled, showing stained and irregular teeth. Then he stepped to one side of the dais and faced us all. He had his hands behind him and he stood like a man too used to power to assert his own authority--his feet apart--shoulders a trifle stooping--big head hanging forward--strong--lean--dressed like Grim, except that this man's cloak and hood were lined with yellow and not scarlet silk. The hood was thrown back, showing a crisp crop of short black hair.

"Who are you?" Grim asked, speaking English too. I think Grim knew already.

"I was Dorje!"

Silence, for about a second. Then a gasp from Baltis. She began to

speak to him in rapid French. Instead of answering, he pointed at her with one finger of his left hand and then swung his arm in the direction of the lounge where we sat. She obeyed him; and when she had sat down near me he spoke to her in English in his dull, disinterested voice:

"You failed. And your sister (he pronounced it shishter) let the cypher out (he pronounced it shypher). Do not lie to me."

"Dorje--" she began.

He interrupted. "You know what you get."

Then he turned toward Grim, and he and Grim observed each other for several seconds.

"It would be usheless," he said presently, "to try to kill me, I am well protected."

"Probably," said Grim.

"Am I to take your name--since you have taken mine? I like mine better. They have spelled yours to me. Jinkrin?"

"Jim Grim."

"Grim, eh? Libra--sun in Taurus--moon in Aries--born, I dareshay, probably at high noon. Courage--judgment--why should you shuppose you could defeat me?"

"Try anything," said Grim.

He nodded. "I alsho. I will try you. You are coming with me. Bright young--what is your name? Jinkrin--Jimkrin?--never mind it, I will give you a good name--you shall be my--"

Baltis and Vasantasena, almost with the same voice, interrupted:

"Dorje! Dorje!"

He snapped his fingers. It was like a whipcrack. Both doors opened. In came three men through either door, all hooded; and as Jeff and I sprang to our feet they turned long tubes toward us.

"Keep still, you fellows. No use courting certain death," said Grim. Chullunder Ghose began to test the iron shutters, Baltis walked forward.

"Very well," she said, "kill me!"

Dorje made a gesture with his finger and the tube-men held their weapons up. She approached Dorje. He turned and struck her--one blow that sent her reeling backward. She fell, writhing. I picked her up; she was winded; not hurt badly.

"Nothing doing, you fellows," said Grim. "No sense in bucking the impossible."

Vasantasena began to suspect there was something wrong with her arrangements. She shook her waiting woman--whispered--shoved her, and the woman went running toward the right-hand door. One of the tube-men turned his weapon on her. I suppose it went off, but there was neither sight nor sound; the woman merely fell dead, and Dorje took no notice. I could smell no gas. Vasantasena screamed and Jeff swore savagely between his teeth.

"Come!" said Dorje, pointing to the door. Grim glanced at us. "So long, you fellows."

Dorje snapped his fingers. The door opened. Dorje gestured with his

head. Grim walked out. Dorje followed. The six tube-men stood and faced us with their backs toward the open door until someone outside whistled. Then they backed out one by one, the last man closing the door after him. We heard the heavy bolts click.

I went in a hurry for the other door, but that was locked, too, on the outside. I examined Vasantasena's waiting woman. She seemed lifeless, but I laid her on the lounge beside the window. Jeff was wrenching at the shutters.

"Get me a tool--a weapon--anything!" he grumbled, "Dammit, let's get out of here!"

Chullunder Ghose went looking for a tool. He overturned the dais--found a two-foot-high bronze image underneath it, almost solid--brought that.

"Anybody else smell fire?" I asked. "Smell it?" said Jeff. "Can't you hear it?"

He took the bronze, obscene god from the babu and began to rain blows on the iron shutter, making enough din to awaken Delhi, while Vasantasena beat her breasts and rushed here and there, trying the doors, screaming, beating on the panels with her fists-- then running back to scream in Jeff's ear, until I dragged her away. I could hear dim, distant screams now and the crackle of flames. There was a hot stench. Smoke began to creep along the floor cracks, and there was more of it, up where wall met ceiling. There was nothing to do but watch Jeff work. I saw flame lick under the door before he broke the shutter down at last with a crash of window glass, and found another outside shutter of thick teak. He could not smash that, but the bolt broke.

"Out with the women!"

I had the curtains ready. Four of them tied end to end were long enough. The floor was well alight now and the heat was terrific, but I almost had to throw Vasantasena through the window. I believe she wanted to commit suttee. However, she went down hand over hand fast enough when she found there was nothing else for it. I took Baltis then and held her while I slid to the ground. The babu followed me. Then Jeff, with his coat on fire; and before he reached the ground the flames had eaten through the rope, so that he fell at my feet and I smothered the burning coat with garden dirt.

"Now, where's Grim?"

We had to run for it to escape the crashing timbers and the clouds of hot smoke bursting between cracking walls. The entire house was already done for--tinder, generations old and drier than match-wood. As I looked back the roof collapsed amid a roaring holocaust of sparks and flame. It was by the light of that that we saw where Grim had gone.

The thing--it resembled nothing we had ever seen--arose, not more than fifty yards away from us, from beyond a clump of ornamental trees that shaded a fountain in Vasantasena's garden. It reflected the flames. It was long, cylindrical, had no propeller--no wings. It arose quite leisurely. It appeared to me made of metal and had fluted sides, like corrugated iron. I guessed its length at fifty feet, its diameter at fifteen. It shone like silver, blood-red where its corrugations caught in the firelight. It went straight up until it was almost lost to sight, then shot away toward the northeast. It appeared to me to go as fast as sometimes the moon appeared to move between the rifts of storm-blown clouds.

"Is that the end?" asked Baltis. "What now?"

"The beginning!" said the babu.

Jeff laughed. "We will talk about the end at Chak-sam on the Tsangopo River!"

Chapter Thirty-Three

"Here is darkness. Curse me, sahib!"

No one--at least no one to whose credence anyone attached the least importance--believed one word of our account of the astonishing machine in which Dorje had escaped from Delhi; least of all the general, to whose house we hurried as soon as the fire-brigade and the police would let us, and who received us in pyjamas. He had already received three accounts of the burning of Vasantasena's house. He was inclined to believe a spy's report that we set fire to it. His doubt of us was irritated by the fact that we had lost sight of Baltis and Vasantasena, who had escaped in the confusion.

"I will send my car for you to your hotel after breakfast," he remarked.

"Checkmate!" said I, as we returned to our taxi. It was then three in the morning.

"He is," Jeff answered. "Generals plug gaps through which they might attack the enemy and forget the one through which the enemy escape. He'll send for us at about nine-thirty. We have six hours and twenty minutes."

"In which to do what?" I demanded. I could see no prospect of our overtaking Grim or of ever learning what had happened to him.

"In which to thank God that we're warned," said Jeff. "Get out of this,

Chullunder Ghose. Tell Benjamin we're coming by the back door."

But the babu had a better notion.

"Rammy sahib, Benjamin expects us. That Jew hears everything. He will have heard already that Vasantasena's house is burnt. He will suspect the authorities of suspecting us. Therefore he will deduce we are in difficulties. To whom else should we go but to him? So he will keep the back door open, and he will stage a camouflage. And he will not suspect us of being such innocents as to arrive in the same taxi that has waited for us where a general's myrmidons could murmidate driver of same. Let us emerge discreetly, you first. Thusly. At first dark corner you vociferously say, in driver's hearing, I am stink in nostrils of obscenity, or some such platitude familiar to him, in order that his penny-wise profundity may leap to circumstantial conclusion. Get me? Visibly exasperated by your honour's criticism, I stop cab and get into seat beside driver, for obvious purpose of borrowing from distance the enchantment is said to lend to disenchanted and humiliated objergatee. I preoccupy attention of said driver while your honours get the hell from here into the shadows, if I may be excused for quoting poetry of U.S.A. United States. Thus we drive on, leaving you to find your way to Benjamin's on foot, or even in another cab, as case may be."

"All right. But how will you get out of it?"

"Through needle's eye of opportunity! See--here is darkness. Curse me, sahib!"

Jeff did a perfect performance. He even scandalized the driver, and an Indian cabman is no chaste stickler for polite speech. The babu went into a paroxysm of indignant righteousness, stopped the taxi, clambered out, and held the driver's close attention while we slipped out through the far door. As we vanished down a side-street I could

hear the babu's voice, disconsolate, in Hindustanee:

"Drive on! Drive on! It is bad enough to have one's ears burned. Look not backward lest you lose your eyesight! Drive on! Let us swiftly be rid of such blasphemous drunkards!"

Jeff's Kashgar costume blended him into the Delhi darkness, and his intimate familiarity with Delhi slums and by-ways made it a simple matter to find our way to Benjamin's. But my European clothes were more conspicuous and it seemed likely that one of the ubiquitous government spies would turn in a report before morning of my having been seen wandering the street—a white man walking with an Asiatic. It would be simple to follow us to our destination. I suggested to Jeff that it might be wiser for me to walk alone to the hotel.

"Trust Benjamin," he answered, but I did not. I was in a mood to trust no one and nothing.

However, Jeff's confidence was not misplaced. Systems of spies in contact with a centralized bureaucracy and backed by armed force, automatically foster similar resources in the governed. Short of extermination, never in the whole world's history has any government succeeded in suppressing a nation's freedom of communication or destroying its ability to conspire and contrive expedients. Even the Prussians failed in Belgium. Drasticism and alertness only sharpen wits.

There was a man near Benjamin's back door who saw us coming while he held the attention of two constables by telling them a long unlikely tale about conspiracy to loot the store and carry off the daughter of a nearby silversmith. He threw his arms up in apparent despair at their incredulity. But that was a signal. Instantly, from nowhere, there exploded one of those sudden riots that sweep like a flurry of wind downstreet and carry all before them until they cease in

an equally sudden calm and no man knows what caused it or why nobody was hurt. Both constables were swept around a corner, blowing whistles and trying to use their truncheons on the heads of men who merely pushed them down an alleyway and vanished, while we entered unobserved through Benjamin's back door.

"Tschuh-tschuh! You have been a long time on the way!" said Benjamin. "I expected you sooner."

Others also expected us. Benjamin led us to a cellar of whose existence even Jeff was ignorant--and Jeff once lay hidden in Benjamin's place for days on end, when secret agents of the since exterminated Nine Unknown were after him. There was a trap-door hidden beneath blankets heaped on a false floor that swung on a pivot. A stairway led between stone walls into a place resembling one of those chambers in the Roman catacombs where fugitives from authority survived in spite of ancient Rome's intelligence department. It was lighted by imported American candles struck into ancient brass vases, and furnished with comparatively modern cots and camp-chairs bought by Benjamin from some expensively equipped explorer.

Forth from an inner chamber stepped Vasantasena, looking like an actress of classic tragedy. She had beaten her breasts. She was demanding deeper misery than anyone had ever felt. Her eyes burned like those of a parched and hungry tigress.

"She mourns her women," remarked Benjamin. "They--and her faith in Dorje and in all her false gods--all were burned in her house. There is only hate left."

Vasantasena did not speak, but I thought she did not hate Benjamin, although she might have said she did, if she were asked. Behind her, Baltis stared out of the inner gloom and scolded:

"Mon Dieu! You think, you two, that destiny awaits your leisure? Jeemgreem is over the roof of the world and face to face with Dorje! He fights his duel. Meanwhile you go, I suppose, to ask the military to believe in an engine-less aeroplane--or perhaps to ask for permits to go to Chaksam!"

"Can you suggest anything?" Jeff asked her.

"Enfin. You turn to me? At last, eh? It is I who shall suggest? Imbecile! If you and Jeemgreem and the rest of you had tr-r-rusted me--But how could I expect it? It is my karma. Even Dorje did not trust me! He believes he burned me, along with Vasantasena whom he mistrusts also. Always one last straw makes insolence intolerable. Life after life I have to teach that dog not to be tr-r-reacherous to me. And now--in the end--at last he forces me to turn on him! You look at me? You do well. You can do nothing without me!"

"That is true," said Benjamin.

"It is indeed true!" She pushed past Vasantasena, who, in spite of her trade and her tragedy, preserved the oriental woman's nervousness in presence of alien men. "Can you persuade Vasantasena? But you need her also! Why? Because she craves revenge--and she will take it from you, unless you help her to avenge herself on Dorje."

"That is true," repeated Benjamin.

"Did I say that I love Jeemgreem? Bah! He is not lovable. He is a man of ice that no warmth melts! But Dorje is hateable! And I hate! Dorje needs Jeemgreem to be his lieutenant. He will not kill him before he has exhausted every temptation, and every threat, and perhaps even every torture to persuade Jeemgreem to yield and

obey. He will show Jeemgreem buried cities and all the marvels that were in the world when the world was Atlantis and the Deluge had not yet made men savages."

"He can do it," said Benjamin.

"But in the end he will have to kill Jeemgreem, because Jeemgreem will not yield to him. So you men shall obey me."

"Go to hell," Jeff answered.

"Unless you obey me, you shall never rescue Jeemgreem!"

"Better make peace with her," Benjamin whispered.

"Tschahyeh! Women without children, what are they? Devils! Devils!"

Jeff stuffed his fists in his pockets and stared at Baltis.

"You obey me, or you lose your friend Jeemgreem!" she gloated. "I am not afraid to lose him. I am weary of him. He bores me. I go after Dorje now because I hate him and fear nothing. But you are afraid!"

Benjamin's spectacled book-keeper opened the trap-door, peered at us and spoke with a squeak that resembled the plaint of the trap-door hinges. Down the steps came Chullunder Ghose, and one could guess by the subdued triumph of his stride that he had either good news or a more than usually fantastic scheme in his head.

"Salaam!" he remarked with an air of patronizing impudence. "If I were civilized enough to wear a hat, I would remove it to you! You are damn--bad, devilish--enterprising woman! Sahibs--we win!"

"Do not trust him. That one is a bad one," murmured Benjamin. He had never forgiven, and never would forgive Chullunder Ghose for

some trick played on him in days gone by.

"You? What have you done?" demanded Baltis. Her eyes narrowed almost into slits. She glanced at Vasantasena; for an agonised second she believed the babu and Vasantasena had a secret understanding. But Vasantasena's dully disillusioned, tragic face killed that suspicion.

"Done much!" said the babu. "Am obese with muchness. Much news. Sahibs, I learned less than an hour ago that they ascribe the burning of Vasantasena's house to rivalry between three schools of prostitution, two of them resenting the entertainment of an alien by Vasantasena who thus brought discredit upon an ancient profession; and your honours are accordingly to be deported before further complications can ensue."

Vasantasena, looking like death, with irregular seams and splotches where the tears had washed cosmetic from her face, turned on her heel with an exclamation of disgust and disappeared into the inner room, her right hand feeling for support against masonry, her left hand beating the air so that her bracelets clashed a dirge of melancholy. I heard a cot creak as she threw herself against it on her knees.

"Listen to me first," Benjamin suggested. But the babu was in haste, although he pretended he was not.

"You may tell them afterwards," he said, "that once I tricked you out of rupees sixteen hundred. At the moment I am speaking of important matters."

"Step on her!" said Jeff. "How do we overtake Grim?"

Chapter Thirty-Four

"I will bet you pounds Egyptian fifty that the Jewess overboils the eggs!"

"Dorje," remarked Benjamin, "will go by way of Chak-sam because there he has a relay post. But his goal is beyond the Kwen-lun Mountains, to the north and west of Koko Nor. And he will not travel by day, for fear of being seen; so he will come to earth at a place, this side of Katmandu. which has no name and is not on any map. It is in a valley amid mountains. It is reputed sacred. Even the people of Nepaul avoid it. He will stay there all day, until after dark. But how shall you find the place? How get there? Ten days--or it might be eight--or even seven--I have one who could guide you, and the Middle Way is open, unknown even to the secret service. But in seven, eight, ten days, where is Dorje? Gone! And Jimgrim with him! And the Roof of the World to be crossed! And then the Kwen-lun Ranges! Hey-yeh! It is the end of Jimgrim!"

"If it is the end of your croaking, then I will sing" said Chullunder Ghose. "Tell me: would you offer rupees sixteen hundred for the means of reaching Jimgrim?"

"More than that," Benjamin answered.

"You may charge off the extra for interest. I no longer owe you rupees sixteen hundred! Do you wish to come with us and see Jimgrim before noon? No? Then you must take my word for it. But we shall jolly well need breakfast before daybreak, so you had better tell your fat daughter to cook it. Rammy sahib likes three cups of coffee, if the cups are big ones; otherwise, five. Five of us-- say twenty cups of coffee and enough eggs for a regiment, with fruit, bread, butter and whatever else you have!"

"It shall be done," said Benjamin. "But, dog of a babu, if you play a

trick on us--"

"Trick? Me? Am simple person. Let us sit."

We squatted on an Afghan blanket, all except Baltis, who stood with her back to the wall and her arms folded, watching us as if she knew we meant to leave her there and follow Grim without her aid.

"Pursuing purpose of deceiving taxi-driver, this babu as per pre-arranged plan took hold of wheel and brought about collision with a bullock-cart, whose driver turned out to be person of malevolence. In cut-off-nose-to-spite face-ishness he swung his bullocks so that taxi-driver could by no means make a lightsome get-away, not knowing that a wheel of taxi-cab was broken but intent on breaking taxi-driver's head with butt of cudgel used for stimulating foot-pound--kilowattic-energy of bullocks. God is very good to this babu. In course of altercation, during which a constable admonished both of them with his truncheon and whistled for help, there came unstipulated godsend in the form of five-passenger, high-speed, ram-you-damn-you, nickel-plated French motorcar, driven with exhaust wide open by a drunken citizen of France, who put on brakes in nick of time to let this babu give good imitation of casualty with at least three broken legs.

"Same had sobering effect. Nevertheless, sobriety not yet adequate to cause suspicion when this casualty climbed in without assistance, sighing 'Take me to the hospital--be swift--will show way--straight ahead!' The constables, not having time to take number of car, and being now three in number, wrought much havoc with the indignant drivers, who yelled for help, and there were the makings of a riot, so that I do not think our driver will remember us. Such men's heads hold only one idea. Even that one will have been made to hibernate by blows from the police. So I commended all those men to God, who

doubtless loves them, and directed my attention to the officer at wheel of this amazing vehicle that passionately scorched through streets in search of hospital that fortunately lies in opposite direction.

"Self, am lightning calculator. Frenchmen are the only ones who drive through streets at that speed. How many Frenchmen in Delhi? Ten? Not probably. Of those, how many drive a car like lunatics possessed of sixteen extra senses and a drunkard's luck? How many Frenchmen get drunk? Very few, unless the English entertain them. Q.E.D. that this one has been entertained. Why? Aviator? Why not? May he not be that one who has piloted the plane that brought our beautiful Princess from Cairo? Bold guess, but am seldom timid.

"Self, am also super-P.F.D., which means, am perfectly familiar with damsels, due to wife of bosom, to say nothing of three daughters who are married and have husbands who dislike work as *infra dignitatem*. Verb sap, very. Woman in our hour of ease is opportunist. In predicament, in an airplane, juxtaposed to handsome aviator of a naturally amorous and gallant disposition, woman become Einsteinian in her relativity to all the inhibitions. Aviator, taking off, beside her on back seat, not improbably is introduced to sandwich in the form of kilowattish love-stuff between slices of imaginary past history and promises of future bliss as unrestricted as prospectus of an oil-stock salesman. Not improbably, this aviator has been dated up and now is looking for his Cinderella, who has very likely given an indefinite address. I take a chance--about as big as if I bet you that the sun gets up next Tuesday morning. I lean over back of front seat and say 'Baltis!' in gentleman's ear. Instantly invented new word--Baltistics--meaning curvature of ace on consequence of mixture of champagne with aviator-complex, amorousness, starlight, secret service trendishness of mind and the seductive genius of her who now observes me as if I were Dick Whittington letting cat out of bag in order to become thrice Lord Mayor of London.

"Brakes--four--functioning as when irresistible force meets immovable obstacle. Invitation to climb into front seat. Why am I? Who am I? This babu's abominable belly being wrong-side-uppish from attempting to continue with velocity while vehicle skids to a standstill, took time to consider problem. Thought being unconditioned by time and space, can do lots of thinking in thirty seconds. Decided I am messenger from Princess Baltis, sent in search of Prince Charming, burdened with her confidences, and political extremist--very. Said so, in so many words, each suitable selected for its vagueness and inspirational suggestiveness. Suggested also that we might do well to drive on, to avoid the impudence of curious policemen. So we began to circumscribe a square mile, like a puppy pursuing its tail; and we went so fast that I swear I could see the tail-light just in front of us.

"Speed, I find, exhilarates the brain. Though drunkenly. Threw logic and all laws of probability to hell. As unfettered and uncontaminated as a Christian Scientist in act of demonstrating money, I decided that improbabilities are all we have to go on in predicting destiny, but destiny is, nevertheless, the mule that must be driven. It is obviously not in the least probable that the French secret service will neglect its godsent opportunities. Ergo--Q.E.D.--this aviator is the sort of gentlemanly patriot who does the fancy spying for his government. Why not? If he is any good, he may be even now establishing an unsuspecting character of drunken irresponsibility in order to conceal a deadly purpose.

"Do the French not wish to know any number of things about the British dispositions and preparedness in India? Is there anything that the French do not wish to know? They crave omniscience, in order to be better able to make us conscious of their culture.

"Multiplying guesswork by the square root of improbability; and

knowing that our adorable Princess is an ex-French spy, like toad under the harrow of dilemma but astonishingly opportunist, this babu deduces that--in order to escape from observation, and in order to save time in reaching Dorje when she shall have learned his whereabouts--she will have dated up this aviator to give her a joy-ride after reaching India. She will have promised to show him things which nobody is meant to see. And perhaps she will have promised, should he set her down at some place indicated by herself, to do a little cultural observation for the French General Staff. That is what this babu would have done in said predicament; and is she less free with promises than I am? Promises are easier to make than pie-crust, and a whole lot easier to break.

"We now descend to facts, like politicians after the election. A debacle, but--God pity us--a fact or two are necessary. I know that our adorable Princess has met Vasantasena, in whose now incinerated studio of chastity I simulated drunkenness and learned, from giggling girls, that someone has been sent to tell a Frenchman whither he should come to enjoy an evening's, or an early morning's devotion to culture. Obviously, our beloved Princess was the sender of the message--to this aviator. Six plus six are sixty-six. And the rest is easy.

"I discover his name, by saying I must not pour confidences into incorrectly labelled ears. His name is Henri de la Fontaine Coq. I peer into his mental processes by saying there is nothing to be done unless he can begin at daybreak. He reminds me he has had but one hour's sleep since leaving Baghdad. I remind him that sleep is the curse of opportunists. He assures me in four-dimensional English mixed with aviation French that opportunity is a pretty oiseau which invariably comes into the cage that he has artfully prepared. So I demand particulars, assuring him that there are other plans in competition with his own. He grumbles. He remarks that the 'plane in

which he made his record-breaking journey is in need of readjustment. Men are working on it at that minute. He is to make a test at daybreak, to discover whether, with a full tank, he can now ascend to I forget what altitude. Thus grief gives birth to opportunity. I sharpen same before his eyes like butcher at a grindstone. He becomes excited. I tell him to convince the British Air Force and the authorities that he only intends to fly a little distance, by leaving his flight companion on the ground. Thus--should he receive a message from our puritanical Princess--he can ascend for purpose of picking up her and whoever is with her, though he does not yet believe that she will have companions. He will be disappointed when he sees us. I am sympathetic babu."

"Very good," said Jeff, "But what if he refused to take extra passengers?"

"International scandal instantly! Eminent French aviator ordered to the ground and sent home for conspiring with unsavory babu to smuggle undesirables to Katmandu, which is forbidden territory! Nay, nay! Having started, he must continue! After reaching neighborhood of Katmandu, he makes forced landing. We vanish. He invents prevarication about throttle having jammed wide open, or some other mechanical alibi that authorities can pretend to believe for the sake of saving face, each knowing that the other spies on each and neither of them actually looking for a scandal. Point is, that he had not yet received a message from our Princess. I delivered it."

Baltis snorted but said nothing at the moment. It was Jeff who spoke next:

"All right, let's say you bluff him into taking us. Will the 'plane hold us all?"

"Like can with one sardine too many. Chummy--no room to be distant

to each other."

"How about the weight?"

"Spill gasoline from reserve tank. Eight pounds to the gallon-- spill a hundred pounds--plenty left to take us all the way to Katmandu."

"He will be watched," said Jeff. "The moment he heads away he will be followed."

"They will have to summon aviators, warm up engines, telephone to God-knows-who, for God-knows-what instructions signed in triplicate on Blue-form B. He will have a long start, sahib."

"But suppose they overtake us?"

"What with? He has just broken all world's distance records. Barring a few pursuit 'planes, all of which are guarding North-West Frontier from raids by Pathan and Afridi Hillmen, his is much the fastest 'plane in India--perhaps in all the world. Catch as catch can--I wish them luck. But I bet you pounds Egyptian fifty."

"All right," said Jeff, "we'll try it. But how are we to find the place where Dorje landed?"

"We will take Vasantasena. I believe she knows it."

"She does," said Benjamin.

Chullunder Ghose grinned. I think he knew exactly what would happen next. "Then all we have to do," he added, "is to eat breakfast, borrow rugs and overcoats, and take our Princess and the other lady to the place at which I made our assignment. It is--"

"I will not go!" Baltis interrupted. "Henri de la Fontaine Coq will

certainly not take you unless I go also." She was a bargainer by instinct; but I think her main motive was exasperation that Chullunder Ghose had discovered her plan, stolen it and made it practical.

"You will not stay here," said Benjamin. "I will turn you out into the street!"

"Where you will be arrested and sent back to France," I suggested.

"Do they send women like you to Devil's Island?" Jeff wondered. Chullunder Ghose stood up and faced her, arms akimbo: "Sweet sahiba, this babu speaks reverently, always being worshipful of disrespect for rules on conduct. Self am pre-Falstaffian anti-delusionist, to whom all human honour rooted in a mess of profiteering stands. In man, spiritual honour is an unknown quantity, but dimly guessed at by those who have friends in tight places. Jimmy Jimgrim, to my face, has called me very often names that I would not repeat in presence of such beauty and integrity as yours. But, behind my back, he has described me as his friend and always trusted me. It seems he thinks that you are necessary to his designs on Dorje. Consequently, if this babu lives, you will accompany us, if necessary in a sack, until our Jimmy Jimgrim sends you to the devil."

Jeff glanced at Benjamin. "Have you a sack that's big enough?"

But Baltis sneered. "Could I persuade an aviator from the inside of a sack?"

"Not likely," said the babu, "but I think I can persuade you. Jimmy Jimgrim needs us; you shall therefore use your full charm on that aviator. Otherwise I will cut your nose off."

She glanced at Jeff, then at me. "They would never let you attempt it."

"I would hold you while he did it," I retorted.

"I have stuff that makes a wound burn like eternal fire," said Benjamin.

Chullunder Ghose continued. "But I offer you this promise. Am professional liar, an immoralist, a person of no reputation and even less desire for one. Nevertheless I keep all promises. If you will play your part and use your charms on Captain Henri de la Fontaine Coq, until we reach Nepaul; and if you try to play no tricks on us, I promise you my friendship as the only comprehensible religion."

"That is different," she answered. "I accept that. You will support me before Jeemgreem? I need Jeemgreem's help if I shall outwit Dorje."

"I will say you are a good girl. He will not believe it, but he will condone my indiscretion," said the babu.

Baltis nodded, turned and went into the inner room, presumably to tell Vasantasena. Benjamin, leading the way, invited us to breakfast in an upper room. Chullunder Ghose took Jeff's arm:

"Rammy sahib, crown me! Mayhem! Me, who cannot see a tooth pulled and not shudder! And oh, what have I promised? Friendship—to a woman, to whom friendship is a bargain on a scratch-me basis, and I scratch you! She will scratch my eyes out. I will bet you pounds Egyptian fifty that the Jewess overboils the eggs."

Part Three--The Uncrowned

Chapter Thirty-Five

"She is a happening--a tragedy exuded from the womb of ruin."

Captain Henri de la Fontaine Coq was of the type that impudently upsets calculations, having genius for seeing flaws in rules, but seldom profiting by it, except in excitement, which is some men's standard of value. And as alcohol makes some men brazenly indifferent to consequences, so excitement made him icily remote from prudence. He had calm eyes that observed everything, feared nothing except boredom, and appeared to be quietly laughing at the absurdity of caring two sous whether the sun should rise or not tomorrow morning. We amused him. Baltis amused him immensely. It intrigued him beyond laughter that no one had remembered to stipulate what his movements should be while in India; that Nepal was closed territory into which no alien may enter; that there was actually no order in council or any other published rule (since nobody had thought of it) forbidding foreign planes to fly into Nepal.

The appointed rendezvous was to the north of Delhi, on a maidan where the jungle, that has overgrown the ancient city, lies hedged around with ruins. It was a landing place that called for iron nerve, because of broken masonry that had been piled in heaps as part of an abandoned scheme for clearing the whole area; but it was easy to see from the air and had the additional advantage that there were no dwellings near it except those of criminals who make their hives among the ruins.

We went to the place in a closed car, not unlike a delivery van or a police patrol wagon; there were small gratings, instead of windows; it

was the sort of thing in which women are transported from one harem to another. It was Vasantasena's hearse in which many a woman had taken chastity for burial, and the driver was a taciturn Moslem who nodded when Benjamin spoke to him, made no remarks, and favoured us with no more recognition than if we had been sacks of merchandise, although he seemed to fear Vasantasena. He drove at a moderate speed, negotiated carefully the rough track leading through the jungle to the cleared maidan, waited just exactly long enough for all of us to get out, glanced to make sure we had done so, and then drove away again, ignoring Jeff's offer of money.

Wrapped like mummies in the clothing Benjamin provided, and a bit uncomfortable because Vasantasena had brought tragedy as well as convention along with her, we sat on broken masonry and waited until daylight. Twenty minutes followed, each of them as irritating as the other, and all of us nervous from lack of sleep as well as from wondering whether Henri de la Fontaine Coq would come. It is a paradoxical world, in which there are no more conventional people than public prostitutes. Vasantasena stood off even Baltis. It was Chullunder Ghose who seduced from her the one short speech she did make. In the courtly Persian that such women, in common with poets and elegant social swells, consider is the only language fit to speak he shot one question at her.

"Dorje will reimburse you for the burning of your house?"

"And my women!" she retorted. "Dorje is a devil who has stabbed his servant."

He translated for my benefit, then added comment: "And the strange thing, sahibs, is that she regards us and an aeroplane simply as the instruments provided for her by the moralistic god she worships. It is not revenge she seeks, nor will she do an act of justice. There is a sort of absoluteness. Dorje has done that to her which sets up

consequences; she gives birth to consequence; it is a sacred frenzy such as actuated all those widows who committed suttee in the days gone by. She intends to slay Dorje but not to survive him. And she is absolutely sure that she will slay him. I tell you, she is no longer human; she has identified herself with forces as irrational as tides and storms. She is a happening --a tragedy, exuded from the womb of ruin, destined to bring forth cataclysm."

"What do you know about women?" Baltis asked him.

"Nothing, most inscrutable sahiba. That is why I ignorantly dared to offer you my friendship--such as it is--such as it is. I am enigma to myself."

Dawn broke brazen-yellow and three jackals, jabbering obscenely, fled as if they thought the great descending 'plane was something prehistoric, lurking in the tombs of memory--some monstrous bird of prey, perhaps a pterodactyl. Henri de la Fontaine Coq made one of those landings that destroy an onlooker's belief in prudence and the laws of gravity and common sense. It was a superbly perfect landing, too good to be anything but accident or almost superhuman skill. He taxied to a standstill within twenty feet of us and calmly signed to us to turn the 'plane around, so that he might take off unobstructed. There was no wind; his only problem was the piles of debris.

He smiled with the curious air of one who regards a biped as an anachronism--estimated, I suppose, our aggregate poundage--got out--spilled a quantity of gasoline which he remarked, in French to Baltis, might help to explain his movements to the Royal Air Force, should they turn inquisitive--helped Baltis into the front seat, and climbed in after her. Jeff and I had to restart the engine and that, even with Jeff's weight and strength, took several minutes. Then the rest of us scrambled into the rear cockpit, wedged like herrings in a barrel.

To make matters worse, Chullunder Ghose and Vasantasena were both air-sick soon after we started.

We escaped the Royal Air Force by about five minutes, perhaps less. Our aviator had been watched and was seen to descend. Supposing him in difficulties, five 'planes took the air to fly to his assistance, rising almost at the same moment as ourselves. Coq calmly turned toward them. Seeing him apparently returning without trouble they went to ground again. Coq at once began circling for altitude, and it was not until he was several thousand feet above the Air Force hangar that he took a bee-line toward the north-east. Then, barring accident, we were beyond pursuit.

Baltis was in her element. The wine of excitement made her eyes so brilliant that it was noticeable even through the goggles that Coq lent her. Several times she stood and turned to look at us, enjoying our discomfort. Her triumphant smile suggested the intention to make us pay at compound interest for each humiliation she had suffered at our hands. I wrote on a scrap of paper: "Can he find Katmandu?" and passed it to her. She nodded--showed a map that Coq had brought with him. It became evident that on her way from Cairo she had fully informed the Frenchman as to what might be expected of him. I scribbled on another sheet of paper:

"It is not Katmandu, but a valley perhaps fifty miles from there. Can you find it?"

She borrowed my pencil and was a long time writing her reply, which was only two words jerkily scrawled. I have kept them, pasted in a notebook, as the only souvenir of her that I have excepting a scar that is as indelible as memory itself:

"Vous m'embetz."

I showed it to Jeff. He produced an unregistered Colt automatic that Benjamin had supplied from some unlawful arsenal; Benjamin had armed me, too, and even forced a pistol on Chullunder Ghose. Jeff wrote on a page of his own memorandum book, tore it out and passed it to me to hand to her. When she turned to receive it he showed her the pistol. The message he wrote was:

"One trick--even one mistake--and I will shoot you. This is a promise. J.R."

Jeff keeps his promises, as she was perfectly aware. She was careful after that to make no gesture that suggested anything except attention to the job. She kept the map on her knees and conned the distant land-marks.

Jeff and I were worrying about the prospect of pursuit. There was no fear of our being followed from Delhi; we had too much start at too high speed. But nothing would be easier than for 'phone or telegraph to send on word ahead of us. We could ignore all 'planes already in the air, since those would have no excuse to suspect us of lawless flight; but 'planes on the, ground could be sent up to get in our way and force us down, so we scanned the horizon nervously. As a matter of fact, the only 'plane that did come near us was a Royal Air Force unit on patrol; but it was slower than we were by twenty or thirty per cent and its pilot, though he tried hard, had no time to gain sufficient altitude. We passed directly over him, and though he followed for a while and appeared to be trying to signal to us, he was soon outdistanced, and I doubt whether he could see how many passengers we had, although it was impossible for us to duck down in the crowded cockpit.

I suppose I never will get used to the speed with which the leagues trail out beneath and behind an aeroplane. I am a natural-born biped, fond of hoofing it leisurely and not air-minded. Trains seem fast

enough, and the Woolworth Building high enough. I discover myself almost scandalized by a speed of a hundred miles an hour. A hundred and twenty--a hundred and forty miles an hour removes me from the realm of reason and I simply don't believe my senses. When I saw the Brahmaputra River, which is the Tsang-po slightly civilized, and Darjeeling, and the Mountains of Nepaul, there was no mistaking them and yet they were no more genuine, to my mind, than remembered dreams. That journey, even now, seems unreal, and it was rendered more so by the Frenchman's perfectly sublime indifference to consequences. He undoubtedly believed he was acquiring information, or about to do so, useful to his government; and he probably knew as well as any other taker of such chances that at least ninety per cent of the risks run and the ingenuity expended by the secret services is as useless as afternoon tea at a cocktail party. But air-mindedness and normal prudence seem incompatible. A genuine airman, who is as scarce as a genuine poet, views life relatively to a brand new set of values. He belongs, I believe, to a new race; and he has the apparent youthful irresponsibility of all things young--and irresponsibility to standards that an ageing race considers sacred because it seeks to justify its inhibitions.

Baltis might be also of that new race. She was at least equally contemptuous of custom and the etiquette of nations. She and he hit it off famously. They seemed to understand each other without speech--almost without gesture. She appeared to me to acquire a new self-confidence during that swift journey, as if Henri de la Fontaine Coq were a magician who had conjured forth, by mere proximity, her hidden value. He appeared to trust her absolutely, which was rather disconcerting to us passengers, because it was she who compared the landscape with the map, she who guided us above the winding valleys of Nepal between enormous mountains. No reason appealed to me why she should sit there with our lives in her hands. But there was nothing to be done about it.

It was she who first discerned the mass of palaces and temples that is Katmandu. From a height in the air it looks like a patternless jumble of fantastic toys that someone played with and forgot; and the enormous snow-topped mountains heaped on one another to the northward look like foaming waves about to burst and overwhelm the place. We flew lower—much lower—I suppose because she and he desired to look at the forbidden city. We could presently see crowds of people, some of whom were evidently soldiers, and we had some faint idea of the excitement we were causing. Most of them had certainly seen 'planes before; but there is not one native of Nepaul who does not know that theirs is forbidden territory.

We were signalled, with flags. When we ignored that, we were fired at. A whole company of troops were marched on to a level space that looked like a drill-ground and fired three volleys at us, but the bullets came nowhere near. Then we saw them dragging out some kind of cannon, but before they could bring that into action we had circled the city and were heading away northward, climbing and then spiralling to get more altitude. There was a pass that Baltis seemed to recognize, although she shrugged her shoulders at the map now. It looked barely negotiable by men on foot and quite impossible for horses; here and there were ascents as steep as the face of the New Jersey Palisades, and where the slopes were less terrific we could see the deep grooves cut by avalanching rocks and snow.

And now the wind became a problem. It began to blow in sudden ice-shod squalls that made our course a swerving zig-zag. The 'plane bumped and swayed like a small boat on an open sea with wind against tide. The roar of the exhaust seemed somehow lacking in assurance, as if the stream of sound was slightly interrupted at its source—not less yet, but less solidly convincing. Henri de la Fontaine Coq began to finger the controls and to watch the gauges so intently that there could be no doubt there was something not right with the

engine.

But we needed the engine's full power. Time and again a sharp squall almost wrecked us against crags where rescue, if we should by miracle survive the crash, was too improbable for even drunkards to imagine. Coq kept trying to climb higher but the engine refused to exert the needed power and several times it stuttered ominously. Straight ahead of us, the summit of the pass--a mere notch between saw-tooth crags swept clean of snow by shrieking wind--seemed actually higher than ourselves; and to turn and go back was stark impossible in that wind, with mountain walls on either hand. It looked, with that failing engine, as if the luckiest conceivable journey's end would be a snatched forced landing on the hundred yards of rock--it looked smooth--in the throat of that screaming gap, through which the wind came pouring like winter water through a broken dam.

I don't know how Coq managed it. I know I thought that we were blowing over backwards--then I believed we were in a tailspin. One terrific bump convinced me, for a fragment of eternity that is not measurable in degrees of time, that we had struck the rock on the summit. Then we worried our way forward with the motion of an artificial minnow being reeled in on a casting line. There were three upward swerves like the swoop of a car on a Coney Island scenic railroad, followed by a sudden, sickening descent that changed into a long, untroubled, gliding motion like the leisurely roll of the water that comes tumbling over the Horseshoe Falls at Niagara. The engine stopped. Rocks--sides of mountains--and then trees sped past us far too swiftly for the eye to measure them. We were coasting, not more than a hundred feet, I think, above the steep northern slope of the mountain. It was almost like a runway underneath us, with walls on each side that prevented our turning. Down that chute we slid, with crags and tree-tops underneath us merging until they seemed as smooth as the top of a billiard table--until at last there was room to

maneuver and Coq went into a wide, slow spiral like a vulture's, seeking for a place to land.

We were above a valley that had no apparent outlet. There was a lake near the eastern end of it--two small villages of stone-built huts--some forest--a wide clearing--then another forest. In the midst of the clearing, buildings in a semicircle. Nowhere but in the clearing was the landing even moderately safe, because where there were no trees there were boulders or else the ground was so irregular that a crash would be unavoidable. Coq headed for the clearing, spiralling downward, using great skill that was, nevertheless, not comparable with his resolute negotiation of the summit. I believe he was tired. Or perhaps like all the rest of us he needed sleep.

At any rate, a squall of icy wind came screaming through a gap between two northern peaks and caught us beam on. We slipped sideways, almost turned over, then nose-dived. Coq came out of that, I don't know how, but struck a treetop on the eastern edge of the clearing. It damaged our right wing. Then he crashed into the trees to save us from being dashed to pieces on the ground and something struck me on the forehead, so that I don't know just what happened during the next few minutes. That, however, is the inside story of the mystery that seems to have puzzled newspaper readers the wide world over, of how that record-breaking 'plane was found within forbidden territory with its aviator missing and no clue as to why it came there.

Chapter Thirty-Six

"I will not be vairee jealous."

I recovered consciousness with Baltis leaning over me. She was kneeling. I knew she had gone through my pockets. Not that it

mattered; there was nothing there of any interest except my small emergency kit, some money and identification papers.

"I think you die," she said. "I think you shall be Henri de la Fontaine Coq."

I understood her, as one understands things in a dream. I didn't even remember where I was, or what had happened, but I understood, nevertheless, that she proposed to leave my carcass lying there with Coq's papers, and that he should escape with mine. Above her I could see the sky through branches, and I knew I was wedged uncomfortably in some undergrowth.

"A pity I must not shoot you," she remarked, "but it would make a noise. Nevaire mind. It will be almost painless."

She had removed a lancet from my pocket-case of instruments. I winced as she slashed at my forearm to sever an artery. But she made her incision in the wrong place, and the pain revived me so that I sat up and hurled her backward into the tangled undergrowth. When she tried to get up I shoved her back again. It was not until then that I remembered everything and saw the smashed 'plane, fifty feet away, nose downward, jammed between two tree-trunks. I had to look upward to see it. I had been thrown into a depression between rounded boulders. My head ached.

"You are a fool," I told her. "Yes," said a voice behind me. I turned slowly, because if a man has the drop on you it is the silliest thing in the world to give him an excuse to pull the trigger. Dorje stood there, on the nearest boulder.

"Damn you, where is Grim?" I asked him. I was not quite in my proper senses yet.

"With the others."

He did not look human. He looked like the devil. Like a devil from a Tibetan picture. I felt for my automatic, but Baltis had thrown it away.

"She hash just that much shence," he remarked. He seemed unable to pronounce the letter "s." The effect was disgusting. It is mainly little things like that which cause mayhem and murder. Big things are too big for us to get angry about.

"Kill Baltis if you wish," said Dorje. "You may take that little knife and kill her."

But Baltis was unimportant. She made the curious mistake of thinking that I spared her life for gentlemanly reasons, or perhaps because I wished to buy her gratitude. The truth is, I was intellectually frozen. I had never suspected myself capable of such concentrated hatred of any condition, thing or person. Baltis was no concern of mine--none whatever. Dorje was a monopolizing obsession.

"He is a doctor. He saves people. He does not kill them," Baltis remarked--childishly, I thought.

I laughed, inside myself. I could have vivisected Dorje, without qualm or compunction. So much for the veneer we think is manners, and good morals, and a spiritual inward grace. Dorje laughed outright--one humorless, cynical sneer:

"Then you are ash big a fool as she ish. To grow corn, it ish nesheshary to kill weeds and inschechts."

Reason returned slowly. I could feel it almost like a physical reaction. The obvious thing to do was to kill Dorje with my hands before he could have a chance to summon help. I took a step toward him. But I

had to climb that boulder; and as I started to do that two faces peered above it, one on either side of Dorje's legs. They were as devilish as his, but stupid. His seemed all intellect; those other two were like the faces of the men who can be hired, for money for promised paradise, to maim and torture heretics. I picked up my case of instruments and put a plug on my forearm to stop the bleeding, bound that with my handkerchief and held it out for Baltis to tie the knot.

"What next?" I demanded.

"Thish way."

The two owners of the faces followed him--mongrel Mongols clothed in dyed leather--lean, muscular rogues whose tread suggested secret purposes and confidence in something not yet brought to pass. They had knives in their belts, but no firearms that I could detect. Then Baltis took me by the hand.

"We are fr-r-riends now--yes?"

"Tu m'embetes!" I answered, paying her in her own coin, with interest.

"Pourquoi? It is obvious that you and I are destined to be useful to each other. Othairwise I could have keeled you. But it is impossible to do what is not destined. Therefore you should do as I do and forget the little difference."

"Come along," I answered. I believe she genuinely felt much more friendly than she ever had done; circumstances, from her viewpoint, had made intimacy almost unavoidable. She kept hold of my hand--locked her fingers in mine. I rather liked it.

Dorje paused beside the aeroplane, stared at it, then turned and smiled at me. The smile wrinkled his face and made him better

looking. It was the mischievous, tolerant smile of an expert at an amateur's mistake.

"Petrol!" he said. "Shilly as shtilts! Grow treesh high enough and climb to heaven! Wind blowsh--down you come! Tree breaksh-- down you come. And heaven ish shtill a long way off--eh?"

He resumed his stroll into the clearing, walking with his head a little forward as if thought were heavy. He had a strong neck and fine shoulders, but his legs looked spidery and spindly in proportion to his bulk; they could carry him well, but he seemed to dislike using them. I noticed for the first time that his clothing, too, was made of leather, dyed to resemble russet-coloured cloth and cut like no garments I had ever seen; they were so evidently comfortable that at first glance one was almost as unaware of them as he was.

In the near distance was the semicircular group of buildings that we had seen from the 'plane. They looked now rather like farm buildings, but of a far better type than one would expect to find outside the United States or certain parts of Europe. There was a central building that resembled an enormous barn, with silos at one end, only they were too wide and not high enough to be regular silos and there was grass growing on their flat tops, so that whatever their use might be they were certainly not filled from above or from the outside. All the other buildings looked like dwellings or else store sheds. The clearing was possibly fifty acres in extent. There were a few small cows, some goats and chickens.

Baltis and I followed Dorje toward a building at the right of the big central barn. We walked slower than he did because my head was a bit woozy from the shaking up and Baltis, too, refused to be hurried.

"Have you been here before" I demanded, and she shook her head.

"When I came down from Koko Nor it was by way of China. And when I went there it was by way of Russia and--"

She checked herself. She had evidently spoken unguardedly, telling the plain truth--something contrary to habit. She had been thinking furiously of something else.

"Listen," she said, "I dare not speak of that. While Dorje lives I dare not speak of it. He is too cruel. When he kills he is swift. But when he punishes--"

She shuddered.

"Are you hoping to regain his favour?" I asked her.

"No, no. Impossible. But I am hoping to save Henri."

"Not in love with Grim now?"

"No. Jeemgreem is too impassionate. Henri de la Fontaine Coq is--oh, he is perfect! I am afraid Henri will laugh at Dorje."

"What then?"

"Dorje does not enjoy to be laughed at. And what he does not enjoy he abolishes."

"Use your wits, then. You and Vasantasena might--"

"You listen to me!" she interrupted. "Should Vasantasena keel him, there would be such vengeance on us all as it is impossible to imagine! Such tortures--such prolongation of the agony--such devilish ingenuity! And Dorje knows why she is here. He is no fool. He will use her, and me, and Henri, and us all as arguments to make Jeemgreem submit to him and become his lieutenant. Either

Jeemgreem does so, or he tortures us in Jeemgreem's presence. Oh, I know Dorje! Not for nothing did he give us opportunity to overtake him. He did not need to wait here. Northward from here he can travel by day and none the wiser, since who would believe a story of an airship crossing all those mountains?"

She sat down, pretending to remove a thorn or something from her sandal, since we were near the buildings now and there was more she wished to tell me.

"I know him. I know how he reasons. He would argue that if we are worth troubling about, then we will find some way of overtaking Jeemgreem. And if we have that much ingenuity, then we are worth employment. Me--Vasantasena--he will keel, unless Jeemgreem makes a bargain for us. All you others he will use."

"Piffle!" I retorted. "If he's shrewd he'd know we would simply pretend to yield to him, and ditch him at the first chance."

"Yes?" she answered. "You have not yet seen the punishments! But he will show you. Furthermore, he will do what he did to Bertolini--and to me--and to my sister--and to all the others who know anything about him. He will force you to commit a crime for which there is no forgiveness if the crime is found out. None of Dorje's intimates can ever turn against him, because always there is that atrocity that never can be expiated. Whether you do it or not, he will construct the evidence. But he can offer such temptation--of such power and excitement--that they are not many who shrink from the practical pledge. He is persuasive."

"A hypnotist?"

"More. He knows the anatomy of emotions. He can produce them. And he is protected always by his bodyguard, who are devils on

whom he imposes discipline."

Dorje had paused in a doorway. I saw him make a remark to his two attendants. He went inside. They turned back and approached us. Baltis refastened her sandal and took my hand again. We strolled forward and the two men waited for us.

"I love Henri."

"Aren't you a bit changeable?"

"I am as lightning that looks for its lover. It flashes this way. It flashes that way. But when it finds its real mate it--"

"Kills him?" I suggested.

"No. You imbecile, it kills those who get in the way! Tell Jeemgreem--he would not believe me--tell him I am truly his accomplice if he only will agree to save Henri!"

"Grim will do what he can to save all of us."

"Maybe. But you do not know yet. You tell Jeemgreem that I make that bargain with him. Unless he saves Henri for me I will ruin us all. I am not afraid of death. And if it is true that Jeemgreem is my destiny and I am his, nevertheless, there can be interludes, and there are many lives. I will forgive him if he finds himself a temporary love until our destiny unites us. I will not be vairee jealous. Tell him to be generous to me, and I will truly help him against Dorje."

Dorje's two attendants were impatient--beckoning.

"Come along," I answered. "All right, I will tell him. When did you and Henri reach your understanding?"

"Not yet. He does not yet know it. He has only begun to wonder why he is annoyed when I speak of Jeemgreem. Henri is a reincarnation of D'Artagnan, who was the greatest lover in the world. But he does not know that either--not yet. He is a vagrant. He has no loyalties. He is no good. But he is marvellous. I love him and he loves me."

Chapter Thirty-Seven

"Henri--he has genius."

We entered a long, narrow room, roughly beamed, with two small windows on the northern side, through which there was a view of snow-topped mountains. Across the full width of the western end there was a platform, about three feet high, untidily loaded with Eastern rugs, and on a heap of those sat Dorje, cross-legged, leaning back against a pile of cushions. He took almost no notice of us when a man in leather closed the door behind us--one glance under heavy eyelids and then attention again to a box-like instrument in front of him, as if he were playing chess and studying the next few moves ahead. To right and left of him, lolling but looking insolently capable of violence, were eight men.

Grim, dressed as when I last saw him, sat on a rug on the floor with his back to the wall near a hearth on which a dozen sticks are burning. Grim smiled, nodded, then resumed his far-away stare through one of the windows. He, too, might have been playing chess; his right hand moved at intervals as if he hesitated which line of attack to develop. Jeff sat opposite to Grim, and it was several minutes before I guessed that the movements of Grim's right hand were signals which Jeff was reading while he pretended to stare at the fire. Chullunder Ghose, near Jeff, was studying the signals too.

Vasantasena had vanished; the only sign of her was a shawl hanging

over the edge of the platform, which I thought I recognized as hers, although I was not sure. Henri de la Fontaine Coq, picaresquely amused but looking pale as if he had been badly shaken by the crash, sat watching Dorje, leaning backward against a rough-hewn post that supported a roof beam. There was another upright post, supporting the other end of the same beam; I went and sat against that, where I could see everyone. Baltis stood in mid-room, facing Dorje, with her back to Henri Coq and me. She was evidently waiting for a chance to speak to Dorje without annoying him by interrupting his train of thought, and I wondered what language she would use. However, Grim spoke first, in English:

"No use keeping up the pretence that you're the Baltis from Marseilles. I have told Dorje how she died in the Cairo hospital, and that I got the key to his cypher from her. I have explained to him how you changed identity in order to be able to worm your way into my confidence. He had sentenced your sister to death for having made mistakes in France."

Dorje looked up. He, too, spoke English. I believe he did it to prevent his men from understanding.

"Bad bitch!" She was silent.

"Prinshpal shstreet of Capetown?" he demanded. "Adderley Street."

"Hotel?"

"Mount Nelson."

"Which way you travel?"

"Buluwayo--Ujiji--Bukoba--Gondokoro--Khartoum."

"Liar! Who ish Capetown representative?"

"Dorje, I can't remember his name. You know I always had a bad memory. That is why you gave me the cypher key in writing. She-- my sister--stole it from me."

"Liar! You are the other one."

"Dorje, you have so many women that you can't remember!"

"No matter. You are both bad bitches!"

There was evidently something wrong with Dorje. His was not the method or the manner of a super-man who knows his power and decides all issues instantly. I would have betted there and then that Dorje's brain was worn out--glowing and dying, glowing and dying like the embers of a tremendous furnace--and that Dorje knew it. That might be why he spoke English--afraid to let his men learn what was happening to him. Almost anyone could have tested Baltis' claim to be her twin sister better than he had done. And Grim would surely not have chosen such a dangerous expedient to save her from Dorje's wrath unless he had detected something wrong with Dorje's grasp of things.

Paranoia? Paresis? I began to wonder. Dope seemed improbable, although I was sitting too far away from him to draw confident deductions about that. But he was certainly not the same dynamic monster that he had been, hardly fifteen minutes gone, when he interrupted Baltis' operation on my forearm. It seemed to me his lower lip had drooped a trifle, and the occasional movement of his left hand near his mouth suggested something wrong with the co-ordination of his faculties. He blazed up suddenly. He seemed to have forgotten the problem, or perhaps to believe he had solved it. Vanity lurked in his smile as he glanced toward Grim.

"You want her?"

"Yes," said Grim.

"Take. You can have as many ash you want. Kill her if she's no good."

"Come here," said Grim, and Baltis promptly went and sat beside him; but she glanced at Henri Coq, who smiled and tilted both ends of his D'Artagnan moustache.

Dorje lurched off the pile of rugs and cushions. Locomotor ataxia? Apparently not; he walked without any noticeable difficulty with his legs, although he still had the air of disliking to use them. He went out through a narrow door at the back of the platform, but the eight men remained where they were. They lolled and stared at us. One of them sprawled on his stomach on Dorje's rug-pile and appeared to try to understand the box-like instrument. The others smiled at him. He smiled back, sat up, shrugged his shoulders and resumed his former place.

Grim glanced at me. "You get it?"

"Is it safe to talk English?"

"Yes, when he isn't here."

"Cracking," I said, "that's obvious. Do you know what it is?"

"He calls it soma. He has probably gone out now to take some. If so, he won't be back for twenty minutes. He never sleeps. He takes that stuff instead. First it makes him relax. Then it makes him diamond-hard and mentally alert."

"There's something physical as well."

"Sure. That's why he began to take the stuff. It's a drug the Atlanteans used."

"Where is Vasantasena?"

"God knows. He seemed afraid of her. Two men took her somewhere. I hope nothing happened."

"Stick to the point," said Jeff. "Tell us all you can before he gets back. I understood your signals to mean 'Success not quite impossible if we humour him.' Go on from there. I didn't get the rest of it."

"He's at the end of his tether," said Grim, "and he knows it. He may decide to kill us, and he may not. He broke down badly on the way here--nerves gone--had the horrors--sees the Asiatic hells when he's in that condition, but has to control himself to keep his men from guessing what's wrong. So he talked to me. He found a buried city in the Gobi Desert, where the Atlantean secrets are all preserved in synthetic gold tablets in chests of the same metal-- chemical formulae--everything."

"I could have told you that," said Baltis.

"But you didn't."

"Benjamin mentioned it," said Jeff. "Go on."

"He hadn't brains enough himself to read them, or the patience either, but he had the luck to find a Chinaman who could puzzle it out. He says it's a kind of key-language, in idioform, not unlike Chinese. The Chink found several men to help him, and between them they deciphered a lot of it, but there's oodles more. Dorje began experimenting with the formulae that they translated into modern Chinese, and he soon found he could wreck the whole world, as the

Atlanteans did, if he trained himself and taught some people to become receptive to his impulse. That's about how he phrased it. He decided to rule the world instead of absolutely wrecking it. And, of course, he had heard the legend about the Lord Maitreya's expected coming, so he began with propaganda about that, and by getting a rep as a great magician."

"How long has he been doing this?" Jeff asked.

"I don't know. He says he is more than eighty years old. He has kept himself going with chemical formulae found in those gold chests. So has the Chinaman. But the Chinaman also is cracking."

"Out there in the Gobi?"

"No. No water or supplies out there. His first establishment was in Siberia. Do you remember reading of a cataclysm, said to be caused by an enormous meteor, that wiped out hundreds of square miles--about the time of the Armistice, I think it was--wiped 'em out so absolutely that it was years before anyone knew what had happened? That was his headquarters--his explosion--caused by him because his men rebelled. It was where he was making his thunderbolts. He blew 'em up--or rather, he made a woman do it; he says he was bored with the woman anyhow."

"He breaks women's hearts," said Baltis. "They love the excitement of his wisdom. When that fails them there is nothing left. Who cares to live for nothing? And to turn against him would be to incur misery and torture without any self-esteem. Women die for self-esteem, not love, and Dorje knows that."

"Go on, Jim," said Jeff. "He'll be back in a minute."

"Dorje's next move was into Tibet, where he found, and rebuilt an

abandoned monastery to the north of Koko Nor. He took advantage of the fact that Tibet is closed territory and that Tibetan monks are naturally secretive and predisposed to so-called psychism and anything of a super-normal nature. The Maitreya legend helped him. He was able to plot, and to do almost anything he chose, under the cloak of religion. He established a college in his monastery and even obtained a sort of charter for it from the Dalai Lama. People flocked to him from all the ends of Asia, and he picked and chose until he had plenty of men--and women, too--to make his thunderbolts and poison-gas. He began to train men--and women--to scatter all over the world and take advantage of Communist--Fascist--almost any kind of propaganda--stir unrest--discontent--preach pessimism. And he had the genius to see that the secret services were his best medium, so he diligently corrupted those, until even the famous Indian secret service is as undependable today as a wet squib. Always harping on the coming of the Lord Maitreya, he encouraged the Indian Nationalists, and the Gandhists, and the Moslems, setting one against the other and them all against the British; and of course, when the ball got rolling it increased of its own momentum.

"He sent agents into China, Mexico, South America--everywhere. The discipline was simple; if they failed, or disobeyed him, they were simply betrayed to the police or to the military. When his agencies grew strong enough they set up secret courts of justice, such as Bertolini's in Cairo, and inflicted unspeakable tortures in the presence of one another, compelling the latest recruits to do the torturing, so that there was not much risk of their betraying one another after that. And only picked men and women knew anything at all about himself, his purpose or his organization; all the others believe to this hour that they are Communists, or Fascists, or some other kind of savior of mankind.

"His plan was to destroy, in one week, all the modern ammunition in

the world. That would leave all modern armies at the mercy of men with bows and arrows--swordsmen--spearmen--cavalry. And there would be no navies--no aeroplanes left. Asia can easily put ten million men in the field, and Asia believes in the Lord Maitreya. All Dorje had to do was to keep himself out of the limelight and to plant his thunderbolts and flask of poison-gas. The idea, of course, of the gas is to bomb the legislatures of the world. The flasks will go in anybody's pocket. Two or three flasks, for instance, tossed on to the floor of the House of Congress--two or three more in the White House--two or three dozen, say, in the Treasury and other important administrative buildings--the same thing on the same day in a dozen or more countries--it only needs two or three hundred carefully instructed men--and where is the world's government?"

"Good riddance to it!" remarked Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "A politician is something to be cr-r-racked like a louse."

Grim glanced at him. I saw him glance sideways at Baltis, too. Then he went on:

"However, Dorje saw he had no chance to succeed, even with his gas and thunderbolts, unless he could contrive a system of communication not connected with the wire or wireless systems or organized civilization. There was plenty about thought transference in the golden library that he found in the Gobi Desert. Apparently the Atlanteans knew almost all there is to know about every form of vibration and what it will do. But there was no understanding it until those ancient books were found, of which Chullunder Ghose told us in Delhi; those reached Dorje through Vasantasena, who has been his agent for a long time. They interpreted into an intelligible script the secret formula; that were engraved on the golden tablets; and after that it was no longer a secret how to direct thought-waves and to send them a limitless distance.

"But the trouble then was, that the receiving and sending instruments--human brains--are just about as delicate and misunderstood as the thought-waves themselves are. So he had to devise an instrument that would act, in a sense, like a mirror and respond--not to the broadcast thought-wave--he says that is impossible, because of confusion--but to the reaction set up in the brain of the recipient. In other words, a man might look at the machine and see the thought to which his brain is responding unknown to himself. That is one of the machines on the platform. He has to use it. He is getting worn out. He can no longer detect the messages his brain receives-- or at any rate, not always. I was trained in Tibet, but I can only do it now and then. Chullunder Ghose can do it oftener than I can-- Jeff not quite so often. Everybody can do it occasionally. But almost nobody understands it. Some call it playing hunches. Others call it being intuitive. The fact is, that the ether, which permeates all matter and is non-dimensional in any sense that our intelligence can grasp, is nevertheless more solid than any substance that we know of, and more sensitive than any photographic plate. A vibration set up in the ether is instantly spread in all directions. An explosion of dynamite might not affect the ether, because the vibration would be at the wrong rate. But a thought-wave does affect it. That is the principle behind Dorje's system of communication. He explained it to me in the airship, on the way here."

Dorje came in, stood in the doorway holding to the posts, stared at us, made me shudder, and went away again. He looked less weary of himself. His eight men stirred with a vaguely felt restlessness. I felt it, too. So, I think, did the others. Grim continued:

"He encountered another difficulty. The machine is only rudimentary --extremely delicate--and doesn't work well. It appears to depend on something that resembles static. It works best at the highest altitudes, and in a dry atmosphere. The metal on which its functioning depends

appears to absorb, not moisture, but the effects of moisture, whatever those are, and to lose a little of its sensitiveness. Dorje still can send--or he says so, but he can't receive any longer without that instrument.

"Another thing he has discovered is the use of anti-gravity--his name for it. Mathematicians, of course, have understood for centuries that each law has its opposite; but it took Newton to reveal the law of gravity as a practical fact; and Dorje seems to be the first since the Atlanteans to put in practice what his Chinaman discovered from the tablets about antigravity--which is the principle on which his airship works."

"I don't believe one word of that," said Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "Nothing can fly without gravity--not even a what-do-you-call-it-- a blimp."

Grim grinned. "That is how he has preserved his secret. Nobody believed a word of it. His ships have been seen and reported by any number of people. He has two of them. Nobody believed the tales about chlorine gas until it wiped out a division at Ypres. Who believed in the telephone? It has been the same with Dorje's airship. And if you want rather worse humiliation than Bell got when he talked telephone, try talking anti-gravity to a group of scientists. Discoveries are made by unlearned men. The learned merely recognize them and perfect them after jealousy and incredulity are bankrupt."

"Stick to your story," Jeff urged.

"All right. Dorje's greatest difficulty is his general staff. He calls them his babus. He hates and despises them. They probably hate him, and I'm betting on that."

"Why did he go to Delhi?" Jeff asked.

"According to his own account, in order to catch me. His theory is, that the best of all lieutenants is a defeated enemy, and he thinks he has defeated me by burning Vasantasena's house. His agents in Delhi will say I burned it, and he thinks the secret service will believe that."

"They already do," said Jeff.

Grim nodded. "He says he has watched me for a long time, and he badly needs a chief of staff. He's a strange mixture of slyness and naive frankness. He admits quite frankly that his plan has broken down, but he doesn't admit what I think is the obvious truth, that his staff have turned against him. He appears afraid of them. He speaks of them with the kind of bitter contempt with which Napoleon, on St. Helena, used to speak of some of his ex-generals."

"It is too simple--too obvious. I got to sleep," said Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "When I awake, then tell me that you still don't know the answer--and I will not believe you!"

"Henri--he has genius," said Baltis.

Henri de la Fontaine Coq composed himself for sleep. He removed his leather jacket and folded it for a pillow.

"Aviators have neither brains nor courage," said Chullunder Ghose--pointedly, deliberately insolent. "They are like birds that can be caught with seeds or quick-lime. And a French aviator is the stupidest of all. Nobody but a French aviator would have been such a fool as to do what you have done."

Henri de la Fontaine Coq sat up again and forced himself awake.

"Your flattery is aimed at me?" he asked. He yawned. "I am unworthy

of it, I assure you. If I were stupid I should be a banker or a commander-in-chief or a father of fifteen children, and very respectable. But I know luck when I see it."

"He has genius," said Baltis.

Grim glanced quickly at Chullunder Ghose, nodded almost imperceptibly and looked away again. The babu resumed the offensive.

"If we wait for him to guide us we shall soon see how easy it is to fly, because our souls will leave our bodies--if an aviator has one!" said Chullunder Ghose. "A man who has been fool enough to fly into forbidden territory, at the behest of an adventuress, is not a savant whose advice this babu would exchange for common sense. He has lost his 'plane. He has lost his reputation. He has lost his prospects--"

"And he has won the game!" said Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "You animal! You fat toad! There is nothing now to do but to collect the stakes and spend them! It is too simple. We accept all of Dorje's proposals. We agree to everything. We even invent new staggering concepts for him. And we presently overturn him and avail ourselves of Dorje's riches. When it suits us, we dictate terms to the world. We become heroes. We are kissed by statesmen. But what we will do afterwards to save ourselves from being destroyed by boredom, I am a fat priest if I know!"

He disposed himself again for sleep, curling up like a dog with his head on the folded leather jacket.

"There is nothing that he does not dare," said Baltis. "I assure you, Henri is an absolutist."

"Self am opposite of absolutist," said Chullunder Ghose. "I bet you

pounds Egyptian fifty--"

"Steady!" said Grim through the side of his mouth. "Here comes Dorje."

Chapter Thirty-Eight

"A leader without a plan is more exciting than a 'plane without a rudder."

He looked like another being--a different monster, revived by the stuff he had drunk. His Mongolian features seemed to have been sharpened. His eyes glittered. He looked as unsympathetic as flint--as devoid of humour as a turtle. His head now was erect on his neck, and his neck looked almost brittle it was so incapable of bowing to any mood or morals not approved of by the bulging brain. There was a suggestion of the gladiator grown contemptuous of fear from too much use of its effect on others. Even his spidery legs had new strength; they were under him, instead of seeming afraid of his weight. And when he spoke, although he still could not pronounce the letter "s," his voice had the jarring gracelessness of power that is beyond passion and not qualified by doubt.

"He smells of ice," said Baltis in an undertone. "Do you know now why a woman neither loves nor hates him, but obeys?"

"Now I go," said Dorje. "You come. Kick that sh sluggard awake, or I will have him vivisected. Shtand up--closhe together--all fache that way."

I shook Henri de la Fontaine Coq and he struck at me, as if he resented being dragged out of a dream. But he was on his feet in a minute and laughing:

"Lucky for you I missed your nose! One or two women have had to learn not to waken me suddenly. What does that animal wish us to do?"

Dorje gave an order in a strange tongue to one of his men. They all came scrambling off the platform and lined up behind us. They stank of sour milk, rancid butter, yak-dung, sweat and rotten fish. The man behind me breathed on the back of my neck and it felt like being chosen for a python's dinner.

"Schlaa!" said Dorje--or a word that sounded like it. A man opened the door and led the way, swaggering into the sunlight, turning there, licking his lips and then snorting his nose on the back of his hand. I would have preferred to have been killed by a hyena. Nothing in the whole world is as loathsome as a human being who has forgotten that he is one. For a second or two I think all of us, Baltis included, believed we were about to be killed. My own thought was that Dorje had overheard our conversation and had decided to make short work of us. It was one of life's abominable moments.

It was not improved by the sight of an aeroplane--a mere speck in the south-western sky--that appeared to be trying to negotiate a different pass from the one we had used, or perhaps to be looking for the route we had taken. Even if it had been several thousand feet lower our smashed 'plane must have been invisible among the trees. It was possibly making for Katmandu, to land there and ask questions. It presently vanished behind the tops of tumbled mountains, and its only effect was to deepen our gloom. Even Baltis was gloomy.

We were shepherded into the entrance of the central building. There was a kind of hallway, about twelve feet long with a door at either end. It was bare of furniture. All except two of our custodians disappeared through the inner door without giving us a chance to see

what was on the far side. The other two appeared to have no fear of our escaping; they leaned with their backs to the doors, with the hilts of long knives thrust forward. They chewed something that stank, and spat unskillfully. If they had any other weapons than their knives they did not show them. We might have rushed them successfully, but I don't know what good that would have done.

Henri de la Fontaine Coq was the first to make any remark:

"Kill Dorje--yes? Then seize everything?"

"Get this," said Grim. "If you try it, I'll kill you! All of you-- I want this understood: if Dorje dies too soon, that will leave what he calls his babus in control of things. They're infinitely worse than he is, because there are more of them. We've got to wreck them first--Dorje last. We need him in order to reach them."

"All right. What's your plan?" the Frenchman asked. "I haven't one."

"Alors--then you all obey me."

Jeff took him by the left arm and the back of the neck. The Frenchman struggled for a moment, but he was as helpless as a fly on a sticky paper, and he had sense enough to try to be funny about it:

"Peste! I was not built to come to pieces that way!" Jeff threatened to crack his head against the wall.

"We obey Grim!"

"Oh yes, why not? It makes no difference. A leader without a plan is more exciting than a 'plane without a rudder."

The two guards grinned but made no move to interfere and Jeff made

the most of the moment. He let go, but he crowded Coq into the corner, smiling at him--always genial when he is least gentle.

"I'm merely calling your attention to a flat fact. Grim is head man. Shall I say that in French?"

"You say it very well in English."

Baltis drew near. "You big oaf, you have only muscles!"

Henri de la Fontaine Coq smiled:

"But they are muscles. One admits that!"

The door opened. A man beckoned us, and we were given not much time to observe our surroundings. Other men came. We were crowded --hustled forward into a great shed built of undressed stone and mortar. There were tanks, and gauges on the tanks. In the midst was Dorje's airship--pearl grey--almost opal--and it was longer than it looked when we saw it rise out of Vasantasena's garden. From below it looked cylindrical, with fluted ends that suggested something new in streamline. Owing to the colour of the metal of which the thing was made it seemed likely that the shape wouldn't be very confusing if seen from below from a distance; in certain lights it might be half-invisible--perhaps not visible at all. It was made of metal plates joined edgewise, not overlapping. Some sort of welding process. The seams had been rubbed smooth, but half-round ridges had been left that gave it a peculiarly neat appearance; but those ridges, too, seemed likely to catch sunlight and produce camouflage, whether or not that was intended.

There were rough steps. We were shepherded up those and through an opening in the airship's side into a chamber about fifteen feet long. The bulkheads at either end appeared to be made of glass; at

any rate, it was something perfectly transparent, except for narrow doors in either bulkhead that were made of wood, not metal. There were several more transparent bulkheads and we could see through those about two-thirds of the interior; but the bow and the stern were invisible, apparently the bulkheads there were made of metal without openings of any sort, but those sealed ends were much too short to possess any lifting capacity in the event that they were filled with gas.

There were mattresses strewn on the floor and on what appeared to be tanks along the sides of our compartment. Those tanks, too, were much too small to possess lifting power, and as a matter of fact they contained liquid ballast which we could hear splashing against swash-plates soon after we started. We could see out; there were four small windows set in the metal sides above the tanks and below the widest diameter of the hull, so that the easiest view was downward. An enormous flask of water hung from the roof in slings, but there was no food in sight and we were all of us ravenously hungry as well as sore-eyed from lack of sleep.

There was no machinery that looked capable of producing power; but a tube, apparently of some metal alloy, about two feet in diameter, extended the entire length of the airship immediately under the roof but not quite touching it. It appeared to be carefully insulated where it passed through the bulkheads, and it was held rigidly in place by a perfect spider-web of metal struts. There were similar, vertical tubes, in pairs, against the fore and aft metal bulkheads; and there was another tube, of the same diameter secured in the form of a circle to a circular plane-table marked with degrees in the roof of a compartment twenty feet astern of ours. Beneath that circular tube were what appeared to be the controls, in the form of three long levers; one of them rose through a slot in a metal housing on the floor; the others were on either side of the housing. Above those levers was a wheel connected to the circular tube overhead, and that

appeared to be the steering apparatus.

There was no sound of moving machinery, no smell of heat or lubricating oil, no indication that I could detect of any motive power whatever. A crew of eight men--not the same who had herded us--l lounged in the forward compartment, and there was one man seated in what appeared to be a conning-tower in the roof; we could only see his legs, which rested on a metal platform that could be reached by an iron ladder from the compartment immediately astern of that one containing the controls. Through a door in the side of that compartment a heavy, iron-bound, padlocked wooden box, about as big as a coffin-container and about the same shape, was hoisted and shoved in by four of the men who had shepherded us. Then Dorje's thought-detecting instrument was carried in and set exactly in the middle of the floor. The same four men then fastened up the door of our compartment from the outside, using screw-bolts, after which they entered through the other door and passed through to a compartment at the stern. Then Dorje came, still looking full of vitality but once more awkward on his feet; he had a hard time getting through the opening, but once in there he sat on some blankets on a tank like those in our compartment and tucked his legs under him as if that was their normal position. A man followed him lugging a heavy box like a sea-captain's medicine chest, which he set on the tank beside Dorje. Then the same man closed the door of that compartment from the inside, after which he joined the others in the stern.

One man, who looked like a mongrel Chinese-Tibetan came aft now, passing through our compartment to the control room, where he took hold of one of the levers. Dorje watched him, and presently spoke to him through a tube; there was another tube from close by Dorje's seat that evidently reached up to the conning tower. The silence was death-like. No sound whatever reached us from the outside, not even when they rolled back the huge shed-door, as they must have done--

until someone struck the hull with a hammer. That appeared to be the all clear signal. Dorje sat back, pressing himself against the bulkhead. Then he laughed. He enjoyed our discomfort immensely.

The man at the controls jerked his lever forward and we started so suddenly, and so swiftly, that it threw us all in a heap on the floor. There appeared to be two simultaneous motions--a foot or two upward, and forward with the speed of an arrow. The sensation was of being caught in a tremendous stream that was already in motion--almost of being caught by a conveyor belt, so that we started at top speed without any interval of gaining headway. It was not in the least like the motion of flying, and there was neither sound nor vibration. Chullunder Ghose was instantly and noisily sick; he abandoned optimism.

"I--whoop--sahibs, life is like that. Every--whoop--everything ends in--whoop--vomit, and the worms win! Whoop--I hope they vomit also!"

There was room for one of us at each small window, but the speed was so great that by the time we looked out there were no recognizable landmarks, and since we could not see astern there was no means of knowing how far we had come from the place we had left. The ship was rising rapidly, but on a perfectly even keel, although there was a perceptible roll and a slight pitching that were probably due to the resistance of the wind. The only sound came from the swishing of liquid ballast, and that was rather a relief from the weird lack of any mechanical sounds. Civilization has so accustomed us to the din of friction that its absence, when anything happens, is almost terrifying--and a silent terror is enormously worse than one that thunders, since we discount thunder from experience.

I am unable to describe the sensations set up by that airship, partly, I suppose, because I lacked at that time any technical knowledge that would have helped me to make mental comparisons; and in such

circumstances memory is extremely tricky, however well trained it may be in some other respects. There was nothing about it that inspired confidence. It seemed amateurish. One expected it to fall at any moment and be smashed on the windswept mountain-tops beneath us. It was so cold in there that our teeth chattered, although a certain amount of heat came from the tube overhead and, I suppose from the other tubes also. By my thermometer the temperature was 42 Fahrenheit, but that reading is not reliable.

A man brought us food--cold, half-cooked meat and parched barley. We devoured it ravenously, beastly though the meat was; in fact, ravenously was the only way to eat it--one had to get it down and get it over with. It was tossed to us as if we were animals cooped in a cage. Dorje, leaning back against a bulkhead, chewed parched barley as if his teeth were none too comfortable, and at intervals he sipped something from a bottle out of the box that resembled a medicine chest. It was noticeable that he allowed no one to wait on him; he produced his barley from an inside pocket of his leather coat.

Except for those outstanding memories the whole experience was like a dream--exactly like a dream, and just as difficult to recall in sequence and detail. That is possibly due to the fact that we needed sleep so badly. Henri de la Fontaine Coq curled himself up on a mattress on the floor, with three times his share of the blankets, and began to snore before we were in the ship ten minutes. Grim was wide-eyed. Baltis yawned and struggled to keep her faculties alert. Chullunder Ghose moaned on the floor until I took a couple of blankets off the aviator and covered him up, after which he slept and snored too. Jeff and I watched each other to see which would yield first.

Then a man came in and spoke gruffly to Grim in Tibetan. He made peremptory gestures, holding the door in the bulk-head open to keep

it from slamming when the ship pitched in the wind. There was much more wind by that time; we could indistinctly hear it shrieking against the conning tower and along the flutings of the hull. Grim explained:

"I'm to go to Dorje. I wish the rest of you would sleep, if you can. I'm good for another hour or two, but after that I'll have to turn in and it won't do for all of us to be asleep at the same time."

Grim went aft. I saw him sit down on the opposite tank, facing Dorje. Jeff and I removed another blanket from the aviator, gave two to Baltis, and then turned in together, on one mattress, for the sake of each other's warmth.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

"There's nothing you would ask me, that I wouldn't do."

When I awoke I had undoubtedly been dreaming. In a sense I was still in a dream. That and reality were so mixed up that I could not separate them. Grim had touched me on the shoulder, and as Jeff and I sat up and stared at him I could feel the ship pitching far more violently than it had done. There was a horrible corkscrew motion.

"We're descending," said Grim. "Present elevation about eleven thousand. We're dropping into the wind that sweeps Tibet from the north."

Henri de la Fontaine Coq sat up. "Who took my blankets? No wonder I freeze! You should have demanded others." He stared around him. "We are all crazy, I tell you."

"Give me something," said Grim, "that will keep me awake. Dope. Lots of it. I mustn't quit. Shoot me full of the stuff."

I objected vigorously. So did Jeff. Grim put it bluntly:

"Don't be idiots. One death's as good as another. I must see this job through."

I felt for my pocket case. Jeff snatched it from me.

"Very well," said Grim, "I'll have to use Dorjr's stuff. But it relaxes before it gets its work in."

He was gone before we could prevent him. Through the transparent bulkhead we could see him talking to Dorje, who gave him a big bottle from the brass-bound box. Jeff hurried after him, but before he could find out how to open the door Grim had swallowed about a tumblerful of milky-looking liquid that he poured into a glass bowl. Judging by the expression on his face the stuff was bitter. He returned. He sat down on our mattress.

"God-damned idiot!" said Jeff affectionately.

Grim smiled. I felt his pulse. It was about sixty already. His eyes had lost their steel, if that describes it, but they looked amused.

"I'll feel vigorous," he said, "in twenty minutes. Just at present I'm incapable of lucid speech."

Chullunder Ghose sat up and belched like a gun going off. He stared at Grim.

"What is it?" he demanded. And when I told him:

"Oh, my God! Our Jimmy Jimgrim drunk on soma!"

Jeff growled at him. "Shut up!"

"I tell you, I know all about it," said the babu. "No, sahib! Give him no antidote--there is none--you will kill him! Let him keep still. If you increase his heart-beats he will fall dead!"

I laid Grim on his back. He took no notice, although he was perfectly conscious; he seemed able to control his arms and legs but too indifferent to do it. I took his temperature. Ninety.

"He is done for!" Chullunder Ghose forgot his own physical distress. He was afraid of something that he understood, and which Jeff knew about, but which I neither understood nor knew. "From now on he must either have that stuff or die in torture!"

"He is drunk, that's all," said Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "It does a man good to get drunk now and then--now and then. I also wish to drink myself into a mood. What has he? Give me some of it."

"He is not drunk at all," said Baltis. "If he has drunk soma, you will shortly see him ten times abler than he evaire was. But afterwards--"

"Am nihilist negationist from now on," said Chullunder Ghose. "There will be no afterwards. We have lost our Jimmy--"

"Shut up!" Jeff commanded.

"Smash me! What do I care! Worst has happened! Let me tell you! Jimmy Jimgrim presently will blaze up and be brilliant. But after a certain length of time he will have to have more soma. Perhaps he will take it once more, or even twice more--because he is absolutist--he will absolutely do his job. But then he will still need soma. And he will not take it, even if he could get it. So he will die--in great agony. Worse agony, I tell you, than a death from any other cause. Worse than death by Chinese tortures. Jimmy Jimgrim goes over the top, I assure you. Oh, how sweet it would be to believe that this life is the

last one! Then one could make an end of it and cease forevermore to suffer!"

"Let us steal some soma. Let us all take some of it," Baltis suggested. "Wait--I will go and ask Dorje. Perhaps he will give it to us. Why not? Life is nothing but experience. Let us have that experience!"

"Yes. We might as well die with our fuselage on fire," said Henri de la Fontaine Coq.

"Sit down!" Jeff commanded. "And shut up!"

He was so worried about Grim that he almost forced me to forget where we were. His whole frame seemed overcharged with an emotion that he suppressed with a will that was as dynamic as his muscles. But he could not suppress Chullunder Ghose.

"Am busted flush. Am no good any more. I, who have tasted all adversity, and all contempt, and every species of disillusion, I am in profundis. Come to hell, all of you! Come, I say, come! There is no other place! That man is the only friend I ever had. He trusted me. He even made me trust myself. He treated me exactly as his equal. I am a scoundrel, and he knew it, but he trusted me, absolutely. I became a needle with a pole to point to. And now Jimmy--oh, Jimmy Jimgrim--"

He collapsed in tears, and there is almost nothing less exhilarating than a fat man crying. However, Grim stirred and that stirred us, so that even Jeffs strain eased a little. Grim's pulse improved. I could feel his temperature rise without the aid of the thermometer. His eyes changed; they resumed the steely blue-grey hue. He sat up--yawned--smiled--braced himself--nodded at Jeff, then at me--but he spoke first to the babu:

"Yes, it's over the top. You're right, I've trusted you. I do now. You will carry on until you haven't a resource left. Then you'll take yours standing up, like any other man whose friendship is worth having."

"All right, Jimmy."

"Listen, please. I want you men to understand me, before this soma makes me too keen-cut to talk. I'm in a middle mood at present. You, too, Baltis: listen, it won't hurt you. Five or ten minutes from now I'll be at white heat and unable to discuss anything. Aim--aim--aim and nothing else! I only hope my aim is accurate. I took the stuff because one of us must go the limit. That is my job. I don't believe in leading from the rear. I'm good now for about thirty-six hours of all I've got in me. Then I'm burned out. You men carry on."

"Without you?" Jeff asked. "Sure thing."

Henri de la Fontaine Coq reached forward and touched Grim's knee.

"Get me some of that stuff! Drunk, I am insuperable. Then together we will scr-r-ag him. Afterwards--"

Jeff's scowl and growl silenced him. Grim continued:

"I have passed my word to Dorje to give him all the aid I can until he has reduced his babus, as he calls them, to submission. He would have destroyed us otherwise. While you fellows were asleep, he and I had it out. We dickered to a showdown. I'm to help him, on condition that he does no sort of injury to any of you, including Baltis, while the contract lasts. It terminates the moment he has licked his own gang. Then we make a new deal--or none--whichever suits both or either of us."

"Can you trust him?" Jeff asked.

"No. But he can trust me, and he knows it. If his gang succeeded in deposing him they'd scough him and there'd be about a hundred of 'em free to play hell with the world. And they'd do it. They'd be infinitely worse than he is. They'd quarrel among themselves undoubtedly, but in the process they'd wreck civilization--just as the war-lords are wrecking China. Dorje intends, of course, to scough me--all of us as soon as he has dealt with his rebels. He knows I know that. But he considers we'll be easy victims, whereas his own gang at the moment are like Caesar's friends, at one and the same time treacherous and indispensable. They're indispensable because he has divided up responsibility between them. None of them knows all his secrets; each of them, however, knows at least one secret. And they're jealous of each other-- which is probably the only reason why they haven't killed him long ago. They damaged his other airship recently--although he says they deny it--in order to restrict his movements; and he caught and killed a dozen of them who were trying to damage this one."

"How does it work?" demanded Henri de la Fontaine Coq. "It is as unexciting as a houseboat. There is no uncertainty. What moves it?"

"I don't half understand it," Grim answered, "but it follows the earth's magnetic currents, which are as intricate and differentiated as the web spun by a spider. There are main currents, and all sorts of diagonal and cross-currents, with what he calls dead places between them where there is no current at all. When they strike one of those places they have to rise or fall until the wind takes them into a current again."

"What makes it rise?"

"I don't understand that either. He says, antigravity. In other words--mind you, I quote him, this is not my own opinion; I haven't one--any

force, of whatever kind, can be converted and reversed, although its motion can't be made to cease. There is a substance in those tubes--so he says--that in some way reverses the centripetal pull of gravity. The tubes lift, and the hull pulls downward; they determine the elevation by adjusting the proportion between the upward and downward pull."

"What steers it?"

"He explained that, too, but I can't grasp it. That circular tube in some way sets up a resistance against which they can straighten the ship with the wheel."

Henri de la Fontaine Coq emerged out of his mask. He became excited --earnest. His eyes, normally so scornful and superior to the thrill of even his own emotions, actually blazed:

"We could go to the moon! To the planets! Let us do that! Let us steal this thing and do it!"

Grim smiled. "We have five--ten--possibly fifteen minutes in which to talk sense before my faculties take charge of me and I become a sort of automatic and impersonal engine. I can feel this soma working. What it does is to release the inhibitions; or perhaps I should say it paralyses them. Whatever real character a man has, takes charge. Jeff, I want a promise from you."

"There's nothing you would ask me that I wouldn't do," said Jeff. "What is it?"

"Dorje has kept himself drunk on the stuff since he first learned how to make it from the Atlantean formula. He has reached the stage where it doesn't work the way it used to. It releases the devil in him; but it has even burned the devil, so that he isn't as keen-edged as he

used to be. But you can see what it releases."

"Well?" said Jeff. "What of it?" He looked scared. It is not in the least agreeable to see a strong man frightened.

Grim broke the ice abruptly: "If I act up badly, kill me."

"Damn your eyes, I knew you were heeled with a barbed hook!"

"I would do the same for you," said Grim. "I wouldn't let you do dirt. Hurry up, Jeff; this stuff's gaining on me!"

"All right, it's a promise. Dammit, Jim--you make demands on friendship."

"I know who my friends are. Listen: you see that big chest in Dorje's compartment--not the one he takes his bottles from-- the big one?"

"Yes. What's in it?"

"Vasantasena."

"Dead?"

"No. Living. He intends to fill her up with soma. And he says she loves him."

"That is true," said Baltis. "In her heart she loves him, though with her brain she hates. But men know nothing about women--nothing."

Grim continued: "Therefore, drunk with soma, she will sacrifice herself to save his day for him."

"She will act exactly as her heart impels her," said Chullunder Ghose. "That is what soma does to people."

"All women do that anyhow," said Baltis.

Grim glanced at her, and continued: "But Vasantasena has refused to taste the stuff. She knows its potency."

"And she wishes to hate him. Why not? All Dorje's women wish to hate him." Baltis was in a mood for revelation of her own experience, but Jeff scowled and growled and she checked herself.

Grim continued: "So he has her locked in there until it suits him to use force to make her drink the stuff."

"He is using it now," said Jeff.

Two men had come forward from the stern compartment. They were opening the chest. Dorje had the big, pearl-coloured bottle in his hand. One of the men reached down into the chest and dragged Vasantasena upright, back toward us. Dorje showed her the bottle. He spoke—I saw his lips move. Vasantasena reached out for the bottle, and I think she meant to snatch and break it: but Dorje and his two men also thought so. One of them seized her head and bent it back. The other wrapped the corners of her sari on his thumbs and thrust his thumbs between her jaws. Then Dorje poured the stuff into her open mouth and, with his own left hand, so pressed the muscles of her throat that she was obliged to swallow. He poured in lots of it. She lay down.

"Have I talked rot?" Grim asked. "I feel as if I were coming out from laughing gas. By Gad, though—"

"What?" Jeff asked him.

"Nothing." Then after a moment: "I can understand now how this ship works. I can see—"

He paused again. Henri de la Fontaine Coq opened his mouth--hesitated--spoke:

"Then tell me how it works. I will go to the moon!"

"You may go to the devil," said Grim, "when I have finished this job. Meanwhile, you will do what I tell you or take the consequences."

"I will go to the moon," he repeated. "I wonder that Dorje never did it. Or--perhaps--did he?"

Baltis crossed the floor and sat beside him: "Henri, I go with you!"

For a while the two talked French in low tones, very rapidly. Grim stared into infinity. The ship pitched like a barrel on a big sea in a gale.

Chapter Forty

"Wreck his bug's nest. Him we kill last."

Castastrophes come suddenly like tidal waves and leave us wondering what happened and how we survived. Presently we begin to invent an explanation, and before long we have convinced ourselves. That is one reason why all history is such a mess of inconsistencies, and why I hesitate to give my version of what took place that night in Northern Tibet. I don't know all, or nearly all that happened; and things happened so swiftly that it is difficult to distinguish between actual memory, deduction and sheer guesswork.

I went to a window. Baltis volunteered the information that we had left Chak-sam and the Tsang-po River leagues away behind us and beneath us. We were flying low and it was sunset, with a howling wind

lashing the anger of Koko Nor. No need to ask what lake that was. There is no other body of water that it possibly could have been. We were flying slightly to the westward of it; I could see the desolate salt marshes and wastes of sterile desert left by the ever-shrinking inland sea. There were clouds of wild-fowl settling for the night. Not a human being. Not a human habitation. Loneliness--dreariness--and the depressing twilight grey that only swamp-land knows.

Something Grim said--though the actual words escaped me--was so startling that I suddenly realized what state my nerves were in. And I was no exception; we had all jumped when he spoke to us. Jeff was ashen coloured under the sunburn. Baltis looked like painted porcelain, because the rouge on cheeks and lips was too red for the blanched skin. Chullunder Ghose was too air-sick to look anything but haggard. Henri de la Fontaine Coq had assumed an air of truculence without effectually hiding fear; and all of us, except him, were suffering from the swift change of elevation. Grim, it seemed to me, was undergoing mental torture, as if he fought within himself for courage to face something much more terrible than death. He spoke again:

"The hell is, I remember human values. However, here goes."

He went aft into Dorje's compartment. Dorje took one glance at him and grew afraid. He stood up, pushing himself off the tank with both hands, and they two faced each other. Scared--dreading what might happen, and entirely ignorant of what weapons Dorje might have, or what his men's attitude was toward Grim and the rest of us, Jeff and I followed, with Chullunder Ghose close at our heels and all three of us doing our best to seem casual. We were in time to hear the end of Grim's speech:

"So don't try treachery; for I can see the colour of your thought. The bargain is: I'm your ally until your babus are at heel or helpless. Where is the stuff?"

He stopped and took the soma bottle from the box--passed it to Jeff, not taking his eyes off Dorje.

"Jeff, give that to Crosby. Crosby, up the ladder there's a hatch. You'll find a portlight facing aft. Unfasten it, and throw that bottle out. Then fasten it again. If the man at the top makes trouble, Jeff will take him by the legs and brain him against the bulkhead."

I obeyed in a hurry. The big, stinking Turkoman who kept the lookout in the streamlined conning tower refused to make room for me and I needed both hands, one for the bottle, which was heavy, and one for the ladder. But Jeff reached for his foot and twisted it until he yelled. Then he crowded himself against the framework, so that I had room to struggle up beside him. The front was rather like the windshield of a car, only sloping backward at a sharper angle. At the sides and the rear there were square ports. I undid eight thumb-screws of a rear port and threw out the bottle, which fell, I believe, into Koko Nor, since we were passing at that moment, at an elevation of a thousand feet or so, above an arm of the lake that sprawled into the marshland like a river estuary. Our actual elevation above sea-level, I suppose, was fifteen or sixteen thousand feet.

Then I sat on the uncomfortable metal seat beside the Turkoman, who resented it but offered no resistance beyond crowding me with his elbow. There was no attempt whatever at comfort in that airship; probably its builders took their cue from the gruesome wilderness around them--raw--cold--gale-swept. Comfort, in a land like that, was probably as productive of a feeling of guilt as Gregorian music would be in a Scots kirk.

On a ledge in front of us, too far away to rest our elbows on it, just at the foot of the sloping window, were three crudely constructed switches something like those on an electric surface car; but they

were apparently not in use just then; the man at the wheel beneath us did the steering; the man beside me apparently signalled him by striking one heel or the other against the sides of the ladder. But there was very little steering needed; it was quite possible to imagine that we were flowing, against the wind, in the stream of one of the earth's magnetic currents. Perhaps my ignorance of what magnetic currents are, and how they function, made it all the easier to imagine.

Straight ahead of us, fifteen or twenty miles away, there was a group of low hills, hardly more than dunes, that might have been islands when Koko Nor was vastly wider than it is now. In the weird, wild quarter-light that follows sunset at that altitude they resembled the bones of a monster. Wind had cut them until spine-like hummocks lay along their summit. To the eastward they were higher, as if the monster's head lay pillowed on a low hill. And where the monster's eye might be there was one blue light--as blue as those they use on the underground tracks in the New York railroad stations.

By the movement of the pools and shadow clumps of marsh-grass beneath us I guessed our speed at eighty miles an hour, against that wind, until the Turkoman beside me spoke abruptly to the man beneath us. Then we slowed down to about half that speed, which enormously reduced the pitching, although the sideways roll continued. It was growing darker and the stars looked so big that nothing-- absolutely nothing anywhere seemed real. It was like a dreadful dream that grew more dreadful as we approached those low hills. A baleful sheen of cold blue light appeared above them--dim--like a luminous mist; and yet there was no mist; there was too much wind for mist to concentrate and stay in one spot, and there was not a trace of moisture on the outside of the window. On the inside, moisture from our breath began to freeze and cloud the window, but the Turkoman growled to the man at the controls and in a moment I could feel heat rising. He leaned forward and wiped the window with

a sour-smelling cloth.

There was no light in the airship. Down below me I could hear Grim's voice, and then Jeff's. Once I thought I heard Vasantasena, and then Dorje's metallic voice, but there was no sound from the others. I could not see down into the dark compartment, and it was impossible to hear what was said, partly because of the swishing of the liquid ballast. Grim would shout if he needed me. I decided to stay where I was--fascinated. It was like a dream of death--a ferry-load of souls and stinking Charon at the helm. Ahead lay Limbo--cold, pale, mysterious. We were heading straight toward the motionless blue light that seemed so like a pupil of a monster's eye. It grew bigger, but not brighter. We appeared to aim ourselves straight at it. The man beside me struck both heels against the ladder and I heard a lever clank. They had shut off power. For a moment the wind checked and veered us, but the man beside me took a switch in each hand and we began to move ahead again. No pitching now whatever, and a lot less roll than formerly. The blue light seemed to race toward us, and it kept growing bigger and bigger. The Turkoman thrust both switches forward to their limit and then seized the third one; he seemed able to control our speed with that exactly as he pleased. We slowed almost to a snail's pace. I believed then, and I still believe it, that our nose was being drawn toward a magnet that formed the mooring; I think the first two switches kept us straight, and that the third one increased or diminished the pull of the magnetic current on the airship's nose. The wind ceased. We were in the lee of a big shed, creeping into it, and the light came from a ball of what looked like metal at the far end. I could see men on platforms made of undressed stone and packed earth, but before we passed into the shed I got one glimpse, to right and left of our surroundings.

Such a glimpse as that is no basis for an accurate description. It was almost more confusing than if I had seen nothing at all. A nightmare

would be just as easy to recall from memory--a nightmare of gloomy walls and fortresses, enclosed within a rampart of alluvial mud, illuminated by pale blue light that streamed through doors and windows, throwing monstrous shadows against beehive mounds of mud and masonry that looked like black breasts burning; but the flame within them, glimpsed through slot-like openings at the bottom seemed to give no heat.

We slid into the shed. The airship's nose made contact with the blue-lit ball. The man beside me closed two switches and left the third one opened to the limit. There was a clanging of metal as the men on the platforms began opening the doorways in the ship's sides--both sides this time; and they were swift--it was hardly a minute before light poured in along with icy air; and before I could reach the ladder-foot they were already dragging out the chest in which Vasantasena had lain imprisoned. Grim was already outside. Dorje was out ahead of him; I saw him talking to a small man in a bearskin overcoat, who had a snub nose and a graceless Cockney accent--caught about a dozen words:

"Hi saye e's sick! I tell yer, sick ain't 'alf of it. 'E's craizy!"

We--Jeff, Baltis, Henri de la Fontaine Coq, myself--were herded by the airship's crew and driven out on to the platform. There were thirty men there, as grimy as stevedores, coated in half-dressed leather to which dirt clung like soot on cobwebs. Some of them--the broader-hipped ones--possibly were women; one of those, struck in the face by a man's fist, stumbled backward and fell between the airship and the platform. She, if a woman she was, lay moaning like an animal, but no one took any notice of her. Presently I saw Vasantasena standing in a shadow beside Grim, who was talking to her; but she seemed to be trying to hear what Dorje and the bearskin-Cockney man were saying:

"Sick, I tell yer! And the gang's all sick o' dilly-dallyin'. They've got the irritator goin' full blast. And now the messages ain't workin'. No news--and they saye you done it. Taike my tip, guv'nor, and get ter 'ell out of 'ere afore they maike an end of yer!"

Then Dorje beckoned and one of the airship's crew ran swiftly. He seized the Cockney from behind, set a knee against his spine and jerked his head back. I was unable to see what weapon the Cockney used, but he struck behind him as he almost turned a back-spring, fell and lay still. I suppose his neck was broken. His assailant swayed and fell on top of him. I saw the Cockney's hand twitch. Dorje also saw it. He beckoned Grim.

"You kill him."

Grim did not hesitate. He stooped over the two, on one knee, holding out his right hand. Dorje laid a knife on it, flat on the palm. Grim's fingers closed; he plunged the knife in, withdrew it, wiped it on the bearskin, passed it back to Dorje and then set his face close to the Cockney's as if listening for breath or heart-beats.

"Quite dead," he remarked, getting up.

"Conshpirator," said Dorje. "Thish way."

Grim followed him. Vasantasena followed Grim. The rest of us were herded by the airship crew and driven along the platform toward the blue-lit ball; but I was never close enough to that thing to be able to describe it, except that it appeared to be semi-transparent. We came to a rough gap in the wall, and as we were herded through that I had a chance to look back. I could no longer see the Cockney, although the other man's body lay face downward where it had been.

Then the shed went pitch-dark with a suddenness that made one's

ear-drums throb with the instinctive leap to relieve a dead sense with a live one. It was even darker in that passage we had entered. Two of our custodians shouted and ran, I suppose to get the light turned on again. The remaining four began to drive us along the passage. Two of them had crowbars; one could understand those even better than the hoarse commands they uttered, although I think Jeff understood their speech. Baltis slipped in front of me to save herself from being prodded. Jeff's voice-sharp and sudden:

"Keep behind me!"

He burst back past me like a gun-team going into action. Jeff is a projectile in the instant when he abandons patience and the art of peace. I heard his fist thud like a battering-ram. No crowbar fell--not that time--Jeff had that one, and it almost struck me as he slung with it to crack skulls. It was the second crowbar, dropped by a man whose brains splashed like an egg-yolk, that rolled against my shins. Henri de la Fontaine Coq seized it. There were four men down in front of us and Jeff was in the gap in the wall--shadow against darkness--just discernible. I picked up Baltis to keep her feet out of the blood that might be oozing underfoot; she let herself be carried but kept calling "Henri! Henri!" until Chullunder Ghose shouted:

"Look out, Rammy sahib! Oh, my--"

His shout saved Jeff's life. The two guards who had run when the light went out came creeping back. They rushed Jeff suddenly. Warned by Chullunder Ghose, he did the unexpected--stepped forward instead of back into the gap--then turned and let them have it. There were undoubtedly other men not far away, but for the moment it felt as if we stood alone in dark infinity. There was not a sound except the moaning of wind on the shed roof, but there was a sensation in front of us as if eternity were moving sideways, toward the left. Alternatively, we were being moved toward the right.

"Are we all dead? Let us hope so," said Chullunder Ghose. "How painless was the passing! What killed us?"

"Baltis!" That was Grim's voice. He was invisible. On the heels of that talk about death the suggestion was bloodcurdling; it was vox et praeterea nihil. Even Baltis, not much given to alarm of that sort, shuddered and pressed against me. However, it was Grim, not his ghost; he stepped toward us--another shadow, no more visible than Jeff's.

"Are you there, Baltis? You and the Frenchman get into the airship."

Henri de la Fontaine Coq took Baltis by the arm and hurried her. He shook her. Suddenly a pin-prick of light gave us something to focus on. It was a struck match. Someone lighted a candle--inside the airship, and one could tell then what had moved and made the night seem to be sliding apart. The airship's nose was no longer fast to anything. That Cockney was standing beside the controls with his hand on a lever. Two doors, on the far side, had been closed and several men were screwing up the bolts of the forward door on our side, but they were having difficulty because the slightest pressure seemed to make the ship move. Grim spoke French then:

"Coq, you and Baltis help him to get the ship outside about a mile away, and wait for us. You may need all your skill to make him wait for us. He hasn't the slightest notion who I am. Don't tell him. If you keep him mystified--"

Coq hurried away with Baltis and the airship started backward, with a door wide open and one door only partly fastened almost before they could jump through the opening. It swung so that its nose just missed us, and there was a great difference now that the power was on. It struck the wall within six feet of where Grim was standing and brought

down probably a ton of debris, bounded off and struck the far wall, but it was too dark to see how much damage it did over there. Then the candle went out, but we could see the airship--a black blot moving against starlight-- acting something like a fish that has not yet struck but feels the first discomfort of a baited hook. It was either damaged, or else the man in bearskin did not fully understand the controls.

"This way," Grim said then. "Quickly--quietly!"

He led us to the opening through which he had recently followed Dorje; he was just visible against the night sky at the shed's open end. In the darkness on the far side there were sounds of trouble, as if the airship hurt several men when it crashed the far wall. Stones were being shifted. There was someone groaning. Grim led through a doorway and along a passage, pausing at the far end and Chullunder Ghose said:

"They are after us! I heard--Krishna!--men went to the opening we just came out of!"

Grim shot an iron door and bolted it. It was darker then than doom; it felt solid; but Grim struck a match.

"Where's Dorje?" Jeff asked.

"I don't know."

"Lord God! We've a fat chance!"

"I came back to save you fellows. That Cockney is a man who escaped from a death cell fifteen years ago when he was awaiting execution for murder. He's tough. When I saw he was shamming hurt I drove the knife into the dead man's body. Then I whispered to him to take the airship out and wait for us. There's a chance in fifty he'll do

that. I believe it was he who put the light out--cut off a magnetic field and released the ship's nose from that ball at the end of the shed. But he's a bad egg. We can't depend on him. He may go over to the babus, and we've got to beat that outfit before daylight."

Someone shook the iron door. Grim paused, listened, then went on speaking:

"They won't try to force that without Dorje's orders. He's still master of this corner of the buildings."

He struck another match and looked at each of us. The soma had enlarged his eyes in some way, but he seemed unexcited--more calm than ever.

"He has sent Vasantasena with a message to his women. I don't know how many they are, or where they are, but he appears to count on them. I don't know what the message is, or what its purpose is. But he was feeling confident again, and when he had sent her with the message he boasted to me that he had ordered all of you killed. I think he thought the soma would make me as much a devil as it has him. I accused him of breaking faith. He tried to kill me with his own hand, but I struck first--not hard-- hit him in the face. Then he ran one way, I the other to save the fellows and to make him think I had escaped."

"For God's sake, why didn't you kill him?" Jeff asked.

"Because I need his help to wreck his whole works."

"He'll be on the qui vive now," said Jeff.

"He was that already. We've a better chance as things are. And I think I shook him badly. He may be a bit dazed. Otherwise, why

should he run? Our first job is to wreck his plant, then kill him. From now on, kill—don't hesitate. Kill anyone but Dorje. Wreck his bug's nest. Him we kill last."

Chapter Forty-One

"Good-bye, old man."

Few conspiracies succeed unless the key-note is sheer simplicity. Even then they succeed because other men overlook such dangers as a blind man might be counted on to see. We were blind conspirators; and we had to be simple. There was nothing else under the stars that we possibly could be.

Grim led through gloom until we found an open door into a passage lined with cell doors and lighted by one oil lamp. We knew then we were in a monastery. At the far end the passage turned a corner. Near the middle of the passage was a Tibetan stairway, which consists of a single wooden upright with cross-pieces nailed to it. We took that and climbed into a room that had a door which opened on a long roof with a waist-high parapet. There was a set-back and the building went one floor higher, Tibetan in every line, with overhanging semi-Chinese eaves. The undressed stone wall was vaguely blue with light reflected from below where the breast-shaped ovens were with their long slots like gashes in Halloween pumpkins, near the bottom of each of the thirty or forty, or perhaps more—I had no time to count them.

We walked to the eastern end of the long roof, where it jutted out and we could see the full length of the south wall. There we saw the airship, hardly a thousand feet up and behaving curiously, slowly going forward and then backward; twice, when it swayed beam on to the worrying wind, it seemed almost to roll over, but it was only a

shadow against the stars and very difficult to observe. On the whole, it suggested a fish that had taken the hook and had struck and was already weakening. Chullunder Ghose spoke:

"Dekko! I see him, sahibs!"

"Shushh!"

Grim had seen him already. There was a balcony above a main gate in the middle of the south wall. Dorje stood there, staring at the airship. Even as a shadow amid shadows he was unmistakable, with those spidery legs, and his big head, and his hands behind him.

"Come where he can't see us. Let us hope he thinks we're up there in the ship."

Grim led us back along the roof and we stood for several minutes staring at the macabre scene to westward, trying to map it in our minds. It was unintelligible--an inferno--formless shadows made bewildering by cold blue lights. There was no pattern that the eye could recognize, and no noise. Nevertheless, there was a feeling--a sensation rather than any signs of great activity. At measured intervals a stream of men, who looked like monks in single file, each carrying something heavy on his shoulders, passed near enough to one of the blue lights to be vaguely visible. Someone, somewhere, blew a radong that boomed like a fog-bound steamer whistle; that was followed almost instantly by a crash like the noise of iron ore being loaded, and blue flame leaped from a dark half-acre on the far side of an embankment. But that flare only confused the shadows more than ever, although I did see what looked like a long street of mud-built dwellings, and there was a glimpse for a moment of hundreds of men scurrying like ants in a broken ant-hill. I had glimpsed, too, a huge, black, shapeless building, blind-walled on the outside, with slot-like windows pouring blue light into a maze of

courtyards.

"I wonder where they make, or store that poison gas," said Grim. "They don't make electricity, they make an alloy that collects it. If I could make that flow into their store of thunderbolts--but where is it?"

"We made a mistake," said Jeff, "in letting Baltis go. She might have told us."

"She was the only chance we had," said Grim, "to keep that airship somewhere near us as a possible line of retreat."

Chullunder Ghose sighed resignedly. "Retreat? We are all dead men. Let us kiss ourselves good-bye to hope, and act like madmen; that is only sane course. Sanity is madness; madness sanity. To hell with common sense, which would encourage us to try to walk on foot across the whole of Tibet without food or money! No, no, I have pounds Egyptian fifty, with which to buy tickets for Tibetan railroad trains! Or shall we catapult ourselves into that airship. Self, am not good catapultist. I say, let us die as soon as possible, along with Jimmy Jimgrim, in what the U.S.A. Americans would call a champeen all-time-record death pact!"

"That is my job," Grim answered. "Yours is to do as I tell you. I take first crack at it. If I succeed, you fellows do your fighting damndest to get home alive. If I fail, Jeff carries on. And if Jeff fails, Crosby carries on. If Crosby fails, Chullunder Ghose, it's your turn; and if you succeed, then you obey my orders and get home alive if possible."

He leaned over the parapet--peered into the darkness--stiffened. "Yes," he said, "I see her." But how he knew it was Vasantasena is a mystery; the rest of us had glimpsed a shadow flitting amid shadows. "Get that ladder, someone."

Jeff and I dragged up the Tibetan stairway--lowered it over the parapet--dropped it. Luckily it fell as we intended. Then we lowered Grim by the arms and the ladder fell with him when he was halfway down.

"All right," he called up, and we heard him set the ladder back against the wall, rooting it firmly.

But the ladder had made a noise. A wooden window-shutter opened and a man came stealthily along the roof with a sword in his hand and a round shield on his left arm. We three ducked into the shadow of the parapet, but he had seen us. I suppose that roof was a forbidden zone--perhaps a place where monks resorted to escape routine. At any rate, he came on like a monitor pursuing small boys. Jeff stepped out to meet him.

The man circled around Jeff, flourishing his weapon, until his back was toward the parapet. Then I, too, stepped out of the shadow, so that he took his eyes off Jeff for a half a second-- and Jeff's fist shot home. I think that fellow broke his back against the parapet, but Jeff's second blow toppled him over; and at last we had a weapon--one between three of us. Jeff kept it.

Then we heard Grim climbing, speaking in a low voice as he came up the ladder. But when we leaned over the parapet and reached down for his arms Vasantasena gripped our hands. Grim followed her. Vasantasena was a living battery of passion. It was like touching a vibrator.

She began to speak in hard, vibrating whispers to Chullunder Ghose. Grim broke her news to us:

"His women are all dead. Killed by his babus, as he calls them. Gassed. They were Dorje's spy system. He had them here, there,

everywhere; but they met as a matter of routine in a central place she calls the bibi-kana. They were trapped in there."

"She says," said Chullunder Ghose, "is this a war on women? First my women--now his. I also am a woman. It is my war."

Grim put a hand on her shoulder. I expected her to throw it off indignantly, or at least to shrink away from him, because Vasantasena's ancient calling is a cult, in India, that sets a chartless no-man's-land between East and West. But they had both drunk soma. They were neither of them any longer bound by unessentials; from opposite directions they had met in mutual understanding, with the same aim, the same view-point. Jeff and I felt like outsiders, and Chullunder Ghose came close to us, putting in words what both of us knew but neither of us could have said:

"I tell you, he and she can see like eagles. And we look to them like trifles. And we are! It took a prostitute to measure Jimmy Jimgrim's consciousness. Self shall be same henceforth. But it is too late. She has left us like dogs in the dust of a bicycle built for two!"

Grim hardly noticed us. He kept his arm around Vasantasena, talking to her in a low voice. They led; we followed through the window that the swordsman had left open, Jeff pausing there a moment to remove the shutter from its hinges and leave open a line of retreat. Long, lamp-lit corridors. Cell doors. Great gloomy rooms, some occupied, some empty. Men like mediaeval monks in shabby brown cloaks, who seemed to take for granted we were Dorje's men--who else could we have been?--looked up from their work. They appeared to be measuring liquid, drop by drop, into tiny phials and there was--nauseating smell--not much of it, but enough to suggest an unwashed morgue. A burly ruffian with daggers at his waist came out of a door and blocked our passage for a moment, but Vasantasena knew a word that passed us instantly. He stepped back. He seemed to

expect something--perhaps a present. But it was praise he craved. He beckoned. Jeff, Chullunder Ghose and I together peered into the passage he had come from. We followed him in, and I wish we had not.

It was a short passage. It led to a gallery that surrounded a stone-walled place of torture and abominable death. There had been human vivisections there--recently. The evidence was spread on tables--hung on hooks on the wall. Jeff went berserker furious. That ruffian was probably not Dorje's executioner; he seemed to lack enough intelligence to have done all that investigating of the human nerves. Jeff gave him debit on the doubt; he seized him by the waist and hurled him to the stone floor thirty feet below, and there we left him--dead or not yet dead, I don't know.

No guards in front of Dorje's room. There was a man inside who opened at Vasantasena's knock. It was a big room hung with oriental rugs, warmed by two braziers, lighted by oil lamps. At the far end was a dais, beneath a canopy. A sick man lay on it--a Chinaman, so old and feeble that he was hardly more than skin and bone, although his eyes were like a child's, alight with mischievous intelligence. He looked up once, then took no further notice of us; he was studying a gold plate, eight inches by ten, and an eighth of an inch thick, inscribed with characters that no one to whom I have shown it has been able to read. In fact, no scientists believe it is an ancient plate, it looks so new, but they are puzzled by the purity of the metal; they appear to think I made the plate myself, and that the characters are nonsense that I etched into the gold in order to create a sensation. It is the only loot I took from Dorje's place--unless food is loot, and it was not I who took that.

They were packing up food in a room at the back of the dais. Dorje watched them. Stuff like German sausage, highly concentrated-- stuff

that in infinitesimal quantities conserves strength, even at enormous altitudes.

"Take some," said Grim with one glance at us. Then Dorje turned and stared; and anyone could tell what ailed him. He craved soma. He was waiting for it. I suppose those monks in gloomy rooms were measuring the drops that should be mixed into the final compound. There was a table, near the dais, spread with glass tubes and a scale with a set of fractional weights; there was also a heavy glass flask. Probably they did the final mixing on that table.

Dorje was almost speechless. Raw-edged nerves were irritating him until he had no will remaining to be brought to bear on any problem but his need of the drug that had dropped in the marshes of Koko Nor. He hardly knew who Grim was.

"Making ready to bolt?" Grim asked him.

I believe it was the English words that rallied his will power. The effort to understand them rallied memory, and memory supported will. He became furious.

"Where'sh my ship?"

"Gone," Grim answered. "Where are your babus?"

Ten or twelve words Dorje spoke then, in a language that I don't know. But Grim understood him. Grim spoke English; I suppose he wished us to follow the conversation:

"Yes. I promised. I am your ally until your babus are defeated."

Dorje answered him in the other language. Grim replied:

"Better make haste. Do you wish them to steal your thunder?"

Rage then. The rage of a maniac intellect that knows its slaves have stolen what it built. A hurricane of words. His spidery legs trembled. He turned on the Chinaman--struck him with a bronze rod that was used for stirring charcoal in the brazier; and the Chinaman died like a flame that has burned its last drop of oil. Another hurricane of words. Grim answered him:

"That is talk. If I am to destroy them, I will not wait until soma is brewed. I don't need it."

Dorje sneered. He said another dozen words.

"Very well," Grim answered. "Tell me where the switch is."

Dorje hesitated.

"Jeff--you kill him!"

Jeff stepped forward. Dorje backed away in front of him. He went into a panic. He began to gibber. Grim restrained Jeff with a raised hand.

"Where is the switch?"

Three monks came in with bottles in their hands and Dorje came out of his panic like a felon who has been reprieved. The monks set down the bottles on the table and retired.

"You may have that afterwards," said Grim. "Where is the switch?"

Dorje spoke to Vasantasena, but she stood motionless. She and Grim were pledged companions. She would make no move unless he made it with her. Dorje lost patience. He spoke to Grim in English:

"I told her. She knowsh where that ish. Let her show you."

"Yes," said Grim, "and very likely you are lying. The agreement is that you and I shall work together until there is an end of all your babus. Jeff, give me one of those bottles."

Jeff went to the table and picked up one of them and brought it. Grim passed it to Vasantasena:

"You may have that after I have seen that switch. And if you get back here alive, you may then mix all the soma you care to. Meanwhile, Jeff--you kill him if he wastes another minute."

Dorje--tigerish new cunning in his eyes, and leas of will power succoring his lean legs--started for the door. We all followed, Grim and Vasantasena leading, and Chullunder Ghose came hurrying from the room behind the dais, munching something; he had a load of the stuff that looked like German sausage. I picked up the gold plate that the Chinaman had let fall when he died of Dorje's blow with a bronze rod.

Three times, I think, Dorje planned to summon help; he hesitated as we passed the doors of cells where men like monks were working. But Jeff, with that sword in his hand, was too near. Dorje had to keep on leading until we reached that window with the shutter taken off its hinges. He would have led on down the corridor where probably there was a surprise in store for us, had not Vasantasena spoken.

"This is the shortest way," said Grim; and Dorje, once more hesitating, stepped out through the window. We could see the airship, like a smudge of hazy opal-grey against the starlit sky. It seemed not to be moving.

Dorje led along the roof toward the northern end. Grim spoke. Vasantasena nodded.

"Wait!" Grim commanded.

Dorje faced about and stared. Grim took Jeff's sword. There was a buttress near us; it supported the wall of the set-back. With the sword Grim signed to Dorje to back into the corner it offered. He believed he was about to die then and he did not like it. But Grim faced us:

"You fellows go now. This is my job."

"Lead along," said Jeff. "We're coming."

Grim looked hard at him. I think he was trying to fight back his emotion. Jeff was his oldest friend.

"D'you want my place?" he asked. "I didn't think, Jeff, that you'd --Your job is to try if I fail. You--"

Jeff cut in on him. "Good-bye, old man." They shook hands. It was my turn, and I felt I had no right to speak when Jeff was silent; so I also shook hands, saying nothing. Grim turned toward Chullunder Ghose and held his hand out.

"Jimmy sahib, this babu--" His voice broke. "Jimmy, this babu will--"

"I understand you. Good-bye, babu-ji. You're a damned good scout. Keep your eye on the ball, that's all there is to it."

Grim shoved him away. I believe he was prouder of the manhood he had found in our babu than of almost anything else he had ever done.

"And now you chaps, if I should pull this off, get back to India. If you can take that airship perhaps science will forgive us if we wreck the rest." He met Jeff's eyes again. "Get as far away as possible, as quickly as you can, then wait and have a crack at it if I fail." Jeff turned

away. We made no attempt to persuade Vasantasena to come way with us; she would no more have come than a Hindu widow of a hundred years ago would have accepted a reprieve from suttee. It would have been an insult to suggest it to her.

I lowered Jeff over the wall until his feet were on the ladder-- then the babu--and Vasantasena lowered me, but she ignored my good-bye. At the bottom we ran--in the direction of the airship-- past the hangar-out through freezing shadows between low alluvial dunes, until Chullunder Ghose was winded and we had to wait for him. He lay down, panting. Then we all three stared back at the roofs where we had left Grim.

We could see them--three black shadows silhouetted by the blue light and the starlight at the far end of the long wall. They were fighting. Grim had Dorje in his arms. He had carried him that far, struggling like a windmill. He carried him out of sight around the corner while we watched.

Jeff spoke: "Grim may fail yet. Better wait here. I'm next."

I quoted Grim: "As far away as possible, as quickly as you can!"

"All right. Let's wait a mile away."

We were less than a mile away; our backs were turned, and we were towing along the babu at a steady jog between us, when the earth shook. We were shaken off our feet. Seconds before sound reached us every fragment of Dorje's monastery and all its suburbs blew up in an incandescent splendour. It was shot with spears of flame that resembled lightning. Clouds of the stored-up poison gas rolled upward and shone like opal and mother o' pearl as they were rent apart by hundreds of explosions underneath them. Then the thunder of it reached us, and a blast of hot wind drove us to take cover behind

the shoulder of a dune. Huge lumps of masonry fell fifty yards away. Then silence and when we crawled up on the dune there was only a crimson furnace, shot with green and indigo, where Dorje's citadel had been, and where Grim went with Vasantasena to their chosen death.

Jeff swore: "The toughest job Jim ever gave a man was when he made us leave him. Damn—I hope he understood me. Do you think that soma had dulled his feelings?"

"It had sharpened them," I answered.

Then the airship came. It flew low, slowly, like a big fish looking for its prey. We pulled off coats and waved them from the summit of the sand dune. We were seen—or I think we were seen. It encircled us once. It came lower, within fifty yards of us. Then suddenly it turned and vanished northward. There were no lights, and it showed no signal.

"To the moon!" said Chullunder Ghose. "I hope they make it! In previous incarnation she was doubtless somebody important on the moon! However, self was d'Artagnan! We have Tibet to cross—by God on flat feet! We have Jimmy Jimgrim's orders to return to India. Dammit—Rammy sahib, you're next; I elect you leader! There, the south is that way. Lead on before I—" But he did. He could not help himself. Jeff broke next, and then I did.

Arm-in-arm together, we three turned our backs on Jimgrim's funeral pyre and started on the bitterest, most melancholy trail there is. There was a wind that howled behind us from the Kwen-Lun ranges; and the leagues of the Roof of the World stretched out in front of us in darkness made more dreary by the contrast of the stars. That night we built a cairn beside the swamps of Koko Nor. There is a legend on it; Jeff did that, and broke his pocket-knife by using it to carve the

stone. One word. A rather good man's name. No date. No comments:

JIMGRIM

THE END