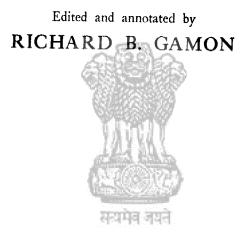




# FOR CONSULTATION ONLY WARREN OF OUDH

BEING THE TRANSCRIPTION OF A LETTER AND THREE ROLLS OF MANUSCRIPT WRITTEN BY COLONEL JACK WARREN OF THE OUDH STATE ARMY, AND LATE OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S FORCES TO HIS SON, NUGENT



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THE Editor begs leave to intimate that, throughout the Manuscript, he has made certain alterations in the rather archaic spelling of Colonel Warren, especially in regard to the names of Indian persons and places, for the convenience of the reader.





# INTRODUCTION

#### Sephali Kothi, Sookhsagar.

#### TO MY SON, NUGENT.

Save through the medium of my letters and such written counsel as I have ventured to add to that of your excellent preceptors, fate has decreed that you know little indeed of me, your father, and still loss, unhappily, of your sainted mother.

It is with the purpose of increasing your knowledge on this score that I address these to you, well aware though I be that ink and paper can never inform as could that personal intercourse which has been denied. As it is, I am conscious that I must write almost as a stranger and that your real parents are those to whose guardianship you were committed as a boy, and who have taught you and watched you and reared you into manhood. But with those who labour in this burning land this cross will ever be.

I desire you to accept the manuscripts which I will enclose in this letter. They deal with my story from the day I set eyes upon your mother. Of my life previous to this I think fit to tell you thus briefly.

As you know, the bosom of this land bears in its scorching depths the bones of both your grandparents. My revered mother died in Calcutta as she gave me birth, and I was suckled by a dark skinned woman, imbibing with her milk enough of the glamorous lore and language of her people to set me dreaming in after years amid the hay and gorse of my uncle's downland farm, and to pester my boyish mind with vague, mystic longings.

My father, dreading as my early years crept on, that I should become a very moor in all save colour, packed me off in charge of a sea-captain's wife to Uncle Giles Warren, Squire of many and mightily mortgaged broad acres in Sussex, who, even at that time, had commenced his expensive and tedious life-work of drinking himself to death. (These estates were lost to the family through Giles' profligacy, otherwise, lad, they would have come to you.) Giles Warren was a huge, bluff man, opulent of colour and of egregious ignorance. He treated me with the greatest kindness, but with such neglect in matters scholarly that I blush for shame when faced by a Latin tag, for the tongue is Low Durch to me. Truly, he provided me with books, but no tutor had I, n.r any who would explain to me the rule o' thumb or the sum of two and two.

One day as I rooted at the behest of the housekeeper in the herb garden for houseleek, stile, camomile and the borage which "comforteth the heart," my uncle collared me by the ear and dragged me thereby into the wast library of Warren's Hurst, (sadly depleted by his wandal hands of its more valuable books) and pointed with his crop to a pile dragged from the shelves.

"Here be education enough for any gentleman's son, child," he said, inhaling a pinch of snuff from the back of his hand. " Chaucer, Lyly, Milton-a dull dog-Dryden, saucy Fletcher, Billy Shakespere and the rest. Though, if you take my advice, you'll do no more than excerpt a tag here and there and learn it to trot out now and then when 'tis seemly. And look'ee ! Here's books as I've spent good money on . . . a new Algebra, Euclid's plaguey enigmas and a book which will show you at least how to count your change; together with a hornbook with the Alphabet writ big and little in it, also the Lord's Prayer, all as clear as Autumn brew. . . . " my uncle pulled his forelock in the Sussex manner at the mention of the Holy Word. . . . " Then here's a book that'll learn you how to parleyvoo, and when you can pick things out a bit in the lingo, you'll find old Rabelais and Lafontaine in the corner there-though behopes you won't understand the varns yet awhile. I ha'nt spent money on books o' Latin and Greek because I don't believe they're spoken anywhere now, and what's the use o' learning about gallivanting gods and coves who build walls in a language as isn't spoke ?

"Now, what more can you want to make you a peddy, eh? Fall to, my lad, and may you do me credit. Hannah, a jug of ale... mulled?"

Thus was I condemned to an ignorance as colossal as my uncle's own, though I may say with some pride that I worked hard now and then, and sought assistance at the foot of the rustic Gamaliel of

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Hurstdean school who initiated me into the primary intricacies of the three R's.

In '57 my father died, working among his fallen men at one of Clive's eight cannon in the plantation at Plassey, and the news occasioned me small grief, such a vague memory had he become.

Then, after many indolent years spent in kennel and field, or lounging in the ancient and neglected pleasaunce with books 1 scarce could read, came a letter from a Mr. Lawrence, that same Stringer Lawrence, I do believe, who commanded the Company's Forces when Dupleix would have conquered the south of this land. The circumstance is vague in my mind, and I know little save that under his direction, precise and potent, despite the fact that neither my uncle nor myself ever set eyes on my benefactor, Giles Warren so conducted that, in next to no time, I had qualified as a cornet of horse, was commissioned, and directed to join the East India Company's newly raised European cavalry in Calcutta.

By what magic Mr. Lawrence accomplished this thing I know not; there was not the slightest justification for dressing my boorish adolescence in the bravery of this honourable rank. But I do believe that Lawrence acted on the behest of my father, who, after all, knew his own brother, and was doubtless unwilling that my youthful, plastic mind should shape and set itself in such a pitiable mould.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that in '63, my uncle bade me a bibulously tearful farewell, and I left him to pursue his légèretés alone, and quitted the shore of England for ever.

A year or so followed in which I was gruelled and licked into shape, and suffered much in consequence, for despite my stupidity I was as sensitive as a fever sore.

But the grinding labour on the parade and in the camp hardened and leaned my yokel's body; my skin burnt brown; a dozen dialects came to companion my mother tongue. At length I obtained my baptism of fire at Buxar, where we so soundly trounced the Padishah and his Vizier, the Nawab of Oudh, under gallant Sir Hector Monro.

Then skirmish followed skirmish with robber chief and petty

prince, and always the meagre troops of cavalry and the party of hussars which constituted the Company's horse, were to the fore, so that, at the close of the Rohilla war, I found myself a squadron leader. The manuscripts will tell you what befell after this period.

It was only meet, however, that I should acquaint you with the outline of my early life, that you may know (I say it with pride and truth) that with God's help it has been throughout an honourable one, as was my father's before mine.

Serve the Company well, lad, and you will find it a complaisant and not ungenerous master. You have chosen to wield the pm rather than the sword, and there are many who would have ihat it is the mightier instrument. I, however, am content to know that you are equipped in full for your work, fitted for the society you will attain, and possessed of a constitution steeled by heredity against the climate of this country.

Mr. Alloway, to whose care I commend you, will instruct you as to the modes and manners of life scemly in India, and it is with all the sincerity I can command that I beg you live continently and moderately, observing his advice, that you may be spared to continue to the third generation in this country, the humble part of our family towards the increase of His Majesty's dominion and power.

It is growing dark . . . only the orange glow of the sunset on the river lights my writing . . . and I must make an end.

Mr. Alloway will deliver this letter and the manuscripts to you. That the good God may guard and prosper you in all things, my beloved son, is the last and heartfelt prayer of

Your affectionate father,

JOHN WARREN, Colonel.

P.S.—I have caused to be prepared for you five kegs of a very fine Lucknow mixture, which you will find smokes equally as well in hookah or English clay. It should be kept in a humid spot.

J.W.

This 18th December, 1799.

x



## BOOK THE FIRST

#### SHOWING HOW CAPTAIN JACK WARREN UPHELD THE BEST TRADITIONS OF HIS TIME NOTWITHSTANDING HIS ENVIRONMENT.





## WARREN OF OUDH

#### I

## "Now will we dance and sport and play." THOMAS WEELKES, 1600.

THE low moon swam out of the horizon mists and cleared her bland features of the crimson murk, that she might smile her silver smile upon us through the restless Bengal night. It seemed to me that there was encouragement in that smile, and, with a deep breath of resolution, I left the friendly shelter of the Fort.

'The odour of pomatum cloyed my nostrils; hair powder clogged my eyelids, and gorget, sword, and full-dress bravery irked as they had never irked before. I doubt, in fact, if the whole four and twenty Pergunnahs held a man so damnably ill at ease on that New Year's Eve as was I, nor one so angered at himself for being so.

Yet I had nothing on my mind of serious burden; no troubles of love or money, twin founts of all human misfortune, afflicted me : I was simply on my way as a guest to a ball. And in brief, I had dared a dozen battles before a single ball a neat play on words, though I say it.

For I was shy.

Now, of all the winged afflictions which Pandora let loose upon the world, few have a sting so subtly envenomed as hath the vampire of Shyness. A wonder working venom truly : it can pigmyfy six feet of brawn and muscle ; it can reduce the possessor of the noblest intellect to a condition of blethering inanity. It is death to initiative ; it tortures maliciously with

the afterthought of lost opportunities; and it has a paralytic effect on the amorous which is usually fatal to their ends.

More, if one dare combat this fateful thing, it forthwith condemns him to cut the sorriest figure that the gods and man e'er grinned at.

Thus, my trepidation. For, though I have never dared fight this flitting evil, it nevertheless turns my hands on occasion into bunches of thumbs, my tan to blushes, and, stealing my wits, capers off with them to the devil, leaving me rather the inferior in converse and intelligence to a new born babe. As for Bath legs, cotillons and minuets—they might be expected with considerably more confidence from Brawn Bess than from me.

The ordeal before me, too, was the most exacting of all such ordeals—the Governor General's New Year Ball, the chief function of the Settlement year, where, even did I not dance, I should certainly be expected to flaunt a graceful kerchief and poke my snuff-horn under a dozen fastidious noses with my poor fistful o' thumbs.

Also I should inevitably be brought into the proximity of ladies. And the plaguey bat of shyness invariably injected its most noxious poisons into me when fair eyes surveyed my doings; it achieved its most crowning triumphs then.

Yet one more melancholy consideration. My liability to harbour this aerial terror was well known in the Settlement. Hence my muttered malediction, when, the moon, having encouraged me to make my sally, revealed me to the dancing eyes of Messieurs Peabody and Pettigrew, subalterns in my regiment and twins in mischief.

They were capering gaily out of the East Gate and accosted me with gusto and disrespect.

"Ha ! Sluggard," cried Peabody. "Seeking solace in the shadow?"

He approached me and sniffed loudly and suspiciously.

"What? Do I catch the aroma of ration rum? 'Tis as I thought, Audelay, the man keeps his courage in a bottle, like the Mynheers at Chinsura."

"I had long feared it," sighed Pettigrew. "But why procrastinate, fair Captain? Why ponder? Have you not marked the words of Shakespere—or was it Julius Caesar?—'Faint heart never won fair lady.' Prenez courage, mong capitaing I Here, catch his other arm, Peter. Quick ! I vow the man Intends to run home again."

The boys seized me, an elbow apiece, and bore me on at a reluctantly enhanced rate.

"I cannot see," quoth I, ignoring their flagrant rudeness, why the etiquette of the community should be offended against were a plain soldier to refuse to slither inanely on a treacherous floor."

"But this plain-very plain-soldier don't do even a slither, Cap'n dear," chuckled Peabody, "he merely blushes as doth the rose in a corner unseen, or sticks to a wall like a mussel."

"At least he endures with exemplary fortitude the wipes of precocious infants who know no better than to taunt their superiors," I countered warily.

"Pettigrew !"

"Mr. Peabody !"

"Methinks the man asperses us."

"Then let us hasten the hour of his destruction."

And regardless of my dignity as a Squadron Commander, the madbrains dragged me into a run.

We scurried past the Great Tank and the moonlit, battered remains of old St. Anne's, and across the Militia parade.

"Dancing inures and hardens against the heat," declared Pettigrew in ierks.

"And what is more graceful or more reminiscent of chivalric days than the minuet?" chimed in the second inquisitor; also breathless with effort.

"With Grace's clothing fairly dripping and Chivalry's sweat drops blackening the floor ?" I gasped back. "Let me go, you young idiots ! We're hard by the Court House."

"Do you recant?" demanded Pettigrew.

"Recant what ?"

"It matters not what, numskull. Do you recant?"

"Yes, I recant ! Damme, children, let me go !"

"Mr. Peabody !"

"Mr. Pettigrew?"

"The man recants."

"As well for him, b'gad," murmured Pettigrew tlarkly, and we slowed down to a ruffled walk.

"You are a couple of zanies," I protested severely. "The justices, councillors, and all manner of great folk are to be at this entertainment, and now look at the state of my uniform !"

"Too much hair powder," said Pettigrew, and chattered glibly on. "I believe some of those moors who were at the Governor-General's durbar to-day are to watch the opening of the ball. I hope they don't stay over long."

"The Nawab's Vizier expressed a desire to see how the subjugating white man conducts his revels," I explained, "but he and his retinue will only watch the reception by the Governor and the walking of the first minuet."

"As well for him," said Peabody, "and for the retinue. An they stay too long, we shall discover that we have toes to our boots, shall we not, Audelay?"

"Mr. Peabody, we shall !"

The brief walk down Eastward Avenue was soon over, and we ploughed our way through the dust in front of the Court House to the door. A host of phaetons, whiskeys and palankeens collided, scraped and manœuvred round the ill-lit entrance to the new verandah, to the accompaniment of shrieks from the press of servants and plaintive appeals from the ladies beleaguered in the vehicles.

Jemadars fussed round the doors of rich, sedan-like bocha palankeens, windowed with glass and lined with red leather, as the stately dames within preened themselves against a triumphant emergence from their shelters.

Little processions of menials, suntabadars with gold sticks, chobdars with maces of carven silver, forced passages through the throng for their masters.

It was indeed a feat to compass a passage, but I was aided in my efforts by the vigorous elbows of the two subalterns, and we

presently attained the ante-room, where the youngsters immediately darted off leaving me stranded amid the crowd of arriving guests. I found myself surrounded by stalwart young bloods attended by coffrees—the African slaves it was the vogue to affect—officers in varied uniforms, and gentlemen in flowered velvets and China brocades, standing in little, expectant groups of which our treasured ladies, a-reek with violet water or milk of roses, and chattering scandal and garments, formed the centres.

I peered blankly for a space, till I caught the glearn of an orange sash in the lanthorn light, which sash I immediately made for, as a drowning man makes for a sustaining spar.

The sish belonged, I found, to Captain Armonde, who with the surgeon, Harryman, was putting a final touch to the arrangement of his elaborate uniform; setting stock and ruffle; dusting away superfluous powder and re-tying stray ribbons.

"Ah, Warren," grinned the surgeon, "come to titivate too? What? No servant? Then let me aid you! Damme man, you look as cheerful as a *faker* in the monsoon. And from the dust on ye, you must have walked. But gay! man, gay! 'Tis New Year's Eve and Leadenhall Street pays. More, there are Frenchies here from Chandernagore and we of the Orange Devils must ruffle it with the best of 'em. Tout à fait comme il faut, y'know."

"You have my sympathy, Warren," quoth Armonde with his slow, not over mirthful smile. "Knowing your antipathy to this sort of thing, I did not expect to meet you here."

"What alternative have I?" I asked, resignedly. "My health is invariably damnably good on these occasions."

"I'faith, I'm thankful enough for health when there are petticoats in the offing," answered Armonde, his eyes lighting up greedily at the thought of some gentle conquest in prospect.

"Your servant, Sir John; 'Servant, Lady Day," he exclaimed as a gentleman with a lady on his arm paused to greet us. It was the Advocate-General, and he had something to say to Armonde, who strode off in his company.

Harryman looked me up and down critically.

"H'm," he commented. "Sword a trifle more to the rearif you propose to wear it. A sword, my friend, should be as your coat tail, an obvious portion of your attire, but never ip the way. Red heels are a trifle out o' date, lad, but the hair à l'aile de pigeon is in good style. However, alleng; it is devilish late, and no doubt Mr. Hastings and the other Olympians are as impatient to trip it as we are."

He cast a sidelong glance at my dour visage and laughed gaily.

Josiah Harryman was perhaps the only man I could justly claim as a friend. He was short, middle-aged and rather stout, ruddy of cheek and bald as to crown, though his baldness was hidden by a periwig, which, as he was wont to say, prevented the shine of his pate from dazzling the ladies. His little blue eyes were keen and kindly, though rheumy with the fumes of his drugs; his lips were finely cut and ever moved in humorous twitches. A man of ready sympathy and ready choler was he, though blunt and shrewd withal. Harryman had taken me in hand from the moment I arrived in India, acting the part of guide, philosopher and friend till the period of homesick helplessness was past. It was he who shepherded me through my first campaign, and bound the scratch I received in the fight against Faizulla and his Rohillas at Buxar. At that present he was still my adviser and sheet anchor, and, parenthetically, I was more than a little grateful for his proximity now.

Together Harryman and I passed down the carpetted corridor to bow low and receive the welcome of the slim, sable-clad man who held the destinies of India like reins in his hand. Thence to the great salon, now tricked out in such a blaze of colour and light that we hesitated, dazzled, on the threshold.

Hundreds of tapers, blazing in sconces, vied with native lamps of brass to cast the brighter glow upon the motley crowd beneath them. The scarlet, blue and orange of uniforms, the gleam of gilt on epaulets and hilts, the gaudy hues of Nawabi dresses, and the swelling clamour of many tongues, confused alike eyes and ears so unaccustomed as were mine.

"Come, Jack, don't stand there gaping like a sick camel !" quoth Harryman, as he groped a way through the expectant

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crush till, half choked by native essences, we emerged near *i* recess in which was set a divan. The surgeon flopped dowr **b**pon it, puffing out his ruddy cheeks in breathless disgust.

"Ugh, I envy Wolsey his fair or or or vinegar when among the ladies—and blacks," he said. Now, lad, allow me to select you a partner for the first scramble. Figures made up are they? Well, I'll engage that you foot it with the best after supper; though they do say," he added confidentially, "that the claret is only Danish at twenty-seven rupees."

"I fear I'm an incongruity, Jo," I sighed, "something of ar in-postor; since I can add nothing to the gaiety of the proceedings save the doubtful ornament of my person."

" Pah : " was my friend's expressive comment.

"See 1" he went on, "the moors are being cleared already slipping away hopelessly bewildered. Hope there are no proselytes among 'em, lest they raid the supper room, perchance and choke up the space reserved for respectable white mer underneath the tables."

The orchestra commenced the music of the first minuet.

In this the figures were walked by the notables; Warrer Hastings himself led the dance, and no masks were worn although, now that the official reception was over, the bright colour of a domino showed here and there among the crowd, and more than one pretty face was half-hid by a gauzy covering.

Hastings was walking the measure with a quiet smile on his alert visage in the same set as a bulky man in peach coloured frock and smalls, whose knee and hair ribbons were of a violent puce. Him I knew as Sir Elijah Impey the new Chief Justice. and Hastings' old school fellow at Westminster.

When the dance came to an end a momentary hush fell upon the assembly, as though some chill blast had transiently dissipated the spirit of gaiety. Watching, I saw a faint flush mantle the cheeks of the Governor-General and his determined chin protrude more pugnaciously than ever; plain signs, in him, of displeasure.

"Ha, the Trinity !" muttered Harryman in my ear, the humour in his voice tempering the irreverence of the allusion. "You know Philip Francis, the tall, handsome duck. There are his two bulldogs trotting obediently to heel. Major Monson is he of the beaked nose; General Clavering is the bluff, hearty-looking man. See how coldly they greet. Ye'd think Francis' pud was a hot potato from the way Hastings dropped it—and there's only a bow for t'others. Marked you that ! There's trouble a-brew for someone o' the four. They were indeed no friends of Hastings who landed that day at Chandpal Ghat."

Francis and Hastings exchanged a few remarks with an attempt to make them appear desultory and cordial that was far too frigid to be successful. The stir broke forth again spontaneously; the band struck up the second dance.

"There's pretty Mistress Clavering and Miss Sanderson with her," went on my friend. " Des bels oiseaux, n'est-ce-pas ? And behold the Imhoff-that bijou with the auburn hair and dressed a triffe hors la mode with a red sacque or cardinal or whatever they call it. I suppose you know 'tis said the Governor-General is-er-has-er-ahem! But honi soit, eh? Nevertheless, only yesterday I did spy him riding in her chariot and fiddling with the horse net and kittesaw as though he were a servant. Zooks ! do I shock you ? There, there ! But one must keep au courant, y'know. We will divert ourselves elsewhere. Here's our little friend Claude Martin making for us. Why is it we all like Claude ? He's little and French, and an adventurer; his palm's itchy and his nose is long. Yet renegade as he is, he's a good fellow. D'you remember how he mastered those scum during the mutiny at Buxar and stuck to the old Jack right through ? He's off to Oudh soon, I believe, surveying the country as he did here in Bengal. Surveying, forsooth ! What the dooce does he know about surveying? Ah-er-hum, Bien the bon soir, Mounseer le Capitaing. What cheer this delectable eventide ? "

"Ah, my dear 'Arryman, I rejoice to see you," cried the Captain, nodding recognition to me. "I trus' you are well. May I present a newcomer in zis lan' to you ?"

"Ongshontay !" declared the surgeon. " If 'tis a lady."

Martin beckoned to a young man who was idly watching the dance, a slight, delicate-looking man with a rather handsome face that nevertheless bore lines unwarranted by his age.

"You will t'ank me, *mon ami*, for zis," murmured the Captain, *sotto voce*, as the youth came towards us. "Zis boy 'as a sister 'cse beauty is *merveille*—or so I understand. I was ask' to distrac' 'im, but I am ver' busy jus' now, so, 'ow you say ?— I 'and 'im on."

He taised his voice.

"Surgeon 'Arryman of the European 'Orse, ze ones zat wear ze orange plume, you know-Meestair Laurence Brunel, a new writer of ze Company, 'oo arrive but two days ago on ze *Rosy Dawn* frigate, wiz 'is sister so entrancing."

The pair bowed, separately and together, coughed awkwardly, and writed. Martin made off without further ado.

Harryman presented me, and the process enumerated above was repeated, cough and all, ere we settled down to the stilted conversation of the newly introduced.

"Lucky to come in the cold weather, sir," the surgeon informed Brunel, in his unhappiest vein—he was very tactless at times in converse. "Fairly cool now, y'know. Different in summer—very. Unhealthy quarters, those writers' places, too. I've told the Civil surgeon *pukka* provision should be made time and again. But what use? The Company will pay a Nabob to sit and twiddle his thumbs in Muxedabad, but not a pie on its servants' behoof."

"I am encouraged," said Brunel, with a wry smile.

"Pardon my plain speaking," pursued my friend. "But a friendly caution, y'know, is of value out here. No place for burning the candle at both ends, I assure you, with the climate frizzling away at the middle of it. Warren here, and myself, have found it advisable to dedicate at least one night a week to sobriety---eh, Warren?"

Glad of the humorous relicf, I solemnly agreed that we were usually to be found sober on Sunday evenings.

Yet it appeared to me that young Brunel accepted the hint as to careful living with some annoyance, as indeed, he was quite entitled to do, and, to swing the conversation round to pleasanter topics, I commenced to remark lightly on the various intrigueof the salon that were being carried on so openly around us.

Thus we stood and talked, till, as the sweating orchestra suddenly ceased their efforts, a fat, comfortable-looking lady, whom I did not know, made her way towards the Governor-General, curtseyed till her paduasoy billowed voluminously about her plumes, and turned effusively to present to him the young girl who had followed her.

"Gadzooks !" ejaculated the surgeon at sight of this young lady, "What have we here—a *peri*? What a gem ! There'll be some new uniforms bespoke ere the week is out, I'll warrant."

Which prophecy even I, notorious for my supposed indifference to feminine charm, mentally admitted was justifiable.

For the beauty of the *débutante* was both vivid and rare. Her face was a perfect oval; her complexion so delicate that it seemed to glow with the lustre of a pearl. There was but the faintest touch of colour in her cheeks, and this, I judged, was lent by excitement to a normal healthy pallor. Great, grey eyes, sparkling lambently and devastatingly from under sweeping lashes, set off to advantage the subtle sheen of her delicate skin. Her rich hair, a-burn in the myriad lights like burnished copper veined with gold, was rolled, unpowdered, from a wide, thoughtful brow. Both the firmly rounded chin and the proud poise of her head indicated that the girl possessed a mettlesome spirit.

Her appearance created a little stir, the sudden turning of a hundred pairs of eyes in her direction, and the curtsey which she accorded the Governor was over low as though she would have hidden the flush of pleasure that the compliment brought to her cheeks. Without a doubt, the lady was incomparably the handsomest woman in the room—an English violet in a garden of exotics. I could scarce repress a chuckle to see the dames of Settlement society, conscious of sun marred faces, rice-powdered Eurasian belles, and even beauties of established reputation, preen themselves involuntarily, as does a peahen in the presence of a rival. "Z'wounds!" grinned Harryman. "Look at the ensigns a-dusting their clobber ! Look at Armonde, there ! He's a victim for a certitude. Even the little padre would feast his eyes—th. epicure. Our Parises have passed a rapid judgment, and a sound, ecod ! John, my maiden-hater, how'd you fancy sucking Ambrosia from lips such as those, Nectar from such a wrist, Amrita from such a shoulder ? Come now, what would you not do for one little kiss, shyly returned ? Damme, what would I not do—Methuselah as I am ? I wonder who the dooce our Venus may be ?"

Brunel cast a sneering glance at the circle of officers and clerkly gallants of the Company's employ, which already paid court with an ardence that less precipitate England would consider unseemly, hiding the beautiful stranger from view.

"That," he said, carelessly, "is my sister, Rosalie."

#### II

" But here a sort of scene began to ensue. . . . " Don Juan.

"OH Lor'!" gasped Harryman. ""Is that your sister? Ah --yes-your sister---of course."

He stared vacantly round him for a moment, growing gradually a vich purple. I was hard put to it to keep a straight face.

"There is a wench," murmured Harryman at last, very vaguely, "a wench, I say, buxom, yet dainty—that daughter of the Captain of the Rosy Dawn. I met her when the vessel called last year—at Belvedere, I believe—and I have not seen her since. I—I wonder if she is here to-night?"

"If you mean Miss Freeman," I aided loyally, "she is there by the tubbed orange tree, talking to the priest from the Mission Church to whom you referred just now." "Ha! Then I will speak with her. I'll—er—rescue her from the clutches of the church. A priest at a ball—forsooth ! An I do not succour her, you may kick me from here to Alipore !"

With which scarce coherent denunciation of the unfortunate Father, my friend fussed off with an alacrity born of his confusion; not daring to look Brunel in the face again. That gentleman giggled inanely.

Presently I caught sight of the surgeon again. He was conducting the buxom Mistress Freeman through a minuet He danced as a budgerow bobs in the wake of a frigate, and it was evident that his consort by no means shared the supreme and dignified contentment which his now placid countenance expressed.

"We meet again, Mr. Brunel," said a calm voice at my side. I turned, to find that, with the silence that characterised him, Duselin had approached us—the Chevalier Isidore Boleslas Duselin, suavest, coldest, most mysterious of men; the acquaintance of us all in Fort William, yet the friend of none.

"A prosperous year to you, Warren," he added pleasantly as I turned. "That is the correct formula—the password and countersign of the evening, I believe. I came over to renew acquaintance with Mr. Brunel here. We were introduced by Mr. MacMurray at dinner this afternoon."

I acknowledged the greeting indifferently; to be cordial to Duselin was an impossibility.

"Tis a happy circumstance that you should arrive at such a time, Brunel. It is so much more pleasant to meet one's fellow workers for the first time in such a genial atmosphere than to be formally introduced over the desks. What think you of the great people who are here to-night?" asked the Chevalier, putting up his square quizzing-glass and sweeping a comprehensive glance around the room.

"They are impressive," answered the new writer, "but scarcely united, it would appear. Is there bad blood poisoning the Council?"

"Hardly that, I am convinced," said Duselin, resting his

dark eyes with that curious half-piercing, half-sedate glance of bis upon the speaker. "Truly an animus was said to be created through an insufficiency of guns in the salute their excellencies received when they landed last October, but they are all men of far too generous an outlook to harbour so small a grievance. Still, Mr. Francis does seem diametrically to differ from Hastings in matters of policy, and he has the votes of his friends Clavering and Monson to back him. Against this triumvirate the Governor has to stand alone, since at present Barwell seems to care for little except loo at high stakes."

"I have heard that our Council Chamber is as full of bickering as the Parliament House at home," remarked Brunel.

"Then God help us all," smiled Duselin, waving his hand to the lilt of the music.

"Is it true," asked Brunel naïvely, "that Mr. Hastings recently accepted a *douceur* of a very large sum from the Nawab of Oudh ? "

"There are certainly those who say," replied the Chevalier cautiously, "that when the Governor stretches out his hand to do a thing, the opposing gentry not only pull it down, but turn up the palm also, to see if it shows signs of itchiness."

I felt a growing distaste at this discussion of the Council's affairs with a Frenchman, and this extravagant statement aroused my indignation.

"Mr. Hastings is a high-minded gentleman who would stoop to no mean dealing," I declared. "You will make a bad start, Mr. Brunel, by lending an ear to malicious stories of this description concorning your superiors. Wait till you've been out here long enough to know the craving for good mango chutney and Lucknow pickle before you footle with the affairs of Nabobs."

"Ah, Warren," quoth Duselin, easily, "you have no interest in the wagging of the world outside the parade ground."

"A soldier should not," I rejoined, "nor a clerical subordinate outside his counting house."

"Perhaps not. Still, you will concede that it is diverting to watch the behaviour and peccadilloes of the exalted, especially

in this land. Here we breathe an air that is poisoned, nourishing as it does the heart of the country, which, i' faith, is but a mass of corruption. Despite their million gods the moors have but one-and that old Mammon-and favour, friendship, power, and even life itself are here as mere commodities uispensed br him. You know that every throne rests precarious upon a mountain of pagodas and rupees; that battles are ofttimes decided with mohurs and ashrafis as well as by powder and shot. The air of India, I say, is laden with the fumes which greed evolves from the metal of bribes and bloodmoney, and, drawing down the white man's lungs, is like to rot his honour, to putrify alike his integrity and self-respect. Is it not amusing to watch the combat 'twixt honour and tradition against this indigenous evil?"

"Your rhetoric proves us all scoundrels," I said, ill-temperedly.

"Oh, I except the company present," added the Chevalier with a cryptic smile, " and, personally, I have a high opinion of Mr. Hastings, his ends—and his means."

"He would be flattered an he knew," I sneered.

"Eh bien, the discussion is unprofitable and like to become acrimonious, so we will abandon it, hein?" suggested the Frenchman, unruffled. "My true object in approaching Brunel was not to subvert his loyalty, but to beg an introduction to his very charming sister; although it would appear a physical impossibility to achieve such a blissful thing at present."

He gave a wry glance at the crowd around the girl.

"Rosalie disjoints many noses these days," giggled the writer with a foolish, intolerant air that I did not like. "But, Chevalier, an you can find a way through this barrier of jackanapes, I shall be honoured to present you. Captain Warren, would you...?"

"A thousand thanks, but on some other occasion if it pleases you. I must leave almost at once-inspection of guards, you know."

Truth to tell, my damnable shyness and no call of duty prompted the ungracious refusal. I could picture the railing glances at my clumsy bow and the disdainful flash of those wonderful eves at my failure in compliments and persiflage. Heavens ! I might even slip on the polished floor.

No, I had stayed long enough. I could quietly steal off now, to smoke a pipe of canaster in peace in my quarters or in the moonlit battlements of the old Fort. 'Twere better than huddling into attempted obliteration amid the cushions of some divan.

The writer raised his eyebrows in mild astonishment, then bowed and moved off with the Chevalier in his wake.

Suppl cating and squirming, I made my way through the laughing confusion to the door, only to be held up in the anteroom by a monstrous crowd of departing natives, chattering and gesticulating, their movement sending waves of rich perfume through the febrile air that stiffled and nanseated. Some casteless fellow, a-search for his master's *palki*, shoved me rudely aside, only to dive into the capacious waistcoat of an elderly gentleman standing near me.

"Ugh," grunted he thus disturbed. "Shove me again, fellow, and, pardi, I'll have you lugged up before the magistrates, caged, slippered and rattaned."

I recognised him then. He was Loveday, an elderly attorney, apoplectic of hue and destitute of reputation. The recognition was mutual.

"Hullo, Warren," cried he. "Not dancing? No 'turnabout, wheel-about and jump just so,' as Punchinello sings? Strange to find so young and vigorous a hand so sadly neglecting his devoirs. Now, upon my soul, these dusky swine do give me the megrims. Go away, fellow, or I vow I'll get my friend here to tickle your marrow with that shiny spadroon of his."

Plainly alarmed, the moor to whom the last phrases were addressed dived into the clamouring mass, and Loveday's face lost some of its choleric congestion.

"I am no squire," I informed the attorney, "and even were I, competition is so keen that my rugged countenance prohibits even my entry into the arena." "Ah," he chuckled, "you are modest. As for me, I'm too old for this gambading and so :

"To pass the tedious hours away, We throw a merry main, Or else at serious ombre play—"

as the Earl of Dorset sang a hundred years agone, though quadrille, old-fashioned though it be, is more to my taste. There is a place set aside for cards next the room for the *huccabardars*. What say you to a quiet game of quad, or tredille if you like or put—a *partie* at picquet—anything ? "

I abominate cards, considering the game a waste of energy and time unless the stakes be high; and high hazards do not become one with so slender a purse as mine. However, I determined to try a hand or two for the sake of my good grace, though in nowise reassured by my companion's greedy sotto voce—" Two rupces a fish—no less, b'God !"

Harryman saved me in the nick o' time, however, by dashing forward, bursting with intelligence like a capless and rather rotund Hermes.

"Your pardon, Loveday," he panted, "Captain Warren's presence is urgently required in the ball-room. Sorry to deprive you of him, and so forth. Come, Warren !"

And once again, poor rudderless ship that I was, I allowed myself to be taken in tow and led through the stinking anteroom to the threshold of the great hall.

"How now ?" quoth I, mystified.

For answer, the surgeon forced me to make a demi-tour that brought me round short, facing the sheltered recess to the right of the door.

"I have ventured to importune Miss Brunel on your behalf, Warren," he said, "and, on learning of your ardent desire, she has been so gracious as to save the next country dance for you. Miss Brunel, may I present Captain Warren of the Orange Devils—ahem, that is to say, the Company's European Regiment of Horse. At the same time, pray accept my excuses, but I must go get my domino. I understand we are to sit at supper masked, and to masquerade for the cotillons and country dances afterwards."

•Harryman glanced at my dropped jaw, repressed a demoniac chuckle, and left me standing with knees a-knock and terrified, beneath the politely interested regard of the beauty of the evening.

#### 111

"A soldier, a good mask, a French Pedlar, a Subahdar, a Turk... the dominoes in general well fancied."

Report of a Masquerade in the CALCUTTA GAZETTE, 1785.

Thus the humour of my best friend.

A speechless, pregnant zon ensued.

Through that seeming eternity I racked my brain for some banality of compliment and gratitude, and racked in vain; the shock of the thing had slammed the door of my poor store.

So stood I and gazed helplessly, confusedly, into Mistress Brunel's deep eyes. Wonderful eyes they were indeed, large and grey and lustrous—yet, and even then I noted it, how sad! They sparkled gaily enough at me, but their gaiety harboured the glint of unreality; bleak desolation lay behind a dissembling glow. Ay, and the same tainting suggestion of effort haunted her lips, despite their smile. I was certain of it, for my own lonely habits rendered me sensitive to such delicate impressions.

Now, even the snowy brow burned with dusky rose under my vague glare.

"At your pleasure, sir?" said the girl in a voice of silver beauty.

My stare grew more vacuous—I knew it.

" I--I--" was all I could accomplish.

A look of wonderment and impatience dawned on the lady's features.

"Surgeon Harryman informed me that a gentleman—for the moment officially engaged—was desirous of conducting me through a contre-danse, he being an expert in the Scotch step. I love the Scotch step, which, it seems, no one knows in India, and so consented. Surely there is no error, sir; you are Captain Warren?" said she.

I stammered an agreement, and, if malign thoughts could kill, Harryman had been dead on the instant for his devilry. Country dance and acrobatic Scotch steps, forsooth ! The devil himself had inspired the man.

"The music commences," said Miss Brunel. "Pray lend me your arm."

Reluctantly coherent speech returned to me.

"Madame, there has been an error," I floundered. "I regret I cannot accept the honour you proffer me, and am desolated that...."

The firm little chin tilted haughtily.

"I fail to understand," its owner informed me in tones to match the tilt. "I have denied many gentlemen to retain this dance for you, and that upon a request vicariously made. Come, sir ! Would you have me do a melancholy *pas seul*, or go sit by the wall neglected ?"

The lady half indicated as she spoke a little group of marooned Eurasian dowagers, sere and shapeless with the untimely age that is the heritage of their kind.

Vainly I sought round for a convenient lie. I could not find one in sufficient time to render it plausible, so fell back upon the truth.

"I can't dance," I blurted out, "I never could and Harryman knows it !"

I regained control and a more becoming air, for more than one anxious gentleman was hovering around barely out of earshot.

"You would bitterly rue an attempt at the Scotch step an I made it with you, Miss Brunel," I said, with such calmness as I could muster. "Surgeon Harryman has a penchant for exuberant humour, of which, I am sure, this contretemps is an

example ; although, in contriving to victimize me, he has been so thoughtless as to embarrass a lady. I am sorry, very sorry bu. I truly connot dance."

But he who declared honesty to be the best policy could have no dealings  $\psi$  ith women.

"Surgeon Harryman has not the appearance of such a zany," the girl retorted spiritedly, though her lips were trembling. "I cannot believe him capable of such a pitiful trick. Nay, I perceive your motive, Captain Warren," she went on, with flashing eyes, "I have dragged you from the company of some other lady and this subterfuge is an excuse for your early return. To delay you, therefore, would be monstrous inconsiderate. Pray you, go to her at once---and make my excuses and regrets."

This was unfair as well as mortifying, I thought, and I assumed a dignity that ill accorded with my trembling limbs.

"I regret vou should see fit to reject my honest explanation, Madame," quoth I, "I do assure vou I am no trifler with the convenience of ladies—and strangers at that. Dalliance and I are unrelated. Surgeon Harryman shall later corroborate me and apologise. In the meantime "—a timorous attempt at mollification—" if you will forgive my saying so, I am convinced you will not suffer long for lack of a partner."

So saying, I executed quite a masterly bow, turned very carefully on my heel (for the floor was like glass) and attempted to make off. But my lady was not done with me; she recalled me with a petulant little cry.

"Will you shame me thus before these gentlemen, Captain Warren? At least make pretence of aiding me to a settee."

Again I bowed quite well, and silently offered my arm, wondering whether this was some subtle penance she had devised for me.

Miss Brunel placed her tiny hand upon my sleeve, and, since I stood too frightened at the thought of stalking with her throughout that vast expanse of ball-room to move, she impelled me by a gentle pressure towards the nearest lounge. Thither I strode stiffly, trying to shame the blood from my thirty-year old checks, handed the girl to a seat, and so stood, miserably failing to appear at ease. Malaise despite, I was preposterously relieved on one score—Miss Brunel had evidently relinquished the idea that I had slighted her to resume some frivolous encounter.

Followed a painful interval in which I coughed, fingered my sword, fingered my sword and coughed; endeavouring to foster an indignation at the treatment the lady's angry caprice accorded my innocent misfortune. Presently, unable longer boldly to face the crowd, I looked down and caught her eye. To my astonishment I surprised a roguish twinkle that had quite ousted the angry glow and even the deeper melancholy. The girl tossed her head when she caught my glance and the twinkle vanished.

I flushed still more at the detection, and yet more at the knowledge that my lady was laughing at me. I coughed a great deal and fingered my sword in proportion.

At this tense juncture Captain Armonde, rudely leaving his partner to her own devices, bustled arrogantly up.

"You may yield up your charge, Captain Warren," said Rosalie Brunel softly. "Pray leave your lady disconsolate no longer."

But her tone was not as serious as heretofore.

Armonde took over command with much the same air as that with which he would take over a squadron on parade from a subaltern, and I hated him exceedingly.

"Enchanté," he said. "Warren, you are lucky. Miss Brunel has permitted you to monopolize her favour this evening longer than she has any other of her slaves."

"Yes," I assented hollowly, "I am very lucky."

The girl smiled up at me a smile of pure mischief, and permitted herself to be led away.

Discomfited and out of humour I wandered back to the anteroom intending to seek Harryman and inform him of certain revisions in my opinion of him.

That ubiquitous individual saved me the trouble, though,

for it was he who aroused me from my brooding consideration of affairs by a clap on the shoulder.

"Well, lad," he cried, urbanely, "I have now time to receive your grateful thanks. What fortune?"

"Damn your impudence !" I burst out. "I cannot dance, and well you know it."

"Nay, perjure not and imperil your soul. I've seen you tread as stately a minuet as any. You surely don't mean me to believe you flouted the lady?"

"I did," snapped I, adding, "There's a world of difference between the minuet and these damned country dances. I might, with luck, have wallowed through the former, but I am no body-twisting Merry-Andrew."

"Egad, then we eat mud, both of us, next time we meet Mistress Brunel. Lad, you don't believe I'd ha' so used a lady ? I give you my word I thought to do you a kindness. Pooh ! What is there in the Scotch step ? There, there ! A truce to this moping, Jack, or you'll lose that faculty for enjoyment which is so all-important to us exiles, entirely. Forget not that slow coaches carry no passengers—nor yet bullion, out here. Take this domino and mask, and put 'em on. Put 'em on, I say ! Don't want to ? I care not a doit whether you want to or not. Put 'em on ! Damme, I'll order you to in a minute and then dare you to refuse. Ye gods ! I'm better than a father to ye."

Partly mollified by Harryman's protestation of regret and sincerity, partly urged by some contrary impulse such as frequently governs me in times of stress, I laid aside sword and belt on a loo-table, and donned the rococo garment of black, and the sable half-mask with its orange fringe, so that I resembled, as the irrepressible surgeon had it, a hangman with yellow whiskers.

I wheeled upon the surgeon with a broad grin.

"Ay," I agreed, "a hangman with yellow whiskers. You need no domino to dress for the part of convicted rapscallion, but swathe your beauty, nevertheless."

"Ah, better," grinned back Harryman, struggling with the

purple, sack-like garment which he had equipped himself. "Damn and blast these nigger *durjis*—the plaguey thing might ha' fitted me ten years agone, but I'm plumper o' figure now than then. Ah !"—as his badly tumbled periwig and glowing face emerged—" Now, to which gallows will you lead me ?"

"To the supper room," I cried haphazard, and we capered off down the corridor arm-in-arm, as though Care had slipped his seat and lay, bogged, a dozen miles behind the horseman.

From the new salon came, even at that early hour, the chres of merry voices and the clatter of dishes.

"He he !" chuckled the surgeon, as we entered the room, "All past their first youth, these refugees! You can tell 'em all—*celles grandes dames*—masks despite, by their shape ! 'Tis too early for anything serious. What shall it be—a beaker of Burgundy or some of this fancy Malaga or Tokay ?"

Malaga was a rarity and I selected it with alacrity.

"Punch for me," said Harryman. "'Tis the only thing that tickles my vitiated palate. What say the side boards pastys, sucking-pig, florican, venison—ugh—too solid ! Ah, what's this ? Fodder à la Persane ! Rice in butter, lamb with rice and raisin stuffing, *chilau*, marrow bones and forced meat. Gad ! I must wait half an hour for an appetite."

A soft-footed steward brought the wine, and Harryman filled a pyramid for me, and ladled out a goglet of steaming tea-punch for himself.

"Our noble selves," he suggested, ere he drained his glass, and I inverted mine in honour of an eminently sound toast.

Now we were standing in the corner of the room nearest the door and farthest from the early feeders, and, since the full number of tapers had not then been lighted, we were partly in shadow.

A tall mask, whose costume may have been that of the Grand Turk, appeared suddenly within the doorway and approached me stealthily, so that, as Harryman dipped the ladle into his punch to replenish his glass, he gained my side.

"Ferré, Dusailly, and Vauprière have thrown up in Chandernagore to go to Oudh. I have just heard. If you know more men of that stamp procure them similar rank speedily. Your methods do you infinite credit."

"Thank you," I said—for it seemed the right thing to say. At the sound of my voice, doubtless on account of its unfamiliarity, the mask drew back a little.

"Bah !" he muttered angrily. "You're drunk again !"

Then he was gone, as abruptly and noiselessly as he had arrived, and I was left nonplusted. Harryman turned, with his nose in the repleted goglet, caught a glimpse of the retreating figure, and looked enquiringly at me.

"Who the devil is that?" he queried.

"I don't know," I replied, and I told him what the mask had said.

"Did the fellow speak with an accent?" the surgeon demanded.

"A slight one-I should judge him to be French."

"There'twas Duselin for a certitude ; I marked his strut."

"Then I suppose he mistook me for someone else; his talk was so much balderdash to me. Harryman, who exactly is Duselin?"

"That's a question which is asked a good many times these days," answered my friend. "But it is never satisfactorily answered. He's a Chevalier; he has an interest in some mills at Tanda, I believe; he is polished and pleasant and a puzzle to the ladies, and that's about all one can say of certain knowledge. But I should hazard that he's as great a danger as all Frenchies are to us. I don't cotton to folk like Duselin, and that they're up to no good, I wager my periwig."

"If this were Duselin," I remarked, "he was certainly mysterious enough; he wore quite a conspiratorial air."

"Frenchies in Oudh?" mused Harryman, unheeding. "What the devil's to do? Do they mean to garotte the Nabob or steal his *begums* for His Most Catholic Majesty? I wonder whom the message was intended for? Some other hangman with ye'low whiskers, I suppose. "Twould be interesting to

know at least. Keep a weather eye skinned, my lad, for a brother executioner with Viking moustachios."

"It may be quite a private matter," I suggested, "connected with the business in Oudh."

"Ay," snapped Harryman, piqued at this simple solution of his promising mystery, "it might even be the gibberish of a raving lunatic. Anyway, we may find out one of these days."

### IV

"Ladies having gone down a country dance shall stand up for all the couples . . . or not dance any more that night."

RULE VII, FOR SUBSCRIPTION BALLS IN OLD CALCUTTA.

"THAT depressing Eyetalian, Dante Ali—Alghi—thingumbob," remarked Harryman as we left the supper room together, "provided a plaguey cold basement to his ingeniously appointed hell—Caina, I think he calls it. But, whatever its name, I should like to see Duselin and all the Frenchies in India comfortably stowed away in it."

"Ah ?" I encouraged, comforted by the spicy fumes of the Spanish wine.

"Ay, and dago preachers, too !" added the surgeon explosively, as the Chapel priest appeared from the direction of the ante-room, talking volubly to a plump little lady by his side— Miss Freeman to be exact.

Harryman forgot the French in his new antipathy and whisked away from me towards the approaching pair, crying as he went, and mendaciously, I fear :

"My dance, Miss Freeman, I believe."

Amused, I followed to the ball-room and surveyed the scene from the threshold. Even the venom of my haunting Vampire could not overcome that Malaga; I was in the best temper in the world. The dance was now fast and furious, for the gentlemen (and not a few ladies) had sought to cool their heated persons with liquors iced but potent. The reception being over, all the dancers were masked and shrouded in various disguises that condoned indiscretion and invited intrigue. The last remnant of the Nawabi suite had been evicted by certain sprightly gallants led by Cornets Peabody and Pettigrew.

The sweating orchestra laboured heavily, and the intricate phrases of the country dances which now followed one after another in quick succession, were translated as a series of scamped slurs.

Viewed through the rosy-hued spectacles I had donned, the country cances seemed comparatively simple ; the whole scene was ingratiating and joyous, and the movement set my blood coursing cheerily.

A twist, a turn, a sort of jump-pooh ! what was there difficult in a country dance after all ? What a gaby I must have seemed to Miss Brunel, stumbling like a country bumpkinincredible memory-to avoid dancing with her. What a golden opportunity I had missed ; what a blissful interlude in company with those wonderful eyes I had boorishly scouted.

A purple domino, generous of girth, bounded elephantinely out of the throng.

"Ha, my hangman, still shirking?" gasped a voice from under the half mask. "Seize upon a wench, man, and try your luck. She'll never know you in that garb, whoever she be."

The domine bounded into the crowd agein, leaving his reckless counsel to challenge my new spirit of bravado.

Serpents and fiddles rang out again. Another countrydance, and introducing that damned Scotch step too ! It was too much ! The wine-warmed blood suddenly suffused my brain, and it was whoop and away with me !

A hooded domino of pale blue silk stole by me unescorted. I stalked bravely up to her, laid a detaining hand upon her firm and declaimed :

"Madame, will you not take pity on a poor soldier, to poor

a disciple of Terpsichore that all conspire to leave him desolate. An you could so far extend your gracious favour as to dance with him, however, he would endeavour so to regard your life and limb so that you might dance again ere long, is no more tonight."

"You are candid, Monsieur Le Noir," was the gracious answer. "But I shall be delighted to oblige you, if, indeed, I may dance before long at another rout."

"Then-" I extended my hand, and seized the lady in a mighty grip.

In another moment we were swallowed by the merry maelstrom, and my wits were at work as never before to imitate and memorize the intricate steps.

And, by the aid of memory and a preternatural alertness of vision, and by dint of allowing my partner to do the lion's share, I scrambled along happily enough, I thought. The unusual presence of so tiny a hand in mine, the suggestion of rich perfume in my nostrils, assisted the Malaga worthily.

"La, sir, you are indeed a bad dancer," quoth the poor lady at length, "'tis to be hoped you may improve in time."

"I should beyond all doubt, if you would vouchsafe to teach me," said I, and was astonished that I could say such a thing.

"I fear I cannot undertake the office," said the lady, and the sweet lips which I could just distinguish beneath the mask, smiled a little. "But truly, you military men do badly need teachers. The first whom I would have danced with, flouted me like a country Jack his Jill, protesting that he had no knowledge of these measures at all."

Heavens ! For a moment the hop, skip and jump quite eluded me. How I blessed my orange whiskers.

"Ah," I panted, "Jack Warren for a surety. But then he ever did deny the ladies, and is but a discourteous lout, I fear."

A masterly, tactical stroke, I venture. Who would have guessed my identity now ?

wh, you are ungenerous," protested She of the Maskand now I knew the eyes that glowed in the cavernous eyeholes, and the glinting hair that strayed from neath the hood. "Frankly I did believe the poor fellow."—I winced—"'Tis certain he was triched by a humorous friend. In fact, 'tis I who owe him an apology for causing him to dance unwilling attendance on me. But I was piqued. Do you not like Captain Warren, str? This is the second time you have decried him to me, this evening. I know your domino, you see."

There was good, honest, womanly distaste in the lady's voice for such a gratuitous strewing of another's path with thorns.

Once again the Malaga spoke.

"It is not dislike," I protested, allowing a suggestion of fervour to creep into my voice. "It is jealousy. And who would not be jealous of your favour, O Psyche? To you, as to her of old, even Cupid must fall."

" Monsieur Le Noir ! You are-are-indiscreet."

"Forgive me," I whispered, "There are some wounds which lead to mad words, and arrow wounds are among them."

"You may not speak to me so," replied Rosalie Brunel firmly and directly, "else we shall not continue friends, Captain Armonde."

Armonde, egad ! Now I understood the decrying.

Julius and myself were never able to like one another as we should. Why, I know not. There are some natures that bear to certain others innate aversion; which are latently inimical each to each. And ours was such a couple.

Nevertheless, my annoyance was so great that I missed a step—two—and then lost myself altogether in the maze that I had been so carefully threading. A bulky officer lurched into my partner and drove her into my clasp, and the pair of us on to a divan. For one delirious minute she lay in my arms; then wriggled furiously from them and stood up, panting and indignant.

There was a breath of hot air across my face, and the sweat on my body suddenly turned icy cold. My confounded mask had fallen off. "Oh !" gasped Miss Brunel, swept off her feet in more than the material sense.

The grey eyes were as brilliant and hard as sapphires.

Their owner stamped her little feet with mortification and anger.

"How could you ?" she cried.

" I-I-" I stuttered, intelligently.

"Your conduct is abominable," burst out Miss Brunel. "You are an eavesdropper—a horrible, underhand creature, a —a monster !"

My stricken silence gave consent.

Clumsily I reached out a hand and touched the lady's arm.

"Please—" I bleated, and so piteously, that she suddenly broke into laughter, delicious, silvery laughter like the sound of a rocky English cascade. But for all that, a tear rolled furtive, from under the silky fringe of the mask, and dropped like a falling diamond. And with its fall the tension, and my lady's anger, alike vanished.

My hand still on her soft arm, I constrained Rosalie Brunel to sit.

"Are you now assured that I cannot dance, Madame?" I asked, endeavouring to adjust my mask with the finest bunch o' thumbs that the bat of Shyness e'er achieved.

"You would soon learn," conceded the girl—but she went on to make it plain that she was by no means as ready to forgive and forget as I was.

"You are really rather an insufferable person, Captain Warren."

" Abjectly I admit it, and seek pardon."

"You allowed me to believe you someone else."

"Ay," I admitted meekly.

"You permitted me to say---to say---things that were not for you to hear."

"Ay," still more meekly.

" And you presumed-to-indiscretion."

"That," I declared boldly, "was Monsieur Le Noir."

"And that, sir," retorted Miss Brunel, " is a quibble."

"Albeit, to all these counts of your indictment I plead guilty. Temper justice with mercy, I humbly beseech, and say we may still be friends."

The imperial air vanished, and the little mouth smiled again.

"Sooth to say," I told her, "I am only a soldier after all, and know little of courteous ways. Pray let us forget this painful past."

With a brilliant smile the olive branch was accepted, and to put my suggestion into effect, Miss Brunel commenced to talk gaily.

"Thank Heaven for the respite of this mask," she said, "I have been so flattered with attention that my poor head fairly swims. Strange that your domino should be the replica of that which Captain Armonde wears. He—he took off his mask that I should know him. So you see how I came to mistake you for him."

Knowing or unknowing, the girl was a mistress of naïve charm.

"Out supply of this frippery is limited," I responded, "and its variety is small.

"Do you find this country to your liking, Madame ?" I went on, imitating as best I might the air with which I had seen our gilded gentry address ladies, for, really, I was sailing on a strange sea.

"It is very beautiful, I think," answered the girl, "but one can har.lly judge the whole land by Calcutta alone. It is so very luxurious and exhilarating to a newcomer. But the people--the white people, I mean-seem so different from those at home. They are more direct, more outspoken--more open than in England."

A blush accompanied the last words, probably evoked, I thought, by the memory of the violent court paid to my companion carlier in the evening.

"Our footing here is recent and insecure," I suggested. "The emotions are stripped of restraint and disguise by the subtle langers that beset us. That may explain the change you remark." The purple domino, cursing low but lustily at some unlucky wight who had struck against him, was exuded from the dancing crowd like the pip of a crushed pomegranate. He was about to speak to me when he noticed my companion and made her a stylish leg.

"Nay, Puck," I adjured. "On your knees rather. 'Tis Miss Brunel—who," I added with emphasis, "has done me the honour of enduring a country dance with me."

"Zooks !" cried Harryman, "D'ye say so? Then, Madame, je vous fais mes excuses les plus—les plus—hum—my French is not over fluent, but I assure you that I am equally regretful in English. Though you will understand, I am sure, that my reliance was on Warren here not to make a painful ass of himself. At the most I am guilty of an error of judgment. Still, I do most unreservedly apologise, and beseech that you will place your foot on my neck—er—figuratively, of course—and pronounce sentence, that I may know the worst."

"The floor is not over clean, so do not grovel, Major Harryman," laughed the girl. "My forgiveness is yours sans cérémonie. After all, Captain Warren has danced his dance with me, even though he has effectually prevented me from dancing again this evening, as he warned me he might."

And the lady surveyed with a rueful air the little pale blue shoe, the sole of which had been almost torn off.

"I think I could repair it in the ante-room in two minutes, if you will permit me," offered the surgeon, grinning at my heightened colour; but Miss Brunel blushed also and tucked the little foot away.

"Ha !" ejaculated the surgeon, turning suddenly, "Surely the second hangman !"

I turned too, at the exclamation, to see a tall figure, in a domino of black with an orange-fringed mask, approaching.

"Warren," said the newcomer, and I knew the voice for Armonde's, "do you find Harryman and Peabody, if you please. Colonel Ogilvie desires to see us all at once in the ante-room immediately. Servant, ma'am," he added to the lady ere he bustled off again. "No need to look far for me," smirked the surgeon, taking off his mask. "I wonder what's on the board now ?"

"Have we your leave to depart, Miss Brunel?" I asked. "I believe I see your brother over there, and doubtless he would be willing to undertake your escort for a short time."

"Pray do not trouble to fetch him. I will seek Mrs. MacMurray, who will see that I do not get into mischief. I trust we may meet again, Captain Warren."

I echoed the hope with great fervour, bowed, and hurried off with the surgeon; Colonel Ogilvie was an ill man to keep waiting.

"For a shy fellow and a hater of ladies you seem to be doing quite well," muttered my volatile friend, adding, hastily, "Did ye mark Armonde's domino, Jack? He had whiskers to his mask as yellow as your own. I wonder if he was the man the message from Duselin was intended for?"

" A ludicrous idea, surely," I answered, shortly.

"I hope so," quoth Harryman, and I was surprised at the lack of conviction in his tones.



" Unto the trembling new love, 'Go,' I said." ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

THE commandant waited us with manifest impatience.

"More work, gentlemen," he said briskly, when he had satisfied himself that the little circle of grotesque figures represented the regiment's full complement of merrymakers. "I have here an order from the Commander-in-Chief for two squadrons of the regiment to visit their sins upon a tribe of Sountals, some thousand or more strong, who, for some unknown reason, have come from the Damodar from their own Pergunnahs to ravage certain villages that lie beyond us to the north-east. I have decided to send your squadron, Captain Armonde, and yours, Captain Warren; but I can only spare you one subaltern apiece, since the training of the new enlistments must be attended to. You should not have much trouble, for the Sountals are a barbarous race and have no firearms; though I understand that they poison their arrows.

"I am sorry to have had to summon you from your various amusements, but necessity compelled, for the squadrons should start at an early hour to-morrow. As to which junior officers accompany the squadrons I offer no suggestion. It is a matter for the commanders themselves."

There was a murmur of excitement from the younger officers, and flushed faces were turned in appeal towards Armonde and myself.

"You will accompany the expedition, Surgeon Major," continued the Coloncl, turning to Harryman. "You have treated envenomed wounds before. The men at the Fort have been warned, and I have sent word to Tanna and such-like outposts concerned; the quarter-master is already burning midnight oil. I'm afraid the enemy will bolt at the sight of a red tunic but, nevertheless, they must be shown that they cannot come marauding in the territory of the Company Bahadur with impunity. That is all, gentlemen, thank you. I will give you your orders on the parade to-morrow, Captain Armonde."

Colonel Ogilvie took himself off in the direction of the cardroom, leaving the cornets in a state of excitement that manifested itself in a variety of violent gambols. Armonde's raised mask revealed a countenance as black as a thunder-cloud. He muttered angrily something about wild-goose chases and inopportunity, then strode off. This was strange, for he was usually the first to spoilt for a fight.

"Damn the Sountals say I, too !" cried Harryman. "If we have to start early, I shall have to do the first five miles with my head in a horse-bucket."

"Do you know aught of these folk, Jo?" I queried.

"No, save that they float the skulls of their dead down the river as raits for their souls—gruesome devils. Well, Jack," went on Harryman, "I'm leaving for quarters. If I get at the punch again the devil himself and all his myrmidons couldn't move me to-morrow. Are you coming, too, or are you for more country dances and sole-tearings ?"

"I'll come," I said, dragging off my domino, and looking round for my sword.

I shoved aside a cluster of fire-eating subalterns who begged me either to take them with me or influence Armonde, and Harryman and I left the Court House together.

Fantastically attired masqueraders, appearing in the smoky, unnecessary link-light as so many weird visitants from the nether world, or the phantoms of a fever-dream, strolled in the verandahs or in the roadway, to cool from the dance. A few departing palankeens bobbed amid the crowd. Now and then a harsh glare flamed out as a *messalchi* stooped to pour fresh sesamum oil on his dying torch, or to trim the seven brands of the *messal* ere raising it aloft again. There were gentlemen who went afcot towards the old Fort to enjoy the moonlight, some gambolling wildly, some progressing with slow dignity—contrary tributes to the same good supper. A dozen naked *fakirs*, powered white with dust, fled into the shadows as the revellers approached them.

As I idly surveyed the passing of the masquers, my gaze was seized and held by a slight, girlish figure in blue silk that tripped lightly along between the taller forms of two men. One of the latter was dressed in the Turkish style, and the other, shamefully unsteady as to gait, I recognized as that of young Brune!.

And then, as I watched. . . .

Some strange, elemental thing within me seemed to stir and lift, bearing with it I knew not where, the composed, even tenour of my spirit. An overpowering desire afflicted me to dash between those two men; to seize and hold that pale blue wraith form to me; to cry aloud in defiance to all mankind that she was mine and mine alone; to strike abandonedly at all who would restrain me; and to steal away with my precious burden to some secret forest retreat.

'Twas pure, primordial instinct working in me, as I realized later. For a moment I reeled as beneath a blow, and it was not for an appreciable period that the Fact completed its evolution from the writhing chaos of my mind, and took crystal shape.

And, when it had done so, I stood amazed and crushed before the realization that I—the rugged and impervious, I—the cynical and introspective—was in love, completely, violently damnably !

Harryman, to my infinite relief, darted off after the fitting figure of an acquaintance—feminine, needless to say—and I was left spell-bound in the murky moonlight, struggling with a variety of new and great emotions, let in from the great unknown, as though some window had been opened on my soul. Through which window, it seemed to me, I could peer out upon the vista of the future, mystically lit, though not so brightly that I might distinguish if my path a-down it were strewn with rocks and thorns or with scented roses evermore.

'Twas the first time that serious regard for my future had awakened in me; and it was too sudden and serious to be pleasant.

A wild elation succeeded ; wondrous visions rose about me, blissfully vague of outline, gorgeous of hue ; I revelled in a host of new and delicate sensations, until, of a sudden, the vanity of the whole thing douched my brain into reason.

Ay, two minutes after the blow had fallen, I knew the worst.

I considered, dispassionately, the question of ways and means.

Ephemeral misapprehensions I had none. I knew what my mirror had to show. Features rugged in outline and illfavoured individually. Grey eyes, penthouse-brows and shaggy hair as black as night, a nose that would have done credit to a centurion of the legions; and a mouth of generous and not over shapely dimensions. Courtly graces I had none; sufficient education to enable me to talk intelligently; and as much idea of how to set about gaining the good graces of a lady as the man in the moon.

But the material aspect of the matter swung the door of hope tight to and locked and barred it. Above my pay I had not a cowrie; my prospects, save for possible promotion, were nil. Patrimony was there none, and my only relative, Uncle Giles, was virtually a pauper, though, by means of mortgages and frequent sales of the treasures of Warren's Hurst, he managed to keep himself in a tolerable state of drunkenness.

Yes, in the matter of marriage, it was a case of "I could not an I would."

Thus, two brief minutes of sane rumination sufficed to inform me exhaustively of my ineligibility, and to set me cursing the unfairness of the attack, and the fickle, wayward circumstances that had saddled me, unwilling and unaware, with a load I was ill-fitted to bear. My first youth was gone, and I had attained those years in which the heart, invulnerable to superficial scratches, must bleed deep and long from the heavy stab which alone could wound.

I jerked myself from the dusty foot-way with an effort, and betook me towards the fort; craving bitterly my old, sturdy peace of mind, and raving against the yoke which was set, inexorably, upon my neck for evermore.

" Mr. Pettigrew ! " I heard a voice say.

"Mr. Peabody !" responded another, not very clearly.

"D'you think if I asked him nishely—er—nicely, the Captain would take me with him ? Especially as my bosom friend, my boyhood's chum, my guide, my philos—phile—philosoph dammit—and friend, is going with t'other squadron."

"He ish man of tender heart, and might yield to pleading."

A hand was laid upon my arm, and the fumes of good wine strayed into my nostrils.

"Then, Captain dear," continued the fulsome tones, in my ear, "May I come with you into the benigh-beni-hicbenighted regions? Shay the word and my shoul is yours ! May I come?"

## WARREN OF OUDH

And I, thinking and raving internally still, replied-distrait, "For evermore-for evermore."

"How he loves me !" hiccoughed the delighted youth.

## VI

"Trav'lers we, in our degree, All strange sights we fain would see, And hither we come in company." "The LORD OF THOULOUSE" (INGOLDSBY LEGENDS).

EVENING fell as I wandered aimlessly through the single bazaar of Chauhati. The mystic quiet of the Indian eve pervaded the village, and but for the harsh voices of a couple of wrangling women raised afar off, nothing disturbed the stillness.

Above the rank jungle snaked the noxious river vapours. The crowned heads of the palms which reared themselves on all sides above the scrub, were traced in olive and purple against the luminous sky. The stagnant air was heavy with the voluptuous odour of jasmine; that perfume which seems redolent of all the mystery and romance of this land, that bears with it a strange sense of longing and tender melancholy

The solemnity of the hour compelled introspection, and I set myself, with that sentimental self torture known to all lovers, to think precious thoughts of pain, prodding my new wound deliberately because it pleasured as it bled.

On the night following that so fraught with wonder for me, the two squadrons, with a train carrying food and fodder for a month, had reached this little village on the northward road, with the river Hoogly still within rifle-shot to the east. Surgeon Major Harryman had armed himself with two pairs of panniers bulging with nostrums, leeches, soap pills, jalaps and like things, and, anticipating work of a sanguinary nature, he had with gloomy satisfaction overhauled his terrifying array of scalpels, lancets, saws and bisturies; deadlier weapons by far, Pettigrew assured him, than any Sountal arrow.

So, the men in bivouac and the officers in commandeered huts, we settled down for the night. I had seen the horses picketted and the guard posted, and had wandered off into the village to be alone.

Presently, as I strolled, a galloping of hoofs sounded distant in the dusk, growing louder and louder until three horsemen came into view, red-coated men with orange plumes, on mounts which sweated and expanded blood-red nostrils as they laboured for breath.

The men were a sergeant and two troopers of another squadron.

"Captain Armonde, sir?" cried the sergeant in enquiry as he passed me, dropping a hand in salute.

I directed him with a gesture, wondering what urgent news he bore and watched him as he hustled his jaded mount into a renewed effort.

Filled with curiosity, I retraced my steps to the huts.

Harryman met me, purple and angry of visage.

"We are to wait in this recking hole for further orders," he announced furiously.

"Why '" I asked. "Has the raiding ceased ?"

"Ceased !" he yelled. "Ceased ! Why, it ceased last year !" "Last year ?" I said in astonishment. "What do you mean ?"

"What I say. The raid takes place months ago. The harassed villagers appeal to their headman. He seeks the aid of some one in authority—an ease-loving zemindar, a pottelbellied potentate of this Subah. This cove lends a gracious ear and writes out a chit asking the Nabob for assistance and reparation. Nabob writes another chit to the Kumpani Bahadur and forgets all about it because of a new doxie or something. The urgent appeal finally reaches us when it is recalled to his Excellency's amiable recollection by some chance circumstance and the Sountals have packed up and gone home. Ever the way of the Gentoo ! Pah ! "

Armonde looked out of a hut door with a grin

"You overlook the fact that there is still hope, lvlajor. The fact is, Warren," he said, turning to me, "we are ordered to await further orders here—perhaps we may have to go on and punish the Sountals despite the lapse of time."

"And perhaps we may not," interjected Harryman.

"Anyhow, we must make the best of it, my dear Sawbones," Armonde gave back, his ready irritability gaining the upper hand. "'Tis no good moping and puling and kicking against the pricks. There's an abundance of good shooting here; that's one consolation; and I mean to ask Duselin and that young writer fellow to come and share it. We can find them a shelter somewhere. The boy's acquaintance is worth cultivating."

"Quite," grinned Harryman. "But why Duselin?"

"Why not?" demanded Armonde. "He's pleasant company, and a friend of mine."

The Surgeon shot me a sly glance, and I confess misgiving gnawed me; but I scotched it at once.

"If our mission is to be discussed in Council." I said hurriedly to change the topic, "there will be time and to spare for shooting. With luck, however, the Nawabi troops will undertake the job and we shall be back in time for the Mahratta war."

"Or the Last Trump," addended Armonde, smiling again.

Any reference to our Commandant's pet obsession could be relied on to produce a smile. Colonel Ogilvie was convinced, that, ere long, we should find ourselves at handgrips with those turbulent Hindoos of the west, and he was always ready to air his intricate theory over a pipe.

"The Colonel has merely invented a probable effect of latent possibilities," Harryman delivered, forensically. "The Mahrattas have been rived into partisan armies since the day Raghoba made himself Peshwa at Poona—they're far too busy frying their own fish to broil any English beef."

"Yet there are certainly queer rumours as to the behaviour of the Bombay Government," murmured Armonde.

"Tchur !'' snapped the irascible Josiah, "I'll send 'em a letter about i.."

Returning from a trip into the jungle with a gun, one evening, several days later, I found a disgruntled Pettigrew assigning stable accommodation to a number of servants who were holding half a dozen nags, near the lines.

Armonde's guests had evidently arrived.

"Whose nag is this ?" I asked Pettigrew, indicating a pretty sorrel hat bore a lady's saddle.

"Mounseer Dusylang come to shoot with Armonde; Lorry Brunel Esquire of the Company, come to see the country, admire and view, and...."

"Gentlemen don't ride after that fashion," I interrupted, indicating the lady's saddle.

"Oh, that sorrel," said Pettigrew, condescending to pay some attention. "That's Miss Brunel's nag."

"What ! " I almost shrieked, " Miss Brunel-here ? "

"Oh, no !" grunted the Cornet, "she's riding a merrygo-round at Peckham fair. That's why I've got to vacate my quarters, and Peabody too. Where the dooce are we to go, mordoo ! Pig in with the men or hire the village temple, I suppose."

Hurrying to our mess hut, dragged by the magnetic memory of two haunted grey eyes, 1 found that only the masculine members of the expedition were there, with Armonde and sundry camp vessels of pewter.

The Chevalier wished me a pleasant good evening and resumed his converse anent the pintails and teal of the river, and the possibilities of tiger, with his host.

I fell into speech with the young writer.

"My duties do not commence for some time," he told me. "Tis a usual preliminary leave to enable one to recover from that interminable voyage. Only claret on board, and no other woman save my sister," he added with a weak grin that aroused distaste in me at once. "Ah," I pursued, discreetly endeavouring to steer the conversation in the only direction that held much interest for me. "It was plucky of Miss Brunel to yield the comfort of the Settlement for this jungle—to say truth, the climate is not very healthy. She will only stay a day, I suppose ? Who accompanies her ?"

"No one, save myself."

My face must have indicated astonishment, for Brunel laughed, a dreary, unpleasant laugh.

"Oh, Rosalie despises convention when she travels with me. I'd have far rather she remained in Calcutta, but it pleasures her to follow me as my own shadow."

" A sign of great affection ?" I hazarded unhappily.

The weak mouth quivered peevishly as the writer answered :

"Rosalie loves me far too well for my liking. She loves to interfere in my pleasures, poke her nose into my business, and criticize my friends. Yes, her affection is so great that at times I can scarcely call my soul my own."

To which ill-mannered depreciation I had, perforce, to listen.

"A little Burgundy, Brunel," broke in Armonde.

At this moment I heard a silver voice trilling a lilting melody —an air of that prodigious boy, the Cavaliere Mozart; there was a burst of youthful laughter, and she whom I had set up as a Golden Image to adore from afar, stood on the threshold, with Pettigrew and Peabody dancing attendance.

Miss Brunel greeted us all sweetly, reminded me mischievously of our dance ; a circumstance which elicited a frown from Armonde.

At sight of his sister, the writer lowered his mug of wine and tried with a surreptitious movement to put it on the table behind him. The girl marked the action and the smile faded from her face. A beam of dawning intelligence lit my puzzledom as I remarked these things.

But Rosalie smiled again and turned to the two infatuated cornets.

" I am so grateful to you, and so sorry to drive you from that dear little hut of yours. I hope it will not be for long."

"We are honoured—honoured and delighted, aren't we, Audelay?"

"We are, Peter, we are !"

And the pair hid schoolboy blushes behind sun-browned hands.

"You will grace our humble board this evening?" besought the Chevalier with an inclination, as Miss Brunel gathered up whip and hat, preparatory to taking her leave. He was a past master in the art of courtesy, and desired, I rather think, to stop the lavish flow of embarrassing compliments, spiced with a too-rough badinage, that proceeded from Armonde.

Miss Brunel accepted the invitation, and ate with us.

That same night I was awakened, just as two lusty strokes were delivered to the gong by the sentry of the quarter guard, by a tentative but horny hand wandering over my face.

"Who is it?" I questioned, bewildered, for I had been cantering along the Barraset road on pleasure bent a moment before, in the divinest of company.

"Wilkins, sir. Sergeant of the guard, sir."

"Oh ! What is it, Wilkins?"

"That young gentleman as come to-day, Mr. Bruno. . . . " I sat up hurriedly.

"What has happened to him? Is he ill?"

"Not exac'ly, sir. But I thought, sir—if you could tell me where he digs, sir, then p'raps, sir, I . . . "

"What are you driving at, man? Out with it."

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, sir, it were like this. He an' Cap'n Armonde cam' out o' the Mess, sir, and the cap'n, bein' a trifle--that is to say...."

The night was too chilly to sit there and listen to a diffident rigmarole, and I had guessed by now what the trouble was; so I drew on breeches and boots, and threw a cloak around me,

Sergeant Wilkins drew a breath of inexpressible relief as I motioned to him to lead the way.

We stole together down the silent, moonlit path, till presently, opposite the hut lately occupied by the two subalterns, the sergeant paused.

"Genelman was a-lyin' 'ere, sir,"

I heard his chin rasp noisily as he rubbed it in bewilderment and looked around.

From a ramshackle shelter not far away came a gentle crooning--in a woman's voice--a half-chant in Bengali.

" I am the Pearl of Delight-the Dispenser of Joys. O my beloved-for-a-space. . . . "

"Sergeant," I demanded, " what is that infernal woman doing here?"

The great fellow shuffled awkwardly and coughed.

"I give ye my word we didn't know she was comin' till she

turns up like, sir. She allus goes with the rigiment." "That will do," I muttered. "See that she goes back to Fort William to-morrow. I'll send in a cossid with a note."

I entered the hut.

Brunel's head was pillowed in the wanton's lap; he was breathing stertorously and was fast asleep, or rather stupified. Between us, the sergeant and I carried him from the den that housed the protesting Pearl of Delight, conveyed him stealthily up the little street, and, with infinite precautions against noise, laid him to rest in his own hut.

VII

" Coming events cast their shadows before."

" I saw my lady weep . . . her face was full of woe." JOHN DOWLAND, 1600

FOUR days passed; four rather dismal days for us all.

They were dismal for me in that I now divined the reason for the sadness in those deep grey eyes beloved. For that it was on account of her brother's behaviour—that Rosalie Brunel was a loyal martyr to a vain cause—I had no doubt. What other reason was likely to cause a lady of delicate nurture to bruise her tender feet on the rough ways of Indian jungle life?

Even Harryman, the hardened and complaisant, shivered at the amount the young writer drank; even the men sniggered at his behaviour in the village. It became obvious to us all that the girl protested against the life he led, protested, begged, reproached and entreated, and it became plain, too, that her efforts were futile. And the tragedy of the thing robbed our days of pleasure.

Armonde and Duselin spent most of their time in the jungle with their guns; Brunel was usually in no mood to rouse and accompany them. And the fact that they were so often together blew many a flicker from the suspicion of Armonde that had begun to smoulder within me despite myself.

And in these four days a tension, almost a hostility, grew up between my brother officer and myself. This suspicion of *sub rosa* connection with the Frenchman; the fact that the captain led the orgies which so distressed the lady; and, worst of all, the hideous air of proprietorship which he wore in her company, created in me a growing dislike.

That it was reciprocated I knew, for Julius Armonde was not the man to dissemble.

Rosalie Brunel treated him with a listless courtesy, ignoring

his broad and opulent gallantries, and, unused to such failure, Armonde became disconcerted—then angry. His brusqueness verged on brutality; his usual taciturnity turned to frank sulkiness.

So, since the bond between us was always very slender, Armonde presently returned so grumpy a Roland for my morbid Oliver, that Harryman suggested a prescription for a pair of indolent livers.

It was cetainly a relief to the pair of us when the two subalterns were ordered back to Calcutta for duty with the recruit squadron.

And thus the days ran themselves out in this devilish doleful fashion, and we lay still in Chauhati, with too little to do, far too much to think about, and with an improvised cellar a good deal too well stocked for the health of at least one of our number.

Harryman and I were in our hut one morning, talking in desultory fashion about matters military and otherwise, when Harryman paused and looked up at me with an abrupt movement. The usual humorous timbre had left his voice, and he said, very irrelevantly and gravely :

"Don't you think it about time she went back to Calcutta? I'm talking now of Miss Brunel. I say I think she should go back to the Settlement and fat Mrs. MacMurray, and not remain here."

"Yes," I agreed soberly, and added curiously : "Why do you think she came here, Jo?"

"Oh," responded Harryman, readily enough, "that's as plain as a pike. She is here to look after that blasted young fool of a brother of hers; bless her splendid little heart. Upon my soul, I've never in all my days met such a vicious young devil as that fellow is. I was a bit wild in my young days myself, but I never drank in nightmares as much as he does in actuality, and every day. And there's that damned woman...."

" I ordered the sergeant of one of my troops to send her back."

"May be, but-well, Brunel has taken her out of regimental hands now."

"The fact that Armonde takes such an interest in the boy isn't over good for him," I said.

"I should think not indeed. Armonde's got Dutch blood in him, and in all Dutch blood, viciousness and ferocity are latent," declared the surgeon. "Howbeit, God help the cali if this goes on much longer. But the point at issue is that the girl should not be compelled to watch and endure all that her best efforts cannot prevent. Man, d'ye think I've not seen her pretty eyes all red, ay, and heard her o' nights appealing to the cub as no woman should have to appeal to a man? Zooks! If 1 had my way, I'd prescribe a sound fustigation a posteriori."

"Ah," I murmured, uncomprehending.

"Yes," Harryman emphasised, "Supra dorsum nudum."

" Is that a medicine ?" I asked.

"Faith, yes. My father cured me o' many things with it And I'll hazard you've tasted many a dose."

The surgeon grinned broadly as enlightenment spread across my face.

"Well, it's not our business, unhappily," I said.

"Then let's make it our business. I'd ask the girl to return myself, if—if I didn't think you were more the man for the job."

"I? Why should it be I?" I protested, and fell back on the lame old regimental excuse, "You're the senior man, Jo."

"Pah ! Faintheart ! But seriously, Jack, we ought to make some effort to get the poor child back to Calcutta, and it is seemingly one of us who should bell the——" The surgeon saw his unfortunate application of the fable and stopped suddenly.

"Should suggest the matter to her----" I helped out.

"Exactly," agreed Harryman. "You could explain that the boy would be in safe hands."

And at that very moment, Miss Brunel, mounted on her hired nag, and with a harrywench jolting uncomfortably behind her on a mule, passed by our door, doubtless bent on a morning gallop on the jungle road.

"Talk of the devil——" ejaculated Harryman, even more unfortunately than before. "Now's your chance. Jack. No time like the present. Strike while the iron's hot, y'know !" And with a determined expression on his face, walked out of the hut and deliberately barred the lady's way. I followed that I might bask in the smile which would accompany her greeting.

"I----" said Harryman, and halted, bogged. He turned to me, and, with a wave of the hand, treacherously indicated that I was the spokesman of the deputation.

"We-" I forthwith announced, with a bitter smile intended to convey to Harryman all that I felt for him just then.

"Yes, both of us, in fact," encouraged the surgeon, unnecessarily, and with an inflection in his tone that again left things to me.

Rosalie Brunel smiled sweetly and looked from one to the other, as she held in her fidgetty horse with tiny, dexterous fingers.

"You both desire to say something to me, gentlemen ?"

"Yes," I achieved, "we are agreed, Surgeon Harryman and myself... Myself and Surgeon Harryman are agreed... both of us... that ir... that

"Truly, the weather is delightful. But, sir, it will be a trifle too hot for riding ere long."

At which gentle hint, the surgeon blurted out our mission incontinently.

"We had rather you were in Calcutta, Miss Brunel, than in this camp. It is no place for a lady—no orange flower water and confections, y'know, and if you would only be content to go, we should be delighted to make arrangements whereby your journey would——."

Harryman stopped speaking, quelled by the curious look in the girl's eyes. They had grown larger and sadder than ever. Yet, a tiny, secret smile played on her lips. It was evident that

she had fathomed our underlying motive. But she met our guile with subtler still.

"You think there is danger?" she queried, innocent." "Captain Armonde assures me that the Sountal Purgunna are far from here. Do you really fear that they may come so far afield in their raiding?"

"Certainly they may come !" declared the surgeon, clutching at the straw. "Yes, one never knows whether or no they may come."

Rosalie smiled again, that haunting, piteous smile of hers.

"Gertlemen," she said, "I do fear that your desire for my safety physics you with undue anxiety. I truly think, though, that I may stay here without alarm—for the present, at any rate."

Miss Brunel loosened her rein and the horse moved forward. Rosalie turned slightly as it passed us, and added softly :

"Believe me, Major Harryman, and you, too, Captain Warren, I am deeply grateful for this consideration."

And, as she cantered off, I thought I caught a sound much resembling a sob.

"You arrant ass !" muttered my friend, when we had done gaping at each other.

"You scion of a snoutless pig," I translated with fervour. Then we gaped at each other again, and sniggered foolishly.

"First if you don't succeed " I suggested fatuously, for I was not so disappointed as I should have been, since a continuance of that divine presence among us was promised. "Supposing, Jo, we approached Duselin? He is a courteous person—and a subtle one. He might find a way of inducing the boy to return, as well, to Calcutta."

"Pooh, he is too woundily content with things as they are. I doubt if he's noticed aught amiss at all. And he has no more feeling than a wall, I tell you. Who could ever do anything with the Chevalier ? He wasn't begot, I'm certain ; he was sculpted out of a chunk of rock !

"See, my cavalier," he added hastily, "there's a chance for

you to express contrition for your unwarranted interference. My lady has dropped her kerchief."

I turned. Surely-enough, there lay upon the path near the mess hut a flimsy bit of white stuff. Its owner and her servant were vanishing amid the trees.

A lithe sable-clad figure stepped from among the scrub and whipped up the fragment.

"Duselin !" I exclaimed. "Damn !"

"God A'mighty !" cried Harryman, staring, "the man's blowing his nose in it !"

The Chevalier was gazing after the trim figure of Rosalie, and his face was certainly half hidden by the cambric, which he had raised in both hands.

"That-or-or kissing it," I amended, staring too.

The surgeon evinced a mighty contempt at the idea.

"Kissing it ! Duselin kiss a woman's kerchief ? Duselin ! Kissing it ? Pah ! "

"There will no man do for your sake, I think, What I would have done for the least word said." SWINBURNE.

VIII

My feeling of satisfaction at the rebuff which met our effort to induce Rosalie Brunel to return to Calcutta became modified as days went on, mainly on account of the growing strain on the relations between Armonde and myself. That burly officer seemed to have induced something of his hostility toward me in young Brunel also; there seemed to be some understanding between them, some collusion to the end of my discomfiture. It even came to displays of open ill-temper, badgerings across the dinner table, when Armonde would pipe a laborious tune and his finikin toady an inane chorus.

And since mountains will grow from molehills when men are alone together, Armonde and I squabbled violently over trifles which we could have ignored in the Settlement. The truth of the matter was, of course, that our differences were increased by the ancient rivalry of two men for a maid; it existed, if unconfessed, and young Brunel took the part of his pot comrade.

On one day at least, over a matter of a Bengali dish I introduced at our midday meal, rice fried with treacle and spices into *moorki*, there was so nearly an open rupture that I clapped hat to head and left the hut and the village to avert it for the sake of us all.

I diffused most of my anger by taking pistol shots at monkeys and sitting birds, and did not return till evening, when, knowing that the hour and quietude would bring comfort, I took myself back by the narrow path that ran by the river side.

The rank miasma that evening draws from the water had risen high. The whole atmosphere was feverish and accorded with the sombre humour which afflicted me. Petulantly, I flung me down beneath the fringe of sago palms that edged the water.

Resting here, I stayed till the hue of the sky deepened to purple, and the scimitar moon swain into view, turning the dark stream to silver and the black forest to an expanse of luminous mystery.

And with the moon, to thought's confusion, rose a dominating vision of tender, sad eyes and appealing lips.

From far off came the voice of a gentoo a-singing :

"The bud of love that bloomed for me,

Unknown in her heart, I nurtured till it flowered.

Too long I lingered in contemplation of its beauty,

"I was plucked from me, and I was desolate."

Somehow the song brought my distress to a head.

"What the devil dost know of love, wedder of babes ?" I yelled at the singer, quite aware, nevertheless, that he could not hear. "Go pray to Lukshmi for rupees. Camdeo has flown to England in disgust." "Did he indeed sing of love, Captain Warren?" spoke a voice from the margin of the scrub.

Astonished, I turned, to see framed in the silver shimmering teak and sissoo, the material original of the vision that the song had dispelled. The girl wore a simple, hoopless gown of pale blue, and her soft hair wreathed her bared head in cloudy profusion. A white chip hat with blue ribands swung idly from her hand.

Rather abashed, I scrambled to my feet and made obeisance.

"Why should he know nothing about love ?" asked Rosalie, approaching. "Surely they are made for it—these people. Some of the women one must love at sight, and of the men I have seen in Fort William, many do rival Adonis in beauty."

I regarded the speaker sheepishly—the subject was one which I was poorly qualified to discuss. The girl smiled a little at my helplessness. The fact that I was alone with her for the first time since I had discovered my new bondage exhilarated me curiously, yet it was an exhilaration that set my knees a-tremble and clutched at my breath.

"What do you here, Miss Brunel?" I questioned. "Is there any way in which I may serve you?"

"I don't know . . . " she stammered. "I . . . "

She stopped and eyed me keenly, slender fingers interlocked, as though weighing my every quality in the balance. A little shiver shook her.

"Keep your cloak close around you," I urged, and since she seemed troubled and uncertain what to say, I temporized further. "This is no ladies' land. I hope you intend leaving India before the next hot weather ?"

"Where should I go?" she asked, wistfully, and I felt that my enquiry had been unwarrantably inquisitive.

"My brother and I are much alone in the world," she went on. "Both father and mother died years ago, and my only other relative, an uncle, was killed some time ago by a highwayman on the York road. So that, you see, whether I will or not I must yield the lanes and fields for jungle, the hay for sugar cane, the oak and may, for *bal* and *tamarind*. "My brother is not strong," pursued my lady, "and were anything to happen to him. ..."

She gasped a little and broke off, while I stared with a new interest at the battered brass-work of my pistols.

Suddenly her tiny hand was placed on my arm.

"Captain Warren, you asked me just now if you might serve me. Did you mean aught beyond the empty courtesy?"

"Heavens," quoth I, fervently, "if there is anything in my power that I may do to help you—so long as it is unconnected with the ballroom—pray command me."

But my poor sally went unheeded, and the girl's earnestness put the ill-timed jest to shame.

"I deliberately sought you to ask that—because of your your kindness the other morning. I know I may trust you, for I love to read faces, and yours is so good, if——"

Again a sudden stop, and just as I was thrilling pleasurably at the flattery.

"-----ugly," I finished with polite bitterness. "Pray have no computction, Madame. I am well aware of it."

"Oh ! " cried Rosalie, and blushed. " It was unpardonable, yet can you forgive me ? I am almost distrait—really—and spoke my thoughts aloud." The girl's self control seemed to be deserting her. She put out her hands.

" Do--do help me, please."

I waited quietly, knowing perfectly well what was coming.

"It is my brother," she hurried on. "He is not well. He is—he has always been so delicate. And I thought that if he would only go out a little into the open instead of spending so much time indoors—it—it would be so much better for him.

"I hoped you might help me," continued Miss Brunel, timidly. "Surgeon Harryman is inclined to be brusque with Laurence, and Monsieur Duselin is so cold that I could scarce be assured of his sympathy. So that I could only come to you."

"There is Captain Armonde?" I suggested, a trifle coldly.

Rosalie looked at me with sheer fright in her eyes.

"Would you have me appeal to him? You know-you

must have seen ! Nay, since I have come to you, let me be frank, Captain Warren."

All the regal spirit shone in the grey eyes now; timidity and fear vanished; euphemism and evasion were plainly to be discarded.

"My brother is not truly bad," declared Rosalie. "He is weak and obstinate, yet easily led. It was through bad companionship at home, that we were forced to come out here. My brother was accused of cheating at cards, and was compelled to challenge. Of course," she added, with an access of vigour, "he didn't really cheat. It was a wicked lie ! Then, when they —they fought, he—some accident to my brother's pistol caused it to explode before the word was given, and he—he was—all manner of horrible things were said, and Laurence was forced to leave England and come to this country. You see how terribly he has suffered ; how circumstances have been against him all through, don't you ?"

I replied that I did see these things. I'faith, 'twas pitiful to see her wasting her life in serving so worthless a creature a rake, a cheat—and a cowardly murderer. That the twain were brother and sister I could scarce credit.

"And now," went on my lady, speaking rapidly, "Laurence has met Captain Armonde, and their friendship has undone all that I have worked for during these past months. Laurence has broken his promises and his health is failing fast. Many a time has Captain Armonde brought him to our hut quite--quite helpless. . . Oh, do keep my brother from that man ! Take him with you when you ride and shoot. Make him interested in such things. For God's sake, do anything that may prevent him from continuing in this fashion. It is killing him, and before my eyes."

Even in the moonlight, I caught the quiver of the sweet lips. Gad, how sweet and proud she was, for all that she confessed a failure. I'd have given my soul just then to clap her to me and kiss those appealing eyes.

I sighed very deeply indeed, but spoke up with an assumed and encouraging heartiness.

"I am honoured by your confidence, Madame. I will do as you request. Exercise o' mornings, jaunts with horse, rod, and gun, will certainly wean your brother from the unhealthy —er—mode of life he has adopted, to one more strenuous and health-giving. Though, I do beg that you will not too greatly build upon my aid, for to return your frankness, Master Laurence does not seem over—well—felicitated by my company, for what reason I know not."

A brilliant colour, plainly visible in the pale light, flamed into the cheeks of Miss Brunel. What the devil was there in my remark to make the girl blush, I wondered ?

"I knew you would help me," she said, "else you would not have desired to drive me back to Calcutta, away from my brother."

"Will you go if I accept this task ?" I demanded.

"You have already accepted it, and unconditionally," Rosalie gave back with a smile.

"True," I agreed, and rejoiced, for the moment, at her steadfast intention of remaining with us.

Relief showed itself in the girl's tone ; her air was almost vivacious. Once again the admirable old precept which adjures a sharing of troubles had proved its value, and the load of anxiety which Rosalie had borne so long in plucky solitude galled less now that other shoulders had received a part of it.

"I have desperately outraged convention, sir, and must go," said the lady, and added in a low voice, "I think you must know how deeply grateful I am to you for the aid you have promised I—I am sorry to have thus inflicted my troubles upon you, but you men have so much more power than we women—in certain things at least. I can only say 'Thank you,' but I—I say it from my heart."

Rosalie offered me her hand. I took it, and, unfortunately for me, looked deep into her eyes. Their calm depths held my gaze entranced; their sweet sadness shook me to the very soul. The wondrous magic of them drew me, unknowing, nearer to her. The cool breeze wafted an intoxicating perfume into my nostrils—the scent of her hair. A vague terror crept into the girl's eyes; I saw the light of it dispel the gentle, trustful glow. Her delicate mouth arched piteously to show the glimmer of perfect teeth.

A mad tremor raced through me. With a gasp I stepped forward and would have caught the slender form to me. But the girl made a little startled movement and evaded me.

"Do you seek such a reward ?" she cried bitterly, ere she was gone.

Transfixed, I knew that my lips had brushed her hair, and that the odour of it enchanted like some subtle attar. Little heed paid I then to my disgrace; I was trembling like a leaf at the contact, and the emotion it evoked had left me as weak as an infant.

Came a rude crashing in the underbush, and a gasping curse. From out of the fringe of trees stared the rage-congested face of Captain Armonde, and behind it, in the blurred shadow, I caught the suggested outline of Duselin's inscrutable features. There was another curse, more violently obscene than the first, then the men too were gone.

I dimly realized that there was a plenitude of fat in the fire.



## " I pray you let me be at peace. Get hence, make room for me to die." Swinburne.

HARRYMAN, who fondly imagined himself to be a cynic, was wont to say that Love can make a bigger fool of a man than Anglo-Indian punch, and for once I found myself in agreement with him. For, as sanity slowly returned to me as I stood by the river bank, I realized that Love had set a fairish sized sugar bag upon my head.

First, I had undertaken a task which, if I failed, was almost certainly bound to undermine any small standing I had with my lady. Not that I believed the regeneration of young Brunel was altogether past hope, but I knew that remonstrance with him was futile and precept vain. I do believe that physical pain and the fear of it form a sound panacea for moral laxness, but in this case the dictum of old Solomon must be exemplified. The rod must be spared. I must dab about with the velvet glove and withhold the iron hand.

Second, Cupid had tricked me into behaving like a cur. I had sought to take advantage of Rosalie Brunel's sweet confidence<sup>®</sup> like any country boor, involuntarily and of no malice aforethought truly, but—God alone knew what she now thought of me.

The next morning, however, with its fresh breezes and tempting perfumes, put new vigour into me, and armed me with a resolve to attempt my own redemption. Truly the Indian morn is a wonderful thing, and he who can resist its charm is no man but a thing of clay without sense or feeling.

Therefore with a light step and my double Manton, I sallied in search of Laurence Brunel, telling myself that for one day at least he should breathe the clean air of the forest.

But when at length I found him, I knew my effort to be foredoomed.

'Twas quite plain that the lad had not been to bed. His head was bound round with a wet cloth; a jack filled with pariah arrack stood by his side. His face was drawn and sallow to ghastliness; his eyes were bloodshot and their lids swollen. He regarded me vaguely and surlily, yet ventured no open discourtesy, he dared not unless supported by Armonde.

Howbeit, one can but try.

"Come, lad," I cried cheerily, "the larder is empty, and the jungle swarms with fat chicks. Let us go fetch a few for supper to-night."

The boy groaned heavily.

"Do I look as though I could go gunning?" he demanded

dully, and, to be frank, he certainly did not. But I would not despair.

"Will you come after you've rested a little?" I asked. "One can always bag a duck near the river."

"Then do you go and bag it and leave me in peace, Captain Warren. Fowling pieces and mallard do no longer attract me. 'Tis pieces and ducks of another sort I want."

Brunel grinned weakly at this masterpiece.

The futility of my hazard and his footling balderdash, combined to break my temper.

"You young fool !" I burst out angrily. "With your talk of dice and women, you might be some faded old hunks bibbing water in the Bath Pump instead of a child scarce weaned. Wake up, man ! Shoot, ride and run, or this country will fix your flint in no time."

I paused a little, then added :

"You should keep a curb on your desires for your sweet sister's sake, if not for your own."

A sneer twisted his lip.

"Please to remember, Captain Warren," he cried indignantly, "that I am my own master, and what I do is no concern of yours. Besides, I have fever. Can I help that ?"

"No man is his own master when he has someone dependent on him," I declared with force.

"Oh, have done !" cried Brunel. "And hint not concerning my sister, nor set your cap at her any longer. Oh, I've many a time seen you mooning after her. Your design is obvious to me, but I'd have you know, sir, that I intend Rosalie shall marry Captain Armonde and no other."

"What ! " I gasped, astounded.

"I intend that my sister shall marry the Captain. He is a real gentleman—of good family, some fortune, and—and——" seeking round lamely for another qualification, "—a merry fellow."

Brunel concluded the announcement by pressing transparent fingers to his head and leaning back with closed eyes.

Clapping a very brake upon my tongue, I left him, fuming at

the thought of so precious an idiot presuming the right to dispose of his sister's hand; and fairly boiling that he should suggest as her future spouse a boozing, gambling libertine, a vicious, brutal pig of a man. But young Brunel had unknowingly enlightened me as to the reason of his support of the Captain in his plaguing of me. Though I had truly surrendered all aspiration on that first fateful night, Armonde's jealous eyes had seen in me a possible rival. A rival ! The irony of it appealed in a queer, bitter way, and I chewed upon it for a time, again despite myself.

But, damme, without the gentle offices of the Captain and his puny lieutenant, I had confounded myself pretty thoroughly. I knew it by the *moue* of distaste which accompanied Rosalie's acknowledgment as she passed me, on her way to play ministering angel to the pale young demon in the guard hut.

Harryman was following her, carrying a phial.

He greeted me with a wink which involved the whole of his face.

"' Fever' again," he chuckled. "This dose'll rouse him a bit. 'Tis my infallible mixture for regimental malingerers !"



## "One only way I find— To slay this fiend of evil mind." "THE RAMAYANA" (GRIFFITHS).

THAT night, the silence that brooded over the table when Armonde and I took our seats alone for mess offered a plain enough indication of how matters stood. It endured till it could scarce endure longer, and Dusclin's entry undoubtedly saved a scene. A tiny smile flickered round the corners of his mouth as he took his seat. He was as usual inscrutably, blandly contented, so far as it was possible to judge from his features. Armonde had dressed himself in yellow satin, with orange ribbons at his knees and binding his coarse hair, instead of wearing uniform, from which I deduced that Miss Brunel was to sup with us. His face was flushed, and in his swarthy way, he had never looked handsomer.

Harryman bustled in rather late, having been called away to administer a brimstone potion to one of the men who had fallen sick. His periwig was awry and he sported silver buckles on his dress shoes, and Maltese ruffles on his wristbands.

The surgeon took his chair with his customary cough and clatter.

"Be all right in the morning," he announced to us all at large. "My medicine keeps illness from a camp as nothing else. A pill o' mine, sirs, and I'll wager he who takes it. . . ." The surgeon rumbled off into silence as the door was pushed open.

Rosalie Brunel, escorted by her brother, entered the room.

Armonde was at her side in a second, assuming command with a leer and a leg. In her dress of white the girl seemed, to my eyes, almost too beautiful to be true. Within their encircling shadows her deep eyes sparkled brightly; her cheeks glowed gently with an enchanted tint of rose; the light of the six-wicked lamp traced threads of brightest gold among the deep masses of her hair—tiny, maliciously dancing lights that seemed to sear mine eyes and burn through to the empty soul of me. The beauty of Rosalie was truly an ethereal beauty, and well indeed had she been named by the moor, Sephali, after the flower that blooms and droops in the moonlight.

Rankling thoughts of my default of the night before, and of my failure of the morning, set me staring at the mouldy thatching of the hut that I might not meet her gaze.

"'Tis right kind of you to honour our humble board so prodigiously," said Armonde to the girl, and added in Bengal "Meri moni," with a sly glance at me to see how I would take the endearing familiarity, for the words mean "My jewel." But my demeanour was indifferent enough, though it was a huge effort to preserve it so, since I saw a flush of resentment

creep into Miss Brunel's cheeks, proving that she understood the application of the term if not its meaning.

Harryman performed his wondrous bow of Queen Anne's day and scraped and finicked till Duselin gently shoved him aside that he might make his own obeisance and supper its delayed appearance. Our simple meal began, set on a cloth of mottled native stuff, lit by tapers in wooden sticks and the brass lamp. From somewhere, Armonde produced two flasks of Calcavello and a small bottle of real Sillery; but he left these lighter liquors to others, and washed down the meal with his own crude punch.

The surgeon chattered away glibly, trying to draw out young Brunel, who sat listlessly picking at his food, the while his eyes wandered about him vacantly. In the uncertain light his face seemed that of a man of hity.

With a grimace, Harryman turned his attention to Armonde.

"I heard the tom-tom of a hurkarah early this morning," he said. "Did the messenger bring important news?"

"Nothing except regimental orders and a tale that the Nabob of Oudh is dead."

The news startled me out of my silence.

"Egad, is that so ?" I ejaculated.

"Who was the Nabob?" asked Miss Brunel, timidly.

"The ruler of the country that lies to the West of Bengal," Armonde told her. "His name was Shuja-ud-Dowlah. We fought with him last year—Company's men and his brown devils against the Afghans of Rohilkhund. The detachments were quartered for some time in Faizabad—his capital."

"Ay," went on Armonde, with a swaggering air. "Faizabad's reasonable enough as these pestilent towns of India go. It was there that Shuja was pleased to express his appreciation of some small deed of my own."

He looked towards the girl for applause.

"Even of late years," I told Rosalie, emboldened to speak by disgust, "the Nawab retained his great beauty and strength. He was really a splendid man. I have myself seen him seize an armoured man in each hand and dash them one against the other till he tired, then let them fall, dead and broken, to the earth of his invaded plains, crying 'Thus go my enemies to enrich the soil of Oudh !' Yes, he was every inch a king, though only the Viceroy of the Dily Mogul in fact."

"It would seem you had a liking for this filthy fellow, Warren," sneered the Captain. "When did the old fool die, Harryman?"

The wine fumes were mounting; Armonde's prodding had lost its clumsy caution; he had exchanged the dirk for the sabre.

"In January," said Harryman hastily, "and the Begum already builds his tomb."

But the taunt had aroused me.

"There was nothing filthy about the Nawab," I declared emphatically. "He was a true man, if hot-headed."

"A true man !" snorted Armonde in assumed disgust, lashing himself into a purely artificial rage. "He was a dirty, brown-skinned banyan rather, a traitorous hound whom we should have blown from a gun. A ruddled old swine who cared for naught save dhoom nautch girls and Persian drabs."

"Nay, nay," interposed Harryman, "I protest you do his memory an injustice, sir. The Nabob was an upright man who lived cleanly—for a moor, that is."

"Pooh, pooh, sir,—I care not a pie for your opinion," blazed Armonde, forgetting in his vinous fury the presence of the lady, "nor for that of another here, who was ever too fond of these black, stinkard by-blows—ay, and of the black sows too."

For a moment the room swam in a red mist around me; the candles merged into a blur of orange, and I clutched involuntarily at my sash, though sword and frog had been left on the threshold. Harryman stared curiously from the Captain to me, hard put to it to find a reason for so foul an insult, gratuitously flung; white-faced too, at the slight upon himself.

His lips tightened, but he laid a restraining hand upon my arm. Then, too, the clear eyes of Rosalie shone through the bloody film that rage had flung across my own, and I checked an outburst ere it o'erleapt the curb.

With keen eyes flashing under the penthouse brows, Duselin watched us undisturbed.

"Laurence," said his sister to the writer, and her voice broke the stillness like a silver bell, "I have a headache—some slight migraine. Pray escort me hence. Gentlemen, I am sorry to derange you, but I must beg that you excuse me."

The writer rose mechanically at the command. He was trembling from head to foot. But Armonde was on his feet in an instant, half-sobered, slavering sorrow and fulsome wishes for the girl's recovery.

Our chairs scraped back noisily as we rose and bowed our regrets and good-nights—that is, of course, all save Armonde, who must needs seize Miss Brunel's hand and cover it with kisses, to which she meekly submitted. 'Twas he also who threw the cloak around her and escorted her to the door, the boy sullenly following.

"Demned bad form to make a scene before the girl," Harryman declared as Armonde flung back to the table with a muttered curse.

And this opinion was boldly ratified by Duselin.

"In the politer circles of society, Captain Armonde," the Chevalier said in measured tones, "it is considered exceedingly vulgar, nay culpably plebeian, to pursue a quarrel in the presence of a lady. In France, this night's work would have closed the door of every *salon* worth the entry inexorably against you."

"Bah,' growled Armonde.

"But then in France," pursued Duselin, urbanely, "even the *bourgenis* know better. In that country, you see, there are certain ar stocratic pedagogues, who, so keenly do they feel upon the subject, write and issue books on comportment and conduct proper in delicate company. I think, Armonde, that I should do you a favour by procuring one such for you."

"Bah," growled Armonde again. "An you do, I'll get you a dozen books on how your people *might* have comported at Wandiwash and Pondicherri. In India even the French don't conduct as they would wish to do." In sooth the Captain seemed to know the one vulnerable point in the armour of Duselin's composure.

The Chevalier actually seemed perturbed. His eyes glittered angrily, and his lips drew back a trifle, showing his sharp teeth, set hard.

"Mayhap there will be little enough that you, or any other in a red jacket, can teach us in the future, my friend," he said.

"Ah," retorted Armonde, "it's as well to say 'Mayhap.' The red jacket fits firm now, and whatever happens in the future, it'll want a deal of dragging off."

"Given time," quoth Duselin, with steely preciseness, "it will discard itself. Even Rome declined—and fell. So must every other arrogant nation in its day. May I direct your attention to the colonies of England in America ? You cannot but observe the canker at work there for which the chafe of arrogance is alone to answer."

A desperately daring speech, I thought, to make in such company, and from the ferment in which Harryman was bubbling, it looked as though it might have sanguinary consequences. But Duselin startled us from our consideration of its burden by his unexpected behaviour.

A mad light suddenly shone in his eyes; his calm totally vanished, and he turned snarling upon the Captain as one dog upon another.

"Keep a check on your tongue when you are drunk! Mordieu! An you do not, it would be better for you had you never been born !"

To my intense surprise Armonde cringed and glowered in silence, making not the slightest protest at so violent a castigation.

Harryman laid a hand on my knee and his glance was full of comically mysterious import.

The Chevalier shrugged his shoulders, sat upright, then leaned comfortably back in his chair, with a quiet smile, as though nothing untoward had occurred.

"And who is Nawab now, in Oudh, Major Harryman?" he enquired blandly, clapping his hands—a signal to the *hucca-bardar* to bring in the reeking pipe.

Harryman's patriotic indignation had subsided, as had my own, whelmed o'er by astonishment at the extraordinary scene He answered quietly enough :

"Presumably the old man's son, Asaf-ud-Dowlah, a seemly enough fellow, I believe, of whom the Governor has high hopes."

"And I too, then," added Duselin, drawing deep at the hookah, and handing me one of the amber mouthpieces, "for, as you know, I have interests in Oudh."

" Ah," breathed the surgeon deeply.

"Yos," went on the Frenchman, looking sharply at the little doctor, "some mills at Tanda."

He turned to me.

"Mademoiselle Brunel does seem to grow in beauty, Warren It is sad that she should have to live in this vile land; yet, i' faith, it is a joy to find one sweet, home flower blossoming amid the dusky blooms of the jungle. Is it not, Captain Armonde?"

The addition was made in a conciliatory tone, and Armonde slowly drew himself up and grinned diffidently, as a dog fawns in doubt when seeking to regain favour after a beating. That for some reason he was heartily afraid of the foreigner was manifest.

"Han !" he assented, then spoke on with a sudden avidity. "She's the prettiest piece on God's earth, and in this devil's stewpan too. So let's drink to her. Charge up, I say, and pledge her health—and the health of all the buxom doxies we used to love across the Kala pani !"

"'Twas as sacrilege to class the loriot with finches," remarked Duselin coldly, putting down his half raised mug. "Willingly will I drink to the happiness of Mademoiselle. But she must be honoured alone."

Very grateful was I to the Chevalier just then.

"Yes," I echoed. "Alone !"

Armonde swung round on me with a furious stare.

"Alone, if you will," he cried. "But drink to my proposition you must, an you wish the lady well. To Rosalie Brunel-who is shortly to sweeten my life beyond all imagining."

So he cried, and stood swaying slightly, glaring malevolent defiance at me. My glass had been raised as he spoke, but now my agitation deluged the mottled cloth with rare Sillery.

Armonde's blow stunned me. I lay back bewildered.

Harryman was the first who thought to seek enlightenment.

"Your fortune is colossal, Captain," he said quietly. "In Miss Brunel you will have the sweetest wife that ever man will win."

Armonde swayed and laughed as though astonished.

"Wife !" he ejaculated. "Who said anything about such woundy things ? Since when could a Captain o' Cavalry afford a wife ? Wives, indeed ! I\_\_\_\_\_"

A mighty relief tempered the white-hot fury which surged through me, but could not cool it.

Armonde staggered back before my blow, which shattered the glass against his lips, covering his face with wine and blood.

"Hound !" I yelled. "Swine ! On your knees and whine for pardon, or I'll kill you here and now."

Armonde's face wizened into a veritable mask of hate, but my ecstatic rage frightened him nevertheless. I saw that.

"Never !" he shrieked ; then, as I made headlong at him, "Duselin ! Harryman ! Restrain that madman ! Hold him, I say ! Arrest him !"

But the whole squadron could not have stopped me then, and Harryman drew aside before my rush. In a single bound I had Armonde by the throat, fingers feeling for a grip beneath the lace. Together we recled on to the table, wrecked it with a splendid crash, and struggled amongst the debris till my foot slipped on a wine flask and we fell, he a-top, so that the breath was dashed from my lungs and I was helpless.

My antagonist saw this, and raised himself on one hand so that he might fumble in his pocket with the other. Fortunately, ere he could do mischief, Duselin leapt on him and collared his pistol; afterwards jerking him, bulky though he was, bodily to his feet. I stood up panting, and my rage returning with my breath, I would have joined combat again, had not the Frenchman signalled to Harryman to restrain me.

"If fight you must, pray let it be done in correct order, gentlemen," said the Chevalier austerely, though his tone bore a tremor of excitement that mated the twin spots of crimson in his pale cheeks.

"Ay, and I'll act for you, lad," put in Harryman precipitately, fearful lest my opponent should claim his services.

The elegant Chevalier took complete control of the proceedings, and waved a hand withcourtly ceremony.

"You are determined that blood shall be shed over this matter?" he demanded of Armonde and myself.

"Can you ask such a question, Chevalier?" I burst out furiously again. "Did you not hear him affront a lady as blackly as it is possible for man to do? Ay, if the privilege of honourable meeting can be extended to such a hound, his blood shall wash the stain away !"

"Zooks !" seconded Harryman. "Can you ask such a question, Mounseer ? I tell ye this—if Warren don't fight : I do !"

Duselin smiled a little at the remonstrance.

"Nay, misunderstand me not," he begged. "I had a motive in asking. Captain Armonde will corroborate me when I tell you, Warten, that an order has recently arrived from Calcutta —a regimental order, I believe—in which it is declared by the Commander-in-Chief that the duello betwixt officers of the Company's Army is gravely discountenanced. The reason is, I apprehend, that too many good officers have been lost of late through such meetings. Howbeit, the order asserts that in future the Civil Law will be invoked with the utmost rigour against offending officers. In other words, he who kills his opponent in fair fight will be regarded as a murderer and hanged as such. 'Tis pretty plain too, that if neither party should sustain hurt, or merely injury, cashiering will be the lot of both. So, to seek gentlemanly satisfaction has been made a criminal offence for officers by your omniscient Government. Will you fight despite this order?"

I gazed blankly for a moment at my enemy. The sight of him set my anger aflame once more.

"Damn the Commander-in-Chief and his autooratic edicts !" I cried mutinously. "Arrange time and place at once. Ay, why not let it be here and now ?"

Duselin shook his head. There was in the Frenchman's eyes an inexplicable suggestion of triumph and relief. It was a look such as might have marked the countenance of Antony when the mob acclaimed the body of dead Cæsar.

"Whom do you nominate ?" he asked, turning to Armonde. "I-I----" stammered the Captain. "Why should we fight ? I----"

"Do I understand that you are unwilling to do so?" enquired the Frenchman, his air conveying the politest, but uttermost contempt.

"Damn you, Duselin ! No !" yelled the other, stung out of his panic. "I'll have pistols, and young Brunel will stand for me. Pistols, d'ye hear ?"

He was famed for his skill with such weapons.

"The choice of weapons must rest awhile, sir. Surgeon Harryman, do you call on Mr. Brunel to-morrow, as he has not now returned," ordered the Chevalier, more formally than ever. "Till you hear from your seconds, gentlemen, I bid you comport as befits. I request that one of you now leave this building."

Armonde glared around him for a moment, then snatched up his laced hat and sword, and strode from the room, a flaming hulk of orange; the foppish wine-stained ribbons streaming out behind him.

Duselin bowed pleasantly to me, and followed him.

"Phew !" whistled Harryman, long and loud, mopping his brow.

He stepped over the chaos of broken food and china on the floor and seized me by the hand.

" Pray God you shoot straight, boy," he said

XI

# "Away delights ! Go seek some other dwelling, For I must die."

John Fletcher.

WE met two days later at a spot where a village had once stood, some two miles from the temporary cantonment. Our little party stole away, grim and silent, before the dawn. Three of us were attired for the morning parade; how many would attend it was a matter for speculation. The pent-up resentment of the past week had contributed to the thorough awakening of that fury which is dormant in every man, and I was ruled now solely by a disciplined passion to kill that obliterated all fear for self or care for consequences.

The news of the quarrel had, of course, been sedulously kept from the innocent cause.

Armonde, in whom the stress seemed to have found some errant shred of chivalry, had held aloof from the girl, to her evident relief and surprise. The writer, even though he stood second to the Captain, had but a general suspicion of the cause of the difference that demanded so salutary an arbitration. He had been deliberately kept in the dark, for such a wreck was he, that we feared he would be unable to see the matter through an he knew all.

Exigencies compelled that Harryman should perform the office of surgeon in addition to his other duty; Duselin had instituted himself Master of the Ceremonics and would give the word to fire.

As the sun tipped the treetops and shed its pale gold upon the clearing, we reached our rendezvous. Armonde and I stood waiting, conducting with exaggerated politeness when converse was necessary. I was cool and steady enough, my hand firm and my eye clear; no fear that I should miss my mark assalled me.

Julius Armonde seemed none too easy of mind; his fingers

twitched at his sword hilt, and his forehead gleamed with an unwonted sweat when Duselin requested us to swip to the shirt and prepare.

Behind the rotting lattice of a ruined hut, Harryman moved silently about, setting out a case of sinister instruments and bandages.

"The only logical thing in the whole proceeding," I heard Duselin murmur to himself with a cynical smile, for all that he had insisted to the letter on the observance of our code of reparation.

Young Brunel stepped out a range of twenty-five unsteady paces, placed a handkerchief at each firing point and retired to seek solace from a flask. Throughout the whole morning he spoke no word.

"Gentlemen," the Chevalier said at length, clearly and steadily, "we await your convenience. Does it please you to take up your positions?"

We duly stepped on the handkerchiefs, not committing ourselves by speech as to the "pleasure."

"Understand, I beg, that at the word 'one' you may raise your weapons to the present, but neither must fire until the word 'three.' Captain Armonde having selected pistols as the weapons, the choice of two remains to Captain Warren. These pistols are my own, rifled, and their priming is full and dry."

I selected one of the long, delicately balanced weapons, wiped the flint and cocked it.

The morning air was redolent of that mystery of perfume only to be met with in Bengal; the sun had dried the silver dewspangles from the long grass; the song of countless birds arose to greet the new day.

Clear against the background of purple-green stood the man I meant to kill, meticulously examining the weapon handed to him. Twenty-five paces. At that distance the ball would rise; therefore I would aim at the wristband.

"Prepare !"

For some reason the chaos of bird voices murmured into silence.

" One---- "

The silver clasp of Armonde's wristband ringed my sight.

"Two--three ! "

Came a heavy double explosion, and a curtain of thin, blue smoke. Something jerked under my raised arm, and from the rush of air against my skin I knew that the seam had been ripped from my shirt.

The vapour drifted sluggishly on the placid air, then rose, to show me my opponent lying still in the grass, a carmine blotch upon his cravat.

The thing was done.

Till now, my hatred had held me to a stern application to physical things and detail that prevented introspection. Now came revulsion, borne on the pure air I gulped so greedily, and the counting of the cost. In killing Armonde I had killed myself. For me the world held nothing more, no future, no hope, no happiness. My course was run. Dully, I looked from my startled companions to the sky and trees. The envisioned form of her for whose sake I had done this thing rose mystically at my unuttered call.

She, the quivering foliage and pale sweet sky, all were things of a world in which I trod my last few steps. A transient ecstasy of fear seized me. God I Had I but thought of these things before. What weight bore the body of a drunken boor in the scale against the scented air o' mornings, the free swing of a horse? What were a few brutal words, a vulgar innuendo, against the treasures of life I had surrendered? Could Duselin have been right when he sarcastically condemned it all as illogical? Was a woman's name really equal in the balance to a man's life, or two? Was our perspective wrong indeed; our inflexible rule a mere fetish demanding useless sacrifices as Juggernaut's car at Poori?

I smiled bitterly and put the vain problems from me. The last word of a Moslem I had stretched dying at my feet in Oudh came back to me—"Kismet !" So must it be with me now.

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After parade, Harryman entered the hut and bounced down on his charpoy so that the strings shot him well nigh to the roof again.

"Methinks," quoth he, peering through the rattaned windowpane at the perfectly cloudless sky, "that we shall have rain."

By way of answer I unbuckled my sword and slammed it, clanging, on the table.

"Since you are the senior officer present in camp, Surgeon Major Harryman—even though a non-combatant—" I commenced.

"If not to-day, perhaps to-morrow, or the next day," interrupted the doctor, loudly.

"It is my duty to hand over the command of the detachment to you," I went on, firmly, "and to consider myself under arrest until the matter is placed before the Colonel and his wishes communicated to me."

"On the other hand," continued Harryman, in a stentorian voice, "it is not at all unlikely that we may not have rain at all."

"Jo," I appealed, " for Heaven's sake stop this foolery."

"Ah," was the answer in tones of mighty relief, "if you care to talk to Jo Harryman, Esquire, I'll listen to you all day —but not otherwise."

"Why delay matters ?" I demanded. "It can do no good. What do you propose I should do ?"

"Bolt !" answered my friend, laconically.

I bit my lip.

"There is a limit to all nonsense," I told Harryman wearily. "I have been through rather much of late, and would rather you were serious, Jo."

"I am serious," declared Jo with sincerity. "The suggestion is Duselin's, and that fact considered, it is a good one. There is no just or logical reason why you should surrender your life in the performance of an honourable duty. You must go, Jack, and to-night."

"The suggestion is ludicrous," I said coldly.

"An inspiration," Harryman contended. "Lad, you heard me when I declared that if you did not fight the beast, I'd challenge him myself. I swear to you that, had I fought and ---and killed, and if my circumstances were the same as yours, I'd bolt for Oudh to-night with all speed and a light heart."

Not for a moment did I believe the surgeon, but more out of weariness than for any other reason, I humoured him.

"What is there to do in Oudh, supposing one got so far in safety?"

"A hundred things. The Nabob welcomes such men as you, strong and capable as you are, to train his troops, to enlighten his underlings, to direct his pleasures, his business transactions, to think and act for him in everything—and aid in the emptying of his treasury. Oudh is the hunting-ground of the promiscuous adventurer, and you could play the *beau sabreur* with the best of 'em, until—until—well, at least for a time."

"And my honour?" I asked acidly.

"It is preposterous that you should suffer death so unjustly. The order is madly unfeeling and would be a lasting shame to the Commander-in-Chief if enforced. The Military Department proposes, but in this case it should really not be permitted to dispose as well. You must go, I say."

"But my honour?" I persisted.

"I say the order is too patently brutal, so-so impossible that to submit to it would be dishonourable."

"Ingenuous fellow. But your argument is hopelessly vain, and you know it. A soldier is dishonoured the moment he disobeys any order, no matter how arbitrary—how impossible."

"Oh, damn it, Jack, your mulish obstinacy will be the death of you yet !" cried the surgeon unhappily.

"That would seem very probable," I agreed.

"A plague on my tongue !" Harryman fumed. "I meant not that. But see, Jack, there is something you do not know as yet. Not only was Armonde what we know him to have been, but he was a filthy traitor as well—as two-faced as Janus."

"Ah," I said, languidly interested. "The domino?"

"Yes--the domino ! Listen ! I went straight to Armonde's quarters when we got back this morning, for, as senior brother officer, it devolves on me to straighten out his affairs here since he appointed none to do so. In his room I found our exquisite, the Chevalier Isidore, arms deep in a box, a dozen papers already selected and laid aside. I ordered him out of it, and though he protested that he was the Captain's nearest and dearest friend as it were, I gained my way. Those papers, boy, were in French, every one of 'em, and relate as far as I can make out to payments received by Armonde-through an intermediary, at whose identity we may guess. The services which had been rendered for this payment seem to have been mainly the securing of appointments in the Army of Oudh for numerous French officers and *chevaliers de fortune*. Armonde had great influence at the Nabobi court-you know he once saved old Shuja's life -and it would be an easy matter for him to get these fellows placed as friends of his. Each paper bore the words 'Brulez ceci' at the bottom of it, but Armonde apparently preferred not to burn them. Anyhow, you can now understand the incident of the domino."

"Why should the French King want men in Oudh ?"

"Quien sabe, as the dons say? But it's plain there's a mine sinking for someone, and if it's not the Company and our noble selves, I'll burn my periwig."

"As an argument, your story has no weight with me," I said. "I killed Armonde in ignorance of all this."

"Unwitting or no," emphasized the surgeon, "you have done the Company a service rather than offended, Jack, and I shall send to Calcutta for relief that I may go inform the authorities, ay, even if I have to face the Commanderin-Chief himself. Those papers will ensure the edict of the cheerful old duck being rendered stingless, this once at any rate."

"You would say that I discovered the Captain to be a traitor and killed him for it?" demanded I, realizing what was in Harryman's mind.

He looked at me uneasily for a moment.

"Rest assured that I shall act with due regard to these queasy scruples of yours."

"But if the papers ensure my safety, why should I bolt headlong like a poltroon?"

"Because, lad, I'm neither prescient nor infallible. I cannot know definitely whether I may succeed until I make the attempt, nor that my poor advocacy would be strong enough to prevail."

"I'm obliged, Jo, and I thank you, but I cannot in honour go."

"Enough ! Confound and damn your pig's head !" yelled my friend, yielding to one of his lightning rages. "I tell you I will not see you shot for killing such a Cerberus."

The vehemence left his voice and the colour his ruddy cheeks; his hands dropped helplessly to his sides, ere he raised them, appealingly to me.

"Jack," he said, with a wry smile, "I said just now that if my circumstances were the same as yours I'd bolt across the river to the Continent without hesitation. And I meant it. You know what I mean by the circumstances. If you will not go for me—will you go for that other ?"

"The other?"

"Miss Brunel. Did you not fight for her?"

"He who would not have done is no man," I answered hotly. "Might it not have been yourself?"

"Truly, or Duselin. Even he went white with anger and half drew his toasting fork. But-you love her, don't you ?"

I staggered back and sat down heavily on my charpoy; then nodded in confusion and murmured something to the effect that he had apprised a well-hid secret.

The surgeon chuckled.

"Well hid?" he scoffed. "'Ods truth! The man's actually blushing!"

Crestfallen, I avoided his eyes, now twinkling with all their old humour.

"Well, boy," insignated the tempter, "what of her?

"One man has died for Miss Brunel," pursued Harryman, gravely. "Have you not thought that, tender-hearted as she is, the news will cause her pain beyond description ?" I had not, and the thought stung me in a new place.

"Yes, the necessity for the duel despite, she will be distressed deeply, and God knows she has trouble enough now. So that if another were to die as a consequence of this business —if another life were to be sacrificed for her, imagine what would be her suffering !"

Heavens, how thoughtless I had been, how callously jealous of mine own dignity and point of view.

"If you love her, Jack," continued the remorseless Harryman, "can you calmly and knowingly impose this further burden on her ? Can——"

"Stop !" I shouted. "I'll go, Harryman !"

"Then God bless you and give you good hap," he exclaimed, and jumping from the charpoy, seized both my hands in his and wrung them.

Briskly he made towards the door.

"Hasten, then. There is little time to lose. Pack your things ! I will go search Armonde's kit again. I want definite proof wherewith to pickle the rod that shall score the back of our sable macaroni !"

Chuckling and sniffing simultaneously, the surgeon hurried away.

सन्यमेव जयने

# XII

#### "Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult." George Eliot

As the sun grew warmer, climbing to his zenith, I discarded scarlet coat and gorget and habited myself in a suit of broadcloth and leather used when hunting, setting aside spare pantaloons of white buckskin and a strong cloak of English homespun. My campaign impedimenta was light—I bore near all of it on my person—so that I should travel light, with one led animal.

This beast I commanded my servant, Melaram, to load with fodder and moorish foodstuffs, *atta*, gram, rice and *dhal*. Green-foods I might cull on the way; for meat I could rely on my gun.

Of arms, I packed my double gun, my rifle, and two pair of pistols both by Rigby of Ireland, with long and short barrels. My sword and gully I carried on me. These things with a parcel of drugs suitable for fevers, some fine rappee in a perpets bag, and my small store of rupees, completed my baggage.

Came the sunset, a Bengal sunset of riotous, flaming orange, dull drab and pale green, and once more the mists rose slowly.

The time was come.

I turned and stole to the little bamboo hut, and there found my two horses, ready loaded, and Melaram a-weeping because he would bear me company and might not. On the mud step stood Harryman, and by his side, debonair and graceful, Duselin the mysterious.

The surgeon seized my hand in a grip that rendered me unable to speak for feeling.

"A letter is half a meeting, say the Arabs, boy," he said. "Write me news if you can. But there, we'll be strolling together again in Surman's gardens and exploring Dimond Harbour way before you've time. Au revoir, therefore, au revoir."

I mounted in silence and turned the horses into the trodden path.

"Bon voyage et bon chance !" came the clear hard tones of Duselin.

I made no response, but loosened my rein.

The noise of ribald song came roaring up from the men's bivouac, as I trotted swiftly by it, and the stink of hookahs poisoned the evening air. I entered the forest road that led to Calcutta; for I desired to approach the Settlement nearly in order to strike the Great Road inland.

Glancing aside in the half-light I saw the opening of the path that led to the river—the one I had taken on that night that now seemed so long ago. Fancy painted a slim figure in pale blue within the murky recess, a wraithlike figure, elusive and haunting. I forced my eyes away and rode on.

"Stay !" called the soft, silver voice I knew so well.

I reined in hard and sat stark, staring straight ahead of me. God ! this was calamity indeed.

The slim, pale-blue figure had run to my side, and had placed a small though material hand on my rein. With a supreme effort, I looked down into those wonderful eyes and smiled steadily.

"Good evening, Miss Brunel," quoth I.

But the girl seemed too agitated to note the greeting.

"Where are you going, Captain Warren ?"

I essayed to appear surprised.

"Away," I answered truthfully, if not informatively.

"You will not tell me why-or where ?"

"I cannot conceive why you should wish to know, lady," I said, still with tolerable facility. "Circumstances have commanded that I leave this spot—circumstances of health mostly. It is, as I told you, not an over salubrious district."

I took a morbid delight in my humour

"Captain Warren," spoke Rosalie earnestly, "I have just come from my brother—he is ill, very ill, I fear. He—he has told me everything that—that happened this morning."

"Then I fear that he selected rather an inopportune time to do so."

I could no longer look into the grey eyes, and stared stonily ahead.

"Tell me," commanded Rosalie in a low and rather tremulous tone, "why did you—what caused this terrible thing ?"

"We quarrelled," I vouchsafed, and added, "Lady, I must go."

But my inquisitor laid such a grip upon the bridle that I should have dragged her from her feet had I moved my horse forward.

"No," she declared firmly, " not till you have answered me."

The insistent note gave place to a ring of entreaty in the clear voice.

"Captain Warren, I am no longer a child. You may not treat me so. Oh, do tell me. Was it because of something that was said—that he said—about me ?"

I harried my slow wits for a prevarication.

"Was that the reason?"

I gave reluctant acquiescence with a nod, and when she saw it, Rosalie Brunel bowed her head as beneath the pressure of a load. Presently she slowly raised her head again.

"A life —a man's life has been yielded for me," she whispered, as though unable to realize the full import of the words.

Heavens ! Harryman could see deeper into a woman's feelings than I. An this would cause her pain, I could wish Armonde a dozen times alive.

"A man who so conducts as did—he, is not worthy to live," I said hurriedly. "Please—please do not let the memory of this thing hurt you."

"But it was for me you killed him?"

I feared to make the admission.

"It was for honour's sake I slew," I said, and felt mighty virtuous as I said it. "For honour's sake, and that of all good women."

A change took place in the demeanour of the girl. She drew herself up; her head was thrown back in that proud poise which I remembered so well from the night of the Settlement Ball.

"Then it was only on principle you acted—and not for me alone ? "

I looked down at the dim figure again-puzzled. Miss Brunel seemed almost offended.

"The principle was made for you," I quibbled lamely.

There was a pause.

"You might have been injured, and not he," said the lady at last.

"Nay. Providence fights in just causes."

"And now you are going. May I not know where ?"

"Well-to Oudh, to Faizabad, an it may interest you." "Why?"

"I have already indicated that this place is like to derange my constitution, and Calcutta might be even unhealthier."

"But you have faced death boldly to-day. Are you afraid to face it again ? Is that why you go ?"

The question was just such a one that I should have expected the girl's mettlesome spirit to prompt. But its abruptness and implied contempt disconcerted me. Hitherto I had spoken stiltedly—like a virtuous prig. I had had to—or remain tongue-tied—or bolt ignominiously. I had played a high and mighty rôle; now I must play a low one.

"More can be done in Oudh by a live man than in Calcutta by a dead one," I quoth with assumed airiness. "I have no fancy for a firing party or a stretched neck at my age, Madame."

Rosalic cried out almost as though I had hurt her.

"That isn't true. Why do you talk in such a manner?"

"Lady," I stammered, taken aback, " I-I--- "

"You know it isn't true," the girl repeated. "Oh, why are you going ?"

"As I have said, a public execution, with myself in the principal rôle----"

"Captain Warren," interrupted Rosalie with an angry gesture, "you are acting a lie and you know it. You are notnot running away because you fear the result of that which has happened."

The grip I had held upon myself was fast weakening-For the first time I spoke my own feelings, naturally and curtly.

"No," I said in a low voice, "I am not afraid to die."

"So that you go for my sake—that I should not have to suffer more than I endure now through the death of one gentleman—caused by me?"

Another silence ensued; Rosalie broke it.

"Captain Warren-you have told me that you fought

for honour's sake. But since you have told me that that my name was the direct cause, may I thank you for defending it?"

"No," I declared. "Its defence was your right-not my favour."

"Yet I do !" cried Rosalie, and there was a new and vibrant note sounding through the words. "I thank you, gallant gentleman, as deeply and sincerely as I may."

"Lady," spake I once more, "I must go."

"Then will you take with you this token of my esteem, and keep it in memory of me? It is my miniature."

My lady took something from her neck and put it into my hand. The contact set me trembling from head to foot, so that, as I stowed the jewel under my necklet for security, I almost let it fall.

"Well----?" said Rosalie gently, as though asking something.

"Good-night, and good-bye, Miss Brunel."

I jerked the rein.

The girl's light hand was still upon the bridle, and the animal did not move.

"You have defended my name à l'outrance," she cried suddenly, "and you sacrifice yourself now, to ease me. Is that all ? Have you nothing to say to me at all ?" persisted my tormentor.

Upon my soul, what did she mean? What should I, the dishonoured fugitive, have to say to her, from whom, moreover, I had to preserve such a weighty secret?

"No, I think not," I responded, keeping my voice on the level by main force o' will, "except—except that I'm sorry I could not help you—about your brother...."

"Oh, my brother. . . . Is that all ? "

"Yes, save-God give you good hap where'er you may be, Miss Brunel."

"Oh ! Oh ! " burst out the girl. " You are insufferable ! "

And like a wraith, she vanished as she had appeared, leaving me thunderstruck. God ! Insufferable ! How ? What did she mean ? What had I said ? Ah, well, truly I should never understand a woman.

I wheeled the horses and spurred them on through the pitchy dark, and with a heavy heart I rode on.

#### XIII

# " My feet are sore with travelling. For calling on my lady's name My lips have now forgot to sing."

OSCAR WILDE.

So, in the fair spring month of Falgoon, when the air was heavy with the scent of flowering mango groves, and the wild cotton trees lit the green with their crimson blossoms, I found myself a fugitive, fleeing from my countrymen to seek service of a pagan lord, with a mind so loaded that I scarce knew what I did, and a sad itching neath my cravat where lay the presentment of the cause of it all.

Harryman had urged me to ride the night long so that I might reach the outskirts of the "Paradise of Nations" next day, and get a change of horses; but the night was so dark that after a stumble in which the horse sustained a grazed shoulder and I a skinned nose, I thought best to rest where I was till dawn. Therefore, but a few miles from the camp I lit a great fire and hobbled the horses, listening for the reassuring cry of the jackal (for where he runs the wolf seldom prowls) and sleeping fitfully.

At day break I rose, shivering, to cook me *chupattis* and fry rice into *murri*. Scant and unsatisfying fare, but there was no time for gunning. Then to saddle up and away.

Day long I rode boldly, knowing that I should meet but few, and they not curious—a dishevelled, painted *sadhoe*, or a pottlebellied *lumbardar* returning in a litter from the city to his village. I was assured, too, that Harryman would keep his messenger back until I should be clear of immediate danger.

However, as I neared the Settlement, I became more cautious, and when at last the rugged outline of pagoda and hut jagged into the evening sky, and the wind wafted carrion odours into my nostrils, I determined on disguise. From the first merchant I came across by the northern gate, I purchased a *mirzai* of flowers and quilted stuff, a turban, breeches of satin, red high boots, a good Oudh sabre to replace my sword, and a shield to sling from my shoulders.

A secret place, hard by the great trench dug years before, when the Mahrattees ravened across the land from Berar, gave me shelter while I changed and packed my English clothes.

My beard, I knew, would grow fast, black and glossy, so that I should be able before long to brush it in the Rajpoot way; my skin, naturally somewhat swart, was already burnt to the hue of coffee by the jungle sun. Thus, Jack Warren entered the Mahrattee ditch and was interred there, while his spirit passed into the carcase of a nondescript gentoo with a vile taste in clothing.

In my new guise I sneaked round the Settlement borders up towards Dean's Town where I hoped to get a ferry to the Continent.

From the river, as I stole past the bastions and curtains of the Fort, came the sound of an orchestra playing aboard a pinnace; a dhow warped clumsily up towards the wharves. So I made on by Tully's nullah and the Governor's fine house in Alipore to Dimond harbour, and here prevailed on a boatman to take me and my animals to the opposite shore.

The sight of the red coats, of which I had caught a glimpse on my way near Dean's Town, had filled me with a new alarm. I had heard of some negotiation in which the Council was engaged with the Nawab—some matter arising from the recent cession of Kora and Prayag to the dominion of Oudh, and the yielding of certain districts to us. I trembled lest this might fill the state with our officers engaged in the ceremonial frippery that is part and parcel of Eastern diplomacy; in which event I stood little chance of showing my face at the Viceroy's court without discovery. I had thought, too, to traverse the routes we had taken on the old campaigns, every inch of which was known to me—through the territory of the Rajah of Burdwan, meeting Mother Ganges at Patna, branching from the great road at Cheyt Singh's holy city of Kasee, and so on to Faizabad.

But, a few kos from Calcutta I found a train of elephants, camels and oxen cramming the way, laden with British kit, and with the same fear of discovery heavy at my breast, I had to draw out from the road and stumble through paths to the north of it. I pitched camp that night with the avenue that lined the trunk road in sight, cursing with cavalry roundness at the luck that withheld me from a comfortable night in some village *serai*.

There is little forest in Burdwan, but it has thick woods of tamarind and *bo*, with palms, and coppices of *sal*, so that my going next day was heavy. My disguise served me well, and though, with my rich motley, I must have presented a queer figure, the blacks themselves favoured me with no more than a passing glance.

My spirits rose. I drank to the future in the pure air of the mornings. I sang, as I rode, catches I had learned from the dark-skinned imps of the country. My gun now brought me a good store of fowl, and in this scrubby ground, broken by dry nullahs, buck and nilghai abounded.

So travelled I, keeping on the pathless ground, for all that mine eyes were dazzled by the glistening kankar and I feared for the horses' feet; but the road was ever on my southern horizon. Occasionally I would join it again for a few hours' smooth travel, keeping an open eye for *thugs*, those organized devils of the road, who carry silken cords wherewith to strangle plethoric merchants and zamindars, so that they may vanish with their mohurs into the wild.

Patna found me with but one horse, my pack beast having died, forcing me to abandon much food and my English clothes. But here I fell in with a caravan from the north of Bengala

Subah on its way to Faizabad with ebony and worked sandalwood for the Nawab's palace, rare spices, perfumed oils, lac, and that peisonous plant from the northern hills which is both chewed and eaten to produce a pleasant madness. The leader, a cheery Moslem, hight Sher Jan, offered to put my surplus baggage on his camels, an offer which I jumped at, and with the train I dawdled by the side of Holy Gunga to Kasee, which is also called Benarus.

I was both reassured and flattered that my race was unquestioned, though save for my accent, there was little reason that it should be. My beard now bristled like that of a Rajpoot prince, black as night and glossed with coconut oil and care. The language of Oudh I know as Bengal's, and that as my own.

They were merry fellows, the merchants of the train, and during the grazing hours, told many tales and sang.

At Benarus we stayed several days while the *sets* bore selected wares to the bazaars and the Hindoos among them paid their devoirs to the gods that abound here as do the monkeys.

Here, at evening, when the smoke of the burning ghauts went up in black clouds against the lurid sky, I would wander down to the river and stay, a-ponder on my fate, till the moon rose and clothed the world in a silver robe, and the tiny, lamplit rafts, sacred to Kwaja Kezeer, god of water and of ships, floated down the placid surface of the stream.

Ofttimes then, I saw the white, dead face of Armonde, staring up at me malevolently, yet it disturbed me not, for the dim shallows at the water's edge shewed me another vision too —of grey eyes, tinted cheeks, rich, burnished hair and drooping lips. Then the death mask of my enemy would fade mystically away, while the great river spoke softly in her tender, sonorous voice, charming from my soul the acid stains which rage and hate had left, whispering messages of hope, and of a future lit by love, till the sweet mouth mirrored in the water smiled and vanished too.

Sighing, I would turn away, for though it was as the goddess of gentle speech that I knew the Indian Mother, I knew that her speech was too gentle, that she promised what she could not fulfil.

On again, following the road that leads through Jaunpore to Faizabad and mystic Ajodya. But now we travelled in the heat of the day, because the drivers and servants of the train refused to move from the camp at night. They held, these people, that when the jackal whines and the hyena shricks out his ghastly mirth in the cold moonlight, then the headless ghost of Said Salar the Afghan rides abroad with his phantom riders, and ravages amongst the souls of men, since, these many centuries past, he has been denied the destruction of their bodies.

Very shortly, the wheel of Fortune took another turn and set my course again askew.

Sher Jan, one noon-tide, had just finished one of his robust yarns, packing the lovers off to bed "like twin kernels in an almond," when he looked over his shoulder and then signalled to the train to draw in to the side of the road.

"Unbelievers !" he said. "Feringis ! White swine ! Chut !"

True enough, behind us and overtaking us, was a pretty cavalcade.

I caught the glimmer of red and gold and steel, and finally the glow of English faces under sun hats. Skulking, I confess, in the shadow of my horse, I watched the cavaliers pass, a dozen officers in differing uniforms in the lead, grouped around the quaint spade-shaped emblem of the Company which flew aloft among them. With the pack rode nigh on fifty troopers of my own regiment, orange plumes a-nodding, and to my horror, I perceived Colonel Ogilvie talking to Mr. Bristow (who rode like a jumping Jack) and Pettigrew and Peabody, at the head of the men.

Here was a terrible pickle, by my faith. My own colonel in Faizabad ! What on God's earth could I do ? I lagged greatly, thinking and distressed.

Then in a mad moment, driven by the prospect of the gyves that I feared for my lady's sake, I turned my Radha into a branching by-path and spurred her up an avenue of basil, leaving the caravan padding on its dusty way.

I had a vague idea of camping inland that night, and worrying my turgid brain for a solution of my new difficulty.

The avenue gave suddenly on to a fringe of paddy fields, and I charged heavily across them, through the compound of a tiny shrine, and so left the track for broken ground. Here, with no road to follow, I let my horse wander at her pleasure, as I listlessly chewed a bitter cud upon my plight. So dark found me, despairing and lost, by the side of a deep chasm-like nullah, n echanically striking fire into a bundle of brush and setting a feed to still my companion's whinny.

The gorgeous, airy castles I had built at Gunga-side lay 'about me in savourless ash ; the Mother's fancied promises vanished into the limbo that swallows all such vanities.

A covey of snipe, disturbed, flashed and zig-zagged north.

From my vest, a-swing on its cord, fell the disc of ivory that bore Rosalie's pictured face. Her smile mocked me maliciously, and I thrust the precious thing out of sight again almost savagely; driving down the lump that rose to my throat with a curse.

Ten minutes of cogitation brought me inspiration. The breeze chilled, and so miserable was I that I seriously pondered as to whether or no Rosalie would be like to hear of the discovery of my body, stark and grey-jowled, if I settled the matter with a ball.

Such a moment of impulse did I endure then, that I hastily blew the priming of my pistols to the four winds lest I should fall to temptation.

Thus I sat against my pack, and, since we had ridden far that day, I presently swayed backwards and dropped into sleep, without covering and with a dying fire



# BOOK THE SECOND

IN WHICH CAPTAIN JACK WARREN CHANGES HIS COLOUR AND MAKES HIMSELF AT HOME.





# " Call upon Rama, brothers ...." The Light of Asia.

JUST as the sky was greying at the dawn, I opened my eyes with a start, a sweat upon my forehead. Nerves a-tingle, skin creeping with nature's danger warning, I started to my feet, for beyond all doubt, I listened to the actual din of combat. They were all there—the sounds I knew so well, the detonations of brass guns, the cracking of matchlocks, the sputtering burst of blunderbores, the shivering concussions of jingals thundering together above the muttering of hoofs and the cries of contesting men.

I ran to where my startled horse strained at her rope head, saw to it that my four pistols were loaded, slung them in my sash, mounted and cantered warily towards the sound of conflict.

My mount tethered handily, I crept through a mass of thorny growth till I found a point from which I could look down.

In the dip beneath me I made out a body of men, some hundreds strong, engaged in what was, for its size, as lively a mill as ever I saw.

I could distinguish no opposing sides; 'twas just one gorgeous *mélée*, everyone cutting and slashing with heavy blades and letting go their guns with apparently little heed as to whom they injured. 'Twas ever so with these folk, and we of the Company's forces must be thankful for it.

But the one side had stationed a small gun on a hillock, and beneath it a row of slim jingals, with which they were peppering their opponents hotly; the other seemed to possess none of this rude artillery.

Presently, above the tumult, the cries, groans and mad laughter, I made out shouts for one Sher Singh, and yet more for another, Deo Narayan; and I took it that these were the gentlemen whose fortunes were in the cockpit.

Pardieu, they were a motley throng—Hirddoos all, some in armour, more, naked to the buff save for the *dheti*; one or two well mounted and bearing lances. Among these mounted men were those I assumed to be the leaders.

One was a man so fat that I wondered how he had been hoisted into the saddle, and he, I gathered, was Deo Narayan. His antagonist was a man worthy of the name, straight and strong; muscles swelling and rolling beneath the bronze skin; beard fiercely brushed from the chin—a Rajpoot or I knew not the breed.

Methought that if the issue had rested upon honest fisticuffs there had been little doubt as to the decision, but as matters stood, the fat man seemed to have the larger force. It was he, too, who possessed the jingals; and though singly they are unreliable and throw shot as a woman throws a stone, these weapons are of import in large numbers. Varying from what in the ancient measure were robinets to falcons, the little guns are easily carried and trained in rough places.

This was exemplified now, for as I watched, I saw men hurrying the pieces forward to a murderous range against the followers of the Rajpoot. He, like a good captain, saw in their temporary impotence, as they ceased fire, an opportunity worth taking. With a mighty shout he spurred his horse forward, stabbing its sides till the blood ran from the keen straight spikes. His men followed prettily, and ere the jingal men had rammed home, were among them, striking lustily with kirich, kuttar and tulwar.

His charge carried the Rajpoot nearly through his enemy's lines, and this in decent warfare would have put the finishing touch to the affair. But the combatants were without cohesion and discipline, and broke line to turn on one another like snarling dogs; so that the whole were lost again in a pitiful chaos, friend striking friend in the blind fury of it.

There is something which stirs in me at the sight of a fight, some subtle thing that veils my mind with red and drives me forward recklessly into the thick.

So it was with me now, and, forgetful of caution, I leapt up and yelled encouragement to the Singh, to whom, being the better man, and having the smaller force, my sympathies went out.

The Rappoot was in the van, unhorsed, but laying about him with a splendid will, making right pretty play with his curved blade, pinking and parrying as though it had been a gentlemanly bodkin.

My fingers itched for the rapier at the sight, and I trembled from head to foot with the old lust to be a-killing. Friend Narayan kept well in the background. With pottle-gut a-quiver like a jelly, he screamed incessantly to his followers, calling them Hanumans and sons of Owls in the same breath, with commendable impartiality. He was all discretion and no valour; the new sun showed the sweat of a white liver exuding in heavy drops and streaming down his skin in a veritable cascade. I longed to drop the coward with a long shot, and would have done had the quarrel been mine.

But the squirts soon got to work again, and, without irksome discrimination, poured streams of slugs into the mass of men to their front. The diversion changed the complexion of things. Even a woman can hit a barn door with a stone provided the range be short enough, and the present case was on a parallel. To miss was impossible.

The men of Deo Narayan scuttled to the flanks or fell on their bellies and crawled under the whirring curtain of missiles. The Rajpoot's men blenched, as much at the noise as anything, and fell back reluctantly but steadily. The artillerists were flattered and shrieked excitedly, sending their slugs flying carelessly heavenward, to the discomfiture of many a crow.

And this permitted their footmen to charge and drive the enemy in a routed wave till they reached their proper rise of the valley and began to pour up the acclivity towards me.

Sher Singh justified his name then. Alone he guarded the

rear, till his tulwar snapped like a carrot at a mighty stroke and he stood helpless.

Then, as he bound a kuttar within his fist with a bandannoe, a wretch who should have been pressed to death for it, crept behind him and blew a hole in his back with *z* blunderbuss that would have accommodated a spiced ale jack with ease.

Such was my indignation that, chucking off coat and turban, I fished out the pistols and went halloing down the slope to get at the cowardly beast. 'Twas what Harryman was wont to call an "In manus tuas Domine, rush."

Right through the retreating fellows I went, yelling at them to turn and follow me, oblivious of the amazement which my white body must have caused, and most else.

Two of Narayan's men came at me, and I plugged them merrily, right and left, and exchanged the pistols for the shorter pair. My right laid another black low, but the other bullet merely left a crimson record across a brown pap, and I was left with the sabre, too heavy for wrist play, but limber enough for the work on hand.

Speedily I was beset.

"Bravo!" I yelled at the big man who first arrived, rushing at me with a scythe-like blade uplifted.

"Nay, nay," I informed him, a second later. "Tis not good practice, that of yours. So! So! A guard thus-then have at you! Ah!"

I wiped the blade on his clothes and waited for the next comer.

But he was unwilling for a lesson in fence, and fell clean head over heels in his anxiety to leave my path free.

"Krishn! Ram! Ram! To our aid!" came the confused cries, and the erstwhile beaten men swept by me again, hewing to such good purpose that the retainers of the corpulent knight bolted in dismay, oversetting the jingals; fully convinced that they were striving against a god—such being their ignorance and the effect of my white skin.

Now, being left behind and alone, the fever suddenly left me, and I was seized with a fear for my own skin that came of

cold thought. As a god I was safe enough, but I was ill-fitted to sustain so exalted a rôle, and, for all that the gratitude of my *protégés* might be great, I was a feringi and stood the risks of one. I was inclined to the opinion that some bright rip among the Rajpoot's men must have been blessed with a master inspiration in hailing me as Ram, and had used it opportunely. Which later proved to be right.

Cursing the mad impulse that had led me into this mischief, I dragged on my clothes again, and waited with all the dignity I could muster, as the dead man's retainers returned from the slaughter. They came shouting and carrying rags of silk and looted weapons, headed by a strange little fellow with painted breast and forehead, a necklace of iron beads, a shock of white hair, and the face of the devil hinself.

He was a jogi, or sadoo or something of the sort.

Straight for me came this apparition, and with every sign of reverence, sat down and commenced to make those postures which are considered *de rigueur* in the worship of certain Hindoo gods, while I stood stupidly and not a little alarmed. For there was a twinkle in the wee black eyes and a sly smirk about the wrinkled gap of a mouth that gave the lie to the reverential balderdash performed by the priest. Suddenly the little man swung round upon his followers and waved them off. They drew away, silently and awed.

When they were out of carshot the fellow spoke, and his first words sent a shiver through me.

"Arré feringi!" he snapped in a voice like the crackling of dried leaves in the hot weather. "Thou foughtest well and I am grateful, having much to lose. 'Twas I who turned thee into Rama for the nonce and to good purpose. What dost here and in such garb?"

"Why should I not wear such a dress?" I prevaricated. "Cannot a feringi be a true follower of the shastras?"

"Phut !" sneered the priest, eyes cunningly a-gleam. "If wert that, wouldst wear thy *mirzai* buttoned as a Mussulman on the left side, and wouldst salute with the left hand, which is unclean ?" A profundity of wisdom and experience seemed to lie behind his penetrating eyes; the customary glare of the fanatic was notably absent, and in its place shone a twinkle that seemed to suggest good humour, even mischief.

"Well," demanded the jogi, "what wouldst thou, and why art thou here ?"

"'Twould seem as though to save ye all from a violent end, old man," I gave back. "And for that service thou wilt doubtless let me go in peace, nay, perhaps wilt aid me."

"Where wouldst go?" he asked. "Tell me freely, art a wrong doer, that thou comest here as one of us, far from the cities of the whites?"

Here I thought I saw a chance to gain time it might be advisable to take.

"Grant me some time to see thee apart, and I will tell thee my story."

The priest considered awhile.

"Han. It is well, for these people are tired and bloody. Besides, I cannot let thee go, O Ram, without a deal of trouble in explanation. So get thee gone where thy presence and shadow will not defile, for we would eat. I will come to thee again after a short space."

The speaker waddled off without further ado, shouting that I was to be left to meditate in peace, and so wonderful was his command, that the crowd held off and left me alone to chew surreptitiously a strip of dried beef; the doing of which, had any seen me, would have settled my fate once and for all; the bull being a thing sacred and its life inviolate.

Ere long the priest came back to me, stepping with a tremulous, fearful gait, cleverly assumed, and on his heels followed the little force, to form a circle round me and stare till I feared for their eyes.

"Thou must lead us to the Sher Khoti," said the jogi to me quietly. "Remember, the half of these have never seen a feringi, and they believe thee to be a great lord, if not an incarnation of Vishnu even as Ram or Kanh. Later, perhaps, we will talk. Now come; I will direct thee."

He girded up his tattered saffron loin-cloth and ordered certain of the men to make a bier of their lances and lay the dead Sher Singh upon it, together with his broken sword and yellow Rajpoot turban.

Then we set off *en cortége*, the jogi and myself in the van, an eager fellow leading my horse, muttering with combined gratification and affright.

For nigh on an hour we stumbled over nullah and scrub, till at length we hit on a path that I knew for the one that had led me into this adventure. For a further hour we followed it, through a fair place where many *beegas* lay under cultivation, and finally brought up dead against a thick hedge of bamboo and thorn.

The priest turned aside, and after some prying, withdrew a few supple stems and low-growing fronds of bamboo so that they disclosed an opening in the hedge which perhaps admitted of two men walking abreast, or one horse skilfully led. The brown of a hard-trod path led into the darkness. He entered and I bent and followed him. In a dozen yards the path twisted in almost as many directions, and thereafter wound in and out tortuously, lit by the merest glimmer of sunlight which filtered through the interlaced fronds overhead.

After a time the path came to an abrupt end, and we were beyond the wall, but on the brink of a deep and broad ditch filled with water so murky that it was almost ooze; scummed over with the hideous slime of stagnation and reeking not a little. Over this moat a drawbridge of bamboo and rushes slowly dropped, leaving a gap in the great, feet-thick mud wall which reared itself on the farther edge of the water.

The procession passed over the precarious surface in mournful silence; a spike-studded wicket gate swung outwards—a neat detail of defence—and I found myself in the courtyard of Sher Singh's house.

'Twas a great, low building of fine brickwork, plastered red, and with the figure of a yellow lion, a-prance, tricked out on a panel over the main entrance. Doors and windows were protected by wooden gates wondrously carven and heavily stapled. At each corner of the building rose a squat, castellated bastion of mud, mounting a jingal or two and matchlock wallpieces. Around the whole mansion ran arcades of carved wood; the work as delicately wrought as Maltese filigree of silver.

The ground of the wide compound surrounding the house was trodden hard as iron and was new washed with cattle dung. In one corner of it stood a shrine of virgin white, whose intricate, sheafed spires, a-glow with gilt and colours, leapt even above the encircling barrier of green.

Observance was plainly strictly enforced within these precincts, since the garlands and streamers, lamps and ochres were new and fresh, and the threshold of the sanctuary was littered with an abundance of tiny, clay elephants and little, legged bowls, such as these people offer on recovery from sickness or wounds of ill-forrune's shaft.

Here, too, were the boulders of rock, rude and unshapen, that stood as memorials of the ancestors of Sher Singh; sleekly smeared with vermilion and oil, and fronted by brass dishes containing a grain or two of gram, their daily sustenance. Thus, hedged about with a painted wall of mud, the senseless stones accepted the homage and care of senseless men, and watched blandly the passing of time and lives.

Peering above me, my eyes were held by a little box-like bow which bulged from the wall and flaunted a gilt cupola. The window of it was barred, but behind the bars I glimpsed a movement, then the suggestion of a lovely dusky face with round, anxious eyes, searching us all.

I followed their gaze till it lit on the bier and its stiffening burden.

Then came a low wail of utter grief and a gasping sob.

The jogi looked up carelessly.

"'Tis the woman, Sovona Suniti-she cometh, too, from Bengal," he vouchsafed, speaking close to my ear. "He had but one, and no seed."

Then turning to the dusty, bloodsmeared crew, he cried :

"Away, my children! Rejoice, for ye have done well! The Lord hath left this earth for a space, but forget not that ye are yet his vassals. Rejoice! He who would have robbed ye is crushed and broken by the strength of the sacred Dead, and that of this new Lord with whom I go now to commune. Away, I say, and purify yourselves as is meet!"

At the priest's commanding gesture, the men seemed to melt away into the green wall of bamboo. But a few wellarmoured men remained—the personal guard of the Talukdar of Sher Khoti.

The jogi beckoned to me, as the doors of the house swung open and a crowd of servants poured forth.

"Oh, Lady Rosalie," I muttered, as I followed the priest within. "Where leads the path of true love now?"



"There lived of old an holy sage, Of shrivelled form, and bent with age." THE "LALITA-VISTARA."

THE jogi led me into a low, spacious apartment, pleasantly cool and dim after the heat and glare outside, and waved me imperiously to a divan, on which I sank thankfully enough, the while he bade a servant prepare scented water and oil for the bath.

"Now," quoth the priest, suddenly, "tell me what thou hast to tell quickly, and I will decide what aid I can give thee."

Discretion adjured obedience, and I there and then gave him a general outline of my misfortunes, touching the story here and there with vivid colour, since his was an Eastern mind. Something of my dead anger was revived by the recital, and I painted Armonde in glossy black, yet no blacker than he truly was. I made no mention of Rosalie, but explained that the honourable combat was now punished with death by the Lat-Sahib, and that, as the prospect was not over attractive, I left with more speed than dignity. Being an oriental, the priest saw no shame in this, but merely nodded wisely.

"Ha'e, ha'e," he murmured when I had done.

Obviously undecided what steps to take, he began to tell me of himself.

"My names," he volunteered, "are Madhava Chaitanya, which names are great in history."

He paused for effect ere continuing.

"In this Taluka I am famed for my wisdom and sanctity. It is I who choose the times of sowing and set up chatties upon the plough. It is I who select *lagans* and auspicious dates; the stars are to me as a book, and by them I read the destinies of children at their birth and—and—and many other things. Yea, in all matters stand I 'twixt the gods and these folk."

From which it will be gathered that modesty is not esteemed a virtue in the East.

Truly the old parasite had much to lose by a victory for Deo Narayan, as he had said. 1 had met his kind before.

A muttered word of flattery brought a twinkle to the priest's eye, and, encouraged, I asked him how it came about that I had witnessed—and won—a fight that morning. This he explained readily enough.

It seemed that Sher Singh's Taluka—a taluka being a holding of land owned by a lord much in the way that the steel-clad barons of our own land held their estates from the king was the fairest in all ways for many miles around. The rights of the Rajpoot in this land extended back for years and years through the times of his most distant ancestors into tradition.

And throughout, the Rajpoots had ruled the domain wisely and well; under them the *shatrivas* had fought and the *vaisya* farmers prospered exceedingly; the dues and demands of a succession of governments had been satisfied in full, and without delay. The Rajpoots had been in fact, subsidiary monarchs of all the very considerable land they could survey from their own impregnable stronghold and, with their ancient title to it, owned a record of military adventure and romantic lore,

that had been handed down as a cumulating family epic from times immemorial.

"Deo Narayan," said Madhava, "is an upstart official of the Viceroy, a bastard of some drabbing dancing girl, whose wealth, ill-gotten in Bengal, hath purchased power and position from the Moslem."

Now Narayan squatted on his estate, semi-somnolent like a sea-flower, but like it also, alert enough to spy and swallow all that came within range of his avid maw. It was to him, as an overseer of *amils* or tax-gatherers, that the talukdars and greater landowners paid their assessed dues.

Deo Narayan possessed to the full the avarice of his class, and was ever on the watch to develop his estate or pouch further *ashrafis* of gold. His land adjoined the Rajpoot's, and with the cunning of a Persian, he had, on pretexts of wondrous ingenuity, sought gradually to impose on Sher Singh taxes that were not only extortionate but actually illegal. The additional load was for long patiently borne, till the endurance of the talukdar was tried too far and he refused to pay. All his efforts to gain redress were either diverted to barren ground or entirely frustrated by his *rusé* enemy.

Finally, doubtless by the application of much golden lubricant, Deo Narayan had so regulated his machinery of deceit, that he had obtained powers of the late Nawab to confiscate the estates and punish the owner thereof for his refusal to be fleeced. That he had preferred to carry out this firman in his own time and with his own men was sufficient indication of the extent to which the confiscation would benefit the state of Oudh, and how much it would benefit the pocket of the Amil.

So, having received warning of the impending blow, Sher Singh sallied forth to fight for his land, and met the Amil halfway.

"But now the lord is dead ; his line is extinct ; the Rajpoot lion will no longer lie, sleek, yet terrible, in his lair. His bones and his wife must burn. Taubah! Who shall succeed him?"

At this concluding wail of the priest I started up in a rage.

"See here, old man. No woman burns for a dead man; Chew upon that!"

Madhava drew himself up with dignity.

"It is not for thee to interfere with usages laid down in the ancient Veda itself. Have a care what thou sayest, feringi, lest I denounce thee as a spy of the whites, seeking excuse for a quarrel and the annexation of our land. This woman is a Bengali, and Sher Singh sadly endangered his prestige in marrying her. Therefore, 'tis doubly meet that she should burn."

"Art mad, priest?" I demanded boldly, "that thou talkest of denouncing me whom thou has hailed thyself as Vishnu incarnate. Who would believe thy changed tale? And even were it believed, forget not that to these people a *sahib* is one born of the egg which groweth on a tree, a Hanuman in strength, and possessing strange powers. Yea, even could you convince them and were willing to admit your apparent error, they would not dare to impede me!"

As I spoke, the idea evolved itself slowly till it filled my mind, that great idea which was the saving of myself from God alone knows what, and Sovona Suniti from the dread Sutee. It shone across my dark horizon of hopelessness in a dazzling way; so that I gasped at the brilliance of it and could scarce scrape words together to put it into speech.

"If there is need of a successor, I myself will be he-at least until some person more worthy of the place appear," I stammered at last.

Madhava fell back a pace and stared at me with eyes of wonder, clutching as though for support at the Brahmin's cord around his neck.

"Thou! Thou, a feringi! A defiler! Sitarem! What possesses thee?"

His wonder changed to a fury that paled him lividly.

"Dog! Child of an accursed race! Swine! .... "

"Enough!" I shouted at him. "My mind is settled. What more appropriate than that I, the deliverer, should charge myself with the rule and conduct of this place? I tell

thee I do so, and will rule justly and well till someone appointed of the Viceroy is sent to take my place. Nay, presently I will go myself to him seeking redress and a new Talukdar of thine own race. There, choke not, little man. Thy mouth is over small for big words. I shall not harm thee. Thy predictions and magickings can continue for ever an thou keepest my secret."

The old fellow nearly died of rage. Desperately he struggled for coherent speech.

Again, I patted him on the back.

"Now hear me," said I. "Thou hast deceived these people for thine own ends for years, I doubt not. Now I, needing a safe refuge for the present, must needs do the same. Go, tell them my name is Indra Rama, a prince of the south, sent to succour them—anything thy glib tongue dictates. Nay! No more words! Send me food—without thy magic spices—and I will bathe. See thou too, that no harm come to the woman or thy life shall answer for it. Get thee gone!"

From the very soles of my shoon to the tip of my crown, Madhava surveyed me, panting with the suppression of his feelings. Then, without a word more, he turned and stole out of the room.

Somehow I knew that he had gone to obey and not to betray.

सन्यमेव जयन

### ш

### "Stranger, thou art come to rest Where the pasturing folds are best." SOPHOCLES.

IN a hamam of Moslem design, of marble inlaid with cornelian and fitted with drying niches to hold fire, I washed the stains of travel from my body and lazed luxuriously. Later food was sent me, brinjals stuffed with herbs, fruits, scented sherbet, gram split with spices, pepper and lemon.

I ate sparingly, and betook me to wandering through the great rooms of the house. Many were hung with flowered velvets and red, English taffeties, and boasted crystal chandeliers, but all were silent and deserted.

Presently I came to one in which there were many instruments of music, beautifully made and embellished—tambouras, quaint, twin-bellied *rashins* and painted *dholaks*. Paroquets squawked petulantly in cages on the walls.

The apartment was cool and handsome and I spent some time in looking about it. And as I stood thus inspecting things, a hand was laid timidly on my arm and I bent my head to find a pair of lustrous eyes looking up at me—the eyes of the woman I had seen at the window, Sovona. It is considered a vast impropriety for women to hold converse with any man save their own relatives; therefore it spoke much for this one's love of her dead husband that she should break the iron rule and approach me.

A comely wench was Sovona, graciously rounded as to figure, with a complexion between ivory and gold (which is esteemed perfect colouring in Bengal) and deer-like eyes. Her filmy silken saree enwrapped her but lightly; in the parting of her hair she wore the brilliant line of red that bespoke her a wife. Small wonder that the proud Rajpoot had forsworn the custom of his race and married outside his own people. She was a *peri*, this child, if a dusky one.

"Whoever thou mayst be, lord," she said, and the tear drops hung upon her lashes as she spoke, "tell me of my lord. Is he indeed dead, or only sore wounded?"

The tears streamed unrestrained down the soft cheeks.

"Shahzadi," I answered gravely, "he has gone to give to the earth, but he died like a true man, fighting to the last breath."

The little lady blinked away her tears and looked sharply at me. Perhaps she had detected some accent in my speech, or had remarked that my eyes were grey, for she gasped, drew

her saree tightly around her, and fled like a gazelle, with a faint jingle of anklet and bangle, from the room.

Staring after her, I vowed silently that no harm should come to the poor wounded child, and that I would glue an eye on that sly old hunks, Madhava, nor would I taste more food till I had crammed some of it down his own gizzard; sending his caste a-limping, if need be, at the end of a long Rigby.

Madhava met me as I walked slowly back through the empty rooms, and conducted me without a word to the courtyard. Here I found assembled a large number of the Rajpoot's followers.

The *jogi* raised a skinny finger, commanding silence, and commenced to harangue the crowd with great energy. My humble self, he described as a stranger from the south, a mighty Sirdar, one Indra Rama, who, it was foretold, should take the place for a space of their late lord and master. He shrewdly suspected, he informed his audience, that I had sprung from the breast of Vishnu even as Ram and Kanh and the other incarnations of that protean god. Of which balderdash he delivered himself very convincingly. Ecod, he was a champion liar, and heaven alone knows what or who I might not have become, had I not tired and bade him have done prattling.

Then I spoke briefly to the people, thinking it befitting; ever conscious that above, from her turret retreat, the dark eyes of Sovona watched me through a veil of tears. I praised and condoled, telling of my intention of visiting the Viceroy to seek redress and ensure that neither Deo Narayan nor any other rapscallion should bleed the taluka again.

The folk seemed well content, and I breathed deeply with relief; knowing that here at least I could live quietly until such hue and cry as might be raised for me had died its death, or my immunity was compassed by Harryman; always provided that I behaved with caution and as a Hindoo of rank might.

The presence of Madhava, however, hung like a menacing cloud over my peace of mind, and I knew that I must placate him in some way, or be constantly on guard against some ingenious treachery. Now, smiling with malice, the wizened little devil turned to me, and whispered in my ear :

" It would seem that as friends we might do much together, feringi, whereas as enemics we should each ruin the other."

And to my surprise he stretched out his hand in the English fashion, so that I could not but take it.

"Iss," he stammered, "I bin Calcutta. Ungrese werry good man. Splen'id feller."

Thus I, late Captain in the Company's Horse, became a Hindoo chieftain, with that little painted rogue as counsellor.

I slept that night on a blue and silver lacquered charpoy, as a Talukdar of Oudh.

Next day, amid all obsequious ceremony, upon a pyre made aromatic with guins and sweet woods, the body of Sher Singh was cremated and his soul wafted on the purple vapours to the abode of bliss. But no living woman lay beside the dead man on his fiery bed.

Later, and throughout the long days that succeeded, I set myself to master the details of the conduct and rude administration of the taluka, and a complicated business it proved. However, by dint of much poring and brain racking, and long conferences with Madhava and the old *kirani*, Pundid Dhuleep, I made shift to get a grasp of affairs.

The taluka, I found, was situated to the east of Ajodya and therefore of Faizabad, and consisted of many *beegas* of splendid arable land, free from jheels or desolating swamps. Most of it was well cultivated; but the loamy uplands with their thick woods and scrub swarmed with game, black buck and such of a similar sort, with leopard and wolves to make a balance.

The Sher Khoti itself lay within easy reach of the road.

The people of the district were in the majority good, staid, full-habited folk, genuine descendants of the Vaisyas, and of pure caste, or of castes offshot; there were also *chamars* who tanned good leather, *ahirs* who grazed the plump cattle, labour-

ing *bhars*, and just a few *pasees*, whose business it was to cull the juices of the tall palms and distil the foetid liquor that maddens one for days.

There were but few true people of the fighting caste, a mere score or so of fine, upstanding men with fierce beards and yellow *safes*.

The record, which the pundit deciphered for me, as 'twas part in Sanskrit, was a fine, resonant family epic; but it showed that of later years the Talukdars had remained much at home, ensconced secure behind their unburnable, unstormable hedge of cane; counting their tithes of rice gram, masoor and pulse serencely, though nabobs and kings might struggle for supremacy around. In the late fighting, Sher Singh had followed their passive example, having little sympathy with the white feringi, and none at all for his Moslem overlord; he being a representative of the sternest and most ancient Hindoo race.

But that he valued and could emulate on occasion the tradition of the screed was manifest by his attack on the fat Narayan.

Since the sealing of our strange compact, Madhava had aided me loyally and well. We conducted ourselves with the greatest courtesy and good-feeling; knowing that each to the other was not only a tower of strength but Damocletian sword as well. The people, implicitly trusting in the tale of their spiritual head, accepted me as their temporal liege quietly and as a matter of course. Each day, when the pundit had turned the wooden key on his massive press of documents, I held a sort of durbar; administering justice in the claims and quarrels brought me, with, I venture, a fair impartiality.

Also I made a round of the villages to receive expressions of allegiance and to aid where I could.

Further, I improved and strengthened the defences of the great house in case of further attack by Deo Narayan or his agents, and drilled the retainers in the use of matchlock and pike.

Thus by hard work I sought to stave off and allay the hornet

stings of memory, but, when the long day drew to a close, the tranquil twilight fell, and the villagers flew their paper kites while in the trees; then was I plagued beyon' is and would send for the *jogi* to chatter of his wreak is and to sympathise—which last he could do right well.

He would come to me, after he had assured himself that the remnants of my meal had been cleared away (for he declared his caste endangered by such a sight) seat himself cross-legged, and recite his doings in a voice thickened by a mouthful of betel.

Such is the contrariety of human nature, that a cord of rich sympathy soon connected the pair of us, incongruous twain as we were, and this in turn gave place to a real attachment which subtly ousted the cooler feeling. Madhava grew to be almost my constant companion; accompanying me everywhere; ever a-chattering his diverting babble, and seeking to display his regard by performing little offices such as the lighting of my hookah.

Withal I loved him for that general broadmindedness which he delighted to cloak under the salmon-coloured robes of the ascetic, and the queer, satirical fun which ever bubbled from him like a spring savoured with mineral sharpness.

I recall how, one evening, he had come to deliver his usual evening oration to his melancholy audience of one, and, despite his contempt for earthly pleasures, was puffing contentedly at my pipe.

my pipe. "'The lady continueth in good health?" I asked after a time.

"Ay, though sulketh a great deal, which is a nuisance. Would have had peace had she been burnt—as were meet."

"Madhava," I protested, "I know well that secretly thou carest not a jot for these customs. Why then hath such a thirst for the life of a fair woman ?"

"Of a truth, I care not whether she burns or no," answered the priest, cheerfully callous. "Yet, it would have satisfied the villagers had she so died. See thou, with them it must be

water of water or milk of milk." (One thing or the other.) "They understand not the relaxation of a rule, thinking it sacrilege. 'Tis the same in other things concerning which thou railest at me. But, an I went against the observance of these people, I, one of the Twice-Born, should lose power and influence, ay, be cast out, mayhap, for an infidel. What other course is open to me, feringi ? Say ? One must kneel to the gods e'en though it be on thorns."

"Clear away the thorns," I suggested. "But hast thou no real religion of thine own, Madhava? No god for whose sake thou wouldst eschew power and influence and trickery?"

But he was in no mood for a debate of this kind, and he led off quickly at a tangent :

"Of the woman, brother. If art here long, wilt take a wife to thyself? Sovona Suniti seemeth to find solace in thy presence--tho' according to the rules at which thou mockest, she may not marry again."

Pardieu, I had noted this fact myself. Despite the recent death of her lord, the girl watched me everywhere with eyes that bore a message growing day by day more urgent and unmistakable, and the fashion in which Sovona regarded me set me oft a-wondering what I should do concerning her.

I told the *iogi*, in answer, that I used not women to gratify whims or fleeting passions, and that it was not right that two of a different colour should wed.

"How so?" he queried. "Did not Akbar the Moghul marry a white, and a Christian at that—Maryam the Beautiful?"

"'Tis said," I acquiesced.

"Then hath not Sovona the eyes of a stag, the waist of a cypress, the face as the full moon ?" he continued, with unction.

"Enough, Madhava!" I snapped irritably; and the priest wrinkled up his button of a nose and grinned.

So the days passed peacefully enough, but not for long.

A few nights later I was awakened in pitchy darkness by a hand laid on my shoulder, and in an instant I had clapped a pistol into the shock of white hair of Madhava, with a force that drew a petulant ejaculation from him.

"Fear not," he said, and I could hear him rubbing his sore noddle, "I have come to tell thee that the sentinel at the gate hath brought some feringis through the hedge. They say they have lost their way. What wilt do with them?"

In sudden alarm, dreading that I had been traced to my retreat, I got up and threw a robe around me.

"What manner of men are they?"

"I have not seen them and cannot say. But, an they have come for thee, we will give fight, or otherwise rid ourselves of them. I know of subtle means . . "

"Useless," I rejoined, though gratified at this expression of good will. "If these men want aught of the Englishman, they have a troop of horse hidden somewhere around for a certitude. Nay, I had best see them myself. Cause thou them to be brought within."

Hurriedly I ran through the dark rooms, the jogi in advance.

Badly flurried, I reached the gateway across the courtyard; and, by the light of the wicks that floated in vessels of mustard oil set in niches in the thickness of the wall, I made out the figures of three Europeans standing on the lowered drawbridge. One of my fellows held their horses at the rear.

Two were strangers to me, but at the sight of the third, my heart, which seemed to have been bobbing jerkily between my throat and its proper seat, leapt finally into my mouth and stayed there. For it was Duselin, slim and calm, smiling wearily but politely, who faced me.

#### IV

# "There's no such things as chance; And what seems to us merest accident, Springs from the deepest source of destiny." SCHILLER.

The light of the lamps was directly on my face, and Duselin's scrutiny was keen; but no light of recognition lit his eyes and I was content. He was, as my Lord Chesterfield would have had it, completely humbugged.

" Ram ram," the Chevalier gave me greeting.

" Ram ram mahadeo! "

" Bundagi araz kerta hun." (My service to you.)

"Meri bhi bundagi pahoonche." (And mine to you.) "How can I serve you, sirs?" I demanded as calmly as I could.

"We have had the misfortune to lose our pack through the rascality of a servant," the Frenchman informed me. "We are travellers to Faizabad—having business with the Nawab." This with a weighty suavity intended to impress. "If we might beseech some small shelter, thy excellence would find us the least embarrassing of guests. Food, could thy excellence provide a little, would be an inestimable boon; a little *sutos*" (which is barley ground and parched) "more precious than the Hesperidian apples."

He laughed his engaging laugh at the conceit of putting such an allusion into the outlandish tongue, and addressing it to one to whom it must be incomprehensible.

Assuming a mein such as I divined a Hindoo of rank would wear in so peculiar a circumstance as the sheltering of three defilers, I considered a while, then ordered the sentinel to open the great gate, which he did reluctantly enough.

I could scarce send the three men back into the Stygian gloom of the moonless Indian night, lost as they were; and more, it would afford a supreme test for my disguise thus to remain under the kite-like eye of him who knew me so well. "Enter, sirs," I invited. "Such shelter as I can provide shall be thine. Give the horses over to the man, and they shall be fed."

I led the way into the god-flaunting durbar chamber and lit a single lamp, the light of which cast weird shadows across the arabesqued ceiling and costly hangings. I indicated a divan, and the three sank down as one, with every appearance of fatigue.

Covertly, I studied them.

I confess that, at the first glance at the Chevalier's two companions, I was conscious of a biting disappointment. I had hoped that one of them would be a tubby little man with a wry periwig and blue, twinkling eyes, but neither answered to this familiar description.

The one was a burly Goliath of a man with a ruddy face scarred in several places, and gapped by a great, toothless mouth that was shadowed by a huge, red moustache. His calling was obvious from his dress; for he wore a striped smock much whitened by salt at the seams, a small jacket with a wide collar and tarnished anchor buttons, and a sailor's petticoat hopelessly out of keeping with the badly fitting riding boots. I'd have given a lot to see him astride his mount. The belt of this amiable character truculently displayed about two feet of double pistol and a hanger. He appeared to have stepped straight from the deck of some pirate craft into the heart of India. His accent was hoarse and nasal, with the twang of our rebellious Yankee cousins.

The third visitor was a slim young man in black satin and a dusty surtout, modest of comportment and speech. His face was regular and pale, but the grey eyes were hard and determined. Egad, an oddly assorted trio to be a-meandering through India together.

Silently I turned and left the men in order that charpoys should be placed in the room and a meal prepared.

I returned with the servants who bore in the food, and watched the trio as they ate. The sailorman was mighty sulky; the sad-eyed youth wrapped in a close-wove reverie.

Duselin spotted me almost at once, and with a gesture invited me to join the group; signalling to his companions to stop eating.

"Canst thou speak English ?" he enquired.

"Nay," I lied. "Naught save this tongue and Persian."

"He knows no English," translated Duselin for his friends' benefit.

I offered to put the travellers on the road to Faizabad on the morrow, and received the thanks of the Chevalier. The young man in black stammered a few words of acknowledgment in grotesquely broken moors, but the flowing idiom of Duselin shamed him into uncomfortable silence.

"Have we strayed far, Monsieur?" he asked presently.

"Not very far, I believe and trust," replied the Frenchman.

"That's as well," announced the buccaneer gentleman with his mouth full. "As my gizzard is made for a gallers, I like not this trapsing round in niggers' rat holes, an' dewin' the high en mighty tew black-faced heathen."

That, at least, was the drift of his remarks. "The tarpaulin had the most masterly gift for lurid embellishment in language, that, as a cavalry officer, 1 have ever envied.

"'T s at least more confortable than a gibbet, even, though your gizzard be truly made for a gallows, Captain Bilge-er-Bulger, which fact I do not doubt for a moment. Consider the pretty pickle you might have been in now, my friend, and compare. Even in Fort William it is prohibited to slay moors promiscuously; even though arrack may exhilarate to such a pitch of temptation. Saw you no vultures feeding at Melancholy Point, as you came upstream ?"

Egad, even Harryman's accustomed ears would have pricked at the ornate verbiage of the disgruntled lout's retort. The slim young man positively winced at it.

What had brought the Chevalier to Oudh, I wondered? And had he kept a still tongue with regard to the happenings at the camp? The inconvenience and dallying that a legal enquiry would impose on him, were sufficient in themselves to ensure his silence, I thought, and I suspected that the Chevalier was not over desirous of too great a prominence, nor too great a contact with Harryman; since the latter now knew of his collusion with the dead Captain.

And who were the others with him, the silent youth, and he of the wondrous vocabulary?

When the meal was finished, I ordered hookahs to be brought in, and informed my visitors that they would find beds in the recesses behind the hangings when they were disposed to retire.

Duselin smoked his pipe with great content; the seaman inspected his closely, and when he thought I was not looking, snapped off the amber mouthpiece and pouched it, much to the Chevalier's disgust.

The youth—Halliday, Duselin called him—took a bold draw at the small brass pipe set for him, and spluttered painfully as a result. His next attempt was a violent puff the wrong way, which bubbled the water noisily and sent sparks flying from the chilam.

"You've never smoked a hookah before, I observe, Mr. Halliday," said the Chevalier with a courtly smile. "I should have thought your young friends of the Company would have taught you the art ere now."

"I-I have not been in the country over long, sir," stammered the young man, colouring. "I commenced my duties in the Secret Department only a month or so back."

"Ah," said Duselin, leaning forward with a sudden interest, "did you arrive in the frigate, *Rosy Dawn*?"

"Yes," acquiesced Halliday.

"Then you could not but have met a young friend of mine, Brunel, and his sister, a lady of remarkable beauty?"

"I know them both-well."

"You will be distressed to hear, then, an you know it not already, that the unfortunate young man is dead. He died of a fever in the jungle, not far from the Settlement, and . . . "

Halliday interrupted.

" I know," he said, very quietly.

Heavens! had such an end indeed come to the youngster, then what of his sister ? My heart was wrung with a vast pity

that had no birth in my great love for her. Poor child! However unworthy he had been, she had loved her brother dearer than anything on earth, I judged, and his death must have been a terrible blow to her. And now, she was alone. Who would look after her? Where would she go? Had she means? Or would this bereavement throw her on the charity of some friend, or fling her on the market for the bidding of the moneyed gallants of the Settlement? God, I twinged for mine own sake at the thought, then cursed my selfishness in doing so.

Desperate impulses urged me to be up and doing. Cold reason bade me sit still and wait. What could I do an I did race back to Calcutta, I, penniless, outlawed, a mere friend ... and a man? Poor child, how she must be suffering.

I writhed inwardly with a torture of despair, anxiety, and a bitter sense of impotence.

How 1 managed to maintain a philosophic Eastern visage for the edification of my guests I know not; but I managed it, even as I prayed with that intense sincerity that calamity alone can compel, that God would rest the poor lad's soul and protect and succour his unhappy sister

I became aware that the man Halliday had left his companions and had seated himself on the divan I occupied. He spoke to me, asking me how far my house was from Faizabad.

I answered him in the simplest language I could muster.

"The road—is it difficult?"

"No, I will put thee on the way to-morrow."

So he sat, looking at the ground with such a lost expression, that in spite of my searing thoughts, I felt I must say something to him to ease his manifest confusion.

"Thy friends are soldiers ?" I queried with a huge ignorance.

"Nay, I scarce know what they are, save that they seem to be together, and go to Faizabad on business."

"Art thou not with them, then?"

"Nay, I met them not far from Calcutta, and joined company for protection. I have business myself in Faizabad." Pardieu, what business could such a stripling have in a far Indian city ?

The said stripling looked up at me with some eagerness.

"Tell me, Talukdar sahib," he whispered in a low, tense voice, "thou livest not far from the road. Wouldst thou be like to see the travellers that pass ?"

Some strange sense sounded a warning note within me.

"There are many these days," I fenced, warily. "Though belike I should see some."

The rich young voice dropped yet another note.

"Then hast seen aught of a solitary horseman who should have passed by these several weeks agone? He led a pack animal, and would be tall, dark, and of commanding address, though clad in sober grey and leather."

Gad, the description fitted me. Ay, beyond all doubt Halliday talked of me. Who the devil was the man? What wanted he with me?

"A friend of thine?

"One in whom I am interested. To say truth, sahib, he was one who did wrong in the Ungrese Pergunnahs, and has fled to avoid punishment. But hast thou seen any who might be he?"

"Nahin!" I assured the man; and then light filtered in upon me, and I was filled with surprise. The authorities had set this man to hunt me down. That was evident!

"Of such a sort I have seen none," I proceeded, determined that my huntsman should leave the Sher Khoti no wiser than he entered it. "None, save soldiers and yourselves, have passed this way... that is, of the white people."

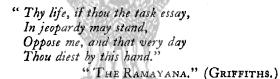
"I thank thee," quoth the clerk. "Pardon my questioning, but I do desire to find this man."

There was a tremulous note in his voice that caused me to look at him sharply, seeking to read his face in the dim light; and it seemed to me that although the lips were firm and steady, Halliday's eyes were over bright. He swallowed hard and straightened his perruque. My tolerant contempt for him grew at sight of his gulping throat. His air of general

guilelessness reminded me strongly of young Brunel in his sober moments.

When he could trust his voice to control again, Halliday stammered a further acknowledgment of my hospitality.

"Think not that it is strange that thou shouldst be welcomed by a Hindoo and taken in . . . " I began, but broke off short and sharp, for, from the far end of the great room there came a muffled cry. I recognized the gentle, thrilling voice and the fear that lay in it, darted to my feet, and ran towards the alcove wherein Duselin and his protégé were sitting.



THE hawk was watching, aloof, while the filthy fish cagle clawed its prey. The parallel was so striking that I noted it even in my rush.

Duselin stood deep in the shadow of the alcove with an air of frigid unconcern; while the petticoated ruffian endeavoured to compel Sovona to his slavering embrace. For she was a native girl, beneath the Chevalier's dignity and beneath his contempt; having no place in his scheme of things chivalric or moral. He spoke, however, when he saw me coming, sharply and authoritatively.

"Let go the trollop, man! Here comes her lord with vengeance in his eye."

"Nay," blathered the sailor, "I swear the drab shall buss me, and I care not a fig who sees, lord or no lord. 'Tis a proper piece and worth a dozen o' yewer Armenian hussies in Calcutta." Duselin twitched aside his coat-tails disdainfully as I passed, and raised supercilious eyebrows at the scene. One would have thought him to be the injured party.

I pounced on the bully and dragged him away from the girl, but he twisted round agilely enough for one of such bulk and his hairy hands clutched at my throat.

"Yew drabson !" he yelled, and things a good deal worse. "I'm Barnett Bulger . . . Barnett Bulger o' Bost'n. What! don't that fright ye? Then ef I don't hev yewer weazand out en tan it fer a belt, I'll never again . . . "

My fist, rammed hard into his toothless mouth, effectually plugged the fount of information. Up and down the alcove we struggled, oversetting a table laden with Benarus ware that rattled clamorously as it fell.

Truly, the creature was one whose hulking size lied not as to his strength, but after a time, I heard him gasping with a premature fatigue that told its own tale of loose living, and I knew that he was mine !

'Twas Duselin who hauled me off, with the same deft strength that he had hauled Armonde from my throat months before.

"Enough!" he cried. "Kill not the fellow, for I may have use for him. Talukdar Sahib, I regret deeply that this should have occurred, and confess freely that we were both in the wrong, beseeching your forgiveness. Get up, Bilge. . . . and don't be a blasted fool!"

The tarpaulin rose sullenly to his feet; feeling at his throat; rumbling anathema; and eyeing me with a glance so vengeful that I thanked my stars the day of basilisks was done.

But Duselin's apology was as handsome as it was insincere, though, had I been an authentic talukdar, it would have proved a poor buckler to save his sleek head or the fiery pate of the pirate.

Howbeit, I showed myself mollified and allowed the matter to drop; packing the sorely shaken damsel off to her tiny seraglio; while the two men betook themselves again to the divan to pick at cardamoms and regard each other contemp-

tuously. I heard Duselin's silky tones applying skilful ironies which, from their silent reception, made little impression on his companion's rhinocerine hide.

As for Mr. Halliday, that dashing policeman had watched the struggle whitefaced and trembling, and soon after, crept off like a whipped puppy to his charpoy behind the hangings. Our little argument had frightened the life out of him.

Having seen the lady safely disposed of, I returned to the durbar room and squatted me again on my cushions. I could not tear myself from this room wherein was housed a man who knew what had befallen Rosalie. "Twas the most refined of torture to me, to know that by one simple question I might learn that which my heart ached to know, and that I dared not ask it, since by doing so I might peril myself and pain my lady.

My only hope was that Duselin might talk of her, a hope which, considering his companion, was the vainest of the vain.

Therefore with the intention of shameless eavesdropping, I picked up a cithar that lay near and touched the strings gently; scarce brushing from them the whispering cadenzas of a melancholy love song. My ears were tuned above it, and listened acutely as the voices rose and fell.

For a time the talk was desultory. Duselin was playing with his man with the educated cruelty that a cat plays with a mouse... admonishing him for his obscenity; raising him to a mortal pitch of terror by suggesting that I contemplated a revenge 'fore which the stake of Bulger's compatriot redskins would be bliss. Then he described at length how criminals were caged and rattaned in Calcutta; picturing the processes so vividly that at last the filibuster, with a jowl as blue as Krishna's own, bellowed to his tormentor to stop.

"Ha' done! Ha' done!" cried the valiant Bulger in great discomfort.

"Dieu! I am unhappy in my choice of topics, it seems. Well, what of the war, then, Captain Belcher? Strange that so enterprising and daring a personage as yourself should not be in the forefront there. I hear there are sad doings in your own natal town of Boston. Though perhaps you are for His Majesty, Captain?"

"Darn His Majesty!" rejoined Bulger, with obvious relief at the change of subject. "I'm a reb, I am, damn my eyes!"

"Then you, *mon cher* Bilger, should be sheathing your hanger in English flesh upon some boarded quarter-deck, or dropping leaden slugs upon the invader from the greenwood. More especially since the British law seems so bent on making your closer acquaintance."

"Blast the British law!" said Bulger. "We Yankees air goin' to substitue Amurican law for British law in Bost'n..."

"Then we have at least one interest in common," quoth the Chevalier quietly. "I too, say 'Blast the British law,' Captain Bulger, but it is in India that it must be blasted for me. You desire to oust the British from your native land; I desire to replace their rule in India by a far more generous and comprehensive one---that of His Most Catholic Majesty of France."

I'faith, I almost laughed. I had many a time wondered what the true explanation of the mysterious traffic with Armonde was; what skin lay beneath Duselin's sheep's fleece guise. And now the mischief was out, and I could not help but smile at it. For the task which lay on the Frenchman's shoulders, even were he acting at the behest of higher authority, seemed to me one of such magnitude and ambition that the possibility of its accomplishment was not only remote but scarce existent.

Wandiwash!—Pondicherri!—pah! What could France hope for after these defeats ? 'Twas the nature of the folk, I suppose, thus hopefully to intrigue. A Frenchman dies happy an he dies a-plotting.

"Sure," cried Bulger. "Yew Frenchies or anyone else for thet matter air welcome tew this doldrum. Guess 'tis the devil's own bed-oven."

"Yet in this bed-oven, as you have it, large numbers of devoted Frenchmen are working ceaselessly for their country's sake."

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"And aught else ?" demanded the Captain.

"Naturellement! A grateful country rewards them in some measure. Further, it so happens that the Indian Prince, in whose dominions they serve, is also grateful, and expresses his gratitude--pecuniarily. And now that the days of Tortuga are over, and the British law is so . . . exigent, a comfortable billet in Oudh . . . " Duselin allowed his voice to die away on a suggestive inflection.

Bulger seemed to reflect. 'Twas plain he had realized that there was meaning in the Chevalier's words. A plain offer indeed.

"But I air'nt a Frenchman," the sailor demurred.

"You recognize our common enemy, Captain, and what we are struggling for."

"Ay." Bulger seemed to remember something he had heard ranted at a Boston conventicle, and he jerked out : "Rights o' man ... cursed tea drinkers ... Tories ... freedom o' our children. But ef one o' the rights o' man airn't a full pocket, then they airn't worth fightin' for! "

Which last sentiment I adjudged to be entirely the gallant captain's own.

"I realize fully that you would fill that pocket with the minimum of exertion and inconvenience, Captain. But those who join my gallant company in Oudh, if they would fatten their purses, must display a sense of patriotic duty, of stern loyalty to their cause, and a capacity for work as well."

"See here, what air they doin'?"

"In confidence... and I know you are a man of discretion... they are so training and disciplining the army of the State, that when the time comes for the black man to fight for his rights ... or what his rights will be under the King of France... then ... but perhaps you understand ?"

Again the suggestive intonation.

"Ay, en yew cain't get me strung on that yard... en that's flat!" announced the amiable patriot very definitely.

"My respect for your-er-gizzard deters me from endeavouring to string you anywhere, Captain Bulger," Duselin assured him, and drew in vast contentment at his hookah.

He had sounded his man, and, since he held that engaging personage under his slender thumb, there was not the remotest reason why he should be disturbed at the reply he had elicited.

The Chevalier broke the silence again.

"What do you propose to do, Captain Bilger?" he demanded, his lip twitching slightly, when the other frowned at the persistent maltreatment of his name.

"Waal, I... See hyar, jest yew say thet agen about thet there company o' yewers."

"Mais non. Maturer reflection inclines me to fear that that sense of patriotic duty, not to mention the other qualities to which I made reference, has scarce been sufficiently inculcated in your youth to render you entirely eligible for that company, Captain Bulger," announced the Chevalier. "Maturer reflection corrects many errors, Captain."

" Hey ? "

"But I think I see my way to promising you a safe journey back to Calcutta and . . . what is more important . . . out of that city; and with a plumper purse than you appear to possess now, if you will follow my directions for a short time."

The seaman looked at Duselin eagerly, yet with an air of cunning.

"Thet depen's on what yewer directions air goin' tew be," he said, though his scorbutic visage was alight at the prospect of a way out of his difficulties.

"They will be simple and easily obeyed ... I hope," Duselin said. "Briefly, at a certain spot in Oudh, a box lies buried. I want you to delve it out and hand it to me.

"It belongs to nobody, my dear Captain, for it is looted spoil. The only man who knew where it lies hid, beside myself, is dead, and if I reap not the benefit of my knowledge, no other will; and the world will be the poorer. Such stuff cannot even decay and nourish the soil. Are you willing to help me? As I have told you, you would gain considerably by so

doing; and the safety of your-er-wizzard, I believe you call it, would be assured."

"Thar is danger, then?"

Bulger was truly a cautious man.

" If matters transpire as I hope, there should be very little."

"Waal, I'll hev a shot at it. Yew're sure that is a box ?"

"Bien sur. And since you agree to help me, I'll explain further. . . . In Oudh, you must know there are certain families of the Shalk following of Mahomedans who are rebels against They have built themselves a fort, and 'tis well the state. armed and provided. For many years these men have raided the country around their stronghold, stealing crops, coin, buffalo, elephants, anything in fact that they can lay hands on in the name of Allah, his Prophet. When old Shooja defeated for the last time the Moghul troops in his recent quarrel with his Emperor, he looted certain spoils of worth from their captains and would have conveyed them to Faizabad, had not these Shaiks stolen them en route one moonless night; so that they were regarded as gone till doomsday. The rascals who cribbed them hid their gains in their fort; and were careless enough to get sliced in pieces next day while endeavouring to raid horses from the columns. All, that is, but one, who vomited his story at me for procuring him the speedier end of a ball or two instead of that prescribed for him."

" Why **₽**"

"An it interests you, he had been a source of certain information to me. But, to pursue, the location of these spoils, whatever they may be worth, is unknown to the Shaiks to-day, though they daily walk over the spot where they lie hid."

전신 사람 영화품

" Then how . . . ? "

"Wait! There is reason to believe that the Nawab, Asaf-ud-Dowlah, intends to scotch these serpents who batten on his dominions, once and for all ; and if we can arrive in time to be present at the attack on the paynims, our task will be easy, and a midnight visit to the mosque of the fort dispensed with."

Captain Bulger was dubious as to the reliability of the

nformation, and said so, with adjectival emphasis. Further, he was anxious to know exactly how much of the spoil he would handle himself.

"That is my concern, Captain," asseverated the Frenchman. "You will be well paid, never fear."

"En what air yew goin' tew dew with the stuff?"

A whimsical smile twisted Duselin's straight lips, and he spoke in a manner which was new to him. I had never heard him speak so softly or subtly before.

"For all I cared, friend Belcher, these limpid emeralds, Burmese rubies, and ashrafis of gold might have stayed as they rest now throughout Eternity. But now I would myself be a king . . . which is a lofty aspiration; is it not? And to be a king one must be rich, and own jewels and gold. Now I am a poor, an ill-paid servant, friend. Patriotism, as you so tritely and truly put it, does not fill the pocket. So, since a king I would be, money I must have . . . which is the germinal reason of my project compactly, O bold buccaneer!"

"Air yew goin' to bone a stretch of India, d'yew mean ?" asked Bulger, in wonderment.

"No, Captain. My kingdom will be small . . . a kingdom of two . . . in which the king will be forever subject to the queen, and where it will be, I cannot say.

"But 'tis late, Captain," resumed the Chevalier, "and we had better sleep. You are with me?"

"Ay," growled the American. "Tis yewer poop as I've said. Efter all, we ken settle up afterwards."

"True," agreed the Chevalier colourlessly. "But, Bulger, remember, please, that until we have settled up..." he extended his slender hand, palm upwards and pressed the thumb into the palm, "you lie there!"

The pair sought their beds, as I bent over my instrument and crooned a line of the moaning song.

I had not heard what I desired, but I had heard words which puzzled me... Duselin's seeming balderdash about his kingdom. The knowledge that he was truly intriguing against the British worried me not at all . . . 'twas quite the usual thing with

Frenchmen. But I was concerned to know whom Duselin meant to make his queen.

As I lay again in my tumbled bed an ashen glow lit the chamber; but the light was insufficient to obscure a vision of my mind's eye... the lithe, sable form of the Chevalier as he bent, picked a handkerchief from the ground ... and kissed it.

## VI

"Thou shalt not love me, neither shall these Eyes shine on my soul shrouded in deadly night. Thou shalt not breathe on me thy spiceries Nor rock me in thy quavers of delight." CAMPION AND RUSSITER'S "BOOK OF AIRS," 1601.

LESS than an hour I lay couched; then sought the open air to perform that ceremony of ablution which all Hindoos keep.

Later, when I had bathed and robed again, came the jogi to me, his hair in a triumphant tangle and a fresh mark of sacred gypsum on his brow.

"Is all well?" he asked. "These strangers . . . are they seeking the man who fled Calcutta; and they have seen him in the Talukdar? If so, I have a certain powder, which, though it looketh innocuous like sherbet, hath the power to . . . "

"There is no need of it, *bhai*" (brother), I answered, "for the men are harmless, all. They are wayfarers on the road to Faizabad who have lost their baggage."

I deemed it discreet not to peach on the poor little policeman, lest peradventure I had a corpse on my hands.

"I mislike the fellow in the woman's kirtle. He hath the aspect of a rogue elephant, and the voice of one," murmured Madhava.

"Be not concerned; but see that provender and fodder are

provided against their leaving . . . with a mule. Stay, I myseli will see to these things."

I issued my orders; and later, in the great chamber, I found the three visitors preparing for the journey, with a number of my fellows watching the operation curiously and suspiciously.

I walked with my guests to the courtyard, and ordered their horses to be led through the secret way to the open, beyond the bamboo hedge.

Duselin, having sedulously removed the last speck of dust from his boots, turned to me ingratiatingly.

"I have to assure thee how very grateful am I and my friends to thee, Sahib, for this great condescension and kindness. Believe me, such freedom from prejudice, and such munificent hospitality, do much to strengthen the sympathy between thy race and mine."

I bowed, and edged round so that my face was against the young sun.

"My house is ever yours," I responded, as the custom is, and I hoped meanwhile, as the custom also is, that the house would never hold Duselin again.

"My friend's somewhat brusque address, and his . . . er . . familiarity towards thy excellence's lady, I beseech thee to forget. His conduct was doubtless unseemly in thy eyes; but he is from a far land called *Amur-iq-a*, and there, believe me, such behaviour is the er—custom of the country."

"Felicitous custom," I murmured, but the Chevalier did not hear.

He bowed again with great ceremony, and mechanically waved his snuffbox to me, thereby almost causing me to betray myself by accepting a pinch.

Captain Barnett Bulger of Boston hung about impatiently, humming a ribald song and smacking at his boots with his switch.

I ignored him.

To Mr. Halliday I turned, and having wished him well, asked if I might inform the man he sought of our encounter, should I see him.

"No," he replied hurriedly, and the answer confirmed my suspicion as to his mission. La! well, an he caught me, my conscience was clear on the criminal score; for honour should know no law save conscience, and God wot mine troubled me not at all.

The trio passed through the feathery tunnel of green, and I sped them with a stirrup cup of very mixed feelings; suspicion and contempt being the main ingredients.

Slowly, I walked back through the bath chamber into the pleasaunce, there to think on things, aided by the wisdom that lies in the morning, and to shape my future.

But no peace was permitted me; for, as I entered the retreat, I spied a graceful figure waiting for me under the baradari, slim, brown, and lightly clad in clinging silk.

"What dost thou here, Sovona Suniti?" I demanded, disguising the trepidation that her propinquity always induced in me with an assumed sternness.

"Lord of the World, I would thank thee for saving my body from that wolf of a man."

"No thanks are necessary for that service, lady," I said. "Twas thy own fault that thou wert molested. What didst thou a-pry in the alcove?"

To my intense alarm, a sudden, swelling note of passion crept into the girl's voice. Her great eyes burned hotly, looking into mine as though to compel an answering flame in them; her soft mouth trembled and her bosom heaved.

"To see that no harm came to my lord . . . to be near him, lest aught befel to his discomfort."

Eyes and voice alike dropped, and Sovona continued in an undertone, "O Lord, Bahadre of Bahadres, canst thou not love thy slave? She would die a hundred deaths for thee! What can she do to win thee from thy reserve? Will no spell charm thee to her?"

"Sovona," I stammered, badly flustered, "it is not fitting that thou shouldst say such things to me. Thy husband is but recently dead, and thou didst protest the greatest love for him. I am a stranger... a feringi, as thou art truly aware. How knowest thou but what I am married already to one of my own race; or that my heart is not in such bondage that it cannot escape to thee?"

"Lord of the World, it cannot be! Lord, tell me it is not so, lest I die of very anguish. Why didst thou save me from the burning, if it were not to make me thy slave?"

God, even an I could have explained, it was certain she had no intention of listening. So, as she advanced, with appealing arms outheld, I stood helpless before this pagan maid, a speechless ninny, as I stood speechless before the woman I loved, in Calcutta, that fateful night.

Even as I raised a tentative arm, not knowing how far the girl might venture, there came a sudden rustle in the foliage that lined the wall of the garden. Sovona glanced rapidly around; following the direction of my gaze. I caught a momentary glimpse of a malevolent red face barred by a huge moustache, rising like a bibulous sun from among the green. Then came the yelp of a big pistol; followed immediately by the report of the twin barrel.

With a cry, Sovona flung herself before me, then fell back into my arms and hung limp, a red stain growing over the spotless silk of her *saree* where it crossed the shoulder.

I laid the girl gently down on the floor of the baradari; but, ere I had time to reach the garden entrance, there came the sound of hoofs scrambling across country from the far side of the bamboo, and the weak voice of the wounded child recalled me. The fleeting glimpse of the face in the shrubs, however, had been enough for certain recognition. It was my gay buccaneer from Boston, who, doubtless considering me in his debt, had sneaked back to settle his account. A cowardly trick, though he had nevertheless dared considerable risk to execute it. I uttered a pregnant *au revoir*.

Sovona appeared to have lost consciousness ; but, as I touch ed the wounded shoulder, she winced and opened her eyes. She had sustained a mere graze ; a narrow red furrow marred the ivory velvet of the skin.

"See, lord," she moaned, "what I would do for thy sake.

I have offered my life for thee. Wilt thou not now reward thy slave?"

"I thank thee, Sovona," I said, and, by my soul, I could not keep the break out of my voice.

I raised the girl so that she lay in my arms that I might better bind the wound with cambric torn from my shirt. A great emotion filled me, which the touch of her soft body did little to dispel; the childish eves stared up at me with an ecstasy of longing in their depths; her scarce-veiled breasts rose and fell tumultuously to the fitful breathing.

Lifting her, I carried Sovona from the baradari and laid her on the grass in the sunshine, lest she should chill ere her women reached her.

But, as I left her to summon them, she burst out with a new note in her tones, an intensity of combined fear, anger and hate

"Is it she who hath beguiled thee—and in the space of one short night? She, with her pale face and eyes of grey iron? Oh, why did I not kill her when I might?"

"She!" I exclaimed, puzzled. "Of whom do you speak, girl?"

"I speak of the feringi womau who came here yesternight in the shame of men's clothes. Ay, when first I saw her I knew her for what she was, and later I stole again to the alcove and peered within as she disrobed; and was assured. Tell me! Is it she who hath charmed thee??"

For a second or two I still floundered in puzzlement; and then the light of truth pierced the curtain of my obtuseness in a dazzling beam.

Oh blind, blind fool that I had been! Here then was the explanation of that familiarity of face and gesture that had set my memory asquirm; involuntarily seeking a true image in its confused impressions. Now had I fathomed the mystery of the solitary search; the womanish alarm at my combat with the seaman bully.

"O Rosalie! Rosalie, my girl," I groaned, "what do you here ...?"

What in heaven's name had caused my beloved thus

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desperately to hazard her delicate person among the innumerable adventures of a bloody Indian high road ? Did she—ah—did she seek me ? She had said so. Yet did she mean this, or was her speech but to distract the Talukdar from pondering on her business and appearance ? She had more reason to avoid than seek me, surely. Did Duselin know who was his travelling companion ? Had she set out under his protection ? But their speech had been that of strangers.

Well, there was a grain of comfort in that last thought. Duselin was at least a gentleman ; Rosalie would be safe with him, even if it were indeed a kiss he bestowed that day upon her kerchief ; even if she were the queen of his kingdom of two.

But be these things as they might, the scarce credible fact remained that Rosalie Brunel was at that moment but an hour's ride away; journeying away from me in company with a French spy and a murderous American pirate.

At that moment the jogi came running with a dozen men; drawn swords gleaming in their hands.

"Brother!" he gasped. "The shots! What has happened?"

The blessed opportunity for action pricked me out of the paralysis which the dizzying revelation had placed on thought, speech and limb.

She—Rosalie—*might* want help. And whether she did or not, I was going to find out.

"Quick, man!" I cried to Madhava. "A horse and food! My pistols! I ride to Faizabad this day. See to the woman! She hath a hurt. The kirtled feringi shot her, though he aimed at me. Arrest the sentinel who let him through!"

With which coherent explanation, I rushed off to obey my own orders.

A few minutes later I was pelting down the path alone, tearing madly towards the road, without the remotest idea what I should do when I met Duselin and that other, and without heed to my neck; my whole being was straining blindly forward to the chase. In my ears rang the despairing moan of a woman, prolonged and pitiful . . . the valedictory of Sovona. At the spot where the avenue led from the jungle lands to the high road, the flimsy Indian girth loosened and slipped, forcing me to dismount and tighten it.

As I did this, the beat of hoofs rang louder and louder on the road behind me; a cloud of white dust rose above the trees.

A smother of stinging white particles blinded me for a second, as amid a clattering of ill-shod hoofs, my pursuer pulled up beside me.

It was Madhava, grotesquely dishevelled and a-sweat, sitting a fiddle-headed Persian nag bareback.

"Brother," he panted, "I bear thee company! Now, did I not warn thee against that skirted bear?"

And he grinned a grin of the utmost satisfaction at his vindication.

# VII

"I started on the trail, and of some footprints I am assured, others have baffled me." "AJAX" (SOPHOCLES).

"THE falcon will fly in vain to-day," rasped Madhava; and licked his dry and cracking lips to indicate his unwillingness to proceed further.

It certainly seemed that he was right. The chase had failed so far, and now we found ourselves, in the burning heat of mid-day, parched with thirst, heads nodding with fatigue, rolling heavily to the shambling stagger of the sore-tried horses.

With the speed we had made, I adjudged that those I sought should not have had more than an hour's start. If they had waited while the sea-captain made his attempt on my life, this start must have been reduced by nigh upon a half; and, if they had not, we should at least have overtaken the gentle Bulger long ago. Yet, despite our killing pace, the road remained blank before us, a ribbon of white with fork-tailed king crows darting like arrows alongside, and white barred hoopoes strutting, crest erected, in the dust.

But no sign of a European did we see.

My body was white with dust ; my legs, no longer enclosed in stout buckskin, were chafed almost raw. The poor horse was snorting for breath through distended, blood-red nostrils. His sweat trailed the way with dark drops.

A rest was imperative.

"Where can these people have gone, Madhava?" I asked. "The road is straight and hath but few by-paths that would lead to error. We should have outridden them long ere now."

"Perchance they have taken a road through the jungle. There are some which lead shorter than this road to Faizabad; though they are little more than paths, and infested by snakes and beasts."

I had not thought of this possibility; but it was likely enough, seeing that the Chevalier possessed a full knowledge of the country.

Too tired and parched to discuss the matter further, I told the *jogi* that we would eat, rest the night at this place, and journey on betimes next day.

Briefly I told Madhava then of what had transpired in the Nil Bagh.

He believed, I think, that I rode to exact vengeance, but I was uncertain as to whether Sovona had told him more. Further, I assured him that, now I had commenced the journey to the capital, I would slay me another bird with the one stone, and lay the grievances of the dead Talukdar before the Nawab, to free my people from the unjust taxations of Deo Narayan, and to learn his will concerning the estate.

Tired as I was, I slept but little that night; watching drowsily the greater part of it, lest, having passed my late guests by some chance, they steal by under the stars.

As the first mynah alighted, chattering, on the ground in the pale light, I aroused the jogi, and we started off again.

Another day passed, and another night of fitful sleep; but no sign did we see of the two men and the slim boy I loved. It remained to seek them in the capital itself.

Early on the second morn the *jogi* waved his arm and pointed to a haze that lay to the northwest, as we jogged on.

"There lieth Ajodya the holy," he informed me. "Hast been there?"

From Ajodya to Faizabad is not a far cry—the latter was, indeed, only a hunting lodge of the Princes of Oudh when first they set up their throne amid the ruins of the sacred city.

Near Ajodya we did pass many Hindoo ascetics and sadoos, and several of those queer people the Jains, who look at every inch of ground before they tread; for fear they should unwittingly take a tiny life and thus offend against their laws. Ajodya, I believe, is a place of pilgrimage for these folk; certain of their saints having been born there.

A little more travel and we sighted the cupolas and towers of Faizabad, and the gleaming waters of the Ghogra. At the city gate I drew to a halt to consider my plan of action; for I must enter the town with caution lest I disturb my hawk and he take flight, perchance with the dove in his talons.

Strangely enough, sitting my horse as it stood under the tangled boughs of a small tree, some reaction of thought drew my mind from the present venture to the villagers and warriors of the taluka I had left. I realized that in my haste, I had left them without head or adviser; so that, as a ship without a steersman, the estate might drift wheresoever it listed—perhaps into the greedy maelstrom that Deo Narayan controlled.

Conscience-stricken, I turned to the jogi.

"Madhava, what of my people? Who is there to care for and protect them while I am away?"

The priest grinned in a manner that showed his still white teeth with the circles and symbols graven on them.

"I have said that thou didst go to Faizabad to seek justice, and they so believe. The *kirani* will watch affairs of business, and Sipihr, the captain, matters of arms. But there is little to fear. Narayan was well beaten, and his people have a fear of thee. Therefore worry not concerning the condition of the taluka. All will be well with it—otherwise," with great dignity, "I should not have followed thee."

Relieved in some measure, I set spur to flank and cantered into the narrow streets of Faizabad, bidding Madhava watch keenly and doing the like myself.

And the search bore no fruit. Neither did discreet enquiry.

In sooth, the place seemed singularly empty, and the bazaar crowds moved not in the usual perpetual stream; but idled in knots and voluble gatherings. Business seemed at a standstill; unrest and anticipation permeated the quivering air. Well sated with both, God wot, I heeded not this new excitement; but kept diligently on the fruitless trail.

Ere we had finished our weary march up one street and down another, even peeping into the courtyards of mosques and temples, lights had begun to flicker through the purple evening gloom; fires glowed mysteriously in the cavern-like booths of the sweetmeat makers. A few walked with lanthorns. Far away the toneless music of a *dhool* arose; and the dancing scream of pipes mingled weirdly with the howling of jackals.

So night found us, arrived at a place where the ground had been cleared as for a great building and where already a network of bamboo scaffolding traced itself blackly against the spangled blue. A crowd of workers squatted, swathed in wrappings, round a great pipkin of seething goats' flesh, which exhaled succulent odours at the behest of a crackling wood fire.

Sentinels with lances stood around the clearing at intervals, guarding the materials, of which there was a great store and costly at that.

I approached one of these men and asked him what the building was to be.

The fellow looked at me in some surprise.

"Art a stranger here, *miran-ji*? "Tis the tomb of the dead Nawab, which the Begum Bahu buildeth to his memory "Tis to be called the Rose Garden."

I admitted that I was a stranger

"Tell me," I asked, "is the Nawab in residence ? I have business with him."

The guard stiffened into a more respectful attitude with a clinic of steel.

"Huzoor; he is gone these several days with many troops to attack the Shaiks at Laksmanpoor-may Allah prosper his arms."

"Ah, then tell me also-hast seen aught of three feringi men to-day? They are concerned with my business and should have met me here."

"Lord, my watch commenced only at sundown. If thou wilt condescend to wait, I will call a comrade who shared the guard during the day, and who may know. Feringis are common in Faizabad these days."

I intimated that I would condescend to wait, and gave the man a description of my quarry.

The guard walked off towards the guard-house shouting : "Karim! O Karim!" at the top of his very considerable voice

A tall fellow stumbled from the hut, yawning and stretching his limbs with a shiver at the cooling air. A muttered colloquy ensued; and then my man returned.

"Huzeor; he tells me that he did see three white men ride into Faizabad to-day by the east gate. They came from the jungle road to the north and asked the Captain of the Gate whether there was an *elchi* (ambassador) of the Francese people at the court. They were told that the court had left the city with the army, and presently rode forward."

"Thy friend described them?"

"He especially mentioned that one of them wore the ghogra (skirt) of a woman."

That was enough for me.

"A coin for thy trouble, friend."

"Ghorribperwar! Khoda salaamet rukhe!" (Protector of the Poor. May God protect thee.)

I called to the priest and turned away.

"What fortune?" he asked.

"But little. The three men reached the city this morning, and have ridden on to join the Court of the Viceroy. Dost know this place . . . Laksmanpoor ?"

"Han! Why, 'tis Lucknow! It lieth to the south-west. There is a fair road. What doth the Nawab there?"

"He purposes to chastise some rebel Mussulmans in that quarter."

"Ah, the Shaiks of the Fish Fort. 'Tis time he drew their teeth, indeed."

But our own fatigue demanded that we rest for a day at least; so seeking a clean serai, we there spent the night.

For another day we lay at Faizabad, and spent the time equipping ourselves more satisfactorily. I had left the Sher Khoti with little save my clothing and a purpose; but Madhava had thought to provide himself with that most potent arm, a fat bag of coin; and on this we now drew heavily.

At dawn on the second day after our arrival at the capital, we set forth again in the track of the Nawabi army; and I possessed my soul in sufficient patience to spare the enduring beasts which had borne so much on the first stage of our journey.

Occasionally we met with a broken-down bullock cart, hackeries laden with stores, and detachments of troops marching very badly and with much chatter.

On the third day of the journey, the road bore down upon the river which is called the Goomtee, because it twists and turns upon itself so much, and here, at hazy noontide, we first glimpsed the army of the Nawab.

From a slight eminence I looked down upon the camp, a dazzling plain of colour; seething with noisy life and bewildering in its display of barbaric splendour and extravagance.

The murmur of innumerable voices and the wild blowing of *sanks* and trumpets had reached our ears long ere we sighted their origin, giving indication of the numbers employed by the Prince in the extermination of the parasite lords; and our eyes confirmed their comparative vastness.

Whole streets of painted tents, some as great as houses, lined the plain; each flying a pennon of satin and silver, wrought

in the device of the sirdar who owned it. Painted elephants, bearing gorgeous howdahs and ornate trappings, lumbered to and fro to the stab of their mahouts; the pursy courtier lolling a-top. Camels tricked out in caparisons of plush and half hidden by plumes, pon-pons, beads and tassels, performed like duties for the lesser captains. Batteries of brass guns gleamed dully in the sun; for they sadly lacked the polish which we give ours; and I doubted not that the bores were equally neglected.

But the housing of the men of the rank and file offered a contrast that is typical of this land of magnificence and meanness, pomp and poverty.

Most of the fighters slept without other roof than the starlit sky; though there were huts of lattice and bivouacs of blankets on lances for some. Many were scarce clothed; others were attired in a grotesque attempt at European uniform; yet others were completely clad in rich Moghul armour, and bore weapons of worth and workmanship.

And it sickened me also to see tents set aside for courtesans and concubines, with smaller ones for their eunuch guards. Silken palaces they were, offering glimpses of perfumed interiors, cushioned divans, rich carpets and veiled, lissom forms of haunting loveliness. And this despite probable starvation and possible disease among the men of the line.

These men of Hindoostan think as much on the battlefields of concubines as of commissariat, rather more of perfumes than of powder; shallow and sensuous, they, for the most part, fight their fights in fits of blind, artificial fury; then sink back into the soft lap of luxury from which they have emerged.

I could spy *mollahs* walking among the men, striking drums with leathern thongs to attract attention and exhorting to provess with the wave of a quotation-covered banner of green.

Madhava and I circled the camp and came to a pleasant, shaded spot where a number of officers in muslin and velvet your true Moslem esteems silk unclean—were practisin tricks of horsemanship, curvets and caracoles; and slicin with tulwars or shooting with pistols at dummy heads set on posts.

One of these, a pleasant-faced young fellow with an oiled moustache and carefully painted eyes, I approached and asked where it were possible to obtain lodging.

He readily volunteered to assist me when I informed him that my business was with the Prince, though he looked curiously at my travel-worn garments and English rifle and pistols. He not only promised to find me shelter, but also offered to escort me to the pavilion of the Viceroy, towards evening; and bade me await his return while he made enquiries as to my chance of an interview.

So the pair of us dismounted, and, in none too bad a humour all things considered, I betook myself with Madhava to seek a point of vantage from which to watch all who came and went to and from the camp.

## VIII

"I beseech your honour, Vouchsafe me a word; it does concern you near." "TIMON OF ATHENS."

AFTER a few moments Madhava nudged me.

"The Sirdar," he said ; and I saw the young officer coming towards me.

He had changed his puggaree for one of silver cloth, and had slipped a surcoat of velvet brocade embroidered with gold coins over his mail.

"The Viceroy is still in Durbar, though it be mid-day," he informed me. "Wouldst have audience with him now?"

I surveyed my dusty clothing ruefully; and the young captain followed my glance and smiled.

"I beg thou wilt use my tent and clothing if need be," he

offered generously. "I see that our caste is much the same, though I am a Rajpoot of Rajpootana . . . not a Poorbya."

I heeded not the subtle slur, and followed the youth down an alley way of tents in which the air hung stagnant and reeking with the odour of water pipes ; and the ground of which was stained a mottled red with the rheum of chewed betel. Into one of these tents he led me, and here I bathed and arranged my dress ; depositing pistols and spurs and saddlery within it. The horses of myself and my companion, were handed over to a syce.

Then, bidding me hurry, the officer escorted me through the lane of tents again till we came to the centre of the camp. Here was a group of splendid silken pavilions, laid out with paths, and decked with fresh-culled plants in metal vessels. Over one of the pavilions, whose bamboo rods were tipped with golden globes, was set upon high on a pole the gilt fish which is the insignia of the Princes of Oudh; while a companion mast bore the device of golden scales.

Around this tent were gathered many persons, including armed men of my own regiment—doubtless of the party I had encountered on my road to the capital.

I was forced to wait in their midst whilst my guide sought the ante-chamber of the great marquee. When he returned he brought with him an almost globular person bearing an ebony wand tipped with gold. This worthy rolled up to me with the gait of a surfeited water-buffalo, and forthwith demanded my name and business.

Politeness was evidently politic ; so I answered deferentially that my name was Indra Rama, and that I had come on behalf of the people of the taluka of Sher Singh, a Rajpoot, now dead, to lay a sore grievance before the Prince for redress.

After a surly glare at my worn equipment, my interrogator waddled into the great tent again, to re-appear after an interval and bid me enter its bedizened interior.

The tent was spacious and crowded with courtiers. The ground was spread with rugs, and the walls draped with appliquéworked hangings depicting hunting scenes in blue, white and green. Great presses lined the sides, each heavily locked; they contained ready money for the payment of the troops, I afterwards found. There was a raised dais at the northern end of the tent and upon it, sitting in a Chippendale chair packed with cushions, was the Nawab of Oudh, Viceroy of Shah Alam, Emperor of India. He was a young man of about twenty-seven years of age, with a fair skin and pleasant cast of countenance. He had a small moustache and deep brown eyes which shone honestly and frankly enough. Already there was evidence of a growing corpulence in his figure, the corpulence which is an inevitable defect in these easy-living princes of India.

Boys fanned him with fans of peacock plumes; the golden mace of sovereignty was borne by a gorgeously attired personage standing at his elbow—the Mukhtar-ud-Dowlah, said Murtaza.

The Nawab was dressed in a caftan of green velvet and a turban of muslin, in which an egret plume was fastened by an emerald-studded clasp. Seed pearls glowed softly on the cushions of his chair. Of the nobles and others on the dais, I recognized Prince Mirza Saadat Ali and Prince Mirza Jangali, sons of the late Nawab, the Naib and Sahib-i-Naubat, Murtaza, our resident newly-appointed, Mr. Bristow, and a pale-faced little man dressed as a British captain, my old acquaintance Claude Martin.

Harryman had told me that Martin was about to survey portions of Oudh; and with his customary pushfulness, the great Claude had evidently gained a notable prominence at court already.

A sweat of apprehension suddenly broke out upon my body; for there, among the native ministers and ambassadors, stood my colonel, Ogilvie, resplendent in full uniform. His eyes met mine as I made my way forward, but after a second or two of calm scrutiny they left my person and turned naturally to some other object of interest. I sighed with relief, although I do believe that the colonel would have proved nothing but my friend.

The Frenchman upon the dais was speaking to the Viceroy in quaintly broken English.

"So zat I hope to complete zis survey wizin a few mont's, sire. Ze country is not so t'ickly-how you say ?-afforesstated as Bengal, an ze work should be simpler zere because."

"Thank you, Captain Martin," spoke the Nawab. "I will see that all help is rendered you. Now, what new suppliant have we here?"

My plump friend of the ebony rod had spoken to a clerk; the clerk had spoken to a secretary; the secretary had spoken to an emir; the emir had spoken to a vizier; and the vizier was on the point of speaking to old Said Murtaza, when the Nawab had caught the movement and interpreted it correctly.

Nevertheless the minister completed the prescribed chain by murmuring something in the august ear.

"The Talukdar Indra Rama desireth speech with his lord ?" asked the Prince, smiling at me encouragingly.

In some natural trepidation I stepped to the dais and salaamed to the fibred floor.

"Not the Talukdar, Protector and Favourer of the Poor," I corrected with due humility, "he is dead. I am but his representative and the representative of his people."

"Thou comest not from this province, by thine accent, friend."

"Nahin; from the south I come, Asylum of the World." "Well, your business?"

Thereat I stood upright and, warming to my work, gave the Nawab an outline of the misfortune of the Taluka, and of the circumstances of its owner's death. As lucidly as I could, I laid the case of the people before him, seeking the punishment of the *amil* and a promise of freedom from future aggression; leading the Prince to believe that I was a man of substance, travelling from Haiderabad to Bengal on business.

"A remarkable history, indeed, Indra Ram," quoth the young monarch, when I had done. "Albeit one, the recital of which could have waited till my return to Faizabad, though doubtless thy championship of these people hath cost thee much, and thou desirest to be away on thine own affairs. For that championship thou hast my deep thanks. Thou wilt see that I cannot now investigate and adjust, since I prosecute an urgent deed of arms. For the present, therefore, pray give to my trusty Revenue Superintendent, Raja Jaggernaut, or to Soorat Singh, the details of thy complaint, with a statement of the extent of the estate . . . in which pergunnah it lies, and of how many *mauzas* it consist . . . and he will instruct thee as to the requirements for the assessment of dues, and will place the matter in the hands of officials for rectification. Later, I will enquire into the conduct of the presumptuous man of whom thou art complaining, and, be all as thou sayest, I will take his ilaka from him. Art thou prepared to retain the conduct of the estate until, since it would appear to lapse to the State, an official is placed in charge ?"

"Yes, Lord of the World."

"Then have I much to thank thee for, Indra Rama. Such an exploit and such sympathy with my people shall not go without its reward. Thou shalt visit me again ere long and tell me of thyself. May God protect thee."

"Lord," I cried, "may thy justice ever be extolled, and thy shadow be as permanent as that of the Phœnix. Thy slave desires to crave another boon."

"Well?" said the Nawab readily. It was plain to see he was working for popularity, this new, young king.

" It is that thou wilt permit him to offer his sword and life for thy cause in the forthcoming fight."

Asaf-ud-Dowlah's features lit up with gratification.

"Such a boon is not exigent, friend. Indra Rama, thy generous loyalty touches me deeply. Thou shalt fight as thou desirest, and with mine own bodyguard. Fear not that the duty will prove a sinecure; for 'tis a personal score that I go to pay."

Again the formula of leavetaking, an obeisance, and I made a triumphant retirement into the crush; well satisfied that I had gained the favour of the youthful ruler whatever befell.

From a distance I saw the Prince make a gesture of relief

at the termination of the durbar, and fasten his loosened caftan preparatory to rising. But, before he could so do, I observed the seneschal-like individual speak to the clerk as before ; and the information was passed on, until once more Murtaza Khan whispered it into the royal ear.

I saw the pencilled eyebrows go up in surprise and a rather eager gesture of consent.

"M. Duselin is 'ere, I sink," said Claude Martin aloud, in response to a whisper from the Mukhtar-ud-Dowlah. "Will 'e please approach ?"

There was a stir in the crowd, and the adventurer stepped forth and bowed to the Nawab.

At last! My heart began to beat tumultuously; my breath came hardly. I pressed forward as far as I could, eagerly scanning the group from the midst of which the Frenchman had emerged. It was composed of Frenchmen dressed in a military uniform of blue with plumed helmets and steel gorgets. They were doubtless the captains recruited and placed into positions in the Oudh army by Armonde. But there was no boyish figure in dark clothing among them. How should there be—in the court of the Nawab?

Well, an that boy were still with Duselin, he must presently return to him, and I would follow. Yes, no leech could stick to a plump calf more closely than I would stick to that international rapscallion.

The Nawab spoke.

"You desire to make a request of me, sir?"

" Ay, sire."

"Pray state what you would have of me, and the request shall have my fullest consideration. The white races do much for us of Hindoostan; it is but meet that we should extend a return of favour when opportunity affords."

Duselin bowed, and moved a step nearer the Prince.

"Sire," he said in a voice so low, that it was clearly intended to reach the Viceroy's ear alone, "with the deepest respect and with great earnestness, I venture to beseech an audience with you alone." "A private durbar ?" ejaculated the Nawab in surprise.

"Yes, Your Highness," replied the Chevalier firmly, "an interview *in camera*... in the presence of neither *diwan* nor *amil*; of no-one saving your personal guard."

"An astonishing request, sir. Your business must be of weight that you should ask such a thing."

"It is of such weight, sire," averred the Chevalier. "It concerns in deepest intimacy the destiny of yourself and the future of your state; and, I would say also, Sire, of a state even greater than this fair Subah of Oudh."

Asaf-ud-Dowlah's soft brown eyes scanned the keen features of the suppliant curiously. He turned, as though to speak with the old retainer by his side; but the Frenchman intervened rather sharply.

"I would suggest, Your Highness," he said, "that the decision rest with you alone."

The Nawab appeared undecided.

"By the Beard of the Propher, sir," he exclaimed, "you do at least arouse my curiosity, and I am minded to grant your request. But be warned. Such a favour is not lightly granted, and must not be lightly made. Unless the importance of your business actually warrants this unprecedented course, it were better for you, sir, that you ask not what you do."

"Not only Your Highness, but the whole of this great land will justify me in future years," declared the Chevalier confidently.

"You may have your way, then. You will be informed of the time selected for the interview. May God protect you."

"Shah; Salamat !" answered Duselin with a bow that hid a grim smile.

And he backed away, as a *kirani* made a spluttering entry of the affair with a reed pen.

The Viceroy rose, pronounced some sort of benediction on the company, who salaamed with one accord, and left the tent. The durbar was over.

Now was my opportunity to seize metaphorical hold on

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Duselin, but to my supreme disgust, I was seized on myself by a crowd of slavering courtiers, who vapoured and admired, and praised and condoled, till I was sickened to death of their babble.

But at length I managed to escape their clutches, only to fall into the hands of a host of officials who insisted on dragging me at once before the revenue superintendent, Rajah Soorat Singh. My mood was not gracious, it may be guessed, when at last I reached the open air; having supplied abundant material for an investigation.

'Twas too late, of course. No Duselin could I see in the dispersing crowds; no word of him could I get from the guard or attendants.

But he could not be far away.

"Madhava," I said, when the priest and I were together again in the tent of the sirdar who had befriended me, "wouldst know that slim feringi an thou sawest him again?"

"He of the eagle visage ? Verily, brother."

"Good ! Then do thou search the one side of this camp, and I will search the other. For he is here. I have seen him this day, and where he is his companion of the kirtle will be, which one must not escape till the red account that Sovona hath against him be paid."

"But what said the Prince, brother? What of the Taluka? What word had he for the concerning it? Tell me. I sought entrance to the *shamiana*, but could not obtain it."

"Damn the Taluka !" I muttered in English.

" Eh ? "

"I said, 'All is well with the Taluka,'" I reassured, and contrived to stave the priest off with promises of a later exposition; packing him off to prosecute his search.

For myself, I wended a systematic way down one side of the encampment enquiring, prying and peeping; but bootlessly till I came to the part set aside for the European element of the gathering. This I boldly entered, ignoring the sentry, who was one of the European Horse, and a man I knew well. He stood outside a number of tents in which officers of many ranks and regiments, together with a number of civil officials, were doffing the fine gear they had worn at the durbar.

From the nearest tent there came the sound of one raving in anger.

"Z'wounds !" came the muffled tones through the canvas wall, "I'm melting like a tallow dip. I've a mind to wear my medals and nothin' else next time I go to court."

The sentinel made a step forward and a grab to stay me, but he was too late. Caution, disguise—everything, flew to the four winds at the sound of that choleric voice.

I raised the tent flap and dashed inside.

There, struggling with his cravat, and in a fine pet, was Harryman.



"O, my old friend ! Why, thy face is valanced since I saw thee last."

HAMLET.

THE surgeon was alone; his objurgation had been addressed apparently to the tent-pole. As I blundered in he looked round.

"How now?" he yelled. "What the devil do you want here? You lousy son of Shaitan! This aren't a bazaar, nor yet a zenana. Clear off to your own bug-rug. Get out! 'Jeldee! shoo!"

And he waved his arms as though I were a goose. Harryman was regrettably inclined to the vigorous in speech, when dealing with natives.

I ignored the banishing gestures.

"Harryman !" I said.

"Eh?"

He came forward and looked at me closely ; then seized me

by the arms, piercing me through and through with his little steely eyes. As though doubting its reality, he tugged my beard.

"Warren !" he gasped. "Warren ! By God !"

Next minute he was wringing my hand as though like to wrench it off, laughing foolishly and swearing roundly at the tears that would come from between his sandy eyelashes.

"Goddam me for an old fool !" he cried, blinking. "Lord, man, what a start you have given me."

"And you me, old friend," I told him, gulping to get rid of the plaguey lump in my throat.

"By'r Lady, I can scarce believe that it is you now. Damme, you're a moor to the life, although your eyes an't black enough. God ! I'm glad to set eye'n on you again, lad."

Then he blazed forth in mock choler to hide his emotion.

"Tell me now ! What in the devil's name you're doing here . . . hidden away like a needle in a bottle of hay . . . the while I've searched Faizabad for you and this damned camp as well ? Explain, I tell you, and this blackamoor masque, too !"

"In good time," I gave back. "I'ell me what you do here, first? Has the detachment returned to Calcutta? And, before all, have you seen Miss Brunel in this camp, or have you heard of her?"

"What! You know that she has ... has ... disappeared ? You think she may be here?"

"Heavens, yes. I followed her here !"

The surgeon looked at me, startled.

"You followed her here? Zooks ! What d'ye mean?"

"I mean that, small thanks to those who should have looked after her, Miss Brunel has journeyed in villainous company through wild jungle and *thug*-infested country to this place or near here. She came to me dressed as a man in my house but a few days ago."

" Dressed as a man?"

"Yes,"

" At your house ? "

"Ay, my house, the Sher Khoti, off the Faizabad road."

"Phew!" whistled Harryman, frowning in bewilderment. "We shall learn little from each other in this exclamatory fashion. Come, tell me slowly and in detail what has happened to you since the day you left Calcutta."

Curbing my own impatience, I told Harryman my story in every particular. He made no interruption or sign of interest throughout, save that his eyes shone with a sudden anger and his lips hardened to a livid line at mention of Duselin.

"So you thought she was an agent of police, seeking you for a crime you had not committed . . . unless the office of moral scavenger is a criminal one, and the removal of carrion a crime. There is a bitter humour in such a situation, lad."

"More bitterness than humour," I said, with a reflection of the former quality in my voice. "You have not seen Miss Brunel then, I gather."

"Nay, I'm sorry to say."

"Jo," I asked next, "how was it this lamentable thing came about ? Can you explain why she came thus into Oudh, and in such a way ?"

"I believe I could, boy, but for the sake of your heart's peace, I won't tell all I think. Still, listen ! You know that before you left, young Brunel was ill . . . a simple fever, which any but a constitution so undermined as his, could have shaken off in a couple of twos. I did my level best, goaded to my utmost endeavour by his sister's eyes; but it was of no avail. He died, and we buried him in the jungle, not far from where Armonde lies.

"The girl shed no tear. She suffered as does a fawn, silently. We saw naught of her, and I dreaded for her reason; knowing how great are these silent griefs. But, thank God, we were ordered back to the Settlement on the day of the burial; and glad was I to hand the lady over to fat Mrs. MacMurray. Duselin rode with us to the Fort; then vanished like a bat at daybreak and I've not seen him since till to-day. I reported what had occurred, but little heed was taken since the one principal was dead and the other flown. Just once or twice I saw Miss Brunel; and 'twas a pitiful sight for eyes that had delighted at her in earlier days. Like the flower after which the Bengalese named her, she languished. Gad, 'twas as though the very soul had been sucked out of her. I offered her my sympathy, but sympathy was an empty gift, a balm of no potence to such a sorrow ; and I could only watch and hope for her. There were others, too, who did the same, but methinks their sympathy veiled a search for opportunity. There were the unworthy few, inevitably with us in these degenerate days, whose vaunted consideration was patently but a cloak tc muffle ugly endcavour.

"This I know because after a few days, Miss Brunel would receive no visitors. Then, one morning, with never a word to a soul, she disappeared. None knew where she had gone. No search revealed a trace of her. Days brought dark whisperings, and men were set at ebb tide to watch the river near... but there, lad, she will never be found thus, and there s no need to dwell on the ghastly surmise.

"Nevertheless I dreaded some such horror myself, knowing how she had loved the young scamp Laurence. And besides, I knew her better than most, I looked closer than most, and found more. I wiped the harrywench's eyes and sleeked her down with good gold mohurs, so that at my behest she searched her mistress's trunk and found . . . that not a single article of attire was missing, not even a nightdress. This being so, I divined d sguise, though, wittess old fool that I am, I never thought to examine the boy's chattels . . . a *kunchli* and a *saree* were the limits of my imaginings.

"Then, when I had routed in my cranium for the why and wherefore of this disguise, I was driven back on to an old conclusion of mine, and deduced from it my lady's direction and her destination. And it was right. Heavens ! how distraught poor Rosalie Brunel must have been to devise such a plan . . . yet how finely daring is the conception, how thoroughly in keeping . . .

"Howbeit, the Colonel being gone to Faizabad on a mission of some kind, I obtained leave to follow him and came here to seek you . . . and someone else besides." "You veil your speech strangely, Jo, for some reason. Do you mean me to believe that you knew Miss Rosalie had journeyed alone into Oudh?"

" I thought it most probable."

"Why ?"

"Because of that same conclusion of mine, lad."

"This is unlike you, Harryman," I protested. "In the devil's name, speak out. You might be a member of Council from the tenuous gas you vent. What is your woundy conclusion?"

"Sure, you might be a justice from your perpetual interrogatories," countered the surgeon. "You shan't know my precious conclusion, lest it may prove a wrong one and get us into trouble. Besides, if you haven't the wit to juggle with a set of premises that should be plainer to you than to me, and arrive at a logical conclusion yourself, you may flounder in darkness ... for a time at least. It were better so, in my mind."

Annoyed, I forthwith floundered, till my friend spoke again.

"So, Master Jack, in your opinion, Duselin . . . well, Duselin did kiss a certain 'kerchief that day."

"He confessed as much to me, unwitting. But the Chevalier is a gentleman, and even if he should find out . . ."

"You were always too complacently generous, boy," the surgeon interrupted. "But it's to be hoped your assumption is correct. Though I tell you this. Duselin is forged of the finest steel, a keen blade, as limber and subtle as they make 'em. And all strong blades are not honest. There are some flecked and smeared and spoiled with crooked venoms. For all we know he may be one of these."

Harryman was depressing in his weighing-up of matters; and I told him so.

"Anticipation of the worst is the best preparation, and saves many a shock," he replied evenly. "Duselin has a genius for machination and an implacability of purpose; and he would brook no rivals if he were in love. Zooks, I can't at all associate tenderness of feeling with that impassive personality, yet, as

old Paul did say, he is a man of like passions with ourselves, and . . . and pigs *might* fly. So, assuming he were enamoured, we have the explanation of his exalted approval of your duel and his efforts to run it so smoothly. He must have known that Armonde and you were his rivals, for there were never two men more patently lovesick since Adam closed his mouth with apple and opened his eyes."

"You think he encouraged us to quarrel?"

"He might even have done that. Duselin is a master at fashioning tools from men, and he could have played on Armonde as on a great, crude instrument. I'm certainly inclined to the belief that he precipitated things."

"Ther: why should he have suggested my flight?" I demanded. "It would have been more to his advantage had I been hung."

"The Chevalier would probably have been called upon to give a deposition and perhaps evidence. He hates inconvenience."

"But, Harryman, Calcutta swarms with men, many of whom are potential rivals to him who would win Miss Brunel. Why should he be content to leave her among them, alone, and set forth into Oudh?"

"The death of her brother would scriously upset the prospects of any suitor, lad; that's plain. There could be no successful advance for anyone for months to come."

"You don't think he's hurt her, Jo?" I queried anxiously.

"The Chevalier is an unknown quantity. How could I venture an opinion? All I know is that he is a man who recks little of laws and conventions, except when they serve his ends."

"Do you think Duselin knows whom he is with?" I demanded fiercely.

"I? No! How should I? I cannot conceive in any case why she voluntarily made the journey with him, unless she was absolutely certain of her disguise. If that were so, let us hope she was not over confident But what are you going to do?"

## WARREN OF OUDH

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"I've sent Madhava to scour one side of the camp. It is too late now to search more on this side. The deployment for battle to-morrow, if it is to-morrow, will discover Miss Brunel, mayhap, if she is here."

"If she is not here, Jack, it is a certitude that she is in the capital. 'Ergo, good master Warren,' "Harryman parodied, "you must hasten there after the fight. For the present, take care that Duselin penetrates not your disguise. He may mean you well, but, by Jove, I doubt if he does. For myself I shall roam around for a day or two until things shape themselves a bit; and then decide what to do."

An entirely original and exceedingly disconcerting idea all at once obtruded itself.

"Harryman," I stammered, "if Duselin should ... should speak to Rosalie, do you think she ... she ... Have you ever noticed anything ?... I mean ...?"

"I see what you mean," grinned the surgeon, "though no thanks to you for that. Seriously, Jack, haven't you got enough flies a-pestering you without entertaining the vampire of jealousy as well?"

"Jealousy !" I exclaimed, angrily. "How should I be jealous who have no . . . no hope. Why, if I thought she loved Duselin, I'd still seek her out, ay, and mount guard over her person till the Frenchman came to fetch her; and thank God that she had found happiness; and pray that he'd be worthy of her. As it is, whate'er befall, it is as Indra Rama that I shall help her . . . she shall never know . . ."

"There ! There ! " soothed the surgeon. "Seek her out in whatever character you like, Jack . . . as Indra Rama, as Jack i' the Green, or the devil himself ! But certainly seek her out, Jack, most certainly seek her out. God A'mighty, what a hell of a heart burning there'll be if you don't."

Dieu, I could not understand my friend's new air of quizzing mystery; but I cordially misliked it; and I was for protesting again, when a commotion outside the tent broke the pause.

I heard the sentry yell "Door ho !" (Get out !) in a strong Scotch accent, and add a compliment or so in Gælic to the subject of the order. Next instant the tent flap was raised and Madhava darted through the entrance, to fawn like a dog at my heels.

"Lord," he cried, "I believed some ill had befallen thee. The gods be thanked that thou art safe and whole."

Harryman rounded his eyes at this unexpected apparition.

"Holy Virgin! What's this? Vade retro, thou monkey!" "This," I explained, "is the priest of whom I have told you; Madhava Chaitanya, dealer in magick and credulity."

"Egad, is that so? Then from his tout ensemble, I'll wager a ton of opodeldock to a bad Arcot rupee that he's a votary of Hanuman. Look at his hessians! And his clobber! Your linen would be the better for a gauffering, old boy!"

Madhava bristled angrily at the surgeon's railing air.

"I bin Calcutta," he declared wrathfully." "Ungrese werry good feller !"

The Major bowed down to the ground.

"On behalf of the werry good fellers to whom you refer, I thank ye, my bully lad."

The jogi understood not one word, but remained staring haughtily at his cozener; wrinkles of displeasure appearing amid the multitude already wizening his features.

"Who is this fellow, brother?" he demanded. "And what saith he in such a tone of one of the Twice Born?"

"Madhava, this is my best friend. You must treat him as myself."

Whereat the *jogi's* face cleared somewhat, and he extended his left hand which Harryman took, chuckling.

"Hope in's clean," he said, "but pleased to meet you all the same."

"I bin Calcutta," insisted the priest with gravity.

"Well, brother. What of the search ?"

Madhava assumed his ceremonial mien.

"Lord," he told me, "both the tall man and the devil with the skirt are housed not far from here." "And the third man?" I questioned, impatiently.

"I did not see him. I did not look for him. What concern hadst thou with him?"

Not to let him see my disgust, I turned away.

"'Fore God, she must be found," I cried desperately, and I verily believe I should have gone then and there rampaging out into the twilight, had the surgeon not prevented me.

"'Fore God, she shall be," he pacified. "Come, come, you will betray yourself, if you yield to such ecstasies. Here, sit ye down on this good Patna chair, and have some sherber, or better still, a tot of Jamaica, and a scegar. "Tis long, I'll warrant, since you have drunk the one or smoked the other. But oh ! for the foaming nut brown and a plug of good virginia."

Harryman rummaged energetically in his pack and produced a stone flask with a tin rummer which he filled and handed to me, commanding that I should swallow the biting stuff. Further, he forced a handful of his sleek Burmese seegars upon me to smoke at leisure and in secret.

"Now go sleep it off," the surgeon commanded after a while, "for you must be up betimes to-morrow, and worrying and vapouring will do no good. Soyez calme, and all will be well. I must reassure that sentry. He's dancing about like a cat on hot bricks outside, ever since this familiar demon o' yours popped in."

The mellow spirit pervaded and soothed; blunting the pringles of anxiety. A sense of indebtedness to this splendid friend of mine rose uppermost, demanding imperative expression. Stammering, I achieved a broken sentence or two, which, when he understood their burden, fetched Harryman up in mock anger at once.

"Damme, mayn't a man play guardian angel an he is fool enow to put himself out, without being pestered in this wise? Go sleep, man, and hide not again like a bug in a rug."

To which typical outburst he attached a dour wipe.

"Peace, Indra Rama, and sleep well . . . and thou too, little monkey."

The last phrase was in English, and addressed to Madhava with whom, trotting at my heels, I left the tent.

The sun was setting; the *mollahs* had commenced to wait the invitation to prayer. The air was cool and sweet.

Overwrought... probably as much by the stronger fumes of the rum as by emotion, I sought the shelter allotted me, and lay there a-babble till even Madhava tired and bade me sleep, too; which command I eventually obeyed, crawling out under the peeping stars for ease.



"... Hurled the rebris to darkness of hell, To a sleep without slumber, or waking, or rest." OSCAR WILDE.

THE Shaik families of Oudh were a comfortable little community of Mussulmans ensconced snug and tight in that corner of the province in which lies Lucknow. The town in fact was theirs. According to their tradition, the Shaiks had Afghan blood in their veins; having come ravening into Hindoostan in the train of Said Salar. But then every Mussulman in Hindoostan hugs the same tradition pretty closely, and, moreover, can produce an array of argument, thoroughly mendacious, but nevertheless convincing to the uninformed, to prove how radically true it is.

Still the Shaiks were powerful, and it was indiscreet and even dangerous to asperse their claim, so that to keep tempers cool and tulwars sheathed, it was generally acknowledged that their forbears were Said Salar's men right enough. Therefore, knowing nothing of their ancestry, and caring as much, I, too, will conform and grant them their bloody family tree.

These worthy gentlemen had in some remote time seized upon the village of Laksmanpoor, and made it their own. Thereafter they built in it, and bred in it, until it became a city of some importance; and its name was shortened into Lucknow.

And for the better defence of the territory thus unobtrusively acquired, the Shaiks built a fort, a large fort, to the designs of a Hindoo architect named Likna, and after him the Fort was named . . . the Kila Likna, or Fort Likna. It occupied a commanding position near Goomtee the winding . . . even the further outskirts of Lucknow coming under the shelter of the iron curtain its rude artillery could drop at will.

Quite what sort of a fort the stronghold of Likna was I scarce knew; for I saw it first at dawn or thereabouts, and last at sunset on the same day, and when the sun had set, the greater part of the building had set with it. But that it was castellated, turretted, mounted with wall pieces and jingals, and formidably inhabited, I did sec.

This Fort, by a coincidence, had once sheltered a viceroy of Oudh, for the first Nawab, Saadat Khan, the great Burhanul-Moolk, occupied it for a space when in residence in Lucknow. It was he who changed the name of the building to that of the Fish House or Muchi Bawan, and decked it with his insignia of the fish. This was forty years before the time of which I tell.

I am ignorant to this day of the circumstances which prompted the Prince of Oudh to raze the place. The Shaiks were self-confessed rebels against his rule and dominion, but what their quarrel was exactly, I know not. But there was a quarrel and a bitter one; and the people of Oudh were the better for this culmination, since the Shaiks demonstrated their independence and contempt for majesty by raiding freely and carrying off much plunder in kind if little in treasure.

Quarrel or no, the average Indian prince would have remained content to let the Shaiks rebel so long as their raids did not extend to the royal zenana or the treasury; so long, in fact, as their field of operation was confined by reasonable bounds; and the folk who dwelt therein were not too importunate.

For action is anathema to an oriental of the normal order; and if he is a potentate, he generally obliterates the word from his vocabulary and its insignificance from the daily round. Therefore it said much for the character and energy of Asaf-ud-Dowlat that he should seek to settle his score so soon after his accession; especially in view of the extensive negotiations he was conducting with our Company; and the reformations in court and army that he had set himself to compass.

Alas, that he should allow himself so soon to sink into that life of torpor and excess characteristic of an Indian prince; and which brought disorder and suffering to Oudh once more.

Howbeit, the day after my encounter with Harryman, the Nawab sallied forth to try conclusions with the turbulent emirs, and he took with him a horde, one could call it little else, of such dimensions as to preclude all possibility of defeat. The camp lay not over far from the Fort of the banditti, and the latter was early reached.

I was attached, as had been ordered, and as was my right as a noble of Oudh, to the personal bodyguard of the Viceroy; and was pleased to find myself placed, in the preliminary defile, by the side of the young sirdar who had befriended me; and who had now added to his kindness by lending me a fairfitting smock of steel mail.

Asaf-ud-Dowlah himself rode in the van with due panoply. A gilt chutter, or sun shade, was carried above him, and on his wris: he bore a falcon as though he were merely going acasting with it for the long-legged waders of Ghogra side. He scorned all armour, and his pennon boldly announced his whereabouts; even had the sparkle of his retinue not performed this office definitely enough.

In the immediate rear of the Viceroy and his suite rode his Turk sowars, armed after the English fashion, and commanded by the cunning old warrior, Jamshed Beg. There were detachments of the Habshi Regiment and representative squadrors of the Najib Battalions of horse. Basant Ali and Mahboob Ali, the generals respectively of firelock and matchlock infantry, rode in state at the head of their fellows on the wings of the force.

With a flourish of barbaric music, the expedition moved off; troops and squadrons of horse defiling side by side with foot and artillery; with no regard to discipline, system, strategy or anything else . . . the whole forming a massive crescent moving slowly down upon the Fish Fort to envelop and destroy by weight and number atome.

Since the start was made so early, I had no time to pursue my search or talk with Harryman. The *jogi* had vanished I know not where. Colonel Ogilvie and the little troops of the Orange Devils I presently espicd; their orderly array showing up in brave contrast to the caracoling irregularity of the native cavalry.

The advance began, and ere long, the Muchi Bawan came into view, a long rambling structure of brick and rain-scored mud, towered and loop-holed; with painted yellow fishes curved over each entrance way. The building was moated, and its doors barred by a sort of rough portcullis. The outline of the whole edifice was now blurred and obscured by the flash-lit puffs of dense smoke from the ordnance and matchlocks on the walls.

In a depression before the Fort, between the river and the building, the enemy commanders had huddled their forces like sheep . . . a helpless-looking rabble truly, but fighters and fanatics to a man. Among them moved their *mollahs*, waving green banners emblazoned with exhortatory quotations from the Koran, lettered in silver.

The enemy mass had been rudely servied into lines of detachments, each of which was commanded by a more or less dishevelled personage wearing the green muslin turban of an emir.

Yet whate'er formation they had adopted had been vain; such a position would have undone the iron Corps de Garde of France, or the stoutest of Clive's veterans. Although the spasmodic fire from the fortress would cover some small tactical move, broadly speaking the Shaik forces were

prisoned immovably by the developing hordes of the outraged Prince.

Extend they could not; retire they could not except into the Fort; advance they must and be slaughtered. The blissful vagueness of the Mussulman heaven awaited many a soul that day.

I heard Colonel Ogilvie give a cry of satisfaction as he noted the disposition of the rebels; and knew this, his opinion, coincided with mine.

Still, there was no doubt a tough task before us all; for such as the Shaiks fight as they breathe, with the confidence of instinct; and more, esteem the killing of an infidel a sure passport to Paradise; and there were many Hindoos among the Nawab's men. Again, the exhortations of the *mollahs*, the mad fervour of a fanatic religion, the panoply of an Eastern battlefield would each react on the emotional Eastern temperament in its proper way; driving the young men into that witless state which is called *ghazee*, and urging them resistlessly forward into the thick of the foe, shrieking, hacking and hewing till their pitiful, tattered bodies could house the frantic souls no longer.

And so it came about.

Gradually the southern horn of the living crescent crept round until it touched the river's bank, gathering up the outposts of the Shaik force from hidden coigns as it advanced, and veiling their annihilation in a fringe of smoke.

The massed artillery in the bight of the curve halted just without the range of the Fish Fort's guns and presently, with a muttering roar, the brass pieces puked their iron vomit into the hapless crush with a bloody effect its masses rendered inevitable.

A curtain of smoke, white and fleecy as summer clouds, drifted down upon the enemy before the breeze, as though some Power had dropped a merciful curtain lest the carnage offend the sight.

Then the *ghazees* broke loose. We could not see them through the stinking mist, but a chaos of yells and groans

heralded their coming; yielding place after a time to the murmurous patter of running feet, and the jingle and clash of mail and bucklers. Nearer and nearer, invisible, they drew, and the clamour swelled. The wild voice of a *mollah* shrieked out above the din, the cry of the fanatic Muslim seeking death through glorious paths.

"Ali ! Ali ! Din ! Din ! Ali Din !"

With a clatter the front rank of our footmen hurriedly marshalled to meet the attack, and, such is Eastern generalship, lined clean across the muzzles of our guns; so that they stood grinning, but innocuous, behind the cordon. Pikes fell to the ready. The blue glare of portfires lit the acrid vapour as they passed from hand to hand; touching the matches into a crimson glow on a thousand long matchlocks.

As the vengeful outcry grew in vehemence beneath the obliterating arras of smoke, an unsteady, wavering movement ran down the lines of our infantry. 'Twas plain to see that the corporate nerve which animates a force in battle was badly shaken at this waiting for the onset of an unseen foe.

"Damn this smoke," I heard Ogilvie cry. "Will it never clear ?"

Then, shrill above the bruit of jangling equipment and blazing muskets, rose the clear voice of Asaf-ud-Dowlah, ringing like a silver trumpet, as he urged his captains to steady the men.

But now that our guns were silent, the smoke thinned, and here and there could we obtain glimpses of the enemy, fleeting impressions of red mouths foaming in madness, wild, injected eyes and glimmering steel.

Unhappily, the charge first met our line at its weakest point. A wedge of desperate fellows, with a green banner, ribboned by shot, borne by a screaming priest at their head, drove headlong between the lines of a battery of camel guns. The frightened beasts shrieked and flinched before the onslaught; turned about, and bolted headlong from the slicing scimitars. The gunners rolled from their mounts and fled helter-skelter; more than one of the swivelled guns bellowed

its graped charge into the ranks of the bewildered sepoys themselves.

This charge bid fair to result seriously for us, and well might have done, had not the Nawab, with admirable coolness, ridden out himself from under his golden chutter, and directed the shooting of the runaway camels and the rally of the men.

The little wedge of fanatics charged recklessly on far into the mass of our troops, but, little by little, the disturbance created by their progress died down, until it ceased with the fall of the last of them.

A derisive laugh went up from amid the horsemen on my right, a metallic, joyless laugh that froze movement from my limbs for a moment. I turned and saw the man who had laughed. It was the Chevalier, and he was laughing, as far as I could judge, at the expression of palsied fright on the features of his companion, Captain Bulger, who, for want of a horse, had straddled a great, white camel. It was doubtless the first time he had seen a *ghazee* rush, and recalling my own feelings on the first occasion that I had seen that terrible sight, I sympathized. The bravest might pale at the insensate fury and gibbering rage of these madmen.

Duselin sat his horse with a stern grace. His head was protected by a steel dragoon helmet, and his breast by a heavy cuirass; he was certainly taking no risks.

Bulget was loaded about the belt with an armament of a size and variety that did credit to the piratic profession. He was also supremely uncomfortable, having lost his stirrups and guiding line both, so that the camel stepped continually on the dangling loop of the latter and threatened to fall in every yard.

Having espied these two, the battle became a secondary thing to me, though, as I scanned the throng for the one figure I hoped yet dreaded to see, the main charge of the rebels broke like a sea upon the ranks of the army of Oudh, and a bloody spray leapt up at the impact.

I sidled my horse nearer to Duselin's ; averting my face and arranging the nosepiece and steel cape of my headpiece to the

best advantage as safeguards against recognition. His clear-cut tones came to my ears as he spoke in French—short, crisp sentences, simple and ungrammatical, which the scaman with his polyglot smatterings would readily understand.

I caught the words, "Faites attention" "troisième," and "dalle," and deduced that Dusclin was instructing his creature as to the location of the golden key for his Kingdom of Two.

"Why not come erself?" Bulger rumbled sulkily above the hubbub. "I might miss the durn stuff efter all."

I listened acutely for the Chevalier's reply.

"Neither my body nor my reputation are mine to stake. Bulger, if you hold back now, you shall live to see the sky from a prisoner's pound, and to dance on air in Cooly Bazaar."

"You smoack me wrong, 1 tell yew. I'll dew it. I airn't never said I wouldn't, ding yew ! Say the bearin's agen. I airn't got 'em proper logged yet."

A terrific outburst of firing drowned the Chevalier's next words, and forcibly diverted my attention.

During the colloquy we had been riding ever forward until the wave of conflict, with its fringe of steely spume, now beat against the very walls of the doomed stronghold. The fleeing Shaiks streamed over the bridge of the moat into the Fort, and many dashed by its flanks into the open country beyond. Isolated knots of men made desperate stands around ragged standards; here and there attackers broke forward in their eagerness from their proper stations; and the characteristic confusion of oriental warfare held sway, despite the efforts of the Chevalier's henchmen. The pace quickened, and I found myself spurring hard forward to keep up with the bodyguard.

Asaf-ud-Dowlah himself was responsible for the enhanced speed.

Ahead, I saw his golden umbrella, pierced in more than one place by musket balls and slugs, plunging drunkenly forward as the bearer endeavoured to keep abreast of his master. The Prince had almost outstripped the fastest of his escort, and was straining hell for leather to reach the Fort ere the drawbridges were pulled up. An elderly *diwan*, the Mukhtar-ud-Dowlah I think, yelled distractedly that the Nawab would be killed, beseeching Allah to cleanse this battle madness from the brain of his ambassador.

With a crash the wooden bridge was hoisted into place; blood oozed from the interstices.

The Viceroy reined in on the very brink of the moat, raising a scurry of dust, and shaking an impotent blade at the firespitting walls.

"Ye pitiful fools !" shrieked the old counsellor, as he flogged his jaded nag with his scabbard. "Will ye see the Prince slain before your eyes, and not raise a hand to rescue or avenge? Oh, bodyguard of Rustams ! Behold, I laugh at your beards. Yea, I spit at them ! Give me a horse for this snambling carrion, and let my white hairs shame your youth !"

There was a stir among the irresolute courtiers, but no forward movement. I'faith, it is a valiant fellow indeed who will charge a bullet-puking wall with a fly whisk in one hand and a vanity bag in t'other.

Duselin took advantage of the stir to manœuvre his horse dexterously from the throng.

"Your chance will come in ten minutes," he yelled to the American. "Bungle it not. I will wait upon the knoll."

He loosened his rein and was gone.

I set my teeth. For the plan I had devised, no arrangement could have been more satisfactory than this separation.

When next I looked towards the Fort, I saw a sight which filled me with a swelling pride of race. While the silken, gutless nobles of the Nawab (I must thus qualify them, although I, too, was of the bodyguard and well wedged in) sat their horses in shameful indecision, an attenuated line of scarlet figures cut their way through to the front; dealing bloodless blows with whip and sabre flat.

It was the detachment of the European Horse, with Ogilvie at their head, who were thus forced to teach the bodyguard its business; though I guessed that the Colonel's motive in thus dramatically dashing to the rescue of the Viceroy was rather political than heroic. As a matter of fact, I afterwards discovered that the Colonel was present for the express purpose of keeping a watchful eye on the safety of this man of whom the Governor-General "had high hopes."

Down the little slope charged the riders, the rearmost urging their horses furiously to maintain a smart troop formation. But it was in a little distorted circle that they reached the Prince and swept round and about him. For a moment there was a hesitation, a wheeling of horses and unslinging of carabines; then Ogilvie seized the young ruler's bridle and dragged him, willy-nilly and protesting, up the acclivity to the shelter of his own defaulting bodyguard; rating the nearest French sirdar as he rode for not covering the retreat with fire. He was always a stickler for strict regard of regulations, was the Colonel.

Twenty minutes later, not ten as Duselin had estimated, the men who had so carelessly allowed their master to unleash his reckless impulse, rammed down the main door of the smoking Fish Fort with their own hands, and inaugurated a holocaust which revolted eye and mind alike.

I kept close on the tracks of Captain Bulger, and they were devious, ending at length in a little, sheltered nullah to the north of the Fort.

Here the pirate halted, examined his pistols, and looked with unmistakable dismay at the ground.

I knew his difficulty for what it was in a second. He had no more idea of making that camel kneel than the man in the moon.

"Whoa, Tiny !" he cried. "Get down !"

The huge camel circled round and came to a halt again.

"Git down, yew beast !"

The camel endeavoured to scratch its ear with a bony hind leg; but Bulger's weight was too much for the comfortable performance of this evolution, and the camel grunted in deep disgust.

The unhappy Bulger muttered thunderously and raised a timorous knee above the high gilt pommel; but his mount

resented the change of balance and made an angry bite at its rider's boor.

Inspiration seemed to come to Bulger. He grabbed the headrope, erked it downwards, and commenced to bellow in imitation of camel survans.

"Groo!" he cried. "Groo!"

The camel emitted a sound vastly similar by way of answer Bulger hac not remembered the pass-word correctly.

"Shish Sh... Shabash ! Sh... sh !"

It was an excessively poor imitation, but it was effective. The came very, very slowly and reluctantly, collapsed on to its knees, and swung backwards with an awe-inspiring grunt.

Bulger, as unwilling a rider as has lived since Mazeppa, rolled out of the saddle in an instant, tied the beast down to a stump, cursed it voluminously, and turned away.

With prodigious caution, he slunk along the moatside, reached the bridge, and crossed it. He kicked aside the bloody splinters in the doorway and entered the Fort.

Twenty paces in rear, I followed.



## "When the towers fall, it is an ill business for the nest builders."

GEORGE ELIOT.

WITHIN the Fort, Captain Bulger turned abruptly from the main corridor into a darksome passage, deep in dust, and reeking with the stench of powder and greased bodies. Half-way down the passage, the American halted as though in doubt, and began to swing his hanger and mumble discontentedly; much in the same way that an ill-bred hound will show anger at a lost scent. I slipped into a brickwork niche and waited for his noisy cogitation to cease. A naked Moslem tore past me down the tunnel. Bulger drew aside deftly enough and ran the fellow through as he passed; afterwards kicking the writhing body aside as he wiped his dulled blade under his armpit.

"'Nuther the less, thanks be the Cripes," growled the seaman audibly; then addressed himself to the immediate difficulty. "Western tower... how in hell can one tell east or west in this rat-hole without a binnacle? An' the baubles air beneath the third lozenge o' black marble away from the tower in the courtyard o' the pagody. Huh ! En ef I dew get 'em, yew'll see a lot of 'em, Mounseer Dusylang... may be."

The speaker stooped to feel around the neck of the man he had killed for a necklet, and finding none, cursed and stumbled on.

I slipped from the niche that had befriended me and gently followed.

The passage was strangely quiet, only a confused echo penetrated within of the pandemonium that reigned around and above it. Now and then the air would quiver with the concussion of a jingal. A strata of drifting smoke hung above our heads.

After a minute the way turned abruptly to the left, and daylight shone murkily in. Bulger blundered clumsily out into the courtyard of a tiny *masjid* or mosque nestling at the foot of the massive tower which frowned at the western corner of the fortress. I remained a discreet distance from the exit to the tunnel and waited, watching.

Bulger looked around the deserted sanctuary uncertainly, till, at the sight of the chequered marble of the flooring, his dull eye lighted up.

Laboriously he commenced to count the lozenges of greenveined black marble that alternated with the white.

He bent at last to pry up a slab with his cutlass.

A flaming brand fell from the top of the tower between myself and the Yankee, followed soon after by a blood-goutted puggaree.

Bulger turned apprehensively and saw me.

"Aha," he growled, and rushed at me with sword upraised and terrific mien; but stopped and lowered the weapon when he saw I made no threatening gesture. I stepped forward with one hand upraised and addressed him in English.

"Well met, Captain Bulger," I said. "Captain Barnett Bulger.. of Boston."

The piratical eyes goggled, and the piratical mouth slackened with astonishment.

"I vow you do appear prodigious amazed, sir; but 'tis possible you may recognize mc if I raise this nose piece... thus. Ah, you do, I see. Then you may recall when last we met. Your aim was plaguey bad, sir. But then, with such a carronade as yours, what can you expect?"

Bulger's slackened fingers renewed their grip upon the hanger. He surveyed me uneasily.

"You speak English vury well, my duck," he said. "Yew airn't no blackie. Who might yew be?"

"A Talukdar of Oudh," I answered.

"I dunno what thet is ; but I calculate as yew're a white man... a renegade ?"

"As much renegade as you are patriot, Captain Bulger."

"White or black, yew'll be pork soon enough," he snarled, and dashed at me.

I sprang on guard and met his first huge blow at my hilt, letting his broad blade slide the length of mine to the ground. He had no idea of sword play; and in another second his weapon clattered on the marble.

Bulger sweated like a frightened ox, as I raised my point and put one foot on his hanger.

"You are as sad with the bodkin as with the barker, Captain," I told him. "And, since I purpose to hold a small conversation with you, you must not be so hasty."

A cunning expression stole over the Captain's doltish visage.

"Ha'aves," he cried. "Ha'aves. Yew dunno whar it is, en won't ef I don't tell ye."

"I am not concerned about that which lies hidden beneath

this floor," I said. "Though it is not yours, nor Duselin's; but the property of the Viceroy."

"Three-quarters !" shouted the Captain anxiously. "Fer the love o' Cripes don't blow it."

"I'm not going to. My desire is that you should tell me a few things I am anxious to know. The first is this; what became of the young man—Halliday—who came to my house with you?"

"What dew yew want tew know for ?"

"Answer ! "I commanded, "Or . . . "

I raised my sword.

"He stayed in Faizabad," gabbled Bulger in a vast hurry.

"Where, and with whom ?"

"I dunno. When we cam' tew the city, Mounseer Dusylang arsted what the Court was; en efter thet we went tew the Silver Market and round about, en visited some durned darkie... a hell of a gut he had... and the scrivick feller stayed with him. We cam' here alonest."

" Did he stay of his own accord ? "

"I dunno. Waal, he didn't seem tew want tew. But Dusylang cocked his eye on him, en says as polite as yew please, 'It is the best I ken dew. Yew'll be safe hyar till I come back,' he says. En the scrivick went in, en I airn't seen him since."

"Where is this house ?" THE SUR

"Hard by the Silver Market. A yaller house with a fish on it."

"Thank you, Captain Bulger. Pray continue your task."

"Ha'aves is fair," said the Captain. "Ha'aves it is, or nothen."

"I've told you that I want neither half nor whole. Finish your digging; get out of this place; and tell no one that you've seen me. I can hand you over to the Calcutta police just as well as anyone else, remember."

"I shan't blow. I don't see any sense in yewer questions to start with. But look'ee hyar. About this ... "

"Dig !" I commanded sternly. "I am interested."

Forthwith, Bulger wedged up the half-prised slab and looked beneath.

There was neither cement nor earth, but a rusted iron surface with a folding handle slotted in it. This the pirate raised with difficulty; but three or four more slabs had to be lifted before the lid, for such it evidently was, could be opened.

The Yankee hauled excitedly on the handle; the catches, clean rusted through, gave way; and the lid shot up with a groan of corroded hinges.

Two compartments stood revealed in the box, one of which was crammed with gems whose pent-up glory now shone forth with a gleam of wondrous rainbow light. Sword hilts, dagger hafts, necklets, coronets, clasps, and aigrettes, scintillated dazzlingly to the delight of the pirate.

"My main !" he crowed, and ran a pudgy finger over the second compartment, which was a dingy brown in colour and seemingly a solid mass.

A trail of filth flowed out on each side of the finger; and there was a merry jingle. The seemingly solid block was a packed collection of coins, the square gold coins of Akbar the Great. A monarch's ransom lay spread before us; enough, I thought, to set up half-a-hundred Kingdoms for Two.

"I cain't lift it," complained Bulger, after a long pause. "Look'ce. Is it ha'aves or not?"

"What of Monsieur Duselin?" I queried.

"Huh," replied the Captain, " ef yew're minded to swag this wi' me, and give me a hand out'n this god-durned hole, what's Dusylang or anybody else tew knew about it ?"

"You're a very complacent person, I protest, Captain. Not only do you ask me to join you in cheating a man who trusts you... at least a little further than he can see you; but you clean forget the fact that I owe you something on my own account."

The redoubtable buccaneer looked up in alarm at this reversion to unpleasant topics.

"For the present, since our combined strength would be insufficient to move that box out of the Fort, you will close it and replace the tiles upon it. Nay, Captain, put back that handful of gold first . . . all of it, please."

Ignoring protests and attempts at further negotiation, I saw that my order was obeyed.

"Now," I quoth, when the floor of the little shrine looked reasonably normal again, "go out and report to your . . . your employer. Do what you please, but don't mention this encounter to a soul. An you do, Captain Bulger, I solemnly assure you that within twenty-four hours you will either be a dead man or else on your way to answer for your deeds in the Settlement . . . you may have your choice. Walk in front of me; and keep your hands from your belt."

Following which piece of bluff, and in which order, we left the sacred precincts together.

The fighting was nearly over, save in the topmost rooms of the edifice, where *mollahs* and their more fanatic adherents had barricaded themselves. The main rooms were shambles ; and a heaped pile of dead lay in each. Upon the Goomtee's bank, by Aurangzeb's mosque, lay another ghastly hillock ; where the more cowardly had been summarily despatched as they fled from the vengeance of their monarch. Ghouls looted the Muslim corpses of their gilded chattels and battered the Koran stands to pieces for their precious inlay.

And, as we emerged from the Fort in seeming cordial propinquity, I caught a glimpse of the Nawab standing under the gilded fish over the main door; his fine garments dabbled and torn; a scimitar in his hand; surveying the dire results of his expedition. His suite stood around him, panting and exhausted.

It was high noon.

In a few hours their last sun would set upon the Shaiks, sinking slowly into a bath of blood and fire. A desultory shot or two rang out, disturbing a swarm of filthy, raw-necked vultures; which scrambled from their awful meal with a clashing of horny wings.

Bulger mounted his camel, which rose altogether too precipitately for his comfort, and I mounted Radha whom I had

tethered near by; keeping a hand to butt, even as I swung into the saddle.

"Right, Captain Bulger," I said. "You may relieve me of your presence."

The American kicked the camel's sides and the beast loped off. I cantered round to the front of the Fort, intending to pay my respects to the Viceroy and to offer my excuses for departing from the bodyguard; for, in sooth, I had done my duty that day most damnably badly.

However, as I drew up amid the suite, there came the sound of hurried feet pattering down the great aisle of the house, behind us.

A frightened cry resounded along the vaulted ceiling.

"They have fired a train. Look to yourselves !"

A wild-eyed man tore out into the open; and the Prince seized upon him and twisted him round to face him.

"How say you, slave? A train !"

"Ay, Cherisher of the Poor! Lord of the World! A train to the powder store bencath the western turret. Save yourself, O my Prince!"

The courtiers nearest to the Viceroy grabbed His Highness with small ceremony at the ominous words; lugged him off to where the horses stood; hustled him into the saddle; and thwacked his mount lustily till he reached a place of safety.

Having no great wish for a grave beneath the shattered walls of Muchi Bawan, I tore after the royal party, while the Nawabi soldiery fled in all directions.

Barely had we reached the brow of the nearest hillock, when the western tower crashed down with a muttering roar, and a rolling cloud of dun-coloured smoke soared aloft into the air ; like a red soul leaving a broken body.

When the dust layers settled, quivering slowly down, I saw that the little mosque had been completely destroyed by the explosion; and that broken marble from the floor of it had fallen objectionably near me.

So that it would be a long time before Duselin could unlock the door to his kingdom, if ever he could indeed, with the WARREN OF OUDH

particular key of his intention. Incidentally, I too, and all others, were debarred the use of it as well.

I looked around for Bulger.

He was remote upon the far horizon ; his trusty mount had bolted.

## XII

"Hearing that the French were intriguing with the Mahrattas, Hastings sent an army against them . . . across the peninsular from sea to sea."

THE BUILDING OF THE EMPIRE. (Story.)

THAT night, in the midst of a camp that rang with shouts, songs and the clamour of drums, Asaf-ud-Dowlah held a triumphant feast, at which I was present, though more in the rôle of reluctant spectator than as a participant; for these folk be at times as horrifying in their mad pleasures as they be in battle.

The young Viceroy was stimulated by the excitements of the day to a vivacity that became him; a rosy glow shone through the tanned ivory of his cheeks, and his eyes burned with a hectic fire.

Yet I could not but note with misgiving the wild, unthinking vigour of his talk ! for it boded an instability in great issues an some sound counsellor guided him not.

Ere they left the great silken room in which the feast was held, the Nawab praised in unmeasured terms the bravery of those of the white race who had rendered him help that day, and thanked them with impetuous promises of favour to come. Then, almost in the same breath, he made a statement which created a sensation.

" I have decided," he announced, " to celebrate this memor-

able day, and the establishment of what I pray Allah may grant to be a lasting peace betwixt the peoples of my dominion, by building me here a palace and removing hither my court and its appanages from the city of Faizabad; for the demise of my beloved father hath rendered even the Beautiful Dwelling a prisoning citadel of pain for me. 'Tis an auspicious spot and fair, this town, and well named after the brother of that mighty Rama whom my beloved of another creed do revere and worship. More, it abounds in game . . . more than was ever seen near Faizabad . . . "

The young man ceased speaking for breath, and looked around him, smiling a trifle dubiously at the sea of astonished faces.

But, after the first hesitation of surprise, the moors sent up a roar of dutiful approbation so that the lights quivered at its vehemence; and the flapper boys ceased their fanning, till, the excitement subsiding, their masters turned to rate them.

'Tis strange indeed, that so great a city as Lucknow now is, should have sprung from so flinsy a foundation as a monarch's whim; yet we who have seen this same Prince selecting a nag from three thousand steeds and a gun from fifteen hundred fowling pieces, wherewith to go a-shooting, wonder less, perchance, than others do.

Captain Claude Martin hung perpetually over the Nawab's seat, smirking benignantly when royalty smirked, and anticipating royalty's every wish.

His compatriots seemed to regard him with a mild disgust, though they were careful not to let the Captain himself observe it; since the position he had achieved at this court already rendered him an enemy to be reckoned with, an he were offended.

It was at Martin's signal that the exalted gluttons stowed away the last succulent morsel into their sore-tried bellies, and watched the removal of the remnants of the feast with regretful, dozy eyes, ere the natch commenced.

A sinuous line of half-naked girls, lecring and voluptuous, entered from an ante room, chaunting a song with a motive of polished indecency such as those at court esteem true and decorous poetry. It snaked and squirmed the length of the great *shamianah*, sequins and jewellery. shimmering dully as their wearers moved through the haze of hookah smoke, and wound on to the dais prepared for its reception.

As I watched the procession idly, Harryman made his way down the narrow aisle between the rows of tumbled cushions on one of which I lolled amid the distinguished company, and stumbled against me with a stolid deliberation that made me frown.

"Come to my tent," he breathed, then coughed loudly and falsely, and stumbled on towards the exit way, fondly imagining that he had acted with the extreme of discretion.

However, a few minutes later, I too, slipped out, making my way to the tents of the European Horse, and sought that of Harryman. He was comfortably disposed upon a couch, puffing at an English clay.

"You've seen her ?" he demanded without ado.

"No," I replied. "But I know where she is, I believe."

"Good, lad. Where is she, and how d'ye know?"

"I forced the information from Bulger . . . she is in Faizabad."

"Ah, Bulger. What thinks that scaramouch of the pyrotechnic vanishment of the coin, if there was any? He was not in the Fort at the time of the explosion, by any lucky chance?"

"No, he had gone. But the treasure was there, Jo, and I saw it. Precious little use it will be to Duselin now, or ... or to anyone else, either. And, Jo ... Duselin knows !"

"The devil he does ! Could you not find out how she is ? How he treats her ? How he regards her ? What his intentions are ? "

"Nay, that I could not. Bulger had not guessed the secret too; but from what he told me, I have no doubt the Chevalier has discovered all. O God, Jo, I hope he means her well!"

The sound of merry voices drew nigh, approaching the tent.

"Sit down and look solemn," muttered Harryman, jumping from the couch.

I obeyed, and next moment, Peabody and Pettigrew, in a considerable state of hilarity, dragged the apparently unwilling Claude Martin into the tent between them.

"What's to do?" snapped the surgeon, pettishly.

"We've come for a nightcap of your Jamaica, sir," cried Pettigrew, "an' we an't goin' till we get it . . . that an' a seegar. There, there ! Cap'n Claude . . . be good, be good ! Sit him down, Peter !"

The unhappy Captain was duly sat down . . . on the ground alongside me.

"Who's your coffy-coloured friend, Major?" asked Peabody. "Didn't know you favoured dark company . . . masculine, that is."

"A noble lord with the megrims," gave back Harryman glibly. "My fame as a *hakeem* is great in the land, you will observe. But what do you boys want? And you, Captain Martin?"

"I want to go to bed," cried Martin, "but zese villain', zey won't let me."

"Not till we've had a nightcap together, Captain dear. Come, si', the punch. Flavoursome stuff, your punch, sir. And the seegar, please."

"Well, well, if you must, you must. Though I fear for your young heads to-morrow. The seegar will certainly make you sick."

"Not us, Major. Is your noble friend goin' to join us?" asked Pettigrew.

"He's a Hindoo, and might," rejoined the Major, to my great dismay. I had been wondering how I might slink off with grace.

Nevertheless, I grinned, bowcd, and accepted a mug of well-watered rum, spiced.

"Lud, Major, a pretty day's work---a pretty day, wasn't it, Peter "

"It was, Audelay, it was. And with big results. D'ye hear the Princelet say about moving the capital ?"

"Faith, yes. On account of the shootin'!" he said.

"But 'twon't come up to Bengal, I'll hazard. I've done some good shootin' there, Peter."

"Perchance ! Perhaps ! Maybe ! Why, you couldn't hit a pheasant in the air, Mr. Peabody, if you tried till . . . till the Mahratta war."

"Mr. Pettigrew, sir, have a care. Do I apprehend . . . ?" Claude Martin interposed adroitly.

"Why do you regard zis Mahrattoe war as so . . . so improbable, mes amis? Your Colonel, 'e is right, I tell you. Il saute aux yeux, zat war, c'est à dire, aux yeux suffisament per cants."

"You don't say so ? W'en's it to be, Cap'n Claude ?"

The cornets had forgotten their difference in a second, and turned flushed, curious, young faces towards the peacemaker. " Ah, prochainement, mes enfants, prochainement !

"Study for yourselves," he continued. "Keep your ears open, and you will know all zat I can tell you. Ah, it will be a great war, and a 'ard one for you English, 'specially if ze slipper-bearer an' ze shepherd remain loyal to zeir Peshwa."

"Explain, Captain Martin," protested Mr. Peabody. "Who the devil is the slipper-bearer and who's the shepherd ?"

"'Olkar the chief is descend from a shepherd, and Sindhia, 'is people were menial slipper-bearers."

"Well, an't they loyal ?"

"More or less. But ze Peshwa is a babe," explained Martin.

"'E was only born last year . . . ze post'umous son of ze dead As you know, ze English do not support 'im. Peshwa. Zev support Raghoba, 'oo is ze uncle of ze late Peshwa, an' 'oo 'as seized ze t'rone at Poona, declarin' zat ze babe is not---'ow you say ?---not ze son of 'is father. You know zese sings ? "

" Ye—es."

" An' you know zat ze French support ze babe, 'ose interest is watched by the minister Furnavese?"

"Do you mean to say that if these parties come to blows seriously, the Company might step in?" asked Harryman, realizing that there was more than idle distraction behind the adventurer's words.

"It is likely. Zey 'ave ze eye on ze Bombay side. An' I believe Raghoba 'as offered Bassein and Salsette to ze English, if zey will support 'im and keep 'im on ze t'rone."

"And would France be involved, too?"

"''Oo can say?"

"So that, once again, France and England might possibly...?"

"What would you do, if—if *it* happened again, Cap'n Claude?" asked Peabody; and was rewarded for his inquisitiveness by an angry frown from the Major.

Martin's sharp features rounded in a grin.

"I s'all remain true-to Claude Martin," he chuckled. "Trus' me to do zat, whatever 'appen.

"But you see," he went on, "zat we would 'ave a tough job, if zese freebooting chieftains, 'Olkar and Sindhia, were to rise up against Raghoba and those 'oo support 'im. Dieu ! What a power zey 'ave. 'Ave zey not taken control of ze Mogul from us, zo we conquered 'im at Buxar wiz Asaf-ud-Dowlah's own papa? An' do zey not 'old 'im a virtual prisoner on 'is own t'rone at Dily? Dieu ! What a power ! What a volcano !

"But God forbid zat ze 'ole volcano should blow up at once," tacked on Martin seriously. "It is bad enough as it is. Yes, we English mus' tread warily, *pardieu*, an' let all ze dogs sleep but ze one we are dealing wiz. See you, if zis war should come to pass, it is of desperate importance zat zis Viceroy of ours should remain a frien'. 'E seems well disposed now, but one is never certain of zese folk. An' why mus' we be good frien's wiz ze Nawab, if we would quarrel wiz ze Mahrattas ? Why ? Because ze Bengal army *mus*' assis' Bombay, *an zeir route zere lies across India.*"

"An' w'en is the circus to commence?" asked Pettigrew, eagerly. "Your *prochainement* is a little indefinite, Captain."

"If I have learn aright," answered the little adventurer very gravely, "ze cirque, as you call it, 'as start already. It is whisper' zat ze Bombay Council 'ave sent troops to aid Raghoba already !" Both boys whistled long and loud.

Silence fell upon the little gathering. One could almost hear the momentous question being revolved in the brain pans of the two youths.

"Captain Martin is fatigued by his disquisition," interjected the surgeon, suddenly. "Come now, you've had your nightcap. Off to bed !"

Martin rose with alacrity, and with a parting wipe or two, the boys stumbled, yawning widely, from the tent.

"Well," said Harryman, " if those children don't know you, nobody will."

"The ordeal has tried me, nevertheless, and I want to rest after it," quoth I, stretching my cramped legs. "I shall start for Faizabad to-morrow, and will see you, old friend, before I leave. A demain."

We gripped hands and parted.

In my own tent I found Madhava, drowsily anxious. I had not seen him since the previous day, and he greeted me eagerly.

"Lord, mine eyes are eased by the sight of thee. Greeting !"

"I am tired, Madhava," I said, suggestively ; but he merely sidled nearer.

"This for thine ear. The peak-faced feringi left this place, long ere the feast ended, for the capital. Thou knowest me, O my brother, to be a *pundit* of some little renown. Therefore, while the Prophet's followers broke his every rule this night, it happened that I fell into argument with the Nawab's *kirani*, who is a Hindoo of caste, yet wrongly interpreted an aphorism of the Pooranas. But ere the moon had risen far, I had shown him his error, and thereafter, in pleasant talk, I learnt this of him, thinking, since the Francese's movements interest thee, that it would be to thine advantage."

There was little time to be frittered if this were true information.

"Howbeit," pursued the *jogi*, "he cometh again on the day "nain Joon" for intercourse alone with the Viceroy. On that day, also, the *kirani* bade me inform thee, art thou to come

to Lucknow to receive word of the Prince concerning what is to be in the Taluka. Here is the tablet with the command."

"This is certain news," I queried, "as to the feringi?" "By the Creator, it is certain."

"Then, thank thee, brother. We will step into the footprints of the Frank ere the cock has crowed many times."

So the ninth of June was to bring Duselin again to Faizabad. I conjectured what might happen before that date, seeking to look forward into the future with the success that always attends such futilities. My mind was thus occupied as I tumbled on to my charpoy.

"Lord," whispered the voice of Madhava in my ear, "why not ever iemain with us . . . as our Master ? Of a truth, thou art as great a bahadoor as Sher Singh ... in fact a greater, since he had grown over fat of late . . . and to thee would come great honour and influence in this state. Say to me, what brooks a difference of colour, after all ? Surely the hue of bronze is as rich as pale red. Caste, too, is as naught, when we love, brother. And then there is Sovona . . .

#### XIII

" A lothely sweven I dreamt last night, How there hoved anigh me a griesly knight, Did smite me down to the pit of hell . . . " "THE RED KING." (Kingsley.)

I SETTLED myself to sleep, wondering the while whether my beloved slept calmly, and where, in the heart of royal Faizabad.

Though sleep had been of late gently elusive or openly defiant with me, I hoped that the fatigue of the past day would stretch me consciousless till dawn. Yet, strangely, it did not. Nor, more strangely still, did I find my dozing hours assailed by my familiar fears for Rosalie, nor sweetened by visions of her. I dreamed truly, but I dreamed the wildest chimera dream that it had even been my lot to dream.

I saw Duselin established in his kingdom, or rather a kingdom, for he was alone ... queenless ... in his regal magnificence. He sat upon a throne draped with golden cloth embroidered with lilies; and the throne seemed to hang suspended over a wide territory, a territory that was familiar to me, since the towers and spires and pagodas of Calcutta sprang upwards from it.

Grouped around the throne were the vassals of the monarch, great stout fellows in Mahratta armour with blazing caste marks on their heads, Mussulman princes in green muslin, half savage folk in tiger skins, and, alas, not a few whose faces I recognized. I made out the figure of the Nawab of Bengal, the form of the Delhi Moghul, Shah Alam, and, seated on the step of the dais and looking up at the enthroned Chevalier, no less a person than the Nawab of Oudh. I recall how the sight of this last person disturbed me; how bitterly I yelled across the separating gulf, reproaching him with his infidelity to me, upbraiding him for his falseness in thus renouncing his allegiance and serving my enemy.

I vituperated with might and main, till at length, the Chevalier, smiling wearily and tolerantly, put out his hand and sent me hurtling down into those seemingly illimitable depths into which an o'ertried stomach is wont to plunge us o'nights. And when these depths had been breathlessly plumbed, I found myself on the parade at the Settlement, endeavouring to drill a squadron of horse. But they wore scarlet jackets no longer, but dresses of blue and grey and silver instead, with little silverlaced hats. And to every order I gave, they performed a movement diametrically different; till, mortified and worn out with endeavour, I turned, to find that the men were obeying not my orders, but those of a French sirdar of the Oudh Army who stood behind me

Whereat my rage was so exquisite that I woke.

Thereafter I lay drowsing, seeking for an interpretation of this nightmare. What meant this pictured apotheosis of the

Chevalier, his appearance as a monarch seated upon the lily throne of France and reigning serenely among the princes ? What meant this ghostly parading of French light cavalry in the very precincts of Fort William ? Surely it was all a portent, and an evil portent at that, as the symbols favoured Duselin and his folk suggesting in fact a state of things palpably absurd.

Chasseurs in Calcutta . . . pish ! And Asaf-ud-Dowlah ? Why should he find a place among the sycophants of a French lord puisne ? Was it a warning . . . this dream of mine ?

The recollection of the Nawab's name brought the prophetic utterances of Claude Martin clearly to my mind, his certainty of war in the west, his declaration of the necessity of keeping well in with the princes of central India, because we might one day want to march our armies through their lands. But what had we to fear from Asaf-ud-Dowlah, should this need arise? His dominions lay not on the direct route; we had beaten his father and reinstated him upon our own terms; we had lent him our troops and protection, and had now extended that protection to his son. The Prince of Oudh was our friend, surely, carefully eyed and influenced by us. Further, he was after all a Subahdar of the Emperor at Delhi, though truly he was virtually absolute, since the Moghul was but a puppet who danced to the strings pulled by Mahratta fists. Would he indeed ever play the traitor . . . forsake us at the vicarious bidding of the Emperor, or of his own volition ? Even so, what could he do ?

I pictured the army of Britain tramping through Bengal to the west; their exceedingly tenuous line of communication with English territory and aid running through the lands of stranger Eastern princes. I thought of the hordes of potential fighting men, the feudal levies, who could be assembled at their desire, leaping from the ground, armed and accoutred, like Cadmus' dragon's teeth soldiery of the old legend. Memory showed me again the serried lines of the now dead day, with the gallant Frenchmen leading and exhorting. How like maniacs the moors had fought under those barbed tongues, and with what perfect confidence in the foreign paladins.

Their obedience had been the obedience of implicit faith; their orderly rallies spoke of stern drillings and discipline. Yes, they could be made good fighting men, these stout peasants of Hindoostan, and their French officers were making them so. French officers !... imported into Oudh by Dusclin, inimical body and soul to England, yet wielding a mighty personal influence and control throughout the army. Heaven ! What did this really mean ?

To what end was the tampering of the Chevalier with these pagan legions ?

What was the question he would ask of the Prince on the ninth of June?

I fell into a sweat at the violence of my thinking. A sense of calamity impending, of imminent disaster, overwhelmed me.

Conscience stabbed me shrewdly and banished sleep for good and all. I was an Englishman, a quondam English soldier, albeit my circumstances were for the present somewhat involved. Yet I had known of this intriguing on the part of my country's great rivals in this imperial land, and had ignored it. Partly, truly, because I had regarded it as something safely to be ignored... we of England are ever too prone to disregard foreign subtleties ... but chiefly since the weight of mine own affairs pressed heavily upon me.

Lying awake in the dark, heated interior, in company with my newly-awakened sense of duty, I had a mighty uneasy time. And so moved was I, that I decided then and there that a warning message must be sent to those whom it would most concern ere another sun had set. The form it should take and the method of delivery exercised me greatly; and, at length, with no clear plan conceived, I watched the dawn light creeping in.

I hastened to dress, disturbing the sirdar, who had returned even later than I to the tent overnight, and who insisted of his innate courtesy in rising with me; though it was plain that he had no clear idea where he was nor whom I was either.

But he commanded his syce to fetch and make ready my horse, at which I was grateful, having no servant.

I stepped from the vitiated air of the tent to sniff the sharp, scented breeze of the morning, and in doing so, because the world was still bosky with the dawn, I almost fell over the *jogi*, who, loins girded, Hessians on leg, and caste mark renewed, sat in carven patience awaiting me.

He raised himself with a groan that told of rheumy joints and announced himself ready for the move, but I hastened on at once to Harryman's tent.

The surgeon was riscn and was vainly endeavouring to set his *toupée* square upon his polished pate.

"G'mornin', Warren," he grunted sourly. "Can tell me why i' the devil's name I didn't bring my wig stand to camp ? This chevalure o' mine is crushed to hell and I gave ten guineas for it... no less... of that French hunks who waits on the Governor. Assured me 'twas the latest fling from the Macaroni.'

"Jo," I asked, ignoring the question, "when may you return to Calcutta?"

"Eh? Why, I'm more or less unofficially here now, y'know. Simply outweighed old Murray, who commands at Calcutta, and squeezed this trip out of him. Told him I might be needed and ought to go with the Colonel, and that if he didn't let me go, I'd never certify a flux for him when he wants a day or two off duty again. Dessay the Colonel'll let me go at any time. But why?"

"I have a message for Calcutta."

"As urgent as all that ?"

"Yes, it concerns the war."

"Which war... not the ... ahem ... Mahratta War?" "Yes... the Mahratta War, indeed."

"Ha! Has old Claude kept ye awake as well as me? 'Pon my soul, he shamed me prodigious last night for chuckling at the Colonel's fire-eating ideas. What simpletons we have been. It really looks as though we shall be embroiled again ere long." "It is all true, I am convinced," I said. "And that is the reason of my anxiety. Have you ever thought, Jo, that Duselin's interests in Oudh may be connected with it ? Why should he pay Armonde to obtain places in the Oudh Army for Frenchmen ?"

"Phew !" whistled the surgeon. "To tell ye the truth, I hadn't given the matter much thought. After what happened in Chauhati, I intended to report the collusion between Armonde and Duselin for a reason you know. But the death of young Brunel . . . and what came after . . . clean drove all thoughts of the political pother from my mind. And then, Frenchmen do this sort of thing in the usual run . . . an' you can't take it seriously . . . it's so tortuous and idealistic . . . their plotting. But now, when I come to think of it . . . "

"I didn't emphasize all that I heard in the Sher Khoti between the Chevalicr and Bulger, because, I confess, it seemed insignificant to me, in comparison with other things ; .selfish as I have been."

"Gad, and you think the request for a private audience has something to do with the plot?"

" I do."

"Hum!" commented Harryman, wagging his head sagely. "Hum! Yes! To be sure it's plaguey likely. Look'ee! I'll ride with you to-day to Faizabad, and thence to Calcutta. I will take these news to a discreet quarter, the very discreetest of quarters, and we shall see. I wonder though what lies underncath this business; I'd give the dooce of a lot to know the colour of Duselin's cards. But, lad, if he would suborn the leopard we must seek counsel of the tiger. Yes, we'll ignore this fellow Bristow here. He's against the Governor, I'm told. Ay, I know to whom to go... Abdul Rahim, you illegitimate offspring of a byblow sow..."

He yelled instructions at his unfortunate servant, till the fellow was darting a dozen ways at once.

"Duselin," I stated, "left for Faizabad last night. 'Tis urgent to hurry."

"Phew ! D'ye say so. The swine ! But we'll get there first, lad. Never fear !"

"We shall have our work cut out to do so. Did I tell you that the date of the Chevalier's interview with the Nawab is fixed for the ninth of June?"

"The ninth o' June, b' God ! I'll lay every stiver I've got, that he's riding to Fort William in the midst of a half squadron on the eighth. He must not gain the Nabob's ear. The man is romantickal and not over sound . . . witness this fad for shifting the capital. And Duselin is plausible, as we only too well know; so that with the authority he may have to back him, he may do much. An' you must stick in his tracks at Faizabad, Jack, and see where he goes. And, look'ee, see her personally, and speak to her . . . if possible. Her being Miss Brunel. I tell ye this, that Dusclin ha'nt got a hope in that quarter, so you needn't worry yourself about what he'll find in his path ere he goes much further. Damn this shirt ! These frills never will trick out properly over the top of the waistcoat. Ay, I'm ready . . . almost, that is ! "

An hour later, our little cavalcade of mounts and pack jingled out on to the gun-rutted road; the sentinels of the camp wondering visibly at the spectacle of a Rajpoot chief and a plethoric feringi in company, and exclaiming at the sight of an ascetic in Hessian boots, who muttered sibilant charms for the dawn pains in his ancient joints as he jolted by on his fiddleheaded monstrosity of a horse.

### XIV

## " A sparrow hawk did hold in Wicked jail... the nightingale " Тномаѕ Weelkes, 1600.

SOMEWHERE on the road, Duselin evaded us.

Towards evening we sighted him in the distance, riding in an attitude of dejection, his head sunk between his shoulders. Behind him rode Bulger, at least, one I took to be Bulger from his bulk and atrocious seat.

Immediately, I fell back with Harryman, and Madhava was sent forward with instructions to keep the twain in sight until the capital was reached and the Chevalier's destination therein revealed.

But, not long after, the priest rode back, quite unabashed, to say that his quarry had ridden out of sight and were no longer following the direct road; nor did he know in which direction they had gone.

"See, Lord, I—I did but stoop for a moment to adjust this boot of mine, and to exchange a word or two with one I know ... a *jogi* who has penetrated the northern hills in search of knowledge and who ...."

"Where are the men I bade you follow?"

"Brother, I rode in a vast circle with the point of their vanishment as centre, but, alack, no sign could I find of them. See, brother, what comes of procrastination when bent on great affairs . . . note how the slightest wandering of the attention, the inopportune deviation of the mind, may wreck great schemes. How saith Firdusi the Persian . . . ?"

With the serenest urbanity the priest drew a moral from his own default and would doubtless have lectured me at length, had I not sworn at him heartily (in English) and bade him retire. He obeyed, but only to pick up the thread of his argument where I had broken it and deliver his homily *in extenso* to the unhappy surgeon. So that there was nothing for it but to hasten on and see what was to be seen in Faizabad.

On our arrival, Harryman took up his abode in the Resident's house, which had been left in charge of the servants while that official was away, to await the escort from Lucknow that would take him back to the Settlement; while I fared forth again; dispatching Madhava to watch the city gate at the east, by which it seemed most probable that Duselin would take his departure.

Between a daybreak of pink and pearl, and a sunset of orange and matve, I wandered amidst the painted walls and carven lintels of the city, and I found, eventually, a large house with a yellow fish of impossible species blatant on its façade, and I knew it for the house of a viceregal official from this insignia. It lay, as Bulger had described, hard by the silver market; but it seemed a most unlikely spot and though I watched it for long, I saw none but servants come and go from it; and at length cursed Bulger for deceiving me and looked elsewhere.

Harryman would pat me on the back on each occasion that I returned for refreshment to his quarters, saying, "Jan hai to jahan hei," by which he meant to convey that while there is life there is hope; though this is not quite the literal meaning of the proverb.

"Denmit," he cried. "What help can I give with a face and figure like mine? Were 1 to dress up, I'd be helped out of Faizabad in a hurry in a brace o' shakes. And without disguise I'm worse than useless ; Duselin knowing me so well."

Another day, and with it came the escort arranged for by Harryman to meet him in the capital. The sergeant and his men went into bivouac near the eastern gate, there to wait the coming of their charge when the heat of the day was done.

In the late afternoon, I took my leave of Harryman.

"Here's the best o' luck and fortune," he jerked. "Pray lud, you find your lady soon, and that you'll find also what to do with her when you have discovered her. For the rest, if you're r ot back in Calcutta with the squadron within a month or so, the blame be upon me." I shook my head doubtfully at the ultimate phrases.

"I shall know what to do when I find Miss Brunel," I said with some dignity; for I could not understand the reference to my course of action at all; nor did I like the tone in which it was uttered. "A moor I shall remain even to her until my name is cleared, lest hers be shadowed. In these days people imagine such ridiculous situations."

"True," answered the surgeon very gravely. "But look, I've told the servants and the sepoi guard that you'll continue to reside here with the Resident's full knowledge and consent. The lie don't count a doit, since Bristow won't be coming back what time the Nabob plans his new capital. You'll find some canaster, a bundle o' seegars, and some other useful articles on that spidery Bugglepore table there. D'ye want money ? No ? Well, I must be off. Give me your pud, lad. God keep you ! 'Tis but a short space to the ninth o' June, and by then I shall have seen you again, and someone else besides. That she is in Faizabad and safe I do believe. Well, *au revoir !*"

Harryman jerked my hand spasmodically for a moment and bustled off through the verandah's portico to where his horse awaited him.

I rode with Harryman and Madhava to the city limits.

The spearmen at the gate watched curiously as the sergeant of the guard escort, sighting the surgeon, meticulously examined the carbines of the men, their belts and pouches, the pack animals and water skins. So long was he in doing this, that my friend informed his impassive subordinate, with choler, that he had no mind to lie in Faizabad another night; that he had but a score of years left him by the Biblical reckoning; and that if those spavinned nags didn't soon fall into line, somebody's chevrons would be in grave danger, gadzooks and b'God !

Therefore, soon the scarlet coatees merged into the purple of the gloom, and the ringing of sabre and harness died away. I turned again to the City as the studded gates swung to, and the night watch touched their matches into glowing stars of fire.

"He has a good face . . . that man," suddenly said the voice of Madhava.

I had clean forgotten that he rode at my elbow; and I think he knew and rather resented this.

"He is a good man," I replied; for I knew he meant the surgeon.

We turned our horses back, and entered the Silver Bazaar.

I rode listlessly down the avenue of shops, as the merchants came forth with unwieldy locks and massive keys to make their premises secure.

The house with the flamboyant fish over the door came into view. I drew rein and studied it, wondering if it were worth the entry.

The slender spire of a mosque rose behind the shuttered houses on the opposite side of the street, and access was gained to it by means of a passage leading from the thoroughfare. I wheeled my horse into this, Madhava following, and from this shelter, incongruous though it was for Hindoo and feringi, I took stock of the building under consideration.

The street was dim lit by the smoky glare of a wall link, such cressets having been introduced by the late Viceroy to reduce *thugee* in the streets; but the early moon, rising gently clear of the city's jagged outline, shed a revealing radiance round. The trees shone out in silver sequin gleams, and threw a tracery of black and grey upon the ground.

A courtyard surrounded the house, bounded by a low wall. There were *peepul* trees within it, and, I thought, a fountain. The square *khoti* itself was of fine brick, plastered, and the yellow fish writhed in tortured attitudes upon its every face. There was a filigree'd penthouse to the front, where lay the chief door, and a row of servants' houses at the rear. The higher windows of the house were barred . . . the *zenana* windows they probably were. I noted that a tall *peepul* reared up but a few feet from the wall, and its branches would give easy access to those barred windows; it was a natural ally of any intrigue that might be pursued in the mansion.

Again my eyes wandered to the little barred windows, and

then, as I watched, I saw two slim, pale hands grip the bars of one. Next moment, a face, equally as pale, was pressed against the bars, so that it looked out and upwards towards the moon. And the face was the face of Rosalie Brunel. How long I sat there, spellbound, I know not; but I feared to move lest the face vanish as it did so often in those dreams wherein the child's beauty haunted me through agonizing nights.

I saw the delicate fingers grip the bars anew; and even across the space that separated us, the reflected sparkle of the large eyes reached mine.

At last I slithered from the saddle, handed my bridle to Madhava, stood for a moment irresolute, then padded across the way and into the courtyard; sneaking like a thief by the sleeping guardian (a *chowkidar* with a belt full of pistols) to hide deep in the shadow of the fig tree that nestled against the wall. The painted façade reared stark above me; the lower windows were faced with blank shutters, and I could not be seen from them.

Slowly and carefully I commenced to climb the tree, leaving the skin of shins and heels upon the rough bark. I attained the lower boughs and thence progress was rapid. Presently I looked up from my search for foot-holds, and found myself face to face with her I loved, panting and too moved to think or speak.

My lady watched me with a faint smile.

"Well," she asked, in her quaintly broken moors, "who art thou, climber of trees?"

"Thy friend, lady, thy friend," I assured her, in a voice husked by combined emotion and caution.

"I don't believe thee," said Miss Brunel, and smiled again. Climb down as thou hast climbed up, or I will call the guard."

"Lady," I beseeched, "I am here to help thee. I am truly thy friend."

"I have no friends . . . of thy colour," was the retort, and Rosalie loosened her hold on the bars as though to retire.

"Do you not recognize me ?" I muttered urgently. "Look at my face."

I allowed the moonlight to fall for a brief interval on my features. "I am that Talukdar, Indra Rama, he who gave thee shelter at his house a while back."

"I know no Talukdar," answered Rosalie, yet looked pretty keenly at me all the same. "How should I... a woman... shelter in the house of a strange man?"

"Lacy," I pleased, "thou knowest 'tis so. Believe me ... I knew thee then for ... for what thou wert, a woman and no man."

A frightened look leapt into the girl's face, she breathed in deeply and quick.

"Thou knewest me? How shouldst thou? Speak, man! What is truly thine errand? What wouldst have of me?"

"Queen of the World, I am here because I heard, because I knew, that thou art in danger and need my aid. Oh, wilt thou not believe that I mean no harm to thee; that I would aid thee... free thee and seek no reward?"

I saw my lady taking eager stock of me, I saw the pale cheeks flush and the eyes brighten with hope.

"How didst thou learn ... that ... that which thou didst learn?" Rosalie questioned, denying no longer. "Who told thee, too, of my present state?"

"We cf Hind have sharp eyes, lady. For the other matter, a friend . . . a priest, heard of thy plight here in Faizabad, and did tell me of it . . . that thou art a prisoner in the hands of this house's owner, and I, having reaped great benefits from the kindness of the white people, would set thee free and befriend thee. Is my word not true? Art thou not here against thy pleasure?"

"Yes,' answered Rosalie. "I am a prisoner . . . the prisoner cf two men. But where wouldst thou take me?"

"Wheresoever thou listeth, lady . . . to thy friends."

"I desire to stay in Faizabad, or at least to return here anon. My only friends are here."

My heart sank. Was it Duselin, after all ? Surely not, since he had immured her here. Then who were her "only friends"?

Rosalie lowered her head as though in thought, and I saw that the silk of a saree covered her wonderful hair. I eased my aching limbs a bit, as I awaited the decision. It was a painful moment in more than the physical sense. Supposing Miss Brunel refused to be rescued after all, should I be wise in revealing my true identity? Nay, I would not do so except as a last resource. Jack Warren had vanished into thin air as far as Miss Brunel was concerned; she must never again be worried by him or his affairs.

The prisoner seemed to reach some decision.

"Talukdar Sahib, I am minded to trust thee, though I know naught of thee, nor why thou comest thus mysteriously to me. Yet I am here a double prisoner and the gods alone know how long this incarceration may endure, or what awaits me at the end of it. If you can release me, I will come with thee."

"Good words," I whispered, vastly relieved. "There is little time. Tell me, lady, how lie the rooms of this house, and what are its ways. May I enter or not?"

"Nay, there are many servants, and the master is here though asleep. I know him not. He is a very fat man and sleeps early and long. This room is my own, but in the next sleep two eunuchs whose duty it is to watch me. If they awoke now, they would see thee from their window. There are also women who attend me; but I know not where they lie."

"Listen, lady," I instructed. "Get ready thy goods, or such as will suffice for a small journey. I will go get tools and root up the bars from this window. Then shalt thou descend by this tree and ride with me to my house, the Sher Khoti, therein to rest and consider. Will that content thee?"

That Miss Brunel regarded the latter part of the proposal with doubt was obvious; but she consented and turned from the window, while I sought for my first descending foothold. And then . . .

A horseman, attended by a servant, rode into the compound, and there was I, bagged as neatly as any badger, one foot

stretching downward in a gymnastic attitude, the whole of me frozen stilf against the cree and patiently awaiting discovery.

The rider was muffled to the eyes in a quilted robe, but I knew him as a hound will know a jackal though it be wrapped in a fleece.

He bade the sergeant awake the *chowkidar*, and this was accomplished after a minute or two of energetic effort and lusty howling. The watchman raised his eyelids with his fingers, yawned, cocked some half-dozen of his pistols, presented a pair at Duselin, and wished him peace.

"Call thy master," snapped the Chevalier.

"Huzeor, he sleepeth."

" Call thy master, egg of a monkey," snapped the Chevalier.

" Immediately, Ambassador of God I"

A ponderous lock was manipulated; latches of carved wood were raised; and a servant, evidently sleeping on the threshold, was awakened with lamentation. The *chowkidar* uncocked his armoury and settled himself on the charpoy again, to resume his watch as heretofore.

Duselin flung off his wrapper irritably and dismounted. Under cover of his movement, I settled myself astride a limb and cursed my luck silently but exhaustively.

Presently a dim glow shone from the open door and a slave appeared carrying a *chirag* in one hand and a sword in the other.

Behind him I distinguished a great, sky-blue bulk, a man of Falstaffian size wrapped in a quilt. From the depths of the quilt came a querulous groan.

"Ram, ram, what desireth my brother at this hour of the night?"

"'T is but the third hour, brother," answered Duselin. "I come as I forewarned thee, for my friend who dwelleth in thy keeping. I ride for the east and would have his company."

"Taubah !" (Alas !) ejaculated the other, and something in the petulant whining voice touched a chord of memory. Somewhere, and not over long ago, I had heard that voice before. "Why that, brother? Come, tell the young man of my coming, and, of thy kindness, have his horse put in trim."

"Ha'e ha'e, how can I, friend, when he is not here ?"

"Not here ! What meanest thou by that ? Waste not time in the venting of wind, brother. Where is the youth ?"

"Alas! How shall I account to thee, friend of my soul? How pitiful has been my stewardship. 'I'ruly didst thou place this young man in my keeping as my guest... but I let him go. But two days past he brought me a scripture, saying, 'Behold, this is from my friend, the Stay of my Life. I must go to him. He is at Nucklao with the Viceroy and demandeth my presence, begging thee to put my feet comfortably in the way.' So, believing this, I armed him with food and money and let him go. And now..."

"Thou fool !" stormed Dusclin, angrier than I have ever seen him. "Thou faithless friend ! Is this the way thou rewardest me for that which I have wrought for thee with the Prince. Art such a simpleton as to believe as truth that which thou canst not read? Did 1 not say, 'He shall remain with thee until I come again, and until then let him not from thy sight? *Bewakoof* ! *Budmash* ! *Teri aisi taisi* !" (Stupid ! Scoundrel ! Could I only express what I think of thee !)

"Sri Krishnajee ! I swear I believed the youth. Alas ! How should I know he lied ?"

For a moment or two, the twain reviled each other, Duselin's voice, incisive and modulated, sounding as a clavecin accompaniment to the shrill, gibbering complaint of the other.

Then, drawn at this most unfortunate of moments by the uproar came Rosalie to her window. And the Chevalier's quick eye saw and recognized her.

He fell silent on the instant, and remained peering intently.

Then, when he was satisfied beyond all doubt, he crouched like a panther and sprang straight for the fat man's throat; bearing him with a thunderous crash to the ground.

"Liar !" he cried, as he fumbled in the quilted folds for a grip. "Thy blood be on thine own head !"

The fat fellow let forth a discordant scream.

"Hola ! Selig Ram ! Santa Singh ! Ram Chand ! To me ! Torches ! I am a dead man !"

Where on earth had I heard that shricking yell before ?

Even then, peering through the interlacing branches at where the twain rolled, I wondered at the change in Duselin. Such violence was foreign to him, and on this occasion it was criminally reckless; for it lost the game for us both.

The great house, which had already given murmurous signs of waking, now filled with the clamour of voices, lights blazed from the windows, and faces looked forth. I saw the servant strike blindly out with his sword at the struggling pair, and from the yell which resulted, I should say he smote his master. Three hal<sup>2</sup>-naked men, armed with wooden clubs, ran forth to join in the fray. The torch held by one bronze giant showed Duselin, his face drawn with fury, squatting astride the bulky form which writhed inelegantly beneath him. He was dragged off by the newcomers, and hurled, still fighting, to the ground.

The prostrate Falstaff ceased to roar and bade his men hurl the feringi into the street and kill him there.

"Kill I im in the street. They'll think it's *thug's* work. Kill him, I say. He hath murdered me !"

From the brevity of his cries, I should have said that the murder affected nothing more than Falstaff's bellows.

The three men stood up from Duselin, hesitating at so ruthless a command; and at the relaxation of their hold, the Chevalier leapt up and dashed for the gate like a hare, his erstwhile captors at his heels.

He spec through the postern, and that was the last I saw of him that night.

It was also the last I saw of anything on this disastrous eve, for I had clean forgotten in my interest in the events beneath me, the cunuch guard of Rosalie Brunel.

One of these gentlemen spied me from his window, hastened into Rosalie's chamber, and stretching a lean arm through the bars, laid a mighty stroke from his brass-bound staff on my defenceless noddle. The bamboo struck a flame from my brain as though it had been a giant flint hammering on a mighty steel. I let go my hold on the tree and on life.

Rosalie's pale, beautiful face shone for an instant before my fire-dazzled eyes; then seemed to wizen till it turned to the countenance of Madhava. From somewnere very near a shot blazed into the night; and then I struck the ground and fell through it into a chasm of soft, murky darkness and illimitable depth.





# IN WHICH CAPTAIN WARREN DOES MORE RAVESDROPPING, AND PROWLS BY NIGHT TO GREAT ADVANTAGE





# "Thou canst not wynn me with thy flattering tongue." OLD PLAY.

A cool breeze blew, and I opened my eyes, awakened at its caress.

The sun was shining brightly down upon a familiar sward, and reflected gleams danced on my couch from the veined columns of marble and the mother-o'-pearl inlet in the ceiling of the baradari of the Blue Garden. I knew my surroundings in a moment, and also the wrinkled features, which, expressing a comical concern, looked down upon me.

"Madhava," I muttered, and recollection came with the word.

"Mad ava," I implored. "Where is she?"

"Who?" he asked. "Sovona? She is but gone to bring new *neam* leaves and herbs to renew the poultice."

I lay s lent, thinking hard.

Presently I questioned again.

"How didst get me here in a single night, priest ? "

Madhava motioned to the boys who fanned me with great leaves, to cease.

"A single night ! 'Tis three weeks since thou hast talked with thine own voice . . . three long weeks ! But the *hakeem* adjureth that you move not, and he knoweth much, although a Persian, having overmuch faith in his spikenards, mumiais and pahzers and suchlike things. So close thine eyes and sleep again."

"Nay," I protested. "Sleep comes not to the troubled mind, therefore ease me first. How did I come here?"

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"I shot the man who would have struck thee again as thou were as one dead upon the ground, with the *tamancha* (pistol) from thy holster, and then, since the others had gone in the tracks of the Francese, I raised thee and brought thee to the Francese's horse which had a deep saddle, and on it brought thee here."

" Alone ? "

"The servant of the Francese aided me. A *tamancha* is a great argument e'en though an empty one. The man I sent away, but the horse, an Arab, I kept ; for it is a good one."

The jogi paused, and I thought I detected a suspicion of unsteadiness in his cracked tones as he went on :

"Ha'e, ha'e; I thought thee dead, for thy face was glazed with blood and thou movedst not through all these days; though I fed thee with wine through a cornstalk as thy teeth were tight closed. All these burning days have we watched, I and Sovona, here in the baradari, and now, at last, thou knowest us again. *Khodawund*, I thank the Great God."

The jogi had never called me "Khodawund" before, nor had he, save in argument, referred to a Deity who stood alone; and by these signs I perceived how deeply he was moved.

"And Duselin?" I asked anxiously.

"Who? Ah, the Francese, thou wouldst say. Ya'e, but he flew like the wind and is gone I know not where. Now say no more, lest thy senses enter Jehannum again."

Presently came the little Persian *hakeem* with his casket of ointments and herbal decoctions, and ran gentle fingers over my wound.

"Mashallah !" he murmured, "I am pleased to see thee thus, Miyan. For days hath the spirit wandered with the shades, while demons muttered from thy lips. The festering of thy wound and the fever of the journey gave them entrance. Fan stronger, little rascals; it growth passing hot. Where are the leaves, Madhava; these are over stale.".

"The girl bringeth them. How farcs my brother?"

"Well now, and, Inshallah, will fare better. But he may not talk much, and needs to conserve his strength. A little

food will help him now. H'm, 'tis a 'hot ' malady, therefore let the food be 'cold.' Had we but a morsel of good Ispahan melon now; but a few curds will do as well, or a fine *pilau* with orange peel to tempt, and sherbet with rose water and pomegranate seeds. No tamarinds, which are too bitter; but a cardomom or so to rest the food when 'tis down. And very little, mark thou ! Later I will prescribe again."

A soft tep announced the arrival of Sovona with the cooling leaves, and having adjusted the bandage, the *hakeem* took himself off.

One by one they came then, my people of the household, to look at me with wondering, gentle eyes, and pass out again ... Sipihr, a tronze giant glistening in his Rajpoot mail, diffident and shy; the old Kirani, peering through his horn spectacles, ink horn and pen case rattling at his girdle, fingers stained with ink ... and the others; even Siva's sacred bull heaved his vast white bulk on to the marble floor and stared down at me with liquid eyes of purple brown, and nuzzled the robes with his sacred nose, till the punkah boy prodded him so that he lumbered indignantly off.

Then when they had gone, Sovona stepped gracefully before me and raised the imaginary dust of humility to her forehead.

"Mahacaj !" she whispered, very low.

I closed my eyes until I heard the girl's departing footfall, for I could not bear the pain in her eyes, nor the sound of her low, husky voice, vibrating with the burden of her passion.

Like a felled log, I lay for another week, sleeping much; scarce waking indeed for the ministrations of the *hakeem* and the priest.

So long as this torpor of weakness prevailed, my mind was more or less at rest. Sustained thought, or involved threads of argument, invariably dazed me to sleep again ; but, as I grew more the master of myself, the old ache returned and in access, by reason of what I had so recently seen.

In due time, when I could sit up, and walk a little, I let the melancholy gnaw me as 1 drank the scent of the jasmine and clematis, ard my infelicity was increased by the slim shadow that ever haunted the garden, materializing now and then into a fleeting vision of tinsel-edged silk and tender, dusky limbs.

Courage, however, grew with strength, and the hope which is man's eternal heritage crept into my breast with tentative thrills. In a few days I could sit a horse, perhaps . . . and then . . .

So I would bellow to the *jogi* to bear me company and divert me with a tale; but presumably, however, I still remained too taciturn to please him, for he installed himself as a sort of mental doctor and prescribed for me with a calm brutality that took my breath away.

"What of this trouble of thine, brother ?" he said. "Why heed it whilst thou must remain thus impotent, awaiting strength for a fresh onslaught ? What is woman after all but a chattel ? What too, is this life of ours that we should spend it in harbouring misery and secret griefs ? What saith the Brahmin sage ... 'The world is but as a bough of a tree whereon we as birds perch for a moment and then flit away.'... Therefore be not morose. Take her who loveth thee here for a space, and be happy whilst you may."

With which comforting advice the priest stole away, leaving me amazed at his knowledge of what I deemed a secret from him; until I remembered that Sovona knew, and that Madhava's intense shrewdness enabled him to ferret around in the unsuspecting minds of the household folk as he would.

Some days later came a diversion.

As I was walking unsteadily about the great house one evening, Sipihr the warrior clanked into my presence and announced a visitor.

"Who is it ?" I asked. "Why dost thou not admit him ?"

"Lord, it is the *amil*, Deo Narayan, with whom we fought not long ago, and against, whom with the aid of thee and Krishna, we prevailed. I came first for thy word."

I am convinced that Sipihr and most of the underlings of the estate cherished the idea that I was but half mortal; and I smiled at the precedence he gave me over the god in his speech.

"Admit him," I ordered. "Methinks his teeth are drawn; but see that he be alone, and stand the men to arms."

Sipihr saluted and went out.

However, there was no need for warlike precaution, for not only had the *amil* come alone save for his personal escort, but he came palpably on an errand of conciliation. His first act was to make me the owner of a considerable bulk of valuable spices, mask, ambergris, safflower, and attar, a phylactery or scapular of gold to contain amulets, and a globular lamp of wrought silver that one might roll upon the ground without extinguishing.

The amil was in a state of scarce concealed alarm, too; and I supposed it to be on account of my visit to the Nawab.

Howbeit, I ushered him in with due ceremony and he plumped down on a divan in the baradari; his flesh seeming to flow and settle in unctuous waves over the soft surface. I looked at him curiously. Deo Narayan must have been a personable man at one time, although he had now swollen to the grossest proportions; and his skin was of the fine, light hue and delicate texture, and his features cut with that clean chiselling which tells of caste.

We watched together in silence as a servant set out on a Moorish stool the brass urns and pots for the making of *pan*. With deft fingers the fellow spread the leaf, sprinkled it with scented betel and areca in nice proportion and smeared the whole with lime and catechu. Deo Narayan crunched the result between his crimson stained teeth with satisfaction; rolling his greedy little cyes over the rich appointments of the room.

For a time we talked desultorily about our respective healths, the weather and suchlike things, but withal I could see my visitor rolling his boneless bulk about in a fidget of uneasiness.

At last he could dissemble no more.

"Hast been to see the Nawab, *Lala*?" he gurgled. "I trust that thy mission was auspiciously accomplished?"

"Of a truth, it was so," I answered, and nothing more.

"Perchance he mentioned my name?" continued the taxgatherer after a pause, with a laborious air of nonchalance. His growing malaise robbed his speech of that circumlocution which natives employ so fulsomely in discussing matters of any delicacy.

"He did."

"Ah, and what did he say? If I may know?"

"Thou mayst know an thou wishest, *Lala-ji*," responded I, and went on clearly and weightily. "The Viceroy said that the *Amil* who so unjustly taxed Sher Singh, the least turbulent of talukdars, was a knave who should pay a heavy amend."

The vast carcase of my guest shook so violently at these words, that I feared it would never subside into its perpetual aspen-like quiver again. He had evidently expected a more salutary punishment than that threatened, for there was relief, as well as a note of fear in his voice when he spoke again.

"A great Prince," he murmured. "A merciful lord whom it is a felicity to serve. Ya'e, it is with reason that the people say of him already : 'Jisko na de Maula, tisko de Asfi-Daulah.'" (To whom God giveth not, giveth Asaf-ud-Dowlah.)

Deo Narayan motioned for the plumed fan above him to be waved the faster; and in order to hide the nervous palsy which still shook him, he grabbed a fistful from a large charger of sugar-cane, ready clipped and peeled.

"Thou art bidden to see the Prince again, is it not so, friend ? "he went on, speaking thickly by reason of the mouthful of cane and *pan*. "Then to prove that all enmity has ceased between this house and mine, thou wilt without doubt explain that there was a slight miscalculation of the dues, an unhappy error on the part of a lazy clerk, which was the inception of this trouble. 'Twould be a neighbourly act, an implied intercession for an unfortunate man which would bear much weight, ay, and good fruit for you, friend."

The speaker leaned forward insinuatingly as he mouthed the last few words.

Egad, 'twas on the tip of my tongue to tell the Amil

that Radha would not dance, but I checked myself and rose, saying :

" A repast awaits us."

Deo Narayan levered himself from the divan and waddled to the other end of the marble summer-house with me. Here a slight collation of f. aits and cakes was set. Now, ere bloating himself further with the delicacies, my exigent guest must first satisfy himself that the cakes were *pukka*, which is that they were fried with *ghee* and not prepared with water; and being reassured as to the care we of the Sher Khoti had for caste minutia, he set himself to grunt and slobber over them for all the world like a Sussex hog with a feed of acorns.

A fragrant hookah seemed to put the fellow more at his ease; and his natural arrogance began to assert itself offensively in bold criticisms of the house and gardens he coveted, and the ordering of the lands; and he lectured me, soundly I confess, on the running of the estate with economy and profit.

The tame peafowl strutted haughtily around to pick up the fragments of food, and the *Amil* would have fondled them, had they not fied in alarm.

"Sweet and sacred creatures," apostrophised the *Amil* unctuously, "whose feathers contain the antidote for venom of snakes and various ills. Are indeed beautiful... an adornment fit to beautify the gardens of the gods themselves. But I, *Lala*..."... he turned to me confidentially... "have something, in my garden which is far more lovely than these, and more precious than rain in a desert, or the Nawab's jewels... a white peacock ... a thing of lissome grace and charm unparallelec. It has gained the sovereignty alike over my garden and my neart—yea—1 value it far above all my possessions and they are vast, thanks be to Ganesh."

I had heard of the splendour of these snow-white birds, yet the fulsome gush of the *Amil*, and the grin he gave, like that of a mad maudlin in his cups, led me to suspect some underlying meaning.

For an hour or more, I was forced to endure the company of the *Amil*, and his jabber concerning this new toy peacock of his; and I did it with a fair patience, though I was like to kick him out of the baradari once for a remark he let fall about Sovona.

A man more odiously greedy I protest I've never met. Everything he set his bleared eyes on he wanted, ay, and was barefaced enough to ask for. He grew quite sulky when he found that ten minutes of flattery was insufficient inducement to me to hand over my best pair of Rigbys. Small wonder that the rascal hazarded a throw for the fertile lands of the taluka . . . with loaded dice.

Thus, I was not surprised when it came about that, my precious miniature of Rosalie swinging out from my tunic upon its cord, he should seize it with his pudgy hands and fall to slavering over it in a very rapture of desire.

"Lord, I must have this. Was ever anything so desirable ever wrought by man. Beshak t it is Saraswati..." The Amil broke off with breath caught, and a great change.came over his fleshy face as he examined my treasure. The fat creased into layers around his little eyes as he peered from the picture to me with an expression I could not read. There were astonishment, fear, and for some reason, a suggestion of jealousy, writ plainly upon the repulsive countenance; the greasy yellow visage turned the ghastly hue of mildewed leather.

"Where didst get this treasure, lord ?" asked Narayan, very quietly.

Maliciously I answered that it was a portrait of a mighty queen, and that I had taken it from the corpse of a white man, one of her own race, who died of hunger on the road from Haiderabad.

"Lala-ji, an thou wouldst show thy friendship and forgiveness of me for what is past, give me this jewel, I beg, I beseech of you," wheedled my guest. "Nay, give it me not then. Let me purchase it from thee. I'll give thee double, treble, ay, ten times its worth. Surely it can be of no value to thee."

He ran off into a sickening whine, and his fawning prattle reminded me of a child begging a sucket or a bun.

Disgusted, I put up the ivory disc, and told my pesterer to have done, that the thing was an amulet of great power, and that nothing on earth would induce me to part with it. Whereon he became as silent as an owl.

"Hear me, Sahib," I said. "Thou hast come here because thou fearest the result of my complaint against thee to the Prince, and for no other reason. I have nothing against thee, and in my complaint was there no personal animus. Go, therefore in peace, but seek not to gain my friendship nor my help... for I would as lief aid a toad, or a cobra against the vengeful heel it has bitten. Go in peace, Deo Narayan, but come not here again. And take thy presents with thee; they are refused."

The *Amil* looked at me unhappily ; then rolled off towards the garden gate, without a word of farewell.

I saw him through the secret way; bis men had to wedge him through the narrower parts as they would have done a barrel; and I watched as he was hoisted into his great, highpommelied saddle by three gaping syces, and ambled off in the dusk.

Forthwith I ordered the baradari to be washed, that it might be cleansed of the stink of the essences in which the *Amil* was soaked.

"Phew !" breathed the disgusted Madhava, as he joined me. "He contamineth as doth a broken egg. A swine ! A glutton ! An avaricious dog ! A child, I doubt not, of a noscless mother !" Π

## " Oh ! Cursed be thou . . . For thou hast ta'en the bird away."

BYRON.

STRETCHED upon the rack of sleeplessness, I lay through the next few nights, reeling between the real and a world of phantasy; plagued by nightmare horrors out of any real rest that came to me, with hateful promptitude and thoroughness.

Things had become most enigmatically involved, certainly.

Duselin, either with or without knowledge of his friend's true identity, had virtually imprisoned him in the house of a moor with the girth of one of Jonathan Swift's Brobdignagians, who had plainly discovered the sex of the "youth," and had played the traitor for reasons—doubtless black and fell—of his own.

Plague on it ! How near I'd been to success, and now how far from it was I, lying useless with an usquebaugh head.

Well, even an this ungainly dodo had flown off with the dove, I should see Duschin again at Faizabad—his Phillippi when he would walk into the gyves held out for him by Harryman; and then I might learn enough, with care, to put me on the trail again.

Impatiently I swallowed nauseous drenches from copper cups, and submitted to poulticings and blisterings; and would have jalapped and nostrum'd myself, had it emancipated me the sooner.

Then one night, as I lay tossing upon the gilded charpoy, I was seized of a queer sensation of a presence nearby, which annoyed me so that I raised my head and quizzed around the room, contemptuous of mine own affright.

By the light that filtered through the night-lamp of perforated metal, a dull reflection caught my eye; the dim glow from the greasy body of a naked man.

To tackle the intruder with bare hands were vain, even had

I my old strength at command, so I gently gripped the cloth that covered me and edged it into my hands till it formed a narrow, close-folded strip.

The marauder, meantime, appeared to be examining the pile of garments, laid aside in a corner of the room, with stealthy expedition. I stepped from the bed, holding my cloth ready, slithered gently towards him, then flung it round his body, arms and all, and twisted it tight after the manner of a tourniquet; so that he was firmly held despite the recking oil which smothered him. Twas a great effort, and when I got him held, I fell weakly a-top of my man with scarce breath enough to yell.

"Child of the Red Bazaar ! What do you here ?" I panted.

"Lord," quavered the offspring of the said Bazaar, "I did but seek shelter, for it raineth pestles and mortars !"

"O son of shame ! Thou liest ! For what purpose is this skin of oil, then, and this knife ? Thou art a *chor* (thief) and to-morrow thou shalt surely die."

My visitor wriggled under me in an ecstasy of fright.

"Dohai, Lord of all the World! Maharaj! Dohai! (Mercy!) I am thy very cow!"

" If thou tellest me at once, who thou art here, perhaps thy life may be spared."

"Huzoor, thy cow is but the wretched slave of an evil master. He it was who sent me thus into crime, bidding me rob thee of a treasure."

"Arre," quoth I, beginning to see light. "Who is this one who sent thee, Son of Shame ?"

"Heaven Sent ! It is the Amil, Deo Narayan."

"Perchance this is the thing he wanted ?"

I held the miniature before the eyes of the disgruntled thief.

He assented with a whine, and commenced to pule for mercy again.

Sipihr blundered in at this moment with a lamp. His alert ear had caught my babe's wail for help. I handed the fellow over to him, ranted at him for the slackness of the sentinel who had let the robber through, and retired again to bed.

Next day, I witnessed the flogging of my captive, and sent

him back to his master with an abrupt message to the effect that I would treat him to a dose of the same medicine if he worried me again. I wondered how it were possible for a man to hire and instruct a thief out of sheer greed for an intrinsically worthless thing.

Then, summoning Madhava, I ordered him to make ready for another journey to Faizabad. I was strong enough to ride, I told him, and must do so without delay, since the time was at hand when the Prince would see me concerning the future of the taluka.

The priest protested, but I was firm, and in addition, informed him that Sipihr would come with us. I wanted a stout man, if a fight were possible, to force the rat's jaws open.

So the little priest wandered off, muttering rebelliously.

I returned to my own room to make ready for the start next day. And burrowing among the various articles of travelling gear in the corner, I came across a bag of soft buckskin which I had not seen before, and a strange roquelaure, frogged and caped, with two tiny pistols in the pockets. The weapons bore the initials "I.B.D." intertwined in a monogram.

At my word, Madhava was fetched.

"Brother," he said, as he entered the chamber, "I have worked out thy horoscope, and do see that the day is an inauspicious one for travel. There is a sinister star in the house of ... "

"Bukwas !" (Rot !) I interrupted rudely. "Tell me, Madhava, whose things are these ?"

"They were taken from the panniers borne by the horse of the Francese. I had forgot to tell thee of them."

I opened the buckskin bag and shook its contents on to the bed. They were a native sandbox and inkpot of brass, together with sundry quills, an empty horn snuffbox, an intaglio set as a ring, and a packet done up in soft leather which yielded in its turn an oilskin receptacle for papers. I opened this latter and a folded document or two fell out. They were wafered all down the edges of the folds with much exactitude. On one was imprinted the Fleur de Lys of France.

These papers I dropped back into the leather bag.

The intaglio alone held my interest . . . I knew it so very well, and the emotion of its discovery nigh o'erwhelmed me, weak and nervous as I was; for the ring was Rosalie's. I had seen it first on her finger as she twisted her fan in anger at the Settlement ball in Calcutta. I had many a time seen it as she slid it to and fro over the pink knuckle whilst enduring the coarse jests of Armonde in Chauhati. She had toyed with it thus tha: moonlit night when I had fled, and she had called me "Insu ferable."

Yes, I recalled now that the ring was not upon the little hand which gripped the iron bars of the window in Faizabad.

Thus I knew that Duselin was aware of Rosalie's true identity. I feared greatly for my lady, therefore, and in my fear bustled the serving men about in preparation till they were almost witless.

Next morning we left quietly, reaching Faizabad on the evening of the following day.

That same sundown, I sent the priest to spy out the land whilst I recovered from the fatigues of the journey, for my legs, still as thin as cheap pipestems, could scarce support me as I entered the *serai* wherein we had found lodging; and the stalwart Sipihr had almost to carry me.

Towar is morning, as I dozed, Madhava returned and crept to my side.

"Art awake, brother ?"

I sat up cagerly.

"I have been to the house and watched it long. It is empty. Neither can I discover who sojourned therein, nor whither they have gone."

With a groan I buried my head in my arms. I'faith the priest was right; a sinister star was in the ascendant.

## Ш

"... chance rather than Skill made me gain the secret door of the hall And thence to the chamber ..."

WERNER. (Byron.)

As the bullocks were led forth into the crisp dawn air to begin their endless walk up and down the well-ways, I verified the priest's report.

I found the house with its egregious, squirming fishes, and boldly entered the courtyard where the stain of my own blood still besprent the sun-parched earth. I broke the clumsy lock on the door and entered, searching from room to room with hurried steps. But they were completely empty, though pervaded by the smells, some pleasant, some vastly otherwise, of recent occupation. In the little chamber of the *zenana* which had once held my beloved prisoner, I lingered long, ay, wept in my weakness at the sight of it; kissing the bars which her hands had clasped as one would a holy relic. The room was pent and narrow, and without ornament save the paint on the lamp niches.

A last search around the compound revealed a withered and ancient man, a caretaker, still wrapped in his ragged blanket; asleep under a banyan tree whose trailing branches groped like fingers in the sustaining breast of mother carth. I waked him and asked him who had lived in the house of late.

Wallah! He could not say. How should he be able to ? His appointment was recent. Also it was ill-paid. No, he truly knew not. Some Government official had been the denizen of the house, he believed. The mansion was one set aside for visiting *diwans* and such-like officials, and they came and went so often . . . these exalted folk . . . that one really knew not who they were or aught about them. Had this one followed the Viceroy to Lucknow ? Shayud, huzoor ! Perhaps. There was no knowing. I left the fellow angrily and returned to the serai.

"Is there naught in the bag which will help thee, brother, the bag of the peak-faced one?" suggested Madhava, when he learned that my enquiry had confirmed his report.

It was unlikely that this could be so, but after the fashion of the drowning man and the straw, I seized the little leather bag and withdrew the papers . . . they being the only things which promised aid.

One of the documents was a letter to Duselin from a man named St. Lubin, evidently bearing on the intrigue in which the Chevalier was involved. St. Lubin stated that he was being sent from France as soon as preparations could be completed, with a couple of thousand white troops and equipment for ten thousand sepoys. With these men and goods in his charge he was to offer support to the Regency of the Mahrattas against Raghoba the Peshwa and his English allies.

"You know what to do if your mission in Oudh fails," read the letter. "And the enclosure, which guard with your life, is an all-sufficing warrant in similar terms to that with which you are now armed. But of all things avoid the Bouncela, and he of Bhopal. Their sympathies are British..."

The Bouncela or Bhonsla was a Mahratta chief, a sluggish personage whom the Company had once trounced and who now hiber nated in Berar.

Interesting though the letter was, it was of no assistance in the present search, and I folded it and replaced it, together with the heavily-wafered "warrant" for more leisured perusal.

Due cogitation decided that my feet should be turned to Lucknow again. 'Twas the most likely spot too in which to hear of the levanting dodo and the stolen dove, and besides, the date was now the fifth of June.

So, again the thick white dust of the variegated Indian road, again the procession of bull-drawn *rooths*, domed and gilded, gold adorned elephants, tasselled camels, and *sadhoos* painted, powdered, cinctured, and armed with clashing firepincers. Once more the impatient chafing amid the aromatic wood-smoke of cooking fires, and once again the wide, blue sky o'erhead, speckled with wheeling kites and hovering scavengers, the wild yelp of jackals through starlit nights, and the laugh of the hyena.

Near Lucknow the road became blocked with wooden carts, creaking along on solid wooden wheels, laden with building material, and scarce moving at all, despite the tailtwisting efforts of the naked drivers.

And anon we came to a place where the helmeted French captains were drilling the Nawab's men in the early morn, causing them to ram and prime in seemly unison, manœuvring elephant batteries and camel guns, and charging gallantly at the head of bodies of horse. Truly under such capable tuition the gaudy-uniformed sepoys displayed a pretty precision and steadiness. In how short a time, I asked myself as I watched, would these gallant captains be seeking other employment than under the Prince of Oudh ?

The Goomtee shimmered in the sunlight, and about its banks swarmed workmen in thousands; a forest of scaffolding had risen upon the site of the new city to the south of the stream. Foundations had already been laid, and busy craftsmen ran about them, accompanied by sallow Italians sober clad in claret and snuff, with queer sun-hats of pelican feathers.

They were the draughtsmen and architects who for ever swarm about the Court of Oudh where the craze for palaces and yet more palaces still persists, and whose freakish fancies combine Corinthian pillars with Saracen domes, and blight the façades of the mansions with the moulded shape of Venetian shutters in lieu of ornament.

Filled with interest, I halted at a trodden spot, where, at my last visit, the black partridge had called his incessant cry of acquiescence in the will of God, and stared about me. Where stood the Rajah's tent I knew not ; but I could see the narrow Chowk bazaar of the original village winding away beneath the gate named the Akbar Durwaza by the subahdar who built it.

"Ram! Ram! Talukdar Sahib," greeted me a shrill voice. I faced the speaker and found it to be Claude Martin; already,

I afterwards discovered, something of an unofficial minister of the Prir ce.

"Greeting to thee, champion of the oppressed and doughty trumpet in the fight," continued the little man. "What dost in our city? Ah, I mind me! It is the ninth of June, and thou wouldst know the mind of our sovereign concerning the estate which thou hast adopted. *Hein*? Be assured. The Prince turns his face towards thee."

"When will the Nawab vouchsafe to speak with me, Sahib?"

"In a short time," answered the Captain. "Early this morning he was trying a new English carabine which I had obtained for him, and now he is at meat. Thou hadst better tell thy fellow here to cook thee food, and when the time comes I will send the steward to thee. And see, Sahib ! Detain the Prince but a short time. He is deep in the planning of his palace, and wishes to speak only of arcades and cupolas these days. Another word ! When thou comest into thy estate——." The Captain coughed and seemed anxious to contradict himself. "I mean, should the Nawab seek to reward thee, remember, an there is anything that I may do for thee, that will I do willingly."

" If my ikbal (fortune) is such, I will remember," I promised.

"Trust more to thy tongue than thy *ikbal*," laughed the Captain. "*Parbleu 1* I mean that my *ikbal* make me a general some day, and build me a palace near this winding river with deep *tykhanas* for the summer, and a marble court with orange trees and bloodstone fountains... But there, Talukdar Sahib, bear in mind that Claude Martin is always thy friend."

ity, that the Nawab Asaf-ud-Dowlah, Prince of Oudh, Subahdar of the Emperor, brightest star of the Oriental Firma-

So saying, Claude bustled off. Since time was so short I bade Sipihr find a secluded spot where he might prepare our little meal. He had barely kindled the fire, however, ere one of the plethoric court officials, with a green and silver turban, strode through the heat-withered mango trees, and informed me, with a sort of deferential authorment, etc., etc., would condescend to grant me an audience in half-an-hour, and that did it please me to make ready, he would presently lead me even into the presence of the Asylum of the World, and the Cherisher of the Poor. *Mashallah* !

Therefore, with unstayed belly and limbs still unsteady with the ride, I laved the dust of travel from me, pulled on my tight Hindoostanee pantaloons and flowered *koorta*, stuck Sher Singh's ceremonial scimitar in my cumberbund, and strode off in the wake of my rotund guide.

Through a wilderness of heaped materials and flimsy scaffoldings he led me to the wide, fibre-covered court where before the royal tent were gathered members of the brilliant court, even as I had seen them surrounding their overlord, and none of them daring, apparently, to approach the *purdah'd* doorway over which the great Mussulmanee Rajpoot sentries stood on guard, naked tulwars in the crooks of their arms.

The guide drew up short on the outskirts of this crowd, mopping his sweating face.

"Wait here till the court re-enters," he said, and rolled off, puffing like an o'erladen buffalo.

Obediently I stood, listening to the light chatter around me without interest.

"What wants this unbeliever of His Highness, Selim?" said one scented cavalier to another, near my side. "Is it *arzi* or *shikayat* (complaint or petition) concession or monopoly? Truly, these white men are so long closeted with the Prince, that 'tis difficult for his countrymen to glimpse him nowadays."

A cold grip seemed laid on my heart. Who was this white man closeted alone with the Prince ? Surely not . . .

I laid a hand on the ornate sleeve of my neighbour.

"Who is this feringi who speaks with the Prince?" I demanded.

"A Frank sirdar," he answered curtly, looking with disfavour at my rather sober costume. "Art curious, friend?"

" My own business waits," I replied in a voice which shook.

"So does that of all of us, when a white skin has a favour to beg," retorted the courtier with an angry laugh. Dusclir then, was with the Nawab. Heavens alive ! What could have happened to Harryman ? Had he been unable to gain the ear or consent of the authorities concerning the arrest of the man ? True, our case had been circumstantial, but it was not so now. Desperately I glanced around for the consoling gleam of a red coat. But I found it not.

Anyhow I must know what was afoot. After what I had read...

I slipped from the crowd, and made my way around the royal tent.

There was an entrance in its side and more sentries. At the rear I found two smaller marquees, one a retiring room, the other a sleeping apartment ; and both formed part of and led from the durbar tent.

There were no sentries stationed near the sleeping apartment, and here I found no entrance save that narrow passage-way of canvas down which the elaborate meals were carried in sealed trays. The passage led to the cooking offices not far away.

A monent's thought showed me the way. I drew the scimitar from its velvet scabbard and gently ripped the canvas wall of the alley so that I might peer within. The narrow interior showed dim and empty. An instant later the keen Khorasan steel had bitten a gap for me to pass through, and I stepped inside. The alley led straight to the great tent, but a curtain was drawn across the junction with the interior of it. Indeed, an arras ran around all four walls of the shamianah to interpose a cushion of air between the scented atmosphere of the apartment and the open, and assist in its cooling.

Behind this heavy hanging I now stepped, and edged my way gently between the walls of silk and velvet in the direction in which I knew the dais to lie.

A low murmur of voices met my ear, growing louder and louder as I worked my cautious way into earshot, scarce daring to breathe lest the movement of my breast disturbed the arras and betrayed me. I knew them now, the boyish tones of the young Prince, and the rich voice of my enemy.

I reached a position in the *purduh*, where it ceased and an

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alcove for the reception of pipe-servants jutted outwards. I peeped through the slit.

Before me were the veiling fronds of a great plant in a metal pot; and almost from my feet ran the dais with its divans and English chairs.

Seated cross-legged among Persian cushions was Asaf-ud-Dowlah, his golden waterpipe near at hand. But it fumed unsmoked, since the young man was leaning forward with lips parted, deep interest writ on every feature. Whatever Duselin had had to say, it had affected the Prince deeply.

The young fellow was unguarded save by a mighty African eunuch. Two similar coffrees wielded the fans, and all were tongueless I guessed, and as near witless as man could be.

Facing the Nawab was Dusclin, stiffly upright and so near to me that I could distinguish beads of sweat upon his high white brow, and the working of the hands which clasped his hilt and the ridged French casque.

I waited anxiously for what would pass between the two.



"We need no more of your advice. The matter, The loss, the gain, the ordering on't is all Properly ours."

" A WINTER'S TALE."

ASAF-UD-DOWLAH broke the silence.

"It is as well, I think, Monsieur Dusclin," he said in English, "that you first obtained my sworn bond of secrecy. Your proposition is amazing; your advocacy and arguments equally so; and your daring beyond all amazement.

"And even were I disposed to consider this—er—proposition," continued the Prince, "how am I to know that it is based upon a secure foundation—that what you tell me is not mere rumour; that that which you say must happen is not merely a magnification of a political probability?"

"Highness," answered Duselin eagerly and earnestly, "you may be young in years, but you are no child in political experience, and I do believe you capable of judging where and how these intricate threads will meet, even though they lead under the curtain of the future and beyond. Highness, I tell you there is no mere guesswork in this great scheme. Look again beyond your borders into the west and you will see that which always happens when a king of Hind is very young and very weak. As you well know, if such a one be not old enough to grip his throne with the hands of a man, or has not wit enough to defend it against the wits of others, that throne is surely dragged from him to seat another. Such a condition have we in Poota. The Mahratta Peshwa is dead, his successor, Madhoo Rao Narayan, is a babe in arms whose unconscious power is vested chiefly in that wily minister, Nana Furnavese. Raghoba, the dead man's uncle, swears that this posthumous child is no son of his nephew, but a nameless impostor put forward by those who would have the rod of power wielded by the same hands who have wielded it so long. Raghoba would be Peshwa, and the British Government on Bombay would have him Peshwe too, without regard to the truth and equity of the matter; and they are prepared to support his stolen royalty by force of arms. That, Highness, you know as well as I. Why, even now, Colonel Keating with fifteen hundred British, marches to the aid of the Pretender.

"But Furnavese is not the man to yield. He knows, as we of France do, that the little Rao is the true son of his father. Further, those fierce warriors Holkar and Sindhia know it too, and are loyal to their prince though he be but a babe and helpless. Thus, if the British do uphold the claim of Raghoba ... as they will, Highness, as they will, ... then there will be much bloodshed, for you know Sindhia, I believe."

The brows of the Nawab contracted. He had good cause to knew the marauding habits of Sindhia, the Mahratta chieftain, and his men.

"Sire," pleaded Duselin. "Be frank with me as I would be with you, and admit that the radical origin of this trouble is . . . the British. What, look you, is the retrospect of English conquest ? Look back, and you will see long, crawling, grabbing fingers like those of the devil-fish, but tipped with scoring claws of scarlet flame, stretching to the north, south, east and west from the foul heart which hath but greed of land and gold for its ambitions. That is how the unbiassed eye must see Britain and British conquest. Our own fair land of France was traversed and tortured by those tentacles until we turned and drove them out; the Americans have borne their rivings and rapacity till they cannot bear them longer; and the country is rising to hack itself free. See, in this sweet land of Hind, how the ghastly tendrils wind this way and that, driving deep into the breast of the country, till the green fields are goutted and the rivers flow with blood, in their resistless search for land and gold ... gold ... always gold. Ay, the Americans are truly right when they call England the Beast .... the Red Beast . . . a beast of insatiable lusts and avarice.

"Its gory fingers touched Bengal and gripped it, and found its lifeblood sweet. They wandered to Madras and ravaged there. They have touched Bombay, and are even now seeking to sink home their talons to rest there for all time that the bloated carcase over the Black Water may be battened."

Duselin paused and some of the rhetorical vehemence left his voice.

"Briefly, sire. The British would have their own nominee upon the Peshwa's throne at Poona, and regardless of right, they have agreed to support Raghoba that their own supremacy over the land of the Mahrattas may be assured. Ay, the seed of war is sown, by England now as ever, and it is England who will water it with Indian blood that she reap the harvest."

Asaf-ud-Dowlah spoke as the Frenchman paused again for breath.

"And to help in the killing of the-er-Beast in India, Monsieur Duselin, I understand the French, whom, you must admit, have been somewhat disposed to spread such tentacles as

those of which you have spoken, themselves, are prepared to support the true Peshwa and take arms again in his cause?"

"Highness, my friend St. Lubin organizes a force of men in France at this moment to sail for Choul and fight in the loyal cause. If had his letter till recently, when  $I \dots I$  mislaid it. But as to what you have said concerning tentacles . . . "

"And you would have me take sides. You declare that an English army must march towards Bombay. And you would have me rise up and swoop down on the Bengal border, to bar the way of this army, while the Mahratta troops and the French do obliterate the Bombay forces?"

"While, too, Sire, our fleet do sail into the Hooghly with armies from France, to accept the gift of denuded Bengal !"

"For this service, supposing, of course, that the English power in Hind is broken, you offer me nothing less than the sovereignty of Bengal under French protection. Truly a tempting bait, if e'er there were one. But what of the Nawab of Bengal?"

Dusclin exhibited a fine contempt.

"The Nawab of Bengal counts not one iota, Prince. He is a monarch after the English ideal. See how he sits at Muxedabad and plays with his women and his dogs and hawks, the while the British tread o'er his inheritance and oppress his people; squeezing them to the last agonizing drop; denying them their freedom as men and their right to a real ruler of their own kind...." This with a notable subtlety of accent.... "Sire, would you see Oudh in such a state, and its Subahdar no ruler but a pensioned puppet? "Tis to what the English will bring it."

"Although," interposed the Nawab, thoughtfully, "my father fought against them once... and I am still the Viceroy and have an army and power over mine own."

"For the present the British would have you so, Sire, but the tentacles will seize you and yours unless you ensure your freedom while you may; unless you utilize that power and that army to cut through the tendrils that may yet reduce the fair state of Oudh to the pitiable condition in which lies Bengal . . . an emaciated semblance of its former self, with the vampire ever sucking."

The Subahdar allowed the eloquent exhortation to pass, and addressed himself to a new aspect of the matter.

"Is it proposed, Mr. Envoy, that I ally myself with the Mahrattas in the struggle you presage?"

"Sire, it is not so intended. You should count yourself the ally of France and of no other power. I deplore that Your Highness should have suggested that such was the desire of my ... my master. For my master knew, when he framed my warrant, that such an alliance would be utterly distasteful, ay, that its projection would partake of the nature of a slight.

"He knew, Altesse, that you are of the true faith, and that these western princes are Hindoos . . . unbelievers. He was sensible too, of the fact that the leaders Holkar and Sindhia are men of low descent, that their progenitors were little else than menials. Further, he was cognizant that your Highness would experience difficulty in accepting as allies men whose turbulent character and inherent dishonesty, as displayed upon your borders, have long constituted them the despised enemics of this Province."

"How should my army fare against the men with whom they have but lately fought side by side?" demanded the Subahdar, more of himself than the Chevalier. "I have done my best by it; 'tis true. The English captain, whom now I apprehend is dead, has procured me many excellent white officers who have done much. But could my forces do more than delay these late allies of theirs, ere over their crushed bodies the advance to the west continues? Oh, I have seen these English, Monsieur Duselin, there in Rohilkhand, and who may fight like them?"

"Lord, the men who command your own are Frenchmen, who hate these English and are veterans of a dozen fights. They would lead with inspiration. More, think of your numbers, Sire. They are as many as the carrion flies in summer time."

"An unpleasant simile, sir !"

"But a just one," retorted Duselin, "in that they will soon swarm on the calcase of the Beast."

"The Beast, the Red Beast," muscd the Nawab, toying with the mouthpieces of his hookah. "You would have me help slay this Beast... and exchange it for ... say a blue one, Monsieur Duselin?"

"Sire?" exclaimed Duselin, taken aback. I could see by his face that during the digression concerning the army, his hopes had run high. His eyes had lit and his talk had become more avid and fluent than ever.

The young ruler raised himself from the cushions and stood erect, facing the Frenchman.

"Morsicur," he said, "you have asked me to be frank, and I will be so. I am not so blind that I do not see that the mission on which you are sent is not one of altruism; your oratory is not expended for the right alone, nor to further the benefit and well-beir g of the people of this land. It is the material gain of France that lies behind this mission, and whether or no France intends well and justly by us would remain to be seen. It is a matter of exchange of fetters. In sooth and justice those which the English have placed upon my limbs are light and irk me not at all. The matter I have to decide is whether those that France will place upon them are lighter still; which suzerainty would do most for the betterment of my country and the advantage of its people."

Duselin would have made answer, but the Viceroy forbade speech by a gesture.

"The Governor-General does not favour this British treaty with the Mahrattas," remarked the Nawab, thoughtfully, after a pause.

"But he cannot prevent it," countered the Chevalier quickly. "Warren Hastings is a man wise beyond this generation of thoughtless, greedy Englishmen. They are unworthy to work for him; but they are stronger than he."

Asar-ud-Dowlah reseated himself, and leaning back among the cushions, closed his eyes. There was a long silence.

A burst of laughter sounded from outside the tent, followed

by an uneasy murmur. It aroused the Nawab from his reverie. He stood up and smiled a little at Duselin.

"I have heard you at great length," he said, "and my court grows impatient at this neglect. Therefore let us have done, Chevalier. Your mission, I take it, is, for the present, merely to find out whether I am prepared to consider this proposal, or no. That, of course, I am unable to state without first consulting certain of my responsible ministers. At present Oudh is at peace, happy and contented. This war is a mere cloud on the horizon to-day, which may not burst for a year or more, but its growth, its size and shape must of necessity govern my decision. But I want from you, Monsieur, a solemn assurance. First that France is prepared to make a determined effort to establish her fortunes in India; that she will not, having raised me up in arms against this great Power, leave me unsuccoured even an my armies, numberless though I may make them, do fail at the onslaught."

"Lord, see what France offers," put in Dusclin. "Am I like to waste thy time with dreams and vapourings? She relies on this help as making her crusade against the Beast a thing vital and certain in its results."

Asaf-ud-Dowlah went on, unheeding the interruption :

"Also, I do want assurance, nay the sworn oath of your king, that my dominion shall remain to me and to my dynasty as long as it shall persist, without restriction or oppression, with perfect freedom of government and independence in dealing with the other states of India. Is your king prepared to ratify such an agreement upon his pledged word, and on behalf of kings to come?

"If he be, then I promise you that, since this is a matter as between monarch and monarch, and since it concerns the welfare of my Province, so will I regard it, and place it before my ministers for consideration in secrecy. I believe you have such written undertaking. Will you trust it to me, that I may show them, representatives of a free race, owing allegiance but to me, that France and its king will keep faith with us?"

Eagerly Duselin took from the breast pocket of his tunic a

packet of oilskin, and from it drew a letter, wafered heavily and sealed with a great seal.

"Lord . . . Sire . . . Here is the pledge of which you speak. And beneath the writing is the signature which must satisfy your Highness as to the good faith of my country and its king."

He opened the crackling parchments and passed them to the Viceroy.

At this juncture a boiling impulse took charge of me again. I seized that which had never left my person since the day I had read it... the oilskin protected parchment with the *Fleurde-Lys* of France upon it that I had found midst Duselin's effects ... and dragging it forth, burst through the *purdah* and sent the palm crashing on its side as I leapt into the presence of the Prince.

All recollection of the character I bore was blotted out by the momentous things which I had heard, and with it, power over my adopted tongue.

"Good faith !" I bawled in English, as I pushed Duselin aside and ran towards the dais, "Good faith ! Read you this, I beg, O Prince, ere you trust to the good faith of the King of France !"



## " If thou hat'st curses, stay not; Fly whilst thou art blessed and free." "TIMON OF ATHENS."

WITH the letters outstretched towards the Prince, I stood quivering with the release of my long pent-up emotion. The Nawab half extended an arm to take the documents, and thus remained. Duselin dropped his ridged helmet with a clang that he might seize the hilt of his small sword. The great eunuch in the back-ground raised his scythe-like blade, and then, seeing that I attempted no violence upon the person of the Viceroy, allowed the blade to drop across his forearm again, and resumed his attitude of witless tranquillity.

Thus during the passage of some few seconds we all stood motionless, for all the world like a show of wax figures such as travel in wains around the English countryside.

And, even when action returned to our limbs and minds, the fact that I was speaking English seemed to pass unnoticed, so great was the tension.

Asaf-ud-Dowlah spoke first, still in English, and in stern though quiet tones.

"Ah," he said, "the Talukdar ... Indra Rama; that is your name, I think? What then do you here, Indra Rama, eavesdropping at this secret audience? Know you that your life is forfeit by so doing ? Know you ... "

I interposed impatiently, my tongue running in as mad a riot as my thoughts.

"I am here to show you what manner of men are these with whom you would deal . . . whom you would trust. To show you how little they scruple so long as their end be gained. How long, think you, Sire, would the jewel they offer remain in your crown an it were earned? So long, I tell you, as it suited the French to let you wear it . . . until, by artifice or by arms, they usurped not only that new sovereignty, but that of Oudh as well, as it is in their minds to do."

"Lord," I hurried off on another tack, "who set your father and his line upon the *masnud* (throne) of Oudh when it was justly forfeited by his treachery, and further lost upon the field of battle? Have you forgotten? Will your gratitude allow your ears to be defiled by this insidious talk? Oh, I tell you that truly there is no honour in this adder, nor in the old cobra his master; though they may fascinate as do all snakes."

The Prince held up his hand with a commanding gesture, and frowned so darkly that I incontinently broke off.

"What is this wild talk, fellow, and what is the paper you hold in your hand ?"

"Take it, Sire, and read," I exclaimed, passing it to him eagerly. "It will justify my eavesdropping and my words. Read and judge what manner of monarch this is who holds out the hard of brotherhood to you."

Now, at the sight of the documents with their broken wafers and cracked seals, the pale face of Dusclin grew grey as ashes, and with a jerky movement he leaned forward and would have snatched them. But at a motion by the Nawab the massive tulwar of the guard dropped almost upon the outstretched wrist, and the Frenchman drew back, veritably grinning in his ecstatic rage.

He turned on me wildly and stared into my face across the glistening blade with an intensity which penetrated my disguise at last; and for a second or so we regarded each other with mutual hate. The shock of the discovery served Duselin as would have done a blow in the bellows. His wind was gone.

As the Nawab read the documents quietly, the Frenchman's breath slowly returned, each gasping breath laden with a curse wrung from the very soul of hiro.

Madly he swung round to the Prince.

"Sire, know you how this man speaks English as an Englishman? It is because he is an Englishman, a spy, a renegade ! The very man who killed the captain who was your slave..."

"Because he was too black a beast and too foul a traitor to live..." I thrust in.

"... And fled like a coward for no reason after it."

"You lie, Duselin, and swallow that lie you shall. There are matters between you and me for settlement, and a speedy one."

The Nawab looked up with no other expression on his face than gentle reproof at our noise.

"Pray be silent, gentlemen. I do desire to read and understand this writing," he said.

Abashed before his calmness, we stood without speaking.

But Duselin could not remain long thus.

"'Tis a forgery," he cried. "A forgery of the English !"

"What is a forgery, Monsieur Duselin?" enquired the Nawab, looking up again.

"The King's signature !" fairly shrieked the infuriated man.

"How came you to know of such a signature, sir?" asked the Prince, with an admirably assumed air of quiet and surprise.

"I..." Something seemed to gurgle and settle with a clicking sound in the Frenchman's throat. He clasped his working hands behind him and so stood, glaring at the fibre-strewn floor, self-condemned and impotent.

At length Asaf-ud-Dowlah folded the parchments, and with features that twitched a little, turned to me.

"I know you not, sir, but the papers you bring are of vast import !"

"I will explain my identity in a hundred words, and how I came by the parchments," I volunteered.

"At least there seems no doubt as to their genuiueness," said the Prince. "The wafers are the same as those of this letter given me by Monsieur Duselin; the seal is unmistakably the same; and the signatures are penned beyond all doubt by the same somewhat shaky hand. Your identity may wait, sir, till this business is concluded."

Very slowly Asaf-ud-Dowlah moved round in his chair to face the Frenchman, and when he spoke, his tones were as cold and as sharp as a knife-edge.

"So, Monsieur Duselin, accredited agent of His Most Catholic Majesty, King Louis the Sixteenth of France, you were doubly armed... a snake with twin heads, eh? An you failed in my seduction, relying on my honour to keep the bond of silence which you wrung from me unwitting !" (and fear of consequences of double dealing revealed, thought I) "you are empowered to go to Sindhia and appeal to him for aid against the Bengal army, is it not so? Here is a parchment which sets out an offer of alliance with the 'puissant Furnavese,' telling of the approach of this St. Lubin and his men to aid the Regency, and guaranteeing that if the Mahratta forces do drive the British from Bombay, the babe Peshwa should be

set upon his throne and the former dominion of the Peshwa restored . . . that is, with the mysterious reservation contained in the words 'under French protection.' A generous offer, truly, and one with which I find no fault. But, Monsieur, the other parchment. . . .

"Who shall stay the English armies of Bengal in my stead as they advance to the relief of their comrades in the west? Obvicusly, as I have said, Sindhia and his hordes, who do now operate on the frontier of Rohilkhand and near the Moghul's capital of Delhi. And for this service what shall be his reward, Monsieur Duselin? Nothing less than military aid to gain the viceroyalty of the Province of Oudh, Monsieur, when victory has crowned his efforts against the British. A bait of seductive attraction to greedy Sindhia, and an addition of surpassing value to the Mahratta dominions . . . and their French protectors. Is it not so?"

The Chevalier made an inarticulate sound.

"Yes, it is so, Monsieur ! We have these things severally set out here in the form of fair promises to the Rao Sindhia; promises which are ratified by the same august personage who would have pledged his bond to me. A disinterested monarch, Monsieur Duselin, and a scrupulous !

"See ! In these, addressed to me, I am serenely desired to betray my trust . . . for Oudh is held in trust by me for the Emperor, and so shall be held, e'en though his is no longer the will and strength that may call me to account and punish, should I play the traitor.

"And by the burden of these, addressed to the Unbeliever, His Majesty regards this loved land, my fatherland and charge, as a chattel, a thing to be disposed of thus . . . or thus, by his Catholic Grace ; a vehicle for mercenary traffic as is coin ; a consideration in the driving of a bargain ; a flail wherewith to fan the spark of loyalty in the pusillanimous Mahratta . . . to the advantage of France.

"By my head ! It almost pains me that scheme so deeply laid should have to come to naught . . . for they both will now, Monsieur, of that you may be assured. "You seemed very confident of success too, Chevalier, so confident indeed, that already you have made substantial preparation . . . I refer to your cunning labours among my troops. I little knew when I entertained these European gentlemen as organizers and officers of my army that their efforts were directed to such an end as stands revealed to-day. It is to be hoped, for their sakes, sir, that they have not laboured to affect the sentiments of the men as well as their material condition. There must be no partisan opinion amongst my troops, see you ! Except for their loyalty to my standard they must be devoid of feeling. By the Prophet's Beard, an I discover that these men have done aught to impair this allegiance, to arouse an interest in external politics. . . . Ah, well, whatever hap, Oudh will not hold them over long."

Asaf-ud-Dowlah turned from the stricken form of Duselin to me.

"I know not who you be, sir, but since you are an Englishman, I would have you credit that I knew nothing of this. These officers were entertained for the purpose of setting my army on a better basis, both from the point of view of discipline and from that of administration. The task of obtaining them was given to Captain . . I cannot recall his name for the moment . . . for services rendered to my father in Rohilkhand, and he was well paid, though apparently he was not satisfied with the gold of Oudh alone. Well, Chevalier Duselin, you are quieter than you were some short time ago. Have you nothing to say?"

The Frenchman remained immobile, brooding eyes upon the floor.

Then, some subtle alchemy of nature wrought a wondrous transformation in the young Prince. The veneer which European influence had applied, with its ingrainings of language and suavity and self-restraint, seemed to crack and fall away from him in an instant. Gone was the polished gentleman of a second before, and, in his place, stood an angry oriental potentate, wielder of an absolute power; venting his accumulated rage in the swift-flowing Persian of the Court.

"Wallah! Has there ever lived such a dog, the pariah offspring of generations of pariahs? Haram Zadeh! Shall I not send the to thy prating king, with eyes put out and cropped of ears, yet with a tongue to tell of the contumely of a Badshah of Hindoostan for him, his false words and his foul works? By the bea'd of Ali ! Shall I not torture thee with tortures at sight of which the very jinns and demons of Eblis himself would stand aghast? Ah ! Does thy liver then turn to water, thou base-born child of sin?"

For Duselin had blenched involuntarily at the mention of torture.

The tirade suddenly ceased; the mobile features of the Viceroy resumed their wonted calm. He straightened the jewelled aig-ette in his green turban with trembling fingers.

"Go, Monsieur le Chevalier !" he said, reverting to English. "Should you be found after a week from now anywhere within the frontiers of this province, you will meet a death that will take a considerably longer period in the dying. Get you gone !"

Without raising his head, Duselin turned upon his heel and walked slow y down the great durbar tent.

Deadly airaid that I should lose him, I ran swiftly after him, and almost as he reached the exit-way, clutched at his sleeve. He turned mechanically, lifelessly; 'twas as though every fire were quenched within him, every emotion spent.

"Where is she ? " I demanded in a low voice.

There was but the mistiest recognition in his gaze.

"Where is she ?" I repeated, fiercely.

"Would to God I knew," Duselin muttered. "Would to God I knew !"

Whereafter his lips fell to shaping a name, a name I knew.

And because I felt he was speaking the truth, and because he seemed altogether too dazed and helpless to run far at present, I let the Chevalier go, and he passed out into the hot sunshine.

Then I became aware that the Nawab was calling me, and retraced my steps towards the dais.

"Who are you?" asked Asaf-ud-Dowlah, when I stood before him again. "I swear by Allah, that, had you not 232

betrayed yourself by speaking your own tongue I had never dreamed but what you were of this country. Pray tell me who you are, if it so please you, and whether I can reward you or no, for the service I have received at your hands this day is of a value scarce calculable."

"I was a captain in the army of the Company," I answered, since 'twere useless to anger the Prince when so well disposed, by lying. "My name is John Warren."

"Why wear you such raiment? Is it adopted merely that you might watch this rat of a Frenchman?"

"Nay, that was not my reason," I assured him, and to assuage the royal curiosity, I forthwith rendered the Nawab a discreetly curtailed account of my misadventures. I had to achieve a bouncing lie, however, to account for the manner in which the document so fatal to the hopes of France fell into my possession, in order to conceal the plight of Rosalie Brunel.

Throughout the recital, the Prince sat in rapt attention, sucking at his long extinct waterpipe; and when I had made an end, he was pleased to express his thanks for my confidence, and to marvel at my boldness of action.

I could see, though, that Asaf-ud-Dowlah by no means comprehended my account of the duel, nor why I was prevailed on to seek refuge in flight. His oriental eyes were unused to western perspective; and it was plain that their owner did not know whether to regard me as a deeply wronged and heroic personage or a decamped malefactor. So long as he respected my confidence, I didn't care a straw which of these rôles I fulfilled for him.

Howbeit, the Prince expressed sympathy with me in my many trials, and begged that I should show him how he might repay me. What did I desire to do? Should I leave Oudh and return to Calcutta?

"Nay, Sire," I answered. "I am all gratitude for your offer of aid, but I still have work to do in Oudh in mine own interest, and I would crave your permission to remain yet a little longer as your vassal and ransom at the Sher Khoti, ere I return to meet what fate awaits me in Fort William." "Ah!... the taluka! I had forgotten. It had been in my mind to offer Indra Rama the charge of that estate if he were willing to accept it, and indefinitely if a successor of the Rajpoot's line were not forthcoming. Now, I suppose, the State must take it over. However, pray make your home there while you care to remain in Oudh, Captain Warren, and be assured of my consideration and hospitality. It is imperative that ere many days have passed we confer again together. To-night, I take it, you will sleep in my camp; I will see personally to your entertainment and lodging."

I thanked the Viceroy, bowed, and would have withdrawn, but he stepped down from the dais and, seizing my hand, wrung it in English fashion, as though he would lug it clean off. There were beads of sweat upon his brow, signs, I thought, that Duselin had been very near success.

"Sir," whispered Ásaf-ud-Dowlah, huskily, "I beseech you to remember, if ever you are like to think evil of me, that it was of Ouch I thought... of my charge and my own countrymen... not of mine own elevation or aggrandisement. Let that assurance govern your discretion."

Hastily he thrust the momentous correspondence inside his tunic, and signalled to a punkah-slave to sound the brazen gong which stood on the dais.

At its resounding note, the curtains swung from the doors, letting in a flood of sunlight, and a clangour of tongues, as the courtiers surged forward. I slipped away, through the alcove, into the alley-way and so gained the open air. VI

"That joyous smile was gone, And the face was white and wan, As the down upon the swan Doth appear."

INGOLDSBY LEGENDS.

ON leaving the Court, I hurried off to see if I could find Claude Martin, and by diligent enquiry of every man jack I came across for information, at last found my way to his tent. as I reached the door the flap was raised and a thin, spindleshanked man with heavy spectacles came out. He was an Italian physician who was attached to the Court.

I seized the curtain as it dropped from his sallow hand and hurried in without ceremony.

The first thing that caught my eye was a tumbled heap of crimson and gold, that lay in one corner of the tent; the brightness of the gold dimmed by dust, and the crimson dyed in places a purplish brown by congealed blood. Then I looked towards the charpoy over which the French captain was bending.

He swung round with a warning gesture as I entered.

"Ah, it is the Talukdar," he said. "What wantest thou, my friend ? Have a care to make no noise."

"Do you know where Harryman is?" I burst out, still in English. Since the morning and its momentous interview, the vernacular, hitherto so glib to my tongue seemed to have deserted me altogether.

The Captain shot me a keen, appraising glance, and without answering, pointed to the bed.

Harryman was lying with his eyes closed and his hands lying inert upon the coverlet. His face was paler than ivory, save where the injected veins ran criss-cross in jagged, purple lines about his temples. He was breathing in stertorous gasps that told of a pierced lung. His head, too, was patched at the back with a bloody plaister.

After a minute I looked up at Martin, horrified.

"He was like to die las' night . . . shot in ze back, in ze bazaar entrance," said the adventurer, stammering away in his broken English, in answer to my mute enquiry. "I watch all night, and now ze *Docteur* say he will live. *Ciel*, but I am tire'."

" It was good of you to watch," I said.

"There was none ozer to do it. He is a white man, an' we are bot' servant of John Company," answered Martin, still with his intent gaze searching me,

"There is fever with the wound ?" I questioned.

"A little, not much. Ze bullet only graze ze lung and zen lie under ze skin on ze chest. But his head is concuss', which is bad, from fall from ze saddle."

" Is the thug who did this caught ? "

"It was no thug," replied the Captain quietly.

"What !" I ejaculated,

"Zere is no proof. But ... what is your opinion of zat ?" The Frenchman led me away from the bed to a side table and pickel something from it which he dropped into my palm. It was a bullet, a little misshapen, and bearing spiral lines upon it.

"It is a pistol ball," I answered, "and has been fired."

"It is ze very *boulet* zat ze docteur has extrac'. But see you ! What sort of a pistol is he which fire 'im ? "

I scrutinized the leaden pill again; and the lines about it told me the answer to the question.

"An English rifled pistol; one of the newest designs. Egg, Jackson, or Jover, I believe, make them of this bore."

"Zen how is it zat a native *thug* comes to possess a such one? Zere are very few in India at all."

The suggestion conveyed in the Captain's voice awoke me to sinister conjecture.

"Then you do not believe that . . . that this was done by a native ?"

"Nenni, mon ami, I believe that no. Moreover, look you, I find zat ze pistol in ze holster of ze surgeon was cock', so zat 'e was not altogezzer surprise'. An' zere is burn mark on ze tunic. Ze pistol was fire' very close."

For a short space we stood looking at each other. Already a name had shaped itself on my lips, and a picture had risen in my mind in which the surgeon's assailant was unmistakably defined.

"'Oo are you, my frien' ze Talukdar?" demanded Martin. "Are you truly a Rajpoot . . . Indien?"

"We have met before, Captain," I said. "My name is Warren."

Martin's air of astonishment was ludicrous.

"*Ciel !* Warren of ze Europeans? Ze man 'oo killed ... zut ! of course, I recognize ze feature'. *Parbleu !* A wonderful disguise. My frien', I know why you came to Oudh, but I 'ad not divine such t'ings as zese. Stay, you mus' 'ave 'unger, for it is late. Come an' eat wiz me, an', if you like, tell me somesing of yourself. Ze Major will res' under charge of my servant, Lemaire."

At his word, a dark skinned Eurasian softly entered from the ante-room and sat down on his hams by the bedside.

Claude Martin uttered a few words of instruction, then beckoned me, and I accompanied him through a curtained doorway into a smaller chamber where there was a meal set. Then, discussing food the like of which I had not tasted for many a long day, I told my story for the second time that morning, and now, whether compelled by the engaging honesty of my host's countenance, or led to wider confidence by the influence of his excellent wine I know not, I told him all ; keeping back nothing ; relying on Martin's inborn French gallantry to respect my lady's name.

I was relieved to find that the Captain agreed that circumstances justified my flight and accepted my explanation, though the handshake and tearful expression with which he announced his agreement were decidedly embarrassing.

When I narrated how I had sliced my way into Duselin's

audience with the Viceroy, I staggered to a lame halt ; fearing to tell all that had passed.

A secret smile played round the adventurer's lips at this.

"Do net tell me if you do not want," he said. "It makes nosing. I shall know from ze Prince before ze day is dead. In fac' I 'ave already an idea of what 'as pass'. I know Duselin an' is work. I 'ave warned ze Viceroy agains' 'im, but even I could not, how you say?... counterac' Duselin's influence. Mais, que voulez vous? Ze Nawab, 'e is quite young.

"But what will you do about zis poor lady, my frien'?" he continued, gravely. "You know not where she is, hein? Excep' zat she is in some danger from a government official 'oo holds 'er prisoner? Zat is good, how you say?... clue. Say ze word an' I will 'ave every zenana in ze province search'. I will cause ze Prince's cavalerie to scour ze country inch by inch. It s'all be proclaim'...."

I stopped the flow of suggestion with a gesture.

"Thank you, Monsieur, but this search is one which I must obviously conduct alone. You know well how ungenerous we white folk are in thought. I know not, and cannot conceive what motive Miss Brunel may have had in leaving Calcutta in so solitary a fashion. She may have friends in Oudh to whom she was journeying. But, in any hap, the mode of her departure may impair her fame, an it become known, while the knowledge that she sojourned, willingly or no, in the zenana of a moor ...."

"Mais oni, I understan'," interjected the Captain, in dolorous assent.

"Nevertheless, Monsieur, I am glad I confided in you, for it would seem that your influence might assist me in ascertaining the identity of this scoundrel, if you would kindly use it so. I know you, Captain Martin, for a man who would sacrifice much for a lady in distress."

A tear of emotion stood in the amenable Claude's eye at this clumsy flattery.

"Mon ami, you 'ave done well to trus' me. Your trus' is not misplaced. I shall find ze scoundrel for you, wiz ze greatest circum . . . circum specting. Never s'all it be said zat Claude Martin refused to aid a lady, especially a 'andsome one. How shameful of ze Chevalier Duselin to treat her so . . . 'is be'aviour is blot on ze honour of ze French...."

"He shall answer for it to me," I said.

Martin looked at me with an air of infinite gloom.

"My frien' Warren," he whispered tragically, "do you sink zat ze lady 'ave sustain' . . . ? "

"If Miss Brunel is still alive," I told the Captain, "she is unharmed. She would never suffer such injury."

The voicing of my great fear seemed to relieve me of some of its oppressive weight. Martin nodded with portentous understanding.

"Ha! Quoi q'y a, Lemaire?" he said, turning to the Eurasian who had silently entered the ante-room of the tent.

"A jogi insists on entrance, Monsieur, saying that his master is here; though of a jogi with a master I have never heard before."

"It must be Madhava," I exclaimed. "Captain Martin, it is the priest of whom I have told you. He must have something urgent to say to me, to thus intrude. May he come in ?"

" Certainement. Lemaire, admit zis man !"

The servant bowed and withdrew, presently to usher in Madhava, complete in his ceremonial leopard's skin and Hessian boots. He salaamed gravely and stood waiting, blinking his sunken eyes at Martin with such unmistakable command in them that the little Captain rose, excused himself vaguely, and withdrew.

Madhava sat himself down before me.

"Brother," he said, "I bring news... my news concerns thy fair one. Many a day since, I had considered and arrived at a conclusion as to where she was incarcerated, and by whom; but since thou wert so anxious, I feared to hurt thee by error and so said naught. Now, may I put the materials with which I built thus before thee? Lord, think ! The White Peacock

of Deo Narayan the *Amil*. The thief who came for thine amulet. The swinish fat of the man thou sawest...."

Why surely yes ! Now I could recognize that shrieking voice that had rung in my ears so often since that moonlit night at Faizabad. It was when the Rajpoot had fought with the *Amil* that I had heard it before. And the cagerness to obtain my miniature, even to attempted theft. That was also explained.

"Machava," I asked, rather shakily, "art certain beyond doubt that the lady is with the *Amil*?"

"I have certain knowledge that she lieth at his mansion not over far from the Sher Khoti itself. As Sri mothered Ram, it is true."

"From whom didst thou obtain this new information ?"

"Lord, it would not please thee to know," answered the priest, and very definitely refused to tell me, reiterating that his news were beyond impeachment nevertheless.

I began to pace up and down the tent, while a thousand hare-brained schemes for rescue pounded in a jumble through my brain. But the *jogi* arrested my restless walk, placing his withered hand upon my shoulder.

"Lo d," he adjured, "thou must haste, lest this son of Shaitan harm the lady. And thou must be stealthy and swift and fearful of harm, if happiness is to come. For Narayan is a weak man, and there is no strength like the strength of the weak man at bay."

"Thou hast a plan ?" I asked.

"Beshak ! (Certainly !)" Madhava answered indignantly. "I have a plan ! An infallible plan !"

And when I had heard it, it certainly seemed good to me, though scarcely infallible.

. . . . . . . . . .

When the priest had gone, Martin re-entered, saying that Harryman still lay unconscious, though breathing more quietly. In a few words I told him that I had good reason for thinking that Madhava had discovered the whereabouts of the stolen lady, and that at least I ought to investigate as soon as possible.

The adventurer begged me to tell him who was the dog who held Miss Brunel, but I refused, on the ground that I had only the word of the priest to go upon, although evidences certainly supported him.

"I may yet have to claim your good offices, Captain."

I begged Claude Martin to send me word at the Sher Khoti as to Harryman's progress, and to comfort him, when the time came, with the assurance that Duselin's mission had been a vain one. These things he promised to do.

Then the Captain dragged on his uniform coat, and we went forth together to rout out the *logi*, Sipihr and the servants.

On the way, we passed a small tent pitched away from the filmsy city of the court some small distance. Martin jerked his thumb towards it.

" Duselin's," he said.

A tall Frenchman came from the tent at that moment, and spying Martin, ran across to us.

"Can you spare a moment, sir ?" he cried in French. "I cannot understand what is the matter with the Chevalier Duselin. He seems ill, and I would beg you to stay by him while I seek a doctor."

Martin sought my acquiescence with a glance. I nodded and we walked into the tent together.

Upon the pallet I saw Duselin stretched out at full length, apparently asleep and snoring loudly through his delicate nostrils; his eyes showed a glimmer of white betwixt the lids.

"If it were not he," stated the Frenchman, as Martin bent over the prostrate man, "I should say it was liquor. But the Chevalier is the soberest man I know; he abominates such weaknesses, and . . . you know his strength of will."

"Néanmoins," responded Martin, as he straightened himself up from his examination, "drunk the Chevalier is, or rather drugged... and with the northern plant, chewed or swallowed. Ah! here we have it, leaves and seeds as well. Something has upset our friend this time, De la Rivière. Has he gambled away his rat-hole of a chateau . . . or his mills at Tanda ? "

The officer shot a sharp look at Martin, and threw the *haseesh* is to a corner with a gesture of disgust.

Neither of us enlightened him.

One had not expected such a man as Duselin to collapse like this, though he had been afflicted with a run of bad luck in the last few weeks that would have quenched the fire in any man. But collapsed he had, and I had thereby to postpone our settlement until he should be better able to grasp the terms of it.



## "The cypress curtain of the night is spread And over all a silent dew is cast." CAMPION AND ROSSITER'S BOOK OF AIRS (1601).

THE house of the Amil was situated not over many koss from my own mansion. It lay toward the border of the revenue collector's estate and on the outskirts of its biggest village, Ramagion . . . the village of Rama, so called since the days that Rima and Sita passed through it on their way to exile. Since, when occasion should demand, the Amil could claim the protection of state troops, the big house was not fortified. But to protect it against ordinary dacoits and the like, there was a close, thick hedge of aloe and prickly pear and cactus around the huge compound and the family shrine. In this, there was a great arch of brick and plaster which served as a barbican, and a sentinel armed with a matchlock patrolled within it day and night.

In June, it is scorching hot at mid-day in Oudh, when the rains hold off, and the great banyan tree which grows not far from the entrance gate bore scarce a leaf, and sent an ugly skeleton shadow across the dusty path.

It was to this sacred tree that a man in the guise of an ascetic came to squat on the stone platform that ran around the gnarled trunk, one high noon. There was a mark in *mirtika* and gypsum on his forehead; his greying hair was tangled and piled upon his crown. Save for the yellow rag about his loins he was naked; and his body was painted with the rude markings of auspicious design and colour. A rosary of great beads, set with gold, hung around his neck.

The sentinel on duty, an officious youth, left the gate and marched up to the priest, asking him abruptly what he did.

"Son," replied the *jogi*, impressively, "the time is come when I prepare for the next state, and this I seek to do beneath this holy tree."

"Rather thou seekest to beg, priest," laughed the sentry, withal a trifle uneasily. "My master loves not priests who batten on his household."

"Enough !" protested the *jogi* with dignity. "Beneath this tree do I seek communion with the gods. See thou that I am not disturbed, or, as Vishnoo was once a tortoise, thou shalt never attain the bliss of Lachmi Nivas."

"But, Protected of the Gods . . . "

"Enough, I say ! Leave me in peace or a blight be upon thee and thine !"

'Twas a noble rigmarole and Madhava had coached me well. The sentinel hurried back to his post in a shiver of apprehension, while I cleared a space beneath the tree, folded my arms and legs in the attitude I had been shown, and closed my eyes.

This new character of mine was a materialized version of the *jogi's* great idea. As a holy man, I could squat in the dust and study the ways of the *Amil's* household and the sitting of the rooms of his house at my leisure. Madhava himself had shaven off my Rajpoot beard, had tangled and powdered my hair, and had wizened my face with an art which grew wrinkles like mushrooms (and which, the priest promised, should remove them as expeditiously). More, he had cunningly outlined my

ribs with the washerman's marking bean, so that my robust figure should appear ip truth to have been castigated by starvation and fatigue; and had painted my face after a fashion that rendered it strange to myself when I glimpsed it in a mirror.

Throughout that day of burning heat I sat beneath the tree in spurious preparatory meditation, watching through my flickering lids all who came and went about the house of Deo Narayan.

They were few ... a party of retainers coercing a refractory elephant, and a few servants accompanying carts of fodder. Nothing I saw that was of any help to me.

After many trying hours, the sun dropped gently into the west, and the stars lit up the world with a gentle radiance, seemingly dancing in the exhalations of the sweating earth. But a cool breeze sprang up and eased me.

When the sentinels were changed I stretched my cramped limbs surreptitiously, and tightened the loin cloth to stay the pangs of a calling stomach.

An owl chattered from somewhere near. The breeze brought an aroma of herbs, fragrant and vivifying to my nostrils.

Again the owl chattered, this time much nearer, and a moment later a skinny arm stretched round the tree and deposited a brass dish of food within my reach. I dragged the dish nearer as the sentinel turned upon his short beat, singing to keep his spirits from falling. The food I scoffed as opportunity offered.

I shoved the dish aside when emptied, and it presently vanished behind the tree. I fixed a rapt gaze upon the sky in renewed contemplation.

The sentry, with a cautious look up and down the roadway, withdrew to the inner side of the gate, doubtless to steal a puff or two at a hookah; for I caught the nauseous odour of the cheap tobacco.

A finger twitched my elbow.

I rose with difficulty, my stiffened joints cracking loudly, and wriggled round behind the tree. Almost in the same instant of time, Madhava had slipped into my place. 'Twas so agilely done, that, as I gazed upon him as he stared into the sky with glassy eyes and contracted chest, it seemed as though I, the spirit, regarded the body I had left.

There came a hissing murmur like the sough of the breeze through the naked branches . . . "The gods be with thee" . . . and I turned and made off into the clumped bananas which grew thick around.

The vast indifference of the sentinel to his duty stood me in good stead; for to negotiate a hedge spined with steel needles like those of the aloe is a long and tough task. The spearlike leaves clashed together like plates of horn as I scrambled over, and my blood besprent them freely.

Keeping well within the deep border of its shade, I followed the hedge around as it circled the house, so that I might judge where best to make my raid. 'Twas a rambling structure, half made of thin Oudh bricks, half of dried mud; and there were many outhouses of mud-daubed lattice thatched with reeds.

An arcade of flamboyant saracenic arches wound round the foot of the main building. In each entrance lay a man upon a skin, muffled from head to foot like a corpse in a shroud, and of about the same use as a guard, for all the naked sword that lay to hand.

Built upon the roof, and partly baying out over the ground beneath, I espied a flimsy, box-like house of wood, which I guessed was the *zenana*.

There my search must take me, and with circumspection; for, were Deo Narayan a much married man, the clatter I might bring about my ears by carelessness would ruin all. Knowing that the dark interior of the house would probably confuse me, I thought it best to mount the walls. The guards I feared not at all; for 'twere easier to wake the Sphinx of Egypt than a sleeping moor.

The arcade presented no difficulty, and I soon lay on its flat mud roof. Three times I leapt thence to catch the sharp edge of the roof proper, and three times I fell back with a thud. But at the fourth attempt, I managed to gain a hold, and pulled myself up till I lay on my belly panting and quizzing around upon the top of the house.

As I ay, I could distinguish the entrance to the seraglio, open, though covered with a heavy *purdah*. A fellow snored across the doorway, as diligently asleep as those below. His stature and smooth face told me he was a cunuch.

On padded feet I slipped across to him, and though it went against the grain, I dealt him a tap on the crown that would ensure his silence for an hour or two at least. The eunuch merely stiffened slightly and half turned. I felt his breast and was reassured that a vinegar plaister would suffice his needs, providing he could get one. His tulwar I flung far out into a bamboo thicket, where it sliced down a stem and stuck, quivering; in the base of it.

So much done, I paused to listen.

Very, very gently I pushed aside the *purdah* and stepped inside the retreat of the *Amil's* women, sinking deeply into a thick carpet. The starlight could not penetrate here, and I was in total darkness, but alone; for I could hear no breathing.

I made along the wall till I came to a corner in which I felt certain there would be a lamp-niche, and so there proved to be. In my mendicant's bowl there was flint and steel, and by aid of these I lit the lamp.

The mustard oil spluttered and burned up brightly as the flame drew it into the wick.

"Koi hai?" (Who's that ?) suddenly rasped a hoarse voice behind me.

I switched round, strung taut for a fight, cursing with despair at the discovery.

Then, despite the danger in doing so, I laughed aloud, for there, in a silver cage was one of those talking mynahs with a yellow jowl that are brought from the north. I twisted his neck without much ado, though it pinked me sharp to do so; loving all birds as I do.

Natheless, the wretched thing had undone me, for I heard footsteps approaching the little room from the deeps of the house. The curtain swung from the inner door, and revealed to my astonished gaze Sovona Suniti, her thick hair tumbled to her waist.

She started when she saw me, and drew the thick strands across her lightly-clad body.

"Greeting, Bairagi ! (Holy man) What seekest thou in the zenana of Deo Narayan ?" she said.

"Sovona !" I ejaculated, and could not keep the reproach from my tone.

In a twinkling the girl was at my feet.

"Lord," she said, "thou wouldst not love me, even though I bear a scar upon my breast which tells how great is my love for thee. I could not live longer near thee, seeing thee every day and tearing my heart with longing and despair. An thou couldst not give me thy love, 1 could not take thy charity. Therefore, I came hither that 1 might become the bride of the master of this house."

"Never shalt thou do so shameful a thing, Sovona," I protested. "This night thou wilt come away with me again."

The girl's wonderful eyes lighted up with a warm glow. She ran suddenly towards me, seized me by the arms, and gazed into my face. Then, as she realized that she had misunderstood, the light in her eyes died again ; leaving them as they, were before, melancholy pools of liquid jet.

"Ay, Lord," she murmured, raising one hand in a piteous gesture. "Forgive me my foolishness. I know well the true reason for thy coming. Come with me, and I will lead thee to her; but, believe me, her coldness will yield thee little comfort. Ah, what joy would I have given thee ..."

"Sovona !" I rebuked, though my great joy at the knowledge that Rosalic was alive near me took the anger from my voice.

"Ay, cold she is and passionless. Even so, that in this place she remains unsullied. And the *Amil* will do her no hurt though his impatience is pitiful to see. Nevertheless, to-morrow he will exchange the garlands with me that thou mayst never see my face again."

Sovona took me by the wrist and led me through a passage

to a heavily barred door. She knocked and called in an undertone :

"White Peacock, a bairagi would have speech with thee."

There came a faint movement from within, and a voice spoke, muffled by the closed door.

" If it is to coerce me, I will not see him."

"Come, come, sister !" cried Sovona with a touch of spite, "Make not cats into tigers. Thou knowest well thou wilt have to marry. Loose the door, so that I may unfasten these bars. *Ram* ! *Ram* ! Make not such a noise lest the other women hear."

I heard a wooden bar raised inside, and Sovona slid the heavy bolts aside and opened the door.

Rosalie, clad in a silken saree, stepped forth.

At the sight of my painted, filthy body, the lady recoiled, which was not to be wondered at.

"Thy errand ?" coldly asked my divinity.

"To free thee," I replied, and putting a petard to my chaotic emotions blew them to nothingness; leaving my judgment firm and unclouded.

Rosalie sighed wearily and incredulously; and bade me leave her forthwith.

But without further ado, I made bold to take her arm and lead her from the foul prison, telling Sovona to follow. And she whom I loved moved unresisting; yet with an apathy and languor that told me she was convinced of some hurtful ruse presently to stand revealed.

But when she saw the strangled bird, and the senseless giant at the outer door, she gave a great cry of surprise and hope, turning to look at me curiously. I saw her bosom swell as she drank in the warm fragrance of the night and expelled the scented vapours of the seraglio.

Speech I dared not trust myself to, so I signalled to Rosalie to lower herself over the roof, which she did lithely enough, and presently the three of us stood side by side on the roof of the colonnade

From far away a faint sound caught my ear, growing nearer

and nearer... the rhythmic beat of hoofs at full gallop. At the sound I was filled with alarm lest at this late hour the flight should be discovered and stayed.

Louder and louder grew the noise, and I thought from the beat of it that there were two horses. So I hastened to lower Sovona to the ground, then, thrilling with the contact, the more precious burden, and finally swung myself over and dropped lightly.

Rapidly I led the way across the court and, relying on Fate and the irresistible somnolence that attacks all Easterns at nightfall, straight through the wicket of the great barbican.

My assumption was correct. We had to step over the carefully-shrouded person of the vigilant sentry.

Not fifty yards away, the hoofs thudded to a halt in the dusty road.

A little figure ran from under the bo tree to me.

"Madhava," I muttered. "The horses ! Are they purs ?" "Nay," he whispered back. "Quick ! Behind the banana trees."

Roughly, I fear, the poor ladies were hustled into the friendly shadow, and scarce were we hid, when two men passed by a-foot; the starlight flickering on the drawn steel in their hands.

Rosalie gripped me by the arm, convulsively.

"Priest," she whispered with agitation, "I know thee not, nor whether I may trust entirely to thee. But, if thou art indeed my friend, let me not into the hands of those men."

"Maharani," I whispered back, "thy wish is my law. I pledge my word that he whom thou fearest will never see the sun rise again."

Turning to Madhava, I bade him give me my pistol, which he did, producing the weapon from under his robe. To his care I then committed Sovona and Rosalie, bidding him await me some little distance from the road.

Madhava would have restrained me, but I tore myself from his feeble grip.

" I shall return in half-an-hour," I said, and was convinced

beyond all doubt that I should. So confident was I that no thought of risk, no fear for those consequences which my death might impose on Rosalie, assailed me for an instant. I might have been on my way to an Alipore ballroom as far as ease of mind was concerned.

Madhava saluted gravely as I strode off after Duselin and his companion.

#### VIII

# "Let them fight it out, friend; things have gone too far. God must judge the couple; leave them as they are." BROWNING.

ALL was quiet in the courtyard; no outcry, no clashing of steel arose in the house, though I half expected it and listened for it as I padded noiselessly across the blue-lit space.

The guards still slept their log-like sleep in the doorways; yet a faint glow, only discernible by its difference in colour from the starlight, diffused into the night through a half-open door to show how entrance had been gained.

I made for this door, stepped over the man who slept across it, stole his tulwar, and stepped within. There came a slight movement from the lighted room adjoining, the sigh of a man aroused from sleep. It drawled forth lazily enough, then abruptly leapt to an anguished gurgle, an inarticulate expression of terror that set my spine a-creep. There followed a soft thud, a choking groan such as a man groans when wounded in the throat . . . then silence fell again.

Intrigued beyond restraint, I stepped boldly over the threshold.

In the chamber I entered, a small bedchamber, burned a little hanging lamp of five wicks. In the centre of the room was a great, delicately-turned string bed. Near it was a stool of sissoo, shell and silver bearing a snuffbox and a plate of curded almonds. On the charpoy lay a great bulk, very quiet and still. Something was running on to the floor with a crepitating trickle. I knew what it was; the acrid odour rose strong above the aroma of sandalwood.

Duselin, his face wearing something of its wonted composure, was putting up his sword near the bed. The other man, that sirdah of the Oudh army I had seen in Lucknow, stood near, hands hanging limp, in an attitude of sublime amazement.

"Il est mort? You have killed him . . . as he slept? Mon Dieu ! "

"Naturellement," whispered back Duselin with a twisted smile. "The monster is slain. Now for Andromeda. Methinks the rôle of Perseus becomes me well."

The officer started back with a low exclamation of demur.

"Is it for this you have sought my aid, Duselin? To murder a nabob and plunder his harem?"

"Ah, mon ami, I should perhaps have told you more. 'Twas this man who first plundered me. 'Tis no dusky trollop that I seek, but a white woman of our own continent and station whom I love. Let us search now. We can talk later."

The poor captain threw up his hands in bewilderment, but I could yet trace the disgust on his face at the stabbing of the sleeping *Amil*, and doubt.

However, he followed Duselin, who was walking towards the door.

As the latter neared the entrance I stepped forward, tulwar in hand.

The Chevalier leapt backward with an oath.

"You may save yourself the trouble of a search," I told Duselin. "Miss Brunel is not in this house, nor will you ever see her again."

The Chevalier's calm left him in an instant. He stiffened and shivered as though with ague as he recognized me.

" Mille diables ! " he exclaimed.

"No," I assured him, "only Jack Warren."

The rapier, deftly and immediately poised, I swept into a

corner with one blow of the broad-bladed sabre in my hand; and it made an appalling clatter. Then, at last I held my enemy helpless upon my point... but there was the third party to be considered.

"Kill the bonebag," hissed Duselin. "He is the household monk. We shall have the remainder about our heads in a moment an you do not."

"Don't," I adjured the irresolute captain. "I am neither bonebag nor monk, but a European . . . though an Englishman truly."

The sirdar's flexible eyebrows rose to their ultimate altitude in his puzzlement.

" Expliquez, monsieur," he begged, lowering his half-raised blade.

I gave a threatening flick with my weapon as Duselin's hand strayed to his side lapel.

" Be still," I warned.

Then, without taking my eyes from my enemy, I addressed his companion.

"There is little time for explanation, sir," I said in my halting French. "The main fact is that Monsieur le Chevalier has virtually abducted this young lady of whom he has spoken. I have rescued her, and now desire to call the Chevalier to account for his conduct, as he should be called to account."

"Never heed him, De la Rivière. He lies !" countered the gentleman referred to in a fierce undertone. "The wench is my affianced, and came from Calcutta with me, but was stolen by the gentoo. Kill him ! Nom de Dieu ! Kill him, I order you."

But De la Rivière made no movement; his complete dismay delayed the proceedings sadly, in fact. I knew not whether he would remain a neutral spectator or no, and so could do no more.

"Monsieur le Chevalier? Monsieur . . .? Whom shall I believe?" he implored almost piteously.

"It is unnecessary that you should believe either of us," I said. "This is a private quarrel, Monsieur, and all I ask is that you will not lend your aid to the advantage of Monsieur Duselin. Second him, by all means; I can do without such support. The duello is honourably conducted in France and you will, I know, uphold the reputation of your country in this matter now. When the issue is decided . . . well, you may believe the survivor."

"But . . . "

"The survivor will explain all," I emphasized, "and, since Providence upholds the right in these meetings, I shall be he. Duselin, get your sword from that corner, or better, the tulwar which stands near by since I am so armed. But first drop your pistol on the carpet. Gently, we shall make poise and enough, anon."

The little weapon bounced on the soft pile, and with a silent movement my antagonist dragged his own slim blade from the corner in which it had fallen. This was unfair, because one cannot perform tricks of fence satisfactorily with a tulwar, and the rapier is a good deal longer.

And a-top of this, when he had armed himself, Duselin charged headlong upon me and I verily believe I should have died of the coward's blow he made at me, had it not been for the timely intervention of his second, who dashed the steel ceilingward.

"I am astounded, Monsieur," De la Rivière rebuked with heat. "You have already dishonoured your sword to-night. Would you do more murder?"

The Chevalier drew back, panting a little and endeavouring to control his working features. With the air of one delivering a long-considered judgment, De la Rivière spoke ~gain, addressing me.

"From what you say, Monsieur, I take it that you are unconnected with this household?" I nodded acquiescence in this. "Then, if there is a matter between you and Duselin requiring such pressing attention, I shall be glad to see that the formalities are observed. But, I would point out that this is a scarcely fitting place... the noise..."

"Then that's all right, my dear fellow," I broke in,

relieved. "And the place must suffice. I really cannot permit your principal an opportunity of eluding me."

De la Rivière entered into the spirit of the bizarre affair with the adaptability and *sang froid* of the true cavalier of fortune.

With swift movements he drew the heavy *purdah* across the door, shifted the carpets so that our feet should play noiselessly on them, and lit the wicks in the branches of a pedestal lamp. Then he drew his sword and offered it to me.

"A genuine Ferrara, Monsieur; 'tis writ on the blade."

I accepted the weapon with a bow and faced my enemy. He stoed motionless with the tense muscles showing through his ashy cheeks.

"Duselin," I asked, "why did you do this infamous thing, detaining an unfortunate lady by force in hideous surroundings that you might bend and break her to your will?"

For a moment I thought he did not intend to speak, but presently speech broke from the Chevalier in a torrent of furious, irrelevant words.

"What is your love to my love, your passion to my passion, your desire to my desire ? Or Armonde's ? He sought her through the boy; you tweaked at her skirt-hem, whitelivered and afraid. I . . . " the dark brows contracted . . . " I who alone truly loved her, was avoided, ignored. How could he love . . . Armonde . . . he was an animal ? And you ! An Englishman . . . a clod . . . what know you of passion ? What are your petty hankerings to the hell-flames that consume me ? I meant honestly by her; I should have had the means and the desire to make her happy. I could have made a princess of her, ay, a queen with riches and a court if need be. I should have returned with her to France, a rich man and an honoured, but for that blundering pirate . . . and you, you cowardly thief. I should have wooed her at my leisure ; she would have come to me readily, flattered at my offer of eminence and power, dazzled by the gewgaws I could dangle before her. But now, with hopes dashed, and pauperized, she must console me, heal my wounds. Ay, she must take me as I am. ...."

"Stop !" I cried, and sprang on guard.

The Frenchman's mouth closed tightly, and he leapt at me with the silent ferocity of a panther. De la Rivière took up a position near the *purdah* with a pistol cocked in each hand, and watched us sidelong.

I knew not my opponent's measure, but, thanks to Harryman, the ruses of French, Italian and English schools were mine. After a tentative feint or two we met in earnest, and Duselin proved himself the possessor of a passing skill. His toughness and agility were the equal and more of mine; his ruses were not those of modern schooling alone, but those of every land and of epochs dead and forgotten. *Punto, mandritta, stoccatta* and *reverso* mingled mazingly with *therce, riposte de pied ferme, carte* and *septime.* 

We made no sound save the travail of our breathing and the shrill scream of the wheeping blades.

Once my antagonist lunged venomously, and his point was prisoned in the silver work of my hilt; so that I wrenched the sword from his hand. I waited while he regained the weapon and, when we engaged again, I knew that he was shaken, and could feel the caution in his play. Twice more he pinked me, his blade pricking hornet stings on my thigh; I scored but one inadvertent scratch on Duselin's arm.

Then I bethought me of an Italian double feint and lunge that I had learned from the surgeon at Chauhati. I tried it as Duselin recovered and led him into a *sixte* that was all but vain.

'Twas patent he did not know the trick. I waited seeking for a favourable chance, the while the Chevalier forced me almost on to the entranced watcher at the door.

My opponent thrust fiercely, was foiled in *seconde* and drew back. I feinted again and drew him, and almost ere I knew it, hand and hilt were buried in the mechlin at his breast.

The Chevalier Duselin smiled wanly, or so it seemed to me, then slipped to his knees and fell gently back; the dulled Spanish steel dragging slowly from its ghastly sheath. Thus, without a murmur, he offered reparation to Rosalie.

I wiped the blade upon the carpet and handed it to its owner.

De la Rivière eyed the fallen man for a second or two, with the sword in his hand, then enquired dispassionately :

" Mantuan ? "

"Milanese," I answered, struggling for breath. "And thank you for your courtesy, Monsieur."

"Believe me, it is of no consequence. Are your wounds serious? No? That, at least, is good."

De la Rivière shrugged his shoulders, took out his snuff-box with an air that would have graced a fashionable drawingroom, and placed a pinch upon his wrist.

"Eh eien, I am as yet hopelessly in the dark, though this episode appears to be concluded, and I should hazard, sir, that although you promised me an explanation, you would prefer that I should remain so. For my part, I can at any time bear witness that this affair was fairly if somewhat irregularly concluded. Permettez ! this rappee is very fair . . .

"Ciel," continued the Frenchman, as I accepted the snuff with what composure I might, "how these moors do sleep! We have awakened no one it seems, though the clangour appeared to wellnigh deafen me. Er... I did not catch your name... Monsieur?"

"Then it were better perhaps that I did not tell you after all. I desire that my identity should be concealed."

De la Rivière bowed, stepped to the bedside of the Amil, then swiftly came to my side again.

"Hasten !" he whispered, "Help me lift Duselin,"

I looked at him in surprise.

"He was a white man and a Catholic. I cannot leave him here," the sirdar said.

I bent over my dead enemy, and marvelling at the stony beauty of the white face, lifted the body by the shoulders. Together we carried our burden from that grisly room, and the sentinel still slept though two live men and one dead passed over him to the courtyard.

At the spot where the horses were tethered, I assisted De la

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Rivière to fasten the burden on the Chevalier's horse. Then the Frenchman extended his hand to me.

"To our next meeting, *Monsieur l'Inconnu*. And may God and the Virgin bless the lady."

When the hoof-beats had died away, I made my way to the banana clump in which I had bade Madhava wait with his charges.

Almost as I reached the rendezvous, my hair rose and my skin crept in startling accord; for out of the dark mass of the great house came a bloodcurdling yell, like the trumpeting of a rogue elephant. The timbre of the voice, as it bawled of *thugs* and murderers and blood and death, I recognized as having offended my cars before.

Now 1 understood why the Frenchman had bade me hasten. It was the *Amil* who yelled. Duselin had stabbed him in the neck, and had missed the vital point by reason of Deo Narayan's armour of fat.



"Behold a wonder here ! Love hath received his sight !" INO. DOWLAND, 1600.

DEO NARAYAN was under the impression that he was dead.

He said so again and again at the top of his voice, and his information rang through the night like the wailings of doomed Salar. Consequent upon the cries came the yells of the awakened men-at-arms, and a cacophony of feminine shricks from the zenana. Everyone howled that Deo Narayan was dead, and none louder than the corpse himself.

As I walked quictly into the banana clump, Madhava ran to meet me.

"Quick ! The horses, Madhava !" I seized Rosalie's hand, unresisting, though limp enough, Lord knows.

"Sipihr has them beyond that brake of sugar," answered the priest, and toddled off behind the bananas; while I dragged my ward along in his wake.

Surely enough the Rajpoot and four horses, champing restively, presently loomed up in the shadow. The soldier mounted as we approached, realizing the need for speed.

I unfastened the bridles, chose a small Afghan pony to mount Rosalie and bent to shorten the leather of the circular, spurred stirrup. As I did so, however, the leather was torn from my grasp and fore ever I could stand upright, a pair of soft arms encircled my neck and a warm body pressed close against mine.

Hot kisses rained on my cheeks and lips . . . then the pressure was relaxed and I caught the whispered words :

"A farewell gift, Lord of the World. "Twas I who sent thee word."

A dim figure . . . Sovona's I knew . . . fled up the avenue towards the *Amil's* house. Where she had learned to kiss I know not, but learn she had, and well.

I cried as loudly as I dared after her, but the girl took no heed, and there was naught for it but to let her go, if we were to escape. Poor child, I never saw her again.

"Art well beloved, *hairagi*," said she who chained my heart, doubt and hope and raillery minging in her tones. "And methought thou didst respond."

"Mount, lady," I quoth curtly, far from pleased at the last phrase.

Rosolie obeyed silently, and we rode quietly out into the silver-lit avenue.

After a time Rosalie spoke again.

"Tell me, priest, what befell there . . . in the house ?"

"Lady, I kept my word. Thine enemy has seen his last sunrise."

Rosalie Brunel gave a great shudder. Yes, this was the second man I had killed for her. 'T'was as well, indeed, that she would never know that. It was a long time before the girl ventured speech again, and when she did so, I noted that she was studying my features as well as the gloom would allow. I took care to cut short her opportunities.

"Didst thou slay," she asked, "only because thou believedst him my enemy?"

"That were enough justification," I answered.

"Who art thou, then? What priest can hold his own against a practised swordsman? Thou art over plump, too, for a m ndicant."

"Lady, this dress of mine was but assumed that I might watch the house and satisfy myself of thy presence there. I am that same Talukdar, Indra Rama, who would have succoured thee in Faizabad, though, alas, to adopt this dress I had to lose my beard . . . and should really have shaved my head as well."

"Ah, I thought I knew thee. Talukdar-Sahib I am grateful to thee for this service, and full of regrets that thou shouldst have deemed it essential to . . . to lose thy beard. I have often thought of thee."

"Regret not the beard, lady. It will grow again. Didst think me then a man of such little resolution that a cracked skull should cause me to relinquish my task?"

"Nay, but I feared for thee. I knew not whether thou wert alive or dead. Whither leadest thou now?"

"To my house, in which thou hast already sheltered. There thou mayst rest and command in me what service thou wilt."

Rosalie raised a hand to her forehead as though to clear something from her eyes.

A silence ensued.

"Lady," I questioned in my turn, "when thou art rested, where wouldst thou go . . . to the city of the feringis . . . Calcutta ?"

"Nay, sir, nay. I have no friends there . . . none at all. I think . . . I think that I must go to Faizabad."

"As thou wilt. To whom in Faizabad? Tell me, that I may warn thy friends of thy coming."

"Sahib, I have a friend in Faizabad, but know not where I may find him, nor where to look. I am new to these cities of India, but by reason of a misfortune in Calcutta, I was bound to seek out this man in Faizabad that he might help me."

A man.... Out upon it ! Whatever my intentions, I was still vulnerable to jealousy.

"Thou desireth that I shall search out . . . thy friend ?" I enquired, determined to know more.

"Talukdar-Sahib, thy kindness is beyond the measure of my gratitude. Nay, give me clothing an thou art able, and let me prosecute my search myself."

"Flay, that thou shalt not do, lady. Nahin, thou shalt rest in the Sher Khoti and 1 will bring thy friend to thee. Now tell me, what manner of man is he?"

"He. . . Ah, sir, thou wilt recall I asked thee hadst thou seen a feringi on the road to Faizabad, when I was thy guest before . . when thou believedst me to be a man. It is he who is the friend of whom I speak."

God in Heaven ! Did Rosalie refer to me ?

"Yes, I remember; the man of sober habit and a packhorse. "Thou seekest him indeed?"

"I do. He is the man I would find."

"But, lady, what can he do for thee?"

"He...he...I need his help. Without it, I...I am lost," stammered Rosalie Brunel in my thunderstricken ears.

She sought me ! She sought me ! Without my aid she was lost !

I scarce knew where I was or what I did; the stupendous words rang and thundered in my ears, deafening and dazing me to all else.

Throughout this time we had been riding quietly down the great road. The outcry behind us had rapidly died away. Deo Narayan was far too selfish a man to allow anyone to leave his bedside now, and there was not a man among his retinue, I judged, who would willingly initiate a hue and cry.

Madhava and Sipihr rode well ahead as advanced guard.

It was Rosalie's voice that brought me to my senses; Rosalie's

startled voice raised in imperious demand. She was leaning forward in her saddle, and one slim index finger quivered tensely an inch or two beneath my chin.

"Where did you get that ? Tell me quickly !"

I squinted down my nose in an effort to look at my chest, and a gleam of reflected starlight glimmered. It was shining from the miniature. Loath to part with it even in my latest masquerade, I had fastened the amulet about my neck; and it had slipped forth from under the necklace, probably during the fight with Duselin, and now dangled loosely on its proper cord.

"Oh, that ... " I announced, " that is ... "

But even my developed mendacity had been damaged by the stunning impact of Rosalie's revelation.

"Where did you get it?" gasped my lady breathlessly. And not till she spoke this second time did I realize that she was using English, and that I had replied in the same tongue.

Willy-nilly, my gome was up.

The avenue closed into a deep tunnel; the tree-tops met o'erhead to roof in a cavern of pitchy blackness.

Shielded by the murk I wiped the paint from my face with a rag from my saddle-bow, rubbing vigorously to take out the wrinkles. I sat upright, and shook my hair about my shoulders dragging its tangles from my brow and eyes. I was always a dignified person, and to be revealed in this clownish garb was not gratifying.

Came a break in the trees, letting the argent gleam filter tenderly through. I turned my face boldly towards Rosalie, and met her eyes. She looked at me intently, and her gaze became fixed and puzzled. Watching, I saw the blood leap to the pale face I adored, turning its clear ivory to a dusky hue visible even in the starlight.

The silken *saree* began to rise and fall irregularly at its owner's breast, her lips parted in an almost painful gasp. Then the little head lost its proud poise, drooping like a flower a-thirst.

At last my traitor tongue yielded to control.

"Rosalie ! "

In beneficent mood at last, impulse took control once more.

At a touch of my knee my intelligent nag sidled nearer the Afghan pony.

I stretched out a trembling, groping arm and encircled the lissom waist. Next moment the Afghan pony was riderless and my own nag unguided.

Merciful darkness fell again, and under its cover, I sought and found my lady's lips, fragrant, honey-sweet and soft as the petals of a rose.

Nirvana was mine.

Rosalie looked up at me with April eyes, and we smiled together, a little abashed and shy, for now that this incredible consummation had been wrought, the magical swiftness and unexpectedness of it left us breathless. There had been no period of sweet probation for us, no tender dalliance, none of the "fair speechless messages" with which lovers prepare themselves for the one great moment life has to offer.

In addition, I was a mendicant priest no longer, but John Warren, and John Warren, moreover, in precious nearly the garb he was born in.

I reined in, seized the nose of the patient little beast which trotted behind, brought it alongside, and assisted my lady to seat herself more circumspectly upon it.

Still Rosalie had not spoken, though her silence had been golden indeed.

"Lady," I ventured, "you have sought one in Oudh, I believe You have found him, and he awaits your desire. What can he do for you?"

"I know not," was the soft answer. "I never did know. It is for him to say . . . and do . . . as he pleases."

"What?" I ejaculated. "Miss Brunel . . . Rosalie, why dia you follow me to Faizabad?"

"Oh !" cried she with face averted, "it was a mad thing I did, I know. But I was mad. My brother's death ... and ... your going had made me so. I was in despair and alone. To whom could I go? I knew no one in Calcutta. Mrs. Mac-Murray took me in again, of her charity, but . . . doubtless thinking it for my benefit, she forced me to meet so many people . . . men. They were sympathetic, truly, for a time, and then . . . "

I understood. Men are precipitate in this land where women are as few and as precious as fragments of the True Cross.

"So you sought me, an exile, a fugitive in the heart of Oudh. I can scarce believe it even now."

"You were exiled for me, a fugitive for me; it was I who sent you away. And I knew you wanted me, and I knew that I...I. wanted you. I tried to tell you so that night you went away, but you would not understand."

"Oh !" cried I, too aghast to say any more.

Small wonder that I had been "insufferable " in my blindness.

To divert Rosalie's mind from her own misfortunes, I began to relate mine in as airy and carcless a fashion as possible. I told her, too, of Sovona's efforts to win my regard, a thing I should have desired to withhold; but which the widowed girl's behaviour earlier that night compelled me to relate in self-defence.

"Believe me," I beseeched, when I made reference to this, "I did not respond when Sovona . . . said farewell."

"Forgive me," replied my lady, and smiled. "I meant it not."

So presently my tale was done, and yet the journey not completed.

I turned to Rosalie.

"Rosalie," quoth I, "what now?"

" I do not understand."

"Dearest," I said . . . and the word came haltingly . . . it was so new to my vocabulary. "I was blind at Chauhati because I would not see. That the world held so much happiness as this for me I dared not hope, nor did I seek it, knowing that worldly goods were scarce with me. And now

that, despite my unhappy self and all this tribulation which you have undergone for me . . . "

"And you, for my sake . . . "

"... we find ourselves together at last with opened eyes, what are we to do?"

" Is not the fact that we are so together enough for you, Captain Warren?"

"Lady, it is ! Believe me, I stand amazed at my good fortune. But . . ."

A slender hand was raised, forbidding speech.

"Capiain Warren . . . Jack !" asked my lady, artlessly, "when did you first know that you loved me ?"

And she insisted on an answer, nor would she let me address myself again to seemly problems of ways and means out of the predicament which was mutually ours.

Thus, for I was nothing loath, we rode on, weaving bright fabrics from imagination's threads to deck the halls of those castles which reared walls of precious, diaphanous material ever higher and higher.

Ere long the stars grew pale and the eastern horizon glowed with lambent green. In the bosky light, more treacherous even than that of the stars, I looked ahead for Madhava and Sipihr, but could not see them, though I could distinguish now the fringe of my bamboo wall, freshly green amid the naked trees that dotted the countryside.

The path narrowed, till it vanished into nothingness a furlong from the Sher Khoti. Even now I was none too certain of striking the true spot in the hedge where one might enter. But suddenly Madhava emerged from the clumped stems, and every jingal on the walls bellowed a vociferous welcome: the billowing clouds of smoke glowing pink and primrose n the dawn. Every paddy bird, kite and crow for miles around rose in consternation.

Madhava had a strange sense of the fitness of things, and there was certainly no more opportune moment for a salute.

"A welcome to the Talukdar's Fort, beloved," I said, as I

assisted Rosalie to dismount, having first thrown a blanket about my shoulders to aid the paint in covering me.

Madhava, ahead, muttering queer Sanskrit phrases of congratulation and wonderment at Rosalie's beauty, we passed through the secret way; and at length stood safe in the great durbar room, amid a curious assembly of servants which I speedily dispersed, Madhava among them.

We were alone for the moment and I would have taken my lady in my hungry arms.

But she eluded me with a grimace at my Madhava-raised wrinkles.

"Good-day, sir priest," she laughed. "The sun has *sen*. To your orisons !"

"Yes," I answered gravely, "it would seem as though the night is done at last."

Whereat, Roselie laid her arms about my neck unasked, and kissed those same wrinkles one by one.



"... a man appeared at the doorway, Bringing in uttermost haste a message of urgent importance." "Miles Standish" (Longfellow).

An urgent desire for news of Harryman determined me to visit the surgeon at Lucknow without further delay. Therefore, commending Rosalie to Madhava's jealous charge, I left quietly one dawning.

"Farewell," said the priest, when I had dragged myself away from the Blue Garden. "If thou goest to Lucknow, there you may secure, as I say, many elephants and long-tailed horses and white camels. There liveth a man there, too, who knoweth how to prepare chatties so that they spout fire of many colours. See thou, the womenfolk already worship the lady as a peri. Why go to Calcutta then, where there may await trouble...."

Madhava was still arguing as I galloped off.

. . . . . . . .

"Your news are better than all physick," grinned Harryman when I had finished. "But, Zooks ! If ever anybody gets to know of this Garden of Eden in the middle of Oudh, you two children won't be able to see for blushes. Egad ! don't I wish I were young again ! I'm rejoiced, lad, to find that you have arrived at my conclusion at last, the conclusion that plagued you so a while back. Gad, what a dunderhead at logic you are."

"Ah, Jo. I understand your innuendoes now."

"I'll wager you do . . . lucky dog."

The surgeon was lying on a pallet in a half-finished brick house in the new city. According to the protestation with which he greeted me, he was as fit as a fiddle, as chirpy as a cricket and as strong as a Chinese egg, but it was not hard to see that a long time must elapse ere he could set foot to stirrup again. However, the snuff-coloured Italian doctor seemed satisfied enough with his progress.

"The beast would be for ever bleeding me, Jack," Harryman complained. "I told him that Duselin had bled me enough in all conscience, and that if he ever came near me wth a bistury, I'd bite him, so help me Bob ! Ay, lad, 'twas Duselin sure enough . . . the treacherous swine. . . . "

"Harryman," I interrupted irrelevantly, "you spoke just now of a . . . a garden of Eden."

"There, there ! Did I truly ? What of it then, O Adam ? "

"It is no joking matter, Jo. How am I to ensure Miss Brunel's safe return to the Settlement without injury to her reputation?"

"Ah, how indeed?" replied the surgeon. "That is a damnable difficulty, indeed. Ah, I have it. You've told me that Captain Claude knows something of your plight. I suggest you trust him a bit more. 'Pon my soul, if anybody can get Miss Eve safely back, and with an unimpeachable yarn to account for things, it's Claude. He's as straight as a die, I'm certain, but on occasion, he can tell a better and bigger lie than any man in Christendom. He's an influential cul'y, too.

"An' that reminds me, Jack. I've got a letter in my pouch from the Colonel for you. I may say I know what it contains... an invitation to return."

My heart jumped.

"I saw him alone ... there, in Fort William," pursued the surgeon, "and gave him the truth. I told him that you left through no fear of retribution but chiefly for the sake of a lady ... and perhaps in some small measure through the love of a very foolish old man. Nay, lad, do not interrupt.

"After I'd told him that and ... well, said what I had to say, I told him some things about Armonde and Duselin that set him sprinting for Government House in a hurry. He saw the Governor-General himself ... Hastings was the discrect quarter I referred to ... you remember. Well, the upshot was the Governor-General trusted me to catch the fox, and, old fool that I am, I let the fox catch me.

"But all is well about the other affair ... your return, I mean. The Commandant has been a true gallant in his day, and he fixed things. Young Peabody wants you back, too. He's lamentably short in his reckoning of powder and shot, and explained the deficiency by saying that the new firelocks had got leaky barrels... and he was well rated for his impudence.

"No, Jack, say naught more. It's all finished and done with, like Noah's Ark. So let us forget what's gone . . . eh boy? Now about Miss Brunel's return. . . . "

Gratitude and love for my friend held back my speech when I would have protested, and the hurried entrance of a man, a white man, prohibited more intercourse of a personal burden. I recognized the newcomer. He was the new Resident in Lucknow, Mr. Bristow, and he was in a vast hurry.

"Good morning, Surgeon Major Harryman," he snapped,

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briskly. "How is the head to-day, and the chest? Better, I trust !"

"Sound as a bell . . . two bells, I mean, thanks. Anything yea want, Mr. Bristow ?"

"Yes," said Bristow, looking at me curiously. "I rather think this is my man"

He relapsed into the vernacular.

"The Talukdar Sahib, Indra Rama of the Sher Khoti, is it not? Captain Martin informed me that I should probably find thee here."

I assured the Resident that I was known as the Talukdar Sath Indra Rama, etc., whereon he rattled on quickly.

"Two gentlemen would speak with thee, Sahib, on a matter of urgent importance. Wilt give me the pleasure of conducting thee to them ?"

I intimated that I would give him that pleasure.

"Then let us go." And in English, "Good-day, Harryman. Wonder what your moor friend has been up to? There's something big on the *tapis*, I'll hazard."

The surgeon appeared as astonished as I was at the summons, but he answered cheerily :

"If you see him who brought that letter for me this morning, you may crown his pate with your cane, Mr. Bristow. It was an ancient bill from England . . . two years' cockfighting dues at half-a-crown . . . five shillings. A nice thing to spring on an invalid, I protest !"

Much to Harryman's delight I made him a low obeisance ere I hurried off after the bustling figure of the Resident. "When events turn out so much better for a man than he has had reason to dread, is it not a proof that his conduct has been less foolish and blameworthy than it might otherwise have appeared?"

George Eliot.

ANXIOUS to find out what lay before me, I hurried after Bristow. That worthy eventually came to a halt beside the flimsy skeleton of a small brick chamber, and shoved me through the gap that was intended to be a doorway, ahead of him.

Within, seated upon plain wooden chairs were two men I knew well enough by sight in all conscience. One was the Viceroy of Oudh, and, at sight of the determined features of the other, I nearly dropped in trepidation and astonishment. There were few in India better known than he.

"Ha !" exclaimed this latter gentleman sharply, as I came forward with a bow. "Introduce us, Mr. Bristow. It will prevent misunderstanding !"

He used English.

Bristow bowed and turned to me.

"This, Talukdar Sahib, is the Rao Sahib Yar Mahomed, a worthy Talukdar of the province like thyself, and this, is . . . er . . . Mr. Stanley Burton, a gentleman from Fort William."

"Thanks, Bristow," said Mr. Burton, immediately. "Now would you very kindly fetch me... ah... those papers I left on the table of the dais in the great tent."

Bristow hesitated, seemed about to protest, then inclined his head and left the room. The pretext was very obvious, certainly; but I recalled that Bristow was not a *protégé* of "Mr. Stanley Burton," but of one who was believed inimical to him.

I waited, watching the couple before me. The "worthy Talukdar" was ill at ease ... of that there was no doubt. He

fingered the jewelled serpash in his turban restlessly and there was something approaching appeal in his eyes as he regarded me. The other scrutinized me with a sharp though pleasant glance. There was no mistaking the bold nose, determined chin and baldish forehead, nor yet the sober habit, and the horse guards in their painful mufti.

Bristow's footsteps died away.

Mr. Burton spoke forthwith and in English.

"It is a lucky chance indeed that brought you here to-day, but as doubtless you have business of your own to attend to, I will not detain you long, sir. The matter is this. My friend here has been good enough to send me urgent word concerning certain things touching an . . . an estate of which I am steward. Since I have but recently attained the honour of this stewardship it behoved me to look into these things personally . . . privately. It is an affair of . . . ah . . . poaching, shall we say ? "

I saw a little daylight now. The Nawab had thought it good policy to disclose the facts of the French intrigue to "Mr. Stanley Burton," and good policy it doubtless was. The concise sentences continued :

"You've understood, ha'nt you, Mr. Warren? This gentleman has my gratitude for his news and perception. There are other stewards with me, of course, but I esteemed it my duty to keep such news as these to myself. You apprehend?"

I nodded my acquiescence and Mr. Burton went on :

"My friend, being a loyal ally of the owner of the estate of which I speak, has handed me a couple of documents which have an important bearing on the affair, and he tells me that it was largely due to you, sir, that they came into his possession."

I felt like replying that, further, it was entirely due to me that the documents came into *his*... Mr. Burton's possession... but I refrained.

For this reason, then, the Nawab's look of appeal.

Well, the Prince had had a good fright, and I was not one to make further trouble for him . . . if only for his father's sake. Therefore I then and there interred all memory of his late vacillation.

"First then, on a far greater behoof than mine own, I have to tender you thanks," continued the speaker. "Secondly, I have to point out the manifest undesirability of referring to this matter again, should you be tempted so to do at any future time. And thirdly, I would ask you if you have any knowledge of the whereabouts of these . . . poachers to whom I have referred."

I acknowledged the expression of thanks, scant but deeply sincere, as this man's thanks ever were, and then replied :

"The man who was chief among these marauders is *i.ad*, sir. I killed him myself . . . . a private affair."

An exclamation of annoyance escaped my interfocutor.

"Damme sir ! What the devil did you do that for ? He would have been well worth the questioning. Dear me, dear me ! Well, Your High ... er ... Sahib, our friend seems to have settled the matter himself as far as that business goes, so that the plan we evolved while closeted together will be of little use."

"Afsez !" (Alas !) exclaimed the Prince, and rolled his eyes, but there was huge relief and precious little regret in the exclamation.

"This much being said," concluded Mr. Burton, "there is nothing left for me to do but to thank you again, Major Warren,"... he stood erect and offered me his hand... adding under his breath, "as a humble citizen of the British Empire."

I returned the grip, vastly flattered.

"I am not a major, sir," I said, correcting his slip.

"Perchance you soon will be," answered Mr. Burton, calmly.

"On the detached list for special service," prompted the Rao Sahib Yar Mahomed, nudging his companion.

"I had not forgotten," agreed the other, a trifle testily. I should not be surprised, Major Warren, if you were invited to undertake certain work in connection with the army of

Oudh . . . reforms and the like, upon which the ruler of that province is bent . . . to his infinite credit."

"And you will be quartered on your estate near Faizabad... the Sher Khoti and the taluka around it," chimed in the Nawab with fulsome gratitude in his eye.

In both of these announcements I spotted the Prince's munificent hand. I was to be rewarded for my silence . . . bribed, if you like . . . and I knew it well enough. But what was I to do ? I had had enough of enemies and trouble. And furthermore, very much furthermore, I was a man desirous of earning sufficient to support a wife. So I did the human thing and murmured my thanks, deprecating the praise by saying that fortuitous circumstances had placed me in a position to do what had been done.

"Fortuitous fiddlesticks," snapped Mr. Burton, taking a pinch of snuff. "Providence, my dear sir, Providence. Aha! I hear Mr. Bristow returning. What the devil was it I sent him for?"

But it was not Bristow; it was the ubiquitous Claude Martin.

He bustled in and bowed to the two gentlemen and myself. His arrival seemed to be taken by both my companions very much as a matter of course.

"You 'ave finish', sirs? Good. Zen I do not interrup'. I am come to beg ze good office on be'alf of my frien', Monsieur Warren, or rather a frien' of 'is. Ze mattaire 'as been explain' to Monsieur 'Arryman 'oo ask me for a suggestion, wiz ze result zat I 'ave evolve a ... a ... supplication."

"A good word, Captain," remarked Mr. Burton. "But go on."

" Zere is a lady . . . "

I could see what was coming and damned this genial little busybody under my breath.

"Ah! the lady! Our vanished belle of the New Year's Ball," exclaimed Mr. Burton, who evidently knew more than I gave him credit for. "Well, if I can in any way help, the honour and delight will be mine." I looked at Martin reproachfully. So this was how he observed my confidence.

The little Captain merely blinked and rattled on.

"Ze poor young lady 'ave only jus' recover from ze shock of 'er brother, 'is demise, and still remain' at Sookhsagar in retirement. But she is now alone, and *naturellement*, is not desirous of returning to Calcutta wizout some protection."

I stared amazed, wondering what was to come next.

"Ze question zerefore is, which kin' lady will muzzer 'er, take 'er under ze maternal ving ? 'Oo, I ask you, will do zis ? Vell, zere is vun very kin'-hearted and beautiful lady at present in Sookhsagar... a lady of 'igh and splendid qualities 'oo wauld, doubtless, take such a task upon 'erself. Every vun respec' and like 'er, an', under 'er maternal ving aforesaid, novun would dream of....'

The Captain stopped speaking suddenly, eyeing Burton appraisingly, for that worthy had ceased to grin and was frowning heavily.

"What the devil are you driving at, Captain Martin? Whom do you mean, sir?" he demanded.

"Ze beautiful Mrs. Im'off," answered the irrepressible Captain without hesitation.

His audacity amazed me. He was appealing directly to the influence "Mr. Burton" was supposed by the ungenerous to have with the lady in question.

Burton's frown grew blacker and blacker. Twice he opened his mouth to speak and closed it again. Then, as quickly as it had grown, his frown died away, and he laughed.

"Then I take it that Miss Brunel... which I believe is the lady's name... must have been spending her retirement with the lady of whom you speak, at Sookhsagar, Captain Martin? If that be so, she will doubtless return with Mrs. Imhoff to Calcutta in due season. I will mention the matter to ... a friend as I pass through Sookhsagar, a friend who will doubtless secure the kindly assistance of Mrs. Imhoff."

Martin bowed to hide his triumphant grin, and at the earliest opportunity favoured me with a mischievous wink.

"I trust," said Mr. Burton, to no one in particular, as we all filed out of the strange little meeting-place, " that, should a certain remarkable young lady ever have the fortune to wed I may be vouchsafed the opportunity of assisting at the ceremony."

And once again he honoured me by offering his hand.

Then, Mr. Bristow arriving, disgruntled and paperless, I bowed stiffly to the "Rao Sahib Yar Mahomed," and went off with a full heart ... and Claude Martin ... to Harryman.

. . . . .

Surely enough, Rosalie travelled to Sookhsagar as an Indian lady of rank, and ere long, she appeared in Calcutta in her own character under the kindly protection of that sweet lady who later became the wife of Warren Hastings. This, coupled with the fact that the trial of poor old Rajah Nuncomar was claiming the undivided attention of the Settlement at the time, robbed her sudden re-appearance of any element of suspicion.

Later, I followed, and we were married quietly at the little church nestling in one corner of the old Fort; and one Mr. Stanley Burton was present to watch the tying of the knot.

There were other witnesses of the ceremony too : Captain Claude the volatile, Surgeon Major Harryman, who did kiss the bride and also one Mistress Freeman at the church door ; receiving by way of exchange from the latter an almighty clap on the ear. Then, too, as the service was midway through, there appeared from nowhere, as though by magic, a little old moor in the costume of a *comprodore*, with Hessian boots in addition. It was Madhava, disappointed of his fireworks, garlands and elephants, who had journeyed from Sookhsagar where he had been left, and had thus obtained admission by a ruse.

He explained to me afterwards that, since no one in the Settlement knew him, it followed that his caste was similarly unknown, and that after all, caste is a poor garment if one may not take it off when people are not looking to give the body an airing.

### WARREN OF OUDH

From the mantle of mild authority which he assumed for the occasion, Madhava seemed to imbibe something of its spirit, for though till his death he remained the most ascetic of Brahm's heirophants, we never had the slightest trouble with the countless servants at the Sher Khoti.

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And now I am all but alone.

Harryman's wound so wrecked his health that he was compelled to sail for home, and his passing cost me much. Madhava's ashes floated years agone down the sacred river, and the rite of his burning will long be remembered in Oudh, so solemn it was.

Asaf-ud-Dowlah, too, sleeps with his fathers, leaving to perpetuate his memory, where was once a humble town, a city of palaces and gardens beyond compare ; in whose Imambaras the faithful will assemble for years to come to pray and mourn and fight at the Mohurrum and to recall, perhaps, in their saner moments, the might of the Prince who built them.

Ay, gone are they all, all save Claude Martin, who is, as he prophesied, a general, and is building a great house with a lake before it on the outskirts of the Nawab's great city. He is old, and suffereth much from the stone, yet I feel that the life in me is flickering mightily, like the flame of a burned-out taper, and that I shall precede him Beyond despite his weightier years; for *she* is calling to me with a voice that grows clearer day by day.

But the task is done, so that I may lay down my pen.

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