

# The Shadow of Abdul

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# THE SHADOW OF ABDUL

BY

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### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The characters in this book are all fictitious, and no reference is made to any living person. The episodes also are purely imaginary, with the partial exception of the dacoity on the Agra train.

# THE SHADOW OF ABDUL

## CHAPTER I

"BE seated, missie-baba; let me take off thy shoes and stockings."

The ayah pulled forward the one chair left in the dismantled room and patted its seat in invitation, but Sylvia Delahey was not yet ready for bed. Clad in her drawers and bodice, she wandered round the bare untidy bedroom, now peeping into open wardrobes and almirahs, now bending over half-filled trunks, as though to measure the space still vacant against the clothes which must go into it. Her face was grave, her brows were knit, as if it was upon the little girl of twelve, and not upon her ayah, that the responsibility of packing up and closing and strapping all those boxes rested.

She came to rest at last, and flung herself into the long cane chair, her legs held straightly out towards the kneeling ayah.

"Rajjia, why must I go to bed?" she asked. "I shan't sleep. I couldn't sleep. I'm going Home tomorrow."

But Rajjia, fondling one little foot between her hands, burst into tears.

"Ai! Ai!" she wailed. "Do I not know it? Has not my heart grown sick to hear you talking of it—as if Bilayat were no farther than Lucknow? How will my missie-baba do without her ayah? Who will undress thee to-morrow night?"

But twelve years old looks only forward. Ahead was "Home," the England Sylvia could not remember; a land—she gathered from her daddy—with neither punkahs nor mosquitoes; where jackals would not howl around the house at night and frighten her; where lived no wicked crows like those which pecked her kitty's eyes out. A land of pantomimes and wireless sets and Devonshire cream, where railways ran in holes beneath the houses, where there were never any sandstorms and the grass was really green. Delights undreamed of, pleasures the imagination could not savour. Could twelve years old be sad because there was no place for Rajjia?

"As if I can't undress myself!" retorted Sylvia. "A great big girl like me."

As though to prove her words she wriggled off her last remaining garments, and stood there, slim and naked, her arms stretched for the night-dress which the ayah held. But Rajjia, her task forgotten, kneeled gazing at the child whom she had nursed and bathed and dressed so many years, and now would tend no longer.

"Ay, big enough," she mused. "As tall as I am,

and so strong, so straight. But a child still—you ripen slowly, you daughters of the sahibs. When I was twelve years old my hips were wide, my breasts were swelling. At thirteen I was husband-ripe.”

Strange words for a child's ears; words which, if overheard by English parents, would have terminated in an instant a dozen years of faithful service. Yet Rajjia meant no wrong. She knew the sahibs' fetishes, and in the main respected them; although she could not understand why girls of Sylvia's age should be expected to believe that children came from gooseberry bushes—by fifteen she had borne and nursed and weaned a baby of her own. But she had guarded Sylvia well, according to her lights. Few children live in India until the age of twelve and do not learn all that unreticent speech can teach them of life's mysteries. The jokes of orderlies on the verandah, the chatter of the women in the compound, even the prattle of the servants' naked brats, serve as the vehicles of premature enlightenment.

From such lewd channels of distorted knowledge Sylvia had by Rajjia's care been saved. To words and phrases which would have appalled her mother her ears had been inevitably hardened; but in all essential things, aided perhaps by her own fastidious temperament, she had retained her innocence. Yet Rajjia's eyes and soft, appraising words caused her a vague discomfort, a shy confusion which she had not known before.



"Don't stare at me like that," she cried. "You make me feel all prickly."

She snatched at the night-gown and thrust her head and arms inside it. Falling, it hid her slender whiteness, as an extinguisher the candle's flame.

. . . . .

The ayah potted round the room; picked up the clothes which lay about where Sylvia had shed them, and set her slippers on the bedside table, lest centipede or scorpion should hide in them; lowered the light, and pulled the curtains back to let the night air in. Then lingering by the bed she whispered her good night.

"Sleep sound, my missie-baba. Dream happy dreams."

The door closed softly and Sylvia was alone—alone not only in the room but in the house. The ayah was supposed to squat in earshot, but on this final night she had her clothes to see to, her saris to recover from the washerman; a thousand things to do. The child—so she excused herself—was worn out with excitement; she would sleep well, and quickly. Also there was the chaukidar, the watchman paid to wander coughing round the bungalow to scare away the thieves. He would hear Sylvia, if she called. But on this night he also was unfaithful to his duty. For him there were farewell festivities in progress in the compound. Why should he miss

them, when the sahib would not be home till midnight? .

For while before its dissolution on the morrow the household ate and sang and chatted under the big nim tree beside the servants' quarters, its master, Sylvia's father, was attending farewell festivities of a more orderly but hardly less convivial kind. George Delahey had been the superintendent of police in Rustumpur for half a dozen years. The station could not let him go without a dinner, the more so as promotion waited for him when his leave was up.

And Sylvia's mother had gone Home six months before, faced with an operation it required a London specialist to tackle. It worried both of them that Sylvia must stay behind—she was already over-old for India; it was high time she was at school. But the pay of a policeman in a district leaves little for emergencies, and Sylvia's going with her mother meant assistance to be paid for on the voyage, expensive care and board and lodging at the other end. On top of doctors' fees and nursing homes the family budget would not bear it. She had to wait until her father could come with her.

And so it came about that Sylvia was left alone in the old, rambling bungalow. She did not know that Rajjia had left her post outside the door, nor would the knowledge of that fact have troubled her. She was a sensitive, soft-hearted child, swayed by quaint fancies and whimsical imaginings. But none

the less a child of spirit, and fear in any form had never touched her. Which was as well, since sleep, as she had prophesied, eluded her.

Her lids indeed were heavy and her limbs were tired, but the hubbub from the servants' houses came to her loudly through the open doors, more unrestrained and more excited as the night wore on. Men laughed and shouted; the tum-tums throbbed and throbbed; a pipe squealed piercingly. Shrill nasal voices chanted an interminable song which seemed to have no end and no beginning, a sequence of long, wailing notes broken by sudden plaintive runs, a threnody in quarter-tones.

The room was warm and stuffy, for the hot west winds of April were blowing in another burning summer. Punkahs, which would have made it bearable, had not been hung—it hardly seemed worth while, when they were going Home so soon. So Sylvia turned and tossed, threw off her blanket, then her sheet. And the gong in the police lines, the other side of the parade ground, beat out first nine, then ten, and then eleven.

It must be nearly twelve, and she was still awake. Daddy *was* late to-night. Twelve struck, and as the clangour died away, she heard a step upon the gravel. But that could not be daddy. It was the wrong side of the house. And anyhow she would have heard his trap. The chaukidar, of course! She waited for his cough, but no cough came. And she remembered that the chaukidar wore boots. These feet were bare.

She listened, wondering, and heard the stealthy footfalls mount the steps to the verandah. Whoever it might be was making for her room. It must be ayah, peeping in before she went to bed. She closed her eyes, pretending sleep. It was horrid to be snivelled over.

But something seemed to force her eyelids open—something outside herself, some premonition which she did not understand. And in the doorway she saw Abdul, the masalchi.

He was a youth whom Sylvia hated, the scullion who washed the dishes. A dirty and a greasy youth, whose pimply face and leering eyes disgusted her. And now, in his untidy *déshabillé*, she liked him even less. Quickly she pulled her sheet up to her chin and spoke imperiously.

“Go, Abdul. Whatever do you mean by coming here?”

But Abdul only leered, and stepped into the room, standing irresolute within the circle of the lowered lamp. And when she saw his face, fear for the first time came to Sylvia, an uncontrolled, unreasoning panic which sent a shudder through her body and brought a cry of terror to her lips. Why he had come her innocence could not divine—her instinct warned her of some deadly peril. She screamed, and screamed again. But the drums throbbed louder, the raucous chant went on.

Had Sylvia kept her head the prestige of the ruling race, though represented only by one helpless

little girl, might yet have saved her. For Abdul was a skulking, cowardly youth; the awe the Englishman inspired in him was not yet quite subdued by drink and passion. It was her screams which sealed her fate, which spurred his bestial instincts into dominance. Brutality is fed by fear. Grinning, he sprang to the bedside, and smothered Sylvia's screaming with a flabby, sweaty hand.

She bit his finger, and he struck her. She fought him pantingly, but how could child of twelve hope to withstand a maddened beast of twenty? Her struggles weakened; she grew sick and dizzy. The end was certain.

. . . . .

A cough outside, and booted footsteps grated on the gravel—the chaukidar was back upon his beat. And Abdul was a craven in his lust. Slinking across the room on silent feet, he vanished by the door which led into the hall. But Sylvia, too numbed and dazed to call for help, almost too dazed to realize that he had gone, lay stiffly, muttering:

“If I might die. If I could only die. Dear God, please let me die.”

Before the haze of terror cleared, the chaukidar was round the corner of the house and out of hearing. And even then she did not dare cry out. She had looked on evil, and knew it for what it was. Knowledge had come to her through agony and shame, a blind, distorted knowledge which

could not even tell her she was saved from greater, final shame. What could she say? How could her lips confess the horror? She was polluted and befouled—she could not tell.

But daddy? That was his tum-tum now; she heard it turn into the drive. She could tell her daddy: he at least would understand and comfort her, when he came in to say good night. She waited for his step, waited to sob her heart out in his sheltering arms. Why did not daddy come?

But daddy never came. The sorrows of departure had been drowned in many pegs, and with six years of hard, successful work behind him and a holiday ahead he had for once outdrunk discretion. He went straight to his room and to his bed. And Sylvia dared not leave the lighted lamp; she dared not even leave her bed. Supposing Abdul was still lurking in that long, dark hall!

She lay in lonely and despairing wakefulness, her shame and loathing burning deeper with each weary hour that passed. Till in the dimness of the dawn she made her pitiful resolve. She could not even tell her daddy, she could not tell anybody, ever. It was too terrible, too frightening a thing for speech.

But how to keep her secret? The light was growing; Rajjia would be in with early tea at six. How could she then explain a night-gown torn to ribbons? She crept out of her bed and delved in boxes till she found another. But that was not

enough, for when she slipped the tattered garment off there were black bruises on her arms and chest. She must be dressed before the ayah came, and then—what should she say? That she mistook the time? That she was too excited to remain in bed? It was so hard to think of an excuse; she had not told a lie before. But since that night the world was changed.

She set aside the frock which Rajjia had put out for her wearing, and found another with long sleeves. She neglected nothing. She tidied up the box her rummaging had disarranged. She packed away the dress she had discarded. She rolled up the torn night-gown and stuffed it in behind a wardrobe, where it would stay unnoticed till the sweeper found it after she had gone. Could Rajjia have seen her care, her thoughtful, sad precautions, she would no more have thought her just a child.

And then, when all was done, she knelt and prayed, and her prayer was:

“God, do not punish me; and help me keep my secret.”

Poor little girl of twelve!

## CHAPTER II

To the resolve engendered by that night of terror Sylvia desperately clung—clung even through the torment of the night spent on the railway journey to Bombay. Lying awake upon her berth, with nothing but a wire gauze screen between her and the crowded station platforms, she wanted to cry out each time a luggage coolie or a hawker or a muddled third-class passenger stooped to peer over her into the darkened carriage.

It needed every bit of her determination to keep her from running over to the berth on which her father slept, the other side of the compartment, to seek protection from those dark-complexioned, lamp-illuminated faces. She could have pulled up the venetians to shut the faces out, but even that she did not dare to do. She had suggested it, but father said it made the carriage close—and she could give no reason.

Her troubles lessened when she got on board the ship, for the ship was England, despite a sprinkling of Europe-going students and a lascar crew. And by the time the English ship had landed her on English soil, the wound upon her mind was healing;



young bodies and young minds alike recover quickly. The load which had at first oppressed her, a load which seemed too terrible to bear, little by little she found strength to carry. The wound still ached, as old wounds will; the scar of it would never altogether leave her. But what had been an ever-present torment faded into a memory which grew less painful and more dim with every day of unremembered scenes and new experiences.

Her parents never knew; she kept her secret. They saw the change in her; they found her shyer, more reserved, sometimes a little timid even—their Sylvia who had known no fear. Her father thought the voyage had upset her. Her mother's more acute perception was blunted by the period of separation, and she ascribed the change she noticed to the irksomeness and the restrictions which are the lot of children penned in English boarding-houses.

Indeed, but for that one recurring memory, Sylvia might well have wished herself again in India, back as the baby-empress of a compound-full of servants who never blamed or scolded her for any of her pranks, to whom her every lightly uttered, instantly forgotten wish was law. Life in an Indian bungalow is not a good apprenticeship for English boarding-houses.

As things turned out, however, she had not to put up for long with chairs she must not tilt, with tables whose scarred legs she must not kick, with fragile ornaments inside and sacred flower-beds in

the narrow, walled-in garden which turned a ball into a weapon of destruction, and all the other nuisances, inanimate and animate, which separate a little girl from her own proper pleasures. For Mrs. Delahey, as soon as she was fit to travel, went with her husband to recuperate in a more genial climate, and Sylvia was packed off to her aunt in Devonshire.

And Tor Cove was a paradise for children. A beach closed in by rough, red cliffs with heather-purpled tops, a tiny pier, a boat. Dark, echoing caves and steep, unfenced cliff-paths. Paddocks at a safe distance from the flower-garden. Long, empty attic rooms in which to romp in wet weather. And best of all, a playmate.

Not that Hugh Frampton, Sylvia's cousin, would have quite liked to be so called—a boy of seventeen is very careful of his dignity. Yet such, when he arrived home for the summer holidays, he rapidly became. Nor was his dignity thereby impaired, for Sylvia, accustomed to command, proved herself ready to be patronized, and liked it. She did, with flattering humility, what she was told; she did not mind how much he tyrannized, so long as she was not ignored.

Indeed, her unconcealed devotion for her big, strong, handsome cousin, however much it flattered him, might under other circumstances have made him look on her with something like contempt. But it was not easy to be contemptuous of a little

girl who by reason of her lightness could climb higher up a tree than he could; who, ignorant of swimming, jumped without hesitation into deep rock-pools that he might demonstrate his prowess at life-saving; who splashed and stumbled after him without a light into the innermost recesses of the winding caves.

There are still pagoda trees in India, and Hugh's father, a Calcutta jute merchant, had shaken one of them with such success that on retiring he had been in a position to purchase the Tor Cove estate from the necessitous Earl of Tor, and, dying there, to leave his widow with the means to keep it up. And Mrs. Frampton, accustomed to Oriental hospitality as practised by the merchant princes of Calcutta, made fuller use of its amenities than had her noble predecessor. For Sylvia's taste, there were too many afternoons that August when she must discard her tattered frock or one-piece bathing suit, pull on silk stockings over her brown legs, and don her party dress and party manners.

For a garden party at Tor Cove held few excitements for a little girl. The residents of the locality were mainly elderly and stiff. They patted little girls upon the head and asked them how they liked their lessons. And it was not very often that mere holiday visitors, who might have been more genial, received an invitation to such functions; for Mrs. Frampton and her friends lumped them together indiscriminately as "excursionists," and sniffed at

them as though they were offensive jetsam, cast up upon an otherwise Elysian shore. Of course there were occasional exceptions, and Mrs. Frampton made one in the case of Syed Fattah Khan, an Indian barrister who was spending his vacation touring England with his family. He called, for in Calcutta days he had on more than one occasion been briefed for Mr. Frampton, and was immediately pressed to come to a conveniently dated party, and bring his wife and children with him.

They came, and gave a picturesque distinction to the Tor Cove lawns. For while the barrister retained his English clothes, his wife and children had dressed themselves for the occasion in the ceremonial brightness of the East. Nevertheless, they hung a little heavy on Mrs. Frampton's hands, for Mrs. Khan had only recently emerged from purdah, and her manners were as Eastern as her garments. She and her little daughter, the one a miniature edition of the other, clung speechlessly together for protection, stricken to hopeless shyness by the curiosity evoked by their close-wrapped and gaily tinselled garb. The little boy of ten, resplendent in a blue plush coat, tight, wrinkled cotton trousers and a gold-embroidered cap, was less afraid but no less uncommunicative. He held tight to his father's hand, and gazed unblinkingly at everyone and everything with solemn, kohl-encircled eyes. Even the self-assertive barrister, accustomed to discourse with fluency and utter certainty on any topic what-

soever, from the Rule in Shelley's case to British rule in India, was sympathetically smitten with embarrassment.

Unable to cope longer with this fourfold blight on her hospitality, Hugh's mother turned to him and whispered:

"Hugh, be a brick and get those two appalling kids away."

The boy looked dubious.

"I'll try, Mater. But what am I to do with them?"

"Do!" said his mother wildly. "Take them and drown them in the lake, if you can't think of anything better. Try them with hide-and-seek. There's Sylvia and the Travers boys, and plenty more."

Hugh gloomily approached the solemn infants. To his considerable relief, the little girl would not have anything at all to do with him—she hid her face against her mother's sari and tearfully refused to be detached. The little Ali was not so accommodating. He went off uncomplainingly, holding Hugh's hand as tightly and as stolidly as he had held his father's.

Hugh parked him with the Travers boys and rounded up such other juveniles as he could find. With Sylvia, when he announced his errand and the cause of it, he met with unexpected difficulty.

"Hide-and-seek's a kid's game," she said disdainfully. "And what would Auntie say about my clothes?"

For if Sylvia played a game at all she played it

conscientiously, as more than one torn, green-stained frock attested. But this time Hugh could cut the ground from under her.

"I know that Mums won't mind this time," he said with real conviction, and indeed with truth. "Not if you tear your clothes right off. And I'm going to play."

Sylvia went with him. To climb up trees and grovel under dusty laurels in a party frock was not an everyday adventure—and what Hugh said was law. Nevertheless, she went reluctantly.

The game proved difficult to start, for Ali, who had never played a game of any kind before in all his life, could not be made to understand the rules. He could not find a hiding-place. When thrust in one, if ever "He" came near his bush he solemnly stepped forth and smilelessly surrendered. Hugh, joining in the game shamefacedly, had dark thoughts of the lake. At last, after the third fiasco, he seized on Ali.

"Here, you and I will both be 'He.'"

The child stared at him in bewilderment. His mind groped for the English grammar lessons he repeated parrot-fashion. This sounded rather like them.

"We'll each go different ways," continued Hugh. "You've only got to shut your eyes, and go as soon as they call out."

"But where I am to go?" the child objected.

Hugh sighed.

"Look here. The rest will all be hiding. We've got to catch one of them. Like that!" A little out of temper, he gripped the blue plush coat more roughly than he need have done. "Now do you understand?"

"He are trying," the boy said doubtfully.

Hugh shrugged, and when he heard the call saw with relief that Ali trotted off towards the shrubbery, a pucker of perplexed determination on his stolid little face. He waited with amusement to see what would happen next.

By this time Sylvia not unnaturally looked on Ali as a dummy. Hugh was the real "He," an adversary not to be regarded lightly. It was not an occasion to respect a party frock. She ran to the great cedar, and crept beneath a drooping bough which spread out fan-wise on the ground. It was not altogether a convenient hiding-place, since rapid exit would be difficult. But with Hugh as "He" concealment was of greater value than mobility. She knew that he could catch her, if she had to run.

But the close-set, grey-green needles of the cedar were not quite so opaque as Sylvia had imagined them, and Ali's great, black, solemn eyes were sharp. He saw a glimmer of white silk, and gave tongue unintelligibly.

Sylvia squirmed out as quickly as she could, her progress punctuated by snapping twigs and little rending noises. She was indignant that this solemn

little fool should have discovered her; at least she did not mean to let him catch her

But however little Ali understood about the game, he had at all events assimilated one portion of his lesson. He waited silently, and as soon as Sylvia had wriggled clear, before she had a chance to gain her feet, he pounced as Hugh had shown him.

Sylvia was furious, and though well and truly caught would not admit defeat. No one could see; no one must know that this solemn baby had got the better of her. She struggled to get free, but Ali's wiry little fingers clung tenaciously. Having done what Hugh had told him, he clung on tightly to her dress and waited for instructions in the further progress of the game.

But suddenly it was a game no longer; for Sylvia, unable to dislodge the grip of those brown fingers, burst into panic-stricken screaming.

Hugh was quite close to them; he had been following quietly up to see what Ali did. Taking him by the shoulder, he pulled him roughly off. "Here, stop that, you young tiger." Two ladies, strolling near the shrubbery, came hurrying up. Sylvia got trembling to her feet. A score of children, running from their hiding-places, were clustering round.

The grown-up interveners looked from Sylvia's grime-stained, tattered frock and crimson face to little Ali, still fast-held by Hugh.

"You nasty little boy," said one severely. "Has



no one ever told you that you mustn't hurt a girl?" And then to Sylvia, "What did he do to you, my dear?"

Sylvia stood silent. That was what they were thinking, that she had screamed because he hurt her—this puny little blackamoor.<sup>2</sup> She would have run away to hide her shame, but that a gloved hand fastened on her arm and drew her gently back.

"No, tell me, dear. There's no need to be frightened any more."

And this in front of bread-and-butter misses she despised; in front of boys who could not run with her or climb with her or wrestle with her. The elder Travers boy was sniggering, distinctly. She could not stand it any longer. She broke from the detaining hand and ran, seeking a place where she could nurse her misery alone.

But not so quickly that she did not hear Hugh's muttered "Wretched little funk!"

. . . . .

No more was said about the episode, for Mrs. Frampton, scenting some deep emotional disturbance, forbade all further mention of it. And Hugh, when next he saw his cousin, made no addition to his whispered comment.

But what remained of Sylvia's holiday was spoiled. She had tried so hard that Hugh should not be ashamed of her companionship, and she had failed. Outwardly there was no difference in their relation-

ship. They bathed together, climbed together, went for the same long expeditions on the heights beneath which Tor Cove nestled. But all the time those three words rankled; they made her feel that she was only tolerated, that she had been deposed from comradeship. She made a second resolution, that she would never let herself be frightened by anything again.

It was a resolve, in her case, of peculiar value, since the unhappy lot of English children born in India was to be hers. One morning in November she waited desolate upon a gusty, rain-swept quay at Tilbury, watching the lock-gates open and a dingy black and yellow P. & O. creep through them to the river. Upon her decks a man and woman, too distant now for recognition, still stood and waved. That was the last that Sylvia was to see of father or of mother until leave fell due again, by which time they would be lucky if they recognized each other.

The next day Sylvia was plunged, alone, into a boarding-school; and there, in unsympathetic obscurity, she passed her period of legginess and blushes.

## CHAPTER III

RACING in an eight-oared boat is a form of sport which can only be enjoyed in prospect or in retrospect—there is not anyone who has assisted to propel a racing-boat at speed who can honestly aver that at the time he liked it. For while the rules of rowing may be many, there is one rule of racing, and one only: to row yourself within the first half-minute into a state of utter and complete exhaustion, and then, with bursting lungs and muscles dead to further effort, to settle down to catch the boat ahead by dint of sheer will-power and training. The oarsman is by nature an enthusiast; he would hardly be a rowing man unless he were. He sacrifices tennis, football, cricket upon the altar of his insatiable goddess. He stuffs himself with food, he starves himself of whisky and tobacco, he rises with the sun and goes to bed at ten. He talks more shop than all the other athletes put together. Nevertheless, he will admit, if he is candid, that a race is pure and simple hell.

Hugh Frampton had been through it on the three preceding evenings, but now, on Sunday afternoon in Eights Week, he had leisure to enjoy

the compensations which await a stroke who has made three bumps in three days, and still has three days left in which to make just one bump more and gain the Headship of the river.

No normal-minded hero seriously objects to hero-worship; and Hugh, holding the painter of his punt and waiting for his turn to take it up the rollers, could not help seeing—and, to tell the truth, did not want not to see—the envious and admiring glances his scarlet Eights blazer attracted. Lesser men, and in Eights Week dons and rigger blues and Craven scholars are all lesser men, pointed him out to parents or to sisters or to other people's sisters. Old Tom, the pensioned bargeman, controlling with abrupt, good-tempered despotism the huddled mass of boats below the rollers, saluted him as though he were the Prince of Wales, and made a chance, amid the Eights Week Sunday crush, to whisper:

“That Christ Church stroke ain't got no guts, sir. Bustle him; you'll get them at the Willows.”

And when he had poled his punt through the strictly male preserve of Parson's Pleasure, and picked his freight up at the landing-stage beyond, Hugh found himself the subject of a hero-worship yet more naïve and undisguised. For Sylvia Delahey, now seventeen years old and fresh from school, considered herself the luckiest girl on the river, and made no effort to conceal the fact.

Five years had passed since Tor Cove days, in

which time Hugh had barely seen his cousin. For Mrs. Frampton, afflicted with the Anglo-Indian's inability to settle in one place, had in a fit of restlessness decided that the Italian Riviera was preferable to the English. Hugh joined her for his holidays, and Sylvia was boarded out with retired members of minor Indian services, who eked out pre-war pensions, in post-war England, by providing "home-comforts and understanding treatment" for such unhappy little derelicts as she. The gates of Paradise were closed to both—the guardian at the gate the Jew financier to whom Tor Cove was rented.

But as they lounged upon the yellow velvet cushions side by side, paddling along the deep and muddy-bottomed reach which skirts the Parks, they were very near a Paradise for which Tor Cove was but probation. How near, the memory of that sexless comradeship disguised from them—at any rate from Hugh. And yet his heart leapt when she asked him:

"What would you say if I came up to Somerville? Lots of girls from Britfield do."

"That would be topping!" he exclaimed. "But all the same"—regretfully—"I should not see much of you during term."

"Why not? I don't suppose they'd let you traipse around the women's colleges. But we'd have lots of afternoons like this. And we could always meet at Fuller's or Buol's, between the lectures."

But the monastic ideal is not altogether dead in Oxford.

"That sort of thing!" Hugh snorted. "Haven't you seen the men who do it? Exquisites, lounge-lizards, dirty little bounders who do nothing for their college—not even read, except the menu and the wine-list. We'd have a lot more chance to win a Boat-race if there were no women's colleges."

Sylvia made a face at him and shipped her dripping paddle.

"What ho!" she cried. "You'd better land me here and let me walk back through the Parks. Your crew might eat me if they lost the race tomorrow."

Hugh checked his violence with a shamefaced grin.

"Why, you're our mascot! And you know I don't mean that. But what I say is true. There's such a lot to do at Oxford, and very little time to do it in. And I don't think much of a chap who can't keep off poodle-faking for eight weeks at a time."

"You're the last man who needs to get wind up about the women," retorted Sylvia. "You haven't got the poodle-faking touch." Yet what girl was there who would not give her eyes to be where she was? "And I shan't come up to worry you. Though I do think those black, square, floppy caps would suit me."

Hugh slipped the punt-pole from its straps and stood erect. Given the choice to ply a lazy paddle

beside a charming and adoring maiden, or to take advantage of the clear, hard bottom over which by now they floated, he chose the latter. He certainly had not the poodle-faking touch. But as the punt-pole clinked upon the gravel he paused to ask her:

"Where *are* you going, Sylvia, now that you've done with Britfield?"

"Paris for a bit. Dad's pakka now in Simla, and he wants me 'finished.' Then Dad and Mum are coming home on leave, and I shall go out with them when they go back. Hughie, I hate the thought of it."

"But why?" demanded Hugh. "I thought girls had a topping time in India."

"Oh, I don't know; I'm very happy here."

And so she passed the question off. She was just too much a woman, too little of a child, to say with frankness that in Simla there would not be any Hughie. Besides, it sounded sloppy and ridiculous, since he and she had not met twice in five long years. And the other reason. . . . She flushed, and closed her mouth tight upon that. She hoped Hugh had forgotten the day a little girl had screamed and run away from nothing.

They had made no preparations for a picnic tea—it had hardly seemed worth while with Hugh in training and tea an interdicted meal for him. Instead they trusted to the chance of finding a vacant table in the garden of the inn at Marston Ferry. They

got the very last there was, and for that they were indebted to the fact that Hugh had scorned delights and operated with the punt-pole.

The garden of the Marston Ferry Inn contains a row of little arbours, each screened off from the next by a clipped hedge of varying capacity. In theory, at least, one does not see one's neighbours. And Sylvia was not in any way curious to do so; she was quite content to have Hugh to herself, and grateful for the greenery which shut the world out. She told herself she ought to be the happiest girl in Oxford.

And yet she was not, and she could not understand it. She was conscious, in that arbour, of a queer, uncomfortable, restless feeling, to which she could assign no cause. She even wondered if it could be shyness—and laughed at the idea. Shy, with darling, downright, unsentimental Hughiel! At last her mind grew conscious of what her ears had all the while been taking in, voices behind her speaking in a foreign tongue, of which, although the intonation seemed familiar, she could not understand a word.

The hedge at the back of her was scraggy, and what she saw on looking round gave her the clue not only to that queer, familiar language, but also to the causes of her own disquiet. Her neighbours were three Indian undergraduates, the language they were speaking Hindustani—the tongue which Sylvia had prattled in before she could speak



English, but which the first six months in England had blotted from her memory.

They were harmless enough, those three out of the multitude of Oxford's coloured students, quietly behaved and busy with their own affairs. They had not even glanced in Sylvia's direction. Nor did she any longer panic at the sight of a brown face. Time had made painful memories mercifully dim. But what the faces of the students failed to do, their speech all but accomplished. The last time that her lips had used that now forgotten tongue, the last time she had heard it spoken, her tragedy had been a few hours old. Its rapid cadence bridged five years; she heard again the singing and the shouting, she breathed the stuffy airlessness of her dismantled room; she saw, illumined by the lowered lamp, a face.

She was almost on her feet before she knew it; she even curled her fingers underneath the seat, as though to hold her shrinking body down. She must not show herself a coward to Hugh a second time. Schooling the terror from her voice, she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Hughie," she said, "it will be simply ages before they get us tea, and when it comes you're not allowed to have it, and I don't really want it. Let's get back to the river. It seems a shame to waste an afternoon like this."

But Hugh was obdurate.

"Nonsense. They won't be long, and it's worth

waiting for. Home-made cakes, and the best strawberries in Oxford. And I'm allowed the strawberries."

And then tea came, and she must sit there and pretend to eat, while all the time the low, quick monotone of Indian speech was drumming in her ears and painting that revolting picture on her brain. Her throat was dry, her heart was hammering; she felt her cheeks, even her lips, were blanched. And she must laugh and joke and chatter all the time, lest even unobservant Hugh should see her plight.

After what seemed eternity—and yet Hugh grumbled at her restlessness—she got free from that hateful arbour and back upon the river. And Hugh had spent his energetic mood, was content now to sit beside her, paddling lazily. The water-traffic thinned as they went on, the Cherwell narrowed to a slip of silver set in emerald. The sun of artificial summer-time, still high, was tempered by the little ghost of a cool breeze, which flicked the water into sparkling ripples and drove them gurgling and slapping against the overhanging prow.

The setting was perfection, but the afternoon to which she had looked forward with such eager longing was altogether spoiled for Sylvia. Her sparkle, her gaiety, her easily awakened laughter were all gone. She was like some bright flower-garden which a thunderstorm has drenched and battered.

And Hugh wondered. Was this what school had done to her? Or had he by some unguessed blundering upset her? He too grew tongue-tied. The situation was beyond him; he was too shy and diffident in feminine society to smooth away the awkwardness, to fill the lengthening gaps in conversation. It was almost a relief when the attendant's boathook grappled them and drew them gently in beside the raft.

And he too, though with less intense anticipation, had looked forward to this afternoon. The re-discovered Sylvia had up to now been all he could have hoped; a chum, as always, and yet something more—a girl, a woman he had almost thought her, with whom one could feel strangely at one's ease, never exacting, never difficult. And she had disappointed him. He supposed that all girls were like that.

## CHAPTER IV

THE prophecy of Tom the bargeman had been wrong, for on the Monday Christ Church held their own, and kept a clear half-length of water between their rudder and the scarlet pennon at the bows of the Sussex College eight.

Tuesday seemed far more hopeful, but ended in sheer tragedy. For Hugh had gone off with a dash, and he was hardly past Weirs Bridge before he heard the single pistol-shot which told him he had closed the distance to a quarter of a length. Setting his teeth, he hunted his opponents, and knew from the excitement on the bank he was still going up. And as his boat slewed round to take the Gut, cox, leaning forward, shouted at him:

“They’re steering wide; we’re right on top of them.”

Hugh quickened up the stroke again, alert for the three rapid shots to signal that the boats were overlapping. The shouting on the bank swelled to a roar. Then his boat checked and tilted suddenly, and cox was tearing at his rudder-lines to keep her from the bank.

“Five’s oar!” he gasped. “Snapped clean in

half." Then, in alarm, "For hell's sake get together."

For the oar had given when five's full fourteen stone of weight was straining at it, and the shock had sent him toppling backwards on his seat. Before he had recovered the remainder of the crew were coming forward for the following stroke. Four had to check his swing, jabbed his oar hurriedly but late into the water, and all but caught a crab. The boat slowed like a car which has been braked, and "The House" shot forward into safety.

But it was not of the Christ Church eight that cox was thinking, or at which Hugh was looking. So quickly had they lost their way that Magdalen, as fast a boat as they were, was almost on the top of them. Five seconds of confusion had turned the almost certain hope of going Head into a very pressing danger of defeat.

Hugh pulled his boat together in time, but only just in time, and staved off danger for the moment. But Sussex carried fourteen stone of useless weight, and Magdalen quickly came again, and hunted them all down the Greener and along the barges. It was a crew of seven weary men, and one quite fresh and blasphemous, which passed the post at last and slid to rest beside the Christ Church eight, saved by a bare six feet.

Sussex were not a rowing college. The products of the rowing schools did not come up to them; like many of the smaller colleges, they mainly had

to find and train their raw material from among the "rabbits" who could not win a place in the fifteen or the elevens. It was not ten years since they had been struggling near the bottom of the third division, and a Commem. Week rag had printed of them: "Surely these be men of Sussex, for their oars strike not the water together"—a dictum almost saved by truth from being libellous. And an Eights Week poet had begun his ditty with these lines:

One, eight, fifty, and one,  
When Sussex were Head of the River.

Then a revival had set in, and year by year they had been working up through the divisions, until at last they had a chance of silencing old libels once for all. Therefore what would have been a bitter disappointment to a college habituated to the Headship was a blow sufficient to send all Sussex into mourning.

For everybody realized—their coach included, though he did not say it—that on the Tuesday they had had a chance which was not very likely to come their way again. They were not really good enough to catch "The House" without that extra bit of luck with which a lapse of steering at a tricky corner had presented them. And next year? It might be twenty years before they had a crew as good again.

One minute before six on Wednesday afternoon! Sweaters pulled off and flung into the punts, a dozen boats pushed out and steadied in position by the boatmen's hooks. Strung out along the river all the way from Iffley Lock, a hundred victims of "the needle" silently endured the miserable, never-ending minute between the warning and the starting guns. And in the second punt the Sussex coach, a burly clerk in holy orders disguised in a blue rowing cap, Leander scarf, a sweater and a brief and tattered pair of shorts, studied his watch and gave his last instructions to his crew.

"All out, stroke, from the very start. You can afford to kill yourselves this afternoon; you'll be out of training, eating cream cakes and smoking, in less than half an hour. . . . Half a minute gone. . . . Salter has betted me five pounds you won't break *that* oar, five. . . . Fifteen seconds more. . . . The House are frightened, they'll be ragged. At them, chaps, like you went last night, and they haven't got an earthly. . . . Five, four, three, two, one, GUN."

The steadying boathook was withdrawn, the bung which cox was holding fell back into the water with a splash, the runners shouted "Well rowed, Sussex" in anticipatory encouragement; and they were off.

Off, and Hugh knew the boat was going well; he felt the drive behind the stroke each time the oars tore at the water, he saw the river streaking

backwards past the steady, level boat. He quickened up, and prayed his slow, hard-working heavyweights would stand it. He was rewarded by a single shot, and by a harsh, distorted, megaphony voice which came to him above the clamour on the towpath:

“Oh! well done, stroke. Well rowed, the lot of you. You’re going up! You’re going up! You’re going up!”

Sussex crept up, the noise upon the bank swelled into pandemonium as the runners, keeping level with their boat, caught up and mingled with those of Christ Church. All down the Greener Christ Church held their own, although the barest yard of water separated Sussex bow and Christ Church rudder—a yard which shortened into inches with every stroke of the pursuing boat, and widened to five feet or more with every answering stroke of the pursued.

It was not until Christ Church had swung out by the Balliol barge to make the crossing to the towpath side that three shots told Hugh he was overlapping, and the battle of the coxes started. The first round went to Christ Church, for as the Sussex cox pulled his left rudder-line, his opponent gently felt his right, and called upon his stroke for just one effort more. So, as the Sussex bow swung in to bump, the Christ Church stern receded. And at the very moment that the rudder took the way off Sussex, Christ Church were bucketing themselves into a gasping, desperate spurt. There may



have been six inches between their rudder and the swinging bow, there could not have been more.

But those six inches were enough; they had lengthened to six feet before the swing had been corrected and the pace regained. And eight men who had rowed themselves right out to close that last six feet had all their work to do again. What those exhausted oarsmen thought about it cannot be put in print. Even the big man on the bank ran muttering—six months in holy orders was not enough to curb his language.

“That blasted cox. Why couldn’t he have waited? We’d got ’em, and he went and lost his bloody little head.” He raised his megaphone, and bellowed, “They’re going ragged, boys; you’ve got them beat. Take her along. Well rowed, Sussex!”

Cox “gave her ten.” Hugh, lengthening out, discovered with a dull amazement that he had still a spurt left in him, could feel his crew responding with every nerve of their exhausted bodies. Christ Church increased their rate of striking, but could not increase their speed. They grew more ragged, and began to lose their rhythm. The coach was right; they were “all in.”

The gap grew narrower; Sussex crept up, first inch by inch, then foot by foot, until their fluttering pennon was six feet up the canvas of the Christ Church eight. Now was the time to shoot. The clergyman upon the bank grew apoplectic.

But cox, determined to make sure this time, refused to shoot.

"Ten more," he shouted, "and we've got 'em."

But ten more were not needed. The Sussex boat slid up, till bow's oar, coming forward, fouled the Christ Church rudder. The Christ Church cox shot up his hand, and sixteen men, exhausted almost to insensibility, collapsed upon their seats, while their boats drifted bankwards interlocked. Sussex had made their bump in front of their own barge, had made it so decisively that they had almost rowed their quarry under water.

Then pandemonium broke loose. The curate pointed his revolver skywards, and relieved his feelings by discharging every cartridge left in it and in his pockets. Finding his megaphone impeded him, he flung it in the river, waded in waist-deep to retrieve it, and bellowed through it his congratulations to a crew too utterly rowed out to hear him. And if he made most noise it was because he was the best equipped for making noises; for there were a hundred others with him on the towpath who were employing to the best of their ability the voices God had given them, aided by such accessories as they themselves had had the forethought to provide.

The cheering from the barge, across the river, came back as a politely modulated echo, for with a very few exceptions the undergraduates of Sussex College had been running with their boat, leaving

their guests to entertain themselves. And from that side there were defections, since while the uproar was at its height a dozen soberly clad figures slipped quietly off on their own business. They were the college butler and his underlings, hastening away to stage that annual Oxford miracle, the preparation in a hundred minutes of a bump supper for two hundred men.

## CHAPTER V

THE butler and his henchmen made their rapid preparations, and at the same time certain other folks were working quietly to pave the way for a successful evening. But of these underground activities Hugh was at present ignorant. After escorting Sylvia and her mother back to their hotel he had had barely time to change, and now, with his Eights blazer over his dress clothes, he occupied the place of honour at High Table, isolated from undergraduate companionship by the Warden on his left hand and the Bursar on his right.

Yet even here faint rumours of irregular and unprecedented "rags" had penetrated. The Dean, responsible for law and order, was silent and a little grave. It would be a thankless and unpleasant task to check high spirits on a night like this—he had once stroked a college boat himself. One or two younger dons were stimulated by the undercurrent of excitement, and bethought themselves a little sadly of their newly-undertaken obligations. The Warden, a decrepit, aged man, conveyed a tactful hint.

"I hope you men will have a pleasant evening. But don't go breaking things."

Hugh, making mental reservations, gave a vague undertaking for his part, and wondered what the morrow's bill for breakages would be.

The Warden went on reminiscently:

"I never have been able to make out what pleasure you men get from smashing chambers. I think it's damned silly."

The Bursar, a fat, explosive man, laughed noisily.

"Yes, Warden, and sometimes inconvenient before the morning."

The Warden looked down his long, thin nose, slightly encarmined, rumour said by college port, and charity by indigestion. Swainson might be the very prince of Bursars, but when undergraduates were present he should really try to be less Rabelaisian.

Dinner went on to an uproarious conclusion, but when the dons came out of Senior Common Room the quad was quiet—too quiet, thought the Dean. Those who were prudent had retired to change into their oldest clothes. The rest strolled round, or strolled about in little knots. Only a little vinous laughter, and here and there a snatch of song, betrayed suppressed hilarity. Things seemed a trifle flat.

Authority retired, and not five minutes afterwards a fourth-year man of hitherto unblemished reputation strolled past the row of pigeon-holes into the porter's lodge.

"Let me out, will you, 'Beatty'? I'm going back to digs."

The request appeared to be addressed to the bottom of a quart pot, for the porter was consuming *his* bump supper.

"Lord, Mr. Marshall, going 'ome?" he asked. "Ain't there to be no fireworks, then?"

"Not that I know of," answered Marshall. "And I'm not stopping, anyway. Fellows getting tight, and all that. . . . No, don't get up. Give me the key, and I'll leave it in the wicket."

"Beatty," a recent importation from the Navy, was unused as yet to the ways of gentlemen belonging to the University he was still learning not to designate as Oxford College. Gratified by the consideration shown him, he tilted back his chair and reached the key down from its hook.

"That'll be all right, sir; and thank you, sir. Just pull the gate to, and I'll nip out in a minute and lock up."

He was out, though, in little more than thirty seconds, for as Marshall swung the wicket open there were loud shouts of "Bonner! Bonner!" and men poured from the nearest staircases, laden with faggots, packing-cases, barrels stuffed with shavings, all manner of combustibles. "Beatty" was pushed aside protesting, and the mob surged out. Since bonfires were taboo in college they would have one in the road. For to go Head and have no bonfire was not to be endured.

It had to be quick work, if interference was to fail. But a can or two of paraffin worked wonders,

and the flames were roaring up, unquenchable by any means except a fire-engine, before the watchful Dean was half-way down the staircase from his room.

Of the mix-up which followed Hugh retained no very clear idea. Out of the pandemonium in the road there suddenly emerged two separate menaces, the fire-engine on one side and the Proctor with his bull-dogs on the other. The roisterers surged back towards the gate, to find the Dean, white-lipped, his patience snapped at last, fighting to slam the wicket in their faces. Fighting, because a tubby little don was hanging on to him and shouting in his ear:

“Let the men in, you idiot! If the prog. takes their names he’ll *have* to send them down. Damn it, man, you’ve gone Head!”

Pressure without prevailed, aided by this unlooked for advocacy from within. The door slammed back, sending the Dean, the porter, and the tubby little don down in a sprawling heap. The crowd pushed in; college became a magazine full-charged with mischief.

One thing was certain; they must have another bonfire to replace the blackened, sodden heap outside. Even the Dean conceded the necessity of something as a safety-valve for boisterous spirits, and went back to his room in order that official cognizance of such unheard-of revelries might be avoided. But Antrobus, the tubby don, led the procession to the back quadrangle.

Fuel was now the difficulty, but an obliging gentleman whose rooms were near the site selected for the bonfire was kind enough to offer their contents, and sofa-stuffing made an adequate, if smoky, kindler. Antrobus, hopping round the fire as though he were back in his twenties, was worried inwardly. The contents of a second room might so quickly follow on the ashes of the first.

He hit at last upon a grand expedient. He led a raid upon the lavatories which stripped them of their woodwork, and by the time the seats and the partitions were consumed the college appetite for bonfires had been sated.

Surveying two denuded rows of porcelain flush-downs, Antrobus was a little apprehensive as to Swainson's comments—the Bursar's watchword was economy. But the wily Swainson scored. He took the opportunity to have the gutted lavatory entirely reconstructed, and charged it up as breakages. And, to drive home the inconvenience of smashing things, he left it in its comfortless condition until the Long Vacation.

But smashing was not finished for that evening, for from the bonfire the college turned to jerry-crashing—the Warden's pet abomination. A string was rigged across the quad from attic-window on the one side to attic-window on the other, and each end threaded through the handle of an indispensable domestic article. A gill of methylated was poured into each, and at the word each operator dropped



a lighted match inside and let his vessel go. Down the loose string they sped, to meet above the grass-plot in a blazing, splintering crash. A childish form of pleasure, but the young gentleman of Oxford, having supped and wined, falls naturally back into the childhood he has not left very far behind him.

A lull came as the time drew on to midnight, and those who lived outside the college must go back to their digs. The moonlight shone on a deserted quadrangle, strewn white with broken chinaware. But through the open windows floated sounds of talk and laughter; the college was not yet asleep.

In a first-floor room on staircase number five, four friends were finishing the whisky in their bottle and reviewing reminiscently the doings of the night. They were agreed that there had been one blot.

"That fellow Joshi is the limit. I don't mind catting; a queasy stomach's nothing worse than a misfortune. But to puke all over the Hall steps before the dons came out . . ."

"It's my belief he was half-sozzled before Hall. He was hiccoughing before the joint was served."

"He's a fresher too—not that I mind a fresher getting tight."

"And a nigger."

"He ought to be debugged."

"Let's debug him."

The suggestion met with general approval.

Green, Stanton, Mannering and Wade put down their empty glasses, held up the bottle to the light to make sure it held no replenishment, and clattered perilously down the stairs.

The Indian freshman destined to receive their kind attentions was no longer in a state to be debagged, since he was undressed already and lying comatose in bed. He was the victim of experiment. Coming of orthodox Brahmin stock, he had never tasted alcohol before in any form—nor had his father or his grandfather, or any of their ancestors right back into the mists of time. But by his trip to England the ties of caste were loosened. He had crossed the great black water, a journey which itself was sin. He was waited on, his food was cooked, by English servants whose near presence made him ceremonially unclean. He had to sit at table beside men consuming the cooked flesh of sacred cows. It was small wonder if with regard to alcohol religious inhibitions lost their hold.

He had fallen that evening, consuming, at the instance of a friend, a tot of whisky which to the water-drinker seemed ridiculously small, but which in fact was almost large enough to satisfy the aspirations of a Scot. He had dressed and gone to dinner in a state of growing dizziness, and had been made to take a gulp of beer from the great scone passed round. The mixture was too much for a stomach which had neither inherited toleration nor

acquired it. As the dons rose to leave High Table, Joshi rushed from the Hall and strewed his dinner in their path.

In the subsequent rejoicings he had had no part. He crept off to his room, undressed as fast as trembling fingers and a heaving stomach would allow him, and now, in moments of half-consciousness, was recollecting all the symptoms he had heard of poisoning by arsenic in India, the home of arsenic. The drop or two which he had taken could never be the cause of such upheavals. He had been poisoned, he was dying, and he did not greatly care how soon he died.

The vindicators of propriety burst in; he hardly heeded them. They stood, uncertain, by his bedside. It seemed a bit low down to torment further a man so grievously afflicted by his indiscretions. But just then Joshi, rolling over, muttered:

"I am a Hindu. I should die upon the ground, not in a bed."

Wade caught the mumbled words, repeated them.

"He's raving. I should think he's got d.t.s."

"Why not oblige the gentleman?" suggested Mannering. "Lug him downstairs and leave him in the quad to sleep it off."

"He'll cut himself on all those broken jerries."

"Not he. He'll lie there without stirring till the porter finds him in the morning."

They stripped the blankets off, rolled Joshi in the undersheet, and carted him, a white cocoon,

into the cold night air. Then Mannering had another brain-wave.

"We can't quite leave him here; this grass is soaked with dew. What about the Black Hole?"

The Black Hole was a twisting, pitch-dark corridor which ran between the cloisters and the kitchen, along which, during his first term, each freshman had to find his way alone. Let Joshi cool his drink-befuddled brain upon its stone-flagged floor.

They groped their way down the stone steps, bumping themselves a little and their load a lot. They let the sheet go and decanted him upon the flags. Stanton, a man of gloomy features and sepulchral voice, kneeled down and struck a match.

"Joshi!" He hollowly invoked the huddled figure. "Joshi, you're in hell, and I'm the devil."

And Joshi screamed. The fumes of drink, his fear of death, the eeriness of that dark, echoing vault, broke down the final remnants of his self-control, and made of him a squirming, shrieking thing, babbling and imploring mercy.

But mercy he was not to find, just yet. His persecutors were themselves too drunk to understand the mischief they might work, the peril to their victim's reason.

"Good Lord," cried Mannering, "the blighter really thinks he's roasting. Let's cool him in the fountain."

Hugh, passing through the cloisters on his way to bed, heard those screams issuing from the vaulted opening and stopped dead. Lighting a match, he groped his way down the stone stairs, and at the corner by their foot ran straight into four bearers carrying what seemed a sheeted corpse. For Joshi's screams had died into low, moaning mutterings.

To Hugh's quick question Stanton answered:

"No, nothing's wrong. We're only teaching that young blighter Joshi not to spew all over the Hall staircase."

Hugh had no sympathy to waste, for his own views on Joshi's conduct tallied with those of Stanton and his friends. It was an offence against good manners which merited such punishment as undergraduate ingenuity could devise. But he was sober; sober enough, at all events, to recognize the quality of those screams.

"He's had enough," he said. "We'd better take him back to bed."

And when Joshi had been taken up the stairs and laid upon his bed, not the most fuddled of the four could fail to realize the wisdom of Hugh's counsel. Joshi was gibbering—no other word described it. They stole away shamefaced and frightened, and left Hugh there, an hour or more, to talk to him, to humour him, at last to soothe him to a drunken sleep.

The episode was the beginning of a strange, unequal friendship between the Indian fresher and the third-year man. Next morning Hugh looked into Joshi's rooms, not yet quite reassured as to the consequences of the rag. He was met by almost servile gratitude and by an explanation he had sufficient sympathy to credit, in face of all the facts. His disgust was turned to pity, and when he left, struck by the Indian's loneliness and isolation, he offered Joshi the freedom of his rooms.

They did not ever become intimate; for instance, Hugh gained no information about Joshi's parentage and antecedents—although the knowledge, if it had been proffered, would have conveyed little to one so altogether ignorant of Indian castes and social standing. But once or twice a term they sat from Hall to midnight, dissecting and reconstructing an undergraduate's universe; and as Greats loomed ahead Hugh had been nothing loath to get a smattering of the Vedas as a foil to Kant and Bradley, from one well-versed in the philosophy and the religion of his race.

## CHAPTER VI

AT the far end of the entrance hall to Faletti's Hotel Cecil—that hall which resembles so quaintly the interior of an ocean liner—there is a little space at the head of the staircase in which are set a wicker table and a pair of easy-chairs. These chairs are never without occupants from eight until eight-thirty, because they are a vantage-point in front of which all who go down to dinner or to the lower lounge must pass. And Simla, however, she may pride herself on being “different,” holds this in common with more humble Indian stations, that there too the proper study of mankind is man—and woman.

One night towards the end of August this observation-post seemed to be wasted, for the pair who occupied it were much more interested in each other than in the passers-by; though they themselves attracted no small measure of attention.

The man—it is perhaps superfluous to say they were of different sexes—was young, for Simla very young. He was carefully and fastidiously dressed; indeed, the neatness of his whole appearance was such as almost to earn for him the ambiguous

epithet "well-groomed." Not quite, however, for he had a head of curly hair which it was impossible to groom. To judge by the advertisements of certain glutinous preparations, curls in the male are to be eliminated as effeminate; but there are curls and curls, and these were of the crisp and crinkly kind which cover the head of a Greek statue. Indeed, there was nothing at all effeminate about Hugh Frampton, for though spare and not above the middle height, he was sturdily proportioned and quite obviously an athlete. Nor, for the matter of that, had he much except his hair in common with Apollo or with Hermes. Praxiteles would have discarded him at once, if only for his nose. But then Praxiteles might also have rejected a prominent, determined chin, and would certainly have regarded as a heresy the proposition that an expression of imperturbable good-humour could compensate for irregularity of feature.

But in good-humour and a pleasant smile there is fortunately nothing uncommon, and it was nothing in Frampton's physical appearance which attracted attention to him. But he was new, and Simla, after its habit, asked itself who he might be. Indeed, he was even more than new: he had just come out from Home—and those who saw him knew it. For the exile can detect in the newcomer an aura undefinable but unmistakable, which stirs up memories of green fields and P. & O. steamers outward bound; a faint intangible freshness, as if



the air of England and the ocean still hung about his person and his clothes.

With the girl who sat beside him the case was different. There was no one who did not know Sylvia Delahey, and very few who could keep their eyes away from her. Members of Council and Major-Generals, with whom she sometimes deigned to dance, described her as a little ripper; and the youth of Simla was at her feet. Slim, shingled and short-skirted, she was entrancingly pretty, irresistibly fascinating, and entirely modern. Her golden head might have been waved in Bond Street; her filmy dress had certainly come from the Rue de la Paix.

She was as virginal and fragrant as a rosebud, and yet with her the tang of the salt seas and England no longer lingered. For at the age of twenty Sylvia had been out a year, back in the country of her birth with the parents who had pinched to school and train and dress her as their only daughter should be schooled and trained and dressed, thinking their reward sufficient if in each four years they could snatch six months in England to be with her, welcoming honours and promotion because they meant a better time and larger stations for Sylvia, when she should at last come out to them again. And they had succeeded, for her father's progress had been rapid in the last eight years. The neat unravelling of revolutionary plots had won for him a billet at headquarters, where luck and

hard work had continued to befriend him. George Delahey was now Sir George, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department for all India; and Sylvia, who might have been hidden in some jungly little district, the daughter of an obscure superintendent of police, queened it in Paris frocks in Delhi and in Simla.

Hugh, on the other hand, was nothing better than a tourist, albeit a privileged one. On leaving Oxford he had selected the Bar as his nominal profession. But jute, and compound interest on his inheritance, had made him independent, and his parliamentary ambitions were already budding. He had been wise enough to realize that a man who is to make his mark in Parliament must take one subject for his own. He had always been interested in India, drawn partly by his parentage, partly by the immensity of her problems; and with an uncle who had spent the better part of a lifetime in her service, his way had seemed marked out for him. Six months in the company of an officer, whose duties carried him the length and breadth of India and Burma, promised to teach him more than years of armchair study.

It was strange therefore that Sir George Delahey's standing invitation to come and study the problems of the country on the spot had up till now gone disregarded. Indeed, Hugh would have found it hard to say with candour that it was his interest in those problems which had eventually sent him to

Cockspur Street to book his passage. At all events, his definite decision had followed with suspicious closeness upon a summer holiday spent with Sylvia and her parents in the Scottish Highlands, and had coincided almost to a day with her departure by the boat-train from Victoria.

But whatever the motive which had brought him, here he was in the summer capital among the hills, after two days of dust and heat and rain and railway trains, feeling rather strange and new. In a way it perplexed him that it should be so. Save for a few barefooted abdars, he might have been in London; the well-dressed crowd of men and women might have been transported on some magic carpet from the foyer of another Hotel Cecil, six thousand miles away. He was not of the uninstructed, who believe that all a memsahib's clothes are run up by a darzi on the back verandah, and that the sahib cherishes till his retirement the morning suit which he brought out with him. But he had certainly not expected to find Indian society, even in Simla, quite so smart and up-to-date.

He was about to confide the fact to Sylvia, when the appearance of an unexpected and most incongruous apparition reminded him that he was very far from London, and saved him from her ridicule. He nudged her elbow in amazement.

"Good Lord! Whatever's that?" he asked.

Sylvia had drained her cocktail, and was busy extracting the cherry from the bottom of her glass.

She held it poised before her open mouth, and followed the direction of her cousin's curious glance.

She did not find it difficult to single out the object of his sudden exclamation. An elderly Mohammedan, who might have been mistaken for a servant in his most untidy *déshabillé*, had just emerged from the lift, and was threading his way, deviously yet with complete assurance, among the chattering groups of black-coated men and bare-shouldered women. He wore a coat of loosely woven puttoo cloth, stained and out at elbows, and his dirty cotton trousers displayed an unmistakable rent. His head was covered by a pagri made apparently of the blue-and-white check cloth which memsahibs use for dusters. Sylvia's eye, travelling downwards, was held by a pair of old brown shoes, so trodden over that their owner almost walked upon the uppers.

Her answer was surprising:

"Must be dining here," she decided; "though I must say he's more fly-blown than they usually are."

Hugh winked.

"I won't swallow that—if I am just two days off the *Ranchi*. He's come to mend the sink, or something."

But Sylvia tipped her chair back and extended her bare arm towards a showcase in the wall behind her.

"I'm not rotting. I'll bet you the biggest box of chocolates on that shelf."

Hugh stared again at the advancing scarecrow.

"You're pulling my leg! They'll never let him go into the dining-room."

"Snob!" Sylvia mocked him. "And I always thought you were a Socialist. He's probably a Member of Parliament, or the local equivalent. You wouldn't turn out Mr. Saklatvala if he went to dinner at the Ritz?"

It was not quite a fair attack. Hugh had not quite forgotten all the nonsense he had spouted at the 'Varsity; he was still prepared to talk with some assurance about equality of opportunity, about which he knew a little, and of equality of colour, of which he knew nothing at all. But a Socialist he certainly was not—least of all of the Norfolk-jacket and red-tie variety.

"I'd turn out Chamberlain or Baldwin," he maintained, "if they did not wear the proper kit."

"I'd turn out all this lot," said Sylvia; "but you'll find they're not so strict in Simla." She made a grimace of distaste, and her tone grew bitter. "If *you* had a brown skin you could go to dinner-parties in a dhoti and hairy legs. Some of them do."

The dining-room steward, approaching softly, interrupted these horrible revelations.

"Sorry to trouble you, Miss Delahey," he said. "We've had to move your table to make room for

Sir Cursetji Botliwala's dinner-party. I've put you in the corner by the door."

"And who's he dining?" Sylvia asked.

"Almost the whole Assembly, I believe," the man replied. "We've laid a hundred covers."

Sylvia nodded, and turned again to Hugh.

"Didn't I tell you he was a Member of Parliament? They're a disgusting nuisance, these Wog dinner-parties; but I suppose that you're in luck. At any rate, you'll see the inmates of the Monkey House on show at feeding-time, and on your first night, too."

And in so far as Frampton was in India to study matters Indian, he was in luck, for a Simla political dinner is among the most amazing of social portents. Food is a rock on which the ship of Indian unity is often split. The Englishman, consuming impartially the unclean pig and the sacred cow, affronts thereby both Muslim and Hindu. The water-drinking follower of the Prophet looks with distaste on wine in English and in Hindu glasses. The Muslim and the Englishman, united by the common bond of flesh-eating, jointly offend the vegetarian Hindu. Nor are the Hindus themselves at one. The twice-born castes eat in a place apart, lest the shadow of their lowlier brethren in religion, falling upon their food, defile it.

It is therefore a matter of bewilderment to men of more experience than Frampton that a banquet is about the only occasion in cosmopolitan Simla

when Englishman and Muslim and Hindu wholeheartedly co-operate; that the Assembly which has been bickering all day over cow-killing or Prohibition will gather amicably in the evening to discuss a menu on which beef and champagne both appear. It may be partly the common bond of a free feed; but the tact of the caterer has probably a lot to do with it. For cabalistic signs in chalk or coloured ribbons adorn the back of every chair, to guide the waiters. Green means no pork, red no beef, yellow no meat at all. Blue is the natural badge of the consumer of soft drinks. A crude arrangement enough, but it seems to work in the atmosphere of genial toleration engendered by good food—until a joker changes the chairs.

. . . . .

If he had come a little later, Sylvia's disreputable Mohammedan would not have attracted so much notice, for it was not long before the hall was filling with dusky gentlemen in bizarre attire; and by the time Sir George and Lady Delahey appeared for dinner the Palm Court, reserved for Sir Cursetji's guests, was buzzing with half a dozen vernaculars, and with quite as many separate brands of tortured English.

The four of them went down and found their table in the corner to which they had been pushed by this invasion; and they were past the fish before the legislators, having dissolved their differences for the time in vermouths and in cocktails, or in

austere but brilliant drinks concocted out of sugar and water and aniline dyes, came trooping down the stairs to dinner. Hugh had begged for and been allotted the seat which faced the door, and he set down knife and fork to stare without concealment at the ill-assorted irruption.

First, with their host, came Viceroy's councillors both white and brown, and after them the rank and file in English or in every kind of Indian evening dress. Orthodoxy demanded a long black buttoned coat and white trousers, but coats there were of plush and velvet, from orange or sky-blue to sober moles and browns; and the headgear of each guest was a law unto itself. Swarajists, clad in their uniform of homespun khaddar cloth, were scattered here and there among the throng. But even among them there were distinctions. The whole-hoggers, as Sylvia had foretold, showed their contempt for English ways and English ladies by retaining the most primitive form of their distinctive garb—a loose shirt and a flowing loin-cloth which left brown legs exposed. A few, more modest than their fellows, covered their nakedness with long white stockings, while one or two, perhaps because they deemed their calves too meagre, had abandoned the dhoti for khaddar trousers.

At the rear there shambled a figure which made Sylvia clap her hands.

"What about my chocolates?" she demanded.

Frampton recalled his wandering attention with



a start, and left Sir Cursetji's guests to sort themselves out round the long tables.

"You stung me all right that time," he grinned, "but you'll find it harder to catch me out again."

Sir George looked at him quizzingly.

"Don't be too sure, my boy," he warned him. "I know this sort of thing must strike you as—well, highly improbable. But you'll see lots of highly improbable things before you're through with India, and you'll be unlucky if you miss the quite impossible."

"For instance?" fished Hugh.

But Sir George shook his head.

"Oh no! I'm not going to spoil your thrills for you in advance. Besides, it wouldn't be fair to Sylvia. She'll win more chocolates off you yet."

"Tell me who all these people are, then," demanded Hugh. "I suppose you know them."

"Most of them," Sir George admitted. "A few professionally, for several of this little lot have been in jail the last few years, and not the most disreputable either."

He cast an eye along the tables.

"You see that great tall fellow over there with the end of his pagri fanned out over his head like a cock's comb. He's a Pathan from the Frontier, more of an Afghan than an Indian. The little fat man next to him is a Bengali. They're chatting very amicably now, but if you let a hundred Frontier Pathans loose in Calcutta and called off the police,

that little fat man and his friends wouldn't stop running till they got to China.

"Just beyond them you'll see three very black gentlemen, with small, tight pagris. Madrasi Brahmins they are, and so holy there's a riot if a low-caste man walks through the street they live in. . . ." He broke off with a smile. "But you'll get no dinner if I run on like this."

Hugh looked at the congealing gravy on his plate, and a hovering khidmutgar bore it away.

"It's fascinating," he consoled himself. "And I can eat my dinner any day."

But Sylvia broke in petulantly.

"Fascinating! I call it disgusting. Look at old Botliwala guzzling."

Sir George protested mildly, but his voice betrayed impatience.

"Still riding the same hobby, Sylvia! You mustn't be too hard on Botliwala. I've seen worse table manners in England, since the War."

A little awkwardness was evident, the faintest sense of tension; and Hugh sought injudiciously to bridge it over with another question.

"Who is this Botliwala?" he demanded. "Why does he dine a miscellaneous crowd like this?"

"That's rather hard to say," Delahey pondered, "but you may safely take it that it isn't mere good-fellowship. The House have just repealed the Cotton Excise Duty, so it might be gratitude—he's a big millowner. But he's much more likely to

be thinking of the future. Perhaps he wants a K.C.S.I. to put in front of his K.C.I.E."

To Hugh the answer sounded cynical.

"But they can't all have an axe to grind," he objected. "And Sylvia says this sort of thing is happening almost every night while the Assembly is sitting."

"There are axes and axes," commented Sir George. "Take Chatterji. He's a Calcutta lawyer, and quite the most persistent of our entertainers. He pegs away at dinner-parties till he gets a really big Brass Hat to come. And that means speeches, and speeches mean graceful remarks about the legal acumen of my old friend Mr. Chatterji—all carefully reported in the papers. You may not find it easy to believe, but a little of that sort of thing makes a greater difference to the fees marked on his briefs than any number of successful cases."

"Quite an ingenious idea," Hugh commented to Sylvia. "I must experiment with it, when I get back."

The little pleasantry fell flat.

"Don't talk to me about it," she burst out. "It's bad enough to be pushed into a corner to make room for a lot of Wogs who don't know how to dress or how to eat. But there's no need to go on jabbering about them all through dinner."

"Sylvia!" protested Lady Delahey. "They'll hear you."

"I don't care if they do," the girl said stubbornly. "I'm fed up with India for the Wogs."

"No one has said a word about India for the Wogs," commenced her father.

But Lady Delahey was wiser. The silver-belted abdar was bending over Frampton with cigars, and she got up.

"Come along, Sylvia. We'll leave them to their smokes."

## CHAPTER VII

It takes considerable practice to ignore the noises which attend the passage, and more particularly the halts, of an Indian train. The ocean traveller new-landed at Bombay, and ushered at Colaba Station into a saloon which seems much larger than his cabin, is tempted to remember with something like contempt his corner-seat in the express which carried him to London. If so, it does not take him long to change his mind. For the song of the wheels, as the Flying Scotsman or the Cornish Riviera Express slips over its shining track, is little more than a rhythmic, clicking lullaby. But when the track is rough to start with, and a drop of seventy degrees from sun-heat at midday to the chill of the small hours has widened out the gaps between the metals, the song of the wheels remains a song no longer, but becomes a strident grind and clanking, more potent than Macbeth to murder sleep.

And this is only the beginning of his troubles. The Indian engine-man regards his whistle as an instrument of music rather than of warning, and his zeal in its employment is only checked because

he has to keep sufficient steam to drive the train. If there is a crossing half a mile ahead—and bridges are few and far between—he grips his lever and hangs on to it till he is safely past. He keeps on screeching at a danger signal till it drops, for he is a suspicious fellow, and it may be that the signalman is sleeping. Then there are cuttings which are haunted, and the whistle, like holy water, is a known specific for the banishment of evil spirits.

Yet when this din is lulled and the train slides into a station to halt for ten or twenty minutes, the odds against sleep lengthen still further. Before the grinding brakes have shuddered into silence the long, dark carriages are mobbed by shrilly vocal vendors of ice and soda-water, of fruit and sweetmeats and hot tea; varied by optimists who hope to find a market in the middle of the night for brassware, earthenware, walking-sticks, sandals, dog-collars, jack-knives, clay figures, carved woodwork and other quasi-ornamental trifles, of a quality and at prices which no traveller would consider in the open daylight. Flustered parties of third-class passengers burst into the sahib's carriage, and as hastily withdraw. If he has shot the bolt to guard against such interruption, they rattle at the handle, until he must get up to ascertain that no legitimate occupant seeks admission.

At last the whistle echoes against the roof of corrugated iron, and for once the passenger wel-

comes it, for he thinks that his ordeal is over. But as like as not the friendly driver is employing surplus steam, which otherwise would go to waste via the safety-valve, to warn his passengers that time for embarkation is getting short and the vendors that their opportunity for chaffering is nearly over. The din redoubles, until with a final and more determined screech the train moves out, and the clank, clank, clank of the wheels begins again, louder and more insistent as the noises of the station die out into the distance.

The old "Qui Hai" dilates upon the comfort of travel in pyjamas, tucked up in a full-length bed, with a bearer to lay out his clothes and bring in shaving-water and early morning tea. The neophyte prefers his huddled corner in the Flying Scotsman.

. . . . .

By which digression it is intended to convey that when Hugh Frampton went to bed upon the night of his arrival in Simla, he had some sixteen hours of sleep to be made up. Yet sleep for a time escaped him. It was not the bewildering variety of his first impressions which kept him wakeful, though these might well have formed a variegated background for uneasy dreams—dreams in which a great Pathan brandished a dripping sword and chased a fat Bengali through the Gate of India; or Mahatma Gandhi, crowned with a Swadeshi halo, leaned in at the window of his railway carriage and pestered

him to buy the ancient gods of India, cast in brass at Birmingham.

Sylvia, on the other hand—and she it was who kept sleep from him—could hardly be regarded as a first impression, since his mind had been evoking pictures of her for a year. And yet in her as well as his surroundings he found much that he had not had the foresight to expect: his pictures were out of date. The Sylvia he remembered was a slim, wild thing, a boyish figure striding easily beside him over the swell of some heather-covered hill, a companion whom he had hardly known whether to treat as girl or woman. But the bud had become a blossom; the Sylvia he had found again was woman, entrancingly and intoxicatingly woman. A year ago her nearness made his pulses quicken; now to be with her sent the hot blood hammering through his veins.

He had known, in the first instant of their meeting, that he loved her, that during the past year he had not magnified into a higher feeling the gap the loss of her companionship had made. But all the same he was a little puzzled how to take her; love did not make him altogether blind. He could not understand her bursts of pettishness, her strange resentment that he took an interest in his new surroundings. It jarred a little, too, to hear her lash with indiscriminating scorn the people in whose service her father's youth and manhood had been spent.



It was, had he but known it, a trait in her which puzzled others—her father not the least. For Sylvia seemed to be a girl whom India had not spoiled; she had not let her head be turned by her abrupt transition from pupil in an English boarding-school to reigning belle in India's chief hill station. Bubbling with young and vigorous life, she grasped with both her hands at all of entertainment Simla had to offer, yet did not suffer gaiety to be her daily bread. She could bear with equanimity an afternoon of ladies whose conversation India had atrophied to complaints of the uncleanness of cooks, the destructiveness of washermen, and the theft of dusters. She would sacrifice a dance without a murmur if her father wished her company at a lecture on ancient Buddhist monuments or the trend of modern Hindu thought. She was as popular with ladies as with men, than which, for the young and beautiful, there is no more searching test of merit. But for Indians she had neither sympathy nor kindness. She seemed to treat the whole indigenous population of the country as a necessary but unpleasant background, to be ignored as long as possible, and to be put in its place if it became obtrusive.

But Hugh was in no mood to criticize for long; he was too deeply beneath the sway of her charm to admit a flaw in her. It was enough for him that the seas no more divided them, that the same roof sheltered them, that there were but a

few short hours of darkness before they met again.

. . . . .

And if the faintest trace of doubt or disappointment had found place to linger, the morning drove it clean out of his head. The monsoon neared its end, and there had come one of those rare spells in the months of beating rain and swirling mist when the clouds are rolled away and the sky is blue, when all the earth is green and the distant ranges darkly violet. And Sylvia, trim in coat and breeches, decreed that such a day must not be wasted. She mooted first Mashobra or Wildflower Hall, and Hugh would have ridden with her to the end of the world. Then she was suddenly and tenderly solicitous. He was not yet acclimatized; his riding must be rusty. They would leave the end of the world to another day and compromise on Jakko.

The syces brought the horses round; his uncle's bay for Hugh, for Sylvia a glossy black, whose neck she fondled and against whose face she laid her cheek.

"Don't you like my Satan, Hugh?" she asked. "Dad gave him to me when I first came out. He's my very, very own, and I love him."

And from the way that Satan turned his head to nuzzle at her as she set her foot into the stirrup, it seemed he loved her too.

She swung into the saddle, disdainful of Hugh's assistance, though the horse was all of sixteen hands. And they were off.

It was a day for lovers. Far off, above the spur of Kaithu, the glistening peaks pushed through the clouds which girt their base. They could almost count the houses of far-off Kasauli in the south. The bank of the Assembly building was carpeted with nodding cosmea, pink and white and deepest lake. Even the brick and iron monstrosity which housed the Railway Board, the massive bleakness of the telegraph office—that Woolworth Building among the huddling roofs of Simla—seemed tempered by the beauty of the morning.

They crossed the Ridge and passed the church, and plunged into the arbour of deodar and holm-oak which clothes the flanks of Jakko. Their road was now a narrow and a stony one, but Hugh's mount had to find his own way up as best he could: his rider's eyes were on the slim, lithe figure that bestrode the big black horse which scrambled up the path in front of him.

At length they reached the little level clearing where the monkey temple stands, to find their syces had already gained the summit by some precipitous short-cut known only to their kind, and were awaiting them. They left their horses with them, and Sylvia, rosy and panting just a little from the climb, led Hugh by woodland paths into a tiny dell, rock-girt and tree-embowered, yet

giving glimpses through the boles of range on range of purple hills, a giant's staircase to the snowy ramparts of the north. She threw herself full length upon a sloping, scented bed of needles from the deodars, her hands behind her head.

"This place is heavenly," she said. "It was Tiny Durrant found this corner for me, just before the rains."

Hugh did not feel as grateful as he should have been to "Tiny" Durrant; he guessed, somehow, that Tiny was no woman's nickname. He could console himself, however, that for three whole sodden months this green seclusion had been useless for the purposes to which it was so clearly suited. Therefore he dismissed Tiny from his thoughts, and drew hope from the fact that Sylvia permitted him to share the secret of her mountain harbour.

He sat down beside Sylvia, his feet drawn up, his hands clasped round his knees, and gorged his eyes upon the slender, careless grace of her prone body. Until she laughed at him, and broke the little silence.

"Don't tell me that my nose is shiny," she implored him. "I've left my powder-box at home."

"'Tip-tilted, like the petal of a flower,'" he quoted.

"Beast!" she exclaimed, and pelted him with cones. "Well, if it's not my nose," she perversely

persisted, "what *is* the matter with me? Face smutty? Not an earwig? I abominate them!"

Hugh came out of his reverie.

"Sorry, old thing. But honestly, I can't help staring at you, you've grown so beautiful."

"Grown!" pouted Sylvia, and reached her arm out for another cone. "Was I so very ugly, then, last year in Scotland?"

Hugh caught her bantering mood; beneath the deodars of Jakko their thoughts and words re-sought that month of happy, careless friendship. But Scotland failed them; its frank, unreticent companionship had served its turn, and could not be recaptured. A silence fell again between them, while Sylvia, prone, gazed into the green tangle of the boughs above, and Hugh beside her sought to read the secret in her eyes. Then suddenly, impulsively, she turned upon her side and stretched her hand out to him.

"Oh! Hugh, it's good to have you here."

Hugh took her proffered hand in both of his. A little flush crept up her cheeks and her eyes shone. Her clothes beneath her opened habit stirred with the quickening of her breath. He found no words to say to her, nor were words needed; that rosy mouth was waiting to be kissed. He leaned towards her.

But as his lips came near she slipped away from him and sat up hastily.

"Hugh, look!"

A tiny, grass-grown track climbed steeply through the glade, and clambering up towards their green retreat there came a most unwelcome interrupter. He was a young Hindu, garbed in the clothes to which Hugh's eyes had been the night before habituated—a khaddar shirt, a dhoti, and white stockings. A woollen shawl of brightest blue was draped about his shoulders, from which it fell in folds of studied elegance. His stockings emphasized this note of dandyism, for they were silk. His shoes were of white kid, cut country-fashion.

So far he was entirely Oriental; but for the rest he followed quite a different fashion. His hair was sleek and brushed straight back without a parting. It was prolonged upon his cheeks into the short side-whiskers which are normally combined with Oxford trousers in their more exaggerated forms. His eye retained triumphantly a tortoiseshell-rimmed monocle which seemed too large for human eye-socket to hold. He combined, so far as in one person that was possible, the fopperies of modern West and ultra-modern East.

This startling spectacle came on till he drew opposite the spot where Hugh and Sylvia were seated, well apart. Then, staring at them suddenly, he turned and bowed—he had no hat to raise.

“Frampton, of all people!” he ejaculated. “Whoever would have thought to see you here?”

Hugh, inwardly confounding the intruder, stared at this fresh surprise. The stranger continued:

"No, I suppose you wouldn't recognize me, in these clothes. But I won't believe you've quite forgotten me—Janardhan Joshi."

Hugh scrambled to his feet and held his hand out. He was not feeling amiable, but he could not well do any less. For when he looked at him, when, in particular, he mentally removed that obtrusive eyeglass, he recognized the man who had been up with him at Sussex. He looked him up and down and laughed.

"No wonder that I didn't spot you! You may be fashionable here, but those clothes were certainly not cut in the High. It never struck me you would go back to this kit."

Joshi smiled.

"I never meant to, till a little time ago. But that's a matter which would take a long time to explain."

He glanced past Hugh at Sylvia, and Hugh turned.

"I was forgetting! Sylvia, let me introduce Mr. Joshi to you. I knew him up at Oxford . . . Miss Delahey."

Joshi stepped forward to where Sylvia was seated, bowed, and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Miss Delahey? I think I know your father."

But Sylvia set her hands palm-downwards on the ground.

"Indeed?" she answered curtly. "My father's work takes him among all kinds of people."

The Indian withdrew his hand a little hastily; save this, he gave no sign that he had noticed the affront. He bowed again, a stately, ceremonious bow, and spoke to Hugh in level, friendly tones.

"I must be going, but I hope you'll come and see me some time, if you'll excuse some rather humble 'digs.' I'm staying in the Lakkar bazar, over the shop of Santokh Singh."

He took the path again, and quickly disappeared among the trees. Hugh turned from watching him, to find a strangely agitated Sylvia.

"The cheek of him," she burst out angrily, "to think that you would go and call upon him there! You know, the little row of native shops we passed below Corstorphan's. I suppose his father keeps one."

Hugh stood dumbfounded at her outburst. Of course she was embarrassed and annoyed that a chance passer-by had seen what Joshi must have seen; that was quite natural. But this display of fury seemed entirely disproportionate to the occasion. In any case, it was not Joshi's fault. And Joshi was his friend.

"There was no need to have insulted him," he ventured.

But Sylvia stamped her foot.

"That is a matter which I won't discuss," she said.

Hugh sighed; it was a most unlucky business.



Only another moment, and Sylvia had been his—he could have laughed at interruptions then. But now the chance had passed, and it was very clear that this morning, at all events, it would not come again.

## CHAPTER VIII

DURING the time he was at Oxford Joshi had had no politics, so far as Frampton had been able to discover; a fact which differentiated him from most of his compatriots, whose dusky countenances turn the Union debating hall into a chequer-board of black and white. On his return to his own country he appeared to have remedied the omission, since his garb was of the type affected mainly by the Swaraj members of the legislature. The fact aroused Hugh's curiosity, and he decided to take Joshi at his word and visit him. For it was Indian politics that he had come to study—or so he still deceived himself—and he judged that Joshi's political convictions must be deep-rooted, since they had caused him to abandon English clothes for his present scarecrow rig. For Joshi in his Oxford days had been a liberal patron of the High Street tailors, and even now his eyeglass and side-whiskers showed his continued hankering after European fashions of the more exaggerated sort.

Hugh had to wait, however, for his opportunity; after her outburst he did not propose that Sylvia should know of his intention. It happened that his

chance came quickly, for Sylvia, booked up six weeks ahead, had been unable to secure an invitation for him to a made-up tennis party. When, therefore, he had put her in her rickshaw and had handed in her racquet after her, he felt himself at liberty to follow up the hill to the bazar.

And when he got there he admitted that Sylvia's strictures upon Joshi's choice of residence were not without some force; for if he lived in that bazar his "digs" were very humble ones indeed. Its little shops closed in a steep and narrow street, crowded upon the right hand between the roadway and the hill, and on the left built out on piles over a precipitous khud. Indeed, at first he thought he had been misdirected, for the shops themselves, with the little workroom or godown behind them, occupied all the ground-floor space, and above them there was nothing but the craziest of shanties.

But having come so far he decided to persist, and at last he found the shop of Santokh Singh, which proved a little larger and more prosperous than its neighbours. It had a frontage of nearly twenty feet, and the rooms behind it, seen through their open doors, were deeper, as though the architect had taken full advantage of the support afforded by some tiny spur. But even so, its space seemed ludicrously insufficient for its owner's stock-in-trade. The walls were hidden behind rows and rows of walking-sticks, of which the overflow depended in festoons from strings across the shop.

All kinds of sticks, from alpenstocks to light Malacca canes, from straight, clean sticks of English ash to knotty bludgeons much more suited for offence than for support. What room was left was cluttered up with tables piled with painted wooden bowls from the Panjab, brassware of Jaipur and Moradabad, curly Kashmiri candlesticks in papier mâché, and all the other handicrafts of India which tourists buy.

Into this tiny Whiteleys Hugh edged gingerly, and at his call the shopkeeper, a bearded Sikh, popped from his little workroom at the back, salaaming with one hand and brushing shavings from his person with the other. His instinct dubbed Hugh globe-trotter, and he began to make the best of what his gods had sent him.

"Yes, my shop best shop," he began. "All genuine, no fake-stuff here. This tray—rupees one hundred only, pakka price." And he thrust at Hugh a piece of Jaipur brass with a surround of green-enamelled peacocks, of which the replica had gone an hour before for thirty-five rupees.

Hugh turned the offer down and asked his question. But Santokh Singh seemed puzzled.

"Mr. Joshi?" he pondered. Then light broke. "Is it Pandit Janardhan you are wanting?"

It was Hugh's turn to be perplexed, until he realized the two must be the same. Janardhan Joshi had discarded with his English clothes the English version of his name.

He assented therefore, and the Sikh led him through the shop, beneath the lines of hanging sticks, into a little chamber from which there sprang a narrow staircase like a ladder and without a guarding rail.

"Up there," he pointed. "You will find door at top."

Hugh clambered up, and knocked at the door which faced him across a landing three feet square.

Joshi was in, and ushered him into a room which answered to the promise of the landing. It was not more than twelve feet long or twelve feet wide. The furniture consisted of a rickety and ink-stained table, a cane chair, a shelf with a few books, and a string cot. Two small enamelled trunks against one wall, and on the cot a roll of bedding, comprised the personal belongings of its occupant. The walls were decorated with a few cheap oleographs of Hindu gods and goddesses. Light came from two low doorways, which looked out over the bazar and opened on a crazy balcony just wide enough to take a chair. This was the room where Joshi worked and ate and slept.

Hugh's thoughts went back to the palatial first-floor suite his host had occupied at Oxford, and he wondered. Something of his astonishment must surely have betrayed itself, for Joshi, delving in a wall-cupboard for a tin of cigarettes, paused in his search and smiled.

"Not the old Joshi, you'll be thinking."

Hugh felt, and looked, embarrassed. The squalor of the room obsessed him, and his English hatred of expressed emotion tied his tongue, his English failing of confusing sympathy with sloppiness.

But Joshi did not seem in need of sympathy. He found his cigarettes and proffered them, and laughed at Hugh's confusion.

"Don't look so crestfallen," he said. "I'm not a beggar yet. . . . But I'm not quite sure," he added slowly, "that I was wise to ask you to come here. I puzzle you, and yet not you, nor any Englishman, would understand the explanation."

"Don't think I want to force your confidence," Hugh disclaimed, a trifle stiffly. "But as for understanding, I don't think that at Oxford you ever found me—well, intolerant."

"You're Sir George Delahey's nephew," Joshi countered.

"I don't see what that's got to do with it."

"It's got a lot to do with it. You know by now I'm a Swarajist, but I don't suppose you know exactly what that means. It means, for one thing, that my relations with you English are peculiar. It means that if he met me in the street Sir George would stop and chat with me; as he would with any other party politician whom he chanced to know. But that does not prevent him putting spies on me, in case my politics are not confined to talking."

"You don't think I'm a spy," protested Hugh.

"Of course I don't. But your attitude to me will be your uncle's attitude, if it isn't that already. That is, the correct official attitude. 'We'll give you Home Rule, but it's a dangerous medicine, and you must take it in the doses we prescribe.' Out of a spoon, and a teaspoon at that! If those are your views too, the less you see of me the better."

His outburst, so irrelevant and so apparently uncalled for, took Hugh completely by surprise.

"I've only been a few days in the country," he said dryly. "I'm not quite such a fool as to come out to India with 'views.'"

Joshi sat down upon his bed—there was no other place for him to sit—and looked at Hugh, his fingers drumming thoughtfully against the wooden frame. It was his instinct and his creed to distrust Englishmen. And yet he had a passionate desire, a desire which surprised and almost frightened him, to justify himself to this one Englishman.

"We've been good friends," he said at last. "I don't forget all that you did for me at Oxford. And now you come here to my little squalid room and treat me as an equal—and you're not pretending. There are not many of your countrymen out here who would do that. Perhaps that's why I want to tell you all about myself. I don't expect you to agree with me; I don't think I can make you understand me. You were brought up in prejudice, however much you may deny it. But I know at least that you won't laugh at me.

"You're wrong in thinking that I've lost my money," he went on. "I could live where you do, at the Cecil, or anywhere in Simla, if I chose. But India needs all that I can spare her. Don't think that I'm parading generosity; I only want you to believe I am sincere."

"It goes into the Swaraj coffers?" Hugh exclaimed. "That is a pitch of party loyalty we have not yet attained in England."

"I did not say so," objected Joshi. "I cannot tell you anything about it, except that it is spent for India's freedom. I know you English call that politics. I call it nationality—something more sacred than any party politics, and more urgent than any party programme.

"I was lonely and looked-down-on when I was in England—you know about it. But at least they looked upon me as a grown-up man. Here, in my country, I am treated like a child. It's true. You tell us that we are not fit to run a country which our ancestors have ruled unaided for two thousand years; to keep us quiet you give us toys to play with.

"Toys!" he declaimed, his desire that Hugh should understand him forgotten in his fiery catalogue of grievances. "Education—you say that if we make a mess of that it does not matter, security is not endangered; roads—if they get too bad you can take them back again and put them right; a parliament, for talking is a safety-valve and hard words break no bones."



Hugh gasped at the fanatical tirade. But since it was all new to him, he ventured upon argument.

"One question, Joshi. You've got the substance—peace and justice and prosperity. Is it worth risking that to have the shadow? Is Ireland any better off?"

"It's not a fair comparison," objected Joshi. "Ireland has got no colour problem. An Englishman who kicked an Irishman to death would not escape with prison for a year; nor is an English subaltern offensive if an Irishman gets into his compartment. But we are treated like mere coolies, and we shall be, until we win political equality."

"You overstate the case," protested Hugh. "You generalize from a few disreputable exceptions, and forget the thousands who love India and give their lives to her—men like my uncle. You would not get discourtesy from him."

"And your uncle's daughter?" asked Joshi quietly.

The question struck Hugh silent; he did not propose to discuss Sylvia with Joshi or with anybody else. And yet the question was a fair one. He could hardly leave the matter there.

"You must have wondered at Miss Delahey," he said. "In fact, I saw you did." He cast about uncomfortably for words. "The truth is that you were a most inopportune intruder. I felt like damning you myself."

It sounded lame, but Hugh could not excuse

the inexcusable. And Joshi, smiling at his frank admission, put an unerring finger on the flaw.

"If that was so I'm very sorry. But still, it doesn't meet my point. You felt like damning me, but you didn't. Nor would Miss Delahey have insulted me, if I had been an Englishman."

But Hugh would not pursue the subject further.

"You can't expect me to discuss my cousin with you," he protested.

"I don't," said Joshi enigmatically. He rose, and paced the tiny room. "Frampton, it isn't any use. We don't see things in the same light, and never will. Your race and mine are oil and water; they will not mix."

"I won't believe it," Hugh maintained, relieved to get the conversation on to less embarrassing ground. "Our own friendship disproves it. And we are not unique exceptions."

"We too are oil and water," the Indian insisted. "If I could tell you all that I have done, and all I mean to do, you wouldn't speak to me again. . . ."

He checked himself abruptly.

"You talk about our friendship. Then go, while we can part as friends."

## CHAPTER IX

THE shafts of the setting sun were slanting upwards from the hidden plains of the Panjab, and the mountains, rosy-topped, were rooted in the shades of evening. Twenty-four hours had passed since Joshi had seen Hugh down the dark staircase of the house in the bazar and out into the self-same golden dazzle. To-day, drawn by the beauty of the evening, Sylvia and Hugh were strolling between tea and dinner along the road which skirts the precipices of Observatory Hill.

There are those who hold that Viceregal Lodge is too close an imitation of a Scottish hydropathic institution to be exposed so nakedly upon the summit of that hill, who think obscurity would be the better for its dignity. And yet there are advantages in hill-tops. It is something, in a country where power is chiefly measured by display, that the Union Jack flies from a tower which is a landmark in all the neighbouring hills. And as the natives of those hills would certainly mistake a Scottish hydropathic for a palace, there is nothing that is humiliating in the resemblance. Another and a minor benefit, which doubtless weighed with the

Accounts Department, is that a palace which is girt with precipices does not require a boundary wall.

But this evening Sylvia set herself to prove, as indeed a generation of hill-men had done before her, that in this respect Lord Dufferin's advisers had been wrong. For when Hugh commented upon the isolation of the site, she flatly contradicted him, with mischief in her eyes.

"Nonsense, I know a dozen places where I could get up." They turned a corner. "There is one."

Hugh glanced up at the narrow, tortuous track.

"Yes," he agreed, "it's not a bad road, for a coolie or a goat. But you can't get up there."

He might have known by past experience what Sylvia was like when put upon her mettle. The reckless tomboy he had known in Devon was before him in a flash.

"I'm going up," she said.

"You mustn't," Hugh protested. "It's far too dangerous."

"Nonsense," retorted Sylvia, and set her hand upon the lowest hold. She was a good six feet above the road, and climbing fast, before Hugh rightly realized she was in earnest. She turned and waved to him, airily balanced on a flat, projecting rock.

"Which am I, Hugh, a coolie or a goat? Come on!"

There was nothing for it but for Hugh to follow; and at first he found the hill-men's road, once his

feet were set upon it, was not so perilous as it had seemed from down below. There were crannies in the rock for feet and hands, and footholds in the softer stuff worn deep by horny soles. But as they mounted higher the rocky outcrops grew more scanty; the track, which was at first a ladder, became a steeply sloping path. And therein lay the danger, for with the slackening of the gradient the footholds disappeared, and left them scrambling over slimy mud or yet more slippery grass.

The track might serve for the men who had made it, but Sylvia was soon discovering that high-heeled leather shoes were a poor substitute for hard, bare feet and broad, prehensile toes. Almost spread-eagled on the steeply sloping turf, and with a little laugh which carried more of nerves than recklessness, she turned her head and called to Hugh:

"I'm stuck." Then, sharply, as her downward glance took in the drop below. "Hugh, tell me what to do."

"Hang on and keep your breath," Hugh shouted. "I'll be with you in a minute."

He forced his voice into a note of confidence, for he could tell that Sylvia was very near to panic. But he was very far from feeling confident; it was not easy to decide how he could best help her. It would take time to scramble up to her; she had climbed fast, and now was all of thirty feet above him. And even when he got there, there was little

help that he could give, upon that miserable foothold. It might be safer if he could nerve her to scramble down to him. But then, if she should slip, had he sufficient hold to stop her fall?

His problem was solved for him; for before he could begin to climb there was a rending of grass roots above him, and crumbs of earth fell pattering on his head. For one long, breathless moment Sylvia fought despairingly for firmer foothold; then with a little cry she started to slide back.

Hugh dug his fingers and his toes into the bank and waited for the shock. Watching his time, he thrust his arm out as she slid past him, and somehow clutched her. But his grip upon the treacherous slope was too precarious, the momentum of her fall tore feet and fingers from their hold. They slithered, locked together, towards the rocky brink.

It was a tree which saved them, a half-grown sapling round the trunk of which Hugh, groping hopelessly, managed to hook his arm. It swayed and bent, but held; a panting struggle brought them safely to a level ledge.

And then—neither could quite tell afterwards how it had happened—Sylvia was in Hugh's arms, sobbing and laughing all at once, and Hugh was kissing her.

"My darling, you're not hurt? You're quite sure you're not hurt?"

"Not hurt a bit," she told him tremulously.

"But oh! I was so frightened. Everything went black."

She clung to him, as though to talk of it brought all her terror back.

"Things *were* black," Hugh said soberly. "But it's all over now. And our cloud had a glorious silver lining."

She slipped out of his arms at last, and sat up to survey the damage to her clothes. Aghast at what she saw, and what he must have seen, she pulled her scanty skirt below her muddied knees and looked up rosily.

"Hughie, I hope that's not your silver lining! If so, it's just as well you are to marry me."

For the spirit of her had overcome her terror; she was her own light-hearted self again, as though that dreadful minute had never been. Indeed, her clothing brushed and freed from grass and twigs as far as might be—she had good cause to bless her shingled hair—she was for tackling at once the steep declivity which lay between them and the road, before the light should fail them.

But Hugh demurred.

"There's half an hour's light yet. And we had better wait till everyone has gone to dress for dinner; we're both in such a filthy mess. . . . Besides, I might not get you to myself again to-night."

Sylvia kissed him.

"You're much too clumsy, dear," she laughed

at him. "What you are really thinking is that I'm too shaky to climb down that khud. Don't try to hide it from me."

"As if I should ever try to hide anything from you!" Hugh prevaricated.

"As if I should try to hide anything from you!" she mimicked. "What about yesterday afternoon? I saw you. Why didn't you walk up the hill with me?"

Hugh rubbed his chin.

"How could you see me?" he asked. "You were ahead of me."

"You call yourself a lawyer, and you give yourself away like that! And I did see you, anyway; I dropped in at the Library. Where were you going, Hugh? To see that Joshi fellow?"

"I know that you don't like him," Hugh explained, a trifle red. "But I couldn't very well not go and see him, when . . ."

But Sylvia put her hand over his mouth.

"I'll guess," she cried. "'When he had asked me?' 'When I knew him before?' Or is it 'When you had been so rude to him?'" She took her hand away. "No, Hughie, seriously, I was a little beast that morning."

For all his new-won happiness, Hugh found room for a feeling of relief at Sylvia's frank avowal. He had been troubled by the incident; still more so by the meaning Joshi set on it.

"That's treason, dear," he told her stoutly,



"and I won't listen to it. Do you think I forgave him for butting in like that?"

But Sylvia shook her head. Love bred in her an urgent need for candour; the barriers she had maintained so long were tottering.

"Darling, it wasn't only that. I hate those Indians, and I can't bear shaking hands with them. They make me go all creepy down my spine."

"But that's ridiculous," said Hugh.

"It's not. I'm terrified of them," she cried.

Hugh could not understand at all. Dislike was one thing; his few days in the country had already brought him into contact with English men and English women who coarsely lumped together in one category every Indian—a category perilously near the savage and the brute. But Sylvia was not of their complexion. And fear? Sylvia and fear were contradictions—the years had blotted out the memory of an afternoon a little girl had screamed and run away.

"Whatever is there to be frightened of?" he asked.

But Sylvia had no answer to that question. How could she share that hideous secret—with her lover? And yet he had a right to know it, just because he was her lover. The very thought of secrets from him cast a shadow on her new-found happiness. Nevertheless, the tottering barrier held.

"Don't ask me that," she pleaded. "It is something I can never, never tell you."

She waited pitifully for his answer. What would he think of her, with secrets; and their love five minutes old? But if in Hugh's subconscious mind the faintest doubt was born, he did not know it. Man-like, he attributed all he could not understand in her to woman's whims and fancies, illogical qualities no mere male could hope to understand. Unable to conceive a reason for her agitation, he set it down to this convenient cause, and thought no more about it. Happiness made him uncritical. He got up, grasped her hands, and pulled her to her feet.

"Time we were going, Sylvia. And don't go worrying about Joshi any more. It isn't likely that he'll trouble either you or me again."

. . . . .

They entered then upon a round of halcyon days, days in which Sylvia's fears and doubts were lulled to rest. The weakening monsoon died in a night of thunder; the sky hung blue and cloudless over the green hills, from where the snow-peaks glittered in the north to where the Sutlej in the south cleft like a silver sword the misty plains. There was a crispness in the air, far-off forerunner of the frosts of winter.

The Rains were over, and when once the Rains have gone all Simla wakes to life again, and packs away its waterproofs and its umbrellas, its trench boots and goloshes. Ladies peer into tin-lined boxes,

fearful of moth in fur and mould on silk; each open space becomes an airing-ground for dainty garments, whose many-coloured brightness puts the flowers to shame. Tennis enthusiasts get out their racquets anxiously, to see how many strings the damp has snapped. In the verandahs of rotunder men chuprasis squat and scrub at rusty clubs, what time their masters fix up foursomes at Naldera. The offices of the Imperial Government, in the monsoon a warm and cosy shelter from the mists and damp outside, become a prison house, where secretaries and joint secretaries and deputy secretaries and under secretaries sit with one eye upon the window and the sun-clad hills outside, and sort out all the files they dare neglect until the winter move to Delhi.

Rickshaws and ponies and coolies bearing luncheon-baskets cumber each road which leads away from Simla; within a five-mile radius there is a picnic-party in every little copse. Dances and dinner-parties have lived through the monsoon, discouraged though they be by a long journey in the pelting rain, imprisoned tightly in a rickshaw with a smell compounded of sodden leather and unwashed humanity when wet. But with the clearing of the weather they too take on more vigorous life, as though a long day in the open or an afternoon on tennis court or polo ground were not enough to satisfy the new vitality, born of the cool and crispness of the autumn. The season draws towards its

end; then let us make the most of it! Next year may find us stewing in Calcutta or Multan.

And through it all went Hugh and Sylvia, dancing till the small hours and coming home again beneath a starry sky, two in a line of speeding rickshaws, in a velvet stillness broken by the swift pad-padding of a hundred naked feet; riding through the forests of Mashobra or Mahasu; wandering in the gardens of Barnes Court or Viceregal Lodge at fête and garden-party; picnicking in some grassy dell among the cedars and the pines.

And wherever they might go, they went together, two in a paradise which knew no third inhabitant. Simla was shadowy and unreal; festivities and friends a dim and changing background to their abiding joy in one another.

## CHAPTER X

IT chanced, however, that their time in Simla was cut short, for Sir George Delahey was unexpectedly required to pay a visit to Mussourie, and offered Hugh the chance of visiting that station.

"Mind, I don't promise that you'll like it after Simla," he warned him, "but I think you'll find it an experience. Mussourie calls itself the queen of Indian Hill Stations, but I think the Blackpool of the Himalayas would be a better name for it, with a bit of Yarmouth and Southend thrown in."

"The Subalterns' Paradise," amended Sylvia. "Complete with peris. But I shan't let Hugh go there. Some of the peris might have no subaltern."

"Not even for a week?" Hugh smiled, "I think I might hold out for that time."

"Not you!" she chaffed. "You're far too polite. You must be really brutal to check a Mussourie damsel in full cry. What would you do if a girl you didn't know from Eve sat down beside you in the lounge and asked you for a cocktail? I'm told it's often done. You'd blush and stammer, Hughie, and end by beckoning to the waiter, to save the poor girl's feelings."

"We'll all go then," suggested Delahey, "and Sylvia can relieve me of the task of looking after Hugh. She can be brutal to the peris, while he keeps off the subalterns. And mother and I can take a week's rest from late nights."

But Lady Delahey excused herself.

"Not me, please, George. Last time I went there young men used to toboggan down the staircases in tin baths. I'm too old to enjoy that kind of thing."

"But, darling," Sylvia coaxed, "there's no need to toboggan, unless you want to."

But neither this nor Hugh's less bantering persuasion could move Lady Delahey; she much preferred to stop in Simla with her friends and with her bridge. So it was only Hugh and Sylvia who descended with Sir George into the steamy plains, to skirt the hills from Kalka until they left the train at Dehra Dun and saw Mussourie in the sky above them.

. . . . .

As Sylvia had indicated, Mussourie is a station with distinct peculiarities. Perhaps the reason is that it alone, among the major Himalayan sanitariums, is not the headquarters of Government; and Government Houses have a chastening effect on morals, at any rate as manifested outwardly in manners. For there are kept those great dividers of the sheep and goats—the Book and the List. And the Book and the List are the bugbear both of ladies with a

past and of ladies the position of whose husbands gives them no official standing, and who seek to make their charms a social compensation for the fact (and frequently end up as ladies with a past in consequence). These, therefore, spend the summer in Mussourie.

It may be lamentable, but it is most certainly a fact that ladies with a past, and ladies with what may be termed a prospective past, have a strong fascination for young men who have snatched short leave from stations in the plains, whence all the female population fled with the first puff of the hot winds of April. What they are looking for is lots of dancing, no calling, and no Brass Hats; and they find it in Mussourie. Hence the subalterns; likewise the young civilians.

And where the young men are, there also will mothers with daughters be gathered together; who are compelled to realize that if they would compete with ladies with a past they must put more "punch" into their methods than would be permissible beneath the shadow of Government House.

Add to the medley a few Calcutta merchants and their wives, to whom the warrant of precedence is a standing grievance and officialdom accordingly anathema; a few officers and their ladies, who come up because they think Mussourie "bright," and because "after all, you needn't know anyone you don't want to," and the English portion of its migratory population is complete.

At the moment this strange congeries was in a little ferment of excitement. The Raja of Dharmkot was giving a ball, and if rumour spoke the truth it was to be an entertainment on a scale befitting an Indian prince. Those in the know—and there were few who laid no claim to inside information—spoke in awed whispers of the sums to be expended on the ballroom and the decorations, the champagne and the supper. And there were vague, unspecified rumours of yet more startling surprises.

At first the invitations promised to be a difficulty, for although the raja had spent the last three seasons in Mussourie, Mussourie had not manifested any strong desire to be acquainted with him. This, however, was an omission which could be remedied, and the calling-book in the verandah of Dharmkot House, of which the first three pages had sufficed for the past three years, had speedily to be supplemented by another volume; while the detachment of the Dharmkot army which guarded his highness's person was principally employed in ushering a stream of visitors in at one gate and out at the other, and in heading them off the zenana block and the private gardens.

The raja's harassed A.D.C.'s were accordingly confronted with a problem just the reverse of what they might have expected—two hundred and fifty cards had to be distributed among at least five hundred names. It is not recorded how they solved it; a number of the disappointed ones declared



they must have tossed for it. In any case, the results were peculiar. Senior officers who had been punctilious in calling, and whose names were entered in the reputable first three pages of the book, were left without an invitation. They might not be particularly keen on going, but they objected strongly to being left out. But Mrs. Brown, who had made Naini Tal too hot for her by her behaviour at the Boathouse, and Mrs. Jones, whom everybody knew had been struck off the Viceroy's list, and Mrs. Smith, who just a week ago had got herself into a row by stimulating the hotel piano with doses of champagne, all had their cards. So had a number of lately arrived subalterns, who had been put by their friends on to a good thing, and who had just succeeded in inscribing their names before the list of invitations was made out. When the Delaheys and Hugh arrived from Simla they found their hotel buzzing with it.

It was inevitable that Sir George and his party should receive cards; he was far too big a "noise" to be left out, upon whatever system the invitations had been arranged. And so two days before the ball, Hugh strolled across the gravel from the hotel office to the winter garden, twirling between his fingers a large square envelope embellished with a gilded coat of arms. He gave it to his uncle.

"A correspondent with a pretty taste in stationery," he commented.

Delaheytore it open with an impatient exclamation.

"Dharmkot's ball! It can't be helped, although I had half hoped they might not get to know in time that I was in Mussourie."

"But what's the trouble?" Hugh asked. "It sounds to me as if it might be quite amusing."

"The trouble is that I would much prefer to have nothing at all to do with Dharmkot's hospitality," Sir George explained. "He's one of the very few exceptions among the ruling princes. He hates us all like poison, and he takes very little trouble to conceal the fact. In fact, it beats me why he gives a ball at all."

"Then why go?"

"We must," said Delahey, and cast a glance behind him to assure himself the neighbouring chairs were all unoccupied. "Between ourselves, Dharmkot has been puzzling me, officially, for quite a long time now; that's partly why I'm in Mussourie. If we refused, he might suspect there was some special reason for it. Besides, this ball is such a strange phenomenon that I want to study it at first hand. He affects to despise everything English, and yet he pours out money to entertain a lot of miscellaneous nobodies. I want to find out why."

"Do not confuse him with the rajas and the kunwar sahibs who haunt the Rink and Stiffles," he went on. "They're just Jazz-hounds—as Sylvia would say—and thank God they also are exceptions. They're more at home in Europe than in India."

They go to Simla to pay their respects to the Viceroy, and come on here as soon as may be to have a good time. They won't live in their states; their only interest in them is to see the money comes in smoothly. No, Dharmkot is not that sort. He governs wisely in a bigoted, old-fashioned way. He's intensely conservative, and lives in almost feudal state. He's got a clean-cut, clever, secret face, and what is in the brain behind it no one has yet been able to make out."

He looked up, and broke off.

"Mind, not a word of this to Sylvia, or anybody else."

For Sylvia, who had been out to pay a duty call, was waving to them from her rickshaw. She burst into the lounge, and sat down on the arm of her father's chair.

"Out, thank the Lord!" She saw the card, and pulled it from her father's fingers. "That show! But we never wrote our names."

"That's a formality which seems to have been waived," Sir George replied. "Write and accept it, Sylvia; I've got to go out in a minute."

"Accept? But you surely don't intend to go?"

"I'm afraid we must, little girl."

"I shan't, at any rate," decided Sylvia. "You can, and so can Hugh, if he wants to see such a dud show."

Delahey patted her knee.

"I'm sorry, Sylvia, but you'll have to. You might

slip out of it in Simla, but here the absence of my daughter would be noticed."

"Whatever does that matter?" she retorted.

"You must take it from me that it does matter. No, little girl, you'll have to go; you can't slide out of it."

"I think it's beastly of you, Daddy," she declared. "You know how much I hate these native shows."

"I should, by now," said Delahey, a trifle sharply. "But then you are so ready to forget that India provides my bread and butter, and yours as well. You've got to make the best of it, and behave as other people do. At all events, it's better than eight hundred pounds a year at Cheltenham or Ealing."

"Better!" cried Sylvia. "I'd sell my soul to see Bombay from the stern of a P. & O."

"Well, that won't be just yet," her father told her shortly, "so go and accept that invitation."

Sylvia got up, rebellious. She stood there fingering the card, as if she had a mind to tear it up. Then, with a shrug, she went inside and found a writing-table.

## CHAPTER XI

THE ball was to be held in a great marquee in the grounds of Dharmkot House—an innovation for the hills, and a costly one; for tents and floor had to come up from Rajpur on coolies' backs, strip by strip and board by board. Indeed, it was evident to the guests, as soon as ever their rickshaws turned in at the gate, that rumour had not lied in saying that the raja was sparing no expense. The gardens and the hill-side which ran up behind them were wired for the occasion, and blazed with coloured bulbs. Chinese lanterns, also electrically lighted, festooned the trees. Small tents had been arranged for sitting out; the grass was strewn with costly rugs and carpets. The drive was lined with gaily coloured soldiery, so numerous that the whole strength of the state forces appeared to have come up from Dharmkot for the occasion.

The first surprise came with the programmes, each one of which contained a printed slip, which bore the following unusual notice:

*Guests are requested to stand during the playing of the Dharmkot national anthem, both during the arrival of his highness and again at the conclusion of the ball.*

Delahey raised his eyebrows as he read this intimation.

"I've never heard of such a thing before," he said. "He has no right to substitute his own tune for 'the King,' in British India."

The tent filled with an ill-assorted throng. Hugh, watching over Sylvia, saw her turn down in quick succession two Calcutta Jews and an Indian princeling, who had not the slightest acquaintance with her, but had proposed to themselves to remedy that misfortune. And then the band rose to its feet and did its best to render the quarter-tones of a wailing Indian tune on saxophones and such-like instruments, producing a cacophony which the raja somewhat surprisingly succeeded in recognizing as the signal for his entrance.

Governors of Provinces do not assume such state. First came a rabble of orderlies, unwinding scarlet ropes to form a passage from the door to a sofa set in an alcove upon a little dais. Two chobdars followed them along the pathway thus prepared, resplendent in green and silver, bearing great gilded maces on their shoulders. After them came the raja, bowing to right and left like a king at his coronation, and attended by a dozen of his officers and the dignitaries of his state.

This potentate walked slowly to the dais, ascended it, and took his seat. Dancing commenced. And at first, but for the number of Indians present and the memory of that amazing entry, there was little

to distinguish this from any other ball. Sylvia had come rebelliously, prepared to be disgusted. Yet even she, although she seemed subdued and quiet as Hugh danced the first three with her, appeared to have convinced herself that she had been unnecessarily apprehensive.

It was not until after these three dances, when Hugh resigned her to another partner, that he got his first glimpse of the things which were about to happen. Having no partner of his own, he set out on a tour of exploration, and strolled along a canvas corridor which led him to the bar. The bar was empty, for it was yet early in the evening, and the band had started. But in a corner, half a dozen khidmatgars were squatting, and an opened whisky bottle stood between them.

Then by degrees the dancing grew more rowdy. Shrill laughter and explosive giggles began to issue from the cunningly contrived retreats among the trees; in them the wine was winking in champagne glasses, and gold-foiled bottles littered all the ground.

But it was not until supper that disorder began openly to flaunt itself. The tent was full of noisy parties, pelting each other first with bread, then with more damaging comestibles. They bridged the intervals between the tables with their loud banter and excited chaff. A trio of young Indians were sitting with three painted, predatory women. The shoulder-strap of one had slipped, and the

brown hand of her companion was stroking her white skin. And here and there, pushed into corners where they had taken refuge, or sandwiched helplessly right in the middle of the clamour, sat little groups of gentlemen and ladies, complaining of their foolishness in coming, and speculating when they could with decency withdraw.

The servants made the tumult worse. They were incompetents, unemployables hired for the night, and the Eurasian major-domo made no pretence of being able to control them. As Hugh had seen, they had been early at the bottle, and there were those among them who had difficulty in threading their devious ways between the closely planted chairs. Plates crashed; angry young men swore at the bumping and the clumsiness; one abdar, with an owlish face, was pouring out champagne into an empty soup-plate.

Sir George's party did not stay long in that pandemonium, and while they waited for the dance to start again, both Hugh and Sylvia begged her father to let them say good night and go. He hesitated, then refused. To Sylvia he said:

"Wait for another dance or two. I know it's pretty thick, but we can hardly be the first to go." And to his nephew: "If I had known that it was going to be as bad as this, I would have come alone. But I want to stop a little longer now; I'm sure there's something at the bottom of all this, and one learns a lot by watching people off their guard.



Don't worry about Sylvia. It will be all right in the ballroom, for a little."

So Hugh and Sylvia went in to dance again, while Delahey moved on to chat urbanely with his Indian acquaintances, to listen and to watch. But the dance had barely started when a member of the raja's staff descended from the dais, threaded his way between the couples, and whispered to the bandmaster. The music stopped at once.

The dancers on the floor came to a puzzled, hesitating stop, like clockwork running down. And then the raja's secretary called for silence, stood forward on the dais and addressed them.

"Ladies and gentlemen. His highness has been pleased to offer prizes for the three most graceful and accomplished ladies dancing at his ball to-night. The first prize is a pearl and sapphire bracelet, the next a diamond pendant, and the third a fitted bag."

Thus far he got with his announcement, when a babble of excited voices drowned his words. A pearl and sapphire bracelet! Rumour had not been wrong in hinting at a very great surprise. How was it to be won? What did the raja mean by "graceful and accomplished" dancing? That puzzled many, at a time when skill in dancing has been quite divorced from grace. When would the competition be? And who would be the judges, in whose hands the disposition of these treasures lay?

It was no little time before the secretary got

another hearing. But when he did, his words provided a surprising answer to the last two banded questions.

"His highness has been watching, and he has decided to whom his prizes are to go. He now directs me to announce the winners, who will please come forward to the dais."

The raja rose, and lifted from the case his secretary handed him a gaud which winked and sparkled in the glaring lights.

"Miss Delahey!" the secretary called.

There was a feeble clapping, but the episode was so unprecedented that nobody quite knew the proper thing to do. And those who thus half-heartedly applauded were quickly quelled to silence by a gathering storm of disapproval. "It isn't fair." "There should have been a competition." "We never knew that we were being judged." A tiny hiss came from one corner of the room.

They did not seem to mind if they were heard, these harpies who had battered on the raja's hospitality. And Sylvia, flushing crimson, stood helpless in their midst. That she, unwilling and unknowing, should have been singled out for this barbaric, ostentatious bounty! It did not need the comments of her neighbours to complete her sense of shame. She seized Hugh's arm.

"Quick, take me out of this."

And as they gained the nearest door they heard the secretary's voice again:

"Miss Delahey. Will she please come up to the dais."

The door they took led out into the garden, and once beyond the range of curious eyes Sylvia turned to Hugh imperiously.

"Go and find father," she commanded him, "and bring him to me here. I'm going home at once. . . . Yes, I shall be all right. I'll sit down here until you come."

Raging at the indignity which had been put on her, she flung herself into a chair and waited. The minutes passed, the band began again. That meant the end of the abominable ceremony. She wondered who had got the bracelet in her stead. Hugh was a long time on his errand, and from her seat, set back among the trees, she watched for him along the lighted path which led back to the tents. At last she saw upon this path, not the two figures she was waiting for, but one—an Indian's. She recognized the raja's uniform.

The A.D.C. came on, stopping to glance into each nook where chairs were set. Sylvia shrank back into her bower as he came level with her. In vain; he stopped, and bowed.

"Is that Miss Delahey?"

"What do you want?" she answered brusquely.

"His highness sends his compliments; he would like to speak with you a moment."

Insolence upon insolence! Her flight had told him, quite as plainly as any words could tell, how

she regarded his impertinent, unsought-for liberality. And now he dared to send her—a command. Her mind, almost her tongue, consigned both A.D.C. and raja to the devil.

But the A.D.C. went on: "He wished to see you just now in the ballroom, but we could not find you there."

Was that a lie, or was it possible that she had not been noticed going out? If it was truth, she could obey without indignity; and she would dearly love to tell the raja what she thought of him. Forgetting she had promised Hugh to wait, she came to an impetuous decision.

"Please take me to his highness."

The A.D.C. conducted her, not to the entrance to the ballroom tent, but to a hanging purdah which gave access to the silk-lined alcove jutting out behind the dais, in which throughout the evening, half-hidden among palms and hothouse plants, the raja had received such guests as he had chosen to converse with him.

Thus far, indeed, the summons was an ordinary part of the procedure of the evening—where others had received an audience it was not likely Sylvia Delahey would be left out. Nor was there anything in her reception to indicate that the unusual had happened. The A.D.C. presented her; the raja rose and bowed.

Sylvia had formed no very clear impression of the course she meant the interview to take, but

that she should be sitting on one sofa with the raja she certainly had not envisaged. Yet so it came about. For the raja, having waved her to the vacant place beside him, sank without waiting into his own corner of the sofa, and left her on her feet in front of him. And though she had no mind to sit at all, it was a case where both must stand or neither; she felt ridiculously like a schoolgirl in the presence of authority. She glanced round vainly for some other seat which she might take, then sat down hurriedly beside him, to save her dignity.

She started, therefore, at a disadvantage, for she could not share a sofa with this man and blurt out crudely what was on her tongue. She doubted, now that she was in his presence, whether she could have done so under any circumstances. He was quite different to any man, English or Indian, whom she had ever met.

In her modernity, her Englishness, she made a striking contrast to the prince beside her. For about his highness of Dharmkot there were none of the Western superficialities affected by so many of his order. His garb was purely Eastern in its magnificence; his jewels, in their present setting, had adorned his ancestors at the court of the Moghul. Nor did his features betray the self-indulgence and degeneracy which in so many princely houses has marked the change from turbulent, if precarious, independence to the secure prosperity of vassaldom to the Emperor of India. Thin-faced, hawk-nosed,

tight-lipped; proud, treacherous and cruel all at once, he might have sat for the portrait of his greatest forebear, that prince who had defied alike the waning power of the Moghuls, the waxing might of the Mahrattas, who at the last had died rather than yield himself to the red-coated soldiers of a mightier power than either. The court or the battle-field was his proper background, most certainly not the ballroom.

The other ladies who had sat upon that sofa with him had not appeared to feel the incongruity of chattering to such a man of dresses and of dances, of picnics and carnivals and tennis-parties, of all the trivialities of life among the hills which, just because they are the bubbles, rise naturally to the top of conversation. But Sylvia, who had so much she burned to say, was stricken dumb. He was urbane enough, the commonplaces of light chat were ready on his tongue. But all the time he talked his face remained expressionless, a mask which hid effectively the thoughts behind it. Only his eyes had life in them, and they seemed to dissect her, to pierce into her very mind and see the tumult there.

She sat half-listening to his commonplaces, and answered him mechanically, seeking for words to clothe the snub she was determined to administer. And then she fancied that his toneless voice had changed a little, that something cold and hard had come into it.

"I hope," he said, "my English friends have had a pleasant evening."

She told him briefly she was sure of it, and not all her race-loyalty could keep contempt out of her tone.

"I am so glad," went on the raja. "I find you English people very hard to entertain. I cannot altogether follow your ideals of pleasure."

Sylvia felt that he had flicked her with a whip; sensed, too, that he intended so to flick her. It was no blundering use of an unaccustomed tongue which made him group her with that noisy, predatory crew. Her anger rose, but a retort was difficult to frame—the insinuation was in part too true. And before the words could come the whip had flicked again.

"I am grieved that you refused the prize I offered you."

So he had seen her flight! And yet he sent for her and talked to her as though the episode had never been, to pass it off at last in half a dozen words—words innocent enough, but spoken with a quiet, amused contempt which roused her to a fury.

"The prize you offered me! The insult, rather. You know quite well no decent woman could accept a gift like that."

"How should I know?" the raja asked. "I do know it was very eagerly accepted, and that one other woman here is blessing you for your refusal."

Why should *you* be too proud to take a keepsake from me?"

His purposeful obtuseness, his cynical confounding of her with the dregs of feminine Mussourie, was an armour all the barbs of Sylvia's anger could not pierce. He made her very presence at his ball condemn her, he could twist insinuations out of every word she said. She got up angrily.

"I take my keepsakes from my friends." She turned her back on him and pulled aside the silken hangings, launching a Parthian arrow as she went. "Nor do I need a keepsake to remind me of this evening."

She had the last word, but she felt herself defeated, shamed. And it was not her fault; she had been trapped into a situation from which the most correct behaviour could not have extricated her without embarrassment. She met her father looking for her in the fairyland of coloured lights, and burst out at him.

"He has insulted me. I won't stop any longer at his beastly show. Please take me home at once."

"He has insulted all of us," Sir George amended gravely; "all, that is, who can recognize an insult. I am convinced this party was arranged, the guests were chosen, to hold the English up to ridicule. And he had the wit to get our kind mixed up in it. He's tarred us all with the same brush."

"You made me come," she bitterly reminded him.

Sir George accepted the reproof.



“You needn’t rub it in; I am as sorry for it all as you can ever be. And I owe you something for your courage in the ballroom—it needed courage to do what you did, with all those people there. He thought that he could force you into taking a bracelet worth a thousand pounds—and you the daughter of a man who may not take the smallest present from an Indian. It was a calculated plan to ruin me.”

While they were waiting for their rickshaws, a tableau was enacted for them in the glare of light which came square-framed from the wide door of the marquee—a fitting ending to the evening.

A woman came out ready for departure; they recognized her as the half-caste wife of an old local resident. The raja’s representative held out his hand to her, to say good night. She shuffled oddly with her cloak, and her posture, as she put her own hand out, was visibly constrained. Then, as the Indian was about to clasp it, she snatched it back and clutched at something underneath her garments. She was too late; a bottle of champagne fell crashing on the ground.

## CHAPTER XII

It turned out as Delahey had said—they were all tarred with the same brush. The ball was reported in every paper in India; the munificence of the raja was extolled. There was a list of guests. Sir George Delahey, Miss Sylvia Delahey, Mr. H. A. Frampton. Colonels and judges and deputy commissioners. And sandwiched in among them Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Smith: Mr. Goldstein and Mr. Rosenbaum and Mr. De Souza. Only a list of names, but no more than that was necessary, for word of what had happened at the ball had gone round India almost more quickly than the newspapers could circulate. Agitators built speeches round it, invented picturesque additions. The loyal were troubled. They were quite ready to concede—it was the merest commonplace of knowledge—that the Englishman was mad, that his religion and his social code allowed him liberties which they regarded as indecent and abominable. But this charitable explanation could not explain the stories which they heard; for these related to offences against a code of decency which knows not race. The Indian Empire holds together

by prestige; the scum which floats on Anglo-Indian society, lured to its worst behaviour by the raja's cunning, had done more harm to that prestige than a defeat of the British Army in the field.

Of the three it was Sylvia who was upset the most. Her father felt professionally hurt that he had not divined what lay behind the invitation; Hugh, disgusted as he was by what he had seen, was too new to the country to elevate a breach of manners and decorum, however wholesale and however gross, into a matter of political significance. But Sylvia felt unclean, as though the raja, by his cynical identification of her with the foul brood which guzzled at his tables, had somehow smirched her. After one outburst of revulsion she had not spoken of the ball again, and Hugh supposed she had determined to dismiss unpleasant memories. But even back among her friends in the security of Simla, once more deep in the gaieties of the dying season, the insult stung and rankled. For Sylvia did not forget, and she had no intention of forgetting. She nursed the insult in her heart, one further head in her indictment of the whole Indian race.

The season was dying indeed, but it was dying in a burst of glory. Such was the energy with which all Simla threw itself into the final entertainments, that the committee of Annandale was encouraged to get up an extra and a last gymkhana. And of the many who welcomed this announcement Sylvia

was perhaps the most enthusiastic. A fine horse-woman and superbly mounted, she had run neck and neck throughout the season for the average cup, and in the end had been defeated by the narrowest of margins. She had now an unexpected chance of avenging her defeat.

But her hopes in this regard were doomed to disappointment, for success in gymkhanas depends as much upon the horse as on the rider. And during Sylvia's absence in Mussourie a lazy syce had neglected her reiterated orders. Satan had not been exercised.

This might have mattered less if the syce had combined dishonesty with laziness; if, after the manner of his kind when the eye of supervision is removed, he had retained a portion of his charge's ration for his family and himself. For it was Satan's liberal allowance of gram and oats, coupled with lack of exercise, which was too much for him. Sylvia did all she could with him in the short time at her disposal, but when the day arrived the big black horse made it quite evident, from the moment that she threw her leg across the saddle, that for the first time in his life he meant to live up to his name. He was disobedient to reins and heel; he danced and he curveted before assembled Simla—conduct which gave small chance to Sylvia to show her skill in intricate equestrian amusements, such as tilting at the ring and bending races.

But Sylvia's mettle forbade her to acknowledge

that a horse could get the better of her. Refusing to be beaten, she struggled through two competitions, alarming in the process the more timid of her rivals and gaining no success. And Satan, instead of steadying to his task, grew more and more excited, until before the third event he bolted with her into the middle of the scattering spectators, and persuaded even Sylvia that she must give it up.

As a result she made an early start for home, for she wanted to get up the steep and winding road before it became clogged with horses and rickshaws and pedestrians, all struggling up a thousand feet of hill. Her father urged a rickshaw; the path was far too dangerous and narrow for a restive horse. But there was no rickshaw to be had for love or money, and in any case Sylvia did not intend that Satan's victory should be complete. She swung on to his back and started off, Hugh after her.

And at the first her confidence was justified, for Satan was a gentleman at heart. But to-day he was a very nervous gentleman, and he had not quite forgotten the whip and the spur which had tried to force him into places where he did not want to go. So when a troop of grey langurs, travelling their aerial road from tree to tree, hurtled across the path in front of him in mighty, swinging leaps, it was too much altogether for his precarious sedateness. He shied, then bolted uncontrollably, skating unbalanced round the hairpin bends, spurning the stones in ringing volleys from beneath his pounding feet.

Hugh followed up as quickly as he dared, but for a moment Sylvia vanished from his sight, hidden behind a spur where the road followed the contour of the hill round a ravine. And when he got her into view again, he saw at the same time something which made him dig his spurs hard in and yell. The road was not quite empty.

In front of Sylvia the path curved out again to round the second spur. Beyond that spur he saw a rickshaw coming down the hill, its coolies rashly trotting, hard put to it to check the weight on the steep slope. And Sylvia, fighting with her feather weight and slender wrists against the horse's fury, could not yet see the obstacle. Hugh shouted till his warning echoed from the hill-side, but horse and rickshaw still sped on.

They met just at the apex where the road looped round the spur. The straining coolies somehow pulled their rickshaw to a standstill. Satan set his four feet, and slid. The shock hurled Sylvia forward on his neck, but with a jockey's balance and agility she managed to regain her saddle. Then the horse reared, right on the edge of the unfenced, precipitous khud.

What followed, almost instantaneous as it was, was photographed for Hugh with the tense clearness of a slow-motion picture. He saw the bank begin to give under the horse's weight—the first dropping pebble become a little avalanche of dirt and stones. He saw the straining hocks strive vainly to regain

their balance. Satan began to topple slowly over backwards. Sylvia, her stirrups providentially lost in the first jerk of his stopping, slipped down like lightning from his back. And then the great black bulk went sliding down the khud, to bring up with a crash against a tree a hundred feet below.

At the moment of disaster Hugh had been still some little way behind, and before he reached the spot a white-clad figure in a dhoti sprang out of the rickshaw and scrambled down to Sylvia where she lay, a dozen feet below the road. Hugh threw his reins to the nearest coolie and leapt down after him. The kneeling man looked up.

"She's in a faint. I think that's all."

It was Joshi.

Hugh knelt beside him and felt Sylvia's forehead.

"Can we get water here?" he asked.

"I think so," answered Joshi doubtfully. "I know there's a spring somewhere."

Hugh looked up at the coolies, gazing down with apprehension from the road above. They clearly were of no use; their one-track minds were fully occupied in speculation upon what their punishment would be for killing a miss-sahib. Hugh took his topi off and thrust it into Joshi's hands.

"Then go, man. Run!"

Just for a moment Joshi, too, looked at the coolies, as though he thought that Hugh's curt order would more suitably have been addressed to them. Then, snatching at the topi, he was off.

Left to himself, Hugh unbuttoned Sylvia's habit and slipped a trembling hand beneath it. Her heart was beating. He felt for broken bones with clumsy fingers; so far as he could satisfy himself she had escaped. And by the time he had completed his rough examination Joshi was back again, breathing in great gasps from his hasty climb, but carrying the topi filled with water.

They succoured Sylvia together, the Indian holding out the sodden hat in careful hands, Hugh sprinkling face and neck with the cold water it imperfectly retained. She stirred at last, and opened vaguely staring eyes.

"I'm giddy," she said faintly, and closed her eyes again.

A moment later she was looking up at Hugh.

"I'm all right now. Let me get up."

Hugh shook his head. "Rest a bit first"; and she obeyed. Then suddenly she struggled up without assistance and looked around her anxiously.

"Hugh, what has happened to my Satan?"

To Hugh, in his concern for Sylvia, the horse's fate appeared of little moment. He blurted out the truth.

"He's down there, Sylvia. I'm sorry."

"Down there?" She followed with her eyes his pointing finger. "He must be hurt."

"Killed, I'm afraid. And thank God you're not down there with him. You had a wonderful escape."

But Sylvia was unmindful of her own escape.



She had no thought for anything except that mangled body down the khud, and, unnerved as she was, she broke down utterly.

"I loved him so, my Satan! And he loved me. He used to walk behind me like a dog; he'd nose for sugar in my pockets. He could very nearly talk to me. And now he's gone; he's dead!"

She suddenly became aware of Joshi's presence, and turned upon him like a fury.

"It's your fault, you black beast! I could have pulled him up, if you had not come tearing round the corner."

Joshi stood staring at her, dumbfounded by the bitterness and the unfairness of her attack. And before he found his tongue Hugh was beside him, whispering:

"Don't listen to her, Joshi; she doesn't know what she is saying. Be a good chap, and get away from here."

Joshi successfully bit back his indignation, and climbed back to the road again. Hugh dropped down on his knees by Sylvia and took her hand.

"You mustn't talk like that, dear," he protested. "It wasn't Joshi's fault; I saw it all. And even if it was . . ."

"It was his fault," insisted Sylvia. "His men were running when they turned the corner. Running, down a hill like that! I hate him."

Hugh wisely dropped the argument, and set himself to soothing her. And when at last her

outcries and her sobbing ceased he got her to her feet and half-supported her, half-carried her, back to the road. The coolies were still there, beside their rickshaw. And not the coolies only, for Joshi had unwisely waited with them. As soon as he saw Sylvia he came forward, and with the best intentions spoke to her.

"I'm glad you're better. I hope you'll take my rickshaw back to the hotel."

The very sight of him infuriated Sylvia.

"Your rickshaw!" she exclaimed. "Not if it was the last in Simla. I don't know why they let such people ride in rickshaws."

It was no time for half-measures; for her own sake and for Joshi's she must be got away. Hugh picked her up without a word and put her in the rickshaw. Then, as the coolies turned it up the hill, he stepped across to Joshi.

"What can I say to you, except to thank you, and to hope you'll make allowances?"

But Joshi turned his back and walked away.

## CHAPTER XIII

SYLVIA had been uncommonly lucky; her coolness of head and her agility had saved her from what had looked like certain death. But of herself, when she got back to the hotel, she had no thought; and her mother's anxious orders to hurry into bed and wait there for the doctor she did not seem to hear at all, for all the heed she paid to them. She did not want the doctor; there was still too much to do. Satan must have decent burial—where he was, if he could not be got up. And it must be done at once, before the jackals and the vultures got at him. She drove Hugh to the telephone. Nor would she go to bed till he was able to assure her that a squad of coolies were already on their way.

He left her with reluctance, but at her express command, to see the body of the big black horse committed to the earth; then hurried back to the hotel. And in the interval the doctor had examined her and gone again. There was no need for Hugh to put his question; he could read his answer in the face of Lady Delahey. Sylvia was scarcely bruised. She had had a shaking, but a day or so in bed would put that right.

And in the morning came a note from her; she told him she was quite all right, and he was not to fuss. Her mother, who *was* fussing, had insisted that she should lie quiet for the present; but Hugh might come and see her after lunch.

Now that his first anxiety was over and he was able to review the whole affair dispassionately, Hugh found himself both puzzled and disturbed. The tiny seed of doubt which past events had planted in his mind began to germinate. Why was it that a girl so frank, so fearless and so lovable should have so queer a streak in her? If this had been the only time, he might have put it down to Sylvia's shocked, hysterical condition. But it was not the only time; it was of a piece with her demeanour as he had observed it ever since that first, unfortunate episode on Jakko.

What Joshi thought of that Hugh knew, and yesterday's disaster must seem to him a confirmation of his view. His attitude at parting showed that he, at any rate, did not attribute Sylvia's rudeness to hysteria or shock.

And the more he thought about it, the more Hugh felt it was his duty to see Joshi without loss of time—a duty which he owed to Sylvia as well as to the Indian. It was but fair to her that the extenuating circumstance, her passionate attachment for her horse, should be made known. And if Hugh could not justify her words, he could at least apologize for them. He did not under-estimate the hardness

of his task; he did not relish the idea of tackling upon so delicate a subject a man so biased and so prejudiced as Joshi was. But he had a stubborn sense of honour, and Sylvia's honour was his own. He could not bear that anyone should think of her what Joshi must be thinking.

His morning being at his own disposal, he set out after breakfast for Joshi's rooms in the bazar, wishful to get the business over. He found himself received, as he had quite expected, uncompromisingly and with impatience.

"I know quite well why you have come," was Joshi's greeting, "but you had better go away again. Speaking can't make things any better."

"Of course it can't," admitted Hugh, "if you refuse to listen. But I hope you won't refuse; I ask it as a favour, as a friend."

It proved a talisman, that invocation of a friendship upon which this Anglophobe set such an inconsistent value.

"I have no option but to hear you," he conceded, "if you put the matter on that ground. But once again I warn you, nothing that you can say will do the slightest good."

Nor did it. Hugh told him about Satan; how Sylvia had prized and loved him. Carried away by his desire for her rehabilitation in Joshi's mind, he allowed himself to descant upon her warmth of heart, her impulsiveness and hasty temper, with a frankness and unreticence which his more sober

judgment would have condemned. He pleaded for generosity of view. It was not reasonable to expect a girl who had just come through so dreadful an experience to remain the mistress of her tongue.

But Joshi seized upon that point.

"I grant you that," he interrupted. "That was the very reason why she spoke her mind."

And from that attitude he would not budge. He maintained that the accident had done no more than rob Sylvia of the self-control which guards the decencies of speech. He insisted, and Hugh could not candidly deny the accusation, that she had meant exactly what she said, that she had insulted him because he was an Indian.

"And of one thing I am certain," he concluded. "Miss Delahey has never sent you to apologize to me."

"She has not," admitted Hugh; "and for the reason that I have not seen her."

"Then I will believe in her regret," retorted Joshi, "when she herself expresses it. But you will find she will not."

This sneer of incredulity brought home to Hugh, a little tardily, the indignity of his own position. It was one thing to apologize on Sylvia's behalf for conduct which had so evidently wounded; it was quite another to enter on an argument concerning her in which he was defending counsel and Joshi both the prosecutor and the judge. He recognized that Joshi was not in any way to blame for

what had happened, for rickshaw coolies go at their own speed and take but little notice of the orders of their passenger. And when the accident had happened the Indian had done his utmost to be helpful. His conduct had been irreproachable, in circumstances charged with provocation. For all of this Hugh gave him proper credit. But he had done his duty, and more than his duty. He refused to strain his sense of fitness further. Vicariously, he took up the challenge.

"Miss Delahey will certainly not leave you to imagine she was intentionally rude to you," he told him confidently. "You may be very sure of that."

That seemed the best way out of it. He would get Sylvia to expedite the letter of regret which in any case she would be writing. If, after that, Joshi refused to credit her assurance that her words were not intended, it was he who was convicted of intolerance and prejudice.

Nevertheless, it was an interview with the result of which Hugh could not well feel satisfied. Had he been dealing with an Englishman, he felt he might have brought it to a different conclusion. For he was just beginning to discern the mental gulf which separates the races, and knew no way to overpass it. He would have liked to talk the matter over with a man of Delahey's experience. But Sylvia's parents' knowledge of the incident did not extend beyond the fact that Joshi had been the occasion of

the accident and that Sylvia maintained it was his fault—a view with which Sir George at least had been unsympathetic—and out of loyalty to her Hugh felt that the unlucky consequence must not be told. He was determined, however, to get the whole irritating business over and done with as soon as might be, though whether he could fairly worry Sylvia with it that afternoon must of course depend on how he found her.

At lunch he was fidgety and silent, so that Sir George rallied him on his loverly impatience, and Lady Delahey forgot her cares enough to warn him smilingly of one more obstacle.

“Yes, you may go,” she said; “that is, if you are able to persuade old Rajjia to let you in. She’s been sitting there all day; I couldn’t even drive her off to take her meal. She says she must be there, in case her ‘missie-baba’ wants her!”

She spoke in jest; nevertheless Hugh found the obstacle a real one. For the old ayah squatted obdurate before the door and did not seem at all inclined to let him pass.

“Perhaps miss-sahib asleep now,” she suggested; “she crying all night.”

“Then go and see,” commanded Hugh.

But Rajjia still seemed doubtful.

“If she sleep, then perhaps I wake her up,” she objected.

It was Sylvia herself who put an end to the dilemma. They heard her calling from the room:



"Ayah, if that is Frampton Sahib, let him come in at once."

Then only Rajjia stepped aside.

"The sahib has wakened her," she said reproachfully, as Hugh went in.

There seems to be some quality about the intimacy of a bedroom which enhances beauty. It was understandable that it should be so, in the days before the shears of the barber had deprived the lover of the glory of loosened tresses, when a night-gown revealed charms which by day were hidden from the eye. But bedtime works no miracle on shingled hair. Its waves are guaranteed to keep in place till they grow out; the pillow cannot even disarrange them. And the sleeves of a silk pyjama coat give but a glimpse of arms which go bare all day, its narrow opening conceals the snowy neck and gleaming shoulders on which at dance or dinner all may look. Why then should modern beauty seem whiter and softer and more delectable when she is in her bed? For despite pyjamas and shorn head she still contrives to be so.

At any rate Hugh thought so, and his first admission to that delightful intimacy went near to driving clean out of his head the memory of Joshi and his grievance. For Sylvia seemed no whit the worse for her adventure; her one complaint was that the doctor and her mother made her keep her bed. It was true that when she spoke of Satan he found corroboration in her misty eyes

for Rajjia's story of a night of tears. Yet even upon that disturbing subject she could now talk with relative composure.

But though Hugh found it hard to strike a note to jar their happiness together, the mesmerism of her presence did not charm him altogether from the duty he had taken on himself. Better to take the plunge, he thought, and get it quickly over.

"I've had a talk with Joshi," he commenced. The name struck Sylvia like a stab. Distressed and agitated beyond measure, she seized his hand and pleaded with him.

"No, Hugh, not that. Don't speak of him. We're happy, and you'll spoil it all."

"Spoil it?" asked Hugh, perplexed.

"Yes, spoil it," she insisted. "You're stern, Hugh, and I know you hate it when I lose my temper. We can't talk about Joshi without quarrelling. I know I oughtn't to have said it, but it just came out—I couldn't help it. . . . There, Hughie, will that do? I've said I'm sorry; let's forget it."

But Hugh could hardly be content to let it go at that.

"I know you're sorry," he persisted. "But what of Joshi?"

She stared at him. "What do you mean, Hugh?"

"You've wounded him. Write him a note at once, and get it over."

"Are you suggesting that I should apologize to him?" demanded Sylvia.

For she could not and she would not. Her treatment at the hands of Dharmkot had stiffened her aversion to his race into an obstinate, blind hate. In Joshi's case the shock of Satan's loss had reinforced that hate, until it grew into irrational, hysterical conviction that he was in the wrong, even deliberately in the wrong. Her warped mentality rebelled at humbling herself to him; she was not going to have anything at all to do with him.

Even if Hugh had known the facts from the beginning, even if he had been able to see into her mind, he would have found it hard to make allowances. To make allowances demands imagination, a quality he lacked. And he did not know the facts; he had not any key to her refusal. To him it seemed, as taken by itself it was, an outrage upon decency that having spoken so she should defiantly refuse to make amends.

"You must," he said. "Things can't stay where they are."

"I certainly will not," retorted Sylvia hotly. . . . And yet she did not want a quarrel. "Leave it alone," she begged; "it's my affair, not yours. We never shall agree on it."

But Hugh had made it his affair; the assurance which he had so confidently given Joshi prevented him from leaving it alone. And he misinterpreted her sudden softening. He thought, despite her words, that she was wavering.

"Agree or not," he told her, "I insist upon it."

"Insist!" she echoed, and there was no longer either gentleness or pleading in her tone. "And what right have you to insist?"

"I think I have some rights," he blundered, "since we are engaged."

"If that is all, those rights are very easily withdrawn."

The threat pulled Hugh up short, aghast at the abyss to which his good intentions had been leading him. With all her flaws, he wanted her; he wanted her so badly that Joshi and his grievances sank into nothingness.

"Sylvia," he cried, "don't say such things!"

But Sylvia shook her head; the threat which she had irritably made gave birth to firm decision. She saw quite clearly she could never marry him; saw it so clearly that she marvelled how she had been blind so long. What did the future hold, beyond a repetition of such scenes? He could not ever understand or sympathize with her, unless he knew the secret she could never tell. And was that all? Had she the right to marry him, or anyone, with such a secret? She knew she had not—there was a shadow over her, which closed her off from all mankind.

"I mean it," she said pitifully, firmly. "You do not trust me, Hugh. It's not your fault, and God knows it's not mine. But there it is; we cannot build our lives on a foundation of mistrust."

Nor could Hugh move her. He told her now what he should have made clear in the beginning,

about the tangle into which his interview with Joshi had got himself and her. He pleaded with her, he would promise anything. But Sylvia steeled herself against his urgency, yet dared not look at him, for fear that she should weaken.

"It is no use," she said, and called for Rajjia.

And to the ayah:

"The sahib is just going, and I am tired and want to sleep. Make the bed tidy for me."

Thus, with self-torturing adroitness, she gave Hugh a dismissal which left him with no chance to argue. And Rajjia, well pleased at his departure, was holding the door open for him.

An hour ago that door had framed for him a vision of a radiant Sylvia, rising like Venus from her pillows and smiling eager welcome, a vision which had made his heart leap for his love of her. Now, as it closed behind him, it seemed to cut him off from all his happiness and all his hope.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE bottom had dropped out of Hugh's world. Since reaching manhood he had been contented with celibacy, not totally indifferent to woman, but ranking her uncritically with friendship, good books, the glories of a sunset after rain, and all the million other diversified and gracious things which dignify and beautify existence. Then love had come and changed existence into life, and, coming, shattered so completely his little artificial world that he could not go back to it again. Sylvia had gone—and he had nothing left.

He hid himself at first within his room, numbed but for that one overpowering thought; but her photograph upon his mantelshelf was like a mockery. He took his hat and stick, and set out walking aimlessly and fast, but every slope and every turn reminded him of days when they had walked together. He grew afraid of his own company; the torment was too great for solitary endurance. But who was there in whom he could confide, except the Delaheys? And surely they, not knowing all, must take their daughter's side.

He had to seek them out at length—he could not

bear it any longer. He found them in their sitting-room, reading peacefully, not knowing that the heavens had fallen. For Sylvia, always reticent, had bottled up her trouble, and had foiled her mother's visits by choking back her sobs and feigning sleep. But Hugh's very face announced disaster, so much so that upon his entry Lady Delahey threw down her book and struggled, startled, to her feet.

"Why, Hugh, whatever is the matter? Surely there's nothing wrong with Sylvia?"

"It's finished," he said dully, and threw himself into a chair.

A stifled scream from Lady Delahey, his uncle's quick "For God's sake, man, what is it?" aroused him to the fact that there existed people in the world who did not know his tragedy. He roused himself to explanation.

But while it was not hard to stay the panic his ambiguous words had caused, it was not quite so easy to decide how to explain them. Would it be fair to Sylvia to tell her parents everything? Or should he baldly tell them they had quarrelled, and leave it to her to vouchsafe what further explanation she might choose? The problem turned out an abstraction, for he found himself too tired and too dejected to fence successfully with all their anxious questions. It all came out, from the first doubts which he had felt up to the final episode with Joshi and the tragedy which followed from it.

He found his hearers sympathetic.

"I'm sorry for you both," said Lady Delahey. "It's not at all your fault, and I don't think it's altogether Sylvia's. Sometimes she seems unable to control herself. It troubles me, but I can't help her when she won't confide in me."

She sighed, and hurried off to Sylvia, pathetically hoping that this time at least she might be privileged to share her daughter's trouble.

Sir George was blunter.

"Sylvia's a little fool," he commented. "She seems to think she has the right to treat an Indian as though he were the dirt under her feet. It can't be done. For one thing, they're not dirt, or anything approaching it; a lot of them have been my closest friends for years. And that's the sort of thing which plays the devil with prestige. Can you wonder at them wanting to be quit of us, when little chits of girls think it demeans them to be ordinarily polite?"

Hugh's loyalty survived his disillusionment. He found his uncle's presentation of the case too strong.

"I don't think that's quite fair to Sylvia," he protested. "It can't be simply wanton rudeness. There must be something at the bottom of it all, though what it is I can't conceive."

"I know she's always ready to plead some mysterious explanation," conceded Delahey. "But that's all nonsense. What *can* there be? And why can't she be frank about it?"

Hugh had no answer ready, for Delahey was



putting into words the more intolerant of his own thoughts. Then, suddenly, an answer sprang up in his mind, unsought, unwelcome, a dreadful thought which brought him shaking to his feet.

"Surely it can't be Joshi?" he asked, white-faced. "If it was that she would not tell."

"God! if I thought it was!" Sir George flamed out. "Hugh, don't suggest such things. Whatever makes you think so?"

"I don't think so; I won't let myself think so," faltered Hugh. "But—— Both times she has suggested that untellable extenuation, Joshi was at the bottom of the trouble."

They stared at one another in incredulous horror, afraid to speak, afraid, almost, to think. And then the door was opened, and Lady Delahey came in, repulsed and worried. For Sylvia had turned upon her, as a wounded beast will turn. She looked from one to other of them quickly, her woman's instinct telling her that something more was wrong.

"What is the matter, George?" she asked.

"Don't ask me, dear," her husband blundered. "You must give me time to think it over."

She pounced on the admission, and used it as an engine to extort confession from him.

"Nonsense," she cried, when she had heard. "It's nothing of the kind. You both ought to be thoroughly ashamed—you, George, especially. You and your wicked theories!"

Irrationally, she convinced them by her certainty, and both men were contented to discard one terrible solution. But there the problem was, unsolved, apparently unsolvable. Sir George, inured to it, was first to put it on its shelf again.

"Cheer up!" he comforted his nephew. "She'll come round in a day or two, and then you'd better marry her off-hand and take her off to England. You'll find her all right there, or anywhere where there are no dark faces."

And by degrees Hugh too allowed himself to hope that Sylvia would "come round." His instinct was to pack his things and go, to flee from a hotel where he must meet a dozen times a day a Sylvia unapproachable and cold. But that was to admit defeat, to cut himself right off from hope. He could not bring himself to forfeit any chance to make her change her mind.

In point of fact the situation did not bring about the awkwardness and the embarrassment which he had feared, for Sylvia doggedly refused to leave her bed. Nor, for that reason, did it give him his expected chance to put things right between them. At last he begged to be allowed to see her, refusing to believe that love could come to total wreck upon so small a quarrel. She sent him back a message that she would not leave her room while he remained in the hotel.

In face of this he had to go; he could not, as it were, besiege her in her bed. He had no plans, he

talked of going home to England. But Sir George suggested a less final plan.

"I'm off on tour in four days' time; come with me. The ladies won't go down to Delhi for a month, and when we meet them there, who knows but Sylvia may have changed her mind?"

Hugh gratefully accepted, but suggested that until they started he ought to find a room elsewhere. To this his uncle would not even listen.

"Nonsense!" he said. "If Sylvia wants to sulk, then let her. It may give her time to realize she's in the wrong."

## CHAPTER XV

THE time came quickly for departure. The little white rail-motor which was to take them down the hill slid out of Simla station, and swinging round the first sharp loop of sixty miles of sinuous track, passed close beneath the high, bare wall of the hotel. Hugh looked up at its towering bulk, behind which Sylvia was hiding somewhere. And then he saw her run out on to her verandah, as though the shrilling of the flange against the guard-rail had called her out to see him go. He could not read her face, for the height dwarfed her, and she made no gesture which could show that she had seen him. And as he looked, before he could make up his mind to wave, the car lurched round another curve, and plunged into the tunnel which runs below Mount Pleasant.

It is not a long tunnel, but as they passed from its dank chill into the sunshine of the farther side it seemed to Hugh as if a link was broken. Behind was Simla and his two short months of happiness. Before him lay the Plains—and a gloomy future into which he did not want to peer.

But it is hard to be completely miserable on

that winding journey through the lower hills, the car now shadowed by their threatening mass, now running free amid a fairyland of valleys. Hugh picked up heart; he took that unexpected glimpse of Sylvia to be a favourable omen.

And after Kalka station and its bustle a full-sized train received him and carried him into the real India—the India of which he had just caught a passing glimpse upon the journey up. The triviality of Simla was behind him—its tennis and its picnics and its dancing; its grumbling, denationalized Indians; its parliament which bickers over trifles—while the farmer struggles against ruin, and disease preys upon under-nourished bodies, and the money-lender takes his toll unchecked; its Secretariat, with all the files and pigeon-holes and desks at which men toil, and know it is not they who govern. They passed a tent half-hidden in a grove of mango trees; an Englishman in shorts and shooting coat strolled out to watch the train go by.

“Simla!” said Delahey. “That is the man who governs India—that man, and a few hundred like him.”

The India that lonely figure ruled slipped past their carriage windows, all reddened by the evening light. Field after field made ready for the wheat; green rustling brakes of half-grown sugar-cane; tall clumps of giant millet waiting for the sickle. And in the fields half-naked husbandmen were

working still, reaping the crop which the monsoon had given, or ploughing for the crop the winter rains would give. Simla still hung on the horizon to the north, but these men did not lift their eyes unto the hills. They looked for help to their own thews and sinews, the sweat of their own bodies, their dogged perseverance under burdens which the centuries had taught them how to bear. And if—which God forbid—the rains failed or their cattle died, it was to the man in the tent that they would turn.

The night closed in, the fading landscape was shut out by the venetians; and Delahey, stretched on his berth, told stories of the days when he had been in fact, as he was still at heart, a man in a tent—of happy days in districts through which his duties led him; days spent in supervising scattered outposts, in stirring up lethargic village watchmen, inquiring into crimes of violence or of stealth, keeping the peace between unruly mobs who made religion an excuse for rioting and murder. That had been life; that had been doing something—better than sitting in the Hills and telling other people how to do it.

He chose the theme designedly, for the plains of India, and the untold, unconsidered millions who live and toil and die on their illimitable expanse, must light the interest of anyone not born without imagination. Hugh snuffed the scent of India, a haunting scent of turmeric and ghi and cowsheds

and slaked dust. The train stopped at a wayside station, and the discordant sounds of India assailed his ear. He let down the venetian by which he sat, and peering, saw the velvet blackness of the mango topes, the faint reflected gleam from water gathered in the borrow-pits, the twinkling lights of a silent village, the fitful glare which came from the straw fire of some night-watcher of the crops. Trivial sights, harsh sounds, not altogether pleasant smells. But he who has once savoured them will never afterwards forget them altogether; for they are the East.

Delahey, watching him, was satisfied. Change is a healer not less effectual than time.

Sir George had much to do in Delhi, but his car was brought round from the garage where it had lain throughout the summer, and in it Hugh explored the ancient, far-spread city, which seven centuries ago had been Muhammad Ghorî's capital, as it is that of George the Fifth to-day. He saw the tomb of Humayun, the emperor who set the Moghal dynasty upon the path of greatness. He climbed the slender spire of the Kutb Minar, enduring relic of a king who reigned and died before the Moghal dynasty was thought of. He wandered through the fort in which rebellious troops had set the last blind emperor of the Moghals, a puppet, to defy the might of Britain. His curiosity, if not his love of art, took him to see the crescents and the circles of the last of Delhi's cities, built by the

latest of her emperors to house the servants of his rule.

A week elapsed, and they were on the move again, bound in the Vauxhall for Lucknow; and Hugh had to find room for yet another set of new impressions. For the Grand Trunk Road runs through the very heart of India as he had glimpsed it from the train, the silent India which tills the soil and pays no heed to emperors or their imperial cities.

Their early morning start surprised the farmer going to his fields, his plough upon his shoulder, his bullocks walking docilely beneath the yoke, or running all ways at the advent of the passing monster. They crawled past strings of bullock-carts and camels, laden with sacks of grain or tins of ghi or bursting, fluffy pods of cotton. They met the bankers and the tinkers, the pilgrims and the potters, whom Kim and his red lama had met before them. But the woman from Kulu no longer travelled in a bullock-rath. She rattled past them in an antiquated Ford, its hood draped round with lengths of flapping cotton cloth, to keep her purdah safe.

At intervals they ran through humble villages of mud and thatch, whose crowding huts constricted the broad spaciousness of the great highway into a narrow tortuous lane, as if there were not endless miles of open land behind them. Places for cautious driving, these, where dogs and fowls and pigs and children shared the road, and men sat bargaining



or gossiping or dozing upon string cots thrust out into the fairway.

They spent the first night in a tiny wayside resthouse, at which their servants, sent on ahead by train, awaited them with baths and dinner. Children peeped shyly in at them through the gate bars; the village dogs prowled in and out, alert for scraps experience taught them they might find when sahibs were about, yet wary of the sticks and stones they might expect with greater certainty. The ancient custodian, salaaming deeply, drew their attention to a faded list upon the wall, beseeching them to check with it the chairs and tables, curtains and lamps and crockery, and to certify in the inspection book his careful stewardship.

The night brought noises new to Hugh, sleep-banishing by reason of their newness—the howling of the jackals in a field of cane near by, the champing and the snuffing of a sacred bull outside the hedge, the coughing challenge of the squad of village-watchmen, detailed by the police to guard the slumbers of their chief. And every now and then the clatter of a lathi and an answering yelp told of one dog less fortunate than his fellows.

The next day took them joltingly, by roads worn to the sole and inches deep in dust, through the industrial squalor of Cawnpore and to the city of Lucknow, where, in this newer home of lesser kings, Hugh recommenced the tourist's round with which he had filled in his time in Delhi.

It is not of the purpose of this story to record all that he saw there; for whatever it might be he saw it, was bored by it, and straightaway forgot it. It may have been that Lucknow seemed an anti-climax after Delhi, that decaying stucco could not compete for his attention with weathered stone. Possibly, not being an American, he was temporarily surfeited. Or, paradoxically, it may have been America which caused his surfeit.

For his arrival synchronized with the first great seasonal American invasion. The hotel was full of check skirts and pepper-and-salt suits and silk plus fours; of men whose apprehensive heads were crowned against the sun from dawn to dusk with monstrous shapes of pith; of others whose contempt for the same sun expressed itself in panamas at midday.

They sat about the hall immersed in guide-books. They twisted confident but unaccustomed tongues round names like Khurshed Manzil and Machchhi Bhawan and Ghaziuddin Haider. They came and went all day in overloaded and precarious "fitton garis," and even more precarious Fords. Their schedule gave them just twelve hours in which to do Lucknow, and they guessed they were going to do it, from the Dilkusha Palace at the one end to the great Imambara at the other. When they had gone, Hugh felt he wanted to conceal the fact that he, too, was a tourist.

But his distaste for Lucknow's show-places did

not include the Residency, for there he went, as every man of British blood must go, not as a tourist, but as a pilgrim. His uncle went there with him, drawn to revisit that supreme reminder of British pluck and heroism and endurance, which in his journeyings he had seen so many times before. And in those peaceful gardens which surround its battered shell, beneath the flag of England which still flies day and night where Lawrence raised it, Hugh grew to understand his uncle better.

For Sir George was not at all an easy man to know. Hugh could discern in him the qualities of mind, the high administrative powers, which had raised him from the hack-work of a district and brought him to his present post. He recognized his uprightness, his scrupulousness, his courtesy and his consideration, which scorned discrimination between race and race. But these were the externals, and beyond them Hugh had never probed. He had been tempted to construe his taciturnity, his stiff, old-fashioned ways, into a want of sympathy, a narrowness of outlook, even a prejudice against new things and new ideas.

The reason was not far to seek. The man whom India has moulded has been beset throughout his life with problems and with difficulties which seem insoluble. If he came out with theories and solutions, as he very likely did, he was soon content to shelve them, and to spend himself upon the daily task which lay before him. It is arguable that his outlook

has been narrowed by his concentration on that task; it is certain that he is contemptuous and resentful of the cocksure confidence of the new-comer, who has not got the knowledge to recognize the difficulties, yet who propounds solutions which experience considered and discarded years ago. And his resentment not infrequently betrays itself as stolid uncommunicativeness. Not that it would be true to have classed Hugh among those earnest visitors of liberal tendencies and reforming aims who produce in their official victims these unfortunate results. It was rather something of the instinct of the hunted which made his uncle reticent in presence of his ignorance, for of such reforming gentlemen Sir George had had to bear with many.

But when they set out on their journey Sir George had laid aside his uncommunicativeness. The very effort which he made to interest Hugh had helped to break down his habitual reserve. And back again among the simple people of the level lands, where for so many years his work had lain, his sympathies and his enthusiasms were openly displayed. Hugh could no longer doubt his warmth of heart.

Nevertheless, it was the Residency which swept away the last of his reserve and showed him in his proper setting. For however great his love for the country of his adoption, however real and warm his sympathy for the wrongs, the hardships and the sorrows which constitute the lives of most of its inhabitants, the real keynote to his character

was duty. He had a streak of iron in him, a stern and single-minded devotion to his duty which ranged him with Sir Henry Lawrence and all the dead whose quiet graves lie clustered in the ground disputing which they died. His task, no less than theirs, was to keep the flag of Britain flying, by hunting down and rooting out all those who sought by subterranean means to tear it down. Nor was his work without its own peculiar peril; he could not know when he would be again, as more than once he had already been, a target for the pistol or the dagger or the bomb. And he, no less than they, regarded duty first and last and all the time.

Nor was his call to duty long delayed, for while he was in Lucknow he received a secret cover, containing news which brought to an immediate end the routine of inspections on which he was engaged. There were the strongest reasons to suppose that a gang of revolutionaries were planning a coup of more than usual magnitude in the vicinity of Agra. The news was vague; the most careful shadowing had failed to discover the nature of their plans. And most disquieting of all, the authorities upon the spot believed that a new leader was stirring up and organizing the local malcontents. Of his identity they could obtain no inkling, but about his energy and his determination they were not in any doubt.

It was a case which called for the urgent personal direction of the head of the department, and

Delahey cancelled his tour forthwith. Hugh's case, however, was a different one. There was no reason why he should not take a chance which might not come again; and his travels had afforded him distraction, if not peace of mind. It was settled, therefore, that Hugh should continue his journey to Benares and Allahabad, and thence come back to Agra to rejoin his uncle.

Before he left Lucknow Hugh wrote to Sylvia. Since leaving Simla he had sat down a dozen times to do so, but every time his fear precipitancy might defeat itself had made him tear the letter up. It was indeed rather a cousinly than a loverly epistle which he now set about composing, in the reply to which he hoped that he might read encouragement for a more ardent sequel. But his pen ran away with him; love, like King Charles's head, was not to be kept out. The sober chronicle of his journey ended with a passionate appeal for understanding, a prayer that Sylvia would not allow a quarrel to separate them finally.

He was not satisfied with the result—no correspondent in such mournful circumstances could well be satisfied—but in the end he gummed it down and posted it, and set off to Benares to wait for a reply.

## CHAPTER XVI

THERE is no stucco in Benares; it depends for its attraction upon the living men and women who throng its streets and water-front from every corner of Hindu India. And yet Hugh grudged the time he spent away from his hotel; he was more constant to the letter-rack outside the office than to the river or the bathing-ghats. Though there was not more than one mail a day by which a letter could possibly come from Simla, assurances to this effect did not diminish the frequency of his inquiries. But Sylvia was merciful in this at least: she did not leave him long without his answer.

*Dear Cousin Hugh,*

she wrote, and thereby in her first three words doomed all his hopes to disappointment.

*I was a coward; I hid from you in Simla, because I did not dare to face an explanation. But I am glad that you have written, for I cannot let you go on thinking, as your letter shows that you do think, that I am making us both wretched because I am too proud to mend a quarrel. If it was nothing more than that, you may be very sure that I should not have let you go.*

*You don't trust me, Hugh, not in your heart. You won't believe there's something I can't help which poisons me and*

*sours me. And if I told you, then you wouldn't want me any longer. I daren't tell you; I've never told a living soul. And I will not marry you, without your knowing.*

*I never should have let you love me, but it was too sweet. Forgive me, Hugh, if I have given you unhappiness. But do not write to me or try to see me. It would only make us more unhappy—if I could be more unhappy.*

*God bless you,*

*Sylvia.*

It was a reply more final than mere petulant refusal; more final even than contemptuous silence would have been. For Sylvia had hit the mark; Hugh could not truthfully deny a feeling of mistrust. Till now it had been something inchoate, a thought he thrust behind him when it forced itself upon his consciousness, something he would not formulate or let himself believe. But in the face of her clear statement it would remain no longer below the threshold of his mind. She had a secret which she did not dare to tell him. And what was there she would not dare to tell him, if it were not in some strange way disgraceful? Not that he loved her less for her confession which was no confession; if he could get her back he could forgive her anything. But till she spoke there was a barrier between them—a barrier her letter told him she would never break.

So he was faced again with the making of fresh plans, hopeless and dreary plans where Sylvia had no place. There was no question of making another



bid for understanding; what she had said she said deliberately, finally; nor did the pitiful impetuosity with which she wrote conceal the fact. And now that hope no longer bade him linger, he was for making a clean cut. He would return to England and pick up again the broken threads of an existence which had till now contented him, but which could never satisfy again. Agra lay on his way. He would have to break his journey there to see his uncle, and then he would go straight on to Bombay, to wait there for the steamer which would take him home.

. . . . .

A score of miles before his destination the passenger for Agra must leave the Delhi mail at Tundla, a dismal junction set down in the open country, where there is nothing to see, nothing to do, and scarcely anywhere to sit. But fortunately for the traveller, the Agra shuttle train is timed to leave ten minutes after the arrival of the mail, so that he passes straight from one train to the other, and so escapes the boredom which seems inseparable from waits at railway junctions.

The day Hugh travelled there was a hitch in this convenient arrangement. The Delhi mail completed its somewhat lengthy halt, clanked out of the station, and disappeared into the distance. But the Agra train still waited in its bay, although the passengers were in their seats, the luggage all

aboard, the signal down, the engine roaring steam. Hugh asked a passing guard what kept them.

"The Rani of Amarpur has reserved a carriage," the Eurasian told him. "She has been visiting in Alinagar, three kos from here. It is her father's home."

"And how much longer are we going to wait for her?" demanded Hugh.

The guard shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"It is as the stationmaster orders," he explained. "No doubt we wait till she is coming. This is 'slow passenger,' not a mail-train."

He gave the explanation as though it justified their waiting there for the remainder of the day; but Hugh was not to have the opportunity of ascertaining for how long a local train could be kept waiting by a rani. For the lethargic guard bestirred himself, and pointed to a cloud of dust rising between the trees which flanked the long, straight road.

"The rani, no doubt," he exclaimed; and made off to the station entrance to get his share of what was going. Even "slow passengers" cannot be made to wait for nothing.

The dust resolved itself into a galloping procession of ekkas and tikka garis, which in due time drew up beside the station porch. The peace which had fallen on the junction with the departure of the mail was stridently shattered. A mob of station coolies, gathered inside the booking-hall, fell on

the luggage in such numbers and with such ferocity that a free fight seemed imminent, to settle which of them should carry it. But there proved to be enough for all, and far more than enough—tin boxes, packing-cases, crates, innumerable rolls of bedding clumsily secured with rope, huqqas, pandans, brass drinking-vessels, birds in wire cages, cumbrous untidy bundles of every shape and size. Judged by the quantity of her impedimenta, and quality would not have been a safe criterion, the rani was a person of no small importance.

Her state was equally proclaimed by the multitude of her tatterdemalion retainers—and here too Hugh would have fallen into error, if he had estimated their mistress's importance by their dirt and raggedness instead of by their numbers. There were a dozen men with long, curved swords in faded green plush scabbards; three more who carried rusty muzzle-loading guns. Women in saris or in tight chintz trousers ran about everywhere, shouting and chattering and getting in the way. But of the rani there was as yet no sign.

It was not until the luggage had been all disposed of, and the bulk of the retainers had inflicted themselves upon the protesting occupants of third-class carriages already overfull, that four men proceeded to erect a sort of small square tent beside a closely shuttered carriage, which had drawn up behind the rest. Such coolies as still waited there were shooed into the background, the carriage door

was opened cautiously, and with a flutter of gay draperies the rani was inside the tent. One at each corner, her attendants raised it bodily, and marched along the platform with it to the train, the lady keeping pace with them inside. Arrived at the reserved compartment, they set it down again as near the door as they could get, and pulled the fabric forward on each side, to close the gap. Indeed, so skilful was the embarkation that Hugh, surveying the proceedings from his window, got nothing more than just a glimpse of one gold slipper as the rani skipped inside.

The tent was folded up and poked in through a window, the last of the retainers took their seats, and the train at last jerked into motion, an hour or more behind its time. Hugh had been travelling since morning. He had not anything to read, for he had long since exhausted his supply of railway literature, and had not bothered to replenish it at Tundla. Nor was there anything of interest to be seen along the line, and night was coming on. He put his feet up on his berth and slept.

He was awakened by the scream of brakes put suddenly hard on. Poking his head out of the window, he could see no sign of any station, nor was the red eye of a signal visible in front. The country on both sides of the track, so far as he could see it in the golden luminousness of the western sky, was barren and deserted, covered with clumps of ten-foot sarpat grass and intersected by ravines.

He drew his head in, and lay down again. The progress of a "local" was so leisurely that one stop more or less portended little. It was a sudden burst of shouting all along the track which told him that this was no usual emergency and brought him once more to his window. He saw men trooping out of hiding-places in the grass and the ravines and lining up beside the train. The third-class passengers, perplexed and terrified, were opening their doors and crowding out on to the running-boards, as if they meditated flight. But none alighted, for the robbers drove them back again with threats and pistol-shots fired in the air.

It was a hold-up, on the lines of Arizona or Montana. But easier, in proportion as the victims were submissive. The doors were quickly slammed, the poked-out heads withdrawn. There was no more than an excited murmur to indicate that the long coaches held five hundred badly frightened men.

Opposite Hugh the track was bare of sentinels. The robbers doubtless thought the first-class coach was empty, for he had it to himself and had been sleeping without lights. Moreover, he was in the middle of the train, and it was round the engine at the one end and the rani's special carriage at the other that the bandits clustered thickly. Hugh, peering warily, could not see what was happening, it was too dark. Then, from the rear, a fusillade of pistol-shots rang out, followed by women's piercing and continued screams.

At this fresh evidence of violent intention a frightened clamour broke out in the crowded coaches; but not one passenger attempted to descend. Nor could Hugh blame them; they were unarmed, the bandits desperate and determined. But his own case was a little different. It was not discipline, it was not valour that won Plassey, but the pigheaded inability of nine out of ten Englishmen to recognize that any number of brown men can ever beat one white. Hugh was not the tenth Englishman. He opened the door silently, swung himself out on to the footboard, and dropped down on the track.

He had no clear-cut plan of action, but he thought that if he could only reach the coach in which the rani's musketeers were hidden he might be able to do something. It was, if he had known it, a project which was doomed to failure from the start. For the musketeers had neither shot nor powder; their arms were carried for display. In any case they could not have discharged those fouled and ancient pieces without the risk of blowing their own heads off. At the first glimpse of the dacoits they had concealed their useless weapons underneath the seats, and now were doing all they could to look like inoffensive rustics.

As things turned out, however, their ineffectiveness was immaterial; Hugh never got to them. For as he worked his way along in the concealment of the grass he found it was still tenanted by members

of the gang. He edged past two successfully, for the grass was thick, and in the dark they probably mistook him for a comrade. But it happened that the train had stopped upon a culvert, and in looking for a way to cross the nullah which it spanned Hugh plumped straight into yet another man, who gripped his arm and peered into his face. Then for a second each fell back from each in sheer astonishment. Frampton and Joshi recognized each other.

Hugh found his voice the first.

"Come on," he whispered, "we've got to find a way across this nullah. They'll see us if we use the bridge."

Joshi's reply was to whip out a Mauser pistol. For one brief second Hugh rejoiced; with this they had some kind of chance against the robbers. But the next moment he was staring at the shining circle of the muzzle rim, a foot before his face.

"Put that thing down," he cried. "It's I, it's Frampton."

No answer, and that tiny silver circle was still quivering before his eyes. Joshi must have completely lost his head.

"Look out," he cried again. "The damned thing will go off."

Then Joshi spoke.

"You fool! Why couldn't you stop safely in your carriage? I'll have to shoot you now; you know too much."

The world had suddenly gone topsy-turvy. A man like Joshi one of the dacoits! Incredible, without the gleam of that unwavering muzzle to drive conviction home. Hugh stared at it half-hypnotized, and waited breathless for the spurt of flame.

But Joshi hesitated, and the hand which held the pistol shook.

"I can't," he said. "Frampton, forget that you have seen me. Give me your word, and you shall go."

His indecision served to break the pistol's spell.

"You'll get no promise out of me," said Hugh, and ducked and sprang.

The pistol spat and crashed, and Hugh lurched sideways, toppled, and slid down the sandy bank into the nullah. Joshi went on his knees and peered down into twenty feet of blackness.

"It's not my fault," he said. "You made me do it."

. . . . .

Thereafter the dacoity proceeded according to plan, with a precision fortunately rare in such a complicated enterprise. Each detail had been carefully worked out. One of the band, detailed to stop the train, had travelled as a passenger from Tundla, and his timing was so accurate or lucky that when the train pulled up in answer to his pulling of the cord, the men told off to overawe the engine crew had not a dozen yards to go to reach the cab.



One on each side, they clambered up on to the footplate, and convinced the driver with a flourish of their weapons that restarting was too dangerous to be thought of. The intimidation of the passengers had been as easy. Once they had shut themselves inside their carriages, a sentinel or two could keep them there. The remainder of the gang were very quickly free to deal with their objective, the rani's special carriage.

There had been just one momentary hitch. The rani's carriage was attached next to the brake, and the guard had had more courage than the driver. He had ignored the warning shouted to him and jumped down from his van. A salvo from the Mausers riddled him, almost before his feet had touched the ground.

A moment later rough-clad men were swarming up into the rani's carriage. They found her cowering with her two attendants in the corner farthest from the door. Bent on intimidation at the outset, they dragged forth all the three of them, and tore the bangles from their noses and the rings out of their ears. The women's screams of terror were turned to screams of pain—screams which had carried down the train to Hugh and made him take a hand.

With both Hugh and the guard disposed of, and no one else at all inclined to interfere, the enterprise was quickly over. The robbers knew the rani travelled with her jewels—one of her servants was a spy in their employ. Once they had cleared

the carriage of the boxes and the bundles and the bags which cumbered it, they could go through them at their leisure. And willing hands inside, aided by willing hands without, soon had the task completed, while the rani shivered blood-bespattered in her corner and noisily bewailed her fate.

The robbers jumped down from the looted carriage on to the littered track. They humped up boxes, and bestowed the smaller packages beneath their arms. A laden, bowed procession faded out into the darkness which blanketed the broken lands and the track was clear again. A pistol cracked in signal, the guard over the engine climbed down on to the steps and bade the driver start his train. They dropped off as the wheels revolved beneath them, and watched the lighted coaches sliding slowly past. They saw the red dot of the tail-light fade and die out into the dark distance. Then they too turned, and disappeared into the jungle.

## CHAPTER XVII

ALI MAHOMAD was not by choice an early riser in the winter. Few people would be who had to face the misty chill of a cold-weather morning clad in two cotton garments, with nothing better than a cotton cloth for overcoat. But it was time his fields had their first watering, and since they were a mile or more away, a full day's work entailed an early start.

He roused his son Latif before the red ball of the sun was clear of the horizon, and shivering went to yoke the bullocks in the byre. He fetched the well-rope from its corner in the gate-house, and looped it in stiff coils about the yoke-pins. Latif picked up his clammy burden, the sodden leather water-bag, and they were off, before more lucky or more lazy neighbours had unwound from off their heads the sheets in which they slept like white cocoons.

They had to cross the railway, and the path they took led them along a nullah's sandy bed. For once the rains were over, and it was no longer filled with a brown, swirling torrent, the culvert was the most convenient place to cross the line. The oxen plodded

docilely ahead—they could be trusted to find their way unaided—while their master squatted down to light his chillum, more for the comfort of curling his chilled fingers round its earthen bowl than because of any wish to smoke.

The team plunged into the low arch beneath the line, but as they came out on the farther side they stopped and pawed the ground, snuffing with nervous curiosity at the scrub which lined the banks. Deciding it held something which they did not like, they turned and clattered back into the culvert at a scampering trot, bumping and kicking and impeding one another, boring and twisting with their heads in unsuccessful efforts to rid themselves of the encumbrance of the yoke.

Their owner, puzzled, brought them to a snuffing, snorting stand. The boy Latif was frightened.

"A panther!" he suggested; for one evening not so very long before an outlying marauder, driven by flood from his haunts in the khadir of the Jumna, had waited for the homing cattle crowding through that narrow gap and taken toll. Ali Mahomad shook his head.

"If it were that Shaitan," said he, "the beasts would gallop. But a pig it might be."

And since a boar disturbed is quite as dangerous as a panther, they scouted slowly forward, standing within the arch and lobbing lumps of mud and chips of ballast into the suspected bushes. But nothing

stirred. At length they summoned courage to approach and searched the bushes. They found—a man.

It was Hugh, delirious and muttering, his face smeared with blood, all scorched and blackened by the flame of the discharge, but otherwise unhurt by Joshi's shot. He had been saved by his own quickness and the irresolution of his adversary, and the bullet had just ploughed the skin above his ear. So far as Joshi and his pistol were concerned, it was a luckier outcome than a miss complete. For the shock had stunned him so completely, he had crumpled up so instantly and so convincingly, that Joshi had not doubted he was dead, and had done nothing to assure himself, except for one perfunctory glance into the darkness of the nullah, that he had permanently silenced a witness for whose removal there now existed double cause.

Yet at the moment it seemed unlikely that this oversight would matter, for what the bullet failed to do Hugh's headlong fall all but accomplished. His head had struck the stone revetment of the culvert, and he had lain all night insensible where he had fallen. The mist and dew had soaked his clothes, the chill had sunk into his bones. He was in a sorry state when the peasants found him.

Nor were his troubles over even yet. Ali Mahomad squatted down beside him and scratched his head.

"A sahib fallen from the train," he muttered. "And alive. It were much easier if he had been dead."

For in that case all he would have had to do would be to go back to the village and report his grim discovery to the chaukidar. But a living sahib was a very different matter, a charge which might involve him in all sorts of difficulty and trouble. Allah alone knew where he had come from, and where he should be taken. And there was that field waiting to be watered.

Hugh's fate hung in the balance; but callous as the daily sight of death and suffering had made him, Ali Mahomad could not make up his mind to let him lie. Even so, precaution must precede succour; he must have the chaukidar's authority before he dared to meddle with the most moribund of sahibs. So leaving Latif to watch, but not on any account to touch, Ali Mahomad tethered up his oxen and trudged back to the village.

When he got back the village was no longer sleeping, or even sleepy. He found the men assembled at the head-man's house, while the women, denied by custom direct participation in events of moment, were gathered into chattering groups about the well or at house doors. For the news of yesterday's dacoity had arrived; a constable had been sent in from the police station to warn the head-man and the chaukidar, the representatives

of order on the spot, to keep a watch for suspects. It was not very likely that after twelve hours had elapsed the guilty persons would be found within a mile of where the crime had been committed; yet the policeman, big with the importance of his errand, swept the assembled village with his eye as if he thought that some of them at least were there.

Ali Mahomad heard the tale of the dacoity with growing perturbation. He thought he knew now how the sahib had fallen from the train. And while to have an injured sahib on his hands was an embarrassment, to be connected in the most remote degree with such a crime was dangerous. To put it at the least, it meant days wasted in attendance on the sub-inspector while he made investigation; when that was finished, more days lost attending court. Worse, to be in the clutches of police subordinates, if only as a witness, meant a great deal of money or a great deal of trouble—both, perhaps. He was very strongly tempted to go on his way again and to leave it to the police, who would doubtless soon be on the spot, to make their own discovery.

But compassion prevailed, and when he had related his disjointed tale an impromptu stretcher-party was quickly on its way, directed by the self-important constable and followed by a straggling and excited crowd. Not that the haste and bustle indicated immediate relief for Hugh; for when they

reached the place where he was lying the policeman ordered that he should be carried, not into Agra and the nearest hospital, but to the police station, which lay five miles the other way. Before the rustics he might brag and bluster, but when it came to taking the responsibility for a sahib he too preferred to let the burden rest on other shoulders.

His word was law, and to the station Hugh was therefore taken, in his wet clothes and with the blood still caked upon his face. And there, to his good fortune, he came at last into the charge of one who was not frightened of the colour of his skin. Heedless of purdah, the sub-inspector hurried him into his private quarters and had him stripped and washed and wrapped in rough, warm blankets. Brandy was not available; instead, they poured a draught of country spirit down his throat which burned him into something near to consciousness. Nor was there in that little town any practitioner of English medicine; its medical resources were all indigenous. But the hakim in most repute was sent for, who plastered up his bruises and his burns with a dark, mysterious-smelling ointment compounded out of pungent herbs. And last and best, the sub-inspector commandeered the local money-lender's Ford, packed in his patient, and rattled off with him to Agra and to hospital.

. . . . .



Of Hugh's identity, once he had reached the hospital, there could be very little doubt, for everyone had heard by now of the empty first-class compartment on the looted train, with its swinging door and a sahib's labelled trunks inside. The sub-inspector rushed off to headquarters to report his find. The civil surgeon, summoned from a tennis-party, washed off impatiently and with intolerant disgust the homœopathic plasters of his humble brother in the craft, and set about his task of healing on lines to which Hugh's English body was more accustomed.

Finding that Delahey had taken the inquiry into his own hands, the sub-inspector had to hunt through Agra till he found him. But once run down, Sir George was at the hospital as soon as car could take him. He found Hugh cleansed and bandaged, still unconscious. He sought the civil surgeon out insistently.

"When can you have him conscious, Forbes?" he asked.

The doctor held up deprecating hands.

"Am I a prophet? He might come round to-night; he might remain like this two days or more. And then he'll probably be raving. If he escapes pneumonia, he'll be lucky."

"Two days! How can I wait two days? I must get some coherent story of what happened, and no one else has got the sense to give it me."

He went off impotent, to return twice more that evening, once far into the night. And every time the answer was "No change." For Hugh's condition, once he was assured that there was no immediate danger, his uncle hardly seemed to give a thought; his mind and will were concentrated, to the exclusion of all else, upon the tracking of the robbers.

The morning brought him better fortune, for Hugh had falsified the doctor's pessimism; he was quite conscious. Better still, he was quite sane, though burning with high fever and in the last extremity of weakness. So weak indeed that Forbes refused to let him see a visitor. "It's life or death," he ended tritely.

"So is my business," Sir George said grimly; "in this case death, especially. Forbes, we shall have to risk it. I'll only be a moment, and I swear I won't excite him."

"Oh no!" the doctor commented. "You'll just go in and pat his hand and say you're sorry he's so ill, and then creep out on tiptoe! Why, man, he's only got to look at you to get excited."

But the policeman got his way; it was not often that he was defeated in a battle between wills. At Hugh's bedside he started off with an apology.

"I've broken one man over this," he said. "We rushed a squad out on an engine and a brake-van,

the instant that your train came in. But they reported they could find no trace of you—nor anything except the body of the guard, poor devil. If they had made a proper search they would have found you.”

And then, by painful, slow degrees, he got Hugh's story from him.

“Joshi!” he cried, forgetful of his promises of caution. “He was the man I couldn't put my fingers on. And no wonder. We've got the dossiers of most of them well up to date—it isn't often that we don't know where they are and just what they are doing. But Joshi hasn't got a dossier at all. He's never been suspected, and I'll swear he's run straight up to now.

“But don't you worry, Hugh,” he added. “We'll get him soon enough. He must think you are dead; he'll not know he's suspected till we put the handcuffs on him.”

His jubilation was cut into by an angry doctor, who ejected him forthwith and stooped to put a finger on his patient's pulse.

The pulse was racing. For, however little Joshi merited his sympathy, whatever he had done, Hugh was distressed at the idea of his arrest and condemnation. He had a queer, instinctive liking for him. He felt that somewhere there was good in him. He looked on him, he could not have said why, as a man who had not ever had a proper chance.

But Delahey wasted no time upon the man. He only saw the criminal, and to him a criminal was vermin, ripe for extermination. To compass that extermination he had gone.

## CHAPTER XVIII

WITHIN an hour the wires were working; before a day had passed there was not a station or an outpost in the whole of India but had its orders to look out for Joshi. Nor was it long before replies began to come, for as a member of the legislature the wanted man was known to many. And since he did not know he was suspected, he travelled openly, without disguise.

Delhi reported his departure eastwards by the mail; he had taken a meal in the Cawnpore refreshment room; he had bought papers at the bookstall at Allahabad. At Moghalsarai he had got into the local train, and the stationmaster of Benares had seen him get out there and drive off in a hackney carriage in the direction of the city. That was the last which had been seen of him, for the Benares superintendent wired that he had had inquiries made without result in all the likely places, and that he was proceeding to comb out the unlikely ones.

This did not suit Sir George. Confident of Joshi's capture as he had showed himself to Hugh, he was not running any risk of bungling by the district staff. A man who had been able to engineer and

carry out successfully so bold and complicated an adventure was not to be caught napping. He took a blank form from the rack upon his desk and wrote a short, emphatic message. He called the orderly who waited at his door.

“Ask Thakur Gyan Singh to come to me.”

He waited, mechanically touching up the letters of his message, turning into the semblance of formed letters the series of serrated lines which was his handwriting. Before he reached the signature, Gyan Singh was standing at his desk.

He was a man of middle age—as Indians count age—sturdy and well set-up, and with a keen, clean-shaven face. He wore a blue serge suit of English pattern, but had retained the turban of the Rajput, bound in curved folds which drooped above one ear. He was denominated confidential clerk, but he had none of the unhealthy, flabby greyness which hallmarks occupants of office stools. His gait, the manner of his entrance, showed the reason—his soldierly salute, the way his arms hung as he stood erect before the table.

For Gyan Singh was not a clerk at all, but a policeman who had worked his way up step by step with Delahey, since many years ago a junior superintendent and a still more junior than an officer had spent a morning on their stomachs in the sun, exchanging shots with a proclaimed offender in a nullah two hundred yards away. Which of the two had got him in the end was still a matter for dispute

between them, for they had not followed the matter-of-fact advice of an old Pathan who met them as they brought the body in—"If he had been a tiger or a stag you would not let yourselves remain in doubt. Rip up the spawn of Eblis and see whose bullet is inside him."

But those exciting days had long since passed, and when promotion forced Sir George unwillingly to change the saddle for the pen, Gyan Singh followed him to Simla. He was his confidential clerk, for want of any better name, but his fortune was better than that of his superior, and led him still into all manner of mysterious, unclerky tasks which Delahey preferred to trust to one whom he had proved.

And such a task was now before him. Delahey told him to be seated, and handed him the form which he had written.

"Have this enciphered and sent off."

Gyan Singh read the flimsy slip.

"'Do not arrest. Am sending personal instructions.' But, sahib, is it wise to give him time to burrow deeper in the warrens of Benares?"

"It's just because I'm frightened of those warrens that I'm doing it. If you have dropped a needle in a haystack, the one way not to find it is by shaking out the hay. Once let him get an inkling that we're on his track and it may be months before we get him. He's only got to walk out of his door and double round a corner; he doesn't need to leave

the city. But he hasn't done it yet, unless they've frightened him already. The open way he travelled is enough to tell us that."

"If that is so," objected Gyan Singh, "and he is living in the city openly as Mr. Joshi, M.L.A., how is it they have failed to find him?"

"Think what a lot there is to do, after a scoop like that. Loot to be disposed of and turned to cash; hirelings to be paid off; hiding-places to be fixed up for those who think they could be recognized—all sorts of things. Look at the people he will have to interview—people who couldn't quite walk up to the front door of a member of the Assembly. I'm quite sure Joshi isn't frightened for himself. But if he organized this robbery, and of that I have very little doubt, then he will need a very private office for a time.

"If there was only his arrest to be considered, I should be inclined to wait till he resumes his public life. But I want to find that private office; it ought to tell us quite a lot of things. And that's where you come in. Go to Benares by the mail to-night. Find where he is without arousing his suspicion, take him and anyone you find with him, and clear up all the papers you can lay your hands on."

Gyan Singh got up and saluted.

"I'll send the wire at once; and then I'll go to make my preparations, if you don't want me here. There isn't too much time."



Not all his discipline could quite conceal his pleasure at this chance of active service. Seeing his beaming face, Sir George said wistfully:

“Good luck! I’d give a month’s pay to be going with you.”

. . . . .

That night a sadhu, clad in a single saffron garment like a dirty night-shirt, shuffled across the Agra platform and got into a third-class carriage on the Benares train. His hair was bound up in a ragged cloth—it could not have been called a turban—which matched his shirt in its soiled colour. His feet were shod with wooden shoes, half-sandal and half-clog—mere pieces of hard wood shaped to the sole, with carved pins sticking up round which the toes might grip. A rosary of wooden beads hung round his neck; his only luggage was a beggar’s bowl and a pair of iron tongs.

He was a very ordinary sadhu, and his conduct when he got into the train denoted his profession as plainly as his clothes. The ticket-babu went his round; his fellow-passengers produced from turbans or from pockets or from waistcloths the little slips of card of which the Sirkar so unreasonably—had they not paid their money?—demanded the retention. Not so the sadhu. He squatted cross-legged on the bench and faced the babu brazenly.

“I go to Kashi for religion’s sake. I need no ticket.”

Left to himself, the ticket-babu would have passed the sadhu by—he too was a Hindu, and no good ever came of harrying holy men. But a mercenary company, concerned for its third-class receipts, had dismissed their venial half-caste head-examiner, and had recruited in his place a pensioned soldier, of whom the babu's fear exceeded even his respect for the profession of religion.

"It is an order," he replied apologetically.

"Orders are not for such as me," the sadhu blustered. "I take no ticket, and I do not stir."

The babu hesitated. He knew his duty; but how could he be party to the forcible expulsion of one on whom the seal of God was set? Why need a sadhu pay his fare, when hundreds less deserving travelled free? The company was very near to losing five rupees, when Mr. Hopkins, head-examiner, came bustling down the platform.

The babu, seeing him, leapt at the opportunity to thrust the perilous responsibility on to the shoulders of a man who certainly was damned! already.

"Mr. Hopkins, sir," he shouted, "here is man not taking ticket."

"Ho! is there?" answered Mr. Hopkins, appearing swiftly at the door. "Now then, night-gown, out you go!"

The passengers looked scared. They could not understand his words, but his minatory gestures were international. The sadhu raised a clamour.

"What tyranny is this?" he shouted. "I go to worship God at holy Kashi. Shall this vile eater of cow's flesh, this unbeliever, lay his polluting hands upon me? Not all the waters of our Mother Ganges could cleanse me afterwards. Will you let holy men be so insulted?"

"Nar then, not so much of it," warned Mr. Hopkins, and advanced with menace.

But the passengers were muttering. "No good will come of it," a woman murmured. "Is the Sirkar so poor that it must take from one to whom all give?" a cultivator asked. A money-lender, fat enough to be a millionaire, came forward with a practical suggestion.

"It is meritorious to help God's pilgrims," he announced. "I will myself donate eight annas."

A teli's wife, thin-cheeked and poorly clad, responded to his lead, extracting from her close-wrapped garments a whole precious nickel anna. Little by little the occupants of the long coach produced their mites, until their offerings, added up, made up the sum required and left four annas over—a surplus which the money-lender claimed, and got, upon the ground that his had been the largest contribution.

The head-examiner wrote out a ticket and pocketed reluctantly the little handful of copper and small silver, chagrined that he had lost his chance to heave the sadhu out. The carriage settled down again, and of the cause of the disturbance no

one took any further heed. He was such a very ordinary sadhu.

But since he was a sadhu, he slept that night full-length upon the carriage bench, while humbler folk crouched cramped and huddled, to give him room; and next day broke his fast at humbler folk's expense. Nor had he any word of thanks for those who had at first financed his journey, and then denied themselves to make it comfortable. Politeness, not to speak of gratitude, was out of place; he had conferred a favour by acceptance.

In this wise Gyan Singh reached Benares, and went off from the station clop-clopping on his wooden clogs, and the city swallowed him. His impositions made him feel a little mean; a sadhu's mind was not so easily assumed as were a sadhu's manners. But he had tried out his disguise, and demonstrated its effectiveness. There was no fear that any watcher would report that C.I.D. Inspector Thakur Gyan Singh had travelled by the mail from Agra to Benares.

And he did not dare neglect the least precaution. This was not the first time that he had hunted criminals within that teeming sanctuary, and he knew by sad and personal experience how hard, once lost, they were to find again. Delahey's warning had been literally true. If Joshi once suspected he was wanted, he need only twist and turn a little in the maze to be completely lost.

. . . . .

As in a seaside town the houses crowd and struggle to get near to the sea-front, so holy Kashi, sparse and scattered in its northern parts towards the railway, grows more and more congested as the distance to the sacred river lessens. It has its "square mile," bounded by the river bank, a packed congeries of lofty houses, with temples great and small squeezed in between them. Save for the broad highroads which British pertinacity has driven through it, it is a city which has almost no wheeled traffic. Land is too precious to be wasted upon roads; the tortuous, sunless lanes which lose themselves among the towering buildings are six feet wide or less.

And the inhabitants those houses hold no man can classify or number. There are the palaces of rajas and of maharajas, set high above the ghats which line the river-front. The Bengalis of Calcutta have their own packed quarter. There are little colonies of widows, whose speech is Telegu or Tamil or Panjabi or Marathi, and whose Hindi barely suffices them for the daily needs of shopping. Tall lodging-houses teem with aged, lonely men and women, who have come to die in holiness. There are sinister, secretive houses, of which the doors seem always shut, into which no one ever goes and from which no one comes out, yet whose lighted windows prove inhabitants within. And the Dal-  
mandi, where the prostitutes reside, holds of itself in its squalid fastnesses secrets enough for any city.

This was the warren from which Joshi must be

ferreted by Thakur Gyan Singh and his assistants. They quartered it between them, and one by one they disappeared within it, going their separate and unobtrusive ways among the throng of its inhabitants. But every day, from sunrise until nine, one of the city's thousand sadhus sat begging on the steps of Dasaswamedh.

Four days he waited there, huddled against a friendly wall for shelter from the river winds which pierced his single garment, courting the winter sun as mounting he gained strength; while the devout poured past him down the steps which brought them to the sparkling river, and bathed, and went their way again.

Each of the city's ghats had its own watcher, but Gyan Singh had chosen for his post the one down which the largest traffic passed. If Joshi came to bathe—as he was almost sure to do—it would most probably be here. And a fixed post had this additional advantage, that his men knew where he could be found.

On the fifth morning a Sikh mechanic—for his grimy hands and grease-stained clothes proclaimed him to be such—edged through the crowd towards the sadhu, and paused to throw a coin. It rang upon the stones, a whole rupee.

“It is a vow,” he added, explaining his largesse. “To-day I give to all, for I have found what I had lost.”

He mingled with the crowd again, and passed on

down the steps. Five minutes later he returned, making towards the street. The sadhu rose, folded the cloth on which he sat, picked up his beggar's bowl, and followed him. The Sikh left the main street and dived into a narrow lane.

And so, for half a mile, the one behind the other, they turned and twisted through the alleys of the city. At last the Sikh, loitering through an empty lane, paused for the briefest moment before an open door which gave upon an inner court. The sadhu, passing in his turn, glanced carelessly inside, and saw what seemed to be a lodging-house. He hurried on after his leader.

At last, in a deserted street, the Sikh mechanic halted and waited for the sadhu to come up.

"The staircase on the left," he said; "the second floor. I did not dare to take him, for the place has many exits."

"You have done well. An hour, and we shall have them blocked."

They went their different ways. Within the hour the sadhu had returned, to find the lane and its environs no longer empty. Passing a side-alley which flanked the lodging-house, he saw a drover in trouble. His buffalo had been obstreperous, and the lane was littered with a load of cow-dung cakes which had been spilled. That bolt-hole had been blocked.

At the next corner was a little shop which sold religious odds and ends—brass images of the Hindu

pantheon, glass bottles for the transport of the sacred Ganges water, crude, shiny oleographs of gods and goddesses, many-headed, many-armed. Two rustics squatted down before it, whose wicker baskets, balanced at either end of bamboo poles for easier carrying, proclaimed them pilgrims haggling for souvenirs. Before the door at which the Sikh had paused a beggar sat exhibiting his sores, sores fabricated with such loathsome artistry that Gyan Singh himself was almost taken in.

Had he gone farther, he would have seen a genuine constable in genuine uniform guarding the farther exit—who would suspect a constable upon his beat of a detective mission? But he had seen enough to show him that the trap was set. He turned in at the open door and slouched across the courtyard.

The building stood four stories high, built round a small quadrangle. At the well in the middle a man was washing, clad in a single clinging rag. The water which he splashed from off him sprayed the filled vessels of two women, who tarried for a moment's chat before they set their dripping burdens on their heads. Narrow verandahs, one to each floor, ran round the crazy building, festooned with garments hung up there to dry. At doorways women squatted, grinding corn; men lounged about and smoked.

It was an ordinary lodging-house; these were its usual inhabitants. To them the sadhu paid no heed



—he did not even stay to beg from those he passed. He made straight for the dark and creaking staircase on his left.

He found a door which yielded, and went in. His luck was in; Joshi was sitting at a table. Roused by the noise, he turned to see who the intruder was, then rose in obvious annoyance. He had been educated out of all respect for sadhus.

“What are you doing here?” he angrily demanded. “Is there no end to the impudence of your kind?”

The sadhu answered him in English, the language of the law:

“You are my prisoner. Stand where you are.”

For a short moment Joshi stared at him, uncomprehending and incredulous; then backed a step towards the table.

“Stand where you are,” repeated Gyan Singh, and pulled aside his gown to show a pistol.

Joshi recovered from his start and laughed.

“Melodramatic! But there’s not a weapon in that drawer, as you’ll discover when you search it.”

The disguised policeman gave him scant attention.

“Put out your hands,” he ordered.

“Handcuffs!” exclaimed his prisoner, and his brows went up in mock surprise. “I didn’t know that politics could be so dangerous. And even so you’re wrong. I haven’t said a word for months which even the police could call seditious.”

“Yes, handcuffs,” Gyan Singh repeated, as he clicked them into place. “Handcuffs—for a dacoit!”

He did not warn him, for in India a statement made to the police is not allowed in evidence, warning or not. Not that he would have got admissions out of Joshi—he could not see the slightest start, the faintest change of colour.

“Dacoity, is it?” Joshi jeered. “You’ll find that even harder than sedition, unless the witnesses you’ve bought are really good.”

“No witnesses are bought. But Frampton Sahib lives.”

The terse announcement put a sudden term to Joshi’s bantering defiance; he stood there in stunned silence. He had been sure he was impregably secure. Now, on the instant, he had to face the certain prospect of conviction. At last he spoke, but not to exculpate himself nor to blaspheme the chance which ruined him.

“I think I’m glad,” he said; and there was limping sincerity in his tone.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE civil surgeon had been right. Hugh fell a victim to pneumonia, and there were anxious days before he passed the crisis—days doubly anxious for his uncle, who saw the biggest case that he had had for years hanging upon so tenuous a thread. At last he turned the corner, and upon that very day Joshi was lodged in Agra jail. Sir George's great anxieties—the disappearance of the malefactor and the death of the chief witness—were simultaneously removed; and left him, with a mind relieved, to shape the jig-saw pieces with which investigation daily furnished him into a complete, coherent case.

But though the case engrossed his mind to the exclusion of all else, Sir George was careful, at his daily visit to the hospital, to keep right off the subject of the crime. He had all the information that he wanted for the present, and after that first interview he feared the doctor with a layman's fear. He steered such little talk as was permitted into more cheerful channels, his trump card being Sylvia's demand to be supplied with daily bulletins about the patient. From this he argued

her resistance must be weakening, and prophesied an early understanding. But to his disappointment he could arouse no answering optimism in Hugh, for Sylvia's letter was a Joker which scored higher than his trump. Hugh knew already that she would be anxious; for she had in so many words confessed that she still loved him. It needed more than love, it seemed, to break the barrier down.

He mended slowly, as does one whose daily portion is despondency. And as he slowly overcame the state of utter weakness in which the patient's world is bounded by his bed, his mind reverted to his plan of going home and breaking with it all. He asked the doctor when he would be fit to travel, and received the answer he might have expected.

"Travell Lie there and get well first. Ask me again after a month."

Dissatisfied and restless, believing, as every patient will believe, that things were being kept from him, he tackled Delahey on the same subject and got a different answer, which he also ought to have foreseen.

"Travell! It will be time enough to think of that after the trial is finished. Why, you're my most important witness."

Hugh had not thought about the trial; he had not thought of anything beyond the swiftest possible escape from his immediate miseries. But now, resigned to what so plainly was inevitable, he roused

himself to ask about the case, and doing so, let loose upon his head the deluge of excited information which Sir George had kept pent up so many days.

"It's going splendidly; Gyan Singh's doing wonders. Joshi had got no papers at his lodgings; he was far too cute for that. But his arrest was made so unexpectedly that we had time to intercept a first-class haul of correspondence—letters which prove that the whole plan was his, from first to last.

"In fact, the proof's so strong that I've decided to get Joshi tried at once. It's not the usual thing—the courts prefer to wait until the gang is mopped up one by one and then to have one case against them all, which often lasts for months. But that's not my idea at all. Political dacoity is getting far too common, and when they get to looting trains I must have an example made, and quickly."

His tone was stern, even intolerant, for he was too old-fashioned to have any use for theorists who would by lenience wean the criminal from his ways. He was a stamper-out of crime, and no penologist; he could not hear the word with patience. His view of punishment bordered upon the patriarchal—to mete out to the criminal the measure he had meted out. His theory, so far as he had any theory, was to deprive the criminal of the opportunity of further crime, and by severe example to deter all would-be imitators.

But Hugh was cast in less severe a mould; nor could he altogether withhold his sympathy from Joshi, murderer in intent though he might be. The crime was horrible, but at least it was not sordid, for he regarded Joshi's disposition of his private fortune as sufficient guarantee that the proceeds of the rani's jewels had gone to help the Cause he had espoused. He knew the punishment would be severe; he recognized it ought to be severe. But he wished that fate had not selected him to be the instrument for the conviction of the man who had once been his friend.

He found that the preliminary part of his ordeal was made more easy for him than he could have hoped. For Delahey so hurried on his preparations that when proceedings started, Hugh was still in his bed, and in a case so clear a brief and almost formal statement, recorded at the hospital, was held to be sufficient. On that, with the subsidiary proof that Gyan Singh had managed to unearth, the magistrate committed Joshi to the sessions.

. . . . .

It had been settled, when Sir George left Simla on his tour, that Lady Delahey and Sylvia should stay on in the Hills until they could rejoin him on his ultimate return to Delhi. It was a plan which Lady Delahey approved, for five-and-twenty years of moving house had not resigned her to the breaking up of even transitory homes. Change

was a necessary evil, to be delayed as long as possible.)

And Sylvia, who was wont to have no small voice in the arrangements of the household, was on this occasion apathetically willing to fall in with any plans which might be made for her.

The day that followed Hugh's departure she was down to breakfast, and that very evening she was at a dance. Her memorandum book was crowded with engagements to which she and Hugh were bidden, and she grimly carried out the programme by herself. She would not let it be announced that her engagement had been broken; she shrank from the condolences which that entailed. But Simla knew, for ayahs talk and mistresses are not in every case ashamed to listen. And Simla, whispering in corners, professed itself amazed at Sylvia's heartlessness. Had they been able to follow her to her hotel, to see the party smile wiped off her face as she stepped into her rickshaw in the porch, to note the fierce relief with which on her return she scored off one more of the dying season's gaieties, the gossips might have been more charitable. Only her mother knew, and wondered when the strain would break her.

Then came the news that Hugh was battling with illness for his life, and Sylvia broke. By this time entertainments were getting mercifully few, and of those that still remained, she made a wholesale cancellation. Her pride might help her hide her

pain; it could not cloak the dread and the anxiety which tore at her. Once more she shut herself within her room, appearing at infrequent intervals, a wan and silent ghost, in the half-empty dining-room.

The news grew worse.

"Why not go down to him?" her mother urged her. "Surely you can forgive him now."

Forgive! Little her mother knew from whom was due forgiveness. And if she went to Hugh, and he got well, then she must do again what it had torn her heart to do. She could foresee how he would look upon her coming, how he would snatch at it as proof that she had put aside the scruples which had puzzled him so sorely, that she had gone back on her letter of renunciation, that she was prepared to listen to the words of reconciliation which she knew he longed to say. That would be unforgivable, for her answer must still be what it had been before. She dared not go.

But if he died, and she in Simlal That was the thought which kept her on the rack of indecision. And all the time her mind was picturing a hospital in the mofussil—the high-ceiled, whitewashed room, an inattentive, overworked Eurasian nurse, the loneliness and the neglect. A man in sickness ought to have a woman with him. She had no longer any right to be that woman.

The next day and the next brought better news, and Sylvia's immediate anxiety was by degrees



appeared. But the strain of those few days had taken too much out of her; reaction sapped her resolution. At last, though Hugh was mending rapidly, she found she could endure no longer. She made her mind up that she must go down. She must at least be near him. The daily difficulties which must come when he began to be about again she would not let herself consider. The remedy of flight, at least, was always open to her.

Arrangements were not difficult to make. If they went down to Delhi, as had originally been planned, they would be alone for the greater portion of the cold weather; for Delahey had fixed his headquarters at Agra until the trial was over. It was the natural thing that they should join him there, at his hotel.

And so there came a time when Hugh's sick-room was brightened by a daily bunch of flowers—sole token Sylvia would allow of her propinquity. They were poor things, as flowers; for all the flowers which flourished in the steamy heat of the monsoon were withering, the English annuals no more than peeping through the soil. But it was not as flowers that Hugh regarded them; to him, as Sylvia had feared, they were a token not of propinquity alone, but of hope.

Little by little his strength came back; he was allowed out of his bed, he was helped into his clothes, he was carried out into the compound of the hospital. He began to look forward, as to a day

near at hand, to the time when he would leave the hospital for good and seek out Sylvia, and force her by sheer tenderness no longer to resist the love which written word and daily action showed that she still bore him.

And the date of Joshi's trial drew nearer.

## CHAPTER XX

HALF measures are as little efficacious in love as in the less complicated of life's affairs; and Sylvia's attempt to salve a wounded spirit by mere reduction of the distance which divided her from Hugh was destined from the first to be a failure. Love disappointed of fruition is a fester no external remedy can cure; to win mere negative tranquillity of mind—and that, to Sylvia, seemed all that she could hope for—a woman must depend on those resources which through the years she has stored up within herself. But Sylvia had no such arsenal on which she could fall back. She was too young; life had for her commenced with love, and love was all her life.

Nor was there anything in the hackneyed round of feminine life in a mofussil station which could provide her with distraction. A ride before breakfast, a morning spent in desultory reading or in sewing, a sleep after tiffin, a game of tennis when the sun got low. And after that, the culmination of all boredom, two hours in the "hen-parlour" of the Club—alone, while Lady Delahey played bridge in an adjacent room, with women whom she

hardly knew and in whose conversation, confined to purely personal or local topics, she could take neither interest nor part. Young men would wander timorously in, and look at her, and go back to the bar. Her only refuge was the weekly pile of illustrated papers; and snaps of Lord Plantagenet or Mrs. Sollie Guggenheim, which doubtless were attractive to themselves and just a little to their friends, were not at all to Sylvia. Nor did she find more interest in the dancers and the actresses whose photographs filled the remaining pages of those monotonous periodicals. Their nudities, portrayed for the intriguing of male readers, made no appeal to their own sex.

At last, that never-ending final rubber finished, her mother would be free to take her home. Then a rushed change to evening clothes, dinner, and bed. And the next day the same monotonous round again.

She had been through it all before, and worse; for the last cold-weather, touring with her father, she had made acquaintance with the really tiny stations, where half a dozen English men and women are condemned to dine with one another, to drink with one another, to play games with one another, till each is sick of all the rest; where everybody knows by heart, yet everybody still repeats, the hoary scandals of two years ago; where the precedence of wives becomes a matter of high politics, and amusements languish because Mr.

Sharp plays bridge too well for his companions and Mrs. Featherhead too badly, and Captain Smiter, who reached, in a bad year, the semi-finals of the Indian championship, will not play cut-in station tennis for fear of ruining his game.

But last year youth and happiness and humour had been allies, proof against boredom or depression; now happiness had fled and taken humour with it, and youth, bereft of these, is an ally whose lightly held defences are a source of danger rather than of strength. Sylvia felt deadened and exasperated by turns; she wanted to escape before she gave way to hysteria, before she burst out into some outrageous speech—something which would so agitate those placid waters of smug littleness that they would not cease from rippling until the next hot-weather sucked their female element up to the Hills again.

Partial escape at last she found, taking the Vauxhall out whenever she could beg the use of it, scouring at reckless speed the radiating web of roads which led away from Agra. Seated behind its gleaming bonnet, her eyes alert for cumbrous bullock-cart or impish boy or slow-brained rustic, her mind at stretch to forecast in advance the movements of the goats and cattle which browsed beside the road, she found she had no time for wretchedness or brooding. When she swept home again, with glowing cheeks and hair dishevelled, her headlights making ghostly the bewildered owls which fluttered in their beam, or lighting like twin lamps the eyes

of startled foxes, unhappiness was for the time forgotten, as though blown from her by the wind of her own speed.

But though the goddess Speed could for the moment lighten Sylvia's burden, the driver's case was otherwise. It almost seemed as if black care was blown from her to perch upon his shoulders. For once the streets of Agra had been left behind, and Sylvia's foot began to press in earnest on the accelerator pedal, he clung rocking to his seat and thought about his family.

Not that he was a man to whom the slogan "Safety First" had any kind of meaning. When he was at the wheel, he had no hesitation in swinging, without any warning signal, across the main stream of the city traffic; he relied implicitly upon the sanity, the quickness and cool-headedness of all who were unfortunate enough to share the road with him. He estimated his electric horn more highly than his brakes; his theory was—and on that theory he confidently acted—that if he hooted long enough and loud enough a way would be miraculously cleared for him. But his nerve deserted him when Sylvia, driving at forty miles an hour, experimented with manœuvres which he would have risked at twenty, and which would have been nearly safe at ten.

At first Bulaqi suffered silently. His pay was good, and God was merciful. At length he handed in his resignation. He did not mind the ordinary

risks of his profession—and they were not few, for there were many like himself upon the roads. But Sylvia's driving he regarded as no ordinary risk; it was a peril which his terms of service did not cover. Luckily for her, his vanity made him conceal his reason.

"I cannot do the work," was all he told Sir George. "You need me all the morning, and then the miss-sahib is calling for me before my time for roti khana, my midday meal, is up. And sometimes there are dinners, and I am not free till midnight."

His master's offers of bakshish for extra work the man reluctantly refused. But Sylvia, told of the trouble and anxious lest an interdict be put upon her one remaining pleasure, suggested a solution.

"I really do not want him," she assured her father. "Give him his afternoons, and I will take the car out by myself."

"But, Sylvia," protested Lady Delahey, "it isn't safe. Suppose you had a breakdown?"

"Touch wood!" retorted Sylvia. "And if I did I'd put things right as quickly as Bulaqi."

Her knowledge of mechanics hardly justified her confidence, for her courage with a spanner was more conspicuous than her skill. Nevertheless, she gained her point, for even Delahey, impatient though he was with Sylvia's "moods," felt that just now she must be humoured; and she could twist her mother round her finger any time she

liked. The drives continued, and Sylvia, alone, went faster and to greater distances than she had ever ventured with Bulaqi.

. . . . .

Through Agra runs the road which leads to the Deccan, in former times the only link between the seaport of Bombay and Northern India. Once it was populous with caravans of travellers, banded against the fear of Thugs and highway robbers, with strings of laden camels and with cumbrous trains of groaning carts. The trotting bullock carriages of raja and nawab made jingling music on it. John Company's apprentices, jolting along in palanquins, saw first from it the country which would bring them early wealth or earlier death. From time to time marauding armies, greedy for the plunder of the cities of the North, swept hungrily along its length and blotted out its peaceful traffic.

But now its glory is departed; the railway is the highway to Bombay. And robbed of its through traffic, it is robbed of all. Unlike the northern highways, it does not pass through fertile plains and prosperous villages. It leads, deserted, to the rocky wilderness of Central India.

This was the road which Sylvia most frequently selected for her solitary drives. Its very emptiness held out attractions to a speed-lover. Its loneliness appealed to her—the barren plains, all torn and scoured by monsoon torrents, the little stony hills



to which she came if she went far enough. It seemed to fit in with her mood. And best of all, the road led to Bombay. Imagination, fleeter than the flying car, would take her on and on until at last she topped the Ghauts and looked down on the sea and saw the ships—the ships which could carry her so quickly from this abominable country and the people whom she feared and hated. It had her in its spell, this lonely road. Each afternoon she travelled farther than the day before, and every milestone passed was one more stage into the desert.

Where Sylvia drove seemed no one's business but her own; at all events she did not often bother to give her parents an account of where she went. Yet there was somebody who found an interest in her movements. It happened more than once, as she came down the avenue which led from the hotel, that a young Indian, lounging at the corner, would dive into an alley-way and bring therefrom a motor-bicycle, on which he followed her. She never knew about it, for her pursuer was discreet, and the dust which choked his eyes and mouth and powdered his dark face made an impenetrable screen between them.

But if this young man was a spy—though why a man should waste his time on Sylvia's innocent excursions seemed hard to understand—he was a spy whose curiosity was limited. He never followed her beyond the confines of the city. As soon as she had swung the car into the Deccan road, and thus

made clear the route that she was taking, he stopped and waited till the dust had settled, and went back slowly to the lair which hid him.

There came a day, however, on which he did not so return. Instead, when he had seen her well on to the Deccan road, he made off quickly for the nearest post office, and thence dispatched an express telegram.

*Left Agra two-thirty.*

He went off on his bicycle, and Agra saw no more of him. His task was done, and the hand of Delahey was long. He spent that night close-hidden in the warren which lies behind the Chandni Chauk in Delhi.

And in a hamlet fifty miles away men brought a shining limousine out of the miry cowshed where it had been incongruously housed, and drove off by the rutted lanes towards the Deccan road.

. . . . .

In the hotel the gong for dressing went at half past seven; and Sylvia had not yet returned. Eight struck, the gong for dinner sounded; but still no Vauxhall humming in the porch. They waited till a quarter past, and then went in to dinner, her mother vaguely nervous, her father jocular at Sylvia's expense.

"A sooty plug or something. She'll start by cleaning out the carburettor, and then she'll scratch

her head and wonder if a valve's stuck up. When she's messed them about she'll stand and stare at the magneto, and wonder if she dare attack it with a spanner. And in the end she'll come home on three cylinders. She'll be back by nine—unless she does decide to tackle the magneto."

But nine arrived without a sign of her. Sir George did not pursue his jokes about magnetos; instead, he telephoned to the police. But no one knew the road which she had taken, and the choice of routes was large. They got no news of her that night, although a squad of hired and borrowed cars was hastily collected and sent to scour the roads. It was not till the morning that the first alarming clue was found—by Delahey himself.

Some forty miles along the Deccan road there is a bridge, built high above the water to be safe in times of flood, to gain the height of which the road curves up a steep embankment. On the unmetalled margin of this ramp were wheel-marks, deeply scored in the soft earth. Wheel-marks which ran right-angled to the road. Delahey saw them as he passed, and pulled his car up with a jerk. Among the bushes at the base of this declivity the Vauxhall lay up-ended, shattered and telescoped into a shapeless mass of metal.

He saw a little leather hat on the embankment, and climbed down, shuddering, to the ruined car. On hands and knees he peered beneath it, dizzy and sick with the anticipation of what he would

find there. He rose, and went round to the other side and looked again. Nothing, except a mess of shattered glass and cushions and spilled tools. He got up, thanking God.

But to relief bewilderment succeeded. If Sylvia had escaped, where could she be? The country round was desolate and barren; the nearest village was five miles or more away. In any case, how could she get there? It was not possible she could have escaped injury, in such a comprehensive smash. And if she had been picked up by a passing car—though passing cars were rare—they must have brought her in to Agra.

A loitering goat-herd left his flock and crossed the bridge to stare. But he knew nothing. The car was there at daybreak, and he had not seen a miss-sahib. He was inclined to be annoyed, for that was his best bit of pasture, and he dared not go there, for fear he was accused of meddling with the sahib's motor-carriage.

And that was all that then or afterwards they could discover. Police were sent to comb the villages, the jungles and ravines were beaten out. All likely and unlikely witnesses were questioned, but no one owned to knowing anything about her. Sylvia had disappeared.

## CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Sylvia turned into the Deccan road and left the scout behind her she opened out until the car was thrumming up into the fifties, and a mile-long cloud of dust swirled up behind her wheels, to hang opaquely in the stagnant air. She slowed down once or twice for villages, death-traps where chubby, naked babies came tumbling out of doorways, where boys in mischief or in fright chased geese and calves and goats across her path, and pariah dogs slept in the dust wherever they could get the sun. Traffic was no great obstacle; what bullock-carts and ekkas were upon the road fled of their own accord to its extremest margin, their occupants all hastily employed in shrouding mouth and nose and eyes against the grey tornado which pursued her.

At length she reached the bridge, and slightly checked her speed to take the curve. Breasting the rise, she suddenly jammed on the brakes in earnest. Ahead a bullock-cart was lumbering towards her. And as he saw the car—as though the dust had not announced its coming when it was a mile or two away—the nodding driver suddenly sat up and

beat his oxen to a shambling run, twisting their tails and prodding them to get them past the narrow bridge.

He seemed to overdo the tail-twisting; perhaps in his excitement he twisted in the wrong direction. At any rate, the oxen suddenly put down their heads and tried to turn. The cart lurched sideways and one bullock fell. The roadway was completely blocked.

The car came shuddering to a standstill not ten feet from this suddenly created obstacle, and Sylvia, blinded by anger and excitement to the fact that the mishap was more her fault than anybody else's, stood up behind her wheel and shouted at the driver:

"Get that cart back at once and off the bridge, you bumpkin! What do you mean by coming on when you had seen my car?"

The driver did not answer; a village yokel could hardly be expected to understand "memsahib's Hindustani." He clambered slowly down and went to set the damage right, followed by two companions who were with him in the cart. They gathered in a knot, staring slow-witted at the fallen bullock. Then, suddenly, they turned with an agility amazing in three country bumpkins and made for Sylvia and the car.

Their conduct surprised Sylvia, but alarmed her not at all—the thought that docile, timid, brainless villagers intended to molest an English-

woman could not have been expected to find a place in her imagination. Yet in an instant the unthinkable had happened; rude hands were clutching her, and brawny arms were dragging her into the road. Her anger turned to panic at the touch of them. Her lips were parted in a scream.

“Be quiet!”

Her captor emphasized his order with a back-handed blow across her mouth, a blow which broke her lips against her teeth and sent a scarlet trickle running down her chin. But Sylvia hardly felt the pain for terrified amazement. The man was speaking English.

A rag was thrust into her mouth, a rag which matched in its soiled greyness the cotton clothing of the men who held her. They bundled her across the bridge and down the slope the other side, towards a limousine which stood at the road-edge. Two men sprang forward from the car to take her over, clad in the bright silk turbans and the buttoned-up, long-skirted coats of Indian gentility. They bound her wrists in front of her, then slipped over her head a long white bourkha, of which the very eye-slits were sewn up. Its shapeless folds cloaked head and face and reached down to the ground all round her, transforming her to all seeming into a purdah woman. Yet, to be sure, they wrenched her English shoes off and thrust her feet into soft, heelless Turkish slippers.

They pushed and dragged her into the closed

car and drew the blinds. One of the pair climbed in beside her; the other took the wheel. The starter snarled, the engine woke to purring life. The gears clicked home and the great car slid off. Five minutes had not passed since Sylvia reached the bridge.

The bumpkins turned and strolled back to the Vauxhall, of which the engine was still running. One of them clambered in and took the driver's seat—a most sophisticated bumpkin this. He turned and backed the car upon the narrow road, until the bonnet pointed to the edge. A heave, and she was started on her journey down the bank, a lurching, leaping journey, ending in a splintering crash. The bumpkins looked down at her spinning wheels and went back to their bullock-cart.

. . . . .

Feeling the car in motion, Sylvia struggled up in one last, hopeless effort to get free. She wrenched and tore at the cord which bound her wrists, until it bit into the chafed, raw flesh like fire. Blinded by the bourkha, half-suffocated by the filthy gag, she fumbled for the door, prepared, if she could get there, to hurl herself upon the road. The man beside her sat quietly watching, until, thrown off her balance by the rocking of the car, she stumbled up against him. He laughed, and dragged her down and threw her roughly back upon the seat.

“If you're not sensible,” he warned her, “I've got another rope to tie your ankles.”



And this time Sylvia submitted limply, cowed by his tone of cool authority as much as by her obvious helplessness. She lay back in her seat, her mind numbed by uncertainty and terror. It was some time before it struck her that she ought to make an effort to find out where she was being taken. Of sight she was deprived, but the sway of her body told her when the car swung round a corner, its movement on its springs betrayed at least the nature of the road. She could hear, too, when they passed through villages and towns, and estimate to some extent the volume of the traffic.

But she soon realized she was too late. She did not even know which way the car was heading; whether, while she was vainly struggling, it had turned round. After what seemed an hour or two they entered a big town, which might be Agra. At any rate she could not think of any town so big which lay within two hours' journey south. If she could wriggle free one little minute, if she could struggle to the window while the car passed slowly through those busy streets! The Indian laid his hand upon her shoulder, as though he guessed her thoughts.

"You can't do anything," he said.

And after Agra, if it really had been Agra, Sylvia gave up attempting to identify their route. She only knew that they were travelling at speed for very many hours. Twice the car stopped in lonely places, apparently to fill with petrol from the

cans beside the driver. Once they passed through a teeming city. For all she knew it might be Cawnpore to the east, or Delhi to the west.

She fell at last into a stupor. How long it lasted she had no idea; she only knew, by the light which filtered through the cloth before her face, that night was over. The car was slowing down and someone at her side was speaking to her.

"We have arrived. You may walk out on your feet, if you prefer. If not, it is all one; you will be carried."

The engine drummed more loudly as the car passed through an arch. It stopped, and Sylvia was hustled out, a gripping hand at either elbow, through a low door and up a flight of stairs into a room. A hand raised up the bourkha to expose her wrists, a knife cut through the cord which bound them. The door slammed and a bolt shot home.

The footsteps of her captors died away along the corridor, and Sylvia was alone. Her wrists were raw, her arms were numb, her legs so cramped that she stood tottering. Slowly and painfully, for every movement of her hands was torment, she stripped away the bourkha which enveloped her and saw her prison.

The room which her recovered vision showed her was purely Indian in its architecture—arched and low-ceiled and lighted insufficiently. Along one side there ran a broad divan of cushions, clearly

intended to be squatted on, not sat upon. The wide, low bed, supported on four scarlet lacquered legs, was native both in shape and in upholstery. A cut-glass chandelier depended from the ceiling, its rainbow facets endlessly reflected in gilded mirrors on the walls. The windows were closed in with screens of fretted stone, and where the sun came in it fell in patterned arabesques upon the rug-strewn marble of the floor. Sylvia had seen such rooms before, when with her mother she had called on Indian ladies who kept purdah. She was enclosed in the zenana of a rich man's house.

There were some signs of ludicrous endeavour to make the chamber suitable for occupation by an English lady. Two bentwood chairs and a camp table were planted down incongruously among the Oriental furnishings. A curtained arch gave on a little alcove, in which were set the bare necessities of a lady's toilet. Little, unnatural touches, which turned what might have been a guest-chamber into a prison-cell.

But these were details Sylvia noticed afterwards—these, and a little pile of quaintly chosen garments, which proved that her arrival without luggage had been foreseen and preparation made. It was the windows which commanded her attention first of all.

Escape by them was obviously impossible; the interstices in the stone lattice were so small that she could barely get her hand through, and in any

case the room was high above the ground. A view was what she hoped for; a glimpse of something which might show her roughly where she was. But when she knelt and peered she found her view annoyingly restricted. Immediately below her she could see a formal garden, with walks and beds and lawns, shut closely in by mango trees too thick to be seen through, too high to be seen over. What lay on either side of it she could not tell; the thickness of the screens cut off her vision.

A building, if she could have seen one, might from its architecture have given her some vague idea of the locality, but there was not so much as a gardener's hut in sight. Even the flowers and shrubs, which might possibly have helped her, seemed non-committal—the common sorts which grow all over India. The sun, declining, told her that since her capture one whole night and one whole day had passed. How far might she have travelled in that time? Three hundred miles? Four hundred? Five hundred, possibly—the car had never stopped for long. And east or west, or north or south? She did not know within a thousand miles where she might be.

And why had she been brought there? That was a line of speculation yet more productive of alarm. Why should she have been snatched half across India and thrust a captive into a zenana, unless for one dread purpose? Remembered tragedy set her strained nerves a-quiver, till she was wrenching

wildly at that unyielding lattice and battering unavailingly upon the bolted door.

Exhausted, she fought down her panic. Beyond the barest of civilities, she knew no Indians. It was not possible, she would not let herself believe it possible, that mere chance lust had prompted all this careful planning, the taking of such fearful risks.

So she at last convinced her reason. But when the sun set and the room grew dim, when footsteps sounded in the passage and a hand outside drew down the bolt, reason could not control her leaping heart or brace her trembling knees.

## CHAPTER XXII

THE door swung open and a woman entered, who set upon the table flat brass trays of highly-coloured, strong-spiced foods. She brought no knives nor forks nor spoons. The sticky, greasy food was purely native, meant to be eaten, native-fashion, with fingers and a fragment of chupati; and so, if she would eat at all, Sylvia would have to eat it.

But famished though she was, Sylvia as yet paid no attention to her supper; she had no eyes for anything except the woman who had brought it. The lamps which she was lighting and placing in their niches showed her to be a servant—a wizened grey-haired woman, clad in clean white, her mien as humble and respectful as that of Sylvia's own devoted Rajjia. So far, at any rate, there was no ground for panic, and Sylvia, her fears appeased, burst into eager questioning.

“Who are you? Where am I? Why am I kept here?”

The woman salaamed humbly, her palms against her forehead.

“I am Phulbasa, and your honour's servant,”

she answered smoothly. "But of the rest my master does not order me to speak."

"Who is your master?"

"That too I may not tell you. My orders are to serve you and to fetch what you require. To answer questions is forbidden."

But Sylvia was not accustomed to be crossed by native servants. She pressed her questions angrily. Phulbasa waited meekly, with her eyes upon the floor. At last, remembering her helplessness, she made belated efforts at conciliation. Phulbasa heard her out, without a change of posture, without an answering word. And then, when Sylvia had done, she spoke, as humble and respectful as before:

"Shall I make up the bed?"

It was an every-day, prosaic question, but the implication underlying it, that Sylvia was to spend the night, and many other nights perhaps, in her captivity, was one to which she was not yet resigned.

"Bring me your master," she demanded, "if you are not allowed to speak."

But that too failed.

"To-night my master does not choose to come," Phulbasa said.

"Then go!" stormed Sylvia incoherently. "I shall not sleep here. There is no need to make the bed."

Phulbasa salaamed again, and turned towards the door.

"It is as your honour orders," she said meekly, and retired.

A humble, unassuming servant, doing, as she must do, what she was bid. But with a hint of conscious power behind her humbleness. And Sylvia had seen her eager, curious eyes examine her from head to foot, had felt them line by line and curve by curve appraise the beauty of her body. Her fears came back again; she rushed across the room and grabbed the door before it closed.

The door slammed back, wrenched from Phulbasa's feeble hand, and Sylvia stepped out into the corridor. Her liberty was not for long, for her unknown captor, as experience might by now have told her, did not leave anything at all to chance. A man's voice, more amused than stern, said, "No, huzur"; a man's arms held her fast and roughly thrust her back into the room. Escape could not be won so simply.

So Sylvia had at last to recognize her helplessness, to creep that night into the bed which she had vowed she would not occupy, to suffer without protest the morning ministrations of Phulbasa. Her outburst made no difference in her treatment; her elderly handmaiden was still as humble and as deferential as she had been at first, and still as uncommunicative. But now, whenever the door was opened, a man stood full in view, to guard it.

And so she lived a week, perhaps—she could not count with certainty the dull procession of the



days. And still she had no inkling where she was and why she had been brought there. Upon the score of food, once she had overcome the repugnance of her English stomach to the pungent flavours of an Indian diet, she had no complaints to make. She asked for books, and she had got them—at first an ancient, worm-eaten selection, then a brand-new consignment of the latest novels, which had apparently been purchased for her special use. Such little personal wants as she might name were satisfied.

And as the days passed by her first anxiety became less keen. She did not trust Phulbasa, for all her meekness; there was about her something which she recognized instinctively as evil. Nor could she hit upon a plausible reason for her incarceration; the only reason she could guess at became daily more improbable. If she had been abducted as the victim of man's lust, that man must before now have come to take his prize.

. . . . .

One thing she lacked, for which she daily clamoured. It may have been because the alcove which served for an impromptu bathroom was fitted up with neither tap nor drain, and because the carrying in and carrying out of water would have brought servants other than Phulbasa into contact with her—the fact remained, she could not get a bath. Hot as the weather was becoming (and the

short cold season was very near its end) she had nothing better than a hand-basin to wash in. And day by day the answer to her protests was the one which she had learnt to recognize as final—"There is no order."

And then one day, when she was lying half-undressed upon her bed, trying in vain to sleep away the stuffy heat of afternoon, Phulbasa came to her with the longed-for permission.

"Put your clothes on and come with me," she said. "The bath has been made ready."

Upon the instant Sylvia was up and flinging on her clothes. Not a bath only, but a change of scene—this was a red-letter day in her captivity. And as she dressed she laughed at the impressive tones of the announcement. Phulbasa spoke as though a bath were some mysterious rite.

Then out into the corridor, from which the guard for once was absent, and through a spangled curtain into a glittering room, a place of arches and of alcoves, its walls and ceiling thickly studded with tiny mirrors set in the cement. The windows were mere slits, through which the daylight feebly struggled. But a great brass lamp hung from the central dome, its light a thousand times reflected from the gleaming walls. Below the lamp, sunk to the level of the marble floor, a pool of clear, cool water shimmered.

But Sylvia's eyes were on the curtains which concealed yet other exits.

"Behind those curtains are locked doors," Phulbasa warned her. "And this door, too, I lock behind me. See."

She held the key out, and the curtain dropped behind her. Sylvia kicked off her shoes and slipped out of her dress; then paused, one stocking half peeled off. She wanted a bath, wanted it badly, but this imperial bathroom made her nervous. Though she could not get out by any of those curtained doors, how did she know that no one would come in? The room was the zenana bathroom of a palace; she had seen many such in the show palaces at Agra and elsewhere. And strange things happened, she had heard, where palace ladies took their baths. The guides had told her stories of one tiny piece of glass which was not silvered, through which the lord of the harem could gloat upon the beauty of his brides.

But that was nonsense. She was much too hot and sticky to resist the invitation of that gleaming water. She laughed away her apprehensions as she shed her garments and joyfully plunged into it.

At last she looked round for a towel, but could not find one. Save for the pile of her own shed garments, the place was bare. Was it the custom for zenana ladies to put their clothes on over their wet skin? And then a key turned in a lock, and Sylvia with a gasp submerged herself.

Which door? It *must* be Phulbasa, back with the towel she had forgotten. It was Phulbasa, but she

had not brought a towel. And when she went to fetch the towel, she took the little pile of garments with her.

Astounded, Sylvia watched her go, too astonished to protest before the door had closed behind her. What should she do? The woman must be mad; there could not be another explanation. But mad or not, Phulbasa quickly pattered back again; and Sylvia, enraged, demanded from her bath:

“What have you done with all my clothes? Bring them back here at once.”

Phulbasa the respectful shook her head, and held out with the towel the tiniest bunch of flimsy, coloured stuffs.

“These are for you to wear. Your own are dirty, and they must be washed. They will be back to-morrow—if by to-morrow you still want them.”

“But there are others in my room,” Sylvia remonstrated, ignoring the insinuation, which she could not understand. “Bring them to me at once.”

Phulbasa squatted down upon the floor.

“There is no order,” she replied, with brief finality. “Nor are there any clothes left in the miss-sahib's room.”

Sylvia lay in the bath perplexed and frightened. An Indian prison, Indian food, an Indian bath. Now Indian clothes, so scanty that a dancing-girl would blush to wear them. What did it mean?

But whatever it might mean, she could remain

no longer in the bath; the coldness of the water, which had at first seemed so refreshing, was slowly numbing her.

"Leave me alone," she ordered, "till I am dried and dressed."

Phulbasa, rising to her feet, held out the towel unfolded.

"I will stay here and help the miss-sahib," she announced. "The clothes are strange to her."

Protests were vain; the woman stood unmoving, until Sylvia got up and stepped out of the water. And as she stood unclothed before those cruel old eyes, she felt as years ago a little girl of twelve had felt before the kindly eyes of Rajjia. They were appraising her, those eyes; the mind behind was thinking thoughts indecent and abominable.

But having donned the clothes provided for her, Sylvia felt something worse than naked. A pair of women's trousers, so thin they showed the shimmer of her thighs; a bodice without sleeves or shoulders, so short it left three inches of her white waist bare; a pair of gold-brocaded Indian slippers. And that was all.

"Thou art a very moon for beauty," Phulbasa murmured in her ear.

And Sylvia, realizing, hid her face against the wall and sobbed.

## CHAPTER XXIII

THAT evening Sylvia, brought back to her accustomed prison, crouched shuddering in a corner in the dark. The lamps had not been lighted; only one coloured lantern hanging from the roof shed a dim light upon the bed. And the old woman, going out, had whispered:

“A maiden’s shyness is as salt to the desires of men; but take heed lest the dish be over-salted.”

The coarseness of the saw, couched in the Cytherean idiom of purdah women, eluded Sylvia; its general purport she could not mistake. It was so pitifully plain—the bathing of her body, the scant, suggestive garments, the sly mysteriousness and bawdy glances of that horrible old woman. Her ravisher was coming to that darkened room; at any moment now his footsteps might be sounding in the passage. Ah! Cruel God, to give to girls a comely body.

A clock struck, and she counted out the strokes. No more than eight? And Phulbasa had only gone at seven. What hours and hours of misery she had spent, that sixty minutes. Almost she had begun to hope, he seemed so long in coming. She almost

wished that he *would* come; she could not bear the torture of this hopeless, breathless waiting.

But when at last a man's foot trod the passage, she shivered back into her corner, muttering:

"Not yet! Not yet! Give me till night. He should not come till night."

The door swung open and a man stood in it. He clapped his hands. Phulbasa came.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Why are the lamps not lit?"

Phulbasa, cringing, spoke with awed humility.

"But, Maharaj, I thought . . ."

"Light them," he ordered curtly, "I gave no order that she should be kept in darkness." Then, as the lighted taper showed him Sylvia: "Come out of your corner, Miss Delahey, I shall not eat you."

His words were English, and their tone betrayed amusement and contempt at Sylvia's terror-stricken posture. But to Sylvia the slighting, scornful words came as a message of reprieve. This man, whatever might have brought him, could hardly be a lecher creeping in to rob her of her honour. She rose, and clutched half-fainting at the wall, so great was the revulsion from her terror.

Then the oil lamps burned up, and in their waxing light the man stared at his captive in amazement.

"What does this mean?" he asked Phulbasa harshly. "Why is she dressed like this?"

Phulbasa, garrulously nervous, began an explanation.

"The Presence told me he would visit her to-night. I have but made her as my lord would like to find her."

"I said that I would visit her. But did I give you any other order?"

"No other order," she admitted. "What need is there of orders, when the Presence pays a visit to a maiden in his house?"

"Go, get a wrap to cover her," the man said shortly. "And don't do more than you are told in future."

Phulbasa lingered, her harem instincts urging her to make one final bid, to try to win the favour of the harem's lord by this fair offering of human flesh.

"And how was I to know?" she grumbled. "What would not have been done to me, hadst thou been pleased to look on her with favour and she not ready for thy couch? And of a truth she is well worthy of my lord. Her face is comely and her skin is satin. She was a very lotus-lily as she came rosy from her bath. Her limbs are as the silver poplar. Her . . ."

"Begone! and do my bidding."

The master's voice cut short before its worst embarrassments Phulbasa's catalogue of Sylvia's charms. Then suddenly he turned, and vented upon Sylvia the indignation which Phulbasa merited.



"Now I can see why you were frightened. Yet by your very terror you insult me. Are you so vain, have you such vast assurance in your beauty as to think that every man is covetous of you? Do you suppose an Indian needs, or wants, to go to England for his women? Dare you compare yourself with India's women, for modesty, for chastity, even for what is less than these, for beauty?"

"What says the Englishman?" the taunting voice went on. "The Indian does not let us meet his women, so he shall not meet ours.' 'We will not let our wives and daughters be attended by an Indian physician.' 'It is not good for our prestige that women should wear here the clothes they wear in London.' And why? Because he thinks, or he affects to think, that brown men look with lust upon white women. White women! An Indian gentleman would scorn to have one for his mistress."

Phulbasa came back with the wrap.

"Put on that cloak. Cover your body up. Don't stand before me like a harlot."

Sylvia, still dazed and half-hysterical, obeyed him. Her ignorance had mercifully saved her from full understanding of Phulbasa's rapid Hindustani; she had not any such protection from her captor's more degrading outburst. His insults made her gasp; his coarseness sent the hot blood flaming to her cheeks. And yet her mind was bidding her rejoice. Each unfair sneer, each undeserved insinuation, was a fresh messenger to tell her she was safe.

And then, with reassurance, her curiosity returned. Who was this man? Why, since he spurned her, did he hold her captive? She had a feeling she had heard that sneering voice before, not harsh, as now, with anger, but modulated to the tones of polite speech.

She looked at him, but his appearance did not help. He was a tall, spare man, dressed all in simple white, as is the wont of Indian gentlemen in their homes. She could not see his face, for his pagri was bound low upon his forehead, and the gold-embroidered end of it was drawn across in front, so as to mask his nose and mouth and chin. Only his eyes she saw, and they as well recalled dim memories she could not place. Cold eyes; cruel eyes. Somewhere or other they had looked at her and mocked her.

But now she did not mind their mocking; her courage had come back. It hardly troubled her that she was in his power, since he had shown her so convincingly he would not use his power in the one way she dreaded. In fact, the thing which vexed her most was the annoying trifle of her dress. She must be calm, collected, for the tussle which she felt was coming. And how could any woman be completely mistress of herself, wrapped in a hideous, shapeless robe, with those disgusting garments underneath? Making the best of things, she pulled the robe more closely round her and sat down.

"If you have done insulting me," she said, "I think it's time that you explained your conduct."

"You go too fast," he answered. "Here you are not the pampered daughter of the great policeman. Neither am I an Indian of the breed you know—fawning, salaaming, asking your pleasure and then humbly doing it. Do you not realize how tight my hold is on you? The explanation you will have is what I choose to give, and when I care to give it."

"Brave words!" retorted Sylvia. "But what will happen when my father finds me? What about explanations then?"

"Your father will not find you"—he spoke with certainty and confidence. "No one knows where you are—you do not know yourself. Not he nor his police can help you, not all the troops in your cantonments. You have just disappeared. If I had chosen what you feared, you would have stayed with me till I was wearied of you. If at the end I ordered you to be thrown down a well—what then? You disappear for ever."

The calm assurance of his tone shook Sylvia's new-found courage. What was to be the end of this mysterious captivity, if it were true her father could not find her? A week had passed, and India, she knew, must have been scoured—in vain. It was a land in which no horror was too dreadful for belief. Still, she must put a bold face on it. "Don't let a horse know that you're frightened of it," was

a good motto. It ought to be as true with men as horses.

"And who are you to wield such powers?" she asked.

The stranger's hand went to his face, as though he would assure himself his features were concealed.

"Your jailer," he retorted.

"But that is childish. I shall find out in time," she threatened. "And when I do . . ."

"Now you are talking foolishly, Miss Delahey. Not only will you not find out; you must not even try. That would be dangerous for you. . . ."

"But let us come to business," he continued. "That explanation you're so anxious for may put a different aspect on the case. And here it is. I hold you here because Janardhan Joshi, whom you know, has been arrested by your father and is under trial for murder."

Joshi again! Their paths seemed bound to cross each other. Of one upheaval in her life he had already been the innocent occasion—sober reflection had long since acquitted him of worse than that. And were those episodes of which she was ashamed the real reason for this outrage, with a new complication super-added? That would at all events explain the vileness of her captor's insults. Vileness for vileness, for her own conduct had been vile.

"So this is his revenge," she thought aloud.

"Nothing so high-flown as revenge," the unknown took her up; "but something far more practical.

You will sit down and write a letter to your father. You may tell him, if you wish to, how you came here—he is quite welcome to such clues as he can gather from that story. In fact, I put no bar at all on what you tell him of yourself. But what you must tell him is this: he will not get you back till Joshi is set free. Write as you like, but for your own sake convince him. For that, believe me, is the truth. You are a hostage for as long as Joshi stops in prison.”

So now she had it. This was the long-awaited explanation; so simple, and yet so incredible it was not possible that any girl so circumstanced could hit on it. Such things might happen in the rough, rude days before the English had established their prestige, but surely not in nineteen twenty-eight. Her captor had been prudent in postponing his disclosure. But for the concrete fact of one unending week's incarceration, she would have laughed at him.

How should she answer him?—supposing what he said was true. There were so many things to think of. Joshi was a mere common thief and murderer—worse, he had almost murdered Hugh. It went against the grain that he should go scot-free because of her. And what about her father, that grim hunter down of crime? She knew what it would cost him to let a bird of Joshi's feather go. And then she hit upon a flaw in this fantastic scheme.

“Can a man be released when once the law

has got him? I think it is beyond my father's power."

But that too had been thought of.

"You under-estimate your own importance," the unknown replied. "The Government would quash the case to save your father's daughter. And if they should refuse"—he shrugged—"your father knows of many ways in which a prosecution can be spoiled. A little meddling with the evidence, a wrong identification. That sort of thing is happening every day."

"But if you think my father does 'that sort of thing' you're quite mistaken," burst out Sylvia; and made her mind up on the impulse that she would not write. It must be bluff; no one would dare to do what this man threatened.

He almost seemed to read her thoughts.

"Don't make your mind up hastily," he warned her. "I can do everything that I have told you; and more, if need be. This is not England; here your English laws have not yet robbed the strong of all his power. Many a man has died—they call it cholera—when it became expedient that he should die. Many a woman—I have already hinted at it—has fallen down a well."

But Sylvia refused to find these grisly threats disquieting. It was sufficiently fantastic that she should be held to ransom as a hostage; this was sheer melodrama. If she had thought, if she had been more calm, it might have struck her that a

man prepared to take the risk of kidnapping might have the hardihood for yet more desperate expedients. But Sylvia was not calm; the rebound from her terror left her hysterically obstinate. If he had kidnapped her to force her father's hand, at any rate she would not help the plot. He dare not keep her long; the search for her would be too thorough. It was all bluff, and she would call his bluff.

"I will not write," she said, and trembled at the boldness of her words.

"So be it," acquiesced her persecutor. "A letter goes, of course; but that may not save you, or Joshi. I see small hope that it will be believed, without a signature. Officialdom, in its superior wisdom, consigns such letters to the waste-paper basket." He rose to go. "You see, I show the weakness of my hand. That is because I hope to make you change your mind. You will, if you do not forget that Joshi's fate, whatever it may be, is yours."

## CHAPTER XXIV

*Your daughter is alive, and for the present safe. It rests with you whether she will remain so. She will return when Joshi is released, but not before. No good can come of searching for her—indeed, by doing so you place her in the very gravest peril.*

Sir George stared down unseeing at the patient, non-committal capital letters of the missive on his desk. He did not need to see them; each word was burned in on his brain. They meant his daughter's safety or his reputation. Far more indeed than reputation, his very plain and urgent duty.

He was still sitting at his office table, numbly considering the implications of that anonymous, laconic threat, when Hugh burst in. A pale, emaciated Hugh, truant from hospital despite the protests of the staff. He threw another letter on the desk.

"This came by post this morning. Whatever does it mean?"

Sir George looked at the envelope. The postmark was Calcutta; his own was posted at Madras. The writer made it amply clear he was not to be traced by postmarks. He glanced at the enclosure. The



same paper, the same block-capitals, almost the same message, but worded for the principal witness instead of for the principal investigator. He picked up his own letter and handed it to Hugh.

"I'm very much afraid they mean exactly what they say," he announced grimly.

"They're genuine?"

"They're genuine enough. I'm sure of that; it's what I've been afraid of ever since she disappeared. I reckoned on reprisals, and took my steps against them. You've been well guarded all the time, although you may not know it. But the normal methods of intimidation are the pistol and the bomb. Kidnapping is something new; I own I never thought of it. It shows what I've suspected all along; this gang are not the ordinary half-baked revolutionaries. There's brains and power behind them, also a quite unusual determination."

But Hugh had not come there to speculate upon the authors of the outrage. For him the problem was a single one.

"What have you done?" he asked.

What had he done? Did this young man suppose that the dilemma could be so soon resolved? His duty, or Sylvia? Duty, of course; in thirty years, thank God, he had not once failed in his duty. But then his duty had never been so pitiably hard. Duty, or Sylvia? And Sylvia was his only child. He would be leaving India soon, his time was nearly up. Had he not done his duty long and faithfully

enough to earn this one departure from its strict demands? He temporized.

"What can I do, but go on searching? At least we've got a line to go on now."

"But what about the trial? You can't let that go on."

No respite then. But Hugh was right; he must make up his mind at once. And it was hard, insufferably hard, because behind his weighing-up of those competing claims he saw so plainly how he must decide. Duty would not let her disciple go.

"The trial must go on," he said at last.

"Surely it can be stayed," protested Hugh. "No Government could take the risk, after those letters."

"Possibly not, if they believed them. But then, why should they? Is not the natural interpretation that some of Joshi's friends are seeking to make capital out of Sylvia's disappearance? It does not follow that the writer of these letters knows anything at all about her. Why was she not prevailed upon to write herself, if she is in such danger?"

"But you believe them," Hugh insisted.

"I do. But I could not say why. One gets an instinct, after so many years' experience of crooked dealing. But Government would need something far more convincing than my instinct."

"But if the prosecution rests with you?" Hugh tempted him. "Is there no way . . . ?"

"No way at all an honourable man could take," Sir George broke in with emphasis. "No, Hugh, all else apart, this case is far too serious to burke, even were Government prepared to burke it. There is no criminal but gives one chance to the police; only the stupid ones give two. If we once free the man we lose him, for good and all; lose the ring-leader of a plot which aims at plunderings and burnings and assassinations. I dare not do it."

This was a complication which Sylvia's captor had been unable to foresee. He was afraid credit would not be given to his letter, either by Government or Delahey; he recognized that Government might in any case refuse to move. That Delahey, believing, would not secure release for Joshi by fair means or by foul, that he would let his sense of duty override the sacred claims of family, were obstacles which neither his nor any Indian mind could have envisaged. And in this case there was excuse for his obtuseness; for Hugh, too, was appalled.

"But what of Sylvia?" he persisted. "Are they to keep her prisoner till Joshi's term is up?"

"Joshi will serve no term," Sir George predicted gravely. "He will be hanged."

"Hanged! For attempted murder?"

"For murder. The guard was murdered."

"But not by Joshi. What I saw is sufficient proof of that."

"It makes no difference. He came there armed, prepared for murder. He was the leader of the gang which did it. That is a murder in the eye of law. And for that murder he shall hang, if I can manage it."

"Then what of Sylvia?" Hugh asked again. "What will they do with her, if Joshi dies?"

"Do you suppose I haven't thought of that?" cried Delahey. "I've been through hell the last half-hour, racking my brain to find a way, tempting myself to shirk my duty. God help me, Hugh; there is no way. It's not ten years since Englishmen were dragged from trains and clubbed to death, since clerks were murdered in their banks and women butchered in the streets. We may yet get her back—God send we do. If not, I solemnly believe it is her life against the lives of many."

Of Delahey's devotion to his duty Hugh had already formed a pretty good idea; in Lucknow he had likened him to Henry Lawrence. But this was surely more than Lawrence's ideal of duty—it went right back to Sparta and to early Rome. Hugh had no means of knowing, as the policeman so well knew, that India was a magazine of discontent and hatred, of ignorance and bigotry and superstition; he could not guess the vital need or stamping out the earliest spark. He neither understood nor sympathized.

"You can't go on without my evidence," he threatened.

"I can't," admitted Delahey. "But I shall go on all the same, because I'm confident that I shall get it. Your statement has already been perpetuated; you can't stand in the box and say you didn't make it, or that you made it knowing it was false. . . . Don't make it harder for me, Hugh. It means a lot to you, I know—it means still more to me. I don't deny the danger, but there isn't any need to give up hope. It won't be easy to conceal an English girl when every constable in India is searching for her. We've got six weeks at least; we'll find her in that time."

But the days passed and search proved fruitless. Of rumours there were many; here a white inmate was reported in a house in the bazar, elsewhere an Englishwoman had been noticed in a train with Indians who looked to the suspicious eyes of the police more like custodians than companions. From one place it was reported that a man had been seen purchasing female attire of European pattern, a man whose unfamiliarity with the names and uses of the garments he was buying did not suggest that he required them for his own womenfolk. Tales plausible and fanciful, true and exaggerated and false. But none of any use, for each clue failed when it was followed up, and Sylvia's hiding-place remained unguessed and undiscovered.

Nor would the Government, as Delahey foresaw, allow of their own motion the respite he refused to ask for. On his report they noted that the question

would receive consideration—the case was so important they could not say more than that—if any letter were received from Sylvia herself, or if the facts suggested received authentication. They were not to be intimidated by unverified anonymous threats.

. . . . .

And so the trial came on. Summoned for twelve, Hugh was already waiting at the court-house before the judge arrived at half-past ten. He saw from the verandah the prison van drive up. A little crowd collected, which half a dozen constables dispersed. The doors swung open and the handcuffed prisoner clambered down clumsily, thrusting his elbow out against the body of the van to keep his balance on the narrow step. He wore his khaddar garments, the emblems of defiance of British institutions, including British courts. Indeed, he showed defiance in the very carriage of his head; he bore himself more like a martyr than a criminal. Hugh saw no more; the constables closed round him and he vanished through the door into the court, led by a rope thrust through his handcuffs—like a performing bear, thought Hugh, who deemed it an unnecessary humiliation. He did not know that Delahey had had the generosity to make one big concession to Joshi's gentility, that as a rule dacoits and murderers are brought to court in leg-irons and cross-fetters.

Hugh found he might not go inside the court until his turn came for the witness-box, and in a district judge's court it is uncommon for a waiting-room to be provided. In any case, he was too restless to sit still. He paced the length of the verandahs; he strolled about the compound, among the chambers of the pleaders, the stands of the petition-writers, the stalls of food and betel-sellers, the little patient groups of litigants and witnesses.

It is a place of many-sided interest, the compound of an Indian district court—a place of comedy and tragedy, of honesty and greed, of ignorance and cunning; the meeting-place of rich and poor, townsman and farmer, of every caste and creed and race. But Hugh had no eyes for its traffic; he had his problem still to solve. What was he going to say when he was put into the box? His was the evidence which would hang Joshi, the only statement which directly proved his share in the dacoity. And to hang Joshi was to doom Sylvia to almost certain death. True, Delahey would not admit it, insisted that they had still ample time to find her. And till Joshi died, at all events, she would remain unharmed. But Hugh was not to be persuaded, for Delahey was no diplomatist—it was too clear that he could not persuade himself. It was sheer doggedness which drove him on, not confidence.

But when it came to it Hugh found, as Delahey had prophesied, that he could not refuse his evidence.

He was himself, in name at least, a lawyer, trained in the courts which more than any others stress the majesty and sanctity of law. How could he stand before a judge and flout the law's authority by refusing to be sworn? Or, being sworn, deny upon his oath the deposition he had made before a magistrate at his bedside? Had he foreseen all that it would entail, no power on earth could have extracted that deposition from him; he would have denied all knowledge of his assailant. But once it had been made, he had no longer any choice but to endorse it.

His name was called and his ordeal began. Strangely, he found some help in his surroundings. The judge was a young man, no older than himself, a gown and bands over an old lounge suit the only indications of his dignity. At the same table with him sat an Indian clerk in nondescript attire, who scribbled down the evidence in Urdu while the judge recorded it in English on a typewriter.

Upon the dais with the judge sat three assessors. Of them two, prosperous merchants from the city, were carrying on a whispered conversation, which seemed from their fat smiles to be about some happier topic than the case before them. The third, an elderly Mohammedan, was very near to sleep. Hugh found it hard to blame them, for they knew no English, and he did not believe that anyone on earth could follow the rapid stream of gibberish which issued from the clerk when he was called



upon to read the Urdu version. In any case they were not there to give a verdict, but only to advise, and they knew quite as well as everybody else that their views would be rejected unless they coincided with the judge's own. Which was no doubt the reason why they were not called to book for inattention.

There was no witness-box, and Hugh stood at the wooden railing which fenced off the dais, between and on a level with the pleaders for the prosecution and defence. A little to his right stood Joshi in the dock, with one policeman lounging up against the wall beside him. A second, with his back turned to his charge, was sitting on the steps below the dock, examining a blister on his heel. Behind Hugh, at a table, crowded the junior members of the Bar, and behind them again, spectators squatted on the flags, audibly occupied, during this unintelligible interlude in English, with the discussion of their own affairs. Hugh found it hard to realize that here, amid this casual informality, a man was under trial for his life.

But as he made his statement—more, even, as he underwent the test of cross-examination—reality, the grim reality, came back. The barrister for the defence might be verbose, his cross-examination long-drawn-out and often futile. Still, he was counsel fighting for his client's life. The young man on the bench might be less dignified than English judges, more summary in his procedure,

a little shaky in his law at times. Nevertheless he wielded powers of life and death. The trappings might be absent; the law was still the same.

And since Hugh absolved Joshi from any share in the abduction, for he had been in prison all the time, a faint, surviving sympathy with him was mingled with his fears for Sylvia. His hand had done no killing, although he was a murderer both in intention and by law. And after all, it was his love of country which had brought him to the dock. His ends might be mistaken, as his means were shocking; but there was nothing personal or sordid about them.

Then Joshi's counsel by his questions began foreshadowing the defence, and Hugh's involuntary sympathy was changed into disgust.

"Sir George Delahey is your uncle?"

"He is."

"You were living with him as his guest in Simla, and you became engaged to his daughter?"

Hugh glanced up at the judge before he gave his answer. Ignorant as he was of Indian courts and Indian advocacy, he could, perhaps, be pardoned for not understanding how matters such as these concerned the case.

"I need not go into the details," persisted counsel, "but I would be right in saying that there was bad blood between Miss Delahey and the accused?"

"Miss Delahey disliked him," Hugh admitted.

"And Joshi thought he had been badly treated?"

"I believe so."

"With reason?"

Perplexed and angry, Hugh protested to the court.

"My lord, am I obliged to give an answer to that question? It is a purely private matter, which has no connection with this case."

This time he found the judge apparently prepared to take his side. But learned counsel was persistent.

"It has a very close connection with the case, as will become apparent in a moment."

The question was allowed. "He had a measure of excuse for his annoyance," Hugh tardily admitted.

Counsel seemed satisfied, and changed the line of his attack.

"The prisoner is a Swarajist, is he not?"

"I understand that that is so."

"And Swaraj is a doctrine obnoxious to Europeans?"

"I cannot say," Hugh answered with decision. "To me it certainly is not."

The lawyer smiled incredulously and reverted to the previous topic.

"Sir George Delahey knows of this quarrel between Joshi and his daughter?"

"He knows as much as I do. But 'quarrel' is not the proper word."

"He is head of the Criminal Investigation Department?"

"Yes."

"As such he is responsible for watching all political activities, and in particular for this prosecution?"

The judge broke in.

"I cannot let you ask this witness that."

Counsel sat down. It was a question to which he did not need an answer.

Then Joshi, called upon to make his statement, dotted the *i*'s and crossed the *i*'s of counsel's innuendoes. He denied his presence at the scene of the dacoity. But he was a Swarajist, bound by conviction and political engagement to take all legal steps to render government by aliens impossible, and it was among Sir George's duties to put a curb on such activities. He had, moreover, been unfortunate enough to fall foul of Sir George's daughter. The case had been trumped up for these two reasons—to remove an inconvenient political opponent and to satisfy a private grudge.

"The case against me," he concluded, "rests entirely on the statement of Sir George's nephew, a man who swears I fired at him from two feet off—and missed him!"

Three witnesses for the defence came next, who circumstantially deposed that on the day of the dacoity the accused was in Benares. Their cross-examination lasted out the day, but at the end of it the toll of contradictions and discrepancies was meagre. They were men whose social status should

have been a guarantee of their veracity, there was nothing abnormal or suspicious in the circumstances under which they swore they had seen Joshi, and they had sufficient reasons for remembering the date. It was Hugh's first experience of perjury developed as an art, and when it was all over, he felt inclined to wonder if he could have been mistaken.

Counsel for the defence addressed the court next morning. He was himself a Swarajist, a man who in the non-co-operation days had boycotted the courts and "agitated" till he found himself in prison. There was a vigour in his speech which was not all professional, which brought him perilously near contempt of court.

"The grounds for falsely prosecuting Joshi have been amply demonstrated," he asserted. "The case against him stands or falls upon the statement of a single witness, closely related to the officer behind the prosecution, and personally prejudiced against my client. How can the court believe that single witness, when upon my side are three respectable and independent men, whose statements have not once been shaken and whose evidence has not been controverted? Let the positions be reversed. What chance would the accused have had, if one of his relations were the only witness to appear in his defence, and three unbiased, independent witnesses had been forthcoming for the prosecution? Let the court disregard that common and disgraceful

maxim, that every Indian must be deemed a liar if he dares to contradict an Englishman. Let not this case be one proof more of the degradation and the tyranny forced on the Indian nation by British government and British justice."

All plausible enough and logical enough, but valueless for the persuasion of the judge. For all his youth, he had a vast experience of perjury made perfect by tuition. He knew of dress rehearsals for the witness, with a real lawyer on each side to question and cross-question, at which the evidence was perfected and polished until every trap had been exposed, the last discrepancy removed.

As to Hugh's statement, the only serious question was the possibility of error. For to it the judge applied, as every judge in India, British or Indian, would have applied, that very test against which counsel had inveighed. It was not just a question of one interested witness against three who were apparently independent; rather it was the evidence of one who could be trusted by his upbringing to tell the truth upon his oath, against the statement of three others in whose favour there could be no such presumption—three others of a race whose life-blood was intrigue, whose moral code permitted falsehood, who recognized no binding sanction in the feeble oath the British law prescribed.

The judge could not believe that Hugh had been mistaken; it followed, therefore, that the evidence

for the defence must be discarded. The prisoner's guilt had been established.

With that announcement, the constables who nonchalantly guarded Joshi stiffened themselves into a posture something like attention. Nor did the prisoner any longer wear the air of supercilious defiance which he had assumed throughout the trial. Of the alternative sentences, he knew quite well which one would be awarded, and braced himself, not altogether an ignoble figure, to meet it fittingly.

There was no chaplain, no black cap, nor any other of the properties hallowed by English custom for the emphasis of the occasion. Only a young man leaning forward at his desk, reciting unimpassionedly the formula he had to use more often in a year than any English judge in his whole lifetime:

Subject to the confirmation of the honourable High Court, I sentence you to be hanged by the neck till you are dead. You are informed that if you desire to appeal you must do so within seven days.

A formula hedged in at both ends with provisos. But Joshi knew, and Delahey knew, that it was final.

. . . . .

Within two days another letter was received by Delahey.

*The day that Joshi dies, your daughter dies.*

And as he read it there were lying on his desk six fat reports received that day from circle officers, wrapping in explanation and verbose excuse the one short fact that Sylvia had not been found.



## CHAPTER XXV

AFTER her captor's one eventful visit, the dull routine of Sylvia's durance recommenced. And if the first unending week was hard to bear, the days which followed slowly broke her spirit. Always the same four walls about her; always a bolted door and close stone screens between her and the outer world. No exercise, except what she could get by pacing up and down, from wall to wall. And even that was unendurable by day, so hot and stuffy was the room. The sun beat down upon its unprotected outer wall, the fresh air could not find its way through the impeded windows. Even at night she lay with neither sheet nor blanket, and still could not get cool.

Nor had she anything to take her mind off her immediate miseries; even her little store of books was taken from her and not replaced. It seemed as though her captor was resolved that nothing should distract her from the memory of his reiterated warning.

Phulbasa, too, was now her bitter enemy. Reproof, or punishment perhaps, had followed her ill-judged attempt to cater for her master's passions, and

Sylvia seemed a victim upon whom resentment could be safely vented. She grudgingly and spitefully performed such duties as she must; the little services which made life in one cramped room endurable remained undone.

And Sylvia loathed the very sight of her; her skin crept when she came into the room. Her morbid dread of colour grew until her mind imagined Indian faces all about her, all cruel and malicious as Phulbasa's own. They hated her, and she was in their power, utterly and abominably.

She had no news. Once she had pocketed her pride and begged Phulbasa to smuggle in a paper, to meet with taunts and venomous refusal. What had been happening to Joshi, all this time? Was the trial stayed, or had he been convicted? What would his sentence be?—That touched her very nearly.

For she no longer disbelieved her captor's threats; each creeping, uneventful day which passed and left her prisoner was one more proof he was in earnest. Fantastic as they were, their maker breathed the very atmosphere of power and grim determination. She had been mad to disregard them.

Mad! If she was kept here much longer she would indeed go mad. What did it matter if through her Joshi escaped his punishment? What did it matter, even, if by her capitulation she assured the safety from detection of her insolent kidnapper? Beside her freedom, nothing mattered. She would

write now, and thankfully. Phulbasa took her message of surrender.

Within the hour her masked tormentor came.

"I told you you would change your mind," he said. "But it is late. In case you should still hesitate, read this."

He folded back and gave to her a copy of the *Pioneer*, that day to hand. Black headlines topped the page:

### THE TUNDLA DACOITY

#### JANARDHAN JOSHI SENTENCED TO DEATH

She gave it back unread. She had no need to read; the headline was enough. Her captor rustled through the leaves and found another page.

"Here is another paragraph, about yourself:

*"The police have so far been unable to discover anything which can throw light on the mysterious disappearance of Miss Sylvia Delahey. It is understood that certain information, which was at first considered reliable, has been followed up without result."*

"So much for your chance of being found," he commented. "You see you are already tucked in at the bottom of a page. A few more notices like this, and people will forget about Miss Delahey. An untraced disappearance soon ceases to be news."

To tortured, broken Sylvia the words seemed final as an epitaph—such is the strange conviction which print brings.

“Let me have pen and ink,” she said.

Then, while she waited: “It’s not too late, now that he has been sentenced?”

“How can I say?” he answered gravely. “For Joshi’s sake I hope not. But by your foolishness the greatest hope was lost; it’s harder to undo a thing once done than not to do it. At least they may commute the sentence to imprisonment, but that would not be altogether satisfactory to you. Your sentence too would only be commuted. . . . Now write, and let your letter be convincing,” he commanded. “Your life, quite literally, depends upon it.”

She wrote, and terror winged her pen:

*. . . You can believe all I have told you. This monster will not let me go till Joshi is released; he really means to kill me on the day that Joshi dies. I cannot find out who he is. I haven’t got the faintest notion where I am. That’s wrong. I am in Hell. Help me, dear Daddy, for I’m sure you can; once you know what has happened to me. And help me quickly, for I cannot bear it long.*

Her captor took the letter, read it. She had not thought of that!

“Not complimentary to me, but that may pass.” She could have sworn to a sardonic smile behind that gold-embroidered cloth—with this new weapon

in his hand he showed the first faint traces of humanity. "You've done the best you can—at last. We must both hope, for different reasons, that this will succeed."

But Sylvia could not really hope. Endless captivity—it was not yet three weeks—had cast its spell on her. Was she too late? That was her fear, almost her sure conviction. Those staring headlines seemed to spell finality.

Her captor left; her midday meal was set. She was inured to its unpalatable flavours, but now she scarcely dared touch it. Some day, it might be, she would eat, and feel the poison burning in her throat. What was it he had said?

"Many men die, when it becomes expedient that they should die. They call it cholera."

And she had not believed him.

## CHAPTER XXVI

MEANWHILE proceedings ran their short, inevitable course. Joshi appealed to the High Court; his pleader raised again before a bench of learned judges the arguments which in the lower court had failed—at greater length but with far greater moderation. But with the same result. The sentence was confirmed; a date was fixed for execution.

Then Sylvia's letter came, delayed by the circuitous routes the need for secrecy imposed. It was too late, though it is doubtful if at any time it would have swayed the issue. To Delahey, save for the poignancy of its appeal, it could have made no difference, since he believed already. And Government, though they had not believed, would have been hard put to it to justify the quashing of the case.

There was no longer any question of believing, but action had become still more impracticable. It was one thing to drop the prosecution of an undertrial against whom nothing had as yet been proved in court. It was another and an altogether harder thing to pardon a convicted criminal. If they did so, they gave encouragement to whole-

sale kidnapping of hostages. Administration would become impossible. They could, and would, allow a stay of execution, but purely as a temporary measure. If Sylvia could not be traced within the time allotted, justice must take its course.

Thus Government, an abstract entity without a body to be kicked, or any soul to damn. But what of Delahey, its human, faithful servant? Unlike the first, this letter led him into no temptation; the case had altogether left his hands. His sterner self was able to be thankful it was so—if Sylvia's letter had arrived before the trial, could he, could any father have resisted a petition so pathetic and so urgent, to save his honour and to do his duty? And yet his impotence was unendurable. His was the brain which link by link had forged the chain of evidence and made conviction sure. But all the power he wielded, the power which in effect had signed and sealed her death-warrant, could not help Sylvia. He had plucked Joshi from the warrens of Benares; he could not find his daughter. Search where he would, he could not get the semblance of a clue.

Nevertheless, he would not listen to postponement. There was a chance, the slenderest of chances, that her unknown captors feared to carry out their threats. To vacillate was only to encourage them. Better to let the date remain unchanged and to postpone if when it came the search had failed. And since the search was in his hands, since, too,

he was the father of the vanished hostage, his view prevailed.

And so, for all that Joshi knew, three weeks of life remained to him. The first he passed in more than Oriental resignation. There were no friends with whom he would communicate, the simple privileges which the prison rules allowed he did not seem to want. He spent his days, even his nights, in cross-legged meditation.

Then suddenly he proffered an unusual request; he wanted to see Mr. Frampton. The prison superintendent hesitated—Hugh, when he heard of it, refused point-blank to go. His feelings were too bitter at the thought of all the harm Joshi had indirectly wrought. But Joshi would not take refusal; each time the jailer went his round he begged for reconsideration. Let this one prayer be granted, and he would not ask another boon on earth.

Till Hugh at last consented. No good could come of it, that he could see. There was too much between them for any sort of reconciliation to be possible, and this he thought must be in Joshi's mind. But the persistency of one whose feet had almost reached the drop could not be easily denied.

So the next morning he was met at the main gate by the Eurasian jailer of the prison, who waited to conduct him through that cleanest, barest, hottest place in India, the compound of a district jail. At eight o'clock it was a hive of industry. Inside the



gate a squatting file whose time was up awaited their release. The grinding of flour-mills, the creaking of oil-presses, issued from buildings to his left and right. Old, wrinkled, white-haired men, the infirm gang, sun-basking in the vegetable patch, sprang into furious activity of weeding as Authority passed by. A team of prisoners, tailing on to a rope, raised water from the well and chanted as they heaved.

And as he passed each barred enclosure gate Hugh caught a glimpse of similar activities. Here men were pounding aloe leaves, feeding the weavers with material for fibre mats. Behind wire gauze the Brahmin cooks kneaded and baked and stacked chupaties for the midday meal. Next door a squad sat at the looms whence come the finest carpets of the East—pickpockets for the time turned artisans. Those who would see the misery of India should not look in her jails.

Another iron gate creaked on its hinge, passing them from the noisy bustle of the jail into a place of real and grimmest misery. Six cells built in a row, facing a clean, bare compound, their only view on to a bare brown wall. Six tiny cells, ten feet by five, behind the iron grilles of which men spent their last three weeks on earth, penned like wild beasts into a cage.

And three were occupied. As Hugh passed by the first, an unkempt, wild-eyed man pressed to the bars and peered at him. In the still loneliness of

that grim place a new face was a thrill not to be missed. Then came three empty cages. But in the fifth a man sat cross-legged on his haunches, his feet tucked underneath him, his hands upon his knees. His lips moved constantly; his body from the hips swayed to and fro in rhythm with his rapid muttering.

"Ram, Ram. Ram, Ram. Ram, Ram. Ram, Ram."

Monotonously, ceaselessly, he called upon his God. This time to-morrow he would call no more.

In the last cell of all sat Joshi, Oxford graduate, his face unshaven and his hair unclipped, his garb of rough grey prison-woven cloth, which made the khadder he affected seem fine linen. A coarse brown blanket, spread upon the flags, served him for seat by day and bed by night; a tarred sand-filled receptacle polluted all the tiny space in which he lived and slept.

"So you have come at last," he said.

Two chairs were placed before the grille, the one for Hugh, the other for the jailer, who must by rule be present at the interview. But Hugh stood awkwardly, unwilling to sit down outside the bars while Joshi crouched behind them.

"Don't stand up, please," said Joshi, his tone that of an urbane host who puts his guest at ease. Then to the jailer. "Would it not satisfy your rules if you sat in the shade under the wall? I am not

likely to say anything to Mr. Frampton which you need to overhear."

Hugh envied his composure. He could not keep his own nerves still, with that unending death-chant throbbing from the next-door cell. He stammered, hesitated. It was ridiculously difficult to hit on words which would not jar. But Joshi smoothly bridged the gap.

"I want to tell you first of all," he said, "how I appreciate your coming to me—here. Twice I deliberately tried to end our friendship, and then by my own act I forfeited it. I cannot look for anything except dislike from you, perhaps a stronger feeling than dislike. But still I want you to believe—I shall not win to peace of mind unless you do believe—how grateful I shall always be for what you did for me."

"Always!" The phrase was pure convention, but the word reminded Hugh that "always" meant two weeks. He felt unbearably uncomfortable; the Indian's exaggerated, stilted gratitude embarrassed him still more.

"You have nothing to thank me for," he grunted.

"I have indeed," insisted Joshi. "If it were nothing more than your first kindness to me."

Hugh's recollection of the incident was dim. Four undergraduates, carting an Indian fresher round the quad trussed in a rolled-up sheet, decanting him on the stone floor of a pitch-dark passage, telling him in sepulchral tones he was in hell.

Joshi, intoxicated almost to insensibility after his first experiment with ardent spirits, screaming and weeping. Hugh's intervention, and an hour or two spent beside Joshi's bed. And that was all. But Joshi had remembered, all this time.

"But that was nothing," faltered Hugh. "Anyone would have done it. Believe me, Joshi, I am sorry for you. I bear no grudge for what you did to me. It's what your friends have done to Sylvia—to Miss Delahey."

"So we have come to it! Frampton, what does she mean to you?"

Hugh stiffened, hostile instantly.

"It's not impertinence," Joshi persisted. "I've got to know. I heard that your engagement had been broken."

"It was," Hugh grudgingly admitted. Then breathlessly: "It can't be possible that you know where she is? You were in prison when she disappeared."

Joshi had no need to repeat his question. His gaunt eyes fixed themselves upon Hugh's eager, anxious face, and read the answer there.

"I do know where she is," he answered slowly, "and I shall tell you, now that I know what she is to you. . . . Don't interrupt me yet, but listen. When you have heard me out you may not be so quick to thank me. I was in prison, as you say, but there are leaks in prisons. An undertrial with money can always get a message to his friends. I

thought the plan out here in jail; it was at my suggestion that Miss Delahey was kidnapped. . . . No, please don't interrupt. I hoped that it would get me off; if not, I own I was not very tender about what became of her—I had small cause to be. But now the plan has failed, my death is certain. For your sake, for my own sake too, I want her to go free. And be very sure of this: if she is in his hands when I am hanged, she dies that very day."

"His hands? Whose hands?" cried Hugh. "Once tell me that, and we shall very quickly have her back again."

"Don't be too confident. You will not find it easy to undo what I have done."

"Why not?" Hugh burst out with impatience. "The whole resources of the Government are at our call. Give me the name."

"I beg of you, do not be over-confident," reiterated Joshi. "The man who has her is my foster-brother and my closest friend. For years now we have worked together, striving to free our country from your English rule. That seemed to us a sacred duty. . . . Though, for my part, I am no longer quite so sure—one has much time to think, in prison."

His voice tailed off uncertainly, his mind reverted to the problems with which his days and nights were spent. Had he been justified in what he did? Was murder ever right? Did the end justify the

means? He had become two selves, the one a phantom self, which could project itself beyond his bars and out into the world which he had left, the other wandering in a new and lonely world of self-examination and self-questioning. From those dim realms he came back with a start.

"He is a fanatic, this man—a madman, if you like. His hatred of your race is greater than his love for me. This very robbery for which I shall be hanged was his devising; he was the brain and driving power and I the arm. How will you rescue her from such a man? He has no pity, no compunction. I am his friend. But if I went down on my knees to him and begged him let her go, he would despise me for my irresolution, he would think that I had let your English prisons break my spirit. I know him; he would kill her out of hand if he once suspected that you knew where he has hidden her.

"Patience! I had to tell you this before I told his name, for once you knew his name you would no longer listen to me; and then you lose her. Besides . . ." His eyes grew vacant, his mind was back among its problems. "Frampton, I don't see even now how I can tell you."

While Joshi spoke Hugh's mind had been a medley of emotions—anger and thankfulness, disgust that any man could make so vile a bargain for his life. But chiefly thankfulness that Joshi had relented; that he would speak while there was

time. All other feelings he had managed to choke down, for till he had the name he was in Joshi's hands. And now, at the last moment, Joshi's irresolute mind veered back again. Forgetting everything but Sylvia's imperious need, Hugh threw himself upon his mercy.

"Joshi, you must tell me," he begged. "You can't intend to leave her to her fate—now, when it cannot help you. You say you owe me gratitude; tell me, and you will shift the burden to my shoulders. You can't refuse me, if you have ever loved a woman."

"I have not ever loved a woman," Joshi answered; "but I have loved a man. To tell you is to cause his certain ruin; worse, even, if your plans to save Miss Delahey go wrong. That is what makes it so insufferably hard. If it were nothing more than making reparation, if I alone could bear the burden. . . .

"And yet I must undo what I have done, for the responsibility is mine. I loathe myself for it—believe me if you choose. I told myself that it was right to sacrifice her for my country's sake, since it is to my country that my life belongs. But that was sophistry; I knew it even then. It was revenge which drove me, for I hated her.

"And hate is wrong. We used to laugh at Gandhi's teachings, I and my set; called him old-fashioned and a dreamer. If he be that, then I have dreamed too, this last week. For what he says is true; by

hating nothing can be won. It is a bitter punishment, to be my friend's betrayer. But I have merited my punishment."

He stopped again, as though he could not even yet make up his mind. At last the ghost of his urbanity came back; he almost forced a smile.

"I keep you waiting," he apologized, "and I am sure you do not want to hear about myself. Miss Delahey is somewhere in the state of Dharmkot, the raja's prisoner. I know no more."

"At Dharmkot!"

Hugh's exclamation held involuntary triumph. But Joshi, the betrayer of his friend, sat in the very posture of the man next door, his head sunk on his chest, rocking himself in silent misery. Hugh looked at him and hesitated, then put his hand in through the bars.

"Thank you," he said, inadequately. "And please believe I have no other thought but thanks. God send that I may never have to make so difficult a choice."

Joshi looked up and saw his waiting hand. Slowly, incredulously, he raised his own to meet it. And as their two hands clasped, the wailing chant from the next cell swelled into sudden shrillness.

"That is his way of praying," Joshi said. "They all do it, before the end. Three times now I have heard it, since I came here—they send men in from



all the districts round to die. Who knows but I shall do the same, when my turn comes! For I am very certain that the Gods I worshipped in my childhood are better than those which I have followed since."

## CHAPTER XXVII

THE news which Hugh carried hot-foot to Delahey was bad as well as good. Good, since they could plan rescue now; they need no longer wait despairingly on chance. But bad, in that a rescue from the hands of Dharmkot was doubtful, if not more than doubtful. Hugh, left alone, might have been optimistic; the policeman had no need at all of Joshi's solemn warning.

"If any man in India has the power and the will to do this thing," he summed things up, "that man is Dharmkot. His hatred of us is far worse than bitter, it's insane—a monomania. He is a man without the slightest scruple or compunction, and yet he has a sane man's faculties to plan and carry out his crime. More, an unequalled opportunity. There is not anything which might not happen inside the palace of a ruling chief. Law does not run there, unless an absolute and naked despotism be law."

So much he showed of his anxiety, and then he bent his thoughts to action.

"It's no good trying to work out a detailed plan. All we can do at present is to flood the town with

secret-service men. We cannot act until we know the situation. And even then no formal scheme will be of any use. We must depend upon the chances of the moment."

"But who will choose the moment?" Hugh demanded. "It may come suddenly; it may be lost if no one on the spot can take advantage of it."

"Gyan Singh goes, I have already sent for him. I've trusted him with lesser things; now I must trust him with my daughter."

Hugh knew his uncle's estimate of Gyan Singh. Not once but many times, in the past weeks, Sir George had lauded his capacity and ingenuity. And Hugh had thought himself above discrimination on the ground of colour. Now, at the crisis, his instinctive racial mistrust came uppermost, that ingrained, subconscious feeling of misgiving which every white man has, however much he may deny it.

"It's far too grave a matter to entrust to any Indian," he protested. "It only needs one false attempt, one slip of judgment, to ruin us. You cannot give him such a charge."

"Haven't I thought of that?" Sir George's choked-up fears almost betrayed him into petulance. "It's not a case of can, but must. *I* dare not go within a hundred miles of Dharmkot. In fact, I'm off to-night in quite a different direction. I am well watched, you may be sure. And when the raja learns that I have gone in person, upon a red-hot

scent, to raid a nest of doctrinaire Bengali anarchists, he may perhaps relax precautions. In any case," he added thoughtfully, "Gyan Singh is a man who has not let me down in twenty years. He'll do it, if it can be done."

"May I go, sir?" Hugh asked.

"You go!" his uncle broke in brutally. "Do you suppose you'd not excite suspicion? And what could you do, anyway, that Gyan Singh could not? This is too big a thing for amateur detectives."

"I won't excite suspicion," Hugh persisted; "that I can promise. I don't set up as a detective, but I've done a lot of acting; I can make up so that not even you could spot me. Not that I shall have to act," he went on eagerly. "I go there as a tourist, and I am a tourist. I can't help dropping all the bricks that tourists do.

"And we need a white man on the spot. I promise I won't interfere with Gyan Singh; I won't do anything but what he tells me. But still, he may be glad, when the time comes, to have an Englishman to back him. And Sylvia will need a friend, when we have got her." He forced himself to say that "when."

Delahey pondered. It would be well, for many reasons, to have an Englishman in Dharmkot. And no official could be sent; officials would be too well known and too well watched. But Hugh might do. As he himself had said, he need not act his part, if he could look it.

"It is Gyan Singh's job, he must decide," he gave his verdict.

And Gyan Singh, instructed in the facts and put in charge, thought the idea a good one. He felt the sole responsibility for Sylvia's life too great a burden even for his experienced shoulders. And when he had assented he put forward rather doubtfully a project of his own.

"We want a woman too," he pointed out. "If the miss-sahib is confined in the zenana—and what more likely place is there than that?—no man can get to her except by force. And force we dare not use. But where am I to find a woman? She must have loyalty and courage; above all she must not lose her head. The sahib knows what Indian women are."

Hugh called to mind a wrinkled, grim old woman who had once barred his path to Sylvia's door, who later on, by Sylvia's order, had firmly thrust him into outer darkness. Of her devotion there was not the slightest question, and loyalty breeds courage. He could not answer for her coolness and resource, the qualities on which so much might rest. But something must be risked.

"What about Rajjia?" he suggested.

So Rajjia was called and sworn to secrecy, and Delahey broke to her, patiently and gently, the fate which overhung her mistress. She could not understand at first; her humble, faithful mind could not envisage any daughter of the sahibs

treated so. But when at last she realized the truth, she hid her face behind her sari and howled and wailed without restraint.

"Ai! Ai! my missie-baba. Ai! Ai! my missie-baba. Be merciful to her, our Lady Sita. Save her, Bhagwanji. Let her not die so young, so young!"

Delahey shrugged; Gyan Singh whispered: "No good, sahib, she is like all the rest." But Hugh, the inexperienced, counselled, "Give her time."

And Hugh was justified, for Rajjia's wailing died away to sobs; until at last she threw her sari back and flung herself down at her master's feet.

"Let me go to her. She needs my service there, as here. And I am harmless; they will surely let me go to her."

By which she showed that even yet she did not fully understand her errand. So Gyan Singh took up the task of explanation, in simple, fluent idiom no Englishman could master. He did not mince his words. He told her all the difficulties, he stressed the danger to herself. He would have liked a woman, but not this snivelling, weeping woman. She could not help him in his task; she would but make his difficulties worse.

But Rajjia, understanding now, was not by any means to be dissuaded. She bent her body to the ground, resting her forehead on the sahib's boots.

"Let me go too," she begged. "I am a poor old woman, and a worthless. If I should give my life, what matter?"

Till Delahey at last bade Gyan Singh take her. If she was not of any use, she could be trusted not to risk the plan by chattering or disobedience to orders. And if it chanced a woman should be needed, then she would do her very best. At least she was as good as any other.

So Gyan Singh and Rajjia were blended unobtrusively with India's uncouneted millions, and disappeared as though the arts of the secret service had turned them into air.

Hugh's preparations took a little longer. There were clothes to be bought, and clothes to be altered, before an uncouth tourist could set forth upon the pilgrims' way which leads to the show-city of Dharmkot. His *topi* must depart sufficiently from the approved style of the resident—sufficiently, but not too much. It must not fit too well; it must be worn exactly at that uncomfortable angle at which, until he learns, the tourist always wears it. He needed field-glasses slung round his neck, guide-books to bulge his pockets. His clothes must be just too thick for the climate; at the American alternative he boggled—plus fours in tussore silk. Lastly, he found a shop where he could buy a pair of huge glare goggles, with wire protectors at the sides. Some migrants wore them, and they might be very useful in emergency.

He could not make much alteration to his person; it was not an occasion for *crêpe* hair or grease paint. Mainly he must rely upon a razor and a pair of

scissors; but cunningly applied they made a world of difference.

"You promised me I wouldn't know you," Delahey reminded him. "You're not so good as that. But you'll do. We say all natives look alike, and they, thank goodness, think the same of us. I wager not a dozen Indians would know you now, and they're all secret service men that I have trained myself.

"I've one thing more for you, a scoundrel of a Bombay dock-side bearer. No tourist is complete without one. He'll drink, of course. He's realist enough to steal your studs. But if you get in a tight place, rely on him."



## CHAPTER XXVIII

Two mornings afterwards a tikka gari clattered up to the door of the Coronation Hotel at Dharmkot, containing Mr. Lindsay, globe-trotter. The traveller wore his solar topi, although the sun had not yet risen. His disreputable bearer, who ought to have been on the box beside the driver, showed his unscrupulous readiness to trade upon the ignorance of freshly landed sahibs by sitting with his master in the carriage. The luggage on the roof was bright with labels from hotels in many lands. A sun umbrella thrust into the straps of the valise added the final touch.

Hugh had not been quite sure of that umbrella; it would not do to let disguise degenerate into caricature. But when, a few hours later, he descended to the dining-room, he felt that no extravagance could spoil his part. Throughout his journey he had been aware of covert smiles and whispered jokes at every station; here he was not the least conspicuous. There was not anyone to laugh at him. The room was filled exclusively with his pretended kind.

One thing he learned, to his discomfiture; there was an easy camaraderie among the globe-trotters which had no counterpart in the official world. A couple of Americans, their breakfast finished, guessed they were pleased to meet him, and sat down uninvited at his table. They told him at great length where they had been, where they were going. A fortnight spent in India, ten days of it in trains, enabled them to formulate aggressive views on every Indian topic, from Moghul architecture to Katherine Mayo. And then they started to cross-question Hugh about *his* travels, until he thanked his stars he had arrived while they were still in bed. He would have been caught out at once, if they had seen the labels on his luggage.

They asked his name, and introduced him to their friends without his leave—a liberty he welcomed, for the inquisition slackened off.

“Say, Mr. Lindsay,” one suggested, “I guess you’re all alone. Why don’t you trail around with us? We’d be real glad.”

They pressed the invitation, until Hugh did not dare refuse it. He had not heard from Gyan Singh; he did not know how he would hear, or when. In any case, it would not do to sit in the hotel all day and wait for news. A tourist must before all else display activity and interest.

And so he spent his morning caught up in a laughing, chattering crowd whose hireling motors whirled along the dusty roads from temple to

museum, and from museum on to mosque and fort and tomb. There was one place, and one place only, which he wished to see, and there he could not go. The raja was in residence, the guide told his protesting flock; the palace precincts were entirely closed to visitors.

They trooped back home for tiffin. Hugh pleaded a sun-headache and retreated to his room. He could not face the afternoon with those gay merrymakers, while Sylvia lay immured within a mile of him, awaiting death.

Night came, and still no news. He counted every hour until the dawn. Each hour was one hour wasted, and time was short, so pitifully short. If there was something he could do! To be so near to her, and yet to be so helpless. That was the thing which was so hard to bear.

He passed to breakfast through a line of hawkers squatting on the edge of the verandah, refusing surlily their invitations to buy shawls and trays and trinkets of carved ivory.

One of them held out temptingly an amber necklace.

"See, sahib, cheap." Then, as Hugh shook his head. "Buy, sahib, for the miss-sahib you love. Perhaps you see her soon."

Hugh stared; the man might be the brother of his fellow-pedlars. And yet, he had not seen him there the day before.

"It's far too hot to look at things out here," he

grunted. "Bring your stuff to my room when I come back from breakfast."

He swallowed a few mouthfuls, for appearance' sake; gulped down a cup of coffee. Hurrying back, he found his hawker deep in business with a lady, pressing a pair of ear-drops on her with an ingratiating smile.

"Cheap, memsahib, dirt cheap. Real pearls from Ceylon." He grinned at Hugh. "Sahib, the memsahib want your necklace. I say, no sell; that taken."

Hugh fumed impatiently, but the trader would not let himself be hurried. Box after box he opened leisurely, until the whole verandah round him glittered. He priced his wares; he halved his prices; he was prepared to suffer loss, if only he could satisfy the memsahib.

But the would-be purchaser of amber was not to be put off with pearls or diamonds. She shook her head and went her way. And then at last the merchant bundled up his boxes in a cloth and followed Hugh. He squatted down inside the room and set his wares out on the carpet. He took the necklace from its box and stroked the yellow beads appraisingly. Was he a common hawker, after all?

He spoke.

"Be careful, sahib, even here. Look at my jewels, while I talk. There is great need of care. One of my men was taken ill last night. It may be unripe fruit, or it may not. As yet I cannot tell."

"Gyan Singh?" whispered Hugh. The man nodded. "Have you got any trace of her?"

"Not much," admitted the inspector. "I hardly dare to move; the whole town is a nest of spies. But one man managed to get past the palace gates into the servants' lines. He is quite sure there is some mystery."

"Nothing more definite than that?"

"No, sahib, he could find out nothing more. Perhaps you can."

"I?" queried Hugh, exulting at the thought that he could be of use.

Gyan Singh chinked his beads from hand to hand.

"Fifty rupees, and not an anna less," he said decidedly. Then, in a lower tone: "Sahib, you would not speak to a poor jeweller like that. Remember, in this city there is no place that is safe. . . ."

"Yes, you," he added, and his voice took on authority. "Listen, and I will tell you. I am quite sure in my own mind Miss Delahey is hidden in the palace. Go to the park; all visitors to Dharmkot go there, to see the raja's zoo. There is a wall between it and the gardens of the palace, and on those gardens the zenana windows look. Go there at midday, when the gardeners are at their meal; they sometimes leave the door unlocked. If so, go through into the palace gardens and bring me word of everything you see. Everything, mind.

There is no sort of detail which may not have its use."

"And what am I to say," asked Hugh, "if I am stopped, or caught inside the garden?"

"There is no end to the assurance of the tourist," Gyan Singh said contemptuously. "Not a day passes but one or more is turned back from the palace door itself. They go in shoals to leave their cards upon the raja; they want to see a ruling prince, just as they want to see the bears and tigers in his zoo. No, you need say nothing; your own appearance is your answer. They will turn you out, they will probably abuse you in a tongue you will not understand. But they will certainly not suspect you."

"And when shall I see you again?" asked Hugh. Gyan Singh, shutting up his boxes, smiled.

"All right, sahib, not buy. I bring more to-morrow morning, real amber, good amber. In case the sahib cannot wait till then, I tell his bearer my address."

. . . . .

Hugh did not find it easy to evade his fellow-tourists, but somehow he achieved it, and set out by himself on foot before the lazy airs had blown away the dust which marked the progress of their cars. He found the park, and saw the great white palace rising tier on tier above the trees. He circled round the tennis courts and cricket pitches in the

centre, until he reached the paths upon the palace side. They were deserted, the menagerie which lay behind him attracted all the visitors. Better, so far as he could see, the gardeners had gone; their tools were lying by the beds where they had left them.

He found the wall and took a path which ran beside it. He could not see it closely, for between there was a belt of shrubs, too thick to be forced through. But from the glimpses he could get he judged the wall unscalable. It must be all of eight feet high, and spiked.

He reached a narrow alley cutting through the shrubbery, and at the end he saw a door—the way into the palace. He had one more look round; he could see nobody at all. He darted down the lane to the closed door.

And fate was with him, marvellously with him. Not only did the door yield to his touch, the key was in the lock. At once he stooped and picked a lump of clay out of a drying water-channel. But clay proved a poor substitute for wax; it stuck into the pattern every time he pressed the key against it. At last he had to risk discovery, and trace the channel back until he found a pool to wet the key in. Then he secured a satisfactory impression, which he stowed carefully inside his emptied match-box. If he found nothing else, he had already won success beyond the wildest dreams of Gyan Singh.

He put the key back in the lock and stepped

into the gardens of the palace. Here too the shrubs grew thick beside the wall, and made a screen from which he could observe unseen. He crept inside them and looked out.

The garden on this side showed traces of neglect. The paths were in sad need of weeding, the winter annuals still in the beds were sparse and straggling for lack of water and manure. What should have been the lawns were hardly lawns at all—coarse, wiry stems, trimmed roughly with a sickle, instead of mown dhub grass. A glance to right and left suggested an explanation; the garden was a separate enclosure, walled in on three sides, closed by the palace on the fourth. If this was the zenana block, as Gyan Singh had said, the plot in front of Hugh must be the women's garden, where they could take the air unseen and unmolested. That was sufficient to account for its neglected state.

And to Hugh's inexperienced eye it looked like the zenana side. The façade of the palace rose in front of him, three stories high. Save for one tight-closed door, the wall on the ground floor was blank. Above there ran a hanging balcony, closed in all round by green mat chiks. On the top floor of all, the wall was pierced with tiny windows, blocked with screens of fretted stone. From ground to roof Hugh could not see one single unimpeded opening.

But he was not content with his concealed look-out within the shrubbery. He had been warned to notice everything, and the thick bushes gave him



little more than irritating glimpses. He was afraid lest, having won so far, timidity might lose him something more. He wanted, for example, to see the steps which led up to that door, the path in front of it. Their state might show him how much it was used, and that he deemed important.

But was it wise to come out in the open? He could not even be quite sure the gardens were unoccupied. And those pierced screens before each window, the chiks which curtained off the balcony; there might be bright, inquisitive eyes behind each one of them. He did not dare presume too much on his get-up, in spite of Gyan Singh's assurances. He fancied that a trespasser within zenana precincts would be subjected, at the least, to inconvenient inquiries. Nevertheless, it must be risked; he had to gamble on the custom of siesta. Between the hours of twelve and two the whole of native India slept.

Therefore he stepped out of his hiding-place and strode across the grass towards the palace. The bolder face he put on it, the greater and more obvious the impudence of his intrusion, the less the danger if he should be challenged. But though he was not challenged, he found nothing to reward him for the risk he took; the palace and the garden showed no single feature he had not discerned from his retreat among the bushes. Nor did the door and its surroundings yield him any information. The steps were marble, and the path in front of

them was tiled. They could not show use or disuse by their condition.

He walked back disappointed to the opening in the bushes, in haste now to repass the doorway in the wall. Before he plunged within them he looked back, to make a final scrutiny of the deserted garden and the lifeless palace front.

But was it altogether lifeless? A movement caught Hugh's eye, a tiny flash of white at one of those far upper windows. Parting the bushes, he peered out, and saw distinctly now a hand thrust through the opening, holding a handkerchief, or something like it, which fluttered faintly in the hot, unsteady breeze. The blood went hammering to his neck and temples; his heart beat in his throat. He had no doubt of what it meant—he had found Sylvia.

He dared not wave back to her openly; still less could he depart and let her think her signal was not seen. He strolled out leisurely on to the lawn, and looked about him. He took his handkerchief out of his pocket and shook it out before he put it to his nose. It was enough. The white rag at the window fluttered violently and was withdrawn.

## CHAPTER XXIX

HUGH hastened back to his hotel, anxious to reassure himself his precious lump of clay remained intact. He hardly knew which was the more important—that, or his exact knowledge of the place where Sylvia was hidden. One thing was plain, discoveries of such great moment were weapons to be put into Gyan Singh's hands at once.

He called his pseudo-Bombay bearer, and blessed his uncle's foresight in providing him. With many admonitions he handed him the match-box—he hardly liked to let it leave his sight—and sat down to compose a message.

But Nannhe Khan was trained in the inspector's school of caution. He would not take a written message; he could remember all the sahib said. He went, and came back two hours later with the terse reply:

“Well done. I come to-morrow, as arranged.”

And Gyan Singh in person the next morning was hardly more expansive than his message. He had imbibed his code from Delahey—duty was duty, and success was its own recognition.

“You have done well,” he said, “but Rajjia has

done better. If all goes well, we make our first attempt to-night."

"To-night!" Hugh could not moderate his voice to the policeman's cautious drone.

"If all goes well," repeated Gyan Singh. "This is the full moon of the month of Phalgun, the night the Holi fires are lit. From dusk to dawn the city will be mad with drink and lust and every kind of licence. You have not seen a Holi. Your books call it—a feast of Saturn?"

"A Saturnalia," murmured Hugh. "Go on."

"What happens in the streets will happen in the palace; the raja keeps the ancient customs. He will himself light in the palace square the fire from which the rest are lit. The palace will be empty at ten o'clock to-night. And Rajjia will be in the palace. . . . Yes, in the palace, as a guest! Somehow she's scraped acquaintance with the women-servants, and she will spend the Holi there with them. If she can find her mistress's room and get her to the garden door, we shall be waiting for her there."

It was a chance, although in many ways it seemed a poor one. Thanks to Hugh's key and the disorders of the night, the palace garden would present no obstacles. Nor, in all probability, would Sylvia's door or that which led into the garden. The Indian architect relies on bolts rather than locks. But what of Rajjia's task? Alone, without the possibility of outside aid, she must sustain for hours an acted

part. If the chance came she must without assistance pierce the labyrinth to Sylvia's room. And if she found it, could she get her to the garden door? Would all those stairs and corridors be quite deserted?

Hugh voiced his doubts.

"To-night there may be many chances," Gyan Singh assured him. "But Rajjia must be quick to see and cool to take them. That is where our worst danger lies. And hers; for if she is detected they will show no mercy."

That was the feature of the plan Hugh did not like—that poor old woman going in alone to perils she was quite unfit to face, perils which probably she did not fully understand. Gyan Singh was more callous.

"Her time is short in any case," he said. "She asks no better fate."

Hugh had to acquiesce. It was a plan which offered chances of success; there seemed no possible alternative. And of the ayah's willingness to face, in Sylvia's cause, whatever dangers might confront her, he had not any doubt. But if there was a post of danger, he had the greatest right to occupy it. And he would spend his evening skulking safely in the bushes in the garden . . . if he was even there. He put the point to Gyan Singh insistently, prepared to be rebellious.

But rebellion was not needed.

"Of course you come," said Gyan Singh. "You

are the only one who knows the ground. And if my fears come true—which God avert—there will be need of cool, determined men.”

So Rajjia was to be the pivot of their plan—that muddle-headed, ignorant old woman whose help Gyan Singh had despised, whose foolishness and clumsiness had often tested Sylvia's patience. But Rajjia the lady's-maid and Rajjia in Dharmkot were different women. The need for them had called out qualities in her so deeply hidden that neither she nor anybody else had guessed at their existence. Up to the present she had played the part required of her with a finesse and skill at which Gyan Singh, her detractor, marvelled. He had but put her in the way of meeting with the palace-women. Armed with no stronger weapon than her own imagination, she had convinced them that she was a fortune-teller of no common merit; more, that on Holi night her powers would reach their zenith. Unaided, she had won the entry to the servants' hall of the zenana.

Her real test was still to come, the test which needed quickness and resource and courage, not merely artfulness. She started out to meet it in that state of self-forgetful exaltation which is the common quality of all the women who throughout the ages have done amazing things—the quality of Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc and Charlotte Corday, the quality of Hindu Sita. She did not doubt her

powers; she did not think about them. Her task was plain before her, and she went to it.

As it grew dusk she passed within the open palace gate and mingled with the crowd which thronged the great courtyard, in which the fire would presently be lit. A man took aim at her, and hurled a paper bomb which burst against her cheek and smothered hair and skin and clothes with vivid pink. A group of roisterers, themselves all pink and green and yellow, addressed her with the licence given by the day.

"Queen of delights, where goest thou? Thine eyes are lakes of love, thy teeth are pearls, thy breasts are as the clusters of the vine."

Old, wrinkled Rajjia answered them in kind, until they fell back, laughing at her last obscenity, and let her go her way.

She found the door the servants had described to her and knocked on it. A woman opened it, eyes bright, face flushed, her sari fallen backward from her hair. She led her guest into a vaulted chamber filled with women, squatting upon the floor, reclining on string cots, leaning against the walls. Its bare stone walls resounded with their chatter. String wicks in open saucers lit it fitfully. The air was acrid with the smoke of huqqas.

A place was found for Rajjia, an earthen crock of stinking country spirit was thrust into her hand. She eked it out, sipping a little, spilling a little. She dared not drink it all, nor dared she throw it

openly away. And when the crock was empty, her ordeal began.

A gross old woman with a fat, bare paunch lounged on a charpai in the middle of the room; an empress of the servants' hall, apparently, since she alone had a whole charpai to herself, and since her glass, almost before it had been emptied, received obsequious replenishment. She beckoned Rajjia, and shifted her unwieldy bulk to give her room upon the cot.

"They say that you tell fortunes. What have you to tell me?"

Haltingly, Rajjia began; and knew from the beginning her performance was a failure. The sudden silence and the women crowding round gave her stage-fright. She could not get the proper atmosphere or patter of the prophet. Only two blessings could she think of, men-children and a lover, and these she dared not promise to a woman who was sixty, if a day. A mocking voice cut through her blunderings, a voice that Sylvia knew and hated.

"A fortune-teller? A beggar after a free feed, more like."

Rajjia went cold with fright. She had failed, then, and so soon. They would turn her out; Gyan Singh and the sahib would wait for Sylvia in vain. The plan was spoiled, and all because she could not do her share.

But the mistress of the kitchen, beaming with



the good nature begotten by potations upon plumpness, saved her from ignominious ejection.

"Pay no attention to Phulbasa," she adjured her. "She is as bitter as an unripe plum. Eat, if you want to. But drink you must; it is the Holi. Though of a truth you are a sorry fortune-teller."

The bottles passed, the room grew more disorderly. Giggles and squeals out of its crowded dimness proclaimed that men had penetrated where no men should be. To Rajjia, discredited, no one paid any further heed. But no one tried to turn her out. There was an endless store of liquor to be drunk. What mattered it if some were wasted down the throat of an impostor?

It was as well for Rajjia that everyone was fuddled, for her nerve was gone, she blundered hopelessly. She thrust herself on groups of laughing women and pestered them with questions, direct and dangerous. Where do the raja's ladies live? What is behind that door? Where does that staircase go? It was a miracle she did not ask straight out where Sylvia was, such was her flurry and confusion. Perhaps the Gods to whom she hourly prayed for Sylvia's safety had set a guard upon her tongue, for her own guard was gone.

But little harm was done. The servants looked upon her as a bore, a rude, inquisitive bore, for whose intrusion they heaped curses on the woman who had bidden her to come. But drink had lulled suspicion. They even gave her answers to her

questions, that they might rid themselves of her more quickly. To this extent, indeed, her rash precipitancy won, where tact and caution might have failed.

Out in the palace square meanwhile the tumult grew. Pipes squealed and trilled; the throbbing drums performed their task of rousing human passions to delirium. Rockets soared up; thrown crackers made their fiery and eccentric passage through the crowd. The shouting and the laughter overpowered the racket in the servants' hall.

Then for a moment tumult stayed, to break redoubled. The drums beat madly, the voices rose to a full-throated roar.

"Raja ji ki jai! Hail to the Raja! The fire, the fire, the Holi fire!"

The servants' room took up the cry; its inmates pushed and jostled through the narrow door into the palace yard. The hall was empty in a trice; empty except for Rajjia, huddled against the wall where they had pushed her.

She waited silently; no one came back. She strained her ears for sounds within the palace, though listening could hardly help her with that pandemonium outside. Then, gathering her courage, she slipped out by the door which led to the zenana rooms.

It was not easy, in the semi-darkness of the passages, to piece together all those scraps of information contemptuously thrown at her. More

by good luck than management she stumbled on what seemed to be the garden door. There was but the one staircase, so she could not be mistaken there. She looked behind, assured herself the corridor was empty, and darted up the stairs.

Nevertheless, the corridor had not been empty; she failed to see a figure closely pressed against a recessed door. For Rajjia had not been the only sober woman in the hall. Sharp-tongued Phulbasa, shunned by all her fellow-servants, had alone elected not to drink.

She had another and a special reason for abstinence: she wanted her revenge on this intruder for whose sake she had been snubbed. And as she watched her, as she crept behind and listened to her, she grew convinced that Rajjia's excuse for coming to the palace was the thinnest of pretences. She was a thief, a common thief from the bazar, hoping to get the chance to raid an empty room.

Phulbasa kept her knowledge to herself; she would not get a hearing from these drunken, chattering women. Besides, she wanted her own back, she wanted to catch Rajjia in the act. If she kept quiet and watched, her chance would come. Therefore she rushed out of the room with all the rest, and stealing back, found Rajjia gone. She quietly dogged her quarry through the passages, intent on catching her red-handed. But Rajjia passed by all the doors and did not try them. Strange conduct for a thief.

When she set foot upon the stairs, Phulbasa

made a chance but truer guess at her intentions. The prisoner was up there! It was absurd, said reason. How could one foolish, chattering old woman expect to take a captive from the raja's clutches?

Absurd or not, it was Phulbasa's obvious duty now to have her stopped. She left her hiding-place and followed quickly up one flight of stairs. But when she reached the landing she stopped again and thought. If her suspicions were correct, the guard would catch the trespasser at Sylvia's very door, and then it would go hard with her—and harder still with that proud girl upstairs. If she was wrong, and Rajjia was a thief, she did not lose anything at all by waiting. For Rajjia must return the way she went, for Phulbasa to catch, with the stuff on her. She sat down on the bottom step and waited.

Once on the stairs, Rajjia's task was easier. She had no longer to depend for her direction upon the scattered information she had gathered; Gyan Singh had dinned into her where Sylvia's room lay in the upper corridor. She went on confidently, till she reached the farthest door of all. And then she knew she must be right, for it alone was bolted. She drew the bolt down, trembling with excitement, and turned the handle.

Below, Phulbasa heard her footsteps leave the stairs, grow fainter as she passed along the passage. She listened tensely for the challenge of the guard. Instead, she heard the drawing of the bolt. The

guard, like everybody else this night, were making merry round the Holi fire.

She sprang up with a cry and started up the stairs. But what was she to do, when she got up? The whole zenana was deserted; even the ladies had been taken to the drawing-room above the porch, where they could peep through bamboo chiks at what was going on below. And though Phulbasa could have tackled Rajjia alone, she knew she was no match for that strong English girl. Malice had overreached itself. She turned and tore down to get help.

Inside the room, Sylvia stood swaying, staring at what could only be an apparition; then stumbled forward into Rajjia's arms and clung there sobbing, helpless—Sylvia, who shuddered at the touch of a brown hand. It was the scatter-brained old ayah who contrived to keep her head, who had to think and act for both of them.

"Come quickly, miss-sahib," she cried. "The way may not be open long."

But Sylvia hardly seemed to hear. The shock was too much for her tired, strained nerves. And Rajjia the unassuming rated her, exhorted her, pulled at her, even shook her—but all to no effect. At last she whispered:

"Come. Hugh Sahib waits for you."

Then Sylvia raised her head and loosed her hold, and let herself be led, like a sleep-walker, along the corridor and down the stairs to the closed garden

door. The bolt was high and stiff, and Rajjia could not shift it. Struggling on tiptoe, she heard at last what all the time her ears had been alert for—shouts and the rush of running feet.

She gave one last despairing tug; the bolt stayed fast. Then she was thrust aside, as Sylvia, roused from her stupor by the noises of pursuit, flung her lithe body at the door, and wrenched and tore at that unyielding lump of iron. A man burst from the servants' hall into the corridor behind them, a man who brandished, as he ran, a naked sword.

## CHAPTER XXX

AND Hugh was waiting in the garden, shut off by that unyielding door from any chance to help; deprived by it, and mercifully so, of any inkling of the imminence of tragedy within.

He had not reached his post without adventures, mild as they were compared with those which Rajjia had encountered. Disguise was his first difficulty. Gyan Singh had selected for him the rôle of petty country farmer, and well as he could ape the globe-trotter, Hugh felt he made a sorry Indian rustic.

The costume was a scanty one—a loin-cloth and a short, unbuttoned jacket, which left his chest and abdomen exposed. The loin-cloth troubled him, yard after yard of thin material wrapped round and through his legs, and fastened at the waist by tucking in one end. He felt it *must* come loose; and Gyan Singh, the realist, would not allow a single safety-pin. He had not got the proper carriage or the proper gait. His heelless slippers rubbed and blistered his unstockinged feet; and they too, like the loin-cloth, seemed always on the point of coming off. Even the unaccustomed nakedness of his stained skin helped to deprive him of

his confidence. And worst of all, he must go dumb where everybody laughed and talked and shouted.

But there was no help for it; the only way to reach the park was through the city, and through the city he must thread his way on foot. Even if any kind of vehicle had been appropriate to his part, nothing on wheels could force a passage through the crowds that night.

Gyan Singh did his best. He taught him the appropriate Holi noise, a nasal drone peculiarly syncopated by slappings of the hand upon the open mouth—a useful way to counter awkward questions. He demonstrated various indecent gestures, suitable to the licence of the night, which could be used to the same end. Lastly he purchased packages of variegated powders and squirts of coloured liquid. A shot well-placed upon the face was an effective check on conversation, and could not be resented.

With these provisions against undue curiosity Hugh managed to win through, one of a boisterous band of villagers, to all appearance, come in to paint the city red and to bedaub its citizens with all the colours which their varied battery contained. Gyan Singh and his underlings took charge of him; and swept him with them through the crowds.

Once only was he separated from them in the press, to be at once surrounded by a drunken little knot of Chumar women, whose words he could not understand, but whose gestures were the counterpart of those in which he had been made proficient.



Powder and squirts had no effect on them; they were already splashed from head to foot with all the colours of the rainbow. And the greater his confusion, the more they pressed upon him, until he feared indecent words and gestures were about to be translated into acts.

At last, in desperation, he resorted to a sign conveying innuendoes which Gyan Singh had not ventured to describe. He had the vaguest and most general idea of its disgusting and lascivious meaning, but his tormentors recognized it instantly. They fell back from him, clinging to one another and convulsed with helpless merriment. And before they had recovered from their salacious mirth, Gyan Singh had come charging back, and routed them with words which Hugh was almost glad he could not understand.

Clear of the crowd which surged towards the palace-front, Gyan Singh split his party up. A band of Holi merrymakers would not be seeking the seclusion of the deserted, silent park. By ones and twos they edged their way among the trees and undergrowth, until they met within the shruberies which masked the garden gate. The home-made key turned gratingly, but turned; Hugh's rough impression had been good enough. They filed inside and pulled the door to after them.

Inside the garden, Gyan Singh's little force required no orders; from the report supplied to him by Hugh he had already patiently worked out

and given them instructions. They silently deployed, and pushed their way ahead until they reached the margin of the grass. Here, hidden in the velvet shadow of the bushes, they crouched and waited.

Hugh's post was straight in front of the closed palace door; Gyan Singh's ten feet from him, on his right. He crept up stealthily until he reached the farthest limits of the shrubbery. And even then he was not satisfied, he was still separated from the door by five-and-twenty yards of grass.

Twenty-five yards is a long way, in an emergency, but to get nearer was impossible. The full moon rode above the palace, and its clear, cold beams, merciless as a searchlight, defined each blade of grass, each flower in the beds. Only the palace and the walk in front of it were still in darkness.

Hugh stretched himself upon the dew-soaked ground, shivering a little in his cotton clothing, and reached his arm out till the moonbeams fell upon his watch. Nine, and the fire would not be lit till ten. He had an hour to wait, if Gyan Singh had forecasted correctly. And what would happen when that hour was past? He hardly dared to hope, there were so many pitfalls. Could Rajjia do her part? And if she did, what then? If it should come to fighting, were they enough to hold the raja's guards in check, till Sylvia got away? There were but six of them, all told. Gyan Singh's magic had conjured up a car, which waited in the park outside. But one chance wanderer among the trees might

notice it and spoil their plans. They had not to traverse the city to hit the road to Munshinagar, the nearest British post. But even so, could they get through the street which led to it before pursuit was organized? There were crowds everywhere.

He thrust his fears into the background; it was time enough to take his fences when he came to them. He sought and found the subdued light which came through Sylvia's obstructed window. What was she doing now, what was she thinking? She did not know that help was near.

He brought his eyes down to the door in front of him, and knew his hour of waiting must be nearly past. The moon had cleared the palace, and its beams now shone upon the door. He turned on his left side and drew the heavy service Webley which was strapped high up on his bare thigh, the only place he could conceal it. He cocked the hammer, and he saw Gyan Singh's head turn at the click.

Ten minutes more of breathless waiting, before the crowd the other side of the vast palace block roared out their greeting to the raja. He riveted his eyes upon the door.

He watched for an eternity, which was five minutes. And then the rusty bolt clanged down, the double leaves burst open.

Sylvia, shot forward by their sudden yielding, half-ran, half-stumbled down the steps, to come down on her knees on the tiled path. Hard behind her came Rajjia, her grey locks bare, her sari flowing

out behind her. And after them, almost upon their heels, a grim, dark figure with a raised talwar.

Hugh started to his feet. Rajjia stopped, and dragged at Sylvia's arm. The steel flashed in the moonlight as the soldier swung his weapon back to strike. Hugh levelled his revolver. It was a desperate chance, but he must take it, or be too late. But Rajjia had turned and flung herself between her missie-baba and the sword, in less time than he took to coil his finger round the trigger. The great, curved blade descended, shearing through flesh and bone and sinew, and Rajjia, her head half-severed, sank crumpled to the ground. She had atoned for one night's negligence, eight years ago.

Sylvia rose tottering to her feet. The butcher raised his dripping sword again. Hugh pulled the trigger, and good fortune seconded his aim. The blade continued its swing upwards, but the hand that guided it was dead.

Hugh was half-way across the lawn before the reeling body of the swordsman came crashing down upon the path. Sylvia wheeled round, and stooped to gather Rajjia in her arms; blindly commenced to drag into some place of safety that crimsoned body with its ghastly, lolling head. She saw Hugh at her side and took him for another of the raja's men. Screaming, she dropped the corpse and ran.

Hugh caught her, swung her struggling up into his arms, bore her towards the postern in the wall. He whispered to her, called her by her name.

She twisted round and peered into his darkened face, to make quite certain of him. Her world was full of ghosts to-night.

"We must go back for Rajjia," she said, and fainted.

But Hugh went on. Rajjia was past all helping, and it would be only seconds now before the raja's men poured through the palace after them. Gyan Singh, at his side, kept pace with him and gave him final, brief instructions.

"Straight through the gate and to the car. The driver will have started up. He knows his way. And stop for nothing—nothing, mind—until you are beyond the borders of the state."

"But what of you?" Hugh panted. "What of your men?"

"Do your own job," Gyan Singh told him. "Ours is to see that nobody gets through the garden gate till you are clear away."

A fusillade of shots rang out behind. Gyan Singh turned, and doubled back into the garden, to wage unequal battle with the raja's hordes.

. . . . .

Hugh stumbled on with Sylvia to the car. He found the driver, warned by the first shot, already in his place and ready to be off—so ready that the car was bumping slowly over the rough ground between the trees before he had got Sylvia well settled on the seat. Gathering speed along the empty

avenue, they reached the entrance gates and swung into the street.

And then their troubles started. They had a mile or more to go before they reached the long, straight open road; a mile of close-packed bustees, each reproducing on a smaller scale the great tamasha of the city. They had their own fires, built beside or even on the road; and every fire was ringed about with its particular crowd. No one took any notice of the horn: at times the driver had to creep on slowly till his radiator almost burnt them on the back. Then perhaps fifty or a hundred yards of freedom, and the same slow crawl to be endured again.

Hugh left the driver to his task and kept a watch behind, waiting with apprehension for the moment when the crowds which they had passed would stand out silhouetted in the glare of following headlights. But minutes passed, the driver wormed his way towards the open country, and behind was nothing but the falling sparks of fireworks and the flickering glare of fires. The pandemonium which kept them back was also their salvation; the raja's cars, when once their drivers had been found, could not get through the masses of humanity which packed the palace yard.

## CHAPTER XXXI

HUGH did not know when Sylvia came back to consciousness. For miles he held her silently, while the great car rocked on, headed full-throttle towards Munshinagar. At times she stirred against him, and once, although she was quite warm, he felt her body shiver. But he said nothing; he judged it best to leave her until she chose to speak.

And when at last she spoke, he had to bend his head to catch the murmur of her lips:

"Don't let him get me, Hugh."

He reassured her tenderly; recounted, for her comfort, all that had happened since she fainted in his arms. She seemed content, and said no more until another milestone had been caught up in the headlights' beam, and passed, and swallowed in the darkness. Then she sat up and faced him.

"Where's Rajjia?" she asked. "You didn't leave her, Hugh?"

And Rajjia's blood was drying on her clothes.

"Didn't you know?" he asked her gently. "You saw her fall; you went to pick her up."

She shook her head.

"I don't seem to know anything, after this after-

noon. He came to me, and told me Joshi would be hanged to-morrow morning. He made two men drag me downstairs into a cellar and hold me by my arms over a well. He threw a brick down it and made me listen to the splash. He laughed, and said the next time that the water would be stirred was when he ordered them to let me drop."

Shuddering, she lived again those hopeless, dragging hours till Rajjia had come. Rajjia! Again she put her question, and Hugh could not avoid the answer. He told her briefly of the part which she had played, so far as he himself knew of it. He ended his compressed recital by quoting Gyan Singh's prophetic epitaph:

"She asked no better fate."

"And I was beastly to her, always," burst out Sylvia. "I took for granted everything she did; I don't suppose I've ever thanked her in my life, and she used to slave for me. I hardly used to speak to her, except to give her orders. I wouldn't even let her speak to me, I shut her up at once. I treated her like all the rest; I wouldn't recognize exceptions."

Her reference to her deep-rooted prejudice recalled the cause of it, and the disaster which had followed from that cause. It seemed so natural for Hugh to rescue her, for her to lean on him and sob against his shoulder, that her self-imposed decree of separation had been blotted from her memory. But when remembrance came, it drove out of her head all thoughts of Rajjia, all the still



vivid terrors of the raja and his palace, everything save the one stark fact that she had not the right to let Hugh comfort her, to let him love her. The shadow lay between them still.

Once she had dared to send him from her, had steeled herself to bear her fate of loneliness. But now she could not let him go. She had no courage left in her; she felt that she could never face the world alone again.

"Must a girl suffer all her life for a man's beastliness?"

Her words were muttered audibly. Hugh caught them and mistook their meaning, translated them into a confirmation of the fear which had distracted him since the first news of her captivity.

"Sylvia, not that! He didn't dare do that!"

She looked at him, perplexed; she did not realize that she had voiced her thought aloud. Grasping his meaning, she flushed red.

"No, Hugh, he spared me that. He hated me too much."

But what would he have said to her, she wondered, if it had been impossible for her to give that answer? Did men forgive unmerited dishonour? He seemed all tenderness. And if he could forgive what he had feared, then she could dare to tell him anything. She drew away from him until she faced him, resolved to put her future to the test.

"Supposing I had come back soiled—what then?"

Hugh groped, and found her hands.

"Sylvia, don't think such dreadful things."

There was a startled horror in his voice which sent a chill of doubt to Sylvia's heart. He tried to draw her back to him, but she resisted. She could not yield to his compelling arm until she knew.

"But what then?" she persisted. "Would you still want me to be nestling up to you, if he had been that kind of beast?"

She felt the muscles of his arm grow tense; whether she would or not, she could not fight against its gentle, strong compulsion. Pressed close to him, she waited for his answer and felt the shadow lifting.

"All the more reason I should comfort you," he said.

She raised her face from his coarse, stained jacket.

"Hughie," she whispered, "we shall have no more misunderstandings, you and I."

The shadow was gone.

. . . . .

In the first grey light of dawn the full hum of the engine died away, the car lost pace. Hugh started up, afraid of a breakdown. Although they had long passed out of state territory, he judged that their determined enemy would not relax pursuit until they reached the safety of a British post. He cast one swift, involuntary glance behind; then, saw, ahead, the reason for their stopping.

The lamps illuminated lorries filled with troops, drawn up beside the road. An officer in khaki stood out in front of them, with hand upraised. The car drew up beside him.

He came up to it. "Is that Frampton?" he demanded. He saw the occupants, two Indians and a lady, and turned, with a bewildered exclamation, to whistle up his men. Something had obviously gone wrong, and till he knew he was not taking any risks.

But Hugh's hand was upon his arm before the whistle reached his lips.

"Don't be a fool; you'll wake her up."

"And who the hell are you?" the soldier asked.

He was not satisfied till he had dragged Hugh out and looked him over in the light of the car lamps.

"They might have warned us," he complained. "The Resident phoned through to say that you were on your way. But he didn't tell us to expect a human rainbow."

He hurriedly explained the situation. The party which had covered Hugh's retreat had had no difficulty in successfully effecting their own withdrawal. The bushes hid their slow retirement, until they had got through the garden gate and slammed and locked it on their adversaries. Gyan Singh, as had previously been arranged, had gone straight to the Residency and reported, and the Resident had got

the information through before it had occurred to anyone to cut him off.

"It's all plain sailing," the officer concluded, "now you have got Miss Delahey away. I have been waiting the last week to tootle out as soon as we heard that. Orders, to back the Resident in making the arrest. Six hours from now should see your friend the raja safe in clink."

The soldier grinned—"Good luck to you"—and went back to his lorry. The car slid slowly past the crowded, staring men. The ruin Joshi had predicted for his friend would not be long in coming.

And Joshi. The sun was rising through the early morning mist, a dull red ball on the horizon. This was the date retained provisionally for his execution. The news of Sylvia's rescue must by now have got to Agra; there would be no postponement. Now, at this very moment, his lips were moving in monotonous prayer, just as those other lips, now dead, had moved. The warders would be coming in, to pinion him and march him through the silent jail, to that high-walled enclosure where an empty noose was dangling from the gallows.

Hugh closed his eyes, as though by doing so he could shut out the tragedy.

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