"C. I. D."

TALBOT MUNDY

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"C. I. D."

Chapter I.

"There is no such person. There is no such country."

It was typical south-west monsoon weather, about as bad as Noah's deluge. Due to choked drains and innumerable other troubles, some parts of the single track lay two feet under water; and it was next thing to impossible to see through the driving rain, so the "up mixed" reached the terminus three hours late. It crawled dejectedly and grumbled to a standstill in Naraha Station, with curtains of water drooling from its eaves. The drum of the rain on the iron station roof seemed to add to the gloom of the lamp -lit platform. Stanley Copeland stuck his head out through a first-class compartment window and received not less than a gallon of water on the back of his neck. Cursing all things Indian, he opened the door then and jumped for comparative shelter--simultaneously with a very obese Bengali babu, who was traveling second and apparently possessed no other luggage than a black umbrella.

"What chance of getting a porter?" he asked the babu.

"None whatever, sahib. Haven't you a servant?"

Copeland had not, but he had a smile worth money. He had to pitch his voice against the splash of torrents from the eaves, the crash of thunder and the scream of the engine's safety valve; but his voice was sonorous, not harsh:

"Some one was to have met me, but apparently he hasn't. If they tried to auction India--"

The babu interrupted him. He chuckled amiably, pointing to the railway dining-room.

"You go in there and order dinner for us both," he said, "and whisky pegs in two tall glasses; those are most important. Do you see those elephants?"

Three huge brutes loomed and swayed in lamplit shadow on the far side of the platform. One had an awninged, nickel-plated howdah, dyed tusks and vermilion paint around its eyes.

"There is a royal personage on this train," said the babu. "He monopolizes all the porters. Is your luggage labeled? How many pieces? How many more in the compartment? Very well, my servant shall attend to them and I will supervise him. I am good at watching other people work. Go in and order dinner."

As he spoke, a dish-faced, coppery-hued fellow in a dirty turban and a ragged cotton blanket left off talking to a pair of yellow -smocked, ascetic-looking pilgrims by the door of a third-class carriage and ran to receive the babu's orders. Rather fascinated by the pilgrims, Copeland stared at them. To him they seemed more interested in the crowd than most such pious people are, when they have sworn a vow of poverty and set forth with staff and begging bowl in search of some religious rainbow's end. However, they walked away and the shadows swallowed them. Copeland, finding himself alone, made tracks for the gloomy dining-room, sat down in the farthest corner at a fly-blown tablecloth beside a window, and ordered dinner from a bare-foot Goanese who knew enough to bring the drinks first.

He had to wait for the babu. He had swallowed one drink and ordered another when a dark-skinned man in a blue European suit, a raincoat, and a turban, entered. He glanced at Copeland shrewdly

and then took a seat as far away as possible, but sat facing him. He had keen eyes and a look of self-assurance, but there was something sinister about him.

His gestures were those of a conjurer "with nothing to conceal," and his very shapely hands were too conspicuous; a ruby, that perhaps was genuine, in a ring on the middle finger of his right hand suggested a danger signal; and Copeland was not prejudiced in his favor by the fact that he wore a gold chain-bracelet on his right wrist. His stare was lynx-like when the babu entered. He appeared to suspect, if not to recognize him, but the babu took no notice. A cane chair creaked under his weight as he sat down with his back towards the other man and swallowed, almost at a draught, the long drink that awaited him. Then he plunged into conversation:

"It will be a rotten dinner, but you will learn that without my telling you. What is the use of your talking to me, unless I tell you what you can't discover for yourself? I am a reprehensible and graceless babu named Chullunder Ghose --investigator; don't, however, waste your time investigating me, for there is no such person. Out there on the platform you were about to speak of India. There is no such country."

"Where, then, have I spent the last six months?" Copeland asked him. "The visa on my passport calls it India."

"If I should call myself a surgeon," said the babu, "would that prove it? India speaks more than fifty languages, but can't explain itself. It has a hundred heavenly religions, and is going to the devil. It has two hundred governments, no two alike, and more misgovernment per square mile than a colony of monkeys in a madhouse. India is misunderstood by itself and by every one else, the same as you and me, but would like to be understood, the same as you would; I, myself, however, pray that nobody may ever understand me. If I understood myself, I should inevitably die of boredom. You, sir, are a

surgeon. Don't deny it. I know all about you."

"Why should I deny it?" Copeland answered. "There is nothing to know about me. I'm a specialist from the neck up--eye, throat, nose, and ear. Just now I'm studying cataract, if you know what that is. I came here because I heard that the next State, Kutchdullub, is full of it. I operate on any one who'll let me."

"So does that man," said the babu with a backward motion of his head, "but sane people don't let him."

Copeland glanced at the man at the far corner table. "Does he know you?" he asked.

"Not yet."'

"He'll remember the shape of the back of your head!"

"He shall remember more--much more!" the babu answered. "If only other people had longer memories, he might not now be drawing such a fat retainer as the medical wizard in charge of the Prince who came on our train. Even wealthy Indian Princes are as silly as peasants and lots of other people; they will listen to and pay a charlatan, but send a reputable doctor to the devil. Do you find it easy to get patients?"

Copeland smiled reminiscently. He had merry eyes and almost comically large ears, but a studious face and an unself -assertive manner.

"I've had better luck than I expected," he answered. "Lots of Mohammedan patients, and some Hindus. In the hospitals I've had no difficulty with the Hindus--even women. However, if I understand the situation, now I'm up against State rights. Narada seems to be the

jumping-off place into ancient history, as well as railroad terminus and border-town. The Rajah of the next State doesn't even answer letters."

"Perhaps, if he were sober--" said the babu. "Oh, is that the trouble? I was told he has religious prejudices against modern medicine and surgery."

"Prejudices!" said the babu. "The religious member of that family is the Rajah of Kutchdullub's cousin. It was he who arrived on our train. It is he who would inherit if the present Rajah should die childless. The present Rajah inherited because his elder brother did die childless. I am an investigator. *Verb. sap.*"

"I should say, then, that the cousin would be wiser not to cross the border. Why does he do it?"

"And in this weather! There are always seven reasons for everything that anybody does. I know three: politics, health, religion. And the greatest of these is human nature! That is not a reason, but a good joke. His political adherents in Kutchdullub aren't so sticky that it doesn't pay to see them now and then and spread more tanglefoot. He has a country villa where his medical adviser, whom you see behind me, tells him that the medicinal springs are curative of ulcers of the stomach. As the hope and ewe lamb of the high church party, it behoves him at certain seasons to be sacramented by the priests. The other four reasons are what I am here to find out. But why are you here?"

"Me? I'm hoping," said Copeland. "I want to see Kutchdullub, and I want to shoot a tiger. There's a small dispensary in this town, and the Sikh in charge of it has offered to let me hold a clinic. So I'll stay here for the present. What did you mean by saying there is no such person as yourself?"

"Am dead just now, as happens frequently. Was mixed up in a case near Quetta, and some murderers were hanged. But certain other murderers and friends of same were not caught, it being out of the question to catch and hang the total population; because no government is wise or reasonable; they always compromise: Therefore the C. I. D.--you have heard of it? Criminal Investigation Department--had me murdered and cremated as a precaution against revenge, and then removed me to this sweet solitude for a vacation."

"Taking chances, aren't you?"

"No, I never take them. One of them will take me some day. Until then I am taking long odds, but betting only on certainties."

Copeland studied him a minute, while they both dipped spoons into abominable soup. He decided that the man's obesity might be as deceptive as his mild brown eyes and his almost bovine calm.

"What I meant," he remarked, when thunder had ceased crashing, "is, why do you tell me your name and what you are? I might betray you."

He was answered by a chuckle. Then: "Do you suppose the C. I. D. would send me here because I don't know the country intimately? Knowing, I am naturally known; and, once known, not so easy to forget! If His Highness the Rajah of Kutchdullub happens to be sober, his spies will tell him before midnight that you and I have dined together. So why should I observe secrecy towards you? On this side of the border what harm can you do me?"

"Will they let you cross, or must you sneak in?" Copeland asked him.

"I would go in with a brass band, if there were one," said the babu. "Some of them will welcome me as small boys do a teacher, telling me the little secrets better to conceal the big ones. For I tell you, that secrets are not kept by being secretive; nor can you discover them by looking like a questionnaire in a headsman's mask. But tell me, have you ever shot a tiger?"

"Can't say I have," said Copeland. "But a fellow needs a steady nerve at my trade. There isn't much room for error when you operate on eyes, for instance. I can handle a rifle. I've a good one that I've used quite a bit. Say, look here! I don't know of anything that I can offer you, but perhaps you can think of something. You can get into Kutchdullub, and you're going. I want people suffering from cataract to come and see me. And I want to shoot a tiger. Help me in either of those respects, and name your *quid pro quo.* If I can match you, I will."

Swiftly, penetratingly, and only once, the babu glanced at him; his brown eyes almost changed their shape during that fraction of a second, and their color glowed like amber with a light behind it. Then he looked down at his goat chop.

"Do you ever gamble, sahib? Do you bet blind? Do you have an intuition that you trust against the evidence of all your senses?"

"Sometimes."

"Care to bet on me? I have a nuisance value. Not even God can guess the value of a nuisance, or He would not have created such a paradox. A nuisance is superior to Einstein's square root of minus one; that has no demonstrable existence but can solve a problem by creating greater ones. I would exact a promise."

Thunder again, chain lightning, and a volley of rain on the iron roof. The man in the far corner washed his ruby in a tumbler, polished it on

a napkin, turned up his overcoat collar and walked out, letting in a gust of wind that blew off tablecloths and smashed some crockery.

"I would ask you to promise," said the babu, "not to cross the border into the State of Kutchdullub until I send for you or come and fetch you."

"What's the big idea?"

"Take no chances," said the babu. "Sahib, it is paradoxically true in this world that the simplest way to get what you are after is not to try to get it. Say no, and resist temptation when you mean yes and already have fallen for it like an apple on to Newton's nose."

"O.K., I get you. Very well, I promise."

"But I promise nothing," said the babu. "It is contrary to my religion to make any promise that I don't intend to break. I am a slave of my religion."

"You're 'a high-caste Hindu, aren't you? How comes it that you eat with me, and eat meat?"

Chullunder Ghose took up a bone in his fingers and gnawed it before he answered:

"Sahib, why do you cut cataracts off eyeballs?"

"For the practice. Hell, I'm learning!"

"Same here! Self am also surgeon--of impossibilities! I amputate them. Why? For the experience. I like it. And one does not get experience by being holier than other people."

"But the Hindu religion, as I understand it--"

"You don't understand it, any more than I do, or the priests do," said the babu. "I am a devotee of all religions and all politics. I am an autocratic-democratic-absolutist, communistically minded --a pro-Gandhian believer in machine-made products. Also am a Nietzscheian-Tolstoyan platonist with animistic leanings, balancing a pole, like Blondin on a tightrope, with a Bryanite bimetallism on the one end and a sense of humor on the other. I believe that governments are necessary nonsense, and that the only deadly sin is sorrow, whether you inflict it or accept it."

"So you sign up with the C. I. D. and send men to the gallows?"

"I? Their lack of humor hangs them! Clowns and other funny people never reach a gallows. It is people who take themselves seriously who slip up on their own solemnity, like politicians on a party platform. The secret of all the crimes there ever were, is self-importance. It is that--their self-importance, that eventually traps them."

"All right, go and prod their self-importance, but remember, I want some cataract cases--and a tiger. You can reach me at the Sikh's dispensary. He wrote he has a bedroom for me, but I don't know the address yet. I'll have to wait here at the station until he shows up. Where will you be?"

"Everywhere, sahib. I must splash around in this abominable monsoon, wishing I were Jonah in the belly of a whale. And I must go now. Thank you for the rotten dinner and the pleasant company. I wish you hecatombs of mutilated heads to study with your lancet."

"Thanks, I hope you hang your man," said Copeland. "Bring him to me first, though, if his eyes need fixing."

"Good-by, sahib. Don't come out into the rain." But curiosity

compelled, so Copeland buttoned up his overcoat and watched three elephants go swaying off into the darkness loaded with a Prince and all his retinue. The station lights, reflected in a kind of misty halo by the rain, revealed even a glimpse of royalty--a lean, dark-turbaned, youngish man, a trifle stooping at the shoulders, perched up in the nickel-plated howdah with a heavy shawl over his English raincoat. He was taking himself, or something, seriously. He looked sad. But he swayed away into the rain and was lost in darkness before Copeland could even memorize his features.

Then an *ekka* drove up for the babu--a one-horse, two-wheeled, springless cart, already piled up with the babu's baggage under a watertight tarpaulin. The babu's dish-faced servant was already up beside the driver. The babu climbed in and the cart creaked. The driver screamed at his decrepit horse. The babu pulled an end of the tarpaulin over him and waved his black umbrella--and suddenly, out of the station shadow, the two yellow-robed pilgrims ran like ghosts and climbed into the cart too.

"Charity to holy people is a way of going long of riches in the next world!" the babu shouted. "Good-by, sahib."

There was a frightful flash of lightning--seething rain--thunder --howling wind; lightning again, and a vivid glimpse of trees bent almost double--ruts through black mud--miles of muddy water. And then darkness.

"It's a hell of a night," said Copeland to himself. He went back to the dismal dining-room and paid his bill. "Who was that man who had dinner with me?" he asked the waiter.

"Some babu," he answered. "I not knowing."

But he did know. He was too afraid of him to talk. The lamplight

shone on too much of the bloodshot whites of his distended eyes.

Chapter II.

"I am sent by Soonya."

Wind rolled away the steam of two weeks' rain and gave a glimpse of tumbled mountains beyond lush green jungle. Out of the jungle poured a roaring river; coffee-brown, loaded with trash; it stank of dead things. Where, two weeks ago, the shallow ford had been, and village cattle came to drink, it boiled and eddied ten feet deep--impassable. A dozen mat-and-cotton, toe-rag camps were clustered on the side towards the city; there the traveling native merchants waited for the yearly race to be first in the field, to sell goods on credit while the peasants' rain-fed optimism rose like sap in green stuff.

On the far side of the river, on a hillock, in a thatched shed built for him by villagers, Chullunder Ghose sat camped in luxury. He had crossed, before the river rose too high, on a log-raft that had been carried away by the next night's flood and left him stranded. He had exactly what he needed, and he needed extremely little. In an English Norfolk jacket, a Hindu loin -cloth and a plain black cotton turban, he looked rich enough to be important and yet not so rich that the villagers might feel afraid of him. He sat on a mat in the door of the shed; cross -legged, like a fat god, smiling. And since he paid his way, and certainly was not a tax-collector or policemen, the villagers came and talked to him between the storms of rain. Their talk was chiefly about taxes, and the priests, and the iniquitous forced labor when the Rajah needed porters for his hunting expeditions. They talked about the Prince who had come across the ford with three elephants, and who had actually paid them for firewood and elephant feed.

"A good Prince. But he came near drowning. There was with him a Madrassi, with a red stone on his finger. When the Prince fell off the elephant in mid-stream that Madrassi pretended to try to rescue him. But we saw. And it was one of us who swam into the stream and saved him. He received for that a gift of two rupees from the Prince. But from the Madrassi he received a cursing. The Madrassi said a low-caste person should not touch the Prince's person. And that is true. But what would you?"

They talked also of Gandhi. Gandhi, they had heard, was in London teaching the English how to use the hand-loom. Was it true, as some of Kali's priests said, that Gandhi intended to kick the English out and give the government to Moslems?

Chullunder Ghose was patient. He declared he had to wait until the ford was passable. He asked no questions about tigers, none whatever about Kali's priests, or about the ruined temple in the jungle near by. If he had asked, he might have heard nothing. But, as usually happens to a good-tempered man who listens but is not inquisitive, what he wished to learn began to reach his ears in driblets. He was told, among many other things, the reason why, for instance, nobody came near him after four in the afternoon, and why the cattle were driven home so early.

"He has slain six women, four men, five children, six-and-fifty goats and nineteen head of cattle. He is a male tiger. He is harder on us than the *takkus.* Our shikari should have set a trap or shot him, but he dared not, though he talked loud; and when we mocked him he ran away, we know not whither. It is not wise that your honor camps in this place, and if we had known how good your honor is we would have spoken. Come now and dwell in the village." Chullunder Ghose might have accepted the invitation, but the rain came down that minute, so a dozen villagers were forced to share the shed with him, and half a

dozen more came running along the track at the edge of the jungle to take shelter. Five of them reached it, and the sixth was hardly fifty yards away when he suddenly screamed. A tiger leaped out from the undergrowth and struck him, seized him by the shoulder, worried him a moment and then dragged him out of sight. It was all over in ten seconds. But they heard the man scream in the jungle--once. After that, silence. It had happened phantom -fashion. Even the rain seemed silent and unreal.

All the villagers took sticks and ran to beat the jungle. But it was useless, and they knew it. One by one they came back to squat and shudder in the babu's camp-fire smoke and ask advice.

"Another widow to feed. That is the fifth man, making sixteen humans. Shall we abandon the village? But where then? There is no place for us."

"Tell the Rajah," said the babu. "Is it not his business and privilege to deal with tigers?"

"Sahib, we have sent and told him. Long ago we told him, when the tiger slew the first man."

"What else have you done?"

"We have paid much money to the priests of Kali's temple. But the priests also do nothing."

"What else?"

"To the priestess we have given money. Her name is Soonya. It is her tiger. She lives in the ruined temple yonder in the jungle. The tiger lives there also."

"Liars! Can she keep a tiger like a tame cat? If it eats you, would it not eat her?"

"Nay, not so. Is she not a priestess? She is not like other people, sahib. Furthermore, she says the tiger will continue killing us and our cattle until the Rajah keeps a promise to rebuild the temple. Nevertheless, if he should do that he would first increase the *takkus;* and how can we pay it, since the tiger eats us and our cattle? Will your honor not speak to the Rajah?"

"I would like to speak first to that priestess," said the babu. "Which of you will lead me to her?"

There were no volunteers. There were fifty excuses, chief of which was that the hour was growing late; it would be dark in the jungle. Some of them even admitted they were too scared.

"Sahib, in a few months, when the sun has dried it, we will burn the jungle. There is nothing to do until that time comes."

"Except to get me an elephant. Get one. Go and do it!"

But the nearest elephant was fifteen miles away. It belonged to a zemindar notorious for meanness; he would demand too much money. The elephant would eat the food of thirty people. The mahout and two or three alleged grass-cutters would also demand rations and money. Probably the elephant would go sick. He might even die; and who would' be blamed for it?

"Tell me then about this Soonya whom you call a priestess," said the babu.

So they told him an endless story, that being the least they could do after refusing his other requests; and he believed some portions of it.

None knew whence she first came. She was married, some said, at the age of ten years to a man so handsome that the gods were jealous of him. Therefore the gods slew him with a sickness. She wanted to die on his funeral pyre, as widows used to, and, it is rumored, that some do even to this day. But that was forbidden by the Sirkar, that is obstinate about such matters. So she tried to starve herself to death, which also was forbidden. Sahibs took her to a hospital and fed her by force with a tube until she gave in and agreed to live. She was then sent to a Christian mission, and the padres taught her to deny caste. But she did not agree to the rest of the teaching, so she ran away. She became a sanyassim--wandering, wandering with staff and begging bowl, and rumor had it that she went mad. But some say that the padres had already made her so.

"We are all mad," said the babu. "If we were not, nobody would love us. How did she come to this place? Did she bring the tiger with her?"

Opinions varied. Some said she had come before the tiger; some said afterwards. They all agreed, however, that at Kutchdullub she had adopted the terrible creed of Kali, which serves death, not life. It worships death and sings the praises of calamity. "Our fathers told us about Thuggee, sahib. Has your honor heard of that? The Thugs slew people as a sacrifice to Kali, the Destroyer. But the Sirkar also made an end of Thuggee--some say."

"I will cross the river," said the babu.

"Nay, nay, sahib! Not yet for a week, or for more than a week. It drowns men. Who can cross it?"

"I will cross now."

"Nay, nay! Tell us more about the dok-i-tar who skins eyes so that

blind men see."

"Lead me to the priestess, or I go now."

"But we dare not. Is that killer not loose in the jungle? He is worse than she is."

"Then I go at once. These"--he pointed to his odds and ends of baggage--"are in your keeping. Make me a raft of goatskins --tight ones--well sewn. Bring a long rope and a pole. And if I drown I hope the tiger eats you all."

They pleaded--argued; but his mildness had vanished. He even beat them. So the goatskins that an Indian village never lacks were blown up tight and lashed together. Standing on that, the babu poled and paddled himself across, assisted by the rope that held the raft against the stream. It took him two hours. It was after nightfall, and he was almost fainting from exhaustion, when he crawled out on the far bank in a storm of wind and rain. He staggered to the nearest trader's bivouac, where a kerosene lantern made a warm glow in the darkness.

"Horses!" he commanded. "Harness up and drive me to the city!"

Mocking voices answered. "Swim, thou mudfish! Sit in the mud thou fool, and pray for miracles! Thy belly holds more food than we have here--go and fill it with frogs!"

"I am sent by Soonya," he answered.

There was instant silence. Presently a man crawled out into the rain and thrust a lantern near the babu's face.

"Who do you say sent you?"

"Ask again, thou dog, and she herself shall answer! Harness up! She orders. I pay--twenty rupees."

That was a mistake.

"So? She? A priestess offers money for a service?"

But the babu snapped back: "Atcha! I will keep my money. Ask her anything you wish to know. I will go and bring her."

He turned away into the dark rain. The lantern followed.

"Sahib! Sahib!"

Fifteen minutes later he was splashing into darkness toward Kutchdullub City in a hooded cart, behind two strong horses, munching at chupatties spread with hot spice. The driver asked no more questions.

It appeared that Soonya was some one.

Chapter III.

"Isn't that brute dead yet?"

Divinely authorized and autocratic sounds good, but it seems that liabilities invariably balance assets, somehow, even in the Rajah business. To begin with, it was monsoon weather. The marble and limestone palace, with its terraces, courtyards, gardens, summer - houses and lotus-ponds was one desolate splash made drearier by hurrying dark-gray clouds. There were creditors out on the palace steps, bemartyring themselves beneath umbrellas. The walls dripped clammy moisture. There was mildew on the hangings. The canaries in gilded cages were molting miserably and refused to sing. The

Rajah had the bellyache, a headache, and a letter from a banker--a swine of a banker--a dirty, contemptible son of a low-caste shroff, who demanded his interest and "found it inconvenient" to lend another rupee. Nor was that all.

The zenana hummed with malice, like a wasps' nest being smoked out. The most recent recruit to the Rajah's private menage was a lady with a genius for spending money and a magnetism that exploded all the stores of jealousy and discontent that she could anywhere discover. There is plenty of both in a Rajah's zenana, always. And today it is not nearly as safe as in the good old days of twenty years ago to use the whip; because even in Indian Native States there are women who know about modern notions. They inform the others. And any woman understands that one does not have to believe things in order to try to get away with them.

So the Rajah was in his library, where the books were all soggy with moisture; and even the brandy and soda did not taste good, because he had drunk too much of it the night before. His servant had left the lid of the cigar-box open, so the cigars were ruined; they tasted like hay and blotting-paper--two rupees each. The cat looked happy, sleeping on a cushion near the smelly oil-stove. So he kicked it, and that settled the cat for a while. Then he got up and looked in the mirror--a full-length one, behind which was a closet of books such as even a Rajah does not let the servants see.

There was a damp film on the mirror, but he could see himself. He had never had any faith in religion except as an important form of politics; but the sight of himself in the glass nearly, if not quite, convinced him that a diabolical intelligence does actually govern things. How otherwise could such a handsome fellow, so endowed by nature with a figure, a brain, and a taste for smart clothes and expensive entertainment, find himself in such a damned

predicament? No answer. He made a grimace at himself in the glass.

Then he pressed an electric bell; but rain had discovered the places where a rascally contractor had saved money on the insulation, so the bell was silent. After waiting a few minutes he seized a revolver and fired it five times at the bell-push. He was a good shot, even with all that brandy in him, so he hit the mark three times, but it annoyed him that he missed twice; and the noise made the cat act like a lunatic, so he put the sixth shot through the cat's head. Then the servant came. He might possibly have shot the servant--it would have cost less than to whip a woman--only that the cartridges were all used up.

"Take away that cat and tell Syed-Suraj I want him."

The servant left the cat's blood on the carpet and ran like a marauding jackal with the carcase. Syed-Suraj was the only one to run for when the Rajah was in that mood. Discreetly vicious sychophant and rapacious grafter though he was, Syed-Suraj could be depended on to calm the Rajah's humor even when the last new female favorite was afraid to go near him. A relation, distant, on the distaff side; an educated sybarite, whose estates had all been squandered in Madrid, Heidelberg, Paris, London, and Monte Carlo, Syed-Suraj had equipped himself with cynicism and a charming manner that the Rajah and Syed-Suraj, too, mistook for statesmanship. But Syed-Suraj was a lot too shrewdly cautious to accept an official position. It suited him better, and so did the pickings, to be the Rajah's confidant, pander, parasite, and go-between.

He entered briskly. There was a flower on the lapel of his well -cut British suit. He looked well, lithe, humorous. His olive skin, fresh from the barber, shone with apparent youth, although he was almost fifty years of age. He was a small-boned man, with rather hairy hands and

small feet. Nothing about him except his eyes suggested danger, importance, or even much experience. But the crows' feet at the corners told their tale, and his eyes were slightly simian, brown, brilliant, a bit too close together, with a habit of narrowing slightly after one swift, penetrating glance.

He sat down, He and the Rajah usually conversed in French or English to avoid being understood by servants, who were always lurking where they should not and who always carried tales to the zenana. The Rajah scowled. Syed-Suraj smiled.

"You'll be dead soon," he remarked, "so be gay. Let the money-lenders worry."

"Damn the money-lenders," said the Rajah. "I would sell my entire State for the price of a trip to Europe."

"But you can't, dear boy. It's mortgaged for more than it's worth. Why be impractical? Besides, imagine what might happen if you went away. You know as well as I do that the priests are playing poker with a whole pack up their sleeves. They'd frame you in your absence. They already accuse you of neglect--of withholding temple revenues--of personal defilement--"

That last was a sore point and the Rajah sputtered, cursing the priests of Kali in a language enriched by ages for just that purpose. The expense of being undefiled was bad enough--they have a special rate for Rajahs--but the worst part was the tedious ceremonies. He shuddered to think of them.

"And," said Syed-Suraj, "they again demand fulfilment of your promise to rebuild that damned old temple in the jungle. You would have made that promise over my dead body, had I been here when you came to the throne."

"But, damn your eyes, I had to make it," said the Rajah. "They pretended they knew all about my elder brother's death. If a lying rumor had come to the ears of the British that he died of poison--"

"Yes, that might have been inconvenient. But rumor and proof, dear boy, are not the same thing, even if your brother's death was slightly opportune, and even if he was cremated rather in a hurry. The point is now, that you can't keep your promise about that because you lack the necessary funds. They know that. Nevertheless, they are using pressure--propaganda--and that tiger. If you shoot the tiger they will charge you with sacrilege, which won't cut any ice except with half the population, who will probably refuse to pay their taxes. Swallow that one! If you don't go and shoot the tiger you will hear from Smith about it--"

"Damn Smith! Damn his middle-class morality! Oh, damn his father and his mother and his--"

"Smith is all right," said Syed-Suraj. "As a representative of the British Raj at the court of a reigning Prince he is rather a joke, I admit--or a bore, whichever way you look at it. But what if he weren't lazy and had some brains and self-respect? You're lucky to have such a fossil to deal with. When he retires on pension, two or three months from now, you'll be out of luck; there can't be two politicals like Smith in India, and if there were, the law of averages would keep them from sending the other to succeed this man. I advise you to get things straightened out before a new man comes in Smith's place."

"To hell with the British!"

"Not so loud!" said Syed-Suraj. "They, too, have their difficulties, but their ears are as long as a mule's and--"

"Blather! Their day's done. They've lost their grip on India --lost it, I tell you. They'll be gone in a couple of years. And then the deluge. Then we'll have the old times back again."

"Not yet! And meanwhile, Smith will be compelled to make himself a nuisance. How can he help it? The British have sent that fat scoundrel, Chullunder Ghose, to spy and report--"

The Rajah sat suddenly upright. "Isn't that brute dead yet? I arranged--"

Syed-Suraj interrupted: "Yes, I know you did, and it was very thoughtless. He's the C. I. D.'s pet undercover man. Do you remember when he came two years ago and asked you to employ Hawkes? Do you remember I cautioned you not to refuse? He wanted Hawkes placed here to keep an eye on you. If you had turned Hawkes down, Chullunder Ghose would have flooded the State with Hindu spies, and those dogs would have framed you for the sake of their own advancement; whereas Hawkes plays cricket. Nobody could make Hawkes tell a lie or shirk work. He's a good servant and he saves you money."

"All right," said the Rajah, "but Chullunder Ghose is--"

"*Sui generis.* He might be much worse. Bump him off--and see then what descends on you! It might be utterly impossible to prove you ordered it, but nobody would doubt it. The C. I. D. would be out for revenge; they value that man. They would send a mob of expert second-raters, who would do exactly what the priests want--frame you and force you to abdicate. The priests, you know as well as I do, want your cousin on the throne."

"He'll never get there," said the Rajah. "He already has what he thinks are ulcers of the stomach. If your doctor from Madras is half as good

as you pretend, the priests will soon have the mortification of conducting funeral ceremonies for their darling nominee for my throne. I see humor in that."

Syed-Suraj blew his nose and glanced at the Rajah's face over his handkerchief.

"Well," he remarked, "his death won't help you at the moment. Neither would it help in the least to kill that fat babu."

"I have ordered him killed."

"Then countermand it."

"It is too late."

"He is probably your best friend in the circumstances. He is not a trouble-maker. He has a genius for pulling the plugs of trouble and letting it pour down the drain. That is undoubtedly why the C. I. D. have sent him."

"He is dead," said the Rajah. "That is, he's as good as dead."

"I'm sorry to hear it. I can't do any more than give you good advice."

"Oh yes, you can." The Rajah stood up. He chested himself. He struck the attitude that always had effect with certain sorts of women, but that did not deceive Syed-Suraj for a moment. "Take my Rolls-Royce, and go and borrow money for me. Go to Ram Dass; he has plenty."

"Twenty-five percent," said Syed-Suraj.

"What do I care?"

"He will also take a note for twenty-five percent more than he really lends you."

"I will sign it."

"And Ram Dass will show your note to the priests."

"To hell with them!"

"They will say you now have money and must rebuild that temple immediately."

"What? During the monsoon? Impossible! Go and get me some money."

"You might offer me a little *douceur!*"

"Damn it, what becomes of all the money that you wheedle from me?"

Syed-Suraj closed his eyes a trifle. Then he contrived to look hurt.

"Any one of the servant-girls in your zenana costs you more than I do," he retorted. "Most of what you give me is spent on your business--on informers, for instance. Do you think spies work for nothing?"

"I am certain you don't," said the Rajah. "Dammit--all right --five percent. And don't ask for another rupee for a twelve -month. Do you hear me?"

Chapter IV.

"This is from the fat babu who ate your dinner."

Across the border, five hundred yards from the railway station, in a corrugated iron barn that faced a yard at the back of the Sikh's dispensary, by the light of a gasolene lantern Stanley Copeland labored and forgot the weather. Rain drove in between the joints of the iron walls and drummed on the iron roof. Sometimes the lantern blew out at critical moments and the Sikh had to come to the rescue with his flashlight. The operating table was a thing of planks and trestles that had to be scrubbed at intervals with soap and water. There was a very slim supply of anaesthetics, and the Sikh was ignorant as well as nervous, although willing. There were no nurses--no trained help whatever.

But the Sikh had snatched at opportunity. The moment he was sure Copeland really would come he had gone hard at work at propaganda. He had promised that the greatest surgeon in the world would operate, free, gratis, and for nothing, on any one, no matter who he was or what might be the matter with him. And the only reason why the Sikh had not been at the train to meet Copeland was that his dispensary was chock-a-block with patients clamoring for first turn. He had had to drive them out into the rain and lock the door on them before daring to leave the place; they might have wrecked it.

So, instead of restricting himself to eyes, with occasional side - ventures to an ear or throat, Copeland had been forced to tackle almost all the horrible and crippling ailments known to Asia. He had amputated gangrened legs, attended to enlarged spleens, opened abscesses, adjusted and set compound fractures, cauterized dog-bites, treated ague, diagnosed and taken chances with afflicted kidneys, livers--anything and everything. And luck was with him, as it usually is with men who pull their coats off and go straight ahead at what needs doing, even though they don't know how to do it. Nobody had died yet on the operating table. Seven days, of fourteen hours' work each, had gone by and the waiting list still grew. The sleepless

Sikh was half-hysterical, but happy. Copeland had begun to dream he really might amount to something some day, which is half the battle. He could see himself getting the high-priced custom in Chicago or New York. And then a messenger arrived--a dish-faced messenger.

He came in grinning, dripping, with a flour-sack hooded on his head and shoulders. He was otherwise naked except for a breech -cloth. In his hand he held a cleft stick, in which a note was tied securely, wrapped in a scrap of goatskin. He refused to wait outside although a cancerous nose was being amputated. He refused to give the message to the Sikh. He forced his way in and waited patiently, amused by the removal of the nose and now and then feeling his own to make sure it was still there. When the job was finished and he had given up the note to Copeland, he offered to help scrub the operating table. He was not in the least discouraged or offended by the Sikh's rebuff, but watched the Sikh's assistant for a minute and then, being quite a person, pushed the incompetent duffer aside and did the whole job perfectly, in quick time.

Copeland lit his pipe with the fourth or fifth match--matches and tobacco being damp. Then he studied the note before he opened it. He only vaguely recognized the dish-faced man and was not really sure he remembered him. There was nobody who ought to write to him; no one, in fact whom he knew on the country-side. The thing suggested trouble, or perhaps an urgent call for surgical help in some outlying district, so he scowled at it. However, he was the kind of man who likes to hit his troubles on the snout, not run away. So at last he opened it. The address read:

To the Skin 'em alive-o Doctor sahib at the Sikh's dispensary. From Babu C.G.

That was impudent, but not discouraging. Besides, the messenger

was a genuine human being with a good grin, who appeared to believe in working while he waited. That, too, was a favorable sign. He unfolded the paper and read on:

This is from the fat baba who ate your dinner. Cheerio. How are you? Please excuse the paper, but the nearest shop is more than twenty miles away and the miles are mud if you can find them under water. I am curious to know if you are still premeditating battle with a tiger? Or have you slain so many people on the operating table that the thought of even lawful murder sickens you? If you are still ferocious, oil your gun but wait for kubber. If you are still the gentlemanly sportsman that I took you for, be kind enough to hold your tongue about it, because silence feeds no flies, of which there are a lot too many. Please send back an answer by this messenger and tell me whether you would back your skill against a belly-trouble, said to be an ulcer but suspected by me to be more of a family token of regard. It might be possible to bag the tiger and assault the ulcer at the same time. Point is: will you do it?

Please don't pay the messenger, it spoils him. Give him two spots of the cheapest whisky you can get and kick him forth to come and find me with your answer. Hoping the supply of crushed and otherwise intriguing eyes is holding out; and wishing with all my heart that you were here to buy me drinks and dinner --alas, I have none of either! I remain, Your Honor's most respectful servant, C.G.

P.S.--And remember, there is no such person!

Copeland thought a minute--thought of the work to be done where he was, and of the mud and the rain outside. He almost tore the note up--almost told the messenger to say "no answer." But the messenger grinned and the grin was good. And he remembered then that the fat babu had smiled like some one who was safe to bet on. So he

handed the messenger two rupees and told him:

"Go and buy yourself some whisky. Come back when you've drunk it."

Then he wrote on a piece of dispensary paper:

From S.C. to C.G. This is a telegram. Try me. I don't believe you.

He folded it, sealed it with a lump of candle-grease, impressed his thumb-mark, wrapped it in the goatskin, tied it in the cleft stick, set it where the messenger could see it on a stool beside the door, then:

"Come on," he said to the Sikh, "bring in your next case. At this rate it'll be midnight before we've done a day's work."

Chapter V.

"I need a new knife, sahib."

Chullunder Ghose sat in the dark cart, enjoying motion after days of sitting still and being talked to by ignorant villagers. It was slow motion; the big wheels sank deep in the mud and the horses paused at frequent intervals to gather strength; but the horses were as keen as the driver on reaching the journey's end, so they pulled their best. The silence--he enjoyed that also --was comparative; the important thing was that the driver made no conversation. Countless millions of frogs made such a din that he could hardly hear the splashing of the horses' hoofs or the squeak of an oil-less wheel. But none of those facts excused carelessness; the business of being "purposely misunderstood" demands unceasing and acute attention.

It may be that the comfort of a heavy blanket made him sleepy. He felt sure, too, that he had left behind a village that was friendly to himself, whatever hatreds or intrigues might dwell there. But probably he

himself could not have told exactly why he let his normally alert and intensely intelligent senses slumber while he mused and pondered. He was chuckling over the letter he had sent by messenger to Doctor Copeland, and envying the almost superhuman skill and courage of the messenger who swam that swollen ford without as much as hesitating on the brink, when his turban fell over his eye and he felt a blow on the back of the head that almost stunned him. But he had felt the blow. He could still feel it. Therefore he knew he was not too badly hurt, and in the dark the odds were in his favor yet, whoever the enemy might be. Between him and the driver was a curtain of heavy cloth that made the inside of the cart so absolutely dark that he knew his assailant must have struck at random. Probably some enemy had crawled in over the cart-tail and was now crouching amid the litter of empty sacks and goatskins, waiting to see what his blow had accomplished. Those thoughts took a fraction of a second.

In another fraction of a second Chullunder Ghose had stripped his blanket off and bulked it, holding it at arm's length in his left hand. Beneath it, with his left foot, he kicked on the floor of the cart to suggest his own whereabouts. He felt a club hit the blanket. He pounced. A man as wet as a fish, and as slippery, writhed in his grasp, and even the babu's prodigious strength was hardly enough to hold him; he had to grab the man's hair and almost strangle him with his left arm while he thumped him breathless with his right knee. The driver heard the intense, swift struggle, and pulled the curtain aside to ask what the trouble might be. Chullunder Ghose mastered his breath:

"Another passenger. He overtook us. I invited him to ride."

"He should pay," said the driver. "Such a journey as this may break my cart and harm my horses. It is enough that--"

"It is enough that your crows' meat pull so feebly that this cripple

overtook us!" the babu retorted. "Drive on. I will pay you with a kick in the teeth if I hear another word from you!"

"Shameless ingrate! I will turn back," said the driver.

"Try it! See what happens!"

It was too late to turn back; it was already nearly as far to the encampment by the ford as it was to the city. And to turn about meant facing wind and rain. The driver made a virtue of convenience.

"I made a promise. It is better that I keep it. I will pray your honor to be generous."

He closed the curtain, and Chullunder Ghose relaxed the pressure on his assailant's throat, but he did not let go of his hair. He seized an arm and twisted it.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Besides being a jungle-bum with less brains than an animal, what are you?"

"Have pity, sahib!"

"Answer before I break your neck, you murderer!"

"And if I answer, what then?"

"Pity, perhaps; and perhaps a thrashing; possibly a rupee. Who knows? Was it Soonya who sent you?"

"Nay, nay, sahib! We of the village laid our heads together."

"And the honey of united wisdom came forth?"

"Sahib, we thought if your honor should make complaint in the city

about the tiger, then there might be trouble from the priestess."

"You should have said that to me before I left you."

"But we did not think of it until your honor crossed the river. Then we guessed that your honor had lied about being a spokesman for the dok-i-tar sahib who skins eyes. Some said you are probably a politician; and we agreed that much trouble might come, and of that we have plenty, without more of it."

Chullunder Ghose jerked at the man's hair. As an afterthought he groped for the club and laid it out of reach. "For instance?" he demanded.

"First, a sahib might come. It might be Smith sahib, who would command the services of many people and much food for his servants, who would beat us. And the servants would pay us nothing, even though their sahib might give them money for the purpose. Or perhaps the Rajah himself might come, and that would be much worse."

"Yes, and--?"

"She would put a curse on us for having made complaint."

"Who? Soonya? That priestess?"

"Yes, sahib. She might carry out her threat to loose on us a second tiger--a she-one--much worse."

"Uh-huh."

"So it seemed best--"

"To silence me by killing me, eh? How did you cross the river?"

"That was easy, since your honor let the raft get caught to the far bank by a tree-root. Was there not the rope? We drew that tight and I crossed by it, hand over hand, being better used to such dangerous work than the others. Was it not I who received a reward for rescuing a Prince in mid-stream? And having crossed I sought a club, but it was difficult to find one in the darkness. The one I cut at last was too light. Thus the blow I struck was feeble and your honor--"

"Where is your knife, with which you cut that club?" the babu asked him.

"It was in my loin-cloth. But it fell in the mud when I slipped, as I tried to crawl silently into the cart. Otherwise I could have used it, and your honor--"

"I will give you a new knife," said the babu.

"That is generous. But it is only fair. I--"

"With which to cut your own throat for being such a frog -brained jungli!"

"Nay, I will need it badly for my work in the fields when the rains are over."

"If I let you sit there near the cart-tail will you jump off and run home?"

"Nay, I need a new knife, sahib. Where can we buy it unless in the city?"

"Then what?"

"I will go home. I will tell them in the village you are one whose heart is so big that it swells your belly. They will excuse my failure when I show

the new, expensive knife."

"Clothe yourself with sacks. Sit silent. I am sick of talking to you."

So the cart creaked on and there was no more conversation. Wind, rain, trees, and frogs united in an ocean-chorus; it was easy to imagine that the cart was a boat on a storm-tossed sea. The villager, almost invisible even against the sky at the open cart -end; sat with his chin on his knees and seemed to meditate. Chullunder Ghose, wrapped in his blanket, cuddled himself at the front end, in a corner, undiscoverable even to a bat's eyes, it was so dark. Even when the jolting of the cart-wheels moved him he was quite invisible.

The cart stopped. Some one spoke to the driver. Chullunder Ghose, ear to the curtain, caught the driver's answer.

"Nay, I am from this side of the ford. I know not who he is."

"Is he a fat man?"

"Look within the cart and judge that for yourself."

Footsteps splashed around the cart. Some one hooded in a flour sack leaned in, from the rear. At the same time there was a faint click, but to the trained ears of the babu it was clearly not a pistol. It was probably a flashlight, damaged by rain, short-circuited, useless. A man swore scurrilously.

"Who is in here?" he demanded.

The villager stirred uneasily. The man seized him and dragged him out into the darkness.

"Who are you? Who else is in there?"

"No one," said the villager.

"Not a babu? Not a very fat man? Not he who was camped beyond the river?"

"Nay, nay! I am from that village. I have seen that fat one--I have spoken with him. He is still there. How could he have crossed the river?"

"How did you cross?"

"On a horse--but it drowned the horse. I, clinging to its tail, was thrown up on the bank on this side."

"Why are you traveling?"

"To reach the dok-i-tar. My eyes fail and I fear I go blind. I have heard there is a sahib--"

Stealthily Chullunder Ghose moved to the cart-tail, the villager's club in his fist. The frog-noise and the rain that spattered on the roof effectually drowned any noise he made. He crouched in the corner opposite to where the villager had sat.

"You jungli, you are lying!" said the voice in outer darkness. "He who drives said--"

Unexpectedness was two-thirds of Chullunder Ghose's method, and the other third was use of intuition. He decided there was only one man to be dealt with. He sprang--two hundred and fifty pounds of suddenness and muscle. He struck with the club with all his might. Luck aided him. Square on the top of a skull the club broke in two and the man went down into a puddle like a pole-axed steer. The babu set a foot on him. He waited; there might be some one else;

although he guessed not.

"See who he is," he commanded presently. The villager knelt --felt-- pulled at something.

"Nay, your honor means, who was he? He is dead now. And he had this."

He thrust a heavy, old-fashioned revolver into the babu's hand. By its weight--by the balanceless feel of it Chullunder Ghose guessed, almost beyond the possibility of error, that it came from the Rajahs armory. The Rajah's private weapons were as new and costly as caprice could dictate and his credit provide, but his soldiers and policemen--and his murderers and bullies--had to use what other armies sold as bargains fifty years ago. However, the babu struck a match to make sure, recognized the Rajah's monogram on the holster worn by a man in plain clothes who lay prone in a puddle, and then threw the revolver away. He heard it splash into a deep hole.

"Are you sure he is dead? I also think so. Get into the cart."

He climbed in too, and resumed his blanket in the corner.

"Cheloh!" he commanded, drawing aside the curtain. "Why do we wait? Are the horses as stupid as you?"

The driver whipped and yelled. The cart creaked forward and the rain came down in blustering squalls that almost blew the roof off. It was several minutes before Chullunder Ghose even attempted to make his voice heard. Then he moved a little closer to the villager and asked him:

"Did I say you are a frog-brained jungli?"

"Yes, but it is not true."

"I repeat it. You wished to kill me. That man would have done it for you."

"Yes, I guessed that, sahib."

"Why, then, did you tell those lies and say I was not in here?"

"I need a new knife, don't I?"

"Krishna! You shall have a good one," said the babu. "I can use such a madman as you are!"

Chapter VI.

"The trouble with impossibilities is that they so often happen."

Major Eustace Smith, aged fifty-four and rather seedy for his years, lay in bed at the Residency. There was nothing much wrong except for a boil on the back of his neck, which made him irritable. The damp and the dripping of rain depressed him; and, since the doctor went on leave, he had been lonely, although he and the doctor detested each other as only two bachelors can who have no other society than each other for months at a time. He enjoyed not having to have breakfast with the doctor, even though he missed him and needed his attentions now. Bed was comfortable. Office details were obnoxious to a military man--of the old school, dammit!--and there was nothing his clerk could not attend to; his successor, three months hence, might suit himself and find as much fault with the clerk as he pleased. In the meantime, the less business the better. Three months--then a pension, thank God!--and a little cottage in Madiera, where a fellow can live cheaply and enjoy the climate.

However, as he reached for a book and a cigarette he saw a scorpion on the pillow. Scorpions made him half-hysterical. He slew the thing and yelled for his servant; and by the time the servant came he was too upset to take things easy any longer. He swore at the servant and made him examine everything--clothes in the closet, boots, suitcases, curtains. Then he put on slippers and his bathrobe, changed the bandage on his boil and decided to try the veranda that faced the Residency garden--a mere patch of shrubbery and draggled flowers circled by a high stone wall. He ordered tea brought out there.

It always annoyed him to be interrupted at his morning tea. As a soldier he had had to rise at five a.m. or earlier and attend to all sorts of details. But "political life," according to Smith's view, called for military dignity, not military rigor. He still wore his graying moustache in fierce, waxed points, and he was ramrod-straight, however lazy he might feel. But business before eleven in the morning? No, sir! Not except in grave emergency.

So he swore when his servant brought out word to the veranda that Hawkes sahib wished to see him. It was bad enough to be expected to interview any one at that hour. But he especially detested retired infantry sergeants who eked out their pensions by staying in India and getting jobs in Native States. Such fellows ought to live in England, where they have equals and where their rotten manners consequently clash less with the social standards of their betters.

However, he knew Hawkes could not be exactly looking forward to the interview; he had been to particular pains to impress on Hawkes that he was not a welcome visitor. So he supposed there was some news that Hawkes, at any rate, believed important.

"Show the man in," he commanded. "Take that other chair away. I'll keep him standing."

Hawkes stood five feet ten in heavy boots and a ready-made English serge suit. He had left his waterproof outside, and he came to attention from old habit, so that his fine figure showed to advantage and made Smith look and feel slack as he sat staring at him in pyjamas, stocking-less feet, slippers, not yet shaven. Smith, conscious of the contrast, decided to begin by taking Hawkes down a peg or two.

"A pity," he said, "that a man of your physique should loaf his days away when England needs guts and muscle. Native States are no place for pensioned soldiers. What good are you doing here?"

"I seem to satisfy His Highness, sir."

"Don't you flatter yourself?"

"And I'm keeping off the dole two sisters, one down with tuberculosis--and my mother."

"Keeping them in idleness, I don't doubt."

"Well, sir, I'm not idle. And I didn't come here to waste your time. There is something I think you ought to know, sir."

Smith's eyes glared with irritation.

"I have told you before, Hawkes, I have very reliable sources of information. Nothing goes on in the state that I don't know about before you know it. I resent your interference. Unless you know of something that I don't know--"

"It's about that tiger near the village beyond the river."

"Bah! That old wives' story! Let me tell you something for your own

good. The political significance of tales like that is wrapped up in obscurity too deep for inexperience to penetrate. I heard it long ago: a woman in the jungle is supposed to possess a man-eating tiger that destroys whole villages. Well, put it in your pipe and smoke it! It's a mare's nest. It's a bit of local politics, in which His Highness and the priests are engaged in jockeying for influence. If I hear of you taking a hand, I warn you, I shall insist on the Rajah getting rid of you at once."

"You threatened that before, sir; but he can't. I've a contract. I don't wish to show you disrespect--"

"You'd better not!"

"And politics don't mean a thing to me," said Hawkes, "but I intend to do my job. When I tell you that there's a tiger killing people--and that the Rajah nor any one else'll do a thing about it--you may make up your mind that I'm telling the truth."

"Is that so? Very well, Sergeant Know-it-all, why don't you go yourself and shoot the tiger?"

"Because of politics and me not touching 'em. My job is inspecting stores and checking sales and purchases."

"Ah! Why not, then, attend to business?"

"Very well, sir. I've reported. Thank you for the interview. Good morning."

Smith did not even answer him. He scowled. As soon as Hawkes had left he got up and began pacing the veranda.

"Dammit, I suppose I ought to go myself and shoot the bloody tiger; that 'ud stop this particular feud for a while. The brute is killing

people--no doubt of that. But in this weather? And with boils on my neck! Mud--rain--snakes--malaria--and then a tiger in a ruined temple? Fat chance for a pension I'd have! Somebody would draw my life-insurance! And I'm not here to do the Rajah's dirty work. I think I'll send for Syed-Suraj. That's it. He's a slimy devil, but he has tact. He can put it to the Rajah unofficially that something has got to be done about this--and done now. That's it. Diplomacy. Nothing in writing that would call for explanations to the Foreign Office. Keep away from red tape. Yes, I'll send for Syed-Suraj."

Europe, profligacy, and the need to refinance himself by stealth had educated Syed-Suraj to an understanding of the value, among other things, of promptness in his dealings with the nervous, Nordic blonde. He arrived almost too soon for Smith to be shaved, and he had to wait in the outer office, where he fingered correspondence while the office babu's back was turned. He was amused to read that the C. I. D. requested prompt attention to the forwarding of Number D.3's confidential reports; and the Department authorized D.3 to draw whatever sums he might need up to Rs. 250, against his own voucher.

One other letter equally amused him. The Foreign Office, in view of strained political conditions, urged that foreigners --particularly doctors--should be discouraged from entering Native States unless provided with a special Foreign Office passport. The attention of the Foreign Office had been called to instances where aliens, possessed of medical skill and enthusiasm, but having no political experience, had acted indiscreetly and contributed to local unrest by exciting caste prejudice. Smith came in before he had a chance to read the other letters. Smith invited him into the library, replete with volumes of the Indian Census, law-books, and the works of Edgar Wallace. They sat down facing each other in front of the oil-stove.

"How are you?"

"How is His Highness?"

The polite formalities took half a minute. Then there was a rather awkward pause, unbroken by Syed-Suraj, who was half afraid that the news of the death of Chullunder Ghose already might have reached Smith's ears. It was news that would have to break sooner or later. His eyes were alert, hard, less simian, more brilliant.

"Suppose you and I have a friendly chat," said Smith; "no witnesses."

"A pleasure, I assure you."

"Unofficial, of course."

"That condition imposes itself, since I have no official standing."

"Understood. Do you mind telling me how matters stand at the moment as regards the quarrel between His Highness and the priests?"

Syed-Suraj chuckled, visibly relieved. "Why shouldn't I tell?" he answered. "It's no secret. They insist on his building a temple, and he has no money. They insist he purify himself by an expensive ritual. He will not."

"Why not?" Smith asked. "Is his personal ease so important to him that he can't concede a bit to superstition? Church and State must hold together, dammit,--or we'll all be Gandhi-ized. The next thing will be Communism. Nobody requires His Highness to believe in gods that were thought good enough for his ancestors. But he might at least pretend a bit. How else, in these difficult times, are we going to preserve our sacred institutions? How shall aristocracy survive in the

face of Communism, if the Native Princes don't stand with the Church? Do you recall what James the First of England said? 'No bishop, no king!' Tell that to His Highness."

Syed-Suraj placed the tips of his fingers together, as he had seen the English lawyers do in consultation. He imagined it impressed the English. He particularly wanted to impress Smith, not that he admired or trusted him, but he admired and trusted his present royal patron even less. It might be time to consider safety. British practice, which is frequently above-board, is invariably based, at least politically, on careful underground investigation--spy-work, to put it bluntly. Why had Chullunder Ghose been sent by the C. I. D. to snoop and listen? Smith, as Resident, was the unacknowledged but none-the-less actual--even if duly incompetent--link in that part of the world between spies and their secretive but immensely powerful masters--men with misleading titles, who can make or ruin any one by hinting at the existence of mysterious, anonymous reports. Syed-Suraj hoped to have his own name inscribed on the list of desirables. But he was shrewd enough to know that to betray his present patron unadroitly would be to destroy his own chances. Treachery, if it is to succeed among gentlemen, has to be cloaked in decency and faithful phrases.

"It occurs to me," he said, "that this might be your opportunity to crown your career with a ribbon."

"Pah!" Smith's scorn of decorations was proportioned to the probabilities. "My dear fellow, I have never let such considerations influence me for a moment."

He believed that, perhaps. But Syed-Suraj did not. "Even governments," said Syed-Suraj, "now and then are grateful. Many of us who have experienced your tact and kindliness would dearly love to see you receive some official recognition before you retire."

"Tut-tut--let us talk of more important matters."

"The forced abdication of the Maharajah of Indore," said Syed-Suraj, coming promptly to the point, "undoubtedly has strengthened British influence in some ways. It has drawn attention to the fact that the British-Indian Government can, when it pleases, discipline--by removal--any Rajah who ignores what we might call the rules of the game."

"Yes, Yes." Smith shifted nervously. The conversation was getting a bit too serious to suit him. Even minor issues, such as tigers, were a nuisance; major ones were anathema. However, he had started it; he had to listen.

"On the other hand," said Syed-Suraj, "it has called attention to the--let us say, vulnerability, of our ruling Princes. There is a feeling that a Prince no longer has the unconditional--and, shall I call it, ingenuous backing?--of the British Raj. A Prince has become, to some extent, a skittle, one might say, who can be knocked down by a wave of indignation."

"That is an extreme view--too suggestive of hysteria," Smith answered.

"Ah! But we must consider local prejudices, politics and misconceptions. It is not on facts, but on their interpretation that rebellions are based."

"Rebellions?" said Smith. He looked scandalized.

"Revolutions, if you prefer the word. The priests have always exercised enormous influence in this State. They resent the present ruler's rather careless--and frequently, I may say, stupid--efforts to destroy that influence. They foresee--or they think they do--that the

democratization of India, aimed at by Gandhi and rapidly gathering headway, must produce a conflict between new and old ideas. In plain words, they believe they must fight to the death for their privileges, sooner or later. They appreciate that phrase you wisely quoted just now--'no bishop, no king.' They would, however, say, 'no king, no bishop.' Therefore, they feel that the reigning Rajah, in order to preserve the established order, must make common cause with them and uphold their dignity and influence, that they, in turn, may uphold his. Our mutual friend, my patron, will not see that."

"Damn him!" Smith said fervently.

"The priests, in consequence, would vastly rather see his cousin on the throne. The cousin, as undoubtedly you know, is a religious man, untainted by vice or cynicism, and remarkably attentive to the drift of world affairs. He is also wealthy in his own right. I know him well. A very honorable man. Perhaps a trifle over-altruistic, but sufficiently shrewd to live over the border, in British-India, where he can keep in touch with his--ah--his admirers in the State, but be more or less safe from--ah--well, you know what so often happens to the heirs - apparent to a throne."

Smith scowled. That was another unpleasant subject. It was notorious that for hundreds of years those few direct heirs to the throne of Kutchdullub who had not been murdered had survived by luck or accident, or through the watchfulness of faithful servants.

"Let us hope that British example has relegated that sort of thing to the dishonored past, Syed-Suraj."

"Yes, let us hope so. Hope is wholesome. The point is, the cousin is sick--very sick. He is said to have ulcers. Rather rashly--in my opinion--he is just now visiting a little place he owns up in the mountains in this State."

"Yes, I know that. He paid me a call on the way," Smith answered.

"He was taken worse there."

"You suspect--?" Smith almost used undiplomatic language. Syed-Suraj diplomatically did not notice it.

"The priests--the High Church party, that is--are afraid he may die and be lost to their cause. They believe, whether rightly or wrongly, that medical--possibly surgical--skill might save him. And they don't trust the man from Madras who has charge of the case."

"Too bad the Residency doctor went on leave," said Smith.

"Yes, altogether too bad. In the circumstances it is only natural the High Church party should be restless. They are in a position to put the screws on. They intend to do it, in order, if possible, to save the life of the heir to the throne. They want him on it, and they mean to get him there by hook or by crook."

"Ridiculous!" said Smith. "Impossible!"

"The trouble with impossibilities," Syed-Suraj answered, "is that they so often happen. The High Church party has been most ingenious. They have a tiger that is killing people. And they have a story that exactly fits the superstitious prejudices of the peasants, while it tickles the sense of humor of more intelligent people."

"Yes, I've heard that tiger story. Something must be done about it."

"What, though? From time immemorial it has been the Rajah's privilege, in person or by deputy, to shoot all tigers that molest the people. If he shoots that tiger he will find himself denounced for having violated the ancient sanctuary where a so-called priestess

keeps the brute. How she keeps him there, I don't know, but she does it. And remember that the Rajah, from the High Church viewpoint, is in a state of gross impurity that he refuses to correct by proper ritual and sacrifice. It would be a scandalous act for him to cross the threshold, even of a sacred ruin, no matter for what reason. They could make an awful stink about it."

"There would be riots. He might get killed--that's almost probable, there are so many fanatics who have been stirred up by the propaganda."

"Whose propaganda? The priests?"

"You bet. They are masters of it. And what will happen if he does not shoot the tiger? They will say not only that he neglects his duty, but that the tiger is sent as a curse from the angry gods because he broke his promise to rebuild that ruin in the jungle. And he can't rebuild it, even if he cared to, since he has no money. Consequence--even worse rioting!"

"Dammit, perhaps I'd better go and shoot that brute myself," said Smith.

"But if you do, my friend, you will end your career in a hornets' nest instead of being decorated for discretion!"

"What do you suggest?"

"I don't know. It occurred to me that possibly you might--ah --let us say, intuitively, guess--the--ah--the British attitude toward the Rajah's cousin. If he should come to the throne, why then, of course, the priests would get rid of the tiger. They'd poison the brute."

Smith was horrified. He was as capable of treachery as any other

nerveless, self-important bureaucrat; but minor treachery --nothing heroic--nothing that might involve him in a nine-day tempest in a teapot at the close of his career. He had a genius for minor treachery. Already he was shaping in his mind a full report of this strictly private conversation, to be sent to Delhi, where it would do Syed-Suraj no good. But now he thought of something better. He could kill two birds with one stone, and retain his own reputation for tact.

"It's as simple as most problems are when you face them," he answered. "I can see no reason to take official cognizance of this. But take my compliments to His Highness, and suggest to him that he should send that fellow Hawkes to shoot the tiger. I am told he is an excellent shot."

"But sacrilege--"

"Yes, certainly. He can blame Hawkes, and dismiss him--pack him off home to England. Hawkes was in here not two hours ago. I had to reprimand him for trying to interfere in what was none of his business. I can testify that Hawkes is an incorrigible meddler."

"Hawkes has a contract--"

"He can be dismissed for cause," Smith answered. "Use tact. Warn His Highness to be careful how he instructs Hawkes. That's all."

Chapter VII.

"You should have been the Unknown Soldier."

From the British Residency, where a Union Jack drooped dismally on a pole from which sun and rain had flaked most of the paint, to the Rajah's palace, where damp-chilled and disgusted sepoys stood on

guard before the pretentious iron gate, was a mile and a half. There was an avenue of trees, then winding, cobbled streets--a maze of narrow-fronted, mostly two-storied houses with flat roofs, built around tiny courtyards in which the hot-weather life of the city was lived. But during the monsoon most of the life was indoors, where it grew shrill and irritable --over-crowded.

At about the time when Louis XIV was inviting bankruptcy by building palaces to house his ignorance of economics, a Frenchman of curious character, possessing an amazing gift of salesmanship, had inspired the despot who then occupied the throne of Kutchdullub with ambition to rebuild the city. Nothing sanitary --such indecencies had not been thought of--but as grandiose and gimcrack as a stack of exposition buildings. Naturally, the job was never finished; tax-exasperated merchants had the Rajah poisoned, and the Frenchman was chased off the roof of the house he had built for himself; the city dogs ate what was left of him. The houses had come to their natural end and had been replaced by indigenous Indian architecture. But the squares remained, and the trees still graced them. So the center of the city was a spaciously conceived oasis of four paved quadrangles. One faced the palace; another the temple of Kali; the third was mainly occupied by shops belonging to the more successful merchants; and the fourth square was a marketplace. Normally the latter hummed with chaffering and stank of cabbage, onions, and spice; but in the monsoon it was a waste of bluish-gray cement on which sheets of rain rippled. Around three sides of that was a stucco colonnade, beneath which were the shops--half -shuttered now to keep the draught out--of the dealers in corn, enamel-ware; and all the cheap stuff that peasants delight in. There, also, was the store of Ram Dass, dealer in mortgages, money, and grain. It had yellow-painted shutters. It occupied eight whole arches of the colonnade.

Wheeled traffic was not allowed in that square, and the prohibition

was enforced by steps and a row of ancient iron cannons set three feet apart with their muzzles downward, along the side of the square that opened to the main street. So even Rajahs had to walk if they should wish to visit Ram Dass, and a Rajah's confidential dick-o'dirty-work was under the same necessity. Syed-Suraj had to leave the Rajah's silver-plated Rolls-Royce standing in the street and mince amid the puddles under a big umbrella held for him by the liveried footman. He hated, as much as a cat, to get his little feet wet. And he hated to wait in the draughty shop. But Ram Dass kept him waiting--sent out word that he was being treated for lumbago by a doctor and could not come until the torture was over.

Ram Dass was a comfortably fat, gray-bearded veteran with twinkling eyes, who no more had lumbago than he had melancholia. There was nothing whatever wrong with him, or with his bank account. Voluminously clothed in clean, white cotton and the little round cap of a bunnia, he sat cross-legged on a pile of corn-sacks, with a kerosene stove beside him, on which a kettle sang cheerfully. In front of him, on an up-turned, empty box, there was a teapot, sugar, cream, two teacups, and a silver case of cigarettes. Beyond that wholly satisfactory and swankless table, on another pile of corn-sacks, equally contented, sat Chullunder Ghose. He was enormously bulky, but there was something about him--it might be his sense of humor--that suggested they were two of a kind.

"If they think you are dead," said Ram Dass, "they will presently unthink it. You are about as easy to disguise as an elephant. Some one must have seen you enter my shop. You are well known. And as soon as the Rajah learns about his bully lying dead in the rain he will--"

"Oh no, he won't," said Chullunder Ghose. "He knows I could appeal to the Resident if he should have me arrested. Even if he locked me

in a secret place, he would know that you or some one else could--"

"Could avenge your death. What good would that do? He would swear that you had died by an accident and bring a hundred witnesses to prove it. Then what?"

Chullunder Ghose smiled and sipped tea. Then he helped himself to an expensive cigarette. "The god of accidents," he remarked, and blew the sweet smoke through his nose, "is a respecter of persons. Self am favorite. You ascertain the odds as soon as possible, and bet on this babu."

"I never bet."

"No? Why, then, did you lend His Highness, yesterday, ten thousand rupees, as you say you did?"

"Only five thousand. I took his note for ten."

"What is that but betting--on a, weak quail?"

"I agreed to lend another five--same terms, same interest --provided I receive the contract to supply grain for the elephants for five years. That is why Syed-Suraj waits outside there. He has brought the contract. He has come for the money."

"You believe, then, that the Rajah will continue on the throne as much as five weeks?" asked Chullunder Ghose. "For a man of affairs you are credulous--credulous. Pour me more tea."

"We could do without him," Ram Dass answered, pouring. "But they tell me his cousin is dying--poison, no doubt. So who shall succeed him? The British always shut their eyes and ears unless they see a way clear; and the whole world knows they have trouble enough with

Gandhi and the Nationalists, and the Round Table Conference, and unemployment, and God knows what else. They certainly don't want to have to add this State to British India. The nervous old wreck at the Residency, who would have hysterics if he were called on to act with determination, is sufficient proof to me that the British don't mean to be drastic."

"Any rioting yet?" asked Chullunder Ghose.

"No, none yet. This is bad weather for rioting. There will be some, though, unless some one kills that tiger. Priests are just as stupid as Princes; they have overdone it this time, and they don't know how to back down. As if the Rajah would care that their tiger eats a hundred people! That will only react on the priests when people wake up. Then what?"

"Let us interview the jackal."

"Bring him in here?"

"Why not? But why lend money?"

"I want that contract."

"Have it. But save five thousand rupees. Hawkesey never takes commissions. Offer Hawkesey good grain at a fair price, promise him you'll not cheat, and ask him to get you such a contract next month. Hawkesey is on the establishment. A change on the throne would make no difference to Hawkesey's job. He loves those elephants. Moldy corn delivered to the elephants would make Hawkesey your enemy. I think I would prefer the tiger--or myself. I also am a sentimental adversary. *Verb. sap.*"

Syed-Suraj was admitted: A discreet clerk bore a chair in front of him

and set it where the light would fall straight on its occupant's face. That act of courtesy made it perfectly clear to Syed-Suraj that he was not being received as an equal. The democracy of corn-sacks was denied to him; he was a mere ambassador from a throne, looked upon from the corn-sacks with contempt. It amused him, or at any rate he tried to think it did.

"I forgive you the lumbago on condition that I need not drink tea," he remarked. Then he faced Chullunder Ghose. "You certainly surprise me. Where are you from?"

The babu winked at him. "I surprised myself. Question is, what will His Highness do with *corpus delicti?* Is it found yet?"

"Oho! So you killed a man?"

"I?" said the babu. "Telling you things is a lot too dangerous; you have brains. For instance, I would not dream of hinting to you that a wise rat leaves a rotten ship."

Syed-Suraj produced one of his own cigarettes and lighted it, cupping his hands around the match to hide his face a moment while he controlled its expression. Then he turned to Ram Dass:

"Do I get that money?"

"No," said Ram Dass.

"I have brought the contract."

"Tear it up," said Ram Dass.

Syed-Suraj stared from face to face. Chullunder Ghose spoke swiftly before Ram Dass could put in another word:

"You know something, don't you? Why not tell us?"

"I have no news. I was at the Residency. Smith was as usual--futile."

"Did you fall or were you pushed?" the babu asked him. "I mean, were you sent or sent for?"

Syed-Suraj dropped the cigarette and set his heel on it. He laid his hands on his knees and faced the babu. He grinned like a cat.

"If you want information," he retorted, "you will have to play fair. Is the net out for me too?"

"No," the babu answered.

"But the C. I. D.?"

"I never heard of that. What is it?" asked the babu.

"Cursed Inquisitive Dog Department," Syed-Suraj answered. "If you won't play fair, damn you!"

"All right, I shall have to ask Smith what you talked about and, if he does not tell me, I can tell him! You were either sent or summoned. What is there for him and you to talk about but His Highness, the priests and a tiger? Did he send for you to talk about the weather?"

"I believe you have already talked with Smith."

"Your beliefs are as unimportant to me as the day-before -yesterday's dinner that I didn't eat," Chullunder Ghose answered. "I wasn't joking when I said I think you have brains. I am giving you a chance to use them."

Syed-Suraj stared a minute at the oil-stove. He looked at Ram Dass,

but the merchant was stroking a black cat that had laid a dead mouse on the sacks beside him.

"Clever pussy! Fool mouse ran the wrong way, did he?" Ram Dass tossed the mouse into a corner and the cat leapt after it.

Syed-Suraj drew a folded contract from his inner pocket, crackled it to attract attention, and then tore it to pieces. "A nod," he remarked, "is as good as a wink. Let us exchange confidences."

He was interrupted. A turbaned clerk came in to announce that Hawkes sahib wished to speak to Ram Dass.

"Ask him to be good enough to wait. Be sure to give him a cigar."

The clerk went out again and Syed-Suraj assumed a rather bored expression. He had evidently thought of a bright idea; he wished to hide its newness; he was conscious that the bright, mild eyes of Chullunder Ghose were studying him--smiling.

"Well, it was, as you say, about the tiger," he began. "I went for a quite informal conversation, but Smith seemed worried about the Rajah's difficulties. One thing led to another until we got pretty deep into local politics, and at last he asked me my opinion. So I gave it. I suggested he should shoot the tiger. He objected, so I offered an alternative. I told him to ask Hawkes to do it. That ought to solve the problem. Hawkes can be the scapegoat afterwards."

"Does Smith pay Hawkes?" asked Ram Dass.

"No. The State of Kutchdullub pays Hawkes. Smith saw that point. You got Hawkes his job, Chullunder Ghose; so I suggest that you should tell Hawkes to go after the tiger. Hawkes would listen to you. You would get the credit with the C. I. D. for having pulled a trigger

that saved a nasty situation."

"And a nice, kind Rajah! No," the babu answered, "we will let you have the credit. You may need it. You tell Hawkesey."

"If I do, and if he speaks to you about it, will you put a word in?"

Chullunder Ghose stretched his naked feet toward the stove to warm them.

"Why not? The suggestion, though, should come from you in the first instance, not me. I will add my influence."

"Then I will tell him now," said Syed-Suraj. "May I count on you also to mention my name in the proper quarter?"

Chullunder Ghose nodded. Syed-Suraj bowed with semi-serious respect to both men and went out, shutting the door behind him.

"Well, that settles it," said Ram Dass. "You have saved a situation, as he calls it. But you have also saved a monster on a throne that he defiles every day of the week. You have probably condemned the Rajah's cousin to a painful death by poison. You have certainly sacrificed Hawkes--and that means you have cost me a contract. I don't think you are so clever."

"Clever?" said the babu. "I am treacherous. And I believe in devils. I believe I know them when I see them. Don't keep Hawkesey too long."

Ram Dass, contract still in mind, went out to do the honors. Five minutes later he himself led Hawkes in. Hawkes looked curiously like a London Bobby with his long black waterproof and the hood drawn up over his head. He was wholesome. As he pushed the hood back

and his eyes grew used to the gloom amid piled-up corn-sacks, he stared--grinned--held out his hand:

"You, you damned old son-of-a-gun! Say, when did you blow in? And why not my house? Damn--I'd sooner see you than a pay-raise! Remember last time you and I got drunk together? It's about time for an encore."

"Drunk since?" asked the babu.

"Hell, no! You're the only one I drink with. I could pass for a teetotaller if you weren't living."

"What is new?" the babu asked him.

"Nothing. Same old round of checking up and finding fault. Yes, there is, though--damn, the sight o' you 'ud make a man forget his mother. Have you heard o' the tiger that's killing and eating 'em, over beyond the river?"

"I have seen that tiger," said the babu. "I have come from there. I saw it kill a man."

"Trust you to know everything! Smith as good as called me a liar today for reporting it. Was that fellow Syed-Suraj in here? Do you trust him? He button-holed me as he went out, said he had the Rajah's orders to instruct me to go after the brute tomorrow morning. Do you think that's on the level?"

"On about three levels," said the babu. "What did you say?"

"Me? I asked for it in writing."

"Hawkesey, you are much too sane to do me any credit! You should have been the Unknown Soldier! Take an elephant and start

tomorrow morning.

"Do you mean that?"

"But you must not shoot the tiger!"

"What's the idea?"

"You must find out for me how they keep a tiger in a ruined temple and persuade it to return when it has finished hunting. When you have found that out, you must come back and tell me."

"You've the call on me," said Hawkes. "I can't say no to you. You know that."

"Some men can forget more easily than you do, Hawkesey. Can you manage to get word to Syed-Suraj? Ask to see him. Say you didn't understand him. Ask him to repeat the conversation. Then agree to start tomorrow. And then do it. But as one friend to another, kindly--please--don't kill the tiger, even if he bites you! I require him."

"Alive?"

"Yes, and gnashful! Teeth, tail, talons and a nasty disposition!"

"Won't you tell me what the game is?"

"Hawkesey, I would tell you anything, if only you weren't honest! Wait until afterwards. But bring back word and tell me all that happens."

"O.K., since it's you, old trusty."

Chapter VIII.

"It happened thiswise, sahibs."

The head mahout was angrier than even the monsoon weather justified.

"Ten thousand devils take that Haw-kiss-ee! Now he gets up in darkness to punish the sun if it rises late! See him look at his watch that he doubtless stole from some one! Hurry-hurry-hurry!"

It was a presentation watch; it had been given to Hawkes by a grateful general as a reward for inventing a wonderful trick for teaching raw recruits to shoot straight. He had saved his country millions of pounds and nobody could ever guess how many lives, but he rightly considered the watch a more than ample compensation. It was a chronometer watch. It had been made by scientists. Hawkes had a touching and abiding faith in science.

That was half the secret of his friendship with Chullunder Ghose. He knew the babu could talk nine languages and think in terms of quantum; drunk or sober, he could quote Kant, Einstein, the Mahabharata, Shakespeare, and Plato with equal humorous familiarity. So the babu was on a pedestal in Hawkes's mind. But there were other reasons; the babu was a genuine friend in need, with secret influence that he had earned by merit. It was the babu who had wangled him the job that saved him from the dreaded half-existence on a color-sergeant's pension back in England and enabled him to keep his sisters off the dole.

So whatever the babu said or did was scientific, straight, dependable, in Hawkes's opinion, to be betted on--blind, if need be--and unquestionably on the level. There were no reserves in Hawkes's mind; he had tested the babu and judged that he could trust him. Dynamite might modify Hawkes's judgment by destroying Hawkes, but he was otherwise as changeless as the honest flavor of an onion

or as the habit of water to run downhill; which was why the babu liked him. And Hawkes started on an elephant at daybreak, having talked the evening before with Syed-Suraj as requested, because Hawkes invariably kept a promise.

He was curious, but not offended, to discover that a sly-eyed villager from beyond the river wished to ride with him. The fellow had a big new knife in an embossed sheath and was inordinately proud of it. He also had a *chiteh* from the babu --just a scrap of paper, with the words: "Please take him. C.G."

"Up you get," said Hawkes, "you naked golliwog; you'll need a blanket. Here, take this one. You may keep it."

It had been a good one in its day. It was an *ante bellum* blanket, big and beautifully criss-crossed by a German-Jew designer's notion of a Highland tartan. It was a bit ragged, but the hole in the middle would do to stick a fellow's head through. It established in the mind of the villager the opinion that Hawkes was a wealthy and profligate man, from whom important favors might be coaxed if he were suitably managed. The question being how to manage him, he sat silent at the rear of the howdah, on the left-hand side, remembering all the tales he had ever heard about a white man's blind obedience to unknown laws. He naturally got them badly mixed up; it seldom happens that a naked plowman from a mud-and-wattle village by a jungle understands an Englishman, however hard he tries to. But he can try.

The elephant squelched through the mud and enjoyed it. The howdah bellyband, his belly, and his legs, became a slimy, comfortable mess that did not dry and cake off, since the rain, that had lessened a bit and had warmed since yesterday, streamed down his sides in rivulets and kept the paste thin. The mahout was miserable, since he

had to face the rain; but he did not dare to vent his temper on the animal, because he knew Hawkes's strange objection to the habit; and he also knew that Hawkes had whisky with him. Liking whisky, he proposed to be rewarded with a tot for good behavior. And the elephant, who also liked it, knew that Hawkes invariably spared some, to be poured on the enormous loaf of corn-meal that formed part of the load in the howdah. So it was best foot first, to reach dinner as soon as might be, and in spite of the rain and the hurrying clouds there was nobody feeling that life did not have compensations. Hawkes smoked, with a hand over his pipe to keep the rain from drowning the tobacco.

On the left was jungle, on the right an endless waste of water reaching to the sky-line, that would presently be plowed fields when the flood subsided. Far ahead were mountains curtained by pearly mist that sometimes, when the wind grew squally, let the sun through and presented sudden vistas of green-and-gold forested ranges. There was not a human to be seen until the villager grunted to call Hawkes's attention, and Hawkes saw four men in the khaki uniform of State constabulary, staggering along through nearly knee-deep mud towards them.

They were carrying something. It was a litter made of poles and twigs. A man lay on it, who was not in uniform. They set down the litter and waited for the elephant, and as it drew near two of the men walked out into the road--looking determined--pulling down their tunics and squaring their shoulders to show authority.

"Halt!" one of them commanded. "Here we have a corpse. It must be taken to Kutchdullub."

"Do you mistake me for an undertaker?" Hawkes asked. There was neither love nor admiration lost between him and the State constabulary. He regarded them as blackmailing bullies, in league

with criminals, and eager to be bribed by any one. They sullenly resented him as an alien who had no right to criticize them, but who did it bluntly and without that tolerance that men who drew the Rajah's pay should feel for one another.

"Who is he?" Hawkes asked.

"One of us. He was on plain-clothes duty. We were on patrol and found him lying near here, raving with a cracked skull."

"Could he talk sense?" Hawkes asked.

"Not until shortly before he died. Then he spoke of a cart. But if there was one, then the rain has washed away the marks of it. And he spoke of a man in the dark, who struck him as they stood together talking near the cart-tail."

From the howdah Hawkes stared at the muddied corpse on the litter beside the road. He observed an empty holster.

"Where is his revolver?" he demanded.

"Missing. Whoever struck him, took it."

"What did the assailant look like? Did he tell you?"

"No; he said he couldn't see him in the darkness. He could only say a few words. Then he grew delirious again and soon died."

"Was he on patrol too? Why was he alone? You plunderers always hunt in couples, when there aren't a dozen of you. What was he doing?"

"Secret duty."

"Dirty work, eh? Why are you patroling?"

"We were looking for him."

"That so? You expected trouble, did you?"

Silence. Surly glances from the four men, then a sour grin from the spokesman. Hawkes stared at the litter again.

"What have you underneath that sacking?" He could see the edge of a shovel. "You look like a burial party to me."

The villager in the howdah interrupted:

"It was a priest who did it," he said suddenly in Hawkes's ear.

One of the policemen overheard him. "Come down here, you!"

"Stay where you are," Hawkes ordered. "Tell your story."

Fame! A pulpit! Oratory from a Rajah's elephant! Police for audience! A friend, not only reckless with expensive blankets, but not even scared of the Rajah's "constabeels." Ecstasy! Also a vision of favors to come!

"It happened thiswise, sahibs. Having lost my old knife, I must get a new one. Therefore I swam the river and set forth on foot to Kutchdullub. There rode a priest in a cart, and I sought to overtake the cart, being minded to ask the favor of a ride into the city, as was not unreasonable. Many a time that priest has drunk our cow-milk at the village, it being he who brings the he-goats for the temple sacrifice."

"What temple?"

"That one that lies in ruins in the jungle."

"Sacrifices?"

"Once a week that priest brings seven goats, all he-ones. There is a daily sacrifice. However, we of the village offer no goats, since a tiger slays too many of them, so we told the priests to--"

The constable swore impatiently to keep the story within limits.

"Tell what happened."

"Thus it happened. As I overtook the cart--it labored in the deep mud, sahibs--that one, he who lies dead, came forth from the jungle suddenly. He did not see me, but I saw him. And I feared him. So I crouched in darkness. I heard him say he would ride in the cart. But the priest said nay to that. For they are thrice-born swaggerers, those priests. They fear a man's touch, notwithstanding that the Lord Mahatma Gandhi teaches--"

"To the lowest hell with Gandhi! Tell what happened."

"But I do tell. He began to climb into the cart, holding his revolver thus. But the priest had a light--a peculiar one, like a stick, that he flashed into the man's face. By that light I saw the priest's hand hold a club and strike the man twice on the top of the head. So he fell. And he dropped his revolver. So the priest got down and, groping for it, found it. He flung it away. I heard it fall into a pool of water. Then the priest returned into the cart. I heard him command the driver to go forward. And, being frightened, I ran. The cart was heavy and the mud deep. Therefore I reached Kutchdullub far ahead of it. I bought my new knife. And because I enjoy the special favor of the Ruler of the Land, I now return home on a royal elephant."

"Get off the elephant before I drag you down," the policeman

commanded. "You may tell that story, or another version of it, at the *kana.*"

But the villager appealed to Hawkes in silence, eloquent in gesture. Hawkes knew as well as the villager did what tortures they would give him in a dark cell to induce him to tell a lot more than he knew, and to edit his story to suit police convenience. It was not his business, but he had Chullunder Ghose's note; he felt he might be letting down the babu somehow if he failed to interfere now.

"Go to hell," he answered. "I'm in charge o' this man. Two of you had better hunt for that revolver that he says the priest threw away. If you find it, it'll be evidence. One of you stand by the corpse, and let the fourth man hurry to Kutchdullub for assistance."

"Nay, nay! That is the Rajah's elephant. We will ride home on it."

"That so?--*Cheloh!*" Hawkes commanded. The mahout knew better than to disobey Hawkes. The elephant resumed his squelching progress through the mud. Rain came down again in torrents. Hawkes sat silent, with his coat up to his ears until the squall ceased. Then he turned his head abruptly.

"You're a liar," he said to the villager. "Why did you tell that mess of lies? If it was true, you'd have held your tongue about it for fear of being held as a witness."

"Nay, I spoke truth."

"Get down and walk then. Swing yourself down by the elephant's tail and go with the policemen!"

"Is the sahib angry that the priests should eat a little trouble? They have made enough of it for other people. They have said their tiger

only slays the wicked. So our village has become a by-word, and other men mock us to our faces. Nobody will slay that tiger for us, and the priests say--"

"Cut it short now. Who did kill the police spy?"

"Nay, I know not."

"Do you mean you invented all that yarn? Then down you get and go back. You're too big a liar to ride on a decent elephant."

"But is the sahib not the friend of him who sent me with the *chiteh?* And if the sahib's friend should be accused of slaying some one, would the sahib like that?"

Hawkes stared.

"I am a poor man," said the villager. "I thought if I should save the sahib's friend from accusation, then the sahib possibly might give this humble person a reward."

Hawkes continued to stare. "Did you see the man killed?" he demanded. "Did you see who did it?"

"Yes, but no matter. I have turned the blame on to those bloody-minded Brahmins. If the sahib should give me fifty rupees, I could hide among the mountains until it is time to plow. And for a hundred I could stay away all summer."

Hawkes spat. "Not a rupee."

"But the sahib has an old coat. It is tied in the roll of bedding that is under the tarpaulin."

"You stay by me," Hawkes retorted. "If I get a good report about you

from the babu you shall have what's right."

"But if he lies about me? All babus are liars."

Hawkes stuck his pipe in his teeth, carefully lighted it, puffed a few times and then leaned back against the bedding roll.

"If you think that about him, hook it," he suggested. "The elephant keeps his tail at that end. Use it. I'll look straight ahead until we're past that big tree on the left hand."

"Nay, nay," said the villager. "That babu said I am to ride free all the way to the village."

Hawkes stuck his hands in his overcoat pockets and whistled softly to himself. The villager did not like that, because it is well known that to whistle softly summons evil spirits; so he hummed a little nasal mantram said to disagree with evil spirits, and sat meditating--wondering why sahibs are so complicated and unable to discern the simplest way of solving riddles.

Chapter IX.

"Talk with one another."

Crises on which destinies appear to hinge are sometimes unimportant, being actually no more than the din of aftermath. The genuinely change-producing undercurrents escape attention, they are so deep and devious. But they meet. They create a vortex. Then the deluge. And they who are caught in the deluge rarely ever know exactly how and why it happens.

The Rajah was a man who did not see deep, although he thought himself almost a Machiavelli. He had plenty of spies; but all of them,

except Syed-Suraj, had learned to tell him what they guessed he wished to believe; he had a way of striking off the pay-roll any one who told unpalatable truths too often. And he read the papers, even though they bored him; so he flattered himself that he thoroughly understood the trend of world affairs.

"Tu m'embetes!" he remarked to Syed-Suraj in the library. "A bat could tell you there's a revolution going on all over the world. It's economic, it's religious, it's scientific, and it's social. It will end in the break-up of empires--as happened to Rome, and to our Moghuls, and to Napoleon's half-finished scheme. And then what? The survival of the fittest! Princes who are not such asses as to give a damn what other people think, will come into their own again. Pour me a brandy-and-soda. India, within a year or two, will be a welter of what that idiot Wilson preached as self-determination--take my word for it--each State for itself, to hell with all the others, and the English, thank God, stewing in their own grease on an island in the North Sea. All I need is to prevent the priests from getting too much power. Just now I'm letting them go too far, on purpose. Later, when the crash comes, I won't need them; they will need me. Have a drink too? Why not?"

"It will need a clear head to--ah--to follow your line of thought," said Syed-Suraj. "I am not a statesman. But I run your errands. Wouldn't it be safer if you took me into confidence?"

"About what?"

"What have you done, for instance, that I don't know?"

"Nothing, except that I've sent a party out to bury that babu. I picked four men notorious for criminal associations. They are men who won't talk--won't dare."

Syed-Suraj blinked his bright eyes, hesitated, and then changed the

subject.

"Any news of your cousin?"

"Not yet. That doctor of yours from Madras is a slowcoach."

"He has made a lot of money out of life-insurance cases," said Syed-Suraj, "and he understands the dangers of an autopsy. He's a safe man. But have you paid him?"

"Why ask? You know as well as I do that I'm personally broke. I will give him a thousand rupees from the five you got from Ram Dass. Then let him whistle. He won't dare talk."

"I'm afraid of the priests," said Syed-Suraj. "They are subtle."

"Are they? They will find themselves out-subtled! Hawkes is on his way to shoot their tiger, isn't he? I may have to fire Hawkes for a scapegoat. But what of it? There are plenty of Hawkeseys. Every one will understand that the tiger trick was rather neatly turned against them. They will be laughed at. It will cost them prestige. And what is left after that of their prestige will fall in the mud when the news breaks that my beloved cousin can't succeed me on the throne for rather concrete reasons! After that, what can they do but make their peace with me? No heir! Do they want the British to take over the State and run it Gandhi-fashion--brotherhood with Christians, Sikhs and Moslems--child-marriages unlawful--caste repudiated? Not they! The priests will decide to put up with me! And they will pray for a son of my loins to inherit the throne!"

"It sounds good," said Syed-Suraj. "How about my rake-off, by the way, of the loan from Ram Dass?"

"Get the balance. Then I'll pay you."

"But he won't lend any more."

"Try him again, if you want your rake-off, as you call it. Take my car and go and see him."

But Syed-Suraj did not take the Rajah's Rolls-Royce. Neither did he go to Ram Dass. He had debts of his own, and a craving--not to pay his debts exactly, but to place a stake to windward where his creditors might whistle for it. He was nervous. He felt that the Rajah had gypped him out of a commission, and he savagely resented it. He could not go directly to the priests, and offer to betray the Rajah to them. They would probably decline an interview. But there are ways and ways of doing things.

There never yet was an important priesthood that did not subsidize a more than ultramontane lawyer to direct its contacts with temporal government. Ananda Raz was a Brahmin schooled in those arts. He kept an inoffensive-looking office in the square where the wealthier merchants had their shops, and did a lucrative legal business. Thither walked Syed-Suraj, carrying his own umbrella, because, although he hated Brahmins, he knew it rarely paid to put on airs in their presence, even if one has adopted Western habits and repudiated caste to some extent. One may afford to smile sardonically at the very mention of religion, but it is wise not to flourish one's offensive affiliations in a land where priests have teeth and competent attorneys.

There was the usual outer office, white-washed, full of meek clerks and spidery files; and there was an oil-stove in the midst, because Ananda Raz was prosperous and liked to have his clerks half-thawed as well as half-starved--meekly eager, that is, and aware that their employer thought about their little comforts. Next, between outer and inner office, was a waiting -room without a stove, as dark as a police

cell, furnished with one plain table and one rigidly plain chair. After a minute or two of mysterious conversation through a tube, Syed-Suraj was conducted to the waiting-room and left there. He was very interested in the thickness of the ancient wood partition between the waiting-room and inner office. It was almost a museum piece -- incongruous. He wondered at the richly carved panels, and as he examined them, he saw a panel slide the merest fraction of an inch. So he sat down and glanced at his watch, a bit disgusted that he could not recognize the eye that he could easily see peeping at him through the opening. The eye vanished. The panel closed again--almost. There was still a thin crack--quite unusually careless for a man of Ananda Raz's distinguished habits. Syed-Suraj put his ear to the crack. He forgot for the moment that his name had been announced through a speaking-tube, so it did not occur to him that the crack might have been carefully left to induce him to listen.

Ananda Raz was speaking--wheezily, squeakily. Even the attorneys of the pious now and then have asthma.

"The priests repudiate all knowledge of the tiger," he said. "If His Highness won't keep his promise to rebuild that temple, no one but he is to blame if a tiger occupies the ruins and slaughters villagers. If there are riots on account of it, he will be answerable for that too. As the legal member of the Legislative Council, I shall raise that issue at the very next session, no matter how many members he thinks he has under his thumb, and no matter how many threats are aimed at me. And I assure you"--he began to whisper, an asthmatic rasp as noisy as an engine's safety valve--"I mistrust that doctor from Madras who is attending the Rajah's cousin."

"I know him," said another voice. "He is a charlatan."

"I intend," said Ananda Raz, "as soon as possible to send another doctor to the Rajah's cousin, at my own expense if necessary."

"There is," the voice answered, "as it happens, a doctor at rail -head--just over the border--at the Sikh dispensary--an American. He is an enthusiast who would cost you next to nothing."

Panic seized Syed-Suraj. Cold sweat crept along his forearms. As the Rajah's Dick-o'-dirty-work, suspicion would certainly fall on him if some reputable doctor were to diagnose poison. And he knew his Rajah. Cousin-poisoners and money-gyps are hardly likely to protect their intimates if danger to themselves looks serious. He could see himself hanged as a murderer--could almost see the Rajah grinning over perjured evidence. The cold sweat turned to hot sweat and again grew cold before the inner office door was opened and Ananda Raz invited him to enter-melancholy looking, shrew-nosed, small Ananda Raz, in a neat white turban, gold-bespectacled and irritable, wearing the thread of the "twice-born."

"You are unwelcome, but never mind. I am busy, but I dare say that it doesn't matter."

That was a bad beginning, although only the obvious Brahmin reaction to his having omitted the phrase "I kiss feet." Nobody who wants a Brahmin's good-will should omit that formula. But there was worse to follow--a shocking spectacle. In a chair outside the railing beyond which no non-Brahmin might trespass with calamitous impurities, near the lawyer's desk, Chullunder Ghose sat smiling like a fat, complacent toad! The most dangerous man in the C. I. D., in confidential standing with the enemy's attorney!

Syed-Suraj had not meant what he said when he told the Rajah he was not a statesman; he did not consider himself a rat who would pimp for a rattlesnake if there were comfort in it. There was no comfort here--none whatever. He had overheard the conversation through the crack, so he knew that Chullunder Ghose at least

suspected that the Rajah's cousin was being poisoned. Not improbably the babu also shrewdly guessed who had instigated the attempt to murder himself; he had probably added two and two together and was out for vengeance. It was time for Syed-Suraj to swap horses. He tried it instantly:

"Am I right," he asked--he looked directly at the babu--"in supposing that the C. I. D. have sent you to contrive a political change here? An important change? If so, I might help you. I am thoroughly disgusted with the goings-on. I have done my best to solve the tiger difficulty; as you know, it was I who told Hawkes to shoot the brute." He hesitated, then stared at Ananda Raz, conjecturing what shot might penetrate the Brahmin's prejudices. "This morning I spent an hour attempting to convince the Rajah that he ought to purify himself and make peace with the priesthood. But I can't convince him."

"You are his intimate. Why not set him the example?" Ananda Raz ask pointedly.

"I can't afford it. And, besides, it might lose me the, Rajah's --ah--friendship, and that would destroy my usefulness." He eyed Ananda Raz. "I could do it afterwards."

"What do you mean--afterwards?"

"A more generous patron might--ah--might provide me with the stiff fees that the priests demand for ritual purification. If the Rajah's cousin knew how sincerely I would work for and welcome his--"

Ananda Raz snorted. He seemed unimpressed. He wiped his spectacles. "If you have anything to tell us, tell it," he breathed. It was too like a snake's hiss to encourage indiscretion. Syed-Suraj grinned back, catwise.

"Make me an offer," he suggested.

But it was Chullunder Ghose who made the offer--suddenly, before Ananda Raz could answer: "Get out of the State, and stay out."

"But I can't afford it. Can't you see, you fool, that you should use me?"

"How so?" asked the babu.

"I could get proof!"

"Proof of what?"

"Some one is murdering some one." Chullunder Ghose smiled like a seraph. "Yes," he said, "and certain sorts of murderers need parasites to cover up their tracks--sycophants to hire their doctors from Madras. Get out of the State, you jackal! Leave your royal tiger to the huntsmen!"

Syed-Suraj wilted. "Oh, all right," he answered, "since you put it that way."

"If I catch you here tomorrow--"

"I will go today. I will take tonight's train."

"Get a permit from the Rajah. You will need it. And I don't care what you tell him," said the babu.

Syed-Suraj strode out, dignified--if dignity consists in throwing up one's chin. And it is difficult to hold that pose and notice things, still more difficult if one must hold an umbrella against a rainstorm. He did not, for instance, notice a man in rags, a beggar possibly, who followed him almost as far as the palace gate. The ragged, dish-faced person dodged behind a tree six feet away, exactly at the

moment when a mud-bedraggled member of the State constabulary, staggering with weariness, stepped out from the shelter of that same tree and confronted Syed-Suraj. It was squally; the constable seized the umbrella and held it to windward, protecting them both. So most of the conversation reached the man who listened. He was downwind.

"Careful, sahib! Some one, who I think is a friend of the fat babu, just now offered me ten rupees to tell what I know. I refused."

Unfortunately, silver jangled in a tunic pocket, and it was certainly not pay-day. However, that might be coincidence, and Syed-Suraj pretended not to notice. The constable continued:

"Something went wrong. He who should have slain that babu was himself slain by a priest from Kali's temple, who was on his way from having taken goats for sacrifice at that old ruin in the jungle."

"Who said that? Who knows it?"

"We four found the body. And Hawkes knows it. With Hawkes, on an elephant, is he who saw the deed done--a fool of a villager; we would have brought him here in custody, but Hawkes said no; he took the fellow with him. What now? May I have an elephant to bring the dead man to the city?"

Syed-Suraj sneered back: "How do I know? What do I care? Ask His Highness."

"He is in his *bibi-kana.* None may summon him," said the constable. His voice held envy or contempt; it was not easy to tell which.

"Do you expect me to enter the zenana?" Syed-Suraj retorted.

"Wait here until you are sent for."

"I am weary, sahib."

"Constables sometimes are, they tell me. What are you paid for? Wait there."

Syed-Suraj hurried toward the palace, still not noticing the dish-faced man behind the tree, who ran before the rain until he once more reached the office of Ananda Raz. But he did not enter; he sat in the rain and waited for Chullunder Ghose. He appeared to be doing, it might be, penance, wrapped up in a piece of ragged sacking.

Syed-Suraj went into the palace and demanded instant audience with the Rajah.

"If he has a dozen women in his lap, I don't care! I will see him now--do you hear me? Tell him."

So the Rajah fumed into the library, showing his teeth. He smelled of blended perfumes. "What the devil does this mean?" he demanded.

"Good-by! I'm off."

"Curse your impudence! I'll shoot you like a dog if you ever again dare to summon me from the zenana!"

"Never again, I assure you! Give me my percentage of the loan from Ram Dass."

"To the devil with you! All you do is badger me for money!"

"Better pay me this time, or I might talk! I'm deserting you. That's final."

"You treacherous swine!" The Rajah turned his back, but watched the mirror. He opened the mirror--took out a revolver--faced about abruptly. "Dog of a traitor! What does this mean?" he demanded, walking forward.

Syed-Suraj backed away from him. "Steady now, steady! I've warned you often enough against your temper. Don't make matters worse by--"

"Tell me, damn you! What has happened?"

"Nothing, my good man; oh, nothing, oh, dear me, no!" Syed -Suraj found that tart sneer irresistible. "I warned you. Did you listen? Not y o u ! Now the priests know you are poisoning your cousin! Furthermore, Chullunder Ghose is alive, in the city, in touch with the priests--one of whom killed the man whom you sent out to murder Chullunder Ghose. Do you suppose the babu doesn't guess who ordered him killed and buried in a swamp? And what does that mean? That you have the C. I. D. against you! That is why I am going. Give me money and a travel permit."

The Rajah took three steps forward. "You propose to desert me, eh? You propose to betray me from over the border! Probably you hope to toady to my cousin! Speak, you hyena! Have you sold yourself? To whom? For how much?"

Syed-Suraj backed away again. He struck a footstool--staggered. Probably the Rajah misinterpreted the sudden jerk toward him in an effort to recover balance. He raised the revolver. Panic -stricken, Syed-Suraj clutched at his wrist. The Rajah fired three times, to summon a servant.

"Help!" he shouted. "Help! Help!" frenzy of indignation making him forget he was using English. Syed-Suraj, wincing as the shots

smashed the window-glass, struck at the Rajah and tried to escape before a servant could arrive. He poked two fingers at the Rajah's eyes. The Rajah shot him--twice--through the heart. As he fell he kicked him four or five times in the face.

Then the Rajah's mood changed. Languidly he turned and faced the door. It had opened. His personal servant stood there. He signed to the man to close it and come nearer. Then he stared into the man's eyes.

"You, who saw what happened, did you see him take my revolver from the closet behind the mirror?"

The servant nodded, wide-eyed, silent.

"Did you hear him threaten me? And did you see him try to shoot me, three times, as I stood between him and the window?"

The servant gravely bowed assent.

"And did you hear him boast that the priests will provide him an alibi, and pay him handsomely for killing me, because they wish my cousin on the throne?"

The servant bowed.

"And did you see me snatch the pistol from him?"

"It was well done," said the servant. "Others saw it also. I will go and find them."

The Rajah poured himself brandy-and-soda, smiled, and drank it.

"Yes," he said, proud of his self-control, "bring them in. Refresh their memories. Talk with one another."

He drank another gulp of brandy--straight, and strode out, back to the zenana.

Chapter X.

"Who ever it is, is as scared as I am."

The rain ceased, but the river had risen; it poured out of the jungle with a gurgling rush that carried big trees ducking and bobbing in mid-stream. Men from the merchants' bivouac on the near side gathered around Hawkes and warned him that not even an elephant could cross for possibly a week to come. No one could remember such a monsoon. They regretted having started out so prematurely. They were beginning to lack provisions; they described themselves as idiots for not having returned to the city along with the man who had taken the fat babu for nothing; nothing, mind you!

"But the babu had a way with him. A madman. Or perhaps a holy person: Holiness makes some folk impudent. Besides, the owner of the cart and horses was afraid of the woman across the river; but the babu claimed to have authority from her. It might be; and she might be dangerous; men say so. There are great owls in the jungle, and they cry too much; men say they cry out to announce the prowling of that woman and her tiger."

"Have you seen the tiger?" Hawkes asked.

"Nay, nay! Could it cross the river?"

"How do the priests cross when they bring goats? I'm told they bring 'em once a week for a sacrifice of some sort in a ruined temple."

"Who knows? Some say they cross by a bridge. The people

hereabouts won't speak of it, except as something to stay away from. They pretend it is guarded by evil spirits. Now and then they tell the truth, those villagers."

Hawkes's passenger had heard the conversation. He admitted that he knew there was a ruin--and a tiger--and a priestess. The tiger killed folk, and the priestess ate them; everybody knew that. But a bridge? He shook his head.

"How do the priests cross the river?" Hawkes asked.

"They sit on a mat, and the mat gets up and flies. But some say that the owls pick up the mat and carry it."

"That sounds more probable!" said Hawkes.

"Yes, much more probable. How could the priests make a mat fly?"

The mahout was adamant. His elephant could not possibly swim the river, and he himself would rather die than ride into that jungle to look for a bridge.

"For should there be a bridge, it might not bear the elephant. And whoever heard of a bridge in a jungle? But every one has heard of evil spirits. They are bad for elephants. An elephant goes crazy and kills, and smashes things, when evil spirits enter him."

Threats, bribes, arguments, were useless, until at last Hawkes gave the elephant a lump of corncake soaked in whisky, to establish confidence, and ordered the elephant to hoist him up to the mahout's seat. With his legs behind the great beast's ears he urged him forward. The mahout's mind changed then. He declared his honor was at stake. He shrieked disconsolately, as a man should who, for honor's sake, must plunge into the midst of devil's magic. Hawkes

crawled into the howdah and took his rifle from its case; but rifles are no good against devils. The mahout climbed by the elephant's knee to the elephant's neck; white-eyed with terror he demanded whisky, which is good against everything. Hawkes gave him some.

Then tank-work, such as only elephants, of all living things, can do--crushing, sliding, grinding, breaking, crashing into undergrowth--plunging through the tributaries of the river, following its course and smashing down the thickets--turning aside for nothing but the big trees and the biggest boulders. Time and again the howdah and its load were almost ripped off; half a dozen times Hawkes swung by the arms from a branch of a tree to save himself from being brained. But the elephant waited for him, and they went on, mile upon gloomier mile, drenched, bitten by a million mosquitoes, leaving a track behind them that a blind man could have followed if he only were amphibian. And at last, about four in the afternoon, the going became firmer. Limestone cropped up through the tree roots and the trees were less huge, although as dense as ever. The weary elephant appeared encouraged, as if he recognized the neighborhood of humans, where a decent beast was likely to get dinner. Suddenly the river curved; it thundered down a waterfall between sheer flanks of limestone, with a fern-filled, rocky island in the midst.

It was easy to see there had been a bridge there once upon a time, although its fallen masonry had long ago been swept down -stream by rain-fed torrents such as this one. There had been a road of some importance; some of its paving-blocks, up-ended by resistless trees, stood up like tombstones in the jungle. For a bridge now, there was nothing but a hand-rope, taut across the river, and two tree-trunks--near bank to the island, island to the far bank. They were slippery with rain and only half -trimmed; branches blocked the way along them. It was something that a goat or a man could tackle; for an elephant, it might as well not be there. The mahout grinned, chattering with terror,

but relieved because this seemed to be the limit.

Hawkes pulled out a flashlight from the bedding-roll, shouldered his rifle by the sling and put some spare shells in his pocket, filled the other pocket with some chocolate and biscuits, looked to his flask and gave his orders.

"Set me down," he said, "and wait here. Feed your elephant and hunt some dry wood. It's getting late; if we have to make a night of it we'll need fire."

He poured all that was left of the whisky on the elephant's big, flat corn-loaves. Then he started across the bridge. It was a slow job, although the rope helped; the rifle and flask slings kept on catching in the half-trimmed branches, and by the time he reached the island he was dizzy with exertion and with the roar of the torrent beneath him. He rested on a pile of masonry that had once formed a part of the bridge. Then he glanced back at the elephant-one of those sudden, intuitive movements that the dogmatists explain away by calling them coincidence.

He could see the mahout in his place on the elephant's neck; and before that sight set thought in motion he became aware of danger. The mahout did not look round; he merely urged the elephant. Before Hawkes could think or shout, the elephant was going full pelt through the jungle, back along the way he came. There was only a glimpse of him, gray as the tree-trunk shadows. He was gone in a second.

Hawkes shrugged his shoulders. It was no use swearing. He would kick the liver out of that mahout in good time. Meanwhile, what -next? Forward was hardly likely to be worse than backward, and he could not possibly struggle back to the ford before sunset. Neither was it the slightest use to sit still. Besides, he was dripping wet; the elephant had shaken down continual showers of water from the trees,

and Hawkes had a wholesome dread of a night in wet clothes in the fever-ridden jungle. He decided to go forward and to look first for a place where he could spend the night. Next, he would look for dry wood. Then, if there was any time left before sunset, he would try to discover a path towards the village on the far side of the river. He was angry, but not in the least discouraged.

The tiger, for the moment, gave him no concern whatever. With his double-barreled .577 express and sufficient daylight he felt well able to care for himself; by nightfall he proposed to have a hot fire going that would keep any tiger away and be smoky enough to defeat the much more dangerous mosquitoes. Chullunder Ghose's curious injunction not to shoot the tiger troubled him least of all; if he had seen the tiger there and then he would have shot the brute without a moment's hesitation. But as he worked his way along the slippery tree-trunk, with the hungry dark-brown flood beneath him, he did wonder why the babu should have been so emphatic about it.

"Damn him, he knows me. He should have chosen a native for this job if he didn't want the tiger sent west."

Something hit him on the helmet. It was a fine, big, padded helmet with a waterproof cover. It absorbed shock, so that the stone, or whatever it was, did no harm except almost to make him lose his footing. Sacred monkeys sometimes swarm amid ancient ruins; thinking of the ruins that he hoped to find, he supposed for a moment that one of the monkeys had pelted him, as they frequently do. He hurried to the far bank, scrambled to the ground and looked up at the tree-tops. Not a sign of monkeys. But another stone hit him a crack on the jaw.

He unslung his rifle, cocked it, stared about him and aimed at a sound. There was something moving in a thicket, or behind the thicket. He was certain it was not a tiger. Some one who had flung

that stone was lurking--looking at him. He could feel eyes. He began to walk toward the thicket. Something or somebody scurried away, not making more noise than a furtive animal, but it was an unrecognizable noise. Elimination left no probability except that a human being was trying to scare him back the way he came, but was afraid to be seen.

"Hell! Whoever it is, is as scared as I am," he reflected. Knowing he was rather scared, he set his jaw and squared his shoulders.

Half-light filtered through the trees of a jungle under heavy clouds, induces nervousness. It makes a sound seem half -mysterious and wholly dreadful. Hawkes was neither superstitious nor a weakling, but the goose-flesh rose all over him. He was as dangerous then as dynamite. He would have shot at anything he saw. But he could see nothing. The trees were not nearly so dense on this side of the river, due to sheet-rock that afforded only random root-hold; undergrowth was dense where it had found a lodging, but there was not much of it to give a fair view in all directions, except where boulders blocked the way. Much of the undergrowth was fern, a little less than waist-high, drenching wet, but passable. And, winding through the fern, if not a track, at least something that faintly suggested one, appeared to take an almost definite direction. Much too nervous now to care to stand still, Hawkes decided to follow that track.

It led away from the gloom of the jungle. It presently curved into a space of ten or fifteen acres where a fire had raged not long ago and second-growth was barely knee-high. Stumps and charred downwood barred the way, but the footpath, more distinct now, wound amid them. On the right hand, sunset bathed the sky in furious crimson. On the left hand was a pond an acre in extent, half-filled with lotus-pads and still surrounded by limestone masonry, broken, but not so badly that one could not see some of the steps that once had lined

the pond on all four sides. And beyond the pond, the ruined temple.

It was a heap of grim blocks, tumbled by an earthquake. Trees had rooted in the cracks, and done more havoc than the tremors that had wrecked the roof and some of the enormous columns. Giant creepers, flaming in the sunset, seemed to tie the mass together as if jungle-gods had drawn a net around it to preserve its shapelessness. Nothing remained of a temple, seen from outside, except one huge image, partly fallen, tilted forward and to one side, staring downward. Unimaginably held by roots and broken masonry, it grinned at its reflection in the still pool --loathsome on a blood-red mirror--cruel, calm, impassionate. A million frogs made music to it. On its head, amid the carving of the hair, a seed had rooted and produced a drooping spray of green that made the head look drunken. And the coarse lips and the lazy, heavy-lidded eyes smiled confidently at the glutted drunkenness of death that swallows life, and even swallows death itself, and ends in nothing.

Hawkes remembered he was hungry then and ate some chocolate. There was plenty of charred wood that would make a camp-fire; there was time enough, too, to gather up a good load. Nothing for it but the ruins; he must take his chance of snakes and hunt for a nook or cranny large enough to spend the night in. He could build a fire in the entrance and dry his wet clothes. Forward!

Fifteen minutes' scramble over fallen masonry and tangled creepers brought him to a window, or what had been one. It was nothing but a shapeless, dark hole, but it opened into what the flashlight revealed as a cell, about twenty feet by ten, with walls of heavily carved limestone, and so deep in bat-dirt that there was no guessing what the floor was made of. At the far end there were shadows and a broken masonry partition, but Hawkes did not stay to examine those; he went for wood. After half a dozen trips he had enough to keep a

good fire going all night; so he frayed up tinder with his clasp-knife, economically built his watch-fire in the middle of the hole, and set to work to clear a piece of floor to sit on, scraping away the bat-filth with a piece of charred wood. The stench turned his stomach, so he let it alone after a few minutes and decided to sit on a loose, square block of stone that had a clean side when he turned it over. Then he pulled his clothes off and began to dry them at the fire.

So he was naked, except for his socks and boots, when something stirred away behind him in the dark beyond the broken masonry partition. He grabbed his rifle. Then he pulled his trousers on. He listened. Suddenly he used the flashlight, but it made the darkness even darker where the shadows lay beyond the broken masonry. He felt his trousers slipping, so he had to tighten his belt with one hand while he clutched his rifle with the other. He held the flashlight between his knees; the light went upward, terrifying scores of bats that were disturbed enough already by the watch-fire in the entrance. By the time he had his belt tight and the flashlight aimed again there was a woman staring at him.

She had stepped from behind the broken half-wall at the far end. One could tell she was a woman by her long hair, flowing to her waist but gummed into ropes with blue mud. From her breasts, as flat as pancakes, to her knees, as gnarled as tree-knots, she was covered with a goatskin apron. She had no eyebrows. Her eyes glowed sullenly from dark holes in a wrinkled face that looked as hard as bronze. Her lips seemed hardly skin-thick, tight against splendid teeth that were as yellow as amber. Beauty that had left her as the tide leaves the barren beaches, made her terrible by hinting it had been hers.

And another thing was terrible. Emaciated, scarred by thorn and weather, she stood straight as a spear and as strong as an Amazon.

Life had not left her; it lingered and burned in a scarred mask. And she looked as if she hated life, that rioted in sinewy, strong loneliness, and gave her nothing.

"Cheerio," said Hawkes. "I've chocolate and biscuit. Come and have some."

No answer. He repeated the invitation in Hindustani. "Come on, mother. Come and share supper with me. I'll forgive you for hitting my jaw with a rock. It was you. No use lying. Who else could have done that?"

Again no answer. But she beckoned, holding a long stick like a spear in her left hand, motioning with her right arm stretched out in front of her at full length, four upturned fingers summoning, unmistakable.

"All right, mother. I can lick you," he remarked. "I'll follow."

She turned on her heel, and from behind she was as splendid as a statue of youth, with the goatskin loosely drawn round her loins and nothing but the long blue ropes of hair to hint at old age. The muscles of her back, as she moved, were ripples in the flashlight.

"Hell! I wonder--could I lick you?" Hawkes thought. But with his thumb he set the safety catch of his rifle. "Hell! I'd hate to shoot a woman. Why not stay here?"

But he followed. Curiosity was stronger than good sense.

Chapter XI.

"How about a permit?"

Stanley Copeland suddenly--as such things happen--saw that he had

bitten off a mouthful that a dozen of him could hardly have chewed. He was getting no rest, and the Sikh was as tired as himself.

"Say, you and I are like the old lady who tried to sweep back the Atlantic with a house-broom," he said; and the Sikh stared wide -eyed at him, equally enthusiastic, equally conscious of human limits, but guiltily aware of a waiting list of crippled, maimed, and sick who had responded to the call of naive propaganda.

"We're like Germany, we need a moratorium," said Copeland. "I'm game to buy my standing with hard work, but you and I are just snowballs in hell, that's what we are. Next thing, both of us will go sick. Nurse each other, I suppose, eh?"

"But I have some very interesting cases for you," said the Sikh apologetically. "I am even hoping to bring you a leper."

"The devil you are. You may not believe it, Kater Singh, but what I crave now is strong drink and a tiger. I'm sick of patching cripples. I want to kill something. Philanthropy palls. If you brought me a really rare eye, I could walk out on you. That's the plain truth."

"God relieves the over-burdened," the Sikh quoted piously. And that was also true, apparently, because the door opened without a knock that instant. The Sikh scowled, not so positively, sure of God's benevolence as speech might indicate. Copeland turned about and faced Chullunder Ghose, the omni-impudent, the all -observing, genial and fat to look at in his English shooting -jacket and his homespun loin-cloth.

"Don't you like it?" he asked, lifting the loin-cloth like a ballet-girl's skirt. He did a caricature of Pavlova. "It is my concession to Mahatma Gandhi. All things in their turn to all men--not too much, though, or they love you, and their love is dreadful."

"Drink?" suggested Copeland.

"You will go far. Never have I seen a swifter diagnosis. Eighty percent of diagnoses--so says Osler--are inaccurate, but yours is *verb. sap.* to the ultimate dimension! Let me warn you, whisky is forbidden by the Sikh religion. Order, therefore, three drinks. We will drink ours swiftly to preserve him from the sin of voting too dry and becoming too wet."

Copeland produced the whisky bottle, and his servant brought the glasses and siphon. They drank in silence until Copeland set the glass down. "I'd forgotten what it tastes like!"

"Same here," said the babu. "And the sun is shining! Your eyes assure me you have forgotten what that looks like! Come and see it! Twenty million miles of mud--and only one macadam road in all Kutchdullub! But it leads you to the city, and it starts here. I've a Ford car."

"How about a permit?" Copeland asked. "I've had a formally polite but firm communication from the Foreign Office calling my attention to section so-and-so of Order in Council number umpty-um restricting the movement of aliens into Native States."

"Did it mention boils?" Chullunder Ghose asked. "Boils on the back of a bachelor's neck--of a hypochondriacal bachelor's neck --of a white babu's neck--an officially dignified and economically useless, ethically hypocritical anachronism's neck? I think not. Circumstances alter cases. I could do the job as well as you can, with a safety-razor blade. But dignity would call that impudence. Besides, I need a mouse to help me nibble at the nets of Humpty-dumpty on a rocking-horse. He rocks like hell, I tell you. One shove--and we shall have his alternative, probably worse, undoubtedly not much better, but

different. That is nature. Work with nature, same as Osler ordered. Are you coming?"

"You bet. But coming where? Why? Do I get the tiger?"

"Yes, unless he gets you. And unless you are afraid of moss-back majors with a mid-Victorian morality that makes them fit this epoch as a pig fits an automobile."

"Frighten me later on," said Copeland. "You have pulled my cork. I'm coming." He grinned at the Sikh. "You'll have enough to keep you busy till I come back. Keep all those eyes in the dark, if you can, and remember what I showed you about draining deep wounds. Go slow with iodoform, and don't let 'em change their own dressings. I'll be back--when?"

"Then!" the babu answered. "When it's over. When the Major has been recommended for a decoration, and when you and I have received our reprimand! Observe my belly; it is obese with reprimands. The walls of my wife's bathroom in her home in Delhi are bee-autified with fifty of them, framed in pale pink. Let us go now."

Chapter XII.

"The devil quotes scripture, sahib."

Major Eustace Smith, in a sweater and blazer with a scarf round his neck that gave him almost the appearance of a rowing man, paced the tiled veranda, pausing at frequent intervals to glare into the Residency garden. He had to turn his whole body in order to do it, because the boils on the back of his neck were in the sharply painful stage. The garden offered no encouragement; it was a drab, wet, dreary wilderness of half-neglected flowers ruined by the rain. The

sun had burst forth through the brown -gray clouds, but nothing welcomed it except the weeds and a lonely bull-frog, who reiterated big drum belches of enthusiasm from an unseen puddle.

"Curse and damn my luck!" Smith exploded. "Why the devil is that fat brute taking all this time to bring a doctor?" To have a murder on his hands--a palace murder--with a little less than three months more to go before leaving India forever--"Damn that Rajah! Damn and blast him for a skunk in velvet! Does he think this is Chicago? To avoid a scandal I shall have to accept whatever lies he cares to trump up. But for two-pence, if I had my own way, I would hang him, dammit!"

He had learned of the shooting of Syed-Suraj two hours after the event, through palace spies who brought the information to the back door. He had spent a whole night disbelieving it, inertia suggesting to him that it might, after all, be another rumor cooked up by the Rajah's enemies. But with the dawn Chullunder Ghose had come--that scoundrelly babu with the know-nothing face and omniscient eyes. The babu had had the story first-hand from the female servant of a woman in the Rajah's over-full zenana; she had heard and seen the whole thing through a panel in the wall above a bookshelf, where she had been lurking to report the Rajah's movements for the information of her own neglected mistress.

And the worst of that was that Chullunder Ghose would write his own report to a Department that regarded Smith as less than nobody, but that employed the babu and accepted his information at face value because--

"Oh, dammit! Why do they insist on knowing everything that goes on? Not a chance for a man to use his own discretion! I could smooth this over. I suppose they'll order me to investigate. God-dammit, and the chances are some idiot will get his lies all mixed up. Then the cat's out of the bag--and gee-whiz! I had better send my own report in--

telegram in code--before the babu gets his off. Confound him, the fat brute has probably wired from rail-head! I had better ask for full discretion, on the ground that all reports are not in, and it may be possible to clear the individual on whom suspicion now rests. That's it."

He wrote his telegram, translated it to code, checked and rechecked it, destroyed the original, gave the coded version to his office babu to be signaled and then returned to the veranda.

He was nearly frantic from the bandaged neck boils when a Ford car with a flat tire clattered to the front door, and its abominable honking jarred Smith's nerves so that a murder seemed like sweetly, reasonable justice. If a snarl and a scowl could kill he would have slain his servant.

"Show them in, you idiot! The library--yes--where else? Do I receive visitors in the bathroom?"

He paced the veranda again a few times, trying to calm himself. But the abominable bull-frog mocked him, a mosquito bit him and he slapped his face to kill it. That jerked his head and sent a stab of pain into his neck that nearly made him cry out.

"Going all to hell!" he muttered. "Eustace, old fellow, take a pull now--steady!--steady!"

He thrust both his fists into the blazer pockets and tried to stroll into the library, remembering that he had donned that ancient blazer merely to impress the damned American, who very likely would expect him to be wearing gold-braid and a cocked hat. Nothing like a little informality with foreigners. It takes em off guard.

"Ah, I'm pleased to meet you, Doctor Copeland. It is very kind,

indeed, of you to come and see me. I am only sorry that I had to send a Ford car and a very unofficial babu to escort you. But the Residency staff is quite inadequate for such emergencies."

"That's perfectly all right," said Copeland, setting his bag on the table. He glanced at Chullunder Ghose, and even Smith could see that those two understood each other. Chullunder Ghose answered the glance and then stared out of the window.

"Did you send a telegram from rail-head?" Smith asked.

"No, sir," said the babu. He had sent one from the city before seeing Smith that morning, in a code more intricate than Smith's, so he was saved from lying. But he would have lied, if necessary.

"I can see you need a sedative," said Copeland. "Let me give you that first. As a working rule, it's not a bad idea to get rid of the discomfort and then see what's left that needs attention." He was looking into Smith's eyes. He felt his pulse without glancing at it. "Tongue, please." There were no apparent symptoms of the solitary drinking that he half-suspected. "If you'll swallow these--" He gave him three big, sugar-coated pellets. "Now, if I may have a basin of warm water, we'll take that bandage off."

"Is yours what you would call a bedside manner?" Smith asked. He could not resist the impulse to be disagreeable. He hated any one who dared to take charge. The suggestion to remove the bandage should have come from himself, as the senior. "May I ask how much your fee is for a consultation?"

Copeland stared at him, then caught the babu's eye again and smiled.

"There will be no charge for the consultation. I will tell you in advance

how much the rest of it will cost you when I know what needs doing."

"And if I let you do it!"

"Quite so"

Then the basin came, and towels. Smith sat with his back to a window and Copeland carefully undid the bandage. Then he wetted the dressing and snatched it off so suddenly that Smith screamed. "Dammit! Oh, my God, that hurt me!"

It had hurt him all right. He put his head between his hands and moaned; but that was eyewash, to explain away the scream; the pain was over in a fraction of a second. Copeland studied the boils.

"They're bad," he said, "and they'll be worse before they're better. Do you like pain?"

"That's an idiotic question! What needs doing?"

"I should say you need to wangle me a permit to go tiger-hunting."

"Quite impossible, my dear sir. You Americans imagine you can do as you jolly well please, whatever government you favor with your disrespect. But I assure you this is one place where you toe the line like other people. You may not go after tiger in Kutchdullub."

"I will bandage you again," said Copeland. "Keep still."

"Do you mean you can do nothing for me?" Smith turned suddenly to look at him. The involuntary movement was a torture worse than pulling off the dressing, and it lasted longer. "Yow! It's agony, I tell you!"

"No doubt. But it isn't serious," said Copeland. "You can stick it out, I

reckon. Once a surgeon names his fee it's scarcely ethical to take less. My fee is a tiger permit--just one tiger."

"I have no authority to grant one."

"Then we're two of a kind," Copeland answered. "I have no license to practise surgery in the State of Kutchdullub. I have a complimentary license for British-India, but Native States aren't mentioned."

Smith smiled, forcing it; he tried hard to recover geniality and decent manners. "Did you see the British flag?" he answered. "Within the walls of this Residency you are on British ground."

But either somebody had tutored Copeland or he had done his own thinking exceedingly well in advance. "That may be law," he said, "but it's a mighty thin excuse for me to bet on. I came here to treat boils, not to split hairs. Do I get a crack at tiger? Come along, I'll match you! You risk your certificate, and I'll risk mine!"

"Perfectly unheard of!" Smith exploded. But Chullunder Ghose came over from the other window and, as meek as Moses, sat at Smith's feet, smiling upward.

"Will your honor kindly send for secret correspondence file and study letter number O-A-7, date of August 30th?" he asked. "I saw a copy of it. Same applies to this case."

"You may go to the devil," said Smith. But his memory stirred uneasy thought. Official secret correspondence was about as rare as fresh eggs for his breakfast, so he could hardly forget that letter. But the babu quoted from it--one whole paragraph:

In view of all the circumstances, it is therefore urged upon all acting representatives of H.M. British-India Foreign Office to avoid any but

the most discreet and only absolutely necessary interference at the courts of Native States. It is important that the public should not be encouraged, at this juncture, to believe that Native Princes are in any danger of removal from the throne or of loss of prerogatives; since obviously, if that impression should gain ground in an already heated and disturbed condition of affairs that may be likened to a major crisis, the authority of Princes might be challenged by their subjects, with results that it is difficult to foresee.

Smiling at him, confidently impudent, but curiously oozing a sort of wise benevolence, the babu paused. He had done with quoting. Now for some diplomacy.

"The Devil," he said, "quotes scripture, sahib. But your honor's humble servant, this babu, is devilishly *compos mentis* when it comes to stern realities. I think your honor would appreciate an O.M., or perhaps a C.S.I., before retirement? Same is not impossible."

"Curse your damned impertinence!" Smith answered. "Do you mean you sell 'em?"

"Sahib, no. I wangle 'em! A decoration is a public honor worn by diplomats who know enough to trust a totally dishonorable person in a tight place. This is tight place--very. *Verb. sap.* Self am a dishonorable person; nobody could easily imagine me bedecorated with a star and ribbon. Reprimands are my meat; I enjoy same. I was reprimanded--and received a pay-raise incidentally--for getting the goods on the Afghan minister; but it was General Aloysius McCann who got the decoration. General McCann had hives; they made him as indignant as a hornet in a big drum. He threatened me with mayhem. But we saved an international imbroglio, and he got decorated for it. Now you! Why not be a properly bejeweled personage at your retirement three months hence? And is the neck

not painful?"

"Dammit, yes!" Smith answered, grateful for the opportunity to answer yes. Dignity did not permit him, in the presence of a damned American, to traffic for a ribbon. Humor beamed forth from the babu's mild eyes. He understood perfectly.

"Let us suppose that you make a mistake," he suggested. "Then we lose what? Nothing! You retire in three months--pension check as regular as Hawkesey's presentation watch! And you can blame me, who am too notoriously unrespectable to dare to answer! But suppose it comes off--!" "What do you propose to do?" Smith asked him.

"Ah! If I myself knew, I might argue with myself, and that is fatal. And if you knew, you might try to educate me, which is much worse."

"But you dare to try to educate me!"

"God forbid it! I propose that you should give this eleemosynary eye-enthusiast a cagey sort of letter which his Yankee optimism can interpret into an authority from you to shoot a tiger on the Rajah's territory."

"I can't do it."

"He can make boils painless!" said the babu. With an angry gesture Smith repudiated the suggestion that his personal discomfort influenced him in any way whatever. But the movement almost made him yell with agony. He had to wait a minute before he could speak. He devoted the minute to furious thought.

"If you should tell me, on your honor," he said then, "that you require this for the doctor for the purposes of C. I. D. I could stretch a point

then. But I would require such an assurance from you."

"Sahib, I assure you on my honor that I need it."

"And your honor rooted in dishonor stands!" Smith answered. He could not resist the obvious retort; he never could; no more than he could understand why so few friendships had graced his career. "It's a very risky course to take. I know nothing of Doctor Copeland. However, I might give him a note to His Highness asking for permission for him to go and shoat one tiger. There would be no obligation to present the letter to His Highness. He might possibly interpret it as--"

"He will do so!" said the babu. "Will your honor kindly write it?"

Major Eustace Smith, as desperately nervous as a schoolboy cheating at examinations, almost tiptoed to his desk. He wrote on Residency paper, with a quill pen, as illegibly as self -respect would let him--blotted it, which made it more illegible --inclosed it in an envelope, then crossed the room and handed it to Copeland.

"That's your fee in advance," he remarked, "but I want it clearly understood between us that I haven't given you permission to go tiger-shooting. I have merely asked His Highness whether he would care to give you that permission."

"It's as good as Greek to me," said Copeland. "I'm taking my cue from Chullunder Ghose. A Rajah and a circus amount to about the same thing in my--"

"In your ignorance!" Smith snapped back. "Now, will you be good enough to earn your fee, sir?"

Stanley Copeland went to work on him with pitifully skillful hands, a

local anaesthetic and a lancet that had learned to stab as accurately as a sculptor's chisel. If he lacked a bedside manner he redeemed that by precision and the confidence that he had bought with hard work. The relief on Smith's face, when the job was over and the patient lying on the couch, was almost comical; his character, the habitual mask relaxed, leered upward loose-lipped and selfish.

"Yours is an easy way to earn a living, isn't it?" he volunteered. "In New York I suppose you'd charge a hundred dollars a boil for play that's as easy to you as cutting toenails."

"No, in New York I would send you to a Christian Scientist," said Copeland, "for a dose of divine intelligence. Take these in water--once every two hours, twice; then every four hours. Have you some one who can change the dressing once a day? Very well, I'll look in on you on my way back to the border. If anything goes wrong meanwhile, just cross the border to the Sikh dispensary--Kater Singh, his name is--he has no diploma, but he's O.K."

"And we thank you," said the babu. "Have we now your honor's leave to give ourselves an absence treatment?"

"Certainly, yes. Go to hell!" said Smith. "You make me want to get my gun and--"

"Good-by," said the babu.

Chapter XIII

"Let us hope you have no conscience."

A spirit of mischief--nothing else whatever--actuated Copeland. He was coming up for air, and neither principalities nor powers --least of

all a sense of reverence for stuffed shirts or responsibility to dead tradition--controlled his behavior. For months on end--particularly for the last ten days, he had been seeing humanity stripped, in the raw, with its weaknesses upward. His regard for it was limited to sympathy, without much of the sauce of admiration; and at the moment, as long as the mood should last, whoever failed to make him smile was no one, but whoever gave him belly-laughs was somebody. In plain words, he was tired out, and Chullunder Ghose had dawned on him like the rising sun at the end of a long, dark night.

The tire was still flat; nobody had dreamed of fixing it. Another tire went presently. The babu drove serenely on the rims; he seemed unconscious of the jolting. Also, he seemed to believe that the horn was part of the propelling mechanism; from the Residency gate until they reached the city he scarcely stopped using it. There was an elephant in mid-street; it was half a mile ahead when they saw it first; it was still in mid -street when they caught up; it remained there; and the more the babu honked, the less inclined it seemed to get out of the way. The street grew narrower, and the crowds were out because the rain had let up for a few hours; it was a sullen swarm, touchy from close confinement indoors, and averse to making room for any one. The elephant grew more and more afraid of the infernal noise behind him; the mahout, afraid of what might happen, concentrated on his mount and never once glanced backward; but the babu kept on honking.

"For a C. I. D. man, I should say you advertise," said Copeland. "If I was the elephant I'd face about and squash us like a pat of wheat-cake. What's your hurry?"

"That is the Rajah's elephant. Observe the mud on him. And there is Hawkesey's luggage in the howdah, but no Hawkesey. I must talk with the mahout."

"You need a telephone. Jee-rusalem, this is a crazy city! What's that show ahead of us? A circus?"

It was Kali's priesthood, reawakening the public consciousness of death by holding a procession through the streets. They had the image of the goddess Kali on a huge float drawn by twelve white oxen. Conch-horns blared amid a jamboree of cymbals, drums of lizard-skin, and jangling brass bells. Drawn towards it down a dozen streets, like water towards a central drain, the multitude roared--surged--sweated--beat its breasts and grew delirious with frenzy. Those in front of the procession lay to let the sacred oxen trample them, and had to be prodded away by the priests' sharp-ended sticks--a substituted pain, symbolical of the invited death and less embarrassing to the temporal power that prefers to gather taxes from the living rather than support the orphans of the dead.

A Ford horn honking at his rump, and all that din ahead of him, the elephant chose hysteria as the only consolation left. He screamed. He raised his ears. He did a trample-dance in time to the incessant drumming of the ankus on his aching skull. And then he charged into the crowd like three insulted tons of dark -gray death endeavoring to slay them all at once.

"Oh, hell! I go to work again," said Copeland. But Chullunder Ghose ignored that. He had left off honking. He had eyes for nothing but the howdah.

The disturbance had awakened some one. Out from under a tarpaulin some one crawled who had his head through a hole in a blanket and a decorated sheaf-knife hanging at his loins. He gave a glance at the catastrophe, then seized the howdah rail. He almost flung himself over the elephant's rump--a whirl of naked legs and lurid tartan. But he caught its tail. He streamed out like a flying devil cast

forth from a monster's flaming entrails. Then he let go suddenly, fell feet first, tumbled backwards, did a perfect somersault and landed on the radiator of the Ford.

"So that's that," said the babu. "Where is Hawkesey? Damn you, where is Hawkesey? There is nothing else I want to know, so shut up and say where he is!" Then he remembered he was talking English. He repeated the question, using the vernacular, bringing the car to a standstill by the narrow sidewalk. "Where did you leave Hawkesey?"

Copeland got out, carrying his handbag. He could see the elephant embattled with the goddess Kali; he was tusking at her float and overturning it, while mortally indignant priests engaged him with their sharp sticks and the sacred oxen milled in only half-awakened panic. Heroism had the priesthood by the shoulders that day; they stood up to the elephant, prodded him and beat him on the trunk. And heroism, as it usually does, caught on, assuming curious disguises. Some one on the sidewalk brilliantly, instantly, decided the mahout was guilty. Fury lent him strength. He tore up a cobblestone, flung it and hit the mahout. It brained him. The mahout fell down beneath his charge's feet; and, having nobody to interfere with natural behavior then, the elephant screamed a last defiance--and departed up-street, scattering the sacred oxen. There were lots of cobblestones. Innumerable heroes tore them up and buried the mahout, a broken mess of blood and bones, beneath a mid-street cairn.

"The Rajah's elephant" yelled some one.

No priest offering to stop that dangerous assertion of a plain truth, tumult took it up and tossed it to the roofs, where women yelled it to and fro until a quarter of a city knew the Rajah had deliberately sent an elephant to wreck the chariot of Kali. The remainder of the city, pardonably swift to magnify a rumor, took to cover and put up shutters, shouting that machine-guns, manned by the Rajah's sepoys,

had begun a massacre. And Copeland, with his coat off, set a leg or two and bound up bruises that miraculously were the only irreligious damage that the elephant had done. (They were covering Kali's fallen image with a huge sheet, to await the privacy of darkness.)

In the Ford car, on the front seat, fat babu and slender villager engaged in argument.

"But you said you could use me. Therefore do it. I will tell you nothing," said the villager, "until your honor guarantees employment. I will prove to you then what a father and mother of brains your servant is. I am a good one. Write me on the roll and pay me."

"I will kick you in the teeth unless you answer!"

"Nay, I have a new knife. See it. I remember now that Hawkesey said I am to have his overcoat. But that is in the howdah, and the elephant is spilling things, so probably the priests will take it."

"I will take you to the *kana,*" said the babu.

"Nay, nay! That is where the constabeels are. I have had enough of that tribe."

"Very well then, tell me, where is Hawkesey?"

"How, do I know? Am I God that I should know it? All I know is that a constabeel accused him on the way of having slain that other plainclothes constabeel, who tried to slay your honor when I saved your honor in the darkness. Lo, they had the body with them and they would have taken Hawkesey to the *kana;* but I told them priests had done it, so they let us continue our journey. And Hawkesey promised me the overcoat."

"And then what?"

"Why, later we came to the river. But the elephant would not swim the river, though I took him by the trunk and tried to make him do it."

"Did you push him?" asked the babu.

"Certainly I did. I pushed him in. But out he came again, the coward. And then Hawkesey rode off looking for a bridge, although I warned him that the jungle gods would not approve of it."

"Did you ride with him?" asked the babu.

"Nay, not I! I went and did a little puja to the gods, to keep the devils from deviling Hawkesey. I made a little image of an elephant, of mud. It took a long time, because I wanted no mistake about it; it must not be like a cow, or like a horse, or like a common elephant. It must resemble that one. As I say, it took a long time. So the devils got Hawkesey."

"How so?"

"It was the fault of the mud. It was too wet. I had finished the elephant and set a little fire in front of him. And I had finished the mahout and set him on the beast's neck. So both of them were all right. But when I started the image of Hawkesey, gun and all, the wet mud would not stick together. And before I knew it, back they came, the elephant and the mahout, with no less than a thousand devils chasing them--although they had no need to fear the devils, because that part of the puja was attended to."

"And Hawkesey?"

"The mahout said that a tiger got him."

"Do you think he was telling the truth?" the babu asked.

"No. All mahouts are liars. That one lies dead yonder, doubtless because of the lies he told."

"Why don't you think he was telling the truth?"

"Because he waited at the ford for Hawkesey. He pretended that his elephant was weary. But I know, by the way he sat all night and watched, that he expected Hawkesey to come any minute. What I think is that the devils tempted Hawkesey far into the jungle, and that is the last you will ever hear of him. They could not tempt the elephant and the mahout, because I had finished their part of the puja. However, Hawkesey had promised me the overcoat. Undoubtedly that elephant has run back to the lines, so I had better go now and claim the overcoat before some rascal steals it."

"I will find it for you," said the babu. "Get into the back seat." Then he shouted in English to Copeland: "Doctor sahib! Do you stop a forest fire by putting out the match that lighted it? You are a reincarnation of Nero--you are setting legs while Rome burns! Incidentally you rob the local leeches of a fat fee! You will hear from the Union!"

But Copeland was already face to face with that. He had been violently shoved away from one case. Two good splints that he had improvised with commandeered umbrellas had been pulled off and the bandages, made from the victim's turban, had been thrown into the gutter. Men of the victim's own sub-caste had carried him away for treatment by a ritually clean incompetent; and other victims, not yet carried off, were calling to their friends to come and rescue them before the foreigner could touch them with pollution.

"Oh, to hell with them!" said Copeland. "How can you help such fools?" He climbed into the front seat, pitched his bag beside the

villager and reached into his pocket for tobacco. "Where now? Who's your new friend?"

"To the palace," the babu answered. "And the son of untruth on the back seat is the guide who is to lead you into mischief. Luckily you can't talk to each other; there will be trouble enough without that!"

He began to drive as furiously as the flat tires let him, taking short cuts through the crowded, winding streets towards the central rectangular part of the city. There was mob-rule in the making--leaderless as yet, but ominous enough to terrify the police, who were conspicuous by their absence; they had concentrated on the *kana,* where they awaited orders from the palace. Popular resentment at the outrage to the image of the goddess took its customary way of raging against anything foreign and anything modern. Cobblestones and vegetables pursued the Ford, shattered the lamps and windshield, struck the occupants; but Copeland's helmet and the babu's turban saved their heads from injury, and nobody was hurt except the villager--and he not badly; he bled at the nose and wiped it on the blanket with an air of having suffered far worse inconvenience without the compensating fun of being driven, gratis, by a babu in a rich man's chariot. It was not until Copeland forced him, that he lay down on the car floor and protected himself with Copeland's bedding-roll and suitcase.

But the worst came in the great square, where the palace sepoys, hurriedly reinforced from the barracks had been lined up two deep to protect the gilded iron railing and the great gate. Their commanding officer looked fierce enough to eat his own revolver, and the bearded sepoys--bayonets already fixed--were in the nervous state that leads to massacre or rout, whichever accident determines, or whichever the leader's nerves may set in motion. Swarming in the square, the hoarse crowd yelled and imprecated, fearful of the bayonets and

perfectly aware that one word might direct a volley into them, but urged on from the rear, where bullets were less likely to reach loud-lunged agitators and the streets offered ready escape. Copeland advised discretion:

"Isn't there a back door to the palace, if you feel you have to go there?"

But the babu glanced up at the lowering sky and shouted back, between the honkings of his horn: "There is a time for meekness and a time for being insolent. I think, too, that the gods will save these imbeciles!"

He honked into the crowd. It made way. At the top of his lungs he shouted: "From the Residency! Let pass some one from the Residency!"

That bluff worked for half a minute. A lane widened. But the sweaty faces glowered. Teeth flashed. Eyes glared. And then some one shouted *Bande Mataram!*--Hail Motherland!--the war-cry of the self-determinists who want an end in India of all things British, influence in Native States included. Some one with a long stick struck at Copeland's helmet and the officer on horseback at the great gate saw it. He shouted. He drew his saber. He turned in the saddle to bark a command at his men. The babu gave the engine all the gas he dared, and above the din of that--above the mob-yell--sudden as a thunder-clap--a volley from a hundred rifles ripped into the air above the crowd's heads. Then the gods got busy.

"Thought so!" said the babu.

Down came the rain. It was as if the bullets had shattered a firmament. A deluge, driven by a gusty wind, smote slanting in the faces of the crowd and scattered them as if their angry gods had

opened on them with artillery. The lightning sizzled through the rain. It thundered. And in sixty seconds one whole company of drenched, but relieved and scornful sepoys stared across a streaming pavement at a solitary, flat-tired, battered Ford that skidded crazily towards them, honking for the gate to open.

"Quick! Am I a fish?" Chullunder Ghose asked.

The commanding officer, proud on his high horse, but peevish because the rain was pouring down his neck and chilling his spinal column, rammed his saber back into the scabbard and motioned the babu away with the flat of his hand. He ignored Copeland. To explain about that volley would be trouble enough without adding to it by an altercation with a foreigner.

"I bring a doctor for His Highness," said the babu.

"I know nothing of an illness."

"Does the Rajah have to ask you for permission to be sick?" Chullunder Ghose retorted. "Do you think your haughty ignorance will save him from a death-bed?"

"Go away, I tell you."

"Very well then, stick that saber into me and take the consequences! Or command a volley! One more like the last one should improve the Rajah's headache! It should sweeten His Highness' temper!"

"Where is your authority?"

"Where yours is--under a wet towel in the Rajah's bedroom! And the towel will catch fire unless they change it very frequently! Already I am late. But I would rather be me than you when I have told who kept me

waiting!"

The commanding officer decided, ungraciously, on a middle course. He faced about and ordered two men to mount the running-boards and go with the Ford to the front door.

"Then, if they are not admitted, bring them back to me and I will show them the guard-room door from the inside."

The gate swung open and Chullunder Ghose drove honking round the drive to the pretentious portico, where insolent retainers lolled in heavy overcoats and scowled at such an insult as a Ford car.

"Tradesmen to the back door!"

The sepoy escort took their cue and ordered the babu to drive on. But he stopped the engine and was out on the palace steps too quickly for them.

"Idiots! Did you hear that shooting? I am from the Residency. Go and tell His Highness that unless he sees me instantly a telegram will be sent to British-India for troops to quell the insurrection!"

Even palace flunkeys understood the dire significance of that threat. The arrival of a single company of British infantry would mean political extinction as a State--and that would mean the end of perquisites. Another differently sordid crew of bureaucratic thieves would govern. So a man fled up-steps and the babu followed, placidly ignoring the command to wait. He followed through the front door; he was too heavy and powerful for the attendant to slam it shut in his face.

"You forgot me!" he said with a grin. "I am the broker, not the moneylender! Kiss yourself on both cheeks with the compliments of

Mother Kali!"

But the impetus of impudence was almost spent by that time, and they kept him waiting in the hall. He gave his name to the attendant. Three inhospitable looking stalwarts stood and glowered at him, while another vanished to inform the Rajah who it was that dared to crave an audience. Their ominous scowling made the babu nervous; he was suffering reaction from his own enthusiasm, and the longer he waited the worse he became--until the chimes of a grandfather clock nearly startled him out of his skin. It was high noon. He compared the time by his wrist -watch--set the wrist-watch.

"Mid-day--mid-monsoon--*in medial res*--we lay our bets--*fortuna insolente ludit*--God proposes, man forgets--and then *calamitas intrudit!*--I forget my Latin. What the devil else have I forgotten? Oh yes--that the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb --let us hope so. Let us hope, too, that the scissors shear well!"

Suddenly and very rudely he was beckoned to the Rajah's presence by a man whose servile nature parroted his master's mood. He even parroted the silence--imitated the sneer and the nod of the autocratic head that had assented to the babu being haled into the presence. Down a corridor as gloomy as a morgue, with mildewed tapestry, the babu followed the attendant to a room that the Rajah described as his office. It was very plainly furnished and reserved for visitors whose social standing was of much less note than their importance. On the wall that faced the plain oak desk there was a portrait of Queen Victoria, bearing her autograph. It had been made in one of her less amiable moments, and a small crown, at a saucy angle, indicated that she knew her onions, although she might have been offended at the phrase.

"You swag-bellied scoundrel! What do you want of me?" the Rajah

asked.

"Magnificence, I need an elephant." With his hands to his forehead, the babu bowed as meekly as a tradesman asking ten times what a jewel for the last new favorite was worth.

The Rajah struck the desk. "May devils with a set of jaws at both ends bite you in the liver," he exploded. "If I had a thousand elephants, you shouldn't have one."

"But the thousand-and-first? I beg the Presence to begin to count at that end."

"I will gladly count a dozen that shall tread you into food for rats, if you will only go and lie down in the mud where you belong!"

"But if the priests should let me have an elephant--"

"Pah! Try them!"

"I should need to persuade them, no doubt, by informing them of what I know."

"Eh? What? You rotten spy! And what do you propose to tell them?"

"It would need to be something serious," said the babu, "since they know so much already. All I need is just one elephant, for one week--"

"Week? You raging imbecile! I tell you, not for one hour!"

The Rajah opened the middle drawer of the desk. He drew out a revolver, a little beauty, all mother-of-pearl and nickel-plate. Then he rested his elbow on the desk and covered the babu, glaring at him.

"Now them Tell me why you're here, and what you think you know, or

go out down the main drain!"

"Did the main drain swallow Syed-Suraj? I am sure Your Highness would have shot me first thing, if it were not risky. Did the main drain swallow all Your Highness' slightly rash remarks about the British? It is said that others than the priests have overheard them. It is said, too, that Your Highness' cousin's health is--"

With the butt of the revolver on the desk the Rajah dinned him into silence.

"They accuse me, do they? And is that what brought you to Kutchdullub? You abominable traitor, are, you sent to inform against me, and to find an excuse for getting rid of me in order to enthrone my cousin?"

"Is the Presence dreaming?" asked the babu.

"Tell me why you want that elephant."

"To save your Honor's honor!"

"What the devil--?"

"If the Presence will believe a desperately hurried babu, I am sent to do the diametrically opposite of what the Presence honors me by hinting that I might be trusted to attempt! A little meditation might convince Your Highness that the British Raj, if it should wish to bring about your abdication, would hardly entrust that task to such a person as myself."

"You lie, you fat hog!"

"If I should reveal a secret, will the Presence not betray me?"

"I will blow your brains out, unless you tell me all you know, you viper!"

"Then I must tell. You are murdering your cousin. You have murdered Syed-Suraj. By refusing to destroy a tiger you have murdered many of your subjects, for the sake of making a dilemma for the priests. I am afraid that you have sent my good friend Hawkesey to his death. And you have tried to murder me. But I am sent to save a scandal."

The Rajah grinned. "And you propose to do it? How?" He tapped the desk with the revolver.

"I intend to send a doctor to your cousin. That is why I need an elephant."

"And--?"

"As Your Highness shrewdly said, I am a viper. I forgive the attempt to have me murdered--"

"Do you? You slew one of my men!" said the Rajah. "It was no doubt you who told a villager to say a priest had done it. You shall hang for that as surely as I sit here!"

"But unless you promise me," the babu went on, pointing an accusing finger, "and unless you keep the promise, to attempt to save the life of my friend Hawkesey--"

"Then what?"

"Then what? Damn you, I will let the priests win! I will let you abdicate! And you shall die in prison in the Andamans, where they will neither give you champagne nor expensive women! Shoot me--go on, shoot me! I am unimportant. I am only the one person who can save you from enforced abdication!"

"Curses on your black soul!" said the Rajah.

"If I thought I could trust you--"

"You can't! You can't trust any one," the babu answered. "My employers trust me. That is all you can depend on. It is your luck that they don't want any scandal. They have sent me to preserve them from the bad embarrassment of forcing you to abdicate, at this time when political strain is too severe already. You can no more trust me than I trust you. But you can use your judgment. Have the whisky and the women left you any?"

"Damn you--"

"Do I get the elephant?"

"When?"

"Now!"

"Do you mean you are for me, not against me?"

"I am dead against you! But I have my orders to save you from the Andamans. Do I get he elephant?"

"Yes."

"Give the order."

"Presently. About Hawkes? What do you wish done about him?"

"I will tell you about Hawkesey when the elephant is at the front door."

"You annoy me," said the Rajah. "I advise you, it is dangerous to do that."

"Is it?" asked the babu, bulging out his stomach. "Let me tell you then, that I am fat from too much danger that has never happened! It is you who are in danger. I would rather see you dead than prosperous, so hurry up! Unless I have an elephant in fifteen minutes--"

"Twenty," the Rajah answered. With an air of bitter resignation he returned the nickel-plated weapon to the drawer. "It will take them all of twenty minutes to get him saddled. Wait here."

"While you shoot the doctor? It will take me twenty minutes to instruct him," said the babu. "It is not so simple as, perhaps, you think, to save your face and keep my conscience at the same time! Let us hope you have no conscience; that may save your Presence from the horror of repentance at the end!"

Chapter XIV.

"We nibblers at the thread say nothing."

Behind Hawkes was the light from the fire he had built. He also held a flashlight that exactly indicated where he was, although it also aided him as long as he kept it switched on. It showed him a hole in the wall, down which the inscrutable woman slid, heels first; and it showed him her head at the foot of the hole, when she landed on something firm and waited for hire. But he switched it off then, in order to spare one hand for his rifle and the other for groping. He could slide in the dark, and he did. But when he switched it on again before reaching the bottom it made him a mark for any one who might be lying in wait for him.

Suddenly, then, he remembered he was naked from the waist up--no spare ammunition; all the extra shells were in the pocket of his coat

that was waiting its turn to be dried at the fire. His curiosity, or possibly the woman's weird appearance, or her magnetism, whatever that is, had obliterated caution. He cursed himself and instantly decided to climb back, to get his coat and reconsider tactics. A bat in his face increased his eagerness. He directed his flashlight up the hole--and felt his feet seized from beneath him.

He had carried his rifle muzzle-upward, to protect the sight, and from habit, and because the butt might come in handy to provide a purchase on the rough wall. Now there was no room to turn the weapon end for end; it was as useless as a protest in an earthquake. Worse, it occupied his right hand. And he clutched at his watch with his left hand--that precious watch that he kept in the padded, buttoned pocket underneath his belt. So he dropped the flashlight, heard it clatter downward, and the next he knew its rays were focused on him.

He was jerked out from the hole so violently that he was almost stunned when his head struck masonry; but he hung on to the rifle and his thumb snapped off the safety catch as automatically as his other hand had gone to the protection of the watch. He could see nothing except his flashlight pointed at him. He was lying in a pool of white light on a black floor--onyx--black marble--something smooth and slippery; and he discovered that his feet were in a noose. He sat up suddenly to aim his rifle at the flashlight, and was equally suddenly jerked to his back again. Some one snatched his rifle then and twisted it out of his grip. Whoever that was, whispered:

"Sorry to be so rough, sahib--take it easy!'" Good plain English! But the noose around his feet was plainer than a hint too. So was the butt of his own beloved .577, poised in the path of the flashlight, over his nose and near enough to explain exactly what it meant. He saw now that the woman held the flashlight; but the rope that held his feet went

taut into the dark beyond her.

Pride has its very peculiar way with individuals, no two reacting quite alike. It made Hawkes silent. It was pride in his own resourcefulness that told him, if he said nothing and did nothing, surprising opportunity would offer him the upper hand in due time. Why waste effort? Why not fool the adversary, meanwhile, with a show of sulky submission? He lay still, hoping his hands would escape being tied. But that was a vain hope.

He who held the rifle set a lean knee on his neck and pinned him to the hard floor, forcing him to writhe to one side to avoid suffocation. He raised his hands to strike at the knee, or to seize and twist it. Both hands were instantly caught and drawn tight in another noose. The pressure on his neck ceased, but his hands were pulled over his head and he lay stretched like a felon awaiting the rack. It was a very neat job; even Hawkes admitted that. He was as angry as a noosed gorilla, and about as likely to forgive his assailants, but he was curious too. He had bumped his head, but why in thunder had they been so thoughtful not to hurt him worse than that? And why the devil did the woman stand there saying nothing?

He began to be drawn, on his back, by the feet. Whoever had charge of his hands kept that rope taut enough to make struggling useless. As he passed the woman she spat on him. Suddenly, then, the torch was snatched out of the woman's hand and switched off. He heard a blow that sounded as if the woman's arm had struck some one, and he heard a knife go slithering along the floor. After that he was dragged in great haste, scraped around a corner, down some steps, where the man behind him raised him by the shoulders, presumably to save him from being skinned on the stone treads, and then carried by two men through a door. He heard it slam behind him.

"Sahib," said a voice, "we thank you in the name of our employer."

"What for?" Sullenness was melted by astonishment; Hawkes could not keep his tongue still.

"That you let us avoid the wrath of our employer."

"Who's he?"

"He insisted we are not to hurt you. Did we?"

"Damn your eyes, who is he?"

"But he ordered us to seem to be your honor's enemies, in order that your honor may assist us."

"Turn alight on!"

"But we are to warn your honor not to use the rifle--not yet."

"Strike a light, I tell you! Let me up, God dammit!"

"Babu Chullunder Ghose said also that your honor is depended on to listen to us two and not be angry with us."

"What's his number?" Hawkes asked.

"C.3."

"What's yours?"

"We are F.11 and F.15."

"O.K., I'll listen to you. Dammit, if you've hurt my rifle--"

"Take it, sahib. It is unhurt."

The spokesman switched on the flashlight that he had snatched from the woman in passing. He grinned.

"She had a knife under her goatskin, but I knew it. Slash your throat and feed you to the tiger too soon--that was her idea. But I tricked her. And now I shall have to persuade her all over again."

Hawkes stood up, kicking his feet free from the noose. He examined his rifle.

"What the hell d'you mean by too soon?" he demanded. Then he stared at two men dressed in yellow smocks, their hair, a mess of yellow clay. They looked like religious pilgrims; on their foreheads were the yellow-ocher signature of Kali's chosen. They were worshipers of Death, if signs meant anything. One of the men was lighting a hurricane lamp in a corner. He was using Swedish safety matches. As soon as the lamp was properly alight the other man switched off the flashlight.

"Let us save that. We shall need it. She--that woman--knows you are the Rajah's agent. She supposes you have come to kill her tiger. She would have knifed you if we hadn't coaxed her to reserve you for a special offering to Kali. We persuaded her that there would certainly be trouble unless the tiger kills you in the open and it looks like accident. And we agreed to tie you, and then loose you in the tiger's way some evening. But you see what she is; she can't wait. She's a bad one."

"Why not noose her then, the same as you did me?" Hawkes asked him. "Drag her to Kutchdullub. Chuck her in the clink. I'll interview her tiger. Let me get my eye on him at fifty or a hundred--"

"Steady, sahib! He who sent us is an artful person. If we take this woman to the *kana,* who can prove anything against her? But it will

prove to the priests that we are their enemies; and the priests will prove it to the people, who will riot. One priest is a better liar than a hundred lawyers, and a lawyer is no duffer at it, God knows. They will turn lies loose against us like a swarm of hornets. And the worst is, they will say the British have a hand in it. They will say that the British are aiming plots at their religion, we being men of the C. I. D., which is a British agency. It would be true; and the truth is deadly dangerous, except as one friend to another."

Hawkes stared at the fellow's straight nose and at his hungry, fierce eyes; they were fierce with savage laughter.

"If you couldn't see a joke, you'd be a damned keen killer on your own hook, I'll bet! What's the game now?"

"Sahib, wait for C.3. He and we are mice that nibble at the thread by which a sword is hanging over some one."

"Politics, eh?" Hawkes scorned the word; he never used it except as an insult.

"Nay, sahib, not so. Politics is talk, of which there is already too much. Is a politician he who lets the pythons strangle one another? Nay, a politician seeks the stronger side. Then he robs both the loser and winner and says: 'Behold me, what a paragon I am!' But we--we nibblers at the thread--say nothing, and rob no one."

"I can't wait here," Hawkes said savagely. He hated mysteries. He had a .577 that he felt could easily solve this one. "C.3 wanted me to find out how they get a man-killer to come back when they call him. I'm to go to Kutchdullub and tell him. How's it managed?"

"We will show you, sahib."

"Any priests here?" Hawkes asked.

"No, not priests, but devotees, such as we are supposed to become when the spirit overcomes and overwhelms us. Do you understand that?"

"No," he answered sulkily. He did not wish to understand it. But as thieves delight in teaching thieves, and scientists delight in teaching scientists, the C. I. D. exists because its members passionately love their art and teach it, as it might be music, to whoever has the O.K. of a master of their guild.

"It is the same as Thuggee, sahib. Thuggee never died out. It was a religion. A religion never dies, although, it can be changed into another form. So when the British set the C. I. D. to wipe out Thuggee; and its devotees, who slew by stealth for the sake of slaying, saw the shadow of the gallows--and the slayers, though they love death, love not that death; then they had to seek another way of worship. So they sought this. And it is also like the death beneath the wheels of juggernaut. And it is also like the death by Sattee. Only this is far more dreadful."

"And they like it dreadful?" Hawkes asked.

"Drama, sahib! They are unlike the little weaklings, who go in gangs and flatter one another. They are like lone criminals, on whom a spirit of crime has cast its shadow; or like great conquerors, on whom the breath of war has breathed. They achieve aloofness and aloneness. And the drama they devise is for themselves alone. It is not crime or conquest that they serve--or profit; and it is not fame they seek--or justice. Neither is it pride. And they are not mad--not as common madmen are. They see crime, or they see death as a drama; and themselves its climax. Slay--then be slain; it is all one."

"They may kill 'emselves for all of me," said Hawkes.

"And why not, sahib? But a man must understand them if he hopes to serve the C. I. D. and grapple with the brainy ones who turn such drama to their own ends."

Hawkes spat. He reached for his pipe and tobacco--remembered again that he had no coat on--swore irritably. Then he answered:

"Out o' my line. I'm not C. I. D. I never would be. I like give and take above the bellyband. To hell with sneaking in and out o' holes."

"But if the secrets are in holes? You shall look at this one, sahib."

F.11 signed to F.15, who took the lantern and led downwards into smelly darkness, by a flight of stone steps in the thickness of a wall whose seams not even an earthquake had been able to enlarge. The darkness stank. There was a silence that not even Hawkes' boots could shatter with Fusilier tramp on the masonry.

"Where's that woman?" Hawkes asked.

"You shall see her, sahib. I must tie your hands now. Even in the darkness that is better; one might come and feel you."

No less suddenly than Thugs were used to whip their scarf around the throats of victims, F.11 noosed Hawkes' arms. F.15 had snatched the rifle from his hand and he was pinioned like a gallows bird before he could start to resist.

"It must not be forgotten, sahib, that a death awaits your honor! It is by your honor's death that we two may achieve the ecstasy that shall prepare us also for the embrace of Kali!"

Sullen silence fell on Hawkes again. He could have kicked and done

some damage, but not enough to make the offense worth while. So he grinned while he gritted his teeth; he had had enough of indignities and somebody would pay--unless--

"Are these blokes fooling me?" he wondered. "They could have learned those numbers--easy. Am I for it?" He could feel the goose-flesh rising on his bare skin; and the stench of a charnel-house sickened him. "Chullunder Ghose said nothing about these men. Why, I wonder? Maybe they've been spying on him, that's what!" He began to think about his mother and his sisters. "Dole!" How he hated the word.

Chapter XV.

"Not yet!"

There was a goatskin on a shelf of masonry. It was sewn like an enormous short sleeve. F.15 used it to cover the lantern, and then it was pitch dark except for the blood-colored glow on his knuckles where the bail just topped the goatskin. So it felt like following a dead man's hand into the morgue at midnight. Or a graveyard. Or a pit where paupers' corpses lie awaiting God's worms.

The abominable stench grew sharper as a passage curved round the roots of broken columns, amid debris over which Hawkes stumbled. There was only a glimpse now and then of a column lying prone beneath the wreck of a colossal roof--until the glimpses presently became a dim reality, and suddenly the passage opened on a segment of gallery, on which about a dozen tiny clay lamps flickered. There had been a balustrade round the gallery, but that had fallen. Perched round the edge, beside the little lamps, sat humans, chins on knees, like vultures at a Parsee charnel-tower. And the stench came upward, from a darkness that suggested death made solid.

The little grease-fed, smoky flames round the gallery resembled yellow tongues that sought to slake undying thirst.

The human vultures glanced uneasily, as vultures on a roof do, at the sound of Hawkes's boots on the masonry. Then they resumed their vigil, staring downward. F.11 whispered, so Hawkes sat between him and F.15, with his legs tucked under him; but they sat like the others, chin on knees, with their arms round their shins. The gallery was only three feet wide; Hawkes set his back against the wall and shuddered. It would be a lot too easy for his guides to seize him, one on either hand, and shove him over. He could almost feel himself go. He shut his eyes--then opened them and forced himself to stare into the dark, polluted silence.

Then he saw eyes. They were green. They were not, they were red--no, green--no, one was green and one red. They were both green. They were moving. Up and down a trifle; then from side to side and back again--as much as twenty feet each way--faster and then slower. They were deep down somewhere, and no guessing how near--fifty--a hundred--a hundred and fifty feet away--no, fifty. And they seemed to be in mid-air. But they were too big for a bird's eyes; and never a bird flew as that one did. They were enormous. No, they were not; they were yellow, and they shrank. They were two of the lamp-fires mirrored on stagnant water. But they vanished. And there they were again as big as ever, moving sideways, emerald--then blue-green. Much more swiftly they were moving.

Silence split so suddenly that Hawkes's heart checked, then hammered on his ribs. It was neither a growl, nor a whine, nor a snarl, but all three, ending in a harsh cough.

"Tiger!"

Now he recognized them; tiger's eyes, weird in darkness, made that

way by nature to confuse all others. And it was easier to guess, now that he knew what they were. They were thirty feet down, and twice that much distant, moving to and fro behind a barrier of some sort, but he could only imagine the barrier. They were catching the light from the tiny clay lamps and reflecting it.

In the gruesome stillness Hawkes suddenly heard a footfall. It was heavy--careless; something rolled away as if kicked. It sounded unlike stone. And then there was light--a little blaze of tinder, leaping into crimson as a resinous torch caught fire. It was the woman. She was perched on a broken column, seated slightly above Hawkes's level, to one side of a circular pit, whose roof consisted of a mass of fallen masonry supported by its own dead weight against surrounding walls. She shook her torch. Amid the leaping shadows, thirty feet beneath him, as he stared, Hawkes saw human ribs, skulls, thigh-bones, scattered amid fallen debris--then a tiger and tigress, she behind a barrier of upright stone bars, rubbing herself against them, as if fawning on the male. He stood as close as he could get to her, magnificent and startled, staring up at the torch. He blinked at the light. He snarled and showed his eye-teeth. His tail twitched in and out of shadow. He crouched. He slunk away towards the dark mouth of a tunnel--turned round a shapeless heap of masonry and changed his mind--turned back again and stared up at the broken gallery -- then coughed and sprang like lightning at the column on which the woman sat. His leap fell short of her by twenty feet. He tried it three times. Then he slunk back to the tigress, who was frantic; she was flowing back and forth behind the stone bars like a shadow with emerald eyes.

No one had moved, stirred, spoken. On the segment of the broken gallery that solemn audience sat still like vultures that await death. Whose? Hawkes struggled to release his arms, but F.11 heard him and whispered:

"Not yet!"

Then Hawkes pressed his back against the wall so hard that it tortured his pinioned elbows; but the pain was better than the too near edge of that rail-less gallery. When F.11 moved a little closer to him he set his teeth--shrank. Pride would not let him cry out, but he felt already the appalling vertigo of falling into dark space. He began to pray for guts with which to face it.

Suddenly the blood came coursing through his veins again like an electric current. Sound as vibrant as a file on brass so struck the silence that it seemed to make the very silence throb with anger. It was the hag. She was singing. And never in battle, nor in the ambulances where the stricken screech their greeting to the jaws of hell, nor in the jungle, when the python steals on victims in the night, had Hawkes heard such a paean to the gods of horror. Agony was in it, and the utter emptiness of hunger for the ultimate of nothing--and the knowledge that the hunger, too, was nothing, and the agony of the nothingness of hunger in a void that had no end and no beginning--an eternity that was not, is not, never will be. And the human vultures in a row round the ledge, between the little yellow lamp-flames, chanted flat, monotonous responses to her litany of death.

It ended in a silence in which nothing stirred except a skull that rolled out of shadow where the tiger's eyes shone in the torchlight. Then the hag struck a gong and the tiger crept into view, as if he knew that signal. Some one at the far end of the gallery--without a word or gesture that betrayed emotion--set his thumb deliberately on the little flame beside him, stood up leisurely as if he yawned at what was coming, raised both arms above his head, swayed slowly and then, soundless, let himself go, feet first, down into the dark pit.

He fell with a thud amid bones and debris. There was no other sound,

except a slight one as he writhed in shadow. Hawker's pulse beat a hundred times before the tiger leaped like tawny lightning through the zone of torchlight. Then a guttural growl --thud--scrunch, as teeth went home into a man's neck. Silence --nothing--no emotion, except that the tigress, like a frantic green-eyed shadow, wove to and fro on a loom of longing in her dungeon behind the stone bars.

Chapter XVI.

"I kiss feet, heavenborn!"

Ram Dass, dealer in grain and mortgages, was a gentleman whose hat was always in the ring. He had an enviable reputation as a good sport, who was easy on his debtors if the debtors played fair. But it was dangerous to "gyp" him. Having lent the Rajah five thousand rupees at usurious rates on an open note, at the request of Syed-Suraj, he was perfectly willing to wait for his enormous profit; but he did not choose to lose the money.

And Chullunder Ghose had very deftly planted in the mind of Ram Dass more than a suspicion that the Rajah was in danger of losing his throne. On top of that came rumor--then the circumstantial story--and then proof that the Rajah had murdered Syed-Suraj in the course of a furious argument. The inquest, held immediately in the Rajah's library; the servants' version of what had happened; and the verdict--had deceived nobody, not even the presiding judge who acted coroner. The Rajah had not even honored the inquest with his presence, although rumor had it that he listened through the panel above the bookcase that had been used by the woman who actually saw the murder and reported it in detail to Chullunder Ghose's dish-faced spy.

"If I must lose my money I will have a run for it," said Ram Dass to his

head clerk. "Royalty may get away with murder, but the ones who do settle their debts! And besides, that babu didn't drop me hints for nothing. It was not for nothing that he told me how to get the elephant-feed contract. Not for nothing that he saved me from lending another five thousand. Not he! He does nothing for nothing. And he knows I play fair. What does he expect, then? He didn't say what he wants. But if I play my own game it will probably exactly fit his."

He had none of the airs of the plutocrat. In spite of all his wealth he did not even own a carriage. Beneath a very cheap umbrella, and with a very ordinary cotton blanket swathed round his shoulders, he walked to the office of Ananda Raz, the Brahmin attorney. He was admitted instantly into the Brahmin's presence. And, being a sensible man, to whom another's dignity was equally important as his own, so long as it entailed no calculable loss or inconvenience to him, he started with the proper formula.

"I kiss feet."

So the Brahmin wheezed asthmatic, equally perfunctory but inoffensive blessing and they sat down, studying each other with the guarded guile of men who thoroughly detest each other's morals but respect each other's business acumen.

"Terrible weather," said Ram Dass.

"Dreadful," agreed the Brahmin. "But the rain should give us good crops. Do you look for a low price for future rice deliveries?"

"I look for God's will."

"Such is wisdom," said the Brahmin.

"As attorney to the temple trustees, you undoubtedly are more

familiar with God's will than the rest of us," said Ram Dass. "Is it probable that changes of importance may occur soon?"

"Of the weather?"

"At the moment I was thinking more of ruined temples--and a tiger--and the funeral of Syed-Suraj," Ram Dass answered. "Is the Rajah's cousin's health improving?"

"I have no news."

"Is the sahib at the Residency well?"

"I have heard he has boils," said the Brahmin. "And if that is true, he should be pitied. Boils are painful, and they who suffer from them usually lose their judgment along with their bodily vigor."

That was an opening. Ram Dass rode straight at it, whip, spur and bridle.

"Is he sick, or is he shamming? Are they diplomatic boils, and is he waiting on events, to see which way the priests--I mean the cats--jump, before he bets on one or other of them?"

"Strictly between you and me, he is ill," said the Brahmin, "but it makes no difference. Such a person as he is always at the mercy of events, since he always looks backwards. If he does look forward, it is only to a dream of laziness. In consequence, a change inevitably sees him trying to resist it."

"So you do think there will be a change?" asked Ram Dass.

"Do I? And what sort of change?" the Brahmin answered.

That seemed to be another opening, so Ram Dass tried again.

"I am in favor of a change," he answered. "Did you hear the Rajah's sepoys fire a volley from the palace gate just now?"

"Yes, yes. Nobody was hurt, however. It was a warning to the crowd to disperse."

"I am in favor of the crowd," said Ram Dass. "I have heard that the Rajah sent an elephant to wreck the sacred image of the goddess Kali. Do the priests intend to overlook such sacrilege?" Ananda Raz knew perfectly that Ram Dass cared no more for Kali's image than he did for Confucius; he was simply talking to seduce the attorney's confidence. Ananda Raz, however, only wanted an excuse; he only dreaded to give an opinion that he could not, later, claim he had been justified in giving. So he yielded--let his temper get the better of him--wheezed as if some one had stolen a fat fee:

"Sacrilege! Sacrilege! Now you have laid your finger on it! Murder we are used to! Insolence and personal defilement we have had to learn to tolerate! But show me proof that it was he who sent that cursed elephant to break up the procession through the streets, and I will--"

He hesitated for effect, and Ram Dass flattered him by a show of breathless interest:

"Tell me!"

"I will guarantee to have him replaced by his cousin within ten days!" said the Brahmin.

"How then?"

"I will bring on a rebellion! And I will get up an appeal for British troops! And I will sign up an association of his creditors!"

He paused again. He stared hard. Then he pointed with his index finger. "Tell me, are you not his creditor?"

At that Ram Dass unmasked his own artillery as blandly as a conjurer producing rabbits from a top-hat.

"Thank you," he retorted.

"What for?"

"A concerted action by his creditors might force me to accept as little as a tenth of what he owes me. So, unless I get mine first, in full, you may depend on me to take his part in any serious trouble that may turn up!"

"You astonish me!"

"I know, too, that he owes you a lot of money," Ram Dass continued. "You expect to get it from his cousin, as the price of the priests' support, but you propose to make the other creditors accept a small percentage of their claims."

"But I assure you--"

"I need no assurance! As attorney for the temple trustees, you know that the priests have got themselves into a mess! They have a tiger--"

"Prove it!" snapped the lawyer.

"I don't need to. Tigers are their own proof! Are you such a fool as to suppose that an inquiry by the British won't involve the priesthood in a scandal that will clip their claws and break their teeth forever? That is why you sit still. You, as the attorney for the priesthood, are afraid to appeal to the British. So unless I get the money that the Rajah owes

me, I am going to the Residency now to demand that the Resident wire for troops."

"Then neither of us could collect the money that the Rajah owes us," said the Brahmin.

"I can afford to lose mine," Ram Dass answered. "I would lose it far more cheerfully if you must lose yours also."

The attorney stood up, blazing indignation. "Go then, to the Residency!" Ram Dass bowed to him in mock humility.

"I kiss feet, heavenborn!"

He bowed his way out, but he guessed Ananda Raz would have him followed. So, his purpose being to recover money, not to make more difficulties, he struggled against the rainstorm to the palace without the slightest effort at concealment. If Ananda Raz should guess that he was on his way to offer the Rajah loyalty and influence, possibly then Ananda Raz might change his mind and buy him off by purchasing the Rajah's debt. But if not--and if the Rajah should be obdurate or flat-broke--there was still the Residency and the more or less amusing prospect of annoying--and arousing--and compelling Major Smith to act with energy that was as foreign to his nature as humor and genuine dignity were.

The officer on duty at the front gate never had been asked to pay his bill for horse-feed, so Ram Dass was promptly admitted. But he was questioned. The officer wanted to know what course the rioting had taken and what the prospect might be of a further demonstration at the palace gate.

"I am not in politics," said Ram Dass, "and I mind my own business. But I have heard that the priests are up to something. They are crows

who caw of death, remember!"

The officer's face betrayed concern. "And His Highness is suddenly sick!" he remarked. "Just now they brought a doctor to him." If he had spoken the word "poison" he could not have expressed the thought more clearly.

Ram Dass nodded, to conceal his own surprise. "His Highness's cousin's health?" he asked, to keep the thought in motion.

But the officer was not so easy to tempt into indiscretion.

"Go in," he answered. "Bring me the news on your way out."

So as accident, or luck, or some unseen directing spirit such as dogs the ways of murderers, would have it, Ram Dass swayed and struggled against rain and wind and reached the Rajah's front steps, under the elaborately gaudy portico, exactly at the moment when Chullunder Ghose came down the steps to confer with Copeland, who was sitting on the back seat of the Ford attending to the nosebleed and the bruises of the villager. The villager was enjoying the fun of being "serviced" by a sahib, in a rich man's chariot, beneath the up-turned noses of a lot of Rajah's servants, who were showing their profound displeasure from the high steps of the very palace entrance. It was exquisitely pleasant to offend such haughty nabobs.

Chapter XVII.

"Sappier and verbier than you guess! Hurry! Hurry!"

No less swift or sure of touch than Copeland's to the villager's needs, Chullunder Ghose's genius leaped instantly to deal with Ram Dass.

That a middle-aged man of affairs should face such filthy weather, at a time of riot, was sufficient proof that opportunity was stirring, and the babu knew the nature of the seed that he had planted in the merchant's mind. The law of probabilities suggests, if it does not actually indicate, that certain sorts of men are likely to react in a clearly predictable way to certain sorts of pressure; and the babu was an artist; he could recognize a psychological condition with the accuracy of a sculptor making notes for future use, and with the skill of a physician who observes the symptoms that a patient is trying to hide from himself.

"Which are you doing?" he demanded. "Are you sawing off the branch you sit on? Or are you trying to ride two camels, in two directions, with a fence between them that you wish to sit on?"

"I have come to recover my money," said Ram Dass.

With his belly thrust out and his hands on his hips, like a fat chef in an apron, the babu laughed at him. He laughed as if the universe held nothing else than good jokes.

"Perhaps you like to lose your money?" Ram Dass shot back irritably.

"God, I haven't any! Ha! ha! You won't have any, unless you change your methods! I would rather look for goblets full of cool wine in the Gobi Desert, than for money where you go questing for it! You remind me of a virgin who has lost her reputation. It is irredeemably lost, and the thing for her to do is to forget it and establish herself as soon as possible as some one much too sensible to feed a dead horse!"

"I have talked with Ananda Raz. I have just been to see him," said Ram Dass.

"Any one could guess that!" the babu answered. "And a pair of pale eggs in a frying-pan could see that you have told him too much and have heard too little! I suppose you offered to join the High Church party on condition that the party should agree to guarantee your money? Don't deny it. I would probably have done the same thing!"

"What would you suggest?" Ram Dass asked. "You, who said you never bet, but who have lent your money to a profligate at the request of needy adventurer, in the hope of making too much profit from a contract to supply good elephants with bad corn --you astonish me that you forgot my hot tip! Bet on this babu, I told you."

"Is it too late?"

"Do I look it? Unless Hawkesey also has forgotten which horse he should bet on, and has upset all the dope by disobeying men he doesn't know and shooting away the weight that my opponents have to carry, I am winning hands down! Bet on me, you idiot!"

"I bet," said Ram Dass.

"Very well, then. Go in and demand your money. He will say the money isn't due, and it isn't, but you must accuse him of having got it from you under false pretenses, and of having shot the only witness."

Ram Dass hesitated. "He will shoot me!"

"Do you think so? In my presence? I shall be there, mind you. It is less than fifteen minutes since he did not dare to shoot me, all alone, and dearly though he would have loved to do it!"

"Ah! If you are coming with me--"

"I would not trust you to see him alone," the babu answered. "And

now understand this--memorize it: he knows a lot too much already for his own good, because I have told it to him. I have given him exactly twenty minutes to prepare a trap, and I intend to walk right into it! He had the impudence to tell me that it takes his whole corps of mahouts that long to harness up an elephant. He had the ignorance to imagine I would wait in his office while he summoned somebody to quarrel with me and provoke a fortunate excuse for my arrest. He does not dare to kill me; he is contemplating other means of making me innocuous. So when he does what I am almost sure he contemplates, you are to fall into the trap too."

Ram Dass was a much too easy-going usurer, and much too downright in his dealings to consider traps with equanimity. He checked again.

"You have a sahib in the Ford car. Take him in there with you. I will wait here. Then, if you don't come out in due course--"

Chullunder Ghose affected sudden interest. He swept away resistance by accepting and conditioning the other man's proposal before he had time to voice it.

"Yes, yes. You could go to the Residency and report to Major Smith. But you must do that afterwards: It is of the utmost importance that you should go to the Residency, and I depend on you to do it."

"Do you mean you planned this?" Ram Dass asked him. "How did you know I was on my way here?"

"Planned it? No, no. But the second I saw you coming I knew the gods were working with me! 'Ram Dass,' I said to myself, 'is a gift of the gods to a man in a tight predicament!' I was in terror at the thought of taking in this surgeon sahib to protect me in the Rajah's presence. He is brave and honorable, but about as ignorant of

statecraft as an alligator is of contract bridge. So you can estimate my pleasure when I saw you--thoroughly experienced and dependable Ram Dass! 'Here is a man,' said I, 'whom I can safely bet on! We shall help each other; what a privilege--what fun--what justice--in return to help him get his money!'"

"Do you believe I can get it?"

"Yes, if you will trust me."

"I have trusted you before," said Ram Dass, "but never to this extent. However, there is no fool like an old one. I will go in with you."

"Not you. Go on now, ahead of me!" the babu answered; and he shoved him up the steps so violently that the palace servants noisily rebuked them both and Ram Dass felt he had to go in, to preserve his dignity, since otherwise the servants might honor themselves by thinking they had overawed him. Then Chullunder Ghose hurried to Copeland.

"From now on, sahib, until hell and high water permit, you will kindly believe nothing unless I tell it to you! As, for instance, do you see an elephant? It is one! And you are to ride it--now, immediately! Get out. The mahout will set a ladder for you; climb it, and don't forget the rifle and the little black bag. The villager shall carry up your bedding, but don't let him appropriate it, you will need it badly. I will tell the villager where to go, and where to wait for me. If the mahout refuses to obey him, beat both of them with the butt end of your rifle and then beat the elephant--since that will cause the elephant to run, and the mahout to make the best of it; and it will make that villager believe you know what you are doing."

"Maybe it's as well I don't know?"

"*Verb. sap.,* sahib! Sappier and verbier than you guess! Hurry! Hurry!"

It would have been harder to persuade Copeland not to ride the elephant, in that holiday mood in which he found himself. It was a monster of a beast that swayed into the rain round the palace wall and halted beneath the portico. It seemed the Rajah had said nothing about trappings, so the chief mahout had compromised on a sort of semi-royal turn-out, with a howdah that had canvas weather-curtains and enough enameled woodwork to suggest that, at the very least, a royal favorite was being sent for a ride in the rain to cool her disposition. Copeland climbed the ladder, drew the curtains, and reached for his pipe.

"O.K. with me," he chuckled.

Chullunder Ghose watched the villager climb up with Copeland's luggage, then beckoned him down and took away the ladder.

"Run away," he ordered.

"Why?"

"You are a liar, a thief, a murderer, a greedy fool, a treacherous and dirty-minded ingrate, and a devil destined to be reborn in the belly of a worm. Besides, I don't trust you."

"Naturally. But you like me," said the villager, "and that is why you take advantage of me. What now?"

"To the devil with you," said the babu. "Run and fetch me a man I may trust."

The villager turned his back and ran into the rain. He turned again

and ran back.

"This is he! And now what?"

"This fellow looks like a talker to me," said the babu.

"Uh-uh! This one's name is Silent Shadow!"

"Are you deaf and dumb?"

"Yes."

"Then you can't hear me tell you to lead this elephant to the grain-barns that belong to Ram Dass, and to wait for me there. So you can't tell any one I told you what to do. But you will do it."

"The mahout might not obey me."

"He is not deaf. I am not dumb. So he will obey me; otherwise the sahib in the howdah will instruct him with the butt end of a rifle."

"Is he such an one, that sahib?"

"He is such an one as cuts out livers. He extracts eyes. He cuts off noses. Legs and arms are so much trash to him, he mows them off. He can make a man unconscious in a moment, and the man may wake up with a noseless, blind head on a legless, armless body--and no liver either. That is the exact truth, so observe a careful attitude towards him."

"Certainly. I will make him like me as much as you do. Does your honor mean the barns of Ram Dass that are on the outskirts of the city, eastward from here? Very well. And now, since I am dumb, you had better command the mahout to tell his elephant to pick me up and set me in the howdah."

"You will walk," said the babu.

"In this rain?"

"And being a silent shadow, you will observe whoever follows. If you speak to nobody until you see me--under any provocation, mind you--and if, when I give you leave to speak to me, your speech is satisfactory to me, I may consider you for permanent employment."

"Don't doubt, I will satisfy you. Let me have a little money for my victuals."

"You shall eat, at my expense, when I eat. Lead on."

"*Atcha!* By the size of your honor's belly, I believe you eat good food and plenty of it."

Chullunder Ghose aimed a kick at him to get him started. Then he ordered the mahout to follow and called up to Copeland to beat the mahout if he should dare to disobey the villager.

"And if any one asks you questions, say you are the Residency doctor--*locum tenens*--temporary--just come--out for a look at the scenery. They won't believe you, but they wouldn't believe you if you told the truth."

Copeland laughed. "They'd have to search me! I don't know the truth!"

"Nobody does," said the babu. "You shall see me when you see me. So long."

The elephant swayed away majestically and the babu returned up the palace steps. He was nervous again.

"You scowl at me?" said the attendant.

"Open the door wider!" the babu commanded. "Do you take me for a sardine? Yes," he added, "things are going too well. I suspect you of soaping a stone for me to slip on!"

Curiously cautious all at once, he peered round the door before he entered, but there was no one lurking there in ambush.

"A hyena smells its own breath, and fears its own shadow," said the attendant, smiling acidly. He had received no slipper money --the extortion customary in the East, where slippers are supposed to be kicked off at the outer door and left in the attendant's charge. Chullunder Ghose's slippers lay beside the plainer ones of Ram Dass, on the top step. He returned. He picked them up. He handed them to the attendant.

"You shall hold them for your greater honor," he remarked, "and if I catch you having set them down, you *beshirm,* I will ram them down your gullet! Where is Ram Dass?"

Slightly cowed, but surly, the attendant pointed and another man came forward to escort the babu, who smiled, but his smile was noticeably thin, as if it had been pasted on his fat face. He was down into the depths of the fear that follows closely on audacity and sometimes overtakes it.

"Things are going too well!" he repeated half aloud, and the escorting servant answered: "Sahib?"

"I said, 'Hurry up, you father of a snail!'"

He was as irritable now as he was normally serene. The palace gloom affected him. He started at the least sound. The corridor

draught made him shudder.

"Where is the library? Where was Syed-Suraj shot to death?" he suddenly demanded.

They were passing the library door. The servant pointed to it. "There is still a broken window, so the room is disused for the present."

"But I wish to see it," said the babu.

"Nay, it is forbidden."

Chullunder Ghose, however, tried the doorknob. The door was not locked. He pushed it open, glanced inside, and suddenly stepped into the room, slamming the door in the servant's face. There was a key inside. He turned it.

"Bohut salaam!" he remarked in his usual calm voice, bowing from the hips, not lowering his eyes. His nervousness had gone as utterly as if it were a cloak that he had left behind him in the corridor. Here was real, unexpected, unimagined danger. He could face this. The Rajah, with his right hand in the mirror -paneled closet, turned to face him with a sneer as savage as a startled cat's.

Chapter XVIII.

"I know devils when I see them!"

There was brandy on the table. There was brandy in the Rajah's eyes too. They blazed. He had swallowed almost half a bottle of the stuff. A mere matter of twenty minutes, plus the alcohol, had changed a worried unregenerate into a calculating savage.

"Who invited you in here?" he demanded, and the babu guessed he

had to answer well and swiftly or receive a bullet in the belly.

"You did! Your dilemma did! Unless you act exactly as I tell you, it is absolutely certain that the blood of Syed-Suraj will be avenged on your head! I am here to save you from it."

That was stark bluff, and the Rajah suspected it was. But he was as eager to conceal what he was doing with his right hand as the babu was to see what he was doing. If there was a pistol in the closet, it was strange that the Rajah did not pull it out and use it. The babu's wits worked furiously, and he was gaining control of his face. He smiled inscrutably--a poker smile that might mean triumph; or it might not.

"Has not Ram Dass asked you for his money?" he said slowly. "You are rightly afraid of Ram Dass. So am I afraid of him. He is the one man rich and important enough, and determined enough, to force an intervention by the British. He would do it for revenge if he believed you cheated him. But can you pay him back his money?"

"It is not due," said the Rajah, trying to withdraw his hand without disturbing something, or without opening the closet door so wide that the babu could see what was in there. Probably he hoped, too, that Chullunder Ghose might think there was a firearm on the shelf.

"But Ram Dass says you did cheat," said the babu. "He asserts you borrowed under false pretenses, not intending to repay. Why did you borrow the money--such a little sum of money? And where is it?"

That was calculated impudence. The brandied dignity of royal breeding boiled up, and the Rajah withdrew his hand to strike, or to make a gesture with it. Keys clashed, and something fell forward off a closet shelf and stuck between shelf and door as the Rajah tried to slam the door shut with his foot. The babu moved a trifle sideways,

and the Rajah followed his movement, as a cornered snake does, so that the pressure of his foot against the closet door was relaxed and something fell to the floor with a crash.

It was an unlocked, decorated metal box. It spilled its contents. There were seed-pearls and a lot of semi-precious stones--trash for the most part; but there also was an aigrette set with diamonds that was probably one of the jewels of State. The Rajah tried to hide it with his foot, but he was too late.

"You propose to offer that to Ram Dass as security?" the babu asked, sure of himself now. "You had much better traffic with me. I am a poor man."

"What do you mean?" The Rajah's eyes glowed sullenly, but there was a flicker of indecision and a hint of half-awakened hope about the way he showed his teeth through slightly parted lips.

"You haven't tried to tempt me, have you?" said the babu.

"Blackmail?"

"Never! A reward for saving you from abdication and the Andamans, however, might be--well, it might make matters easier."

"I have no money at the moment."

"None? Not any? None of what you had from Ram Dass?"

"I have only three thousand rupees of it left. And as for you, you dog, I wouldn't trust you with it. You would pocket it and then betray me."

"Why, of course I would, if I could do it!" said the babu. "I don't love you and you don't love me. But how do you suppose I am to pacify Ram Dass, unless I let him see what happens to his money, or some

part of it, and tell him why it happens? And if Ram Dass is a witness, how shall I be able to betray you without ruining myself? So I suggest that you should let me talk to Ram Dass, and then pay that money to me in his presence. It is very little money. It is scandalously little. But if it's all I can get I will have to accept it."

"Yes--and then collaborate with Ram Dass to betray me!" said the Rajah.

"I would tell you not to be a fool, if you were not a royal personage," the babu answered. "I am under orders, as I told you, to prevent an abdication if it can be done. And Ram Dass simply wants his money. Promise him the elephant-feed contract and--"

"I did. I offered that just now," the Rajah interrupted. "He refused to listen."

"Let me talk to him."

The Rajah hesitated, blustering to hide his fear that fifty of his crimes were known to the babu. It would be no use buying him off on two or three counts, only to be blackmailed on a dozen others.

"You dog of a devil!" he sneered. "It might be wiser in the end to shoot you as you deserve! And besides, this is inconvenient. I need that money."

"So do I," the babu answered smiling. "However, keep it--keep it! Any one who won't pay that small sum of money to be saved from abdication and the Andamans is, after all, no patron for a man of influence like me! It may be better to report to my employers that this is a situation too explosive to be saved except by drastic measures."

"I will try you," said the Rajah. "But if I even suspect you of playing a

trick, you fat hog--" He snapped his fingers by way of illustration.

"Bring the money," said the babu. "Let us waste no more time."

But the Rajah had to go and get the money, so he turned the babu over to a servant.

"Keep an eye on the fat brute!" he ordered. "See that he waits in the corridor. During my absence he is not to speak to Ram Dass."

So the babu stood and stared out of a window, and because it was raining outside and the murky clouds shut off the sun, some one had turned on the hideous electric chandelier that dangled like a trained icicle from the corridor ceiling. The window-glass, due to the stronger light on the inside, became a moderately clear reflector of the corridor. The babu watched it. Suddenly he ducked. His foot slipped on the polished marble and he fell on his back. He rolled sideways as far as the wall and got up cautiously, first on his hands and knees, with his back to the window. However, he could only see a very slight sway of the curtains at the far end of the corridor where, in the window -glass, he had detected the long tube of a blowpipe. And in the window-pane behind him was a neat hole surrounded by feathery cracks, such as nothing on earth could have made but a sharp dart.

"Am I so unpopular?" he asked the servant. "Stand here and observe me! How can you observe what I am doing if you shrink behind that statue?"

He compelled the man to stand between him and the curtains; and the fellow's nervous shudder and his furtive glances were enough proof that he knew about the blowpipe and expected at least another shot. The babu watched him like a lynx.

"If you should move your right hand, I would break your neck!" he

warned him. "Not that you are not a pleasant fellow, nicely scented up with musk to save your nose from turning upward, but I dislike a knife in my belly."

Then the Rajah returned, not more than glancing at the babu as he beckoned him and opened a door on the right-hand side of the corridor. He looked as if he had another stock of brandy somewhere and had swallowed a lot of it--perhaps to make it easier to part with money.

"Wait for me. We will go in here together!" said the babu. "Your assassins are such rotten shots that they might hit the wrong man unless I protect you! How you would laugh if you knew how important to me your royal life is!"

"You are drunk, you fat fool!" said the Rajah.

"Yes, Your Highness. I am so drunk that I do not notice that you, not the servant, have opened the door. Has he a pistol? A dagger? What has he?"

Sullenly the Rajah jerked his head. The servant slunk away along the corridor. The Rajah entered the room and the babu followed him. Ram Dass was standing in a big bay window, dwarfed and as shabbily aged as a mendicant by the high ceiling and the rich cut-velvet hangings. He looked sorry for himself and eager to be back amid the grain-sacks in his comfortable store; but he perked up at sight of the babu. As he bowed to the Rajah he raised both hands respectfully to his wrinkled forehead and glanced between his fingers at Chullunder Ghose. But there was no answering signal, and for a moment here was silence. The Rajah seemed not to know what to say. However, it was up to him to speak first, so he turned contemptuously on Chullunder Ghose.

"It is beneath my dignity to repeat your conversation," he sneered. "Tell this merchant what you have suggested."

Then, as naively as if he were a bagman selling rubbish to a fool, Chullunder Ghose unfolded his proposal to the gravely nodding Ram Dass, who stroked a graying beard and puckered wise eyes.

"Ram Dass, sahib, as your honor knows, this babu is the underpaid employee of a government that sends me into trouble but repudiates me if I can't keep out of it. I know His Highness owes you money, but he can't pay me to turn my coat and do him certain little favors, if he pays you also. And, besides, he has not enough money for you at the moment. He has only three thousand rupees. And that is my price."

"I demand my money," Ram Dass answered.

"Either that, or I go to the Residency. And if Major Smith won't ask for an investigation, I myself will go to Delhi and demand a hearing at the Foreign Office."

He was so sour and vehement that he almost deceived Chullunder Ghose. He made the Rajah swear and stutter.

"Tell him!" he commanded. "Tell him what you told me!"

"In a moment. Ram Dass, sahib, only this babu in all the world can save His Highness from flattering the Kaiser and the King of Spain by imitating them. But he would have no money and less liberty, so he would rather imitate the Czar of Russia. And that would do nobody any good, since who would pay his debts? So he proposes to pay me a little money in your presence, and to assign to you all the contracts that are at his disposal. In return we are to lend him our united influence, and you are not to press him for the money he recently borrowed, until it is due. I beg your honor to agree."

"I want my money now," said Ram Dass.

"But he can't pay!"

"I won't pay until it is due," said the Rajah.

"And unless he pays me something there will be a calamity," said the babu. "All his creditors will have to whistle for a dividend from nothing, properly prorated after the attorneys have been satisfied. He is to bribe me in your presence to prevent my double-crossing him. Is that clear?"

Ram Dass looked amazed. "I didn't know you take bribes," he answered.

"I can seldom get them," said the babu.

"Do you mean," said Ram Dass, "that your influence can actually save this Rajah? Changes are sometimes bad for business. When we know where we are, we are there, at any rate. But can you do it?"

"I am sent to save him from an abdication," said the babu.

"But you won't, unless he bribes you? Oh, well. I shall never think the same of you again. But stability counts. I will wait for my money--provided I get all the contracts for delivery of corn."

"Yes, yes," said the Rajah, "at a good price--at a very good price. I will see the treasurer about it, and you need not fee him. But I shall expect your loyal influence. There must be counter-propaganda to offset the lies the priests are telling."

"I detest those rogues," said Ram Dass.

The Rajah forced a smile. He crackled three one-thousand rupee notes and laid them on the window-sill.

"I may depend on both of you--eh? They are yours. You may take them," he said to the babu. But as he drew his hand away his finger-ring struck the window-pane. And as the babu took the money, a red turban--two eyes--then a lean, mean face appeared above the sill.

"You see, we have another witness!" said the Rajah, smiling much more genuinely than he had done. "I supposed a little bribe was all you wanted, so I took a precaution."

"Only one?" the babu asked him.

"No need now to kill you!" said the Rajah. "You will either serve my interests without fail, or lose your job and go to prison for accepting bribes. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, huzoor."

"You had better begin to use your wits at once against those thieving priests."

"I wish to do so."

"And don't forget that they are intriguing to get my loving cousin on the throne."

"I will not forget it."

"Then you have my leave to take your beastly presence hence into the rain, you blackguard, and begin!"

"I go now," said the babu.

Bowing--suitably respectful--he and Ram Dass hurried out. Chullunder Ghose retrieved his slippers from the door attendant and slapped him with one of them.

"Just to remember me by!" he remarked. "Your master has insulted me. Out of my way, you dog, before I spit at you!"

"Just try to get in here again!" said the attendant.

"You have done it now!" Ram Dass grumbled. He hurried down the front steps, but the babu overtook him.

"Get in!" he commanded.

"Into that old Ford? Not I. It has flat tires. Why should I risk my neck at my age?"

"Because I tell you. Get in!"

Chullunder Ghose hustled him in, but it took him a minute or two to get the thing started, and he had to hold the merchant.

"Let me out, I tell you! I have never ridden in a--"

Fear seized Ram Dass as the car jerked forward, missing badly, thumping on its rims. He set his teeth and held on grimly until the car had to stop at the iron gate, where the officer, dismounted now, leaned in to speak to the babu.

"What news?"

"Not much," said the babu. "Any more rioting?"

"None yet. That one volley turned their stomachs. Let us hope the rain will continue. That will stop rioting. But tell me your news."

"Can you keep a secret?" asked the babu.

"None better! I am trained to keep them."

"Don't say that I told you. But the truth is that Hawkesey--you know Hawkesey?"

"Don't I!"

"Hawkesey has been got at! He has turned against His Highness. He is in a temple in the jungle, where he is conspiring with the priests to bring about a *coup d'etat* to put the Rajah's cousin on the throne. Hawkesey has been promised double salary. And the Rajah's cousin has guaranteed him a pension for life in the event that the British insist on having him deported. That's all."

"And you call that nothing? Does His Highness know it?"

"No. And I daren't tell him," said the babu. "Even if I did dare, I could not get back into the palace. One of the attendants has assaulted me. He called me vile names. All the palace servants are afraid of me because they think I spy on them and will report them to the Rajah. So I don't know what to do."

"How many people know this?" the officer asked.

"Not many, sahib. Even Ram Dass hears it only for the first time."

The officer affected scorn. "I don't believe this. It is another big-fish story."

"Who expects you to believe it? Who expects the Rajah to believe it? Nobody believes a true tale, until too late! Why should you believe me? I am an anonymous and stupid fat man, sent by some one

stupider than me to find out what is going on--so, naturally, I know nothing! I would like to know, though, what the Rajah is to do about it!"

"Five hundred Men!" said the officer. "We can hew hard. We can shoot straight. Even Hawkes has praised our shooting lately!"

"Oh yes. I suppose, then, you will face about and display your heroism to a brigade or so of British troops? You idiot! Do you suppose the British will permit a civil war in this State at a time when they must also deal with Gandhi and a dozen other troubles? They will simply march in and annex the territory. And then where will you be? Perhaps you think the British will sack their commander-in-chief in order to provide you with a fat job?"

"What is this about poison?" the officer asked. "His Highness sent away that doctor just now on an elephant."

"Poison, nothing! I suspect the Rajah knows the truth of what is happening and simply has the wind up! He is drinking too much, and he has a headache, that's all. Any one who told him what to do would be a Godsend to him."

"I can reach him," said the officer. "His Highness is always willing to receive me whenever I have anything to report."

"But you are not to tell him that I told you," said the babu. "He would be angry with me for not having told him myself just now, when I had the chance."

"Why did you not tell?" asked the officer.

"Because I was afraid of him, for one thing. As for you, if you are not afraid, you had better say your own spies told you. Thus you will receive more credit."

"Why not? Yes, that part of it is simple. But what is the proper advice to give him?"

"Ask me!" laughed the babu. "Who am I to know that? I know well enough what I would do in his shoes. But I am not in them, praise be to the gods of Karma!"

"What would you do?"

"I would go to that temple on elephant-back. I would take not more than one or two men with me, and perhaps some servants. I would order Hawkesey to return to duty."

"And if Hawkes should refuse?" asked the officer.

The babu stared. "Are you so innocent as that? Do you suppose Hawkesey would shoot him--and hang? Of course he would not! Could he take him prisoner? Quite equally, of course not! What could Hawkesey do with such a prisoner? I tell you, Hawkesey is alone, with only three or four priests. He is supposed to be shooting a tiger. He is actually making propaganda."

"Why not appeal to the British?"

"That would take time," said the babu. "Time is in favor of Hawkesey."

"Why not go, then, with a hundred men and seize Hawkes?"

"Because of the rioting! Let twenty-five, or fifty, or a hundred armed men march, in monsoon weather, and who will believe the Rajah is not making war against the priests? Do you suppose the priests will sit still and say nothing? You have never seen a riot such as that one would be!"

"But if Hawkes refuses to surrender to His Highness personally?"

"Then the Rajah has a fine case, hasn't he, against the British! They would have to help him to destroy Hawkes, but it would not give them an excuse to overturn the government and put another in the Rajah's place. At the least, they would have to pretend to be ashamed of Hawkesey's misbehavior."

"Well, why not shoot Hawkes?" asked the officer. "He might be ambushed. Or he might be tempted into a parley and--"

"Oh, how I envy any one whom you advise!" the babu interrupted. "Shoot Hawkes without bringing him to trial--and then see who can stop the yell of 'murder' that will go up! Don't forget that Hawkes is much more popular than you are. And the priests, who probably despise him, nevertheless would take advantage of his murder to accuse the Rajah. Can the British let a Britisher be killed and not retaliate?"

"So you suggest--?"

"That he should use his courage!" said the babu. "Has he any? Order them to open me the gate, I pray you."

Presently, in drenching rain, in mutually watchful silence, Chullunder Ghose and Ram Dass skidded to a standstill. There was no one near the yellow-shuttered corn-shop except a dish-faced penitent who sat in sackcloth, chin on knees, beside the shop door; even he seemed unobservant.

"Now I thank God I am still alive," said Ram Dass, starting up the steps between the ancient cannons. He seemed to wish the babu not to follow him. He hurried. He turned at the shop door and noticed the babu giving money to the dish-faced individual.

"Buy merit if you can! You need some," he remarked, and then entered his shop.

Chullunder Ghose followed him through to the back room, where the oil-stove burned amid the corn-sacks. Ram Dass turned on him.

"You are insane!" he said bitterly.

"I hope so, sahib! Here are your three thousand rupees. Take them."

"My three thousand? Are you drunk too?"

"Not yet. When insanity has done its job, I mean to get as drunk as Bacchus! Take your money. You are fined two thousand dibs for having lent good money to a bad crook! I could not do any better for you."

"Do you mean it? You are not so mad after all. That dirty dog would never have repaid me, whatever I threatened. He knew I was bluffing. I thank you. Three thousand is better than nothing at all. And I apologize for my remarks just now."

"But how about the contracts?" asked the babu. "Do you want them? And don't you owe me something? Turn about is fair play."

"Money? How much?"

"To the devil with your money! Hawkesey and I are on the level. So are you, Ram Dass-jee. Run an errand for me, and we cry quits!"

"What now?"

"Go to the Residency and insist on seeing Major Smith, however many times he may refuse to see you. Tell him that his boils are not

an alibi, and say you have important information for him. Then, as soon as he has finished reprimanding you for the intrusion, turn the tables on him. Say that the priests are telling all the people that the Rajah has sent Hawkesey to commit a sacrilege by invading a sacred place. Say also that the Rajah boasts that Major Smith advised him to send Hawkesey, and that therefore the people are doubly indignant. Tell him that today's riot was a prelude to rebellion that only he can prevent. And then commence to flatter him. When flattery has done its work, tell him you have overheard me talking to the Rajah's bodyguard, and say you think the Rajah intends to force a civil war, in order to compel the British India authorities to intervene and put the hooks into the priests--which will inevitably bring the British into the religious sort of difficulty that they dread with all their nerve and instinct."

"I was right when I called you insane," said Ram Dass.

"Nevertheless, reserve your judgment," said the babu. "My insanity is catching! What I want is to get Major Smith to hurry to the palace. He will take a sore neck and a rotten temper with him. He will threaten the Rajah. He will Dutch-uncle him. I know Smith. And if I know the Rajah, he will drink a lot of brandy and decide on what a statesman would have jumped at in the first place--and spoil it by incorporating what that officer of the guard to whom I spilled a little seed of my insanity, advises."

"Then what?"

"Major Eustace Smith will get a decoration." "What for?"

"Nothing. I shall get a reprimand, and much more interesting work to do. And you will get the contracts."

"Pah! I doubt it. That man's promise--"

"Is as good as wooden money, no doubt. How about his cousin's promise? If I tell his cousin you were instrumental in--"

"Oh! This man has to abdicate?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Wait and see!" the babu answered. "Will you do that errand at the Residency?"

Ram Dass rubbed a finger on his sly old nose and hesitated half a minute. Then he answered:

"I will do it. Not because I trust you, but because I think you trust me."

"Stchah-Stchch! The fellow to trust is the Rajah," the babu answered. "I know devils when I see them!"

Chapter XIX.

"C.3 meant to do that, if he did it."

Familiar though he was with death's most bloody and disgusting shapes, Hawkes was dazed and sickened by the devotee's death at the claws and fangs of the tiger of Kali's temple. Helplessly bound, with the stench of the tiger's den beneath him and the grim hag's torchlight breaking up the gloom, he hugged the wall again for fear of falling off the ledge. Ghosts of dead men seemed to leap out from the shadows. He could hear the tiger snarling and the crunch of the brute's fangs on human flesh and bone.

There was no more ceremony, except that the hag stood upright on her broken pillar and began to scream, waving and shaking her torch. She was as mad-drunk as ever a Roman mob became at orgies of dramatically frightful death. Her screams appeared to stir the tigress in the cage behind the stone bars; eyes that glittered in the torchlight did a dance to the measureless rhythm of the hag's chant, leaving to imagination the invisible contortions of a body yearning to glut strength in a feast of frenzy.

Both Hawkes's captors seized him by the shoulders, raised him to his feet and started back along the gallery, one leading with the shrouded lantern and the other urging from behind. He could not have been recognized by any of the others on that gallery; it had been too dark; his captors hustled him away too soon. At the end of a winding passage--not the same they came by--they descended three steps and passed through an iron door that F.11 closed and bolted. Then the other unshrouded the lantern --grinned and pointed.

Half in and half out of a trough of carved stone lay a python, heavier and much longer than any Indian python Hawkes had ever seen. It was offended by the lantern-light. Red anger stared from its fixed eyes. It swayed its head in baffled arcs as it tried to see beyond the lantern. Then it crawled away across the threshold of another door and vanished amid tumbled masonry. And F.15 spoke:

"Fed full! He has slain his count of men, that serpent; but he eats goats, since a man is too much for his jaws to swallow, though he crushes them like sponges dipped in red wine! One goat a week they give him--and six for the tigress; on the seventh day they let her hunger. But to the he-tiger they give nothing; he must hunt men!"

"Loose my arms!" Hawkes ordered. "Dammit, I gave all my whisky to the elephant. I need a drink like Judas Iscariot!"

F.11 unfastened his arms and chafed the places where the raw hide thong had bitten when he strained against it in his terror.

"Now the rifle!"

F.11 gave it to him. There was no hint of his being a prisoner now--no fear of him, and not the slightest trace of anything but comradeship. F.15 and F.11 grinned, disclosing teeth as yellow as their long smocks, and their eyes were as inscrutable as those of alligators. They were partners in an ugly game; they were as full of guile as rats, as full of ruthlessness as leopards; but they were as friendly as two good hunting dogs.

Hawkes stared up at a ceiling formed by broken vaulting, into which huge blocks of masonry had jammed themselves in falling.

"What now?" he demanded. "I'd like half a ton o' T.N.T. I'd fix this place up proper! Samson could ha' done the job right--pull away the props and drop it on 'em? Never heard o' Samson? You should go to Sunday school, the same as I did. How do I get out o' this?"

"You don't!" said F.11. "Did not C.3 tell you to obey us?"

"Chullunder Ghose asked me to get back quick to him with information," Hawkes answered. "If you've any message for him, get it off your chests, now. And then how about one of you coming to show me the way home?"

Both men shook their heads. "Our orders are to stay here," F.11 answered. "We have done our work well. Soonya believes we are a pair of Kali-worshipers in quest of this death." Even F.11 shuddered. "Our turn is the last--us two together--after all the others have been torn and fanged into eternity. We are to keep you here until the babu comes. He said so."

Hawkes asked: "Did he mention me by name?"

"He did not. What does C.3 care about a man's name? C.3 is a doer of the silent deeds that set up this one, and that set down that one, but that leave him as secret as the drawers of night's curtain. Nay, a man's name or his place are nothing to him; for if Number One says, 'this one is a traitor; ruin him!' or 'that one is a true man in a tight place; clear a way for him a little!' C.3 does it. And he told us he would send a man to stand by, who should do our bidding and defend us if it comes to grave need. We are to defend him also and to show him all we can discover. You are that one."

"Am I? I'm in a predicament," Hawkes answered. "That's what I'm in. First of all, the Rajah's Dirty Dick says I'm to come and shoot the tiger. I tell C.3, and he urges me to come, but says I'm--not to shoot the tiger; I'm to hurry back and tell him what's what. On the other hand, he did say I'm to dress by any one I find here who appears to have credentials; and you blokes have 'em. And you tell me I'm to stay along o' you until he comes. But I'm paid by the State o' Kutchdullub, out o' taxes, and supposed to obey the Rajah--barring that, I mayn't take part in politics or buck the local prejudices, one of which is that a white man shouldn't enter temples. It's a mix-up! Damned if I know what to do now! I've a mind to go and shoot both tigers to begin with."

"Nay, nay, sahib! C.3 needs them."

"What the hell for? Is he crazy? Ever since I've known him he was just a good old fatty with a sense o' fun and twice his share of honest guts. Has he gone off his onion? Does he know about the goings on in this place? Has it made him barmy? Dammit, I'll go barmy if I don't get out o' here!"

"But in the darkness, sahib? Through a jungle such as this one? In the

monsoon?"

"What do you suggest?" Hawkes answered.

"Sahib, we are pieces in the game he plays, so let him move us!"

"But he has told you one thing, and me another!"

"Sahib, nothing is more certain than that C.3 meant to do that, if he did it."

"Damn his eyes!" Hawkes spat perplexity. Then he reached for his pipe and swore again when he remembered he was naked to the waist and that his pipe was in his jacket pocket, in a cell at the end of a maze of winding passages. "You two come and sit by my fire," he suggested. "It'll go out if I don't get back and heap some wood on. We can sit there until daylight--fresh air and no skeeters--how about it?"

Both men nodded.

"But to hell with that damned hole where you two caught me by the feet!" said Hawkes. "We'll stick a rock in that from top-side. Let's get out o' here and find our way by the glow o' my fire in the dark."

"But there is no way out." said F.11, "except through the chamber where the woman keeps watch."

"O.K. She shall have my butt end if she cuts up!"

"Nay, nay! She is mad, that woman, and she has the cleverness of madness. As a drunkard gets drink, or as a drug-addict gets drugs, Soonya will get what she is after, until the end comes. It is better that we let her think she has her way now. She will take a short cut to her way if we stir suspicion. If we slew her, we should have those others

down on us; and they would be worse than she is, because the would have lost their guide into eternal death! They would say we had robbed her also of eternal death! She teaches that eternal death is only to be had by dying in the right mood and exactly at the proper moment, of one's own will. And they crave the nothingness of nothing--the annihilation of themselves and of knowing, and feeling, and being. They crave it as an egg craves life, or as a lover yearns for his beloved."

"All right. Up the hole!" Hawkes answered. "I'll go nutty if I stay here, that's a safe bet."

He shuddered. Unimaginative as a rule, and ignorant as most men are of all that did not interest him, he had not the remotest notion of the meaning of that temple, or of the fact that Moloch -worship, the fire of the Inquisition, and a hundred other horrors, are only new names for a basic madness that is older than history. All Hawkes cared to know just then was that the stars and moon were shining somewhere outside, up above a murky wilderness of clouds that would be blown away by clean air. And he yearned for that air in his lungs--good, washed air.

"Get a move on!"

F.15 led, carrying the lantern. F.11 followed with a cat-like tread that suggested his own nerves were nothing to boast of just then. The contact with Hawkes's plain thinking probably had showed him, as a light shows darkness, something of his own weird peril. He seemed almost as much afraid as Hawkes was, and the echoes of the thump of Hawkes's boots on the floor of shadowy, long passages so scared him that he crowded close on Hawkes's heels and glanced backward so often that Hawkes, too, felt they were pursued. Crowding on the man ahead, Hawkes stumbled frequently, because there were steps

in unexpected places and the rising ramps between them were encumbered by the litter of fallen carvings off the passage walls. But at last they reached the sloping hole that Hawkes had come down at the invitation of the woman.

Then F.11 went up first with his rawhide looped round his waist, and when he reached the top he lowered it for Hawkes to clamber up by. But it was too short. F.15, with bare feet, had a better grip on time-smoothed masonry, so Hawkes, encumbered by his rifle, had to tread on the lamp-bearer's shoulders, and the two of them slid twice to ground again before Hawkes caught the noose at last. It tightened on his hand, and F.11 felt the strain. He pulled hard. Hawkes went upward like a fish hooked foul, and landed, cursing, with his chest and face in bat-dirt and the stench of that to stomach rather than the fresh night wind for which he famished.

But the fire burned; all it needed was a few sticks and a moment's fanning. Outside, gusty rain was splashing on the stones and gurgling down the channels it had cut in slopes of root-bound debris. Hawkes went out, trousers, boots and all, and washed himself until the bat-stench faded. Then he pulled off his trousers and wrung them, coming in again to dry them at the welcome fire and squat there like a wet frog. He examined his rifle carefully by firelight before he found his pipe. When he had filled and lighted that he felt less nervous, but a military instinct urged him.

"Take that rock, you two, and plug the hole," he ordered. "There's a brace o' tigers, and a woman, and a python; none o' them's good company."

When they had done that they came and squatted on their heels beside him, and for a long time there was silence, only broken by the storm sounds or when one of them poked the fire. But at last Hawkes got into his clothes, and that broke F.11's reverie.

"Until the earthquake," he said, "and that was in the time of Akbar, or earlier, this temple was known as a place where death could be had for the asking. There was fire in those days. Men --aye, and women were thrown in, at their own wish, after being taught the meaning of it by the priests of Kali. But it always was a secret, told in whispers. Men said that the earthquake ended it. But our trade teaches this, if nothing else; that evil has no end and no beginning. Vigilance reduces it, as day does night, but even day has shadows. None knows how to stay night from returning. And an evil springs up from its own roots in the very shadow of the scythe that just now mowed its stalks."

"Hell, you talk like a funeral," Hawkes objected. "What do you draw pay for? Half the world 'ud starve if the other half weren't in need of policing, one way or another. Clean up! Rout this place out! Burn it like a hornets' nest!"

"And there would still be hornets, sahib! Aye, aye, we are sent to clean this. Trust us, we will do it. C-3 will attend to it. But there is no end. That which causes evil will discover such another place and find another way of befouling the darkness. It is like the cholera--plague--smallpox--"

"It's a job o' work for you blokes--What's that?" Hawkes asked. Suddenly he gripped his rifle. Wind was blowing, but the rain had spent itself and myriads of night sounds were as audible as Hawkes's own breathing!

"It was probably a jackal or a rat," said F.11.

"Shut up! Let me listen."

Water trickled and the frogs made a floor of din on which all other

noises marched. It was impossible to see beyond the firelight, even if smoke had not watered their eyes. And the wind went sighing through the foliage of creepers rooted on the ruins. One could imagine anything. Hawkes whispered:

"Were you expecting some one?"

"Only C.3."

"'Tisn't him; he'd give his signal. But there's some one out there who has seen our fire. He's afraid to come close before he knows who's in here."

"Surely a hyaena, sahib."

"Sit still." Hawkes took his rifle and crawled out, cursing the mosquitoes. For a while he sat in total darkness, listening, but at last he put himself directly in the zone of firelight and stood upright so that he could not help but be seen if there were eyes in that outer darkness. He could hear no outcry, and no footstep. He had decided he was mistaken and had faced about to crawl back through the hole when something touched him on the instep and he almost yelled, it felt so like a snake. It gripped his ankle. He raised his rifle to smash at whatever it was with the butt, when a voice said "Sahib!" and he checked the blow in mid-swing.

Hawkes sat. He knew his knees had given way from panic. He pretended to himself that he had sat in order not to have to raise his voice. Training and natural doggedness served him; he recovered swiftly, and the moment he could trust his voice he answered, hardly above a whisper:

"Well? What?"

"I am F.9."

"What do you want?"

"I look for F.11."

"Where are you from, and who sent you?"

"Nay, I will not answer that until I know who you are."

"Come in then."

"I will follow, sahib."

"Watch your step then! Any funny business and you'll wish you hadn't!"

Hawkes did not catch even a glimpse of the owner of the voice until he himself had crawled back to the fireside. Even then he only saw a momentary naked shadow, because a bundle of wet clothing struck him in the face, and by the time he recovered from that surprise the newcomer's wet fingers had gripped him by the throat from behind. It was an iron grip, one-handed, forcing his face in jerks towards the fire while another hand twisted his arm behind him. Then his pipe fell from his teeth into the embers. F.11's hand recovered it. There was a little talk in undertones, and then the grip relaxed as it had seized hold, suddenly. Hawkes struck at random, but his fist hit nothing and a man laughed.

"Do you wish to fight me, sahib? Better give a number next time, if you hope to be questioned gently! I was taught to take no chances."

"Who the devil are you?"

"Not the devil--but a playmate of the devil! I am acting Number Two to

C.3. These men spoke for you, or you would now lie smothered in those ashes."

Naked, and the color of coppery-bronze a little reddened by the firelight, with a chin like Gandhi's and incredible, steel-rimmed spectacles above a thin nose that was almost like the beak of a falcon, sinewy and stronger to the eye than whipcord, grinning with the tip of a red tongue thrust through a gap in his front teeth, F.9 met Hawkes's stare and mocked his indignation.

"One of these days I'll teach you manners," Hawkes retorted.

"It is hard to teach an old ape new tricks, sahib. I was learning in Chicago how to keep a thumb out of my eye before your honor knew a rubber teat from dry dugs. I have word for C.3. Do you take it?"

F.11 leaned into a cloud of smoke and touched Hawkes's knee.

"I said it, sahib! Said I not that C.3 has the key to any puzzle that he sets up? All we have to do is to obey him, and the plan unfolds! Not you--this man was the one we waited for; and not we--he is to instruct your honor! He stays here with us, and we shall show him what we know. But you obey him!"

"How do I get back to C.3?" Hawkes asked.

"How did I come? How else than by elephant?" said F9. "Did you think there is a subway?"

"Can he swim the river?"

"Easily, but can you hang on when the river ducks him?"

"Say, I'd hold fast to a submarine if it 'ud take me to Kutchdullub! Where's your elephant?"

"Down yonder in the jungle."

"What's your message?"

"It is for C.3's and no other ears. The elephant's mahout knows nothing."

"O.K. I'll deliver it to C-3--if I get through. And I'll get through if it snows ink."

"Tell him this, then, sahib: 'F.9 saw the target and reports that many shots have missed it, since the marker uses tricks that turn the arrows. But the marker is not suspected.' Please repeat that."

He made Hawkes repeat it three times, then resumed dictation:

"Add this: 'But the archer, becoming impatient, invents excuses to step nearer to the target and assault it with a new bow. Being unpaid, he is eager to hit the very heart of the bull's-eye and claim the reward.' Repeat that also to me three times, sahib."

Hawkes repeated it. Then F.9 made him say it all from the beginning, interrupting him to test his memory. But Army signaling had made Hawkes good at that game.

"Then add these words, sahib: 'It is high time. Too late is as bad as never!'"

Hawkes stuck his pipe in his pocket and tied a shoelace. Then he buttoned his jacket.

"Say what it means," he demanded.

"Oh yes, I forgot that." F.9 grinned at him again and leaned into the

firelight. "Probably it means that C.3 trusted you to come and get the message, and that F.9 trusted you to take it! Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? There are bread and meat and whisky in Kutchdullub!"

"Are there! And there's cheese in your guts! You've fair warning. Watch yourself, the first time me an' you meet unofficial! You can have it Queensberry or catch-as-catch-can --your choice."

F.9 chuckled. He stuck out his tongue. "Come along," he answered, "I will show you to your elephant. Perambulator for the sahib! Cushions! Let me know if the mahout is rude to you and I will slap him!"

Sticking a fist into his pocket to restrain himself, and setting his rifle at safety to prevent an accident that might have looked like an attempt at murder, Hawkes crawled out into the darkness. F.9 followed, took him by the hand and led him at a half-run, laughing at him when he stumbled--pushing him, pulling him --seeming to see in the dark like an owl, whereas Hawkes saw almost nothing, having stared too long at firelight. He could smell an elephant before he saw it; and before he knew how near he was or guessed the meaning of F.9's shout he was caught by an elephant's trunk and hoisted, kicking, to a lightweight howdah such as sporting princes use for speed and distance. And before Hawkes had his breath the elephant was crashing through the jungle like a landslide; he had to lie low and cling to the howdah to save himself from being brained against low branches. Twice he almost lost his rifle. Half a dozen times he threatened the mahout with mayhem to persuade him to go slower. He could guess neither time nor distance. It was pitch-dark, and the crashing of the elephant through undergrowth silenced all other sounds until the roar of the river greeted them.

The great brute did not hesitate. There was a sickening slide, then a splash and they were swimming in an unseen maelstrom. The mahout climbed in and hung on to the howdah rail. They seemed to

spin round in tunnels of bewildering spate, in a deafening roar, on a slippery perch that ducked them twenty times a minute. And then earthquakes, as the elephant stuck toes into the far bank and hove himself up on rotten earth that gave way under him. Panic in the blue mud--the mahout in place again--a blind crash into tents and overturning carts--a chorus of blasphemous cursing from awakened campers--and they were off again, towards Kutchdullub, splashing through the mud at top speed--full five tons of dark anachronism hungry for a hot meal.

Chapter XX.

"It will probably be something!"

Ram Dass once more donned his blanket and sent a shop assistant for a one-horse gharri, it being too far to walk to the Residency, and too wet for his old gray Muscat donkey that he sometimes rode and always treated with the sentiment that he seldom allowed to intrude into corn or mortgages. Chullunder Ghose rehearsed him while they waited for the gharri, going even to the length of telling him what Major Eustace Smith would probably say, and how to make Smith angry and afraid without the slightest risk of personal retaliation.

"Tell him that you have a telegram of about three thousand words already written, that you will take to railhead to avoid State censorship, and send to Delhi at your own expense unless he takes immediate steps to check this rioting, same being bad for business."

"It is nice to be able to tell at least a little truth," said Ram Dass. "We had better shut our shops if rioting continues."

"Truth," remarked the babu, "is good. But only that is good of which we like the consequences. Use that as the measure of the lies you

have to tell, and don't be squeamish! On your way you are to stop for just two minutes at the office of Ananda Raz, who is a mixture of lawyer and priest, so beware! You are to tell him you have absolutely confidential, but positive, news that the British-India authorities are intervening; and that, therefore, if the priests will tell the people to stop rioting they will soon see a change. However, if the rioting continues, there will be investigation and a public trial of the culprits."

Ram Dass nodded. "Kali's priests would dread that."

"And a riot," said the babu, "is a form of suicide committed by ignorant fools at the behest of human jackals in the pay of human tigers, who are much worse than the beasts, because they know what they are doing. So let us stop these riots. And Ananda Raz can do it. As the priests' attorney he has influence enough to make those devils change their tactics."

"I will talk to him."

"Two minutes only! He is an attorney; he will totally defeat you if you argue with him! Simply say your piece and go away in silence--to the Residency. Go and get into the gharri; it is waiting. Go now."

As mercurial as the very essence of his native Bengal, Chullunder Ghose cracked his knuckles and the joints of his toes inside his slippers. It was all he could do to force himself to wait until the merchant was well out of sight. There was no sense in letting Ram Dass know too much; he had seen that dish-faced fellow squatting near the shop door, but had probably not memorized his features; so it was not until the gharri drove away that Chullunder Ghose walked past the man and, *sotto voce,* bade him follow. Round the corner, out of sight and earshot of the shop assistants, he turned and gave his orders rapidly.

"Buy bananas; eat them as you run, if you are hungry. Go now swiftly to the British Residency. Speak there with the old chuprassi whom the Major sahib uses as a spy. You are to tell him that a rumor is abroad that Hawkesey is indignant, and has refused to shoot the tiger because somebody has said to Hawkesey that the Major played a dirty trick on him by telling Syed-Suraj to instruct Hawkesey to go and shoot the tiger and then to tell the Rajah to dismiss him as a scapegoat. Say that over to me."

Dish-face had a number in the C. I. D., so he was not in need of much rehearsing. Unimaginably underpaid, he was as keen as he was illiterate, and as proud of his job as he seemed to be stupid and humble. He adored the babu. When he repeated the message accurately at the second attempt, and the babu nodded, his eyes had the mute devotion of a sheepdog's.

"You are not to say to the chuprassi whence you have that news. But say that if it does not reach the Major's ears immediately there will be a new chuprassi within three days. If he asks who said that, say a bullfrog told it to you. Go then to the palace. Watch what happens. If the Rajah goes away by elephant, you are to set on fire as soon as possible the"--he hesitated--"it must be a very big blaze. It should look like the work of rioters. I must be able to see it from far away. And it must kill no one. It must not inflict important hardship."

Dish-face nodded. "I can burn the place I sleep in, sahib. It stands alone in a deserted compound at the rear of the palace. It is a great old wooden barn, wherein they stored the grass for elephants. But a contractor filled it full of grass no elephant would eat, and now the rats are in it, because the roof is tight and the grass dry."

"Atcha. Set it well alight then," said the babu. "I have given you the money for your railway ticket. You will not see me again until we meet in Delhi."

"At the usual place?"

"Yes, if you are not shot by a Rajah's watchman as you run from the burning barn. Go now, and be careful."

But it was the babu who was almost caught off guard and was lucky to keep that rendezvous in Delhi. He was almost sizzling with excitement as he hurried through the rain on foot towards the barn where Ram Dass kept his surplus grain. His theory that typhoons illustrate the nature of all violence and that, therefore, the safest place is always in the slowly moving midst of the disturbance, may have made him overlook the element of motion of the midst. He was no longer in it. Three hundred yards from the barn, with a couple of acres of muddy slums to thread his way through and the rain in his face, he was suddenly struck on the jaw by a stone as he passed a narrow alley between two disreputable houses.

Ninety-nine men in a hundred might have taken to their heels. But his brain was too swift for his instincts.

"He who hits to kill, hits harder," he reflected. So he dodged into the alley whence the stone had come. There was not much more than shoulder room between the walls, and rain came pouring from the eaves on both sides, forming an ankle-deep stream down the middle. There was no shelter--no cover of any kind, except the buttress of a house wall on the right hand. It projected two feet out into the alley-way. He ran towards it. Out from behind it sprang the villager who had named himself Silent Shadow. Quicker than the shadow of a rat, he knocked the babu off his balance and shoved him flat-backed against the wall behind the buttress. Then he smote him in the belly.

"It is too big! Suck it inward! Anyone who passes in the street could see it."

"Where is your elephant?"

"Where I left him, by the barn of Ram Dass. But your honor ordered me to watch who followed. So I noticed that the same men whom I prevented from taking that elephant away from Hawkesey --they, I mean, who found and carried in that *badmash* whom your honor slew with my club--they four came forth from a guardroom near the palace gate and followed. They were very weary men, and they had knives and clubs and pistols. So I said to myself, they are up to no good since nobody sends out tired men on a long chase but to do that which weariness will urge them to do swiftly."

"Must I listen to a tale about your cleverness?"

"But I was clever, sahib! I am much the best assistant that your honor ever found by good luck! Did your honor not forbid me to have speech with them? So what could I do but coax them to have speech with me?"

"Very well, they spoke. And what then?"

"Only one of them spoke. The others smote me; and they twisted my arms until I had to speak. However, that was all right, and not disobedience at all, because I lied to them. It is a well -known fact that lies are nothing and the truth can prove them to be nothing. Telling nothing is not speech, so I was not disobedient. I told them that your honor saw a woman through a window and had called to her to set a signal whenever her husband should be away from home. I said she set the signal and I saw it and informed your honor; so your honor hurried to the house."

"Did they believe that?"

"Yes, they presently believed it, after I had added certain details. They would have broken my toes and fingers if I had not been clever and made them believe. I told them how your honor wished to use that woman as a spy, by getting her to talk to the zenana servants. So they set an ambush, saying they will stop such treason. There they wait, to slit your honor's throat; but me they drove away, mistrusting me. They feared I might cry out or make a signal and inform your honor. So I came here by way of the back street. And here I waited in all this draughty air and rain, as cold and hungry as a--"

"Where are they now?"

"Round the corner. Just round the corner of the next street."

"Very well. Now we shall see if you are fit for permanent employment. Go and tell them--and demand a fee for telling it --that you have just now seen me entering the shop of Ram Dass. If they doubt you, offer to go with them."

"But if they take me to the *kana*--"

"You will get a meal there and a dry bed. What should you care if you sleep in a police cell? We, of our service, sometimes even serve a term in jail to hide from enemies."

There was no more speech between them, but it was as if an ax had fallen and severed the thread of the villager's interest. He nodded, but the nod was unconvincing. The natural slyness left his eyes and was replaced by a look of stolid honesty, which is a danger-sign in yokels. The intangible, perhaps magnetic, current that unites two men in one enthusiasm, ceased as suddenly as switched-off light; and the villager smiled as he walked away into the rain. If he had looked back, he might have noticed that Chullunder Ghose was smiling also.

"He was too good to be true, that villager," remarked the babu to himself. "That one is the ninth or the tenth I have tested who was afraid of a cell, although crafty enough to fool a hundred constables. Well--now he sells me to the constables, so what next? There are two ends to this alley."

But the villager knew that; and the babu felt equally certain that the villager had decided to betray him. The chances were that two of the police would come from either end, so as to catch him whichever way he bolted. But to do that, two of them would have to give the other two enough time to run round the block of buildings and take up position. Nothing for it but the buttress.

"There is no time now for bad luck! O thou Lord Ganesha, lift me by the short hair! Grip same as it rises!"

It was such a buttress as an ape might clamber easily enough, but it was slippery with rain and not an easy climb even for an athlete equipped with leg-irons. For the babu it looked like stark impossibility. But he kicked off his slippers and stowed them in his waistband. Pudgy-looking fingers and bare toes took a grip on cracks and the interstices of weathered bricks. Knees and elbows hugged the buttress as a vice hugs lumber, and he went up like a Jack-o'-ladder in a toyshop, until he swung himself over a low parapet on to a flat roof and lay there listening.

Three minutes later, four men approached from opposite directions and came to a halt beneath him. One of them spoke to a fifth man:

"Well, where is he?"

"Sahib, he was here!"

"You lie, you vermin! I watched this end of the alley."

Another man spoke: "If that fat brute had escaped at our end, we two surely would have seen him running. There is no door here --no window. He could not have hidden. This lying jungli has been fooling us!"

"I have not, sahibs, I--"

"Take that, you mud-begotten toad!"

"And take that, you dog of a liar!"

"And take that!"

"And that!"

"To the *kana!* We will teach him in the *kana!*"

"In a dark cell we will teach him--"

"Where a rat or two will gnaw his whip-sores!"

"He shall eat salt--"

"Lots of it, and listen to the splash of water!"

"Put the handcuffs on him."

"Hold him while I bruise his insteps! Why should he walk in comfort when our feet ache from a long wait on account of his lies?"

"Ouch--ohee-ee-yow-oh-h-h-!"

"Forward, or I'll crack you on the heels, you jungle-hopper!"

Peering above the parapet, the babu watched them march away

down the alley in single file, with the villager limping in their midst.

"Another cull!" he muttered. "What a pity! He was almost all right, that one. But the tainted egg becomes a bad egg. That one will become a criminal. There is not room for a split hair between those and us; and yet the stars are nearer to the earth than they and we to one another! Too bad!"

Down he went over the parapet, and out the far end of the alley, hurrying, and not once glancing backward.

"I am probably beholden to the god Ganesha," he reflected. "And the gods are worse than money-lenders. They collect--they collect--they collect! So why waste breath on thanks to them? And bombs don't fall twice in the same place. Good luck is just like a cold in the head; it runs for three days if it isn't squelched the first hour. Three days? I can do it, if only Hawkesey hasn't acted like a true-blue Britisher and shot my works away to save his character--or something. It will probably be something."

Chapter XXI.

"What are good guys for?"

Copeland sat up, in the howdah, smoking, studying the back of the mahout's head and admiring the way the rain ran from the roof of the enormous barn--a two-storied affair. The upper part projected and was supported on thick wooden posts; it served as shelter from the rain, and the smell of the corn and semsem seed and peas was not bad, so that Copeland actually was enjoying the long wait. He had hardly realized how tired he was, after so many days of incessant and exacting work, until he sat in that swaying howdah while the elephant pumped restlessly at an imaginary crank. And there was lots to think

about--the Sikh's enthusiasm--Major Eustace Smith's boils and abominable manners --the riots in front of the palace--this astonishing elephant--and the babu. Most of all the babu. It was like a dream directed by a humorous, fat showman.

Copeland had ceased to believe or disbelieve. He chuckled over it, enjoyed it and pretended to himself that nothing mattered, although at the back of his mood was sane sense warning him that things like that don't happen unless serious events are stirring underneath the surface.

"Hell, it's not my funeral!" he reflected. "It's the tiger's if I've luck and if the babu isn't lying. He probably is, but who cares? He amuses me, I like him, and I shan't mind if he soaks me any reasonable sum of money. All I've missed until now is the Rajah, but I'm riding his elephant, so that's something. And I don't know where I'm off to, which is even better! Here's luck!"

He drank from his flask, relighted his pipe, and almost fell asleep in the gently swaying howdah, with nothing bothering him except mosquitoes and the smell of the mahout, who stank of garlic, betelnut and unwashed underclothing. He was somewhere between sleeping and waking when a clod of earth fell in his lap and the babu called up from beside the elephant:

"Come down! I have a key to this place, but just look at the cripple from whom I took it! Ram Dass probably employs him because he couldn't run away with grain-bags!"

There was a rope suspended from a beam, so Copeland swung himself down by that. A half-paralyzed and at least half-insane watchman fled at sight of him, limping and writhing round a corner of the building.

"He would not have let me have the key if I hadn't told him you are sent by Ram Dass to remove his legs and arms and have them cured in the United States. Let us steal two hundred pounds of grain."

"I'm willing. But, for God's sake, why?" asked Copeland.

"Fuel! Number One Welsh for the non-stop special! Elephants are engines with the fire-box at the wrong end. Do you like excitement? Look at me then; I am essence of it! Come on!"

Between them they dragged out four bags of the best unhulled rice, and the elephant hoisted them into the howdah. Then he lifted Copeland and the babu, who addressed the mahout with savage vehemence:

"You son of evil, I am wet through and ashamed to ride behind a filthy drunkard such as you are! So beware of making me more angry than I am already! I want speed and plenty of it. If I have to speak again to you about it, I will brain you with your ankus and then drive the elephant myself! Get going. Take the road towards the river."

An elephant is one of the fastest things on four legs. Corn-fed and in good condition, with his feet well tended, he can out -speed and out-endure any mammal that breathes, excepting always, man. He is incomparable in squelchy going, if the squelch is only on the surface so that it does not bog his great weight. But his head bobs, and his body sways; he is as comfortless at high speed as a racing motor-boat in the teeth of a wind-crossed tide. So Copeland presently bestowed his breakfast on the blue -black mud that smick-smacked to the suck-and-plug of four enormous feet. He was not interested in the sandwiches he had brought and that Chullunder Ghose appropriated. Optimism oozed away, along with the rain that drooled down from the high-peaked howdah-top. It is impossible to vomit and be proud, or even to be reasonably vain; so he began to live on

obstinacy. Nothing but that preserved him from the last disgrace of asking to be set down and left by the roadside. At the end of ten miles he would have welcomed a tiger, if the brute would only guarantee to kill him.

However, most people survive even sea-sickness and its equivalent, especially men like Copeland, who can laugh at themselves between the devastating spasms. Sunset found him sprawling on his back with his eyes shut, unable to endure the sight of a revolving universe. One hour after sunset he was sitting up and following the babu's gaze across the trees in the direction of Kutchdullub.

They had stopped on high ground, he supposed, to breathe the elephant. But except for the great brute's heaving lungs there was no motion now, and Copeland's senses came back to resume work almost as swiftly as they had deserted him. He saw a column of flame in the distance, and a hell-red splurge below the belly of a black cloud. It looked as if a city was burning.

"What is it?" he asked--his first words since they left Kutchdullub.

"Just a signal," said the babu.

"Looks like rioting to me."

"It means that things are going much too much like clockwork," the babu answered. "I shall begin to suspect disaster unless something goes wrong presently."

"My works have been going wrong," said Copeland with a pale grin.

"That is not enough, however. In important matters there are always errors. To succeed, it is essential to get those errors cleaned up and out of the way. If not, the climax catches us with so much to attend to

that we act like politicians chasing broken pledges with a fish-net. I am worried."

"Talk sense, can't you? What does the signal mean?"

"It means that the Rajah has left his palace."

"Didn't you want that?"

"I insisted on it! I have used up all my ingenuity to get him to do so. He has done it. Now I am afraid."

"Of what?"

"I can imagine only one way now by which he might upset my calculations. I imagine that, however; and it makes me feel like being raised the limit by a fool who drew one card and may have filled a royal flush."

"I don't know what you're calculating. What could he do to upset you? Do you suppose he is out after our tiger?"

"If he isn't, we are flummoxed, sahib, if you know what that means."

"For the love of Pete, talk sense and then I'll try to understand you."

"Sahib, if he has not had enough to drink to inflame his ego --which is to say, if he has the wind up too badly--some stray, fluffy little shred of common sense still floating in the water on his brain may tempt him to disgrace his ancestors and save himself by hurrying across the border into British India. If he should do that, and claim protection against his cousin and the priests, accusing them of having caused the riots, my work would be wasted and the British would have to send for Jack the Ripper to invent a reason for not coming to his rescue--since a treaty is a treaty, even among statesmen!"

"Are you framing him, for God's sake?"

"Sahib, he is framed in barbed-wire by his own besotted conduct! It is inconvenient to abdicate him, so he must be buried. And he can't be executed, so he must be made into a hero."

"Bumped off?"

"Much more diplomatic. Have you ever seen a scorpion sting itself to death?"

"Eh? Suicide?"

"No, no. But allowed to follow causes to their natural conclusion, sahib."

Copeland shied off vigorously. "Dammit, I've no share in this. I won't be drawn in. If you'd given me a hint of all this, I'd have--"

"You shall keep your moral feet dry," said the babu. *"Cheloh!"* he commanded, and the elephant resumed its squelching down the pitch-dark lane between the jungle and a wilderness of flooded fields.

Copeland would have liked to argue, but the vertigo seized him again. It was not quite so bad as before, but it made speech impossible; so he lay still, watching the crimson cloud grow dull-red as the rain descended on the fire beneath it. For another hour they swayed amid a sea of forest noises into black night. Then a shout--unmistakably English--stopped them, and Copeland sat up. An electric torch stabbed at the darkness and the elephant was bathed in milky white light, striped with parallel lines of rain.

"Oh, Hawkesey--is it Hawkesey?" asked the babu, his voice

sonorous with emotion.

The answer was equally sonorous, but the emotion different:

"Who the hell did you suppose it was? Get down off there--or let me up--I'm scuppered!"

"What has happened, Hawkesey?"

"I've a message for you. Lost my elephant! He went into a panic when a buffalo got up and startled him. He crashed into the jungle and brained the mahout on a branch; he brained him deader than a doormat. Then he bogged himself in a mud-hole, and I jumped. He couldn't climb out. Last I saw of him was bubbles, where his trunk blew 'Last Post' through a foot o' stuff like blue soup. He'd a bullet in him. Soon as I saw he was there for keeps I shot him; then he sank in half a jiffy. That was mid-day. I've been walking ever since."

"I thank you, Hawkesey!" said the babu.

"What for, dammit?"

"Oh, for getting in the way of trouble! You are a very dependable person, Hawkesey! Now I am an optimist! I think that all is well from now on!"

"Cheese it! Hoist me up there. Any liquor?"

"Catch!" Copeland summoned strength enough to throw his whisky-flask. Hawkes recovered it out of the mud, up-ended it and drained it empty. Then the elephant knelt in the mud and Hawkes stared at Copeland by the aid of the flashlight while he leaned against the big beast's heaving flank.

"I hope that whisky wasn't all you had," he said politely. "'Struth, but I

needed it."

"I've another bottle," said Copeland.

"What is the message, Hawkesey?" asked the babu.

"F.9--scarecrow in his birthday trousseau and a pair o' specs. You know him?"

"I have known him when he wore a top-hat, Hawkesey! I have seen him ride a bicycle in plus-fours. He is a very important liar. What did F.9 tell you?"

Hawkes delivered the message. "It's as Greek to me," he said, "as algebra. He sassed me when I asked him to explain it. Does it mean much?"

"Hawkesey, yours will be the winning uppercut at Armageddon! Did you shoot that tiger?"

"No chance, dammit! Wish I had! I saw him kill and eat a bloke who asked him to! I never saw the like of it. If I'd been drinking I'd have known I had the D.T.'s. And I didn't shoot that woman, either; but I will if she ever gets in range o' my express!"

"F.15 and F.11?"

"On the job. F.9 is with 'em. It was they who tied me so I couldn't shoot the tiger."

"God reward them for it! Hawkesey--"

"What now?"

"Are you all in?"

"You're a Pharaoh, that's what you are! Do you think I'm a blinkin' Israelite to go on making blinkin' bricks for you without no blinkin' straw? I want supper and sleep."

"That message, Hawkesey, means that your employer has been paying a physician from Madras to poison his cousin. But because that, cousin, Prince Jihangupta, has a body-servant who is loyal; and because F.9 explained the danger to that body-servant, something else was substituted for the poison. So the doctor from Madras is seeking other means of killing him, and we must hurry to prevent it."

"I'm not stopping you," Hawkes answered. "I can reach home on foot all right, if I take it easy. Got a sandwich?"

"Your employer, Hawkesey, is behind us. Or at least, I hope he is behind us. He will not come quite so fast as we did, being fonder of his comforts."

"Don't I know it. Elephants give him a gut-ache. When he rides 'em you'd think he was going to his own funeral."

"He may be going to it, Hawkesey. Who knows?"

"Hey? What? Some one set an ambush for him? Maybe I'd better wait right here and warn him as he goes by!"

"Wait, yes. But there isn't any ambush, Hawkesey. Nobody will kill him. Tell him all that you have seen within that temple. But neglect to tell him that you know he ordered you to shoot the tiger, with intent to sack you afterwards for having committed sacrilege by entering a sacred and forbidden place!"

"The hell he did!"

"It is as true as that I sit here," said the babu.

"Then he's worse than I took him for!"

"Lot's worse, Hawkesey."

"And he'll sack me anyhow, if I admit I've been into the temple. Sacred places are expressly mentioned in the contract; I mayn't touch 'em."

"So we understand each other. Had I asked you not to tell him what you saw in there, we might have argued half a night about it! You are quite right; you would be a fool to tell him."

"What then?"

"Say that you have heard his cousin will be there at daybreak."

"What for?"

"To destroy the tiger and to get the credit."

"But I haven't heard it."

"Are you deaf? I told it to you. You may say I told it to you. You may say I am encouraging his cousin to get up out of bed and to steal a march on him and kill that tiger for the sake of gaining popularity, and, at the same time, putting hooks into the priests of Kali, who will have to behave after that, or else be shown up. You may tell the Rajah I am very angry with him for his several attempts to have me murdered."

"How can I speak civil to him?" Hawkes asked.

The babu leaned out of the howdah, thrusting his face into the rays from the flashlight.

"Be a good sport, Hawkesey! You have done so perfectly that I am prouder of you than a cuckoo that has laid a fresh egg in a foul nest! Don't go now and spoil it! Swallow anger for the sake of--"

"Damn you, I'll do anything for you," said Hawkes, "so cut the Sunday sermon. I'll wait here and--"

"Offer to go with him to the temple and to help him kill that tiger!"

"Did you hear me say I'm all in?"

"Play the little gentleman, and--"

"What else?"

"Dogged does it, Hawkesey! Here are seven sandwiches. But drink rain--no more whisky! And expect me when you see me. I depend on you to be a true-blue British bulldog of the sort whose ignorance is priceless, and whose errors are so honest that the gods convert them into pitfalls for the enemy!"

"Oh, go to hell!"

"*Auf wieder, sehen,* Hawkesey!"

"*Bong swoir!* And the same to you, sir. Thank you for the snifter."

Then the elephant rose to its feet like something rocked up by an earthquake, and resumed the sucking, plugging sway into the darkness.

"It's a hell of a night to leave a good guy sitting in the rain," said Copeland.

"What are good guys for?" the babu answered. "To be put in paper wrappers in a glass case?"

Chapter XXII.

"You shall drink with it to your own health, you devil!"

Pictures burned themselves from then on into Copeland's mind. They were lurid, with gaps between them, like the midnight glimpses from a railway window. Some of them were like remembered fragments of a nightmare. There was one where the elephant swam the river; part of it was a fantastic fight in darkness with a tree that whirled down-flood. It entangled the elephant's legs; he tried to dive beneath it, and its branches caught the howdah trappings. Tree and elephant at last were flung against the far bank.

Then there was a two-hour wait beside a smoky bonfire while they fed the elephant on wet rice; and a little whisky for his disposition. Copeland dried and cleaned his rifle by the intermittent glow of firelight, coughing and rubbing the smart of the smoke from his eyes. The mahout refused further duty at that stage, until he was beaten with a fire-brand by the babu, who threatened to kick him into the fire and leave him there. He meant it. He clutched him by the beard and throat and forced him backwards. The mahout capitulated and was given about an ounce of whisky.

Then on again, into the folds of foothills, where the trees went by like black ghosts. There the going became rocky and the elephant's tired feet began to hurt him, but he was driven mercilessly.

"Show me man or beast who doesn't have to suffer at some time without knowing why," said the babu in answer to Copeland's protests. "Most of us suffer without reward, but this big simpleton will

get a hot mash, with some sugar in it, and a gallon of arrack."

Measureless and timeless darkness--then an oil-lamp throwing wet light on a gate amid enormous trees. A gate-house, and a sleepy gate-man with his turban all awry, who sulkily refused admission.

"I will crash that gate, you son of sixty dogs!" the babu yelled at him. He ordered the mahout to charge it, head-on, but the gate-man ran into the gate-house for his key and let them pass in. Then a winding drive amid a dumpy maze of feathery bamboo and scented shrubs. A dark house. One dim light beneath a portico. A huge bell, that the babu tolled like the knell of hastened destiny. An angry group of servants at a dark door--one wax taper, and a voice like a barking watchdog's.

"He is ill. You may wait outside until the morning. This is no time to disturb His Highness."

"Shall I shoot my way in?" asked the babu. He seized the bell -rope--sent a clangor through the night that brought another group of servants on the run from the stables and out-houses. Some of them brought ladders and a chemical fire-engine. Light after light appeared at curtained windows; one jerked open with a screech of unoiled hinges and a voice called:

"What now? What the devil is it?"

"An important message from His Highness the Rajah of Kutchdullub!" the babu shouted, and the window slammed shut.

Then the doctor from Madras appeared in the doorway, in his blue suit and his watch-chain, with his necktie loose. His black beard looked as if he had been sleeping on it.

"You--I want you!" said the babu. The elephant knelt. He climbed out. "Come here--and talk English, or you may regret it!" Then he drove a group of servants out of earshot and beckoned the man from Madras to the side of the howdah. He approached with hesitation, that he tried to offset with an air of insolent importance.

"You?" he said, folding his arms on his chest. "I know you well by sight. Who are you?"

"No one of the least importance," said the babu. "I am from His Highness of Kutchdullub, who is not pleased. You are too slow! He has sent another doctor--this one--who must see the Prince instanter!"

"He is too ill."

"Did you hear me?"

"Have you it in writing?"

"Do you take His Highness for a born fool? You are to receive your payment in a certain place at daybreak. After that you may go to the devil. I will take you to the place, and I will be a witness that you are paid-in full--as a precaution against blackmail!"

"I have never heard of such indignity. I--"

An acetylene light in the hall was turned on suddenly. A very weary looking man with strange eyes, in a yellow turban and a yellow robe of flowered silk, came and stood in the doorway. He was shadowed by a servant ready to support him; as he appeared to fear his master might fall backwards. Chullunder Ghose promptly salaamed with both hands to his forehead. Behind them he whispered to Copeland:

"Get out of the howdah!"

He almost pulled Copeland out. He hustled him towards the door.

"Prince Jihangupta," he said, "it is my privilege to introduce to Your Highness Doctor Copeland of the United States of America who comes in great haste--"

"Why?" the Prince asked, staring. He appeared not to see distinctly. Copeland muttered one word: "Digitalis!"

"He congratulates you!" said the babu.

"I am flattered. But on what account does he congratulate me --and at this hour?"

"Her Majesty Queen Victoria had to be haled out of bed by Lord Melbourne to be told she had succeeded to a throne," the babu answered. "So we have a precedent to go on. May we speak to Your Highness in private?"

The Prince swayed, but the servant caught his elbows. Then he turned on his heel and led the way into a small room, where his servant lighted candles. It was furnished almost like a monastery cell--wood-paneled, severe, no ornaments, a vaulted ceiling. The servant remained; he merely withdrew into a corner at a sign from the Prince and stood still and alert--a very old man with a young one's quickness.

"Well, what is it? Is my cousin dead?" the Prince asked.

"Not yet," said the babu.

Copeland interrupted: "You will be, unless you listen to me! How much digitalis have you taken?"

"But it was not digitalis!" said the Prince, and sat down.

"Let me see your wrist," said Copeland. He did not touch it; he could see the tell-tale needlemark from where he stood. "How many shots have you had?"

"Two. He--my doctor--says that two more will restore my health entirely."

"Send that servant for my bag," said Copeland. But the servant said his say then. He was voluble and he even shed tears. Chullunder Ghose interpreted:

"Who am I to know about such matters? But I know that these hurt no one, so I substituted these for what the doctor gave him--and he lives!"

The servant produced a tin box from his sash. On its cover, in big white words, were the name and the claim of a patent capsule so notorious that reputable druggists will not sell it and some governments refuse to let it pass their frontiers. He went on with his story, and Chullunder Ghose interpreted:

"Today he took a little syringe. What could I do? And he squirted something into the Bahadur's arm. He did it twice. And now what? Will he die in spite of all my watching?"

"Tell him to bring my bag," commanded Copeland.

But the servant was afraid to leave his master, so Copeland himself went for the bag, and that took several minutes, because the mahout had taken the elephant towards the stables and was busy arguing about accommodations. When he returned he found the babu talking

to the Prince like an auctioneer to a baulky bidder. He caught the end of a sentence:

"You are not the first Prince I have talked to! If it isn't priests, it's money-lenders! If it isn't drink, it's women! I am nothing but a babu, but I don't keep my brains in my belly, and I will ruin you unless you listen to me!"

Copeland poured a tumbler nearly full of brandy. "Drink that," he commanded.

"But I never drink. It is against my--"

"Drink it!"

Then the doctor from Madras came in, his beard brushed and his necktie properly adjusted. He watched the Prince screw up his face as he drank; and he smiled as the Prince wiped teeth and lips with a purified handkerchief to offset the defilement from Copeland's touch. Then he shrugged his shoulders:

"My responsibility has ceased! If that man's medicines should kill you--"

"How much did my cousin offer you to poison me?" the Prince asked; and before he could answer the babu turned and faced him:

"Tell it when the Rajah pays you, dog of a hypnotist! Dog of a murderer! You are coming with us!"

The Madrassi turned towards the door, but the babu seized him and flung him backwards almost half across the room. Then he glanced at the Prince, and from him to Copeland.

"Can he travel?"

Copeland nodded. "Violent exercise is what he most needs. Put him on an elephant and sway him. That and the brandy ought to overcome the digitalis."

"Will Your Highness give the necessary orders?" asked the babu, and the Prince staggered out of the room on the arm of his servant.

Then Chullunder Ghose nudged Copeland and the two of them faced the Madrassi. He showed his teeth; his hand was in his right hip-pocket. They approached him closer.

"If you have a pistol, draw it!" said the babu. Suddenly he kicked him, pounced and seized him by the arms. "You take his pistol, Doctor sahib!"

The Madrassi had no pistol. In his right hip-pocket were a hypodermic syringe in a silver case that also held a phial of digitalis, and a screw-lid wooden box that looked as if it might hold ink for refilling a fountain pen. Copeland opened it. He found a small glass bottle, drew the cork and sniffed once:

"Prussic acid!"

The Madrassi wilted. "Let me have that!" he said in a harsh voice. "It will save trouble for us all!"

Copeland gave the poisons to the babu. It was not his business. But he was curious. "Any ground-glass in the Prince's stomach?" he asked.

"No, no," said the Madrassi. "He has ulcers and--"

The babu interrupted: "Pah! The Prince is nothing but a

hypochrondriac, and morbid! He had belly-ache, and this man hypnotized him to believe it was ulcers! This man is a specialist, I tell you. Too many of his patients die of overdoses of some drug or other! Yet he has no money; he is blackmailed by the undertakers and the servants of the heirs who pay him to murder a rich relation!"

"You are a fat and filthy liar!" the man from Madras said savagely through tight lips.

"Tell that to the Rajah! Are you coming with us? Shall I tie you?" asked the babu.

"Listen to me; I will let you have that prussic acid--"

"Give it to me!"

"You shall drink with it to your own health, you devil, if you will accuse the Rajah to his face, before us all, of having bribed you to murder the Prince!"

"Ha! Two sides of the same coin! He will simply shoot me."

"Otherwise, you go to prison," said the babu, "and await what happens in the prison to a man whom the police of this State find it inconvenient to send to trial!"

Chapter XXIII.

"A tiger comes quick as a punch in the eye!"

Hawkes, with is head on a tree-stump and his rifle on his knees, fast asleep on a fallen monument beside the temple pool, snored louder than the bullfrogs. Sun was rising very dimly through a gray mist and the pool was like a mirror ruined by the damp--no ripple on it, but a

patchwork of leaden lanes with silver-gray between them. Kali's temple drooled, gray-ugly; it was like an ant-heap, except that the mist made semi-luminous the green of its marauding foliage, redeeming it a little. Two huge elephants--blue-black phantoms looking twice their real size --swayed amid trees at the edge of the jungle. Out of sight of those, but visible from where Hawkes lay, two other elephants stood stock-still waiting to be told to kneel and be unloaded; they were on the opposite side of the temple--away from the river. A minah-bird squinted at Hawkes from a burned stump, scolded at something--and took wing.

"How long have you been sleeping, Hawkesey?"

Hawkes sat up, gripping his rifle. Seconds passed before he recognized Chullunder Ghose. The babu sat six paces off, facing the temple but camouftaged by tree-stumps and a bunch of tall grass. Hawkes yawned.

"Thought you'd gone and lost yourself," he answered. "It's a pity you didn't. Things look enough like hell to pay, without your adding to 'em!"

"Tell me."

"The Rajah's drunk. He was afraid to cross the river, though he's generally bull-rash when the liquor's in him. Damned if I think he'd ha' crossed if he weren't so bent on shooting you. He hates you worse than he does his cousin. I'm next. I'd ha' betted a hundred dibs he'd try to shoot me when I told him what you said to tell him."

"Where is he?"

"Yonder by the elephants. There's seven servants with him, not including the mahouts. It takes two of 'em to keep the champagne

iced and ready for His Highness; and at that he never offered me a drink, the stinker--not even when I took an elephant and three men, crossed the river to the village, stole a rope and made a raft o' goatskins, sent that over on the elephant, and towed him across--in the dark, mind! He's as drunk as two coots. Killing drunk. His eyes 'ud burn a hole in sheet-iron. I came over here to be out o' harm's way. I don't want to have to shoot him--not even in self-defense. I'd sooner hook it."

"Stand by, Hawkesey!" said the babu. "I am needing all the courage I can beg or borrow!"

"What's, up?"

"I have brought the Rajah's cousin! I have also brought the doctor from Madras who has been poisoning the Prince! I have him tied into a howdah, between Doctor Copeland--"

"Who's he?"

"U.S.A. You saw him and you drank his whisky. He is pukka. Between Doctor Copeland and a servant who would give both eyes for leave to torture him to death; but I have other uses for the doctor from Madras."

"You'd better use him quick," said Hawkes. "It's getting daylight, and the Rajah's up to dirt o' some sort. Give him about one more quart o' champagne and then watch him!"

"Is the woman in the temple?"

"Lord knows."

"Have you seen F.9?"

"No."

"He has seen us," said the babu. "He has set a signal."

"Which? Where is it?"

The babu pointed to a red rag hanging from the limb of a tree amid the temple ruins. "That means he has seen us and that the tiger is in there."

"There are two of 'em," Hawkes answered. "One's a female. She's behind bars."

"No, she isn't," said the babu. "F.9 had his orders. If there was a way of letting out that tigress he has done it."

"How did you know about a tigress?" Hawkes asked sulkily. "You sent me to discover how they--"

"I could not imagine any other way of getting a loose tiger to return home after killing somebody, Hawkesey. So I told F.9 to look for one, and, if she happened to be caged, to loose her."

"Why? Which are you--drunk or off your nut, you fat fool?"

"Listen, Hawkesey. I have done a good job. It is too long to explain in detail, but by choosing a critical moment to spring a surprise, and by dint of impudence and luck and argument as forceful as a ton of T.N.T., I have convinced a pious and perfectly harmless Prince that it is up to him to assert himself. And Doctor Copeland has inserted ginger into him in little capsules. He must act, however, before lethargy sets in again, or he will think he has an ulcer in the stomach and must lie down."

"What's the program?" Hawkes asked.

"I have told him he must shoot that tiger, since the Rajah has refused to do it. He is ritually clean, and therefore he can go into the temple without involving himself in a charge of sacrilege. And after he has seen what he has seen, he will be able to compel the priests of Kali to behave, for fear of an exposure of their goings-on. And the Rajah will follow him into the temple. I will be there. And the doctor from Madras will be there. F.9, F.15 and F.11 will be there also. That's all."

"Don't you kid yourself!" Hawkes answered. "That's not half of it! There's Major Eustace Smith across the river, boils and all! There's him and Ram Dass. Ram Dass hired an elephant and brought him, and they're both afraid to cross the river. So they're setting there, top o' the elephant, afraid to wet their feet and cracking on like two old cronies. Smith's as mad as a man with corns in tight boots. No doubt Ram Dass likes to see him that way."

Suddenly the babu beat his head and breast and struck clenched fists together.

"Dammit, Hawkesey! Why did I up-shoot Ganesha? Listen! Bear me witness. I will give the god Ganesha, for his temple in Benares, rupees fifty to convert this into good luck! Does the Rajah know about this?"

"Not he. You remember sending me a note about a villager you wanted me to take home on the elephant? I took him, but it seems he returned to Kutchdullub, on the same elephant, after its damned mahout rode off and left me. He fell foul of the police in some way; they arrested him and gave him hell. But he escaped 'em somehow and ran to the Residency, where he found Ram Dass and told him a long yarn about you being gone on an elephant to find me and look for treasure in this here temple. Can you beat it? Smith was furious

and fetched the villager along, so's to be able to prove to the Rajah that you and I are behaving without any orders from him. And Ram Dass came along to make sure Smith pays for the elephant."

"Who told you, Hawkesey?"

"He--the villager himself. He swam the river, and he found me. He's as proud of what he told'em as a dog with two tails. Now he's in the temple."

"Did he say why?"

"Yes. It's you he's looking for. He says he knows you're in there."

"Did he say why he wants me?"

"Yes. He said he'd saved your life a time or two, and if he saves it again, perhaps you'll hire him permanent."

Chullunder Ghose sighed. "Oh, well, there are always difficulties! This was too good to last. I should have known that villager would get into the wheels and ditch the train!"

"Tiger may kill him," said Hawkes.

"I hope so! Oh, I hope so! Hawkesey, the Rajah is not so very drunk. I see him."

"He is so drunk that he's icy-sober," Hawkes insisted. "See him? He walks like a man in a dream. And he's alone; he's left his servants! Know what? I believe he thinks the Prince is in there, and he wants no witnesses! He's killing-crazy, that's what he is!"

"And he has no rifle with him," said the babu.

"Automatics--two of 'em--in holsters," Hawkes answered. "He knows he's no good with a rifle."

"How does he know the way in, Hawkesey?"

"Hell, I told him! I got sick of lying, so I told him good and plain I'd been inside. He made me tell him ten times how to find the hole that I went in by. You can see it from here; you can see where my smoke blackened up the stonework. Can he see your elephants?"

"He isn't looking," said the babu. "Hawkesey, do you know another entrance? Which way does the tiger take?"

"Do you mistake me for a blinkin' lunatic?" Hawkes asked him. "Do you think I asked the tiger? There's a tunnel that he uses; Smarty F.9 maybe took a chance and--"

"Blocked it!" said a thin voice, so near in the knee-high grass that Hawkes turned two shades paler. He looked haggard, anyhow, unshaven and with dark rings under his eyes. But the babu sat unmoved. He did not even turn his head when F.9's spectacles appeared through parted grass.

"I have been waiting for you," he said. "You are almost too late."

"Time enough," said F.9. "I have blocked the tunnel to keep that tiger in. And I have loosed the tigress; it was possible to raise a stone bar from above by climbing carefully along a cornice. Now they are both in the pit in the midst, and they are raging thirsty. The tunnel mouth is only blocked with stones and branches, so they may escape unless you set a gun there."

"Any other way in?" asked the babu.

"Yes; the way that I came."

"Where are F.15 and F.11?"

"Shadowing the Rajah. Acting holy. Waiting to betray to him the passages--in silence. They are supposed to be under a vow of silence."

"Safe stuff, silence, always," said the babu. "Let us hope he doesn't shoot them for it! There he goes now. He has gone in. Quick, come with me! Come on, Hawkesey!"

Several minutes later Hawkes and the babu posted Copeland on a big rock that commanded, at a range of less than fifty yards, a tunnel entrance on the far side of the temple from the hole that Hawkes knew. It was partly choked by fallen masonry, and the remaining space was jammed with branches.

"It's a bad light," Hawkes said, "and a tiger comes quick as a punch in the eye. So don't wait. Plug him if you see a tuft o' hair between those sticks. He'll bust through there as sure as Christmas. Five shots to your magazine? Good. Give him all of 'em, and then reload quick--same as if you was seeing a girl home in Chicago and the bandits asking for your small change."

"I have kept my promise," said the babu. "I have given you a chance at tiger, Doctor sahib. It is up to you to kill him! Come on, Hawkesey, let us put our Prince into a hat and see what comes out! Too bad there is not an audience. I love an audience when tricks click!"

"Cheese it! Take me for a clown like you are?" Hawkes retorted. "Me, I'm out o' bounds and acting foolish. What's more, I can't keep my eyes open, let alone shoot! If we come out o' this alive--oh, hell--come on, let's get it over with!"

Chapter XXIV.

"Simple! Since they wished it, why not!"

F.9 led. Hawkes followed him, for no especial reason except that he might get a chance to retaliate for F.9's cheek, as he regarded it. Next came the Prince's servant, on the watch for snakes and fussily suspicious of the entire proceedings. Then the Prince, with a repeating rifle that he fingered with an air of knowing how to use it; but he looked as if he felt the effort was beneath his dignity, and he walked as if he felt too fragile to exert himself much. Chullunder Ghose came next, unarmed, untidy, corpulent, unshaven, weary-looking, but sturdily strutting his weight on huge thighs. He was wearing his loin -cloth tucked up, workmanlike. And he was talkative, perhaps to keep himself awake, but every word was aimed directly at the Prince's lethargy or at the pale mood of the doctor from Madras, who walked beside him. The Madrassi spoke once:

"If I should run, and were shot as I run, would that not save trouble for us all?"

"I am not your executioner," the babu answered. "I am not your judge, and I am not the jury. I arrange the pieces for the gods to play with. I have set there quite a puzzle, and I think I know the answer. But it may end by your being Rajah of Kutchdullub! Who knows?"

"Bargain with me. I will give you evidence against the Rajah."

"Bargain with the gods," the babu answered. "Priests will tell you the price."

To the Prince he was a calculating irritant. He lectured him as if they were a small boy and a master of a sternly managed truant school.

"The modern state of mass-intelligence does call for figureheads on thrones, no doubt of it. But a king is a king, and dignity is not attained by being hypnotized into a death-bed. What is the use of morals, if you let a drunken blackguard get away with murder? You are like a rabbit that waits for a weazel to bleed it to death because it knows a weazel does that sort of thing. You can't help having royal blood in you, but you can make the best of it."

The Prince kept silence, although his eyes glowed with anger. He showed no nervousness when F.9 led them into what had formerly been cloistered passages and now were trash-encumbered channels leading between broken walls. There was a practicable footpath, winding amid roots and debris--only room for single file, and the babu made the Madrassi walk ahead of him. There began to be broken arches--sections of unfallen roof--until at last F.9 pulled out a lighted lantern from behind a fallen statue. Then he scrambled, almost like a hairless monkey, up a pile of fallen masonry into a dark hole in a thick wall. There Prince Jihangupta hesitated and his servant tried to make him turn back, but the babu mocked and Hawkes said, "Maybe he's forgotten his goloshes." So the Prince found unsuspected energy and went up like a front-rank man into a breached fort.

Then there were interminable passages, and no one spoke because the echo of their footsteps was a solemn, horrifying noise that made the blood run cold. It sounded like the voices of the shadows put to flight by F.9's lantern. And the bats were like dead men's memories of evil, wakened for a moment's panic by a light that broke on peaceless dreams. There was an acrid stench of bat-dirt and then, presently, pervading it and blending with it, the appalling reek of rotting bones and tigers' ordure. But at last a row of clean cells, doorless, in a carved wall representing Kali's orgies of annihilation; and another lantern; and the saffron smocks of F.15 and F.11 dimly looming in a broken archway at the far end of the passage.

F.9 spoke to them in whispers that went murmuring away into the silence like the rumble of muffled wheels. Then he beckoned. Chullunder Ghose shoved the Madrassi in front of him, pushed past the other three and joined the conference. The sweat of fear was dripping from him, but he governed his voice and himself, not trembling. The Madrassi, too, was either proof against hysteria or else beyond it, numb-brave as a gallows-passenger to unknown regions, on his last march.

"Soonya?" asked the babu, making almost no sound; but the echo of it multiplied itself in hollow darkness and an underworld said "Soony-oony-oony," as if secret messengers were calling her from her forgotten tomb.

"Soonya saw him--"

"Saw him, saw him," said the echo.

"--and she ran and summoned all her holy candidates for death. They tried to terrify him, but we hid him in the chamber where we hid Hawkes. And he is *hokeema mut;* the liquor crazes him and he is unafraid. He seeks his cousin. He will slay his cousin. He will throw him to the tigers."

Chullunder Ghose lost patience. "Never mind that. Tell me what happened."

"Came the noises you made, and they echo like tramping of armies all converging on a center. There is no guessing whence a sound comes. Soonya cried out that the Rajah's men are here to stop the sacrifice and make an end of Kali's mercy, and she summoned them to bring their little lamps while there is yet time. Then the Rajah threatened us with pistols, so we let him go forth. He is wandering in

darkness."

"Hurry! Lead us to Soonya's charnel-house!" the babu ordered.

They were swift, and the noise of their feet was a tumult as loud as the quarreling roar of a torrent that vanishes into a mountain. Shadows fled before them in enormous frog-leaps, until, rosy-red on masonry, a torch-flare lit the darkness as they turned an angle. In a moment then they pressed on one another's heels into a stinging tiger-stench and stood grouped on a platform whence the broken gallery projected over one-third of the circumference of Soonya's dreadful pit.

There was a row of little lamps along the gallery. A row of ghosts--ghouls--vultures--sat between them. Perched on her pillar of marble, Soonya stood brandishing a flaring torch and shaking sparks into the pit, where four eyes glittered opal -colored in the coal-hole darkness. Soonya screamed. The row of little lamps went out as suddenly as if her scream had switched them, and she flung her torch into the pit. It spiraled, blazing red and yellow, and she followed it, spread like a home-coming Harpy embracing a spirit of hell in her shadowy arms.

Then, one by one, as frogs seek water when a footstep startles them, the owners of the clay lamps sprang into the dark pit. There was one scream--then a sound of struggle amid dry bones and the snarl of tigers. The Madrassi said the first word: "Simple! Since they wished it, why not?"

Hawkes clicked his pocket flashlight, swearing: "Just my cursed luck! It's played out, dammit!" F.9 swung a lantern over darkness, but it made no depth of light; it seemed to set a yellow halo swimming on a sea of black pitch; and beneath that there was growling horror.

Suddenly F.15 and F.9 raised their lanterns and a pale light framed

the broken entrance-gap. It shone on an English shooting -jacket--and a pair of nickel-plated automatics held in lean hands--and on the dark eyes and the self-admiring, sly smile of the Rajah of Kutchdullub.

"Caught you!" he remarked. His eyes were on the babu and he aimed both pistols at him. "Dog of a meddlesome Bengal rice-rat!"

"My turn!" said the babu. "Oh, well."

F.15 and F.11 drew away their lanterns. F.9 smothered his in something. But there was light enough still. The Rajah lingered on his aim, enjoying the amazement on the babu's face, not guessing why the babu stood so still and breathless. Suddenly a slim black shadow flicked out from the darkness at the Rajah's back. It bunted him off balance, snatched both pistols from his hands and sent them spinning down into the dark pit. Naked --grinning--confident--the villager, a broken handcuff on his right wrist, stepped up and saluted the babu like impudence addressing dignity.

"So now I am your honor's friend again!"

Chullunder Ghose thrust him aside; he had no time for pleasantries. The Rajah's cousin was in shadow behind Hawkes and F.9; now the villager's black body added one more to the protecting screen. The Rajah tried to step back through the opening, but F.15 and F.11 stepped behind him and prevented. He made rather a brave figure of a man, at bay with folded arms. The babu pushed the doctor from Madras towards him.

"Your turn!"

"Well, well!" said the Rajah.

The Madrassi seemed as unemotional as ice. His attitude was

almost casual, his voice as calm as if he passed a good check through a banker's window.

"We are found out."

"Are we?" said the Rajah.

"But I don't choose you should leave me to suffer the sole blame. I accuse you of having bribed me to poison your cousin."

"You yelp like the pi-dog you are," said the Rajah. "Where is he?" There were death-sounds in the darkness--groans now, and a noise of struggle. "Is he down there?"

The Madrassi went a step nearer. "You deny it?"

"Damn you, yes, you liar!" said the Rajah, and he struck him. The Madrassi clutched the Rajah's wrists and forced him backwards along the broken gallery. The Rajah's cousin forced himself out between Hawkes and F.9, pushed past Chullunder Ghose and ran towards them.

"Stop that!" he commanded. But he paused and let an enigmatically lean smile linger on his lips as F.11--lantern held high--ran, too late, along the gallery. The lantern lit the Rajah's face. He saw his cousin. The Madrassi tripped him and leaned on him, bending him backwards, but agony changed to maniac, stark hatred on the Rajah's face as his eyes blazed at his cousin and he fell, with the Madrassi clinging to him, somersaulting down into the stinking darkness. They were striking at each other as they fell.

Then pandemonium was loose. The pit became a pool of frightful tumult. Lanterns swinging from the gallery suggested unseen horrors hidden amid shadows heavier than waves of dark oil. There were

yells and the guttural snarls of brutes made frantic by thirst and the fury of slaying. Hawkes's voice shouted, "Get a rope and let me down there! Maybe he's alive yet. I can't see a dam' thing." Then the Rajah's cousin began shooting--at random--at nothing--blindly--each flash showing fragments of a scene like Dante's vision of the pits at the Inferno.

Hawkes snatched F.9's turban--then Chullunder Ghose's--then the smocks of F.11 and F.9 and the Prince's servant's turban--tore and knotted them into a rope and gave the babu one end.

"You and them others hang on to it and let me down--not too slow --I'll be done for if a tiger sees me. Maybe I can see when I get down there. Stop that fool shooting!"

But the Prince refilled his magazine and had his own way. Blinding flash and echo-cannonading crack continued, even after Hawkes was swinging by a string of turbans, turning as the babu lowered him. He was clinging by one hand, with his rifle in the other.

"Can't see a dam' thing!" he called up, when his feet touched bottom.

Then the babu: "Wait there, Hawkesey. I will bring a lantern."

F.15 and F.11 laid their weight and strength against the rope and F.9 hurried to their aid as Chullunder Ghose grabbed at a lantern and swung himself over. He went down hand over hand, with his naked toes against the masonry, the lantern clattering against the wall. They were both visible, like divers under water --small--foreshortened. Hawkes's voice: "Steady now. I see one."

His express spat blue-white. Stripes--fangs--black-and-yellow phantom with a sound like snapped wires--leaped into the zone of lamplight, fell short, clawing at a rotten skeleton, and lay still.

"Tigress!" said the babu. His voice boomed. He sounded steady, like a big gun.

Hawkes's voice, several notes higher: "Can you see the other?"

"He is down that tunnel, Hawkesey. I saw his shadow as he stole in."

Came the sound of an empty brass shell falling and the snap of the closing breech as Hawkes reloaded. Then again Hawker's voice:

"Find the Rajah."

The pool of lantern-light went sideways, slowly, while the babu hunted amid shadows. Then it moved back.

"I have found him. He is stone-dead. I believe his neck was broken."

"The Madrassi?"

"Dead, too."

"Can you climb back? Blinkin' man-eaters in blinkin' tunnels ain't a picnic."

"I can hear him, Hawkesey. He is clawing at the branches at the far end. We could see him against daylight if we should go in after him."

"You're crazy. If he didn't kill us we'd be shot by that American."

"If we pursue him with the lantern, Hawkesey, he will break through that way. He is thirsty. He has had enough of this place. It is never wise to think the enemy is less afraid than you are."

"Have it your own way. Come on."

"And I like to let the gods have equal opportunity to swat me like the others. We are all flies on a cosmic window-pane."

They vanished down a dark hole, and a tunnel rumbled to their footsteps, until two shots, muffled by a distance, cracked as faintly as whips in a blustery wind. Three minutes later, Hawkes's voice, tunnel-hollow:

"The American got him! He broke through. We're going out at that end. So long."

Chapter XXV.

"Accept my humble praises, sahib."

"That's a splendid tiger. Did you get permission?"

Copeland turned and stared at Major Eustace Smith, wet, bleary-eyed from lack of his accustomed sleep, and pompous as an offset to a dirty collar and a two-day growth of whiskers.

"How are the boils?" he answered.

Before Smith could answer that, Chullunder Ghose, unturbaned, bloody from thorn-scratches where he had scrambled out of a hole, abominably filthy and so weary that he rolled like a drunkard, came towards him.

"Salaam, sir," said the babu. "Did you swim the river?"

"No, I got wet, dammit, hurrying to stop your mischief! What have you been up to?"

"Earning you a ribbon!"

"What the devil do you mean, you vulgar fellow?"

"Listen," said the babu. "I am going over there"--he pointed --"to appropriate the champagne that his late lamented Highness of Kutchdullub does not any longer have an opportunity to drink. I am taking with me Hawkesey and Doctor Copeland. Let us hope there is enough champagne to make us all drunk. We deserve it. You will get a ribbon, and you don't deserve it, but it will look very nice on your dress-suit lapel."

Hawkes strolled up, wearier, if anything, than the babu.

"Morning, sir."

"You are both arrested," said the Major.

"No, no," said the babu, "you are much too diplomatic. You have saved a very nasty situation, I assure you."

Ram Dass, glancing at the tiger, came and stood as close to Major Smith as tact permitted.

"Had you shot the tiger--had Hawkes shot it--had the Rajah shot it," said the babu, "diplomatic priests would have immediately stirred a revolution in a teacup, and it might have been another Sarajevo--who knows? And if you, or I, or Hawkesey, or the Rajah's cousin, or a common murderer had shot the Rajah, there would certainly have been a bad mess. As it is, the Rajah took advantage of an opportunity to die in manly battle with the poisoner who tried to take his cousin's life; and I have no doubt that you recommended to the Rajah he should look into the dirty rumors that were flying. It is certain that he acted as a consequence of what you said to him in private conversation. He is stone-dead, so he can't deny it. And by giving

your authority to Doctor Copeland, in a letter that I witnessed, to go tiger -shooting, you have cleverly removed a menace from the countryside without affording opportunity to priests and such-like people to accuse the British of the sacrilege. As an American, does Doctor Copeland give a damn for local prejudices? Not he! And what can be done to him? Nothing! He is diplomatically no one, and a very useful scapegoat. You invited him to shoot the tiger, in my presence! You requested me, in fact, to bring him to relieve your boils with just that purpose, and no other, in your mind before you sent for him. I know it. I shall say that in my confidential report."

Smith glanced at Copeland. Copeland grinned and nodded to him.

"I'm mum."

"It is true, there were a tiger and a tigress," said the babu. "Both of them are dead. The death of one is not accounted for. But I admire immensely your particularly brilliant intention to congratulate the Rajah's heir immediately and to tell him, if he does not burn this temple, you will take steps--diplomatic steps, as serious as may be. It is nothing less than statesmanlike of you to think of telling him that if his elephants should draw some fifty or hundred tons of fuel, such a quantity, if burned beneath the dangerously-broken roof, would cause it to collapse completely and to bury a bone of contention--many, many bones, I might say! And I think it noble of you to insist on Hawkesey's contract being recognized and properly extended, at an increase, by the new regime. Accept my humble praises, sahib. Now, if you permit me, I will lead away my boon companions and get as drunk as quantity permits. I have my leave to go."

But Ram Dass interrupted him. "About that contract for the corn--"

"Oh, to the devil with you!"

Then the villager came running. "Am I numbered on a pay-roll, sahib? What next? Am I--"

"Oh, my karma!" said the babu. "C. I. D. is not a bed of roses, is it! Come on, Hawkesey--come on Doctor Copeland--let us drink annihilation to the C. I. D., and politics, and tigers, and to every other dam' thing!"