

*The Blue Eyed
Manchu
Abdullah*

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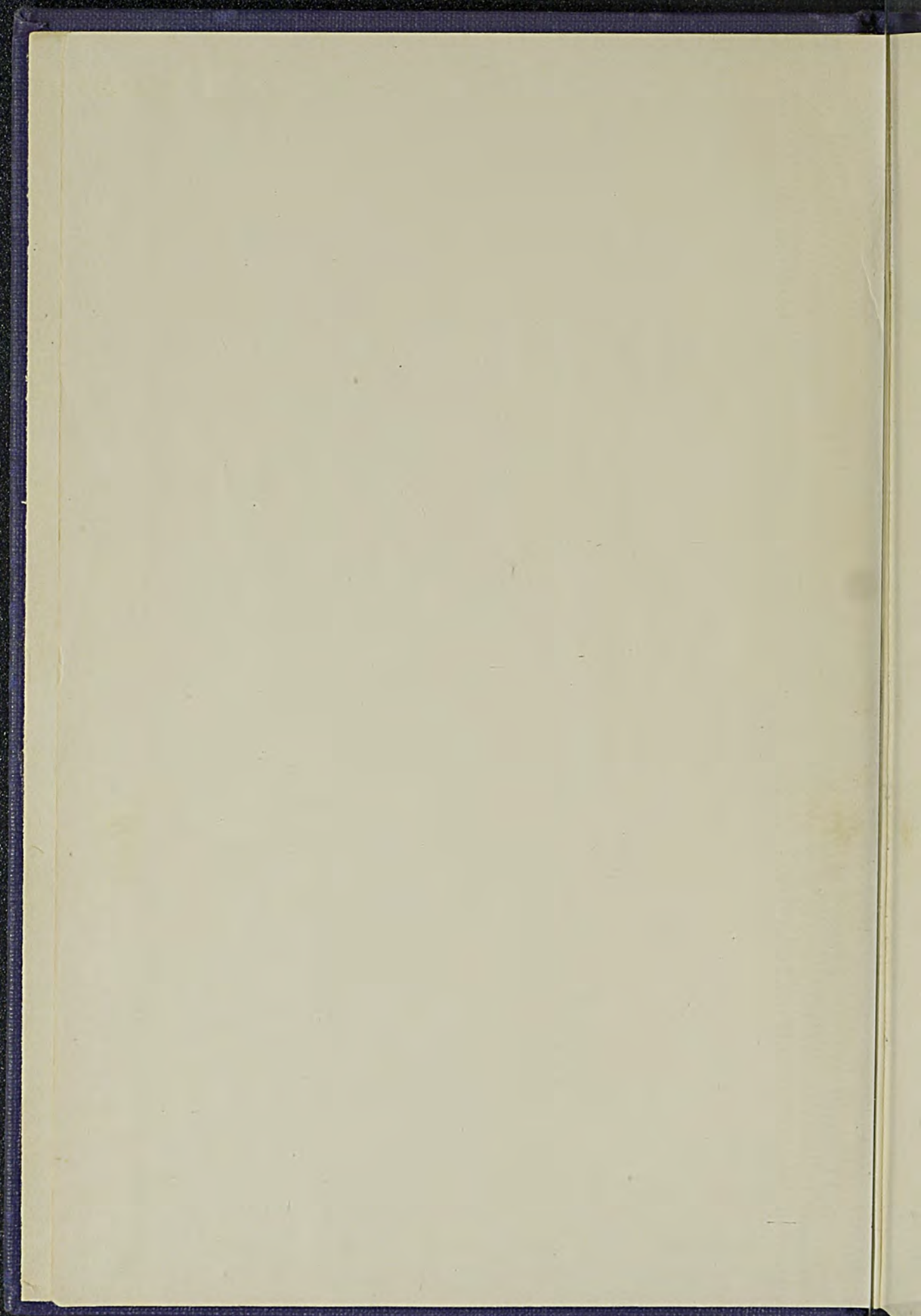
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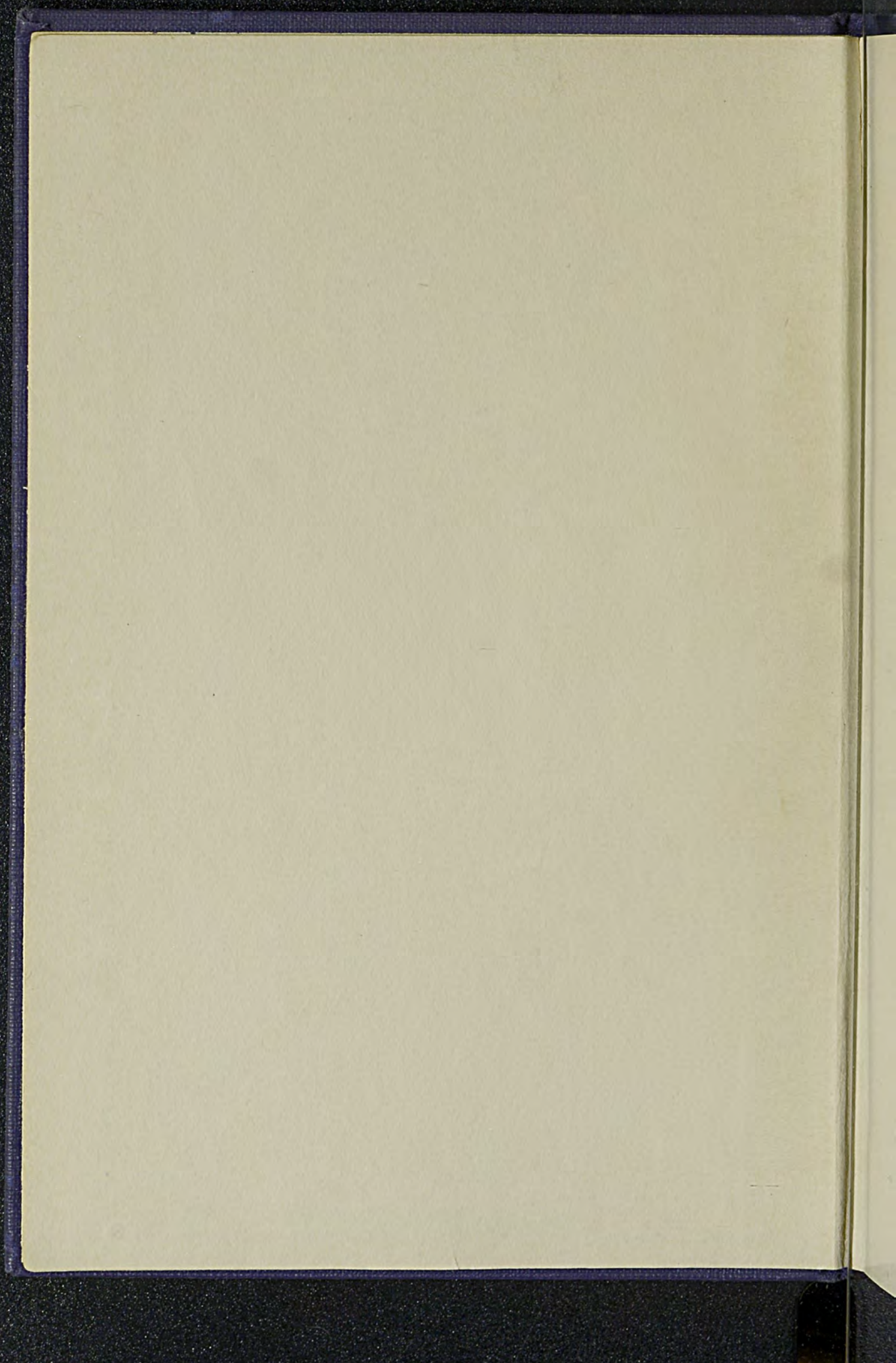
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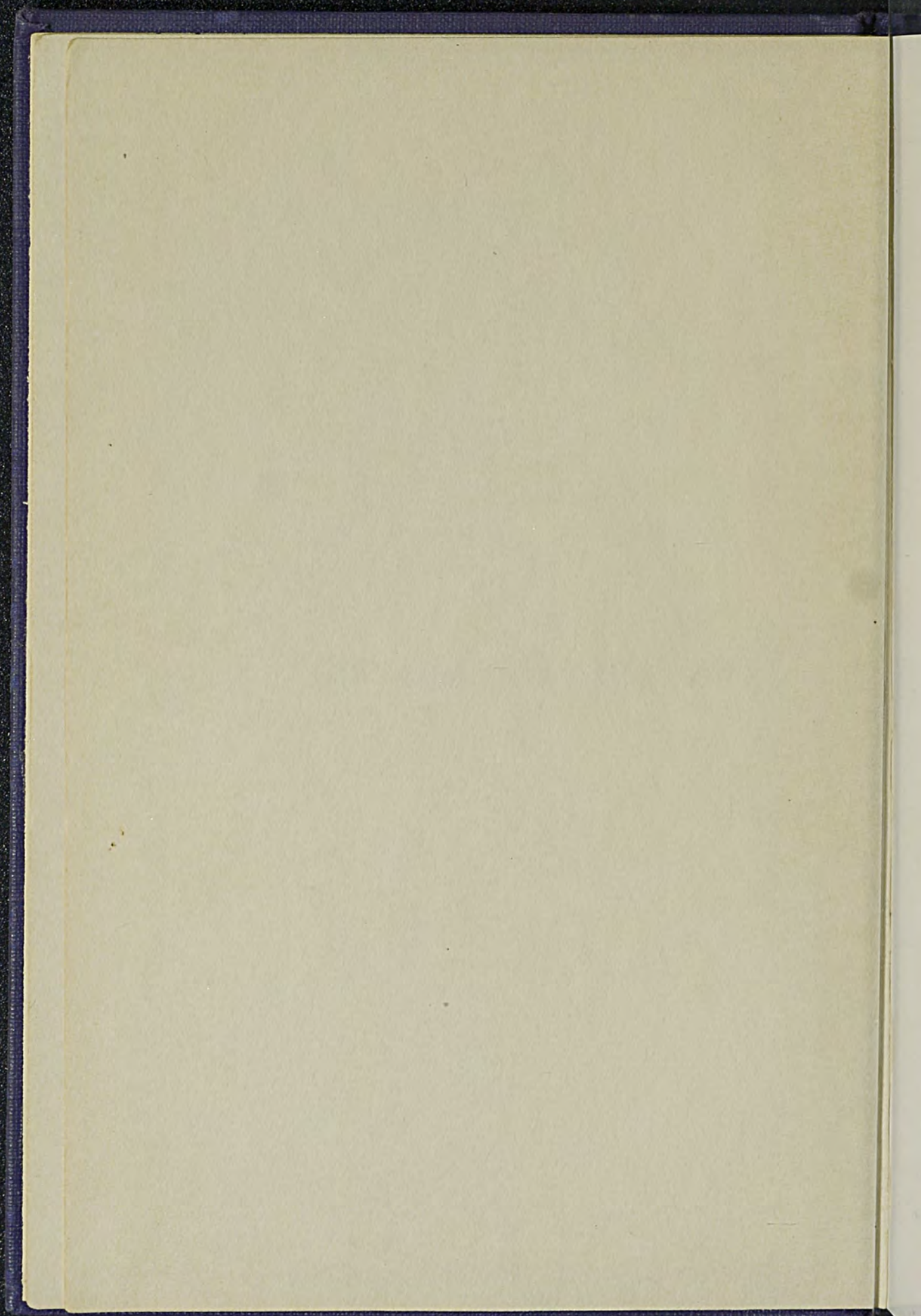
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THE BLUE-EYED MANCHU





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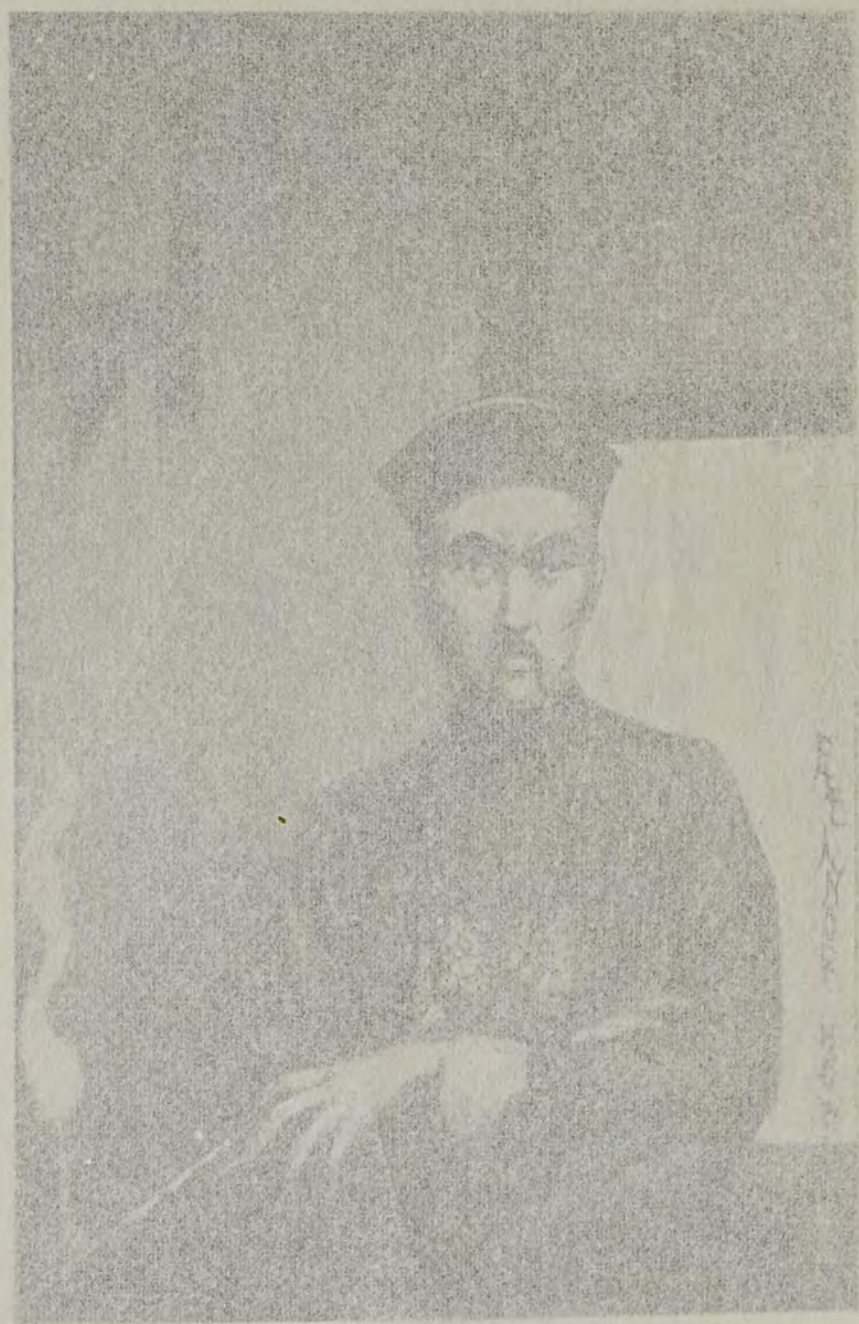
BY

ACHMED ABDULLAH

(Author of "Bucking the Tiger",
"The Cadying Race" etc.)



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New York

THE BLUE-EYED MANCHU

To
ROBERT H. DAVIS
who helped, advised, suggested,
corrected, and gave freely and
generously.

THE BLUE-EYED MANCHU

CHAPTER I

"Even from beyond the grave I shall kill you!"

Nice, cheerful sort of prophecy, isn't it? It made me shudder at nights, when the wind was shrilling in the tree-tops and all the little downy screech-owls were giving their evening concert.

But I did not take my fears very seriously, though the memory of the prophecy never quite left me.

I had really nothing tangible to worry over ever since I had returned from Europe a few weeks earlier, and had made my home, including a garden, obligato chicken coop, and garage, on the Jersey side where the street car conductors are still polite and where I could get a good view over the Palisades.

Rest—that's what I needed—and I divided my time between my chickens and some tattered

copies of "Le Vicomte de Bragelonne" and "Aucassin et Nicolette"; and for awhile at least I was childishly, ridiculously happy. What if the little hamlet where I lived was grey and drab and prosaic? It was the very medicine for me. It spelled forgetting—forgetting what had gone before—what had wound up with the cheerful message quoted above.

Nothing remained to remind me of the whole eighteen months—those months pregnant with excitement, adventure, and forebodings—but Cajetano Maria Mascasenhás, the Goanese half-caste. I had taken him to America with me. In the past the man had risked his life for me. He had stuck by me through thick and thin. So now I gave him asylum and bread. It was the least I could do.

And he repaid me with a doglike devotion which was a little embarrassing to me and which at times brought a lump into my throat.

And then, overnight it seemed to me, a subtle change crept into the manners and the behavior of the Goanese.

He took to staring at me for long seconds in a frightfully embarrassing, appealing manner, like some dumb animal; his whole soul self-involved,

enigmatic, encircled by superstitious, sybilline speculations.

At other times, chiefly when he imagined himself unobserved, his lips would straighten into a thin, sneering line; a purple-black, opalescent light would come into his deep-brown eyes; his whole attitude, his carriage, the poise of his head, the very gestures of his frail, high-veined hands would give me a sudden impression of arrogance and defiance; yes, and of hatred.

I could never nail him. For never did he speak an arrogant word; never did he do anything which he should not have done. But there was something about him which I did not understand; and which, therefore, I did not like.

But then I am a prosaic, matter-of-fact sort of a chap. And so I decided to banish this impression from my conscious memory as something altogether incredible, altogether ridiculous.

So matters drifted along for several sleepy weeks.

Finally one night—and I shall never cease to remember the drab, gray, inarticulate horror of it—a strange thing happened.

I was reading Williams' Grammar, rubbing up my Chinese a bit, when Mascasenhás came into

the library with some letters. He stepped directly in front of me, bowing in his usual feline manner. I took the letters. He straightened up, and as he did so it seemed to me that there was a faint smudge of scarlet on his forehead.

It was very strange. I can't quite express it with the written word. But the smudge was faint, very faint, very evasive; and yet it was starkly vivid.

I spoke instinctively, without thinking:

"What's that scarlet mark on your forehead, Mascasenhás?"

The Goanese looked at me. He shivered like a tree cut away from its supporting roots. His olive skin turned a dull dead white.

"A scarlet mark, Mr. Vandewater?" His words broke and splintered. "Surely—not a scarlet mark—surely not—"

His voice snapped off in mid air. He stepped in front of a large Louis-Seize mirror which is the pride of my library and looked at himself in a searching, intent manner.

Then he turned to me again. His face had regained its natural color. His voice was low and steady.

"No, master. You are mistaken. There is no scarlet mark."

I looked at him again. And he was right. There was no mark on his forehead. Not even the faintest trace. And yet, two minutes ago I could have sworn that—

No, no, no! It must have been my wretched imagination, perhaps an optic illusion, which had been fooling me. For I could have sworn on a stack of Bibles ten feet high that a scarlet mark had been on the man's forehead; a scarlet mark which, in its hazy outlines, resembled the dread caste-mark of Doorgha, the black-faced Hindu goddess of destruction.

I tried to steady my nerves. I poured myself a stiff measure of bourbon. But the impression refused to budge.

My nerves twitched and ached. Peace had flown out of the window, and my little suburban home had lost its charm—had lost the clean scent of its sheltered security.

CHAPTER II

In a way, I was therefore glad when the summons came from Washington asking me to report there at once to the chief of the Intelligence Department.

Of course, I had followed current political events in newspapers, magazines, and reviews. I had read that Japan, callously and sneeringly disregarding the protests of the West, had annexed China, and had at once proceeded to introduce military conscription into the Middle Kingdom.

And China was a nation of over four hundred million!

But that was not the worst. The real danger appeared with the reports from both missionaries and travelers that the Chinese did not have to be coerced at all; that there was not the slightest dissatisfaction among them; that, on the contrary, they were eager and willing to serve in the army.

The Chief of the Intelligence Department in Washington put it up to me straight. He was closeted with Lord Northmere, the British ambassador, who looked pale and worried.

"Of course these yellow devils mean war, Van," he said over and over again. "Of course they mean war—war of conquest. But what can we do? They point out that they have no more soldiers pro ratio of their population than has France, or Germany, or Austria. Still we kick—and they promise to call a halt to their military preparations. But they only mean to throw sand into our eyes." He smote the table with his hairy fist. "Yes. They think we are purblind, damned fools. And, by gad, they are right!"

Lord Northmere rose. He paced up and down the room, speaking in a nervous, halting manner.

"It's true, Vandewater. They say that they have stopped their military preparations. But all they have done is to shift their arsenals and their concentration camps. They have shifted them with marvelous speed and efficiency. And they have shifted them far out"—he pointed out of the window toward the setting sun—"to the west, to outer Mongolia—to the far lands where European influence is non-existing, where European travelers are unknown, where even your wide-awake Yankee reporters and correspondents never penetrate."

I interrupted him. I was really thinking aloud.

"In Asia it is never a nation in turmoil, a nation in ferment. In Asia it is always One Man—*One Man*—"

There was a piercing look of rapid comprehension in the Englishman's steel-gray eyes.

"Exactly," he broke in. "One Man. Just as you said. And that's why we want you—I say we. For, of course, you understand that my country and yours are working hand in hand in this crisis. You must find that One Man, Vandewater." He put his hands on my shoulders. "All we know is that the man is somewhere in Central Asia, that he is a genius at organizing, and that he knows everything—yes—everything Europe and America can teach in the line of warfare."

There was a short, heavy pause. The Chief came up close to me.

"When can you go, Van?"

"To-morrow. But there is one condition."

Lord Northmere laughed a thin, fine laugh.

"It has been complied with before you speak, my friend. You want *carte blanche*, absolute *carte blanche*. We have already prepared it." He took a heavy despatch-box from the table. "Here are confidential instructions to every British and American official of note in the Orient."

I took up the despatch-box. There was a pause. Then the Chief shook my hand.

"God bless you, Van! Come back safe."

Lord Northmere did not say a word. He just gripped my hands with fingers of steel.

So I left them. And as I walked down the street, a shapeless, brooding gray shadow seemed to creep out of the western sky, and I shivered just a little.

The next moment I was myself again. Fight once more, I said to myself, and I would not shirk the steely sharpness of it.

I returned to my house in Jersey on the next train. I was not going to lose any time. The stage was set, a vast stage which reached from the Gobi clear through to the Mersey.

I smiled. I thought of the *carte blanche* instructions in my despatch-box which I was hugging close. They were beautifully complete and sweeping. It pleased me. Why not? We all have our little pet vanities.

I reached my house. With my very first words I ordered Mascasenhass to pack our trunks.

"We are off to San Francisco." I slapped him on the shoulder, and I suppose my voice was buoyant. "To San Francisco, my lad. To the Golden

West, and thence—westward ho!—to Hong-Kong.”

His voice came slow and halting.

“To—Hong-Kong?”

“Right-o.”

Again he asked:

“To Hong-Kong—to Asia—”

And his voice was pregnant with a moody uneasiness.

Immediately I reacted to his mood. My buoyancy left me. I looked at him with sharp, direct intent. But his face was like a stone mask. He was superbly calm, superbly collected. And if my subconscious comprehension had half-formed, half-shaped suspicions of sorts, they flew away like rubbish in a typhoon, circling but never lighting.

Once more I regained confidence in myself and trust in him.

After all, I said to myself, I was going to Asia; and the Goanese was familiar with everything which affects the great mother continent. He knew the tortuous channels of the brooding, sinister continent he knew the sharp-cutting minds and ambitions of the handful of men who directed its destinies. And he was loyal and faithful to

me; had always been loyal and faithful to me. He was also grateful.

And so now he would be of immense help when it was my duty to match my brain and my craft against the brain and the craft of the Unknown Man; the Unknown Asian who was drilling those millions back yonder; who was pulling the sharp-cutting wires of coming war in the heart of Outer Mongolia.

I made up my mind to confide fully in the Goanese. I have always despised half measures, contemptible half confidences.

"I have a sort of roving commission, Mascasenhass," I resumed. "There is the devil to pay out there in Asia, and the powers that be have chosen me to find out who is stirring the caldron. They remember my little work in connection with Hussain Khan—"

Something made me stop—made me look up; and I gave a quickly suppressed cry of surprise and horror.

For again, evasive and yet starkly vivid and baleful, a smudge of scarlet seemed to appear on the forehead of the Goanese. Again it seemed to spread and sharpen into the contours of the caste-

mark of Doorgha. Again I tried to banish the mad thought. But I could not.

This time I was convinced that it was not an optic illusion—that it was not the fault of my own wretched imagination. The thing was there, staring at me with an evil leer—with a dread meaning; a deep scarlet mark—the mark of Doorgha and the worshipers of Doorgha.

Mechanically I repeated the last words:

“Hussain Khan—”

And, even as I spoke, the confounded mark on the forehead of the Goanese took on a deeper shade of scarlet. The contours shone out more distinctly. It glowed with an intense, unearthly shimmer. It flickered and winked like a live thing.

At the same time Mascasenas took a step forward in my direction. His body seemed to grow, to expand, to strengthen. There was menace in his poise. His lips curled back from his teeth in a wolfish snarl. A strange, fanatical light gleamed in the depths of his brown eyes.

I am not a coward. Yet, instinctively, I receded a step or two.

But practically at once a quick thought came

to my rescue a quick, flashlike suggestion which bubbled up from some back cell in my brain.

I spoke slowly, clearly, like a doctor addressing a hypochondriac patient.

"We are going to China, Mascasenhass. There's work out yonder for me and for you. Work for the west, work for white men." I raised my voice a little. "And we be white men, you and I—yes, you and I," I repeated with sharp emphasis.

Instantly, with harsh suddenness, the scarlet mark on the man's forehead vanished into nothingness. Once more his lips settled into their usual soft fleshiness. The tight menace in his poise and carriage gave way to a curve of utter servility.

Then he looked at me with that old, embarrassing appeal in his eye.

"Yes," he answered; and there crept just a suspicion of conscious pride into his voice. "We be white men, master."

And again, with a little pathetic catch in his throat:

"White men—you and I."

He spread out his hands in a vast, circular gesture, and, bowing, turned and walked to the door.

There he stopped short and faced me once more.

I stared at him—fascinated. For his lips were moving feverishly; they were formulating words; but they did not shape them into sounds. He was trying to speak, trying hard, but could not.

That was it; he could not speak.

When finally words did come, they seemed to come from a great distance; they seemed unnatural, dead, as if he were combating something, somebody within himself, as if he were forcing himself to speak of something which he ought not to say.

He stepped back into the room as he spoke.

"Master, master—you—"

He stopped. It was evident that a horrible struggle was in his soul. Then he continued:

'Beware, master—beware of the blue—blue eye—'

His voice snapped off. He fled out of the room, and I after him. I caught him by the shoulders just as he was running from the house, bare-headed, swift-footed, like a madman persecuted by the winged creatures of his own wild fancy.

But I did not care to be made a victim of somebody else's nascent paranoia. I wanted facts.

I whirled him about until he faced me. The man was shaking like a jelly-fish on dry land.

"What's all this damned tommyrot, Mascasenhass? What's the meaning of your enigmatic warning?" I asked him sternly. "Blue eyes! What in the name of Satan himself do you mean? Come on! Let's hear the sound of your voice, even if it does hurt you."

He did not answer; simply continued shaking in a limp, disgusting manner.

Suddenly a thought came to me. I burst out laughing and released him.

"So you are jealous, my friend! You think I am going to fall for some nice, little, pink-and-white, blue-eyed doll." I laughed again. "No fear, my boy. I am a warranted, *hors-de-concours*, all-wool, nickel-plated, diamond-edged bachelor."

I suppose I expected him to join in my jocular-ity. I have always prided myself on my sense of humor. And so I was a bit annoyed when Mascasenhass remained silent.

He looked at me. Again a change came into his face. Again there was a suspicion of arrogance in his voice as he answered. And the most disconcerting thing was that he talked to me in Behari, the language which, as a rule, he avoided scrup-

ulously, the language which Hussian Khan had used when he had wished to be especially venomous.

"*Bhains*," he said, and the words came with a sharp, metallic clank. "*Bhains ke age ben bajame, bhaiti bhains paguray.*"

He walked away abruptly, leaving me deeply in thought. For he had told me that a fool plays the flute before the buffalo, but that the buffalo continues to sit and ruminate. Who was the fool, and who was the buffalo? Either way, it was not very flattering. Either way, it was arrogant.

For, in an Oriental manner, he had told me to leave him alone—to chase myself—if the vernacular is permissible.

Back in the sane, prosaic security of my library I saw the whole affair in a different light.

Of course, the man had been arrogant. But a Behari proverb quoted at random does not necessarily constitute a capital crime; and even the best of servants has moments when arrogance gets the best of discretion. Further, the Goanese was not exactly a servant. He was a gentleman in his own country—an educated man who for two years

had been a friend and ally of mine. No use making a mountain out of a mole-hill.

Red smudge? What infernal, driveling nonsense! It must have been a reflecting glow from the evening sky.

That night, at dinner, I was more certain than ever that the whole thing had been but a foolish mistake. For Mascasenhás was quite himself again. He waited on me with the utmost punctiliousness. His attitude was deferential in the extreme; and when once in a while I caught him looking at me, there was nothing but deep devotion and loyalty in the expression of his eyes.

When I ran over to New York late that evening to say farewell to my married sister, I left without the slightest misgivings. I had put the despatch-box in my safe.

Just as I was leaving, Mascasenhás rushed up to me.

"I love you, master," he said without any special reason or provocation. "I love you. I shall always be faithful to you."

And then he kissed my hands again and again.

CHAPTER III

My brother-in-law is one of those ever-comfortable stock-broking chaps, famed for the potency of his Bourbon and the black virility of his cigars. So it was not altogether family affection which made me remain later than I should, considering the fact that I was off for the Coast on the morning train.

I took the last trolley back to Jersey.

When I reached my house I found it in complete darkness. I did not want to awaken Mascenhas; and so I took off my shoes, opened the front door as quietly as possible, and pussy-footed up the stairs without making the slightest noise. I passed by the half-caste's bedroom. The door was open, and I looked in.

He was sleeping the sleep of the just, breathing rhythmically and peacefully, and the slanting moon-rays brought out his face with startling clearness. It was perfectly serene, perfectly untroubled, rather childlike in its olive smoothness. So I smiled at the foolish suspicions I had had

in the afternoon, and proceeded to my bedroom in a happy frame of mind.

I undressed very leisurely, slipped on my dressing-gown, and then I decided that my happiness would not be satiated without a farewell puff at one of those sympathetic, long-tubed, blond cigarettes with which my friend Dmitrieff, of the Russian embassy, keeps me supplied. I opened my cigarette-case, but I discovered that I had smoked the last.

So I walked down the stairs again, still in my stocking feet. For I kept a box of the cigarettes on my library table, handy to my elbow.

Very softly I opened the library door.

And then I choked back a cry of surprise, of amazement, of rage. For, sharply silhouetted in the fretful rays of the moon, I saw a man kneeling in front of my safe, fingering the lock with quick, knowing fingers.

I thought of what the Chief had told me in Washington; of the colossal task with which I had been entrusted; of the precious despatch-box on the other side of the steel doors.

My nerves telegraphed to my muscles; and both nerves and muscles acted at precisely the same fraction of a second. I guess I must have cleared

the width of that room in two bounds. Before I knew exactly what I was doing, and how and why I was doing it, my hands were gripped around the throat of the burglar.

I choked that soft, yielding, pulsing bit of flesh under my fingers. I choked and pressed, ruthlessly, mercilessly, with every ounce of savage, exulting strength in my body. And I am not exactly weak.

The man gave a horrible, gurgling gasp. His arms waved wildly up and down, trying to clutch at me. Then they fell limply to his sides. One second more and the man would have expired.

I let go with one hand, reaching round and turning on the electric switch, while with the other I kept a firm grip on the burglar's throat.

I looked at the man whom I was killing. For I *was* killing him.

He was a Hindu—dark-complexioned, square-bearded, hook-nosed—evidently a high-caste, and probably a Rajput. On his forehead was a painted caste-mark. I looked at it closely; it was the scarlet mark of Doorgha.

When I saw that hated stain I gave a cry of rage and hatred. I pressed his windpipe harder than ever. Blood squirted between my fingers. I had

broken the skin, I could feel the warm, quivering flesh.

His eyes rolled upward, glassy, dead-white. But with their last conscious, comprehensive glance they saw and recognized the little bronze emblem which I wear in my buttonhole.

And with the dying bit of strength left him the Rajput gave the signal of distress—the signal which is known from West to East; the signal which is known wherever men believe in God.

Immediately, quite instinctively, I let go. That was natural. He had called to me as brother to brother.

He dropped to the ground, a limp, inert mass. His breath came in a rapid staccato, like the thumping of a piston-rod. Tying his hands and feet securely with a curtain rope, I walked to the door, opened it, and listened.

I was neither excited nor afraid. A physical encounter always elates rather than depresses me. And now, with my fingers still tingling and my muscles still bunched from their contact with the Rajput's hairy throat, I felt as self-righteous and refreshed as a hangman who has just swung a sinner to the winds of heaven.

But my mother was from Vermont, and so I

have that old, atavistic Yankee trait: I always *want to know*. And right then I wanted to know if Mascasenhass was awake or asleep.

I listened. But not a sound came from the upper regions of the house. Creeping noiselessly up the stairs, and looking into Mascasenhass's bedroom, I learned that the man was still sleeping peacefully, in spite of the fact that my tussle with the Rajput must have caused a considerable commotion.

I looked at him very closely—keenly; and again suspicions, hotly fermenting, ominously glooming, were half shaping in my brain, rearing their ugly, flat heads, sticking out their venomous forked tongues.

Down-stairs was a Hindu, a Rajput, tainted with the scarlet caste-mark of Doorgha. I had caught him in the act of robbing my safe, and I knew that it was not money that he was after. High-caste Rajputs do not steal money. He had been after bigger game; after the despatch-box and the invaluable *carte blanche* instructions which Lord Northmere had given to me.

And nobody knew about their existence except the Chief of the Intelligence Department, Lord Northmere, myself—and Mascasenhass.

Where, then, was the leak? In Washington—or here, under my own roof?

I looked at the sleeping man. Was he playing false? His face was calm, serene, childlike. Only a few hours back he had kissed my hand, and had told me that he would always be faithful to me.

I thought deeply for a minute or two. Once or twice I was on the point of taking him roughly by the shoulder and shaking him into consciousness. But I desisted, deciding to leave him to his dreams. The man was innocent; the leak was somewhere in Washington, and I did not need him downstairs. That little intermezzo I would play single-handed.

I returned to the library. The Rajput had come out of his trance, but was still breathing laboriously, as I had used him rather roughly.

Wondering what to do with him, I at first thought of turning him over to the police; but immediately afterward I knew that it was of vital interest to me to question him myself. A police investigation would mean a lot of mutton-headed, long-winded red tape, and I had to start for San Francisco on the morning's train. My commission was sharply urgent. It permitted of no delay.

I walked over to the Rajput and slipped a pillow under his head, then searching him for weapons, found a vicious-looking Scinde dagger, and confiscated it; after which I eased the ropes which bound his hands, and there came a gleam of gratitude into his immense opaque eyes.

I pointed at the safe, then at the ropes which still held him.

"Why?" I remarked laconically.

He smiled a little, thin, bloodless smile.

"I tried to ride Fate with a bit and bridle of my own fashioning—and, by Shiva, it broke!"

Again he smiled. The man's nerve was superb.

But I had no time to exchange epigrams.

"Look here, my friend," I said. "Your life is mine. But I have decided to let you live, because of the little bronze emblem which I wear in my buttonhole because of the little sign you gave me when you were about to die under my hands. I have also decided to let this matter rest where it stands, to keep you out of the hands of the police—under one condition."

He looked at me questioningly.

"Name it, *sahib*."

"Quite an easy one," I paused; then continued

in a low, clear voice: "Tell me who you are in this house. Tell me what you expected to find. Tell me who sent you."

He looked at me stony-eyed; looked at me for a minute, it seemed to me, without a flicker in his eyes—and said nothing.

Finally I drew up my chair, and sitting down close to him, I lighted a cigarette and inhaled the scented smoke luxuriously. If patience was a game, I thought, two could play at it.

I finished my first cigarette, smoking slowly; then lighted another. Quite casually I addressed him again, speaking in Urdu.

"Flavorless is a betel without lime, and insipid the adornments of one without wealth. Tasteless is a curry without salt, senseless the conversation of one without knowledge—" I pointed in the direction of the safe—"and futile the crime without cause."

There was a flicker of amusement on the Hindu's thin, bloodless lips.

"The *sahib* speaks well the Urdu," he replied. "Also knows he the art of twisting metaphors. Then let him ponder well the following: Expect good from the wicked; drain the swallow's milk; pluck a hog's soft wool; cause the sand to yield

pomegranates; fix a pump in the middle of the sea; and put a male elephant into a kokilabird's egg. Do all these things—then make the silent talk."

He laughed, and I joined in his laughter. He had won first honors. But I returned to the attack. I changed my tactics.

"I saved your life when it was mine to take. I saved it because of the emblem and the sign." I paused significantly; then I bent down and brought my face close up to his. "Once a man told me that Rajputs are grateful. That man was a liar."

The Rajput blushed a deep scarlet under his bronzed skin. For his race is famed through the breadth and width of Hindustan for their undying gratitude.

A sad, far-away look came into his opaque eyes which, somehow, made me think of a homing bird rising from a marshy island, scenting the clean air of the uplands.

"Two masters I serve," he spoke haltingly, with a deep, metallic catch in his throat. "One is the master who sent me here; one he who saved my life when he had it in the grip of his fingers."

He paused; then continued in a lower key, as if talking to himself:

"How, then, can I serve the one without being faithless to the other? And I *am* a Rajput!"

He was silent and closed his eyes. Deep pain was in the lineaments of his face.

I felt sorry for the man; couldn't help it.

Then he opened his eyes and looked straight at me.

"*Sahib*, take warning. I came here to rob, perhaps to kill. Take warning, *sahib*. It is said that only a fool will grind pepper for the bird that is still on the wing. It is said that only a fool will lift his hands to snatch at time. Stay here, *sahib*, and do not meddle with the destinies of Asia, whatever happens." A pause. "*Whatever happens*," he repeated with sharp-riveting emphasis, and then was silent.

I bent over still more closely, and when I touched the scarlet caste-mark on his forehead with my finger, he winced and shuddered. I was defiling his caste; but I was doing it deliberately.

"My friend, I killed Hussain Khan. I killed the master-ministrant of Doorgha."

His eyes blazed at that. He did not like my careless tone. But he controlled himself, and

spoke in a low, even voice, as passionless as fate.

"It is true that you killed Hussain Khan. But what of it?" He smiled contemptuously. "Would you measure your puny strength against the strength of Asia, the mother? Would you sound the ocean with a jackal's tail? Indeed you have killed Hussain Khan. But in killing him you have killed only the least of the great god's servants—*only the least of his servants.*"

Only the least of his servants?

Rather a staggering facer, that. I suppose my face expressed the mixed feelings of rage and disappointment which were searching my heart. For the Rajput watched me closely.

He followed up his advantage.

"You have killed Hussain Khan. It is a true thing. But tell me: how long did it take you? Was it an easy matter? Did not your own life often hang by a single thread? Yet I repeat that Hussain Khan was only the least of the servants of Doorgha. I speak the truth, being grateful to the *sahib*. I ask you: do not play with the forces which you can neither see nor hear nor understand. Do not run a race with Fate. Even the swiftest horse escapes not its own tail."

He was silent. There was a long, tense pause.

My mind was in a turmoil. My fate seemed manacled by the strength of the yellow lands.

Here, on the very threshold, when I was about to find the man who was pulling the wires of war in the heart of Outer Mongolia, I was again face to face with the blood-lusting specter of Doorgha; with the mysterious, crass-brutal force which I had fought for eighteen months; which, in my white man's conceit, I had thought crushed and killed.

I breathed deeply. And for a moment it seemed as if a clammy hand were reaching out of the West—squeezing my heart, squeezing, squeezing.

The Rajput's even voice cut into my thoughts as a knife cuts into butter.

"You have decided, *sahib*." Then, with a little shudder of regret and resignation: "You have decided not to take warning."

"You've read my thoughts correctly. I have decided."

I unfastened the ropes with which he was tied and helped him to his feet. He stretched his cramped limbs, drew himself up to his full, towering height—he was a giant in stature—and looked down at me.

His voice came sharp and cutting:

"Nami maralan nam la petu maralan pet la."

I smiled. In his native language he had told me that an ambitious man dies for fame as a glutton dies for his stomach. Sharp warning, indeed. But I shook my head.

"I have decided."

He came up close to me.

"Listen, *sahib*. I, also, have decided," he said. "The man who told you that Rajputs are faithful until death spoke the truth. You know it. Thus you cut my bonds. Thus you set me free."

He raised his thin, brown hands in a sweeping, majestic gesture. His words boomed out sonorously.

"By the light of the deity! By the war cry of my tribe! By the peacock which is sacred to my clan! The day will come when Krishna Gose will pay in full his debt of gratitude."

He came up still closer. He whispered into my ear.

"Between you and death shall I stand as long as I live—as long as he will let me live—" His voice flickered and broke. "He—"

"Who?"

Kishna Gose turned a grayish white. His voice

was still lower, as if afraid that the shadows of night could hear him.

"He—" Again he hesitated; then spoke rapidly, as if the words were burning his lips: "He of the Blue Eyes."

The next moment he had slipped out of the room. I rushed after him. I called and called and called. But there was no answer. The darkness had swallowed him.

I returned to my room, shuddering a little.

I could not collect my thoughts. They were madly tossing up and down like a drift-log on the shoreless ocean of eternity. But ever above the rushing and twirling came the thought of the Rajput's last words. And Mascasenhass—he, too, had spoken of them—of the Blue Eyes!

Was it a coincidence? Was Mascasenhass a traitor? There had been the scarlet caste-mark on the forehead of the Rajput, and I had seen it on the forehead of Mascasenhass!

I fell asleep; and it seemed only two seconds later that I heard Mascasenhass's voice at my bedside.

I awakened with a start, and I stared at the Goanese, afraid to see what I might see. But his forehead was smooth. There was no stain on it.

His eyes were calm and untroubled. He was smiling at me as a woman smiles at the man whom she loves.

"Six o'clock, Mr. Vandewater. Our train leaves at half past eight."

And I smiled back.

That man was not a traitor. Not he.

CHAPTER IV

"Doorga!"

"Hussain Kahn!"

"Hussain Kahn!"

"Doorga!"

..... sang the crunching of the wheels, like the response in some fantastic litany, as the train rushed West—and my mind took a back leap.

I remembered—and I did not wish to remember. For, with Hussain Khan in his grave, what was there to fear?

But—there was Mascasenhass—and there was the crunching of the wheels—there was the throb of remembrance in a back cell of my brain.

Too, there was the memory of Hussain Khan's last message to me:

"Even from beyond the grave I shall kill you!"

I recalled when I had met Hussain Khan a little over eighteen months back.

At that time I was employed in the Foreign Office in Washington, D. C.—a position which I

held thanks to my familiarity with the Orient and my knowledge of Oriental languages, and it was quite natural that I should come into frequent contact with the Asiatic gentlemen who crowded Washington that winter, amongst them Hussain Khan, who had come to us with the best of introductions, and who became very much of a lion. And deservedly so. For he was rich, well-bred, a splendid linguist, a wonderful polo player, witty, and as handsome as a tiger.

The Great War was over, and everything, including world peace, world gushings, Washington, the official society, the cave-dwelling society, myself, and Hussain Khan traveled along very smoothly * * * until, over-night, the world was startled by a series of murders—murders which struck swiftly, mercilessly * * * which, in every single instance, removed some Western man of high standing in his own country and directly or indirectly interested in or connected with the destinies of some Oriental country * * * which, moreover, forced me to believe that one central intelligence, one central energy, was the driving power behind all of them.

For, in every case, as attested by witnesses, the murderer wore the red caste-mark of Doorgha,

the Indian goddess of destruction, on his forehead; in every single instance some prominent Oriental resident was arrested as the culprit; every bit of direct and circumstantial evidence pointed to his guilt; and always at the end of the week the accused man proved a perfect alibi, and had to be released with profound apologies. But, to me at least, it seemed that thus always time had been gained for the real assassin to make good his escape.

Coincidence? Oh, yes! It's a favorite word, a regular creed with skepticians and mongers of cheap philosophy. But when coincidence made it a practice to murder prominent Americans and Europeans and to smear on its forehead the unclean caste-mark of a Brahman vampire god, then I thought it time to throttle that self-same coincidence.

Years ago I had been in India. I had been in Benares at the time of the Doorgha-Puja, the great religious Hindu festival in honor of Doorgha, the goddess of destruction. I knew that in former centuries human beings were sacrificed in the great temple there, and I had also been told by Anglo-Indian friends of mine that, in spite of the close supervision of the British authorities, even

to this day human sacrifices are made there from time to time.

I also knew that, at least to the more militant of the Brahmin castes, Doorgha had of recent years assumed the spiritual position of India herself, of the *Great Mother*, to use sacerdotal Hindu phraseology. I knew that these same Brahmin castes were the leading factors in the national Indian reaction against European civilization, European influence, and European dominion. Furthermore, the more modern among the Brahmins had recently begun to substitute "Asia" for "India"—and all the prominent Western men who were being assassinated by these unknown Oriental murderers who wore the scarlet mark of Doorgha on their foreheads, were enemies of Asia, from an Asiatic point of view, since they tried to further Western interests.

One of the men murdered was Senator Kuhne, of California, the leading anti-Japanese of the Pacific slope. Hussain Khan was arrested as the murderer, proved an alibi, and was released. But, somehow, I was convinced that Hussain Khan—while not perhaps actually the assassin—was not altogether innocent.

Still, I was bothered by the fact that Hussain

Khan was a Central Asian Mohammedan. What had he, being a Mohammedan, a believer in the One-God faith, to do with the heathenish rites of Puranic Hinduism, with sacrifices made to an ancient, lust-scabbed Brahman god?

I decided to find out. I resigned my position in the Foreign Office. I became a searcher after uncanny and deadly mysteries, a searcher after an awful Indian divinity whose many arms meant death to the white men who crossed her path.

And so, when shortly after his arrest and subsequent release, Hussain Khan went to Europe, I followed him.

He went direct to Paris, and I decided to shadow him until I discovered how and where he passed his time there. I had no trouble in locating him, as he was socially well known in the French capital. And so I spent a good deal of my time in a little café across from his hotel.

And then, late one evening in April, I succeeded in forging the first link in my chain of evidence. I was sitting again in the little café across from his hotel, carefully watching.

A few minutes later, Hussain Khan came out. But instead of the high hat which he usually affected, he wore a carefully-twisted, voluminous

muslin turban. He walked down the street, and I followed. For the turban told me that he was going to meet Orientals—countrymen of his—and I wondered who they were—and why and where they met.

At the Seine he boarded one of the steamers which ply continuously up and down that river of light. I followed aboard.

He—and I—got off at Marly-le-Roi—it was then nearly midnight—and turned north through the sleeping streets of the little suburb. He stopped in front of an old villa surrounded by a garden wall about seven foot in height. The gate was opened immediately—a sure sign that the lodge-porter was on the lookout for them. The gate closed behind them; I stepped quickly into the inky shadow of the opposite villa as I heard footsteps up the street. Half a dozen men were approaching; I could see their features clearly in the rays of the moon. They were Orientals, all of them.

I didn't know what to make of the last man. He was also an Asian. But there was something about him which seemed less east of Suez, less racially repellent and hostile—to call the child by its proper name—than was the case with the

others. Suddenly I new what he was—a Eurasian, probably a Goanese of mixed Portuguese and Hindu stock. They passed inside.

For an hour I waited in the shadow of the wall, but no more came. Carefully I studied the house, which was dark with the exception of a long, thin slit of yellow light from a second-story window. The light broadened at the base like a pointed finger. It was evident that a blind was partly open, and that if I could get on a dead line with it, I would be able to see the interior.

I made a quick decision. Just in front of the window stood a gaunt pine-tree which planted its black, lank arms sharp against the sky like a herald of evil.

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

There were a dozen men in the room beside Hussain and those I had seen in the street. Some looked like Hindu, Algerian, and Arab students. Others I remembered as attachés of the various Oriental embassies. They were conversing animatedly. So far there was nothing strange about the gathering. It seemed like a club. The only

odd thing was there were no tables, no chairs, not even a divan. They were all standing up.

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

After sitting in the tree for several minutes I was getting tired. Then that happened which made me forget my stiff limbs. For from somewhere in the bowels of the house came the deep-booming, ominous sound of a Chinese gong. At once every man in the room * * * Hindu, Moslem, Buddhist, Christian from Goa, and what-not * * * dropped on his knees before that infernal curtain and prostrated. The gong sounded again, more strident, more ominous. A door opened, and a tall, bearded man, dressed in long, black robe and black turban, entered, followed by two others, robed in scarlet. And scarlet also were the caste-marks on their foreheads.

The high priest—for such he seemed to be—walked up to the curtain and drew it aside.

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

cruel smile, the same glaring, fiendish eyes, the same choking, strangling fingers. Here was the same beastly emblem of obscenity and lust and destruction! Here was that unspeakable representation of the mysteries and the cruelties of life which the Hindus are pleased to call religion—religion!

I saw the lips of the priests move as in an incantation. A shiver seemed to pass through the worshipping crowd.

It was all over in a minute. The priest pulled back the curtain, and the men filed out of the room, their head on their breast as if in deep meditation.

I sat there in my tree trying to believe that I had seen this thing with my living, waking eyes—that it was not a foul nightmare.

Had I really seen it?

Had I seen men from all Asia, of different religions and races—Moslem, Goanese Christian, and Buddhist—do worship in front of a heathen Hindu goddess?

Was it possible?

Good Lord, was it possible?

Ultimately I solved the mystery. I found out that here was an organization of Oriental assas-

sins—patriots they called themselves—waging private warfare against the West—men of all Asia's many races and creeds, and their central symbol Doorgha, the goddess of destruction. I solved the mystery, thanks largely to the help of Mascasenhass, the Goanese half-caste Christian whom I had seen make worship, together with the other Asians, in the temple at Marly-el-Roi, and who today was my servant in the little Jersey house.

It is immaterial how I met him face to face, how I persuaded him into a realization of what he owed to his Portuguese name—his Christian faith—his white blood.

But I did. He stood by my side throughout the eighteen months during which I fought Hussain Khan and Hussain Khan's organization, and he gave me his supreme confidence; he told me how it was that he, a Christian, a devout Catholic, half white, had become linked to that organization in the first place.

"You called me a white man," he said, "and you are right. My father was a Mascasenhass—Leopold Aloysius Mascasenhass. His mother's father was a Mercado; my mother's father a Lyon-d'Sousa—honorable old Portuguese names, every

one of them. I know that there is also Hindu blood in me.

"I studied in Europe, in Berlin. I was lonely there. I am from Goa, a Portuguese, a Christian. I am all nearly white. But it seemed that the Europeans did not like me.

"Yes, I was lonely. Very. Then Hussain Khan came to Berlin. We met. Then came happy days for me. For he befriended me. He took me everywhere. He taught me many things. I thought him wonderful. Like a god, he seemed to know all things and all sensations, but to have suffered nothing. There was no scar on his soul. And I gave to him my heart. From the very first Hussain talked to me of Asia, of her past, her future. He was an enthusiast, and the flower of conviction blossomed on his lips. To him Asia was a concrete whole; he ridiculed the differences of creed and caste and race which split it. They were a mere nothing, he said—a sand-grain in the desert of Gobi. He was all for the Whole, for the Great Mother—so he called Asia—and he would weave a glittering fabric of words, and tell me what Asia had done and what she could do—what she would do.

"‘Look,’ he would say. ‘There’s France in

Tonking and reaching over into China. There's England in India, and Russia in Manchuria and in the Khanates. But what of it? Presently we shall wake up and kick them out, every one of them. We—Tartars, Moors, Arabs, Osmanlis and Turks—we've conquered them before, and we shall conquer them again. We shall give them a land hissing with blood, and the simitar when it is black with gore.'

"I remonstrated. I told him that I myself was a white man, a Portuguese from Goa, a Christian. But he roared with laughter.

"'You a white man?' he would ask me. 'Then why do the other whites here ostracize you? No, my friend, you are an Asiatic—even if you are a Christian!'

"Yes, he conquered me. He mastered all my wishes, even my secret thoughts. There was only my religion, my devout faith which stood between me and complete subjugation to his will and his nefarious schemes. For even in those days he was dreaming of a war of revenge, a war of dagger and rope and dynamite.

"It was at that time that he took a sudden interest in hypnotism, and naturally he asked me—his friend—to assist him with his experi-

ments. I did. Why shouldn't I? You see, I loved him. I never thought then that he would use me—as he has used me.

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

"Hussain laughed.

"‘You see, your western science is not good,’ he jeered. ‘Let me try the ancient Asian medicine. Let me hypnotize you into well-being.’

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

Mascasenhass went on to describe how, at the end of the term, he returned to India, together with Hussain Khan. They traveled all over India, and it appeared that Hussain Khan had many friends * * * in all the cities he visited; not only Moslems, but also Hindus and Jains and Sikhs. They would whisper together for many

hours, and always the whisper was about War—War and Revenge against the West—and Hussain Khan was the leader. He would give orders—and they would be executed.

He tried to persuade Mascasenhas to help—to help actively. “Every prominent European or American killed now, is an enemy the less at the final Day of Reckoning,” he would say, but the Goanese, though he loved the other and though he would not give him up to the English, to the police, would on the other hand not help actively—for he was a Christian, a White man.

At times Mascasenhas’ old nervous headaches came back to him. And every time Hussain Khan cured him by hypnotizing him and taking away the film of pain and unrest.

One evening Mascasenhas fell very sick. For hours he was in a dead faint. And when finally he came to, weak, dazed, in a dripping perspiration, he found Hussain Khan standing by his bedside. Hussain Khan told him that the doctor had only given him another half-hour to live.

Mascasenhas was afraid of death. He implored Hussain Khan to send for another doctor, to telegraph for a specialist. But Hussain Khan shook his head. Everything known to science had been

tried, he said, tried in vain. He walked to the door, saying that he himself would go for the spiritual adviser. At the threshold he turned. He came back to Mascasenhass' bed.

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

But let me continue in Mascasenhass' own words:

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

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

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

"See, my friend! Inside of a few minutes your spirit will depart from your body. You will be dying. You will be dead. Now, I have learned in the dervish lodges of Sahara that even at that

supreme moment of death a strong mind, well versed in the secret science of hypnotism and soul-craft, can infiltrate part of his own strength into the dead body, thus giving to it a semblance of life—no! An absolute reality of life—which will last as long as he keeps the dead body under his hypnotic trance. But as soon as the master mind gives the word which breaks this trance, then the strength of the living soul will once more leave the body, and the body will once more lose the senses and the sensations which are life.'

"He was beginning to pass his hands over my forehead with soft, rhythmic gestures.

"'See, Mascasenas, even now you are dying,' he crooned. 'Can you feel the icy hand of Azrael, the black-winged angel of death? It is the final dissolution, my friend. You are dead—dead.'

"His voice seemed to drone from across illimitable distances.

"'And now I, the master mind, take part of my mind, of my strength, of my soul, and I send it into the empty husk which is the dead Mascasenas.'

"My body stiffened out. I was asleep. I was dead. But still, as from behind a veil of mur-

mured sounds, I could hear Hussain's voice. The next moment the film of my physical reason departed, and I was suddenly electrified into the most vivid realization of existing, of living, of knowing. It was at that moment that the spirit of Hussain Khan passed into my dead body and gave to it once more the semblance and sensations of life.

"Ever since then, now four years ago, I have been the slave of Hussain. Let him but break the spell, let him but unchain the thunderbolt which overhangs me, and then I am dead again.

"I am his instrument. I do what he bids me do. I kill—at his bidding. I have killed—many—Europeans—Americans!"

Thus Mascasenhass' tale.

I tried to talk sense to him. I tried to convince him that he was his own, real self, and that Hussain Khan had simply hypnotized him during a moment of great illness, perhaps after drugging him in the first place. At times I thought I had convinced him—with how much success I was to find out later on.

But, whatever his superstitious fear of Hussain Khan, he became my close ally and remained so to the end—to the end which came after

eighteen months of plotting and counter-plotting, of treachery and craft matched against treachery and craft—the end which consisted in the death of Hussain Khan at my hands, the burning of the temple at Marly-el-Roi, and the arrest and imprisonment of the many Orientals who had used the temple as both their spiritual and secular headquarters, and who had waged secret warfare against the West.

All these events are history—if forgotten history—and they can be looked up in the proper places.

I had returned to America. And the only thing which disturbed me at times was the warning which Hussain Khan gave me the last time I saw him alive—a few days before I killed him:

“See,” he said. “It is indifferent what happens. You may kill me, or I may kill you. What odds? For this I know: Even if your hand should bring death to my heart, even then I shall kill you. *Even from beyond the grave I shall kill you!* It is an assured thing.”

And I remembered the prophecy, I remembered Hussain, I remembered Doorgha, as the train clattered west—toward the Golden Gate—the Pacific—and China brooding beyond.

CHAPTER V

We reached San Francisco on the following Tuesday.

I had not been there since the fire, so I poked all about the dear old streets, trying to reconstruct the place as it had been in my imagination. And it wasn't so much changed after all.

I booked passage for the two of us on the City of Tokyo, one of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha steamers, the Japanese transpacific line. The ship was due to leave on the next day's noontide, and so I devoted my last evening on dry land to sight-seeing.

Chinatown had moved, I was told by the native son in the cigar store; and, together with Mascenas I went in seach of it. I was off to Hong-Kong and the interior of China the next day; and I thought it particularly appropriate that I should spend my last shore day among the Chinese coolies who still crowd part of the Slope in spite of Kearney's hallowed specter, in spite of the orators of the sand-lots school.

I always did like the warm, moldy scent which is China; that queer mixture of sandalwood and incense and opium and oil of geranium. And to-night there was a prophetic tang to it.

We dined in a little Chinese restaurant on O'Farrell, and then we strolled up the hill into the heart of Chinatown. It was a corking night, with a stiff, high breeze from the Gate which swept the heavens clean; and the full moon was leering down at us with that familiarity which is peculiar to moons.

I was in a capital mood. But Mascasenhass was nervous. The nearness of Asia seemed to oppress him. Sniffing the air like a trailing otterhound, he kept close to my side; and every time a son of Han passed him on noiseless, padded feet, he gave a shudder and gasp.

I was getting angry at the man; at the silly, painted, foolish devices of his diseased imagination.

"Stop making a damned ass of yourself," I told him. "These men are peaceful Chinese merchants and artisans, with about as much harm in them as a warrenful of tame, ruby-eyed rabbits."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Vandewater."

He seemed to take my little curtain-lecture to

heart, and straightening up, commenced talking in an even voice. But there was something forced and conventional about his conversation which was worse than his former nervousness. He was too composed, too quiet, and he uttered a stream of verbose commonplaces with a pontifical unction which drove me wild.

We were both getting nervous. That was the long and short of it. We felt lonely among these sad-faced, slant-eyed Mongolians. And I had just decided that we'd be better off on Market street, among white faces and white shops, when we passed a particularly gaudy joss-house.

It was a perfect jewel; a shimmering, barbaric mass of crimson, orange, electric-blue, and Nile-green. It gleamed and twinkled like a live thing.

Instinctively I stopped and gazed. Mascasenas was plucking at my sleeves.

"Come, master, come," he whispered again and again.

But I paid no attention to him. Quick thoughts were crossing my brain. It seemed strange to me that Chinamen, crassly irreligious as they are, should go to the expense and the trouble to erect here, on the shores of the West, a building for those gods whom their ancestors had argued into

existence, instead of believing in them with the fire and strength of faith, and whom they only worship at those rare, thaumaturgical moments when their prosy, bland-philosophic souls demand a few ounces of hygienic stimulant in the form of a bit of incense powder, a dull-booming gong, or a meaningless prayer or two written on red paper and then chewed and swallowed.

The fault of my own barbarian mind, I suppose; but this Chinese mixture of up-to-date, driving commercialism and ancient, cruel Mongol superstitions has always been beyond me.

So I stopped and gazed, and I suppose I laughed a little.

The next moment a low, well-modulated voice, quite devoid of the usual Chinese sing-song, struck my ear.

"Come in and see."

I looked. The carved, painted teakwood gates of the joss-house had slid noiselessly to right and left, and framed in the doorway stood an immensely tall and broad-shouldered Chinaman.

He was an unusual type for the Pacific Coast. For he was not one of those short, squat, red-faced Cantonese coolies whom China has sent over for years as a vanguard of what is coming by and by.

He was straight as a lance, and robed in plum-colored, embroidered garments which moved with a heavy, silken swish. He had those marvelously long, gold-encased finger-nails which are the sign of the highest caste Mandarins and literati. His creamy complexion had the minutely crackled texture of ancient eggshell china; and there was an expression on his fine thin lips which was as old as hate and older than love, as old as sin and older than virtue, as old as tears and older than laughter. He wore huge, horn-rimmed spectacles; but beneath the thick lenses I could sense the steel of sharp-seeing eyes.

"Come in and see," he said again.

Mascasenas gripped my arm convulsively. He whispered rapidly into my ear, speaking in Hindu.

"Come away, protector of the pitiful. Do not go inside, for the love of the dear Saints. This is not a good place."

But I cursed him for a fool and a coward. I tore myself away from his nervous, clutching hands, and followed the Chainaman across the threshold. The Goanese trotted at my heels, still muttering protests.

The heavy gates, sliding in well-oiled grooves, closed behind us without a sound, shutting out the

outside world—the white world. It made me just the least bit nervous; I had a quick impression, as if I were suddenly caught up in the tail-end of my life.

But the sensation passed quickly. I looked about me.

Inside, the whole building was a crazy mass of shimmering lights. A brand-new, particularly hideous and therefore, I suppose, sacred joss was squatting at the farther end in bronze stolidity, leering at us like a monstrous beast out of the Apocalypse. The atmosphere was choking. Heavy incense-clouds were floating and twisting about like a vaporous, gigantic furnace of opal colors wreathing up to the painted ceiling; and there was a diseased scent of hot, heavy, lascivious flowers.

With a courtly gesture, the Chinaman asked us to sit down. Then he clapped his hands together. A servant came through the door to the right of the joss, bowed, received a rapid order, and returned a minute later with steaming cups of sun-dried, jessamine-flavored tea.

We drank in silence. Then my host turned to me, and somehow his voice was like the rubbing of a very ancient temple-gong.

"You take an interest in China?"

"I do, indeed."

"Ah, that is flattering to us—very flattering."

With a swift, gliding gesture he brought an ivory-sticked fan from his voluminous sleeves and began fanning himself slowly, rhythmically.

He smiled.

"You take an interest in us because of the things we have done?" There was a sudden quiver in the corners of his lips as of a high-eddy flame. "Or because of the things we are going to do?" A moment's pause as I drew a sharp breath of surprise.

"*We are going to do,*" he repeated on a slightly lower key.

I was rather nonplussed, rather uncomfortable.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all," the Chinaman answered. "But indeed I have been told by one who knows that it is dangerous for the yellow man if the white man takes an interest in his affairs. There is Hong-Kong; there is French Indo-China; there are the Philippines—colonies I believe you call them." Again he laughed, and then, quite suddenly, he was serious. "I have also been told that—may I make a little pun in

your own language? Yes, I have been told that a white man's disinterested interest is as rare as wings upon a cat, as flowers of air, as rabbits' horns, as ropes of tortoise hair."

He paused. Then he continued:

"But you must forgive me. I am rude, tactless. For you yourself are a white man, an American."

Suddenly he turned to Mascasenhass, who was squirming and fidgeting on his chair.

"And you, my friend, what are you?"

The voice of the Goanese was proud and sharp-defiant.

"I also am white."

There was a sardonic twitch on the thin lips of the Chinaman. He played with his fan for a second or two, crossed his legs, carefully arranging the silken folds of his plum-colored robe. He studied Mascasenhass as he would a new, exotic, and rather disgusting variety of animal. Then his face settled into its old, bland lineaments.

"And yet I would have sworn that you are not all white." He spoke slowly. "Yet I would have sworn that the blood of darker races has tinged your skin. Yet I would have sworn that Hindus as well as Gulf Arabs have been among your ancestors."

He smiled again; then continued in a sharp-cutting voice, rising as he spoke:

"Yet I would have sworn that there is a faint scarlet spot upon your forehead."

The next few moments reeled off with the quickness of a kaleidoscope.

I do not know which caused which. I do not know if the whole thing was prearranged, or simply the result of Mascasenhass's behavior. But I remember a pantherlike spring on the part of the Goanese. I remember seeing his fingers close around the Chinaman's throat. And at the same moment, from nowhere it seemed, half a dozen stalwart Chinamen were swarming about us and closing in.

I am afraid that during the next few minutes I did not adhere exactly to either the rules invented by the late lamented Marquis of Queensberry, or to the gentlemen's agreement known as Graeco-Roman. My method of muscular procedure was a mixture of longshoreman, lumberjack, Cornish cousin-jack, with a bit of *savate* and jiu-jitsu thrown in for good measure, and two or three small inventions of my own. I remember distinctly, among other things, biting through a soft, quivering ear.

But it was a good method.

And presently I found myself at the gate, Mascenhas beside me, crazily tearing at the lock, which refused to budge.

The coolies made another concerted rush. But at the same moment I bethought me of a police whistle which I always carry in my hip pocket. I jerked it out, put it to my lips, pressed my face as closely as possible to the tiny rift where the sliding doors met; but as I was about to whistle, the tall Manchu—for Manchu he doubtless was—stopped his retainers with an impetuous gesture.

A few purring, sing-song words, and the hatchetmen disappeared as they had come.

The Manchu smiled. The lights in the temple threw deep shadows which cut the pale-yellow, silky sheen of his high-bred face as clean as with a knife. For several dragging seconds he fanned himself slowly. Then he shut the ivory sticks with a little dry click of finality.

He smiled again; and there was that in his smile which was very gentle, very patient—and very inhuman.

Taking a step forward, he spoke in a clear, untroubled voice:

"Life, my friend, is as uncertain as a Tartar's beard."

He paused as if to give me time to appreciate the adage, then continued:

"A moment ago your life was swinging by a single, rotting pack-thread. And just because of a little mistake I made. For that I apologize humbly. Indeed, I should not have spoken about the Asian blood in your friend's veins. Assuredly I should not have spoken about the little scarlet mark which I imagined to be on his forehead. Come, forgive me. My servants are too loyal, too hasty. They were ready to kill you, being ignorant men. For it is said that the sense of an ignorant man is in his fist."

He walked to the door, brushed the Goanese aside, and, using a large bronze key which he slipped from his sleeves, opened it.

A gust of fresh, cool wind whistled across the threshold. I inhaled deeply, luxuriously. It was clean, safe, white. But even then I still smelled the incense which had oppressed me in the interior of the joss-house. It was unlike the ordinary Chinese punk, unlike that mixture of aloe-wood, essence of cinnamon and crushed lotus bulbs

which Sing Fat and Aoh Fong sell to their American customers.

This incense was just a hot, diseased, nameless scent of heavy, lascivious flowers. And for days afterward it seemed to cling to me.

I left the joss-house, followed by Mascasenhás. I turned to have a last look. The Manchu was still standing between the sliding doors. He waved his long, thin hands in a gesture of farewell.

"*Au revoir*," he said mockingly, in perfect French. "*Au revoir*, my friends."

The gates shut with a hard click. I walked down the hill, followed by the half-caste. The moon had sunk below a bank of clouds, and the shadows of night were drifting and twisting, shapeless, slimy, crawling.

CHAPTER VI

Noon found us on board the City of Tokyo.

"All ashore who're going ashore!" shrilled the stewards.

Slowly the gangplanks were being drawn in; and at the very last I had a fleeting impression of a familiar figure rushing up the plank which led to the Asiatic steerage. There was a flash of hook nose and square-trimmed beard. Krishna Gose, I said to myself. But a casual inquiry from the diminutive Samurai who was my cabin steward elicited the information that there was no Hindu on board the steamer. Of course, there was an off chance that my little brown brother was toying with the truth. But even so; even suppose my eyes had registered correctly, and the belated steerage passenger was Krishna Gose—I knew India; I knew the Rajputs and their undying gratitude. No danger in that quarter, I said to myself.

The voyage passed without incident. There

were the usual games of shuffle-board; the usual wordy jealousy between New York and the middle West; the usual flirtatious California widow; the usual recent university graduate holding forth mellifluously on cabbages and kings, because there was a sheepskin somewhere in his trunk, and because he knew the difference between Fabius Cunctator and a safety razor.

I made a trip of investigation through the steerage, but I saw no trace of the Rajput among the huddled, blanketed Orientals who crowded the narrow, fetid quarters.

Once I had a faint sensation of smelling the heavy, sweet-diseased incense which, in my mind, was so indissolubly associated with the joss-house and the Manchu. But a casual inquiry elicited the information from my cabin steward that the gentleman in the cabin next to mine, whence the smell seemed to drift, was an American gentleman, and sick on top of the bargain.

When I mentioned the scent of punk-sticks, the young Nipponese smiled like a Cheshire cat and sucked in his breath deeply in that manner which is meant for the height of politeness in his native land.

"No, sar," he piped. "No incense—American gentleman—white—same as you—see?"

I can't exactly swear that I believed that pocket-piece of nascent Yellow Peril. But I did not think any more about the incident. It was hardly possible that the Manchu would go to the trouble and expense of following me across the Pacific because of our little *contretemps* in the joss-house. And at all events, I was safe on board the steamer. Of course, it was a Japanese ship; but the majority of the passengers were white; also, the skipper was an Englishman, and the chief engineer a Scot. I was all right.

Honolulu and Japan were only charming incidents, glimpses of strange new color and strange new life. They made no impression on me. It was only when Hong-Kong loomed up that I realized a little of the adventure for which I was bound. Here was the first step. I knew all at once that I was standing on the brink of the unknown, and the thought rather pleased me.

Danger? Possibly.

But then I had lost the perspective of danger, the crass realization of it. There had been too much of it during the last few years in Europe when I was fighting Hussain Khan. I was simply

doing my best for the pride of my race, the pride of my land; and I had no time to think of the personal side of it.

So, suddenly, I felt elated. America and the peaceful Jersey shore seemed far away. For here was China at my feet, yellow and brooding and sinister—yes—and there were Japanese among the crowd, walking and directing as masters do; and the English, the whites, who still rule this colony of Hong-Kong, they seemed to me to be out of place; cut off; very, very lonely.

We landed.

Together with Mascasenhass, I drove direct to the Royal Alexandra Hotel, that great new pile on Victoria, right close to Johnny Butterfield's palace.

Our drive took us through the heart of the Chinese town. I am not racially prejudiced. But here, surrounded on all sides by swarming thousands of Japanese and Chinese and Koreans and several unclassified varieties of the genus Mongol, my heart was crystallizing all the hatred and contempt and disgust the white and the yellow have felt for each other since the world evolved from a pellet of star-dust.

I devoted my afternoon to correspondence and

preparations for my journey into the interior, and then, following an urgent invitation, I dressed to dine with Sir George Nathan, the governor of Hong-Kong.

Mascasenhas came to the door with me. He had been very silent, very self-involved ever since we had left San Francisco. But knowing his moody nature, I had made no attempt to shake him out of his shell.

He kissed my hand. There was entreaty and appeal in his voice, and a strange, far-away look which I was to remember for many a day to come.

"Let me come with you, master."

"No, no, my boy. You've got to finish our preparations. There are a dozen and one things to do."

His hands twitched. The man was terribly in earnest.

"Do not leave me alone. Take me with you."

I laughed.

"You are a *silly* fool. There's nothing to be afraid of. Good Heavens, man, you're as safe in the Royal Alexandra as you'd be in the Waldorf!"

He reiterated his entreaties, but I cut him short.

"So-long, my boy. Don't take any false money."

I was off.

Let me pass swiftly over the next few hours. Sir George gave me a good dinner, and then proceeded to devil my soul with the things that were happening in the interior.

"It's One Man," he repeated again and again. "One Man—and you must find him. Find him and kill him. Kill him out of hand. It's your duty, Vandewater, your duty. And nobody else can do it."

I reached home shortly after midnight. I walked up to my suite, which was on the third floor of the hotel.

Mascasenhas met me at the door.

I looked at him, and was profoundly shocked. The man was in a horrible, speechless state of fear. He was completely unnerved. Twice he tried to force the words out of his month, but they refused to come.

Finally, still speechless, he pointed a shaking hand in the direction of my bedroom.

Then he spoke:

"Five minutes was I gone—by the dear saints, not over five minutes—and this—this happened —"

I rushed to my bedroom, opened the door, and entered.

Silhouetted in the fretful rays of the moon, I saw the body of a man stretched out in the center of the room. Rushing up to him, I bent over him.

The man was bleeding to death from a dozen knife-wounds. He was nearly in a state of coma. The wounds had evidently been inflicted by a savage and ruthless enemy. Part of his face, his very lips, had been completely cut away. But still I recognized him.

It was Krishna Gose, the Rajput.

I knelt down and lifted up the bleeding head. Rapidly, feverishly, I asked him who had done it—when, why, how?

The mutilated lips were trying to speak. A horrible gurgle came from his throat. Finally a few incoherent words came forth:

“Yuen—he—he”—

He was silent. Again he sank into coma. Pouring water down his throat, I implored him to speak; and suddenly he revived. A faint gleam of intelligence came into his eyes; intelligence and comprehension and gratitude.

He lifted his right hand in a supreme spasm

of energy; pointed at his eyes with a jerky, stabbing motion; and then, even while his body was stiffening into final oblivion, he pointed at the wall paper.

So he died.

I was deeply shocked, deeply grieved.

There was no doubt that the Rajput had kept his word. Somebody had come into my room to murder me. The Rajput had followed. There had been a fight. And he had been killed.

"Between you and death shall I stand as long as I live," he had told me that day back in New Jersey. "As long as I live—as long as he will let me—he of the Blue Eyes—"

Rapidly I considered. Krishna Gose had pointed at his own eyes, and then at the wall paper.

The wall paper was blue.

The murderer, the unknown man whom the Rajput had obeyed and feared during life, was blue-eyed.

A European?

So I pondered.

And then again I seemed to smell that hot, sweet-diseased incense of the joss house. It seemed to drift in from the open window.

I stepped up to it. There was a balcony outside

the window connecting my suite with the next.

A tall figure, robed in heavy, silken Chinese garments, was sitting there, quietly smoking a long, red-tasseled pipe.

I reached behind me and rapidly switched on the electric light.

Instantly the man on the balcony turned around. I got a clear view of his face.

It was the Manchu of the joss-house. But this time he was without his spectacles.

"And his eyes were blue, bright blue!"

CHAPTER VII

A faint smile of recognition passed over the Manchu's features. He rose, bowed, and walked the length of the balcony, back to his rooms.

I closed the door and the windows. Then I telephoned to the police. Using the *carte blanche* instructions which Lord Northmere had given me, I had the body of the Rajput removed and buried, and I gave strict orders that no investigation of any sort should be made. Police interference would simply bungle things, instead of helping. That much I knew. And I knew also that the murderer who calmly sits, smoking his pipe, within a few feet of the body of his victim, without trying to make a get-away, is bound to have a bullet-proof alibi.

So I sat there, smoking, thinking.

It was quite natural that my nerves should be taut to the breaking-point. It was quite natural that, in that mixture of emotions and prejudices which constitute the human soul, a certain un-

healthy, clammy expectancy should be first favorite with me.

I tried everything, from whisky to "sheep jumping over a stile," to co-ordinate my twisting thoughts, to banish the swinging, brooding fancies of night. But I failed signally. Somehow, drawn as by a magnet, my eyes would rivet themselves on the darkening, acrid blotch which stained the scented grass-mat in the center of my room.

That blotch was a live thing, reeking of threats. The spreading edges kinked into the semblance of a bestial maw; and there were two drops of crimson moisture standing out grim and crass-contoured, which seemed like eyes — eyes which winked at me with an evil, sardonic leer.

The man who had died on that spot had been a servant of Doorgha, a servant of Hussain Khan, the master-ministrant of the grim goddess, whom I had killed in Paris not so very long ago. He had also been an emissary of that new, mysterious Force which was grasping the reins of gathering war in the heart of the yellow continent, to bring strife and desolation and perhaps slavery to the lands of the West, the white lands.

But he had been a Rajput; and, true to his word, he had stood between death and me. He

had accepted death jestingly, as a light word which a veiled woman whispers to her lover in passing through a bazaar. But with his last gesture, with his last spasm of energy, he had warned me against his murderer, against the blue-eyed Manchu.

I decided to leave Hong-Kong at once, the very next day. For discretion is the better, saner, safer part of valor the world over; but chiefly in China, where revenge is inclined to be exquisitely slow and exquisitely humorous from the other fellow's point of view.

So, with the help of my half-caste servant Mascanhas, I prepared everything for an early start the next morning. I sent him off to bed. But I could not sleep. I was nervous.

Pacing up and down the room, smoking and thinking, I stopped at the window and looked out.

It was a peaceful summer night, throbbing with the low hum of a sleeping world. Not a breeze was stirring. But peace was far from my soul. I felt oppressed, uncomfortable, clammy, and very lonely.

For starkly clogging my brain was the hard, dry realization that I was playing a lone hand; playing

it for perhaps the biggest stake man ever played for.

Of course, my own, as well as the British government, knew the aim of my mission. They had sent me on it, in fact, on the strength of my former record in dealing with the association of Oriental assassins, who did worship at the feet of Doorga, the goddess of destruction. But they could not help me, though my task seemed amazingly simple and clear: to find one man, and to kill him.

But it so happened that this One Man was the most dangerous, the most important, and the most elusive man in Asia; that he was known to thousands of close-mouthed Chinamen and Japanese and Manchus and Central Asians, but that his very name and race and faith had remained a profound mystery to the cleverest secret service men of the West; that the peace of the world and the destiny of the white man depended and trembled on his will and strength.

It so happened that this unknown man could strike at me when and where and how he pleased; but that I could only strike into the dark, at random, trusting to that blind goddess of gamblers and fools which is called Chance.

All I knew was that he lived and worked somewhere in Outer Mongolia, and that he was thoroughly familiar with everything the West had to teach; with everything the West, in its stupid vanity, *has* taught the men of Asia since Perry knocked at the feudal gates of Satsuma.

My life swung on the turn of a card; and I knew that the card was marked.

And so I decided to shove in my stack, to play *va banque*.

I had an idea that the very audacity of my plunging straight into the interior might carry me safely across and over the breakers. They would not expect such a move. They would not be prepared for it.

Once beyond the pale of civilization, I might lose myself in the immensity of the hinterland. I might gain enough leeway to find—and to kill. But in Hong-Kong, even in Peking or Shanghai, I would be a marked man, with every hand against me.

No, no. There was no reason in the world why I should stay on at the Coast and constitute myself a target for the informal vendetta of a blue-eyed Manchu, to whom death and the thought of death was as negligible a thing as autumn

leaves scattered from the lap of some vagabond wind.

I am not a coward. But even so, I do not exactly relish the idea of having to sleep every night with my weather eye peeled for battle and sudden death, and to walk about at day time panoplied and caparisoned like a butcher with a penchant for homicide.

I would welcome the morrow. I would welcome the clank of action and the harsh jar of final decision which the morrow would bring.

So I needed rest. I needed a strong, refreshed body and a mind free of fog. I needed long, dreamless sleep. But it would not come to me. The shadows of night played about me like gossamer sprites, wagging at me with mocking fingers.

I walked out on the balcony, and looking over the gray poetry of that huge, poignant Eastern port—that market of the seven seas which the English, with the stolid, plodding genius of their race, have carved and hewn out of primordial nothing—the thought came to me that to-day this town of Hong-Kong was still Europe's window toward Asia—but that to-morrow, through the intrigues of that One Man who was sitting there in the heart of Outer Mongolia, like a fat

spider flinging forth its slimy, venomous net, it would become Asia's window toward Europe and toward America.

A clear summer night was humming above it, white and peaceful. An early spring typhoon had swept the heavens as with a broom, and there was not a drop of moisture in the air. But to me the atmosphere seemed viscous, sludgy, sombrous. It seemed to clog the pores of my soul. It seemed as if a gigantic, dead hand were clutching at me from beyond the grave, and hurling me into a vast, wide-weltering chasm of ruin.

And I thought of Hussain Khan. I thought of the last words I had heard him say, the day before my revolver bullet crashed through his skull, blotting out forever the scarlet caste-mark of Doorgha:

"Even from beyond the grave I shall kill you."

I tried to ridicule myself into a semblance of prosy common-sense. I tried everything from whisky to bromid of sodium. I picked up a belated San Francisco weekly, and read all about the actress who got herself arrested and dragged before the police magistrate of Coronado Beach with the help of a press agent and an abbreviated one-piece bathing suit; about the Denver black-

smith who had rediscovered the forgotten craft of tempering copper; and about the Arkansas jury which, after being "hung" by one member for twelve solid hours, had finally spun a coin to decide the guilt or innocence of the peer whom they were trying.

I forced my legs to fall asleep, and then kicked them viciously against the sharp edges of the carved teak-wood table which held my smoking materials.

It was all to no avail. If I had been a cat, my hair would have bristled, and I would have spat at unseen, unseeable things. But being a mere human, I returned to my routine of whisky, cigars, and bromid of sodium.

And then, with a thump of utter suddenness, a gust of cutting, ice-cold air blew into my face.

CHAPTER VIII

It was not my imagination. It was not a hallucination due to the squirming state of my nerves. For it blew the ashes from my cigar, and scattered them over my trousers and over the rug at my feet. It picked them up again and whirled them sportively over the shiny surface of the furniture.

I walked over to the window to close it. And then I stopped still and shuddered. For the gust of ice-cold air was now striking me in the back. There was not even a breath of air coming from the outside. The scented night air was warm and absolutely quiet, and the window curtains of sleazy crape hung limp and motionless.

I turned and walked away from the window.

And again the cutting ice-cold gust of air struck me square between the eyes. I say that it *struck* me; and that is exactly what I mean to say. For there was an actual physical impact, if such a thing as a physical impact of air is conceivable.

I looked about me, slowly, cautiously.

Every door was closed.

Walking back to the window, I fastened the outside shutters, then the windows themselves, and drew down the blinds. I examined the floor and the ceiling; studied the wall inch by inch. But there was no rift, no hole. There was no place where even the weakest, gentlest breath of air could blow through.

Even as I walked about the room the gust of wind seemed to follow me about, striking me in the face; and again, as I turned, striking me in the back. I ran up and down the length of the room; but it followed. I entered the bathroom. But even in that tiny, warm, hermetically sealed compartment the icy blast was following me.

And suddenly I had the sensation that the shaft of cold air—for it was a shaft—was swinging clear around and sweeping ahead of me with a whistling, sucking noise, as if pointing the way—as if ordering me to follow!

And I did follow.

It led me through my bedroom, through my dressing-room, across the width of the little private dining-room straight up against the door of Mascasenh's bedroom.

Then, as startlingly sudden as it had come, the cold air disappeared. Once more the night was still and warm.

I shook myself into consciousness and looked at the door. It was closed. Bending down and pressing my ear to the keyhole, I listened intently, hardly daring to breathe.

But not a sound came from within. It was evident that the half-caste, who had been utterly terror-stricken by the sight of the Rajput's mutilated, murdered body, was sleeping the sleep of deepest nervous exhaustion, and I called myself all sorts and varieties of donkey.

What a fool I was!

But *was* I?

My thoughts gyrated madly, fluttering up and down, twisting and squirming, but never lighting, never conclusively proving one thing or the other.

My hand gripped the door-knob. Should I open it? Should I walk in and see—good Heavens! What did I expect to see?

The half-caste had been a faithful servant, a loyal and fearless ally in the past. In my fight with Hussain Khan, his help had been absolutely vital, absolutely invaluable. And here I was, suspecting his loyalty because of some wild hallu-

cination, some wild notion that a gust of wind had led me up to the door of his bedroom.

Asia was getting on my nerves, I decided. My American common sense was changing into an unclean, mephitic thing. I, of the West, Western, was becoming as much of a superstitious lunatic as some ruffianly, ash-smeared fakir who was barring his dirty limbs to the crunching wheels of Jag-anath in the city of Puri.

I turned away from the door and essayed a laugh. But it was a miserable fiasco. It snapped off in mid air with a high-pitched pop; wrenched and contorted itself into a ghastly, meaningless cackle. Again I looked at the door. Again my hand closed instinctively around the metal knob. Should I go in?

On the other side of that door was Mascasenhass—a white man, yes—but only half white. For he was from Goa. Hindu and Persian and Gulf Arab had mixed their blood with the strain of those old piratical conquistadores who had sailed out of Lisbon to help themselves to the world at large.

Continuously my thoughts swung in a circle.

Once or twice during the past few months I had caught a suspicion of arrogance and defiance in his manner toward me. Again I had thought I

could see a gleam of fanatical ghoulish hatred in his deep-burning, gold-flecked eyes. And on three distinct occasions I had imagined that I could see a scarlet smudge on his forehead; a scarlet smudge which, in its hazy outlines, resembled the caste-mark of those who do worship at the feet of Doorgha, the black-faced goddess of destruction.

But what of it? These things were oily hallucinations, only strange incidents out of life's grab-bag. I could not let them tangle the skein of hard, sensible facts. And the fact remained that he had always been loyal to me; and also and more particularly, that I needed him in my search for the One Man. He knew Asia. He could and would help me as long as he remained loyal. And so it was up to me to keep him loyal in spite of all my foolish, fancied imaginings.

For there was the close-knit duty to my race; my atavistic pride of race; my ideal of what I owed to the clarion blood-call of the white peoples of the earth.

And I needed that man. I must watch him. But I would defeat my own ends by suspecting him needlessly. There was the danger that I might suggest to him the very thing which I was trying to avoid.

For he was a half-breed. His was thus the curse of the half-breed. Suddenly, on the edge of nascent danger, the moral heritage of his white ancestors would shrink into instantaneous abeyance, and the strain of timid Hindu blood would come to the surface with a pop.

Also, he had the superstitions of his Hindu blood. And so I knew his mad notion that the soul of the dead Hussain Khan had found an asylum in his body, had become part of his own soul.

But there was no reason on earth why this should affect me. I had only to consider that Mascasenas was in himself a throbbing anachronism, like a Norman edifice embroidered with peaked Gothic intersections and crowned with bulbous Saracenic towers.

I had only to consider that his madness was just a passing, temporary phase, and that, cleared from the mist-begotten paralysis of inherited superstition and fear, the man's soul shone out strong and sweet and sane and loyal.

So I turned away from the door. With firm steps I walked in the direction of my apartment. At last I would rest. At last I would sleep.

But as I crossed the threshold of the dining-

room, with the same startling suddenness the cold gust of air piped up again from nowhere and struck me squarely between the eyes.

This time I did not wait to reason or to think. I did not allow my common sense to parley and compromise with my imagination. I acted.

Whirling on my heels, I rushed back to Mascasenhás's bedroom and opened the door.

The room was in darkness.

For several slow-dragging seconds I peered into it through half-closed eyelids. Finally I made out the contours of the bed. It was smooth, tight, undisturbed. The Goanese had not slept in it that night.

I began to wonder, and walking forward a step or two, I craned my neck so as to see better. And the next moment I suppressed a cry of amazement and surprise.

In the far corner of the room I could make out the dim silhouette of a figure bending over a trunk, busily fingering the contents of the top layer with quick, agile, nervous movements—turning over things, dropping them negligently onto the floor—but still fingering, as if searching for something.

It was Mascasenhás.

There was no doubt about that. I could tell by the narrow hips, by the feline curve of the spine, by the angular, sloping shoulders.

But what was he doing there in the dark? What *could* he be doing there in the dark?

I gathered my wits and my voice and called to him:

"Mascasenas! Hey, there, Mascasenas! What are you doing there?"

The man did not answer by word or gesture. He did not turn. It was evident that he had not heard me, that he had not even noticed the fretful shaft of yellow light which filtered in through the half-open door of the dining-room, weaving fantastic, trembling, ever-changing patterns on floor and wall and ceiling.

He did not alter his position. Bending over the trunk, his nervous fingers were buried in the top tray—searching, searching—dropping things on the ground in his mad haste, then searching again.

I called once more, louder this time.

"Mascasenas! What's the matter with you? Why in the name of Satan can't you answer?"

But there was no sound. Only a faint rustling and swishing and crackling as his fingers swept

through the masses of silken garments which were packed in the trunk. Still he kept on searching, every now and then dropping an article of wearing apparel on the floor.

For a moment I stood stock-still, debating what I should do. I felt limp, inert, horribly nervous. Mechanically my hand sought my handkerchief. I wiped my face. Beads of perspiration were on my forehead; they moistened my wrists and oozed from the pores of my nose.

I turned on the electric light. It flooded the room with sudden, startling, glaring light. But the Goanese did not turn. He did not utter the faintest sound. His fingers searched the trunk as before.

I spoke again; shouted at the top of my lungs; but the man did not answer. He was utterly oblivious of my presence.

Walking forward, sharply bringing down the full weight of my feet, I passed to one side of him, between the chandelier and the trunk, so that the shadow of my body fell on his face like a black pall. But he did not notice it. His fingers searched more rapidly, more eagerly than ever. His breath came in little staccato thumps. I imagined I

could hear the feverish pounding and pumping of his heart.

Suddenly he gave a short, suppressed cry. It was not a cry of joy. It was not a cry of grief, or even of astonishment. It was not a *live* cry. It was an eery, unearthly sound; a dead cry with a ghastly affectation of life; the cry of a slaughtered soul.

My hair bristled. An ice-cold hand seemed to touch my spine. For a mad moment I thought—Good Heavens! I *knew* that the wrath of Hus-sain Khan was hovering about the room, mocking me in death as he had mocked me in life.

I raised my hand, about to grip the Goanese by the shoulders, to shake him savagely into consciousness.

But my subconscious mind controlled my nerves and my body before they had time to act. With the instantaneous precision of a photographic shutter, my hand dropped to my side and my body regained its poise.

I decided that I would watch and observe. I would not interfere.

Mascasenhas straightened himself. I saw that his fingers were tightly clutched around something; around the object he had searched for and

found in the trunk. He drew it forth with a sudden, tearing jerk, tumbling a dozen things pell-mell on the floor as he dragged it out.

His fingers stiffened and his elbow straightened. He held the thing at arm's length and stared at it, while again from his throat came that eery, dead sound.

At first my thoughts were confused, chaotically whirled together. My eyes did not perceive clearly what it was; and if they did, could not register it on the dense of my brain. I had just an impression of silken, shimmering colors—white and magenta and royal purple, picked out with highlights of biting yellow and slashed with sharp, cruel crimson.

The next moment the half-caste had flung the thing across his shoulders. It fell in long, swishing, graceful waves; folded and molded itself to his slim figure like a garment which was his by right of ancient possession and ancient usage. It seemed to be part of himself.

I looked at it more closely.

It was a ceremonial robe, such as the priests of Doorgha wear on occasions of high ceremony; chiefly on those occasions when they sacrifice a

human body on the reeking altar of the black-faced goddess.

I gave a cry of rage and hatred. Instinctively my fingers clutched and made for the man's throat. But again I controlled myself. For Mascasenhass had turned, and stood facing me.

And his eyes were tightly closed, so tightly that little puckered lines ran from the sockets toward the ears.

He walked past me, quite close to me, but he did not touch me; and when he had traversed the width of the room, carefully avoiding the sharp edges of chairs and table, I realized that the man could see. There was no doubt of it at all. But he saw with that spiritual power which exists apart from the limited bodily organs.

The man was a sleep-walker, I said to myself.

Again I raised my hands, about to touch him, to shake him. And then I remembered having read somewhere that it is a very dangerous thing to awaken a somnambulist too suddenly.

So I kept my peace and watched more carefully than ever.

All at once, Mascasenhass stopped in his tracks. His body swayed forward, and his head dropped a little to one side. His lips, the poise of his

shoulders, the tense clutching of his hands, the intensified pucker of his tightly closed eyelids, his whole attitude expressed the most intense listening. Instinctively, I caught my breath, bent forward, and listened.

Then it came.

Gradually, imperceptibly, and very slowly, dull-booming sound vibrations filled the room. They drifted in from a far distance. They were not palpable. I could not tell if they were the echoing resonance of human voices or of instruments. They were just droning waves, ascending and descending, pitched in those broken, sighing, unearthly quarter and eighth notes which stamp the music of Asia from the Caucasus to the Yellow Sea. Somehow they reminded me of the soft rubbing of an age-green bronze temple gong, cast and carved in the far-off days when Kong-Fu-Tse was young.

But then I knew that it could not have been the echo of a gong. For the nearest pagoda was miles away, across the river in Kowloon, and there were no Chinese temples in the European section of Hong-Kong.

Suddenly the vibrations snapped off. There was a second clogging of silence.

I watched Mascasenhás in absolute fascination.

A smile came on his face which straightened the fleshy curve of his lips into a thin, sardonic line. The contour of his soft countenance seemed to harden and stiffen; his rounded cheekbones seemed to jut themselves into a bony Tartar angle; his huge, oxlike eyes narrowed into Mongolian slits. The usual servility of his facial expression gave way to a wolflike snarl.

The whole face changed; changed right there, in front of my eyes. It was not an hallucination. It was real. The man was changing into a semblance of Hussain Khan. Even his body grew, filled out, and expanded in stature and massiveness. I saw it; and as I saw it, the marrow in my bones seemed turned to jelly, and my heart felt as still as freezing water.

But the next moment I gained control over myself. I watched.

Mascasenhás, his eyes still tightly closed, walked past me again without sensing my presence. There was now a dignity and certain massiveness in his carriage which he had never had in his waking hours. He walked over to the dressing table. I followed close behind, intent on observing his every act and gesture.

He opened the top drawer of his dressing table; his fingers groped and fumbled for a moment; then he brought out a flat, green porcelain jar and a small, pointed brush made of yak hair, such as the Kulu Brahmins use.

And then, with quick, masterly strokes, as if doing something which had become second nature to him, he painted on his forehead the scarlet caste-mark of Doorgha.

I do not believe that I was exactly afraid. The fact is, I could not afford to be afraid. But veiled, foamy dream things came up from the abyss of my soul—things of dead, putrid memory—of Hussain Khan, the man whom I had killed, the man who had mocked and threatened me even on the threshold of death.

I pulled myself together. To the devil with these blotched, streaked, chimerical far-loomings! This man, there in front of the dressing table, was Mascasenhass, a half-caste Goanese, and my servant. He had been my loyal ally. And Hussain Khan was dead. These two facts were stony certainties.

My sole duty was to watch, and to act at the right moment.

Mascasenhass stepped back from the dressing

table. With firm, deliberate gait he walked to the door, opened it, and left the apartment. I followed close at his heels.

We crossed the outer hall, the public corridor, and descended the broad-sweeping stairs. We paused by the sleepy Chinese house-boys. The Eurasian night clerk, stealing forty winks in the security of his wire cage in the lobby, did not notice us; nor did the huge Manchu watchman who was resting his fat-encased body against a broken plinth in front of the hotel.

We walked into the street.

It was then a little after one o'clock in the morning.

Godowns, as well as clubs, had sent forth the last, lingering Englishman and American and Portuguese. The gin bottles were corked for the night. The market babble of tea and silk and ginseng and cotton goods and steel rails was stilled for the time being. The last yellow lights in the private residences on Victoria Heights were guttering out like candles in the wind. It was becoming very dark. A high wind had piped up from the mainland, and was momentarily blinding the face of the young moon with rolling cloud-banks.

Mascasenhás walked along steadily with a long, swinging step, like a man sure of the way and the goal. As a rule, he walked with a sliding, feline motion. But to-night there was a roistering swagger about him that smacked of Central Asia.

At the corner of the Admiralty road a drunken soldier from the Gunners' Barracks hove in sight. He nearly collided with the Goanese. But the latter side-stepped him easily. And even then, in the flaring glare of an arc-light which swung overhead, I could see that his eyes were tightly closed.

The gunner was surprised. He was also alcoholically indignant. He shouted after Mascasenhás with a loud voice.

"Hey there, yer spotted swine, yer! Wot d'yer think you are, yer cursed nigger, dressed up like a monkey on a stick! Wot d'yer mean bumpin' into gents wot's wearin' the king's coat? Come back 'ere like a man, an' I gives yer a clout on the side of yer 'ead. Stroikey me pink! walkin' along dressed up like a general—"

His voice quavered away in the distance. Mascasenhás did not hear. He quickly swung down the length of the street and turned into the native town. There, too, the streets were deserted. Not

a single coolie was roaming about. The houses were shuttered. They were dead, massed together into a dim-gray, compendious unity.

Once Mascasenhas stopped in his tracks. Again his body swayed forward. Again his head dropped a little to one side. Again his whole attitude expressed intense listening.

And once more the hazy resonance of a temple gong being rubbed and thumped drifted across the distance. This time it seemed a little nearer. It was whispering in a language of dread stillness with dull, muffled beatings and thumpings.

Mascasenhas listened. Then he walked on, following the sound as he would a voiced direction. I kept close behind.

So we walked to the very end of Hong-Kong roads, and there, at the foot of Victoria, the sound seemed nearer again. It was steadily becoming more real, more palpable; and it came evidently from the direction of the mainland of the Colony.

There is a little settlement of scraggly, rickety huts there, inhabited by the very dregs of Canton, with a sprinkling of Formosans, Koreans, and a few Black Flag pirates in search of a temporary asylum. The whole place was like a warren, with crisscrossing streets and cul-de-sacs, strongly

savoring of murder and torture and similar small social amenities of Mongol life. Even these streets were practically deserted; except when, once in a while, a blue-bloused coolie would come ambling along on padded slippers, picking his way among the reeking puddles and heaps of evil filth which littered the streets.

Mascasenhas walked along with great swiftness, perfectly sure of his way. And I followed. I was keyed up, expectant, eager; and I did not mind the black shadows which seemed to wag at me with mocking, threatening fingers.

So we reached the end of the island. The channel which separates it from the mainland reaches here its narrowest point. The distance is hardly a mile; and there is a little bay which provides a safe anchorage for boats and small launches.

We walked swiftly down to the river-front. I could see the distant sky-line of Kowloon. The moon was sinking low; and nothing of color remained save that white, milky haze, dull but glaring, which is the peculiar dawn tint of those regions.

I saw a crouching figure detach itself from a clump of black-shadowed rocks. Automatically I ducked behind a thorn-bush.

He was a typical low-class Hong-Kong river rat, squat and bow-legged, with huge, rounded shoulders and the curved, sweeping arms of a male gorilla. It was evident that he had been posted there as a sentinel, and that he was waiting for the half-caste. For as soon as he saw him he lifted his hands with a beckoning gesture and purred a few sing-song gutturals.

Mascasenhas did not answer. He did not seem to notice the other's presence. But he followed him. They turned a little to the left. A sharp moon-ray momentarily illuminated the half-caste's face. His eyes were still tightly closed.

They reached the anchorage.

The Chinaman gave a long-drawn, high-pitched, quivering yell. Twice he repeated it; and immediately the rubbings and thumpings which had been steadily drifting over from the main-laid ceased as if obeying a prearranged signal. The boatman dropped into a rowboat. Mascasenhas followed and sat down in the stern. Then the Chinaman cast off, gripped the oars, and started across toward Kowloon with massive, sweeping strokes.

I waited for a few seconds and looked across the river. It was a nocturne of drowsy murmurs

and fleeting, veiled shadows, with here and there a little, trembling yellow gape.

When everything seemed safe I rushed down to the anchorage. I jumped into the nearest sampan I could lay my hands on, cut the lines with my pocket knife, and was off.

The Chinaman was rowing at a good clip; the green tail-light of his boat was rapidly disappearing. So I put my shoulders to the oars with a will and pulled after it with a long, feathery college stroke.

Twenty minutes later Mascasenhass's boat bumped the opposite shore of Kowloon. The coolie helped the Goanese ashore. Then he jumped into his boat and rowed rapidly back toward Victoria.

I had braked my oars and drifted on the stream for a dozen feet or so to avoid discovery. Now I rowed again toward shore, landed, jumped out, and made my stolen sampan fast in the shelter of a friendly bush.

For a moment Mascasenhass stood perfectly still, a picture of indecision and expectancy. The moon, a bloated thing of copper swinging among the trees, threw down a single broad ray of orange which slashed across his face.

And again I saw that his eyes were tightly closed. Again I caught the fleeting impression that this man was not the mild-mannered Goanese half-caste who, night after night, put the studs into my dress shirt, but another man—a man I had killed in Paris over two years ago—a man of a sharper, fiercer, harder race.

Suddenly the sounds which had guided Mascasenhas all the way from our apartment in the Hotel Alexandra boomed forth once more. This time I made out distinctly the scientific rubbing of a temple gong. It came from a little hill to the west of the Kowloon anchorage; and it was pregnant with a nameless, sinister, brooding message which swept through my soul on silent, unclean feet.

For a moment I stood still. But I refused to think. I followed the half-caste up the hill.

CHAPTER IX

At the very crest I could see the fantastic, exaggerated contour of a pagoda roof. It was of copper, burnished and in spots enameled, mirroring the moon-rays a thousandfold like countless, intersecting rainbows—endless zigzag flashings of

Mascasenhas had not yet reached the main electric blue and deep rose and keen, arrogant emerald green, like the shooting of dragon-flies and purple-winged tropical moths. From a window near the roof a shaft of light stretched out like a long, osseous, yellow hand.

The rest of the pagoda was choked up by a mass of ignoble buildings which criss-crossed up and down the hill. Mascasenhas walked toward it at a good clip. I followed, keeping in the darkness of the trees and the houses. I was nervous. But I was grimly determined to see the adventure straight through to the end.

The Goanese stopped in front of the temple. The rubbing of the gong snapped off suddenly.

The painted, carved teak-wood doors swung open, and Mascasenhás crossed the threshold. Noiselessly the gates closed behind him.

I crept up to the building. There was a window at just about the level of my eyes. I stepped up to it and looked in. It was the hall into which I was looking. I could hear his footsteps echoing through a distant corridor. And so I observed the scene before me at leisure.

The temple was in the shape of a parallelogram with a spacious central area, surrounded by a peristyle of numerous rows of pillars like the colonnades of an Italian cloister. The pillars were ugly, bulbous monstrosities made of coarse red syenite; but the walls were of fine, polished porphyry and covered half-way to the ceiling with slabs of splendid green marble and exquisite marquetry work of a forgotten century.

A huge screen cut off part of the central area. It was of some light silken stuff, painted in vermilion and black and orange, in irregular patches and broad streaks like the face of a clown in a London Christmas pantomime. The room was too full of ornaments that were not accessories, and decorated with a tawdry, pauper splendor.

Somehow I got the impression that it was not

genuine, but that it had been patched and jerked together on the spur of the moment, to serve a certain aim which had to be achieved in a hurry.

The only thing of taste and value was an ancient temple gong of immense proportions on a red-and-gold lacquer stand. A tall Manchu, dressed in magnificent plum-colored robes, stood beside it. The rubbing stick was swinging loosely from a leather loop around his wrist, as if he had just left off sounding the gong. His face, it seemed to me, was strangely familiar, and a light gossamer scrap of remembrance came to my mind. But I had no time to finish and register my groping thoughts.

For at that moment Mascasenhass stepped through the colonnade to the left of the painted screen which cut the hall in twain. He was preceded by a hideous Chinese dwarf whose bony head dangled from a thin-sinewed neck, like an evil flower on a rotten, slimy stalk.

My nerves were now like live wires, jarring, tingling, burning.

The Manchu stepped up close to Mascasenhass. Then he turned. Pointing at the screen without uttering a word, he walked up to it, and the Goanese followed. He passed directly on the other

side of the window through which I was watching, and he was still in a trance, his eyes still tightly closed.

The Manchu stopped. He lifted his muscular arms and nipped off the flimsy painted silk which covered the wooden frame of the screen.

I looked, suppressing a cry of rage and hatred, and for a moment I thought it was a hideous dream. But it was a dream which did not fade, a dream which passed over into waking consciousness, into throbbing actuality.

For there in front of me, bared by the torn, crumpled screen, I beheld once more the giant black basalt statue of Doorgha, the dread Indian goddess of destruction. It was the sister to the statue I had seen at Benares, and to the one I had seen in the temple of Marly-le-Roi. Here were the thick, blood-red lips adrip with the quivering flesh of human sacrifices. Here were the glaring, fiendish eyes, the choking, strangling fingers, the whole hideous, bloated body in its stony passion of hatred and destruction. Here was again the beastly emblem of the mysteries and the cruelties of life which spells religion to one-fourth of Asia.

I shuddered as I thought of the things it had

stood for; the things it had ensouled through the swinging centuries—the unspeakable things, immeasurable, dusky-glooming, born of foul ambitions and cruel desires, of ensanguined murder and gangrened superstition.

And at that moment I absolved Christianity of all the injustice and intolerance it had been responsible for in the past.

Mascasenhass fell to his knees in front of the black idol.

He rubbed his forehead in the dust; lifted his arms in a supplicating gesture; gave a strange strangled cry half fear and half deep fanatic joy; kow-towed again and again, while the Manchu stood like a statue, watching him, a fine, sardonic smile playing about the corners of his thin lips.

At first my knowledge of what was happening there was rather hazy. Then, suddenly, I understood the gist of the thing.

In there was Cajetano Maria Mascasenhass, a Goanese, a half-caste, a nervous, superstitious man, a neurotic, a mixture of strange and warring bloods, soaked in the horrible belief that his soul was part of the soul of Hussain Khan, the dead master-ministrant of Doorgha.

It was clear to me that that sneering Manchu in

there, whoever he was, knew all about Mascasenhass, and that, acting on that knowledge, he had somehow succeeded in sending the half-caste into a heavy, hypnotic trance. He had most likely worked through that devilish science of hypnotic telepathy of which the West, relying on the truth of the old German proverb, "*Was ich nicht weiss, macht mich nicht heiss*," is so superbly contemptuous—and so superbly ignorant.

In that trance the Manchu was kneading and twisting the man's soul and brain and latent energies as he willed; and would presently be trying to forge the Goanese into that same ruthless leader which the dead Hussain Khan had been.

Mascasenhass jumped up. His eyes were now wide open. They glared and glistened like ruby-burning charcoal. His fingers were clawing convulsively at his clothes. Streams of perspiration moistened his forehead, washing the scarlet castemark of Doorgha into a streaked, obscene blotch. His legs and arms began to move in rhythmic gyrations. His voice came up from his throat in a deep, inhuman gurgle.

Suddenly he broke into a chant; with a high-pitched, quavering voice, swelling and decreasing in turns, bursting forth in thick, palpable fervor:

"Hail, Mother! Hail, three-eyed goddess of destructiveness, three-eyed goddess of horrid form! Hail, malign image of death and hate! Listen, thou, to my Matra!"

I have never been a very religious man. My Christianity has always been Laodicæan. But I suppose there is a certain residue of faith in my psychic make-up; and when I saw this man, a Christian and half-white, praying before a bestial Hindu idol and breaking forth into foul hog-squealings of blasphemy, something fiery and sharp rose in my soul.

I acted without thinking. In there was a Manchu, working on my servant, my friend, my brother-white, with the cold, inhuman deviltries of his Mongolian brain. In there was an unclean thing, noxious and mephitic. And here was I, a white man, an American, strong and—

I struck the window with all my strength. The glass shivered into a hundred jagged pieces. Hot blood squirted from my lacerated hands. But I did not feel it; had no time to feel it. I pulled myself up with a tremendous effort.

Then I jumped through the window into the temple. Landing on all fours, I picked myself up

and made for the Manchu with a rush, every muscle of my body bunched for combat.

But the Manchu, in spite of his huge bulk, side-stepped me gently without any apparent effort. He fumbled in his voluminous sleeves for a second. I turned and whirled. But before I could reach him, he had me covered with a vicious automatic.

I recognized him then. It was the same Manchu who, back in San Francisco, had lured me into the joss-house and had attempted to assassinate me there. Then his eyes had been hidden by huge, shell-rimmed spectacles. Tonight they were free of them.

And they were blue, bright blue!

I gave a cry of rage and despair. This man—why—it was he who had entered my apartment in the Hotel Alexandra—who had killed the Rajput—who had—

His voice came suave and silken.

"Be gentle, my friend. Be gentle in this gentle land. Do not scratch your head with a firebrand. Also, be pleased to consider the truth of the following little saying—"

I interrupted him savagely:

"To the devil with—"

"Please, please." His voice was more silken than ever. He backed against the wall and sank into a high-armed carved teak-wood chair. But the hand which gripped the heavy revolver never wavered. "No, no. You must not move. You must not. For this little toy was made in America, the land of efficiency, and so—this little death-toy is most efficient."

I stood still and listened, waiting for my chance. It was the only thing I could do.

The Manchu was arranging the folds of his plum-colored robe with his left hand, while his right kept me covered.

His voice was very low and gentle.

"This is the fable, my friend—a little fable in three parts, and each of the three is true. So distressingly true! Listen."

He paused. Then he continued in a contemptuous drawl:

"On the egg combating with a stone, the yolk came out. Do you not think that funny? No? Then listen to the second and the third part. They are both of an exquisite wit. The tit-mouse held up its feet so that the sky might not fall upon it and crush it. And the tailless ox attempted to

push the elephant away with the strength of its back.

"You do not laugh? Yet I have heard tell about the great American sense of humor. Can it then be that you do not understand our simple Oriental jests? Must I explain the point? Listen. You are the egg you of the West, you white men; and we, we of Asia, are the stone—hard stone; and as to the yolk—"

Something made me turn.

And in the flash of a second I saw that Mascasenas had crept up close to me. His eyes blazed with the most fiendish hatred and vindictiveness I had ever seen on a human face. His hands swung aloft a heavy teak-wood stool. I lifted my hands to avert the blow. I cried out.

"Mascasenas! Mascasenas!"

Then everything was covered with a heavy, clogging pall. The world seemed to swing past me in huge, chaotic circles—a crazy mass of colors whirled together by demons.

The floor seemed like jelly. It gave, I remember crying out in rage and pain. I remember hearing the Manchu's gentle laugh even as I lost consciousness.

It seemed years later that I awakened.

I tried to move, but could not. My hands and feet were tightly strapped to a string bedstead. My tongue was swollen and terribly dry. I felt a numbing pain in the back of my head, and momentarily I lost consciousness again. Somehow I thought that I could feel a whirling sensation; the whirling of a cloudy fog in the brain of a blind world. I imagined that I was dying.

The next moment I was wide awake. Somebody had dashed a glass of water into my face. I looked. The Manchu was standing over me, with the old bland smile on his thin lips.

I moved my head a little to the right. I discovered that I was in a small room which was fitfully illuminated by a single oil-lamp. A whole day must have passed since Mascasenas had made the murderous assault upon me. For a young moon was in the skies, breaking into the room through purple mists and weaving checkered patterns on walls and floor.

The Goanese was sitting, crosslegged, beside the bedstead on which I was strapped. His head was turned away from me, and I caught a glimpse of his profile only.

But even so, I had again the mad sensation that

his features had subtly changed into those of the other man, the man whom I had killed two years before.

I conquered my thoughts. Rot! This man was my Goanese servant. In the past he had been loyal and faithful. Heaven knew why he had turned traitor. I must talk to him. I must persuade him. Unfeasible hope loomed up in pallid, doubtful, bewildering glimmers.

I must try. I had no choice.

"Look here, Mascasenhass." I kept my voice as steady as possible. Purposely I chose negligent, matter-of-fact words. "What's all this nonsense about? What do you mean by dressing up in these confounded heathenish masquerade clothes? What do you mean by assaulting me?"

Mascasenhass turned. He looked me up and down. There was that same keen look in his purple-brown eyes, that same calm, arrogant insouciance in the curve of his thin, contemptuous lips, which my memory associated with the dead Hussain Khan.

He answered, speaking in Arabic, the language which had been as much mother tongue to Hussain Khan as his own native Pukhtu, but which I

was positive Mascasenhas had never had occasion to learn.

"Tawakkal al' Allah, ya Shaykh."

A holy-sounding injunction meaning "Place thy reliance upon God, oh Chief." But in reality it was only the slang of the Mecca bazaars, and had the same meaning as our American "nothing doing." It seemed to amuse him. For he poked me gently in the ribs and continued:

"Yah, Harikar al-Hakim," another Arab slang word which has the exact significance of Mr. Butinski of comic supplement fame.

I was silent for a moment. I knew that it was useless to hammer cold iron. But I must try again. It was Hobson's choice.

"Listen, Mascasenhas. You're a white man—a Christian—"

A sharp, mocking laugh made me stop. I looked up. The Manchu was in convulsions of laughter, howling at the top of his lungs, slapping his fat knees in a paroxysm of glee.

"White man—Christian—" he mimicked me, and then he burst into another gale of laughter.

He stepped up close to me and addressed me with mock seriousness:

"White man, Christian, son of a superior race,

scion of a superior civilization! Has not your matchless education taught you that it is useless to quote the maxims of the Lord Gautama Buddha to the wild buffalo who is about to gore you? Have not your famed universities beyond the water taught you the truth of the saying that every man should sweep the snow in front of his own door before busying himself with the frost on his neighbor's tiles?

"A white man, are you—a Christian? Then sweep your own snow. Stay among white men. Do not meddle with the destinies of the brown and the yellow. And when you do meddle, when you are caught in the act of meddling, turn not for help and sympathy to the inferior men, the men of color. For this man"—he put his hand on Mascasenas' shoulder—"this man is Hussain Khan, an Asian, an Afghan, a hater of the Cross."

Mascasenas looked up. His voice was slow, slightly bored.

"Of course, I am Hussain Khan."

Once more I tried to bore through his armor of insanity.

"Mascasenas, don't you remember Paris? Don't you remember our peaceful little house in Jersey—"

The Manchu laughed again.

"My friend, it is useless to plant sugar-cane on your lips. It has also been said that an elephant is an elephant on low ground as well as on high. Why do you talk, talk, talk? What matters it? If a jackal howls in the distance, will my old buffalo die?" He paused, then continued very gently:

"Pray! Pray instead of talking. For in an hour's time Hussain Khan will kill you. A painless death, my friend. Just a sharp knife drawn gently across your throat." He smiled, "I could kill you now. But I am a Chinaman, an Asian. I am just to everybody, but most just to you, because you are a white man, a Christian. One hour I give you, that you may think of your past life and the glories of the life to come. For death is not such a mouthful that you should gulp it whole. One hour, my friend, to think of the might-have-been."

He slid a fan from his voluminous sleeves and began to fan himself slowly. He continued:

"May you think of your life, and also of Europe, and of Asia. You came to find out, I believe." His voice was low and mocking. "You came to find the One Man—perhaps to kill him. Is it not

so? Then ponder on the wisdom of the ancient saying that the torrent passes while the sand remains. You are the torrent, friend Vandewater. And I"—he tapped his chest lightly with the fan, "I am the sand. I remain, eh?"

Stepping up to the opposite wall, he drew aside a heavy purple curtain which had been draping it. The gold face of an ancient Chinese water-clock shone out dully. He lit a small, red-shaded oil lamp, and adjusted it in such a manner that the face of the clock came into sharp relief. The hour hand was of white, shimmering nacre, the minute hand of some black metal.

"See, my friend," he purred, "it is now the hour of eleven. I said that you would die after an hour, at midnight precisely. But I have decided to give you an extra ten minutes so that you may praise my mercy and benevolence; the benevolence of Yuan Kee, the Manchu. For I know that on the threshold of death, every minute and every second and every fleeting fraction of a second seem like long, swinging, precious years."

He set the machinery of the clock into motion and turned to me again.

"This is a very old clock, my friend, very old and just a little tired. As old as Asia, as tired as

cursed the clock which was ticking off the seconds in front of my face. I cursed the lagging minutes which seemed like years. I cursed and groaned as I saw the inexorable black hand move closer and closer up to the white.

Black, white, black, white—I repeated over and over again. I was half mad—counting, counting, counting.

Finally I forced myself to look away from the clock.

Directly to the left of it there was a heavy, black-and-gold embroidery fastened against the wall. I looked intently, until I could make out the Chinese ideographs with which it was embroidered.

And as I read and reread a great, white peace, a deep sweetness stole over my soul. The quotation was from the book of Lieh-Tzu, the book of the unknown philosopher who lived many centuries before Kong-Fu-Tse:

"There is a Life that is unrevealed;
There is a Transformer who is changeless
The Uncreated alone can produce Life;
The Changeless alone can evolve Change."

I read the words again; memorized them; meditated on them. "There is a Life that is unrevealed—unrevealed—"

Suddenly I was resigned to my fate. I was even happy. The hopes were over, the promise, the ambition—but also the strife. Death would soon come.

I looked at the clock. It was just ten minutes to midnight. And at the same moment, with a sweet, clear vibration, the great bell from the cathedral across the river commenced tolling its message of love and of sacrifice.

“Ave—Ave Maria—Ave Maria—”

I closed my eyes. To me the tolling of the bell was a sacrament. The faith of my childhood years came back. I prayed.

Then I shuddered a little. Midnight! That meant death! I kept my eyes tightly closed and waited for the knife. I waited, waited. Then I remembered. Yuan Kee had put back the hands of the clock by ten minutes—ten more minutes!

And those ten minutes which I owed to the benevolence of Yuan Kee saved my life.

For with the last lingering vibration of the church-bell a change came over the features of Mascasenhass. He seemed to drink in the sounds. He stared at the window whence the sounds were drifting.

Instinctively he crossed himself.

His thin, sardonic lips relaxed and regained their fleshy curve; the hard contour of the chin softened, and the bony Tartar cheek rounded out. The slanting Mongol eyes became once more large and oxlike.

Hussain Khan had disappeared, and Mascasenhas remained; the Goanese, the half-white, the Christian; my faithful servant and loyal ally.

For several dragging seconds he looked at me. Then understanding came into his eyes. He threw himself on his knees before me, and kissed my hands again and again.

Then he cut my bonds and helped me up. Once more he fell on his knees. Tears rolled from his eyes, and he prayed fervently.

When he rose he was calm and collected.

"Come, master," he said to me. "I know the way. Trust me. Follow me."

We walked out of the room, down a flight of stairs, and out into the street. The temple was deserted. Nobody met us. Nobody stopped us.

The night was black. A single glimmering star was fading to the east in a milky haze.

Together, we walked toward the Kowloon anchorage. Hand in hand we walked, as friends who had lost and had found each other again.

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And as we walked, I thanked the benevolence of Yuan Kee, the Manchu—who had given me ten extra minutes!

CHAPTER X

The sampan was still where I had hidden it, in the shelter of some bushes. I stepped into it, and bent to the oars, while Mascasenhass took the tiller. I looked at him closely. He was my old Mascasenhass once more; and I blessed the great cathedral bell which had tolled the "Ave Maria" from across the narrows, whose sweet, clear message of love and sacrifice and everything else Christianity stands for had awakened a responding chord in the mad heart of the hypnotized half-caste.

I thanked fate which had sent the Eurasian back to me. For I needed him in my search. He was half Asian by blood, wholly Asian by tortuous cunning, and he would be of invaluable help to me in that far heart of Outer Mongolia where the One Man was said to live and rule, waiting calmly and patiently for the psychological moment when he would deliver his blow against the West.

With renewed enthusiasm and energy I bent my strength to the oars.

The river was a shimmering band of silver against the blackness of the night.

There was neither wave nor ripple; only here and there a high-light of shining rose and emerald green, and a thin, wavering galoon of electric-blue, where the gold emblazonry of the moon mirrored itself in little floating pools of oil discharged from some passing Shanghai-bound tank-steamer.

I put the full weight of chest and shoulders against the bending oars. The light sampan obeyed my touch like an Arab stallion sure of its master which has never known the trammel of spur or straight bit. It feathered and danced over the water with a little gurgling swish of delight; and with every stroke of the oars the jagged, fantastic sky-line of Hong-Kong jutted more sharply into the focus.

Mascasenhas was at the tiller. His hand was steady. He was perfectly calm and self-possessed; and when he addressed an occasional remark to me or answered my questions, he spoke with a tenoring eagerness which throbbed with loyalty and devotion.

A moonray cut across his features with sudden, yellow sharpness; and they flashed out composed and peaceful, with that utter calmness which

comes from the soul and not from the mind, and which somehow reminded me of a Bodhisattva on a conventionalized Tibetan cloister painting, balancing himself on a frail lotus-leaf and meditating on the seven virtues of Ananda's Lord.

I looked at him intently. Yes, I said to myself; the evil spell was broken. From now on the half-caste would be faithful to me; faithful unto death as he had been in the past. Hand in hand with him I would fight. And win?

Would we win?

I did not know.

But the Eurasian would stick by me. That much I knew. And with added zest and confidence I swung my arms to the heavy rhythm of the blades—away from Kowloon, and on toward the friendly hills of Victoria.

"Karam bansao adhe adh."

The half-caste's voice cut the silene as cleanly as with a dagger. I looked up and he flashed a pleasant smile at me.

"Yes," he repeated translating his words into English. "Fate and self-exertion are half-and-half in power. It was fate which stayed my hand with the tolling of the cathedral bell. And now"—he touched my arm with his thin brown ner-

vous fingers—"now it is your self-exertion that is doing the rest."

He smiled and continued in a low intense voice:

"Your self-exertion, Heart of my Heart! And may my feeble hand and feeble mind be permitted to help the shadow of a trifle!"

Clearer and clearer the shore-line jumped into sight. Glancing over my shoulder, I could see the friendly contours of clubs and godowns and private residences and, on a low hill above the anchorage, the huge arc-lights which marked the beginning of Hong-Kong Roads. I smiled. Somehow, a clean scent of home was in the morning air; and I bent over the oars with greater enthusiasm.

Mascasenhass reacted to my mood. A smile played about the corners of his lips and he commenced whistling softly and tunefully.

But the tune snapped off in mid-air. He turned grayish-pale.

I looked at him in astonishment.

"What's the matter Mascasenhass?"

The next moment I knew. For from across the river from Kowloon, a deep, gurgling tone-vibration floated into the night air.

It was a temple gong, scientifically rubbed and

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thumped. It moaned and shrieked and sobbed. It was like a human voice speaking—of what?

Mascasenhass clutched the tiller with both hands.

"Listen, master! Listen, Protector of the Piti-ful! Yuan Kee has found out our escape. The ten minutes are over. He came to look. He is sending the alarm!"

I motioned to him to be quiet. I rested at my oars so as to hear the better.

Mascasenhass was right. Yuan Kee was giving the alarm.

A second later other gongs took up the refrain. Reed-pipes and drums and cymbals and tomtoms joined in the harsh chorus. The tone-vibrations whirled and twisted and shaped like thick, palpable, floating masses, sinking into low, growling octaves, again rising into thin, quavering tremolos.

They shrilled to a ghastly, mind-freezing pitch; then dropped into an inferno of unclean, moaning, cruel sounds which were like the voices of all the lost souls in the seventh hall of Gehenna.

Thump-thump-thump spoke the gongs; and it seemed as if destiny was opening wide her scream-

ing lungs of brass and was blaring at us with the mad, crimson lust of killing.

I bent again to the swing of the oars, putting every ounce of strength and energy and despair into the bunched play of my muscles.

The light sampan jumped truly and speedily to the strokes.

"Hong-Kong!"

I whispered to myself, and prayed for the clean, white security of the European section, the friendly red coat of Tommy Atkins, the pleasant gray of British naval vessels riding in the bay!

I must hurry up to the Government House, regardless of the hour, and make a full report to the British governor.

Only two nights ago the big, burly Englishman had paled and trembled as he told me how pressing matters were, as he implored me to make haste, to find the One Man and to kill him.

With substantial detail he had related to me how the whole of Asia was seething with the suppressed fever of gathering war; how India was in travail; how the flames had spread to Tonkin, to the Philippines, and to Eastern Siberia.

He had told me shivering tales of great European and American colonial officials mysteriously

murdered; of a Japanese attempt to blow up the defense works at San Francisco; of a regiment of Brahman Sepoys, stationed on the border of the Shan States, having killed their white and loyal native officers, and of their having escaped into the neighboring Chinese province of Amoy with the help and connivance of the Manchu amban who governed it.

And last, but not least, he had told me of the mysterious wholesale purchases and manufactures of the Chinese and Japanese governments—powder and dynamite and chlorin and all the deadliest instruments of poison and gas which the great European war had invented and developed and used; which Asia would use with thousandfold strength and thousandfold cruelty.

The fact of the purchases and manufactures was known. That much the American and English secret service men had found out. But nobody knew where they were stored.

"Imagine, Vandewater," the governor had concluded, and he had clung to my hand like an hysterical woman, "imagine a new Attila, a new Scourge of God; an Attila with all the science and efficiency of Europe—an Attila who will use gas-

bombs and dynamite and poison instead of lances and spears and javelins!"

I must hurry, hurry, hurry! I must tell the governor of Yuan Kee, the blue-eyed Manchu, who there in Kowloon, in an English colony, under the very noses of the British authorities, was flinging the iron nets of intrigue and murder.

With redoubled strength I bent to the oars.

But what could I do after all; I, a single man, with only a half-caste to help me! Why, against the steely cunning of Asia, my own cunning would be as thin and flimsy as the tittering of sparrows in the gutter. But I must try. I must not be afraid; and first of all I must hurry to Hong-Kong. I must report to the governor.

And again I increased my speed.

Suddenly the message of the gongs and the tomtoms burst out with renewed vigor. The reed-pipes shrieked and moaned. Then a new sound floated on the breeze—a sound of far-away human voices, bellowing and cursing and yelling. There was a momentary lull. Then came a gliding, shifting, sucking noise, as of boats being launched.

They were after us. I smiled to myself. All right. Let them come. I was nearly there. An-

other hundred yards and my sampan would bump the friendly shore of Victoria.

I turned to Mascasenhass.

"We've beat them to it, old fellow," I said, with a ringing laugh.

Mascasenhass looked at me. A change had come over him. He was a servant no more. He spoke rapidly, sharply, discouraging with his first words the imagination of possible, hazy alternatives.

"We must turn down the river, master, and away from the land. Quick!"

He swung the tiller at right angle, and the sampan obeyed with a protesting swish and gurgle. We were headed away from Hong-Kong.

Momentarily I thought again that he was a traitor.

"Damn you!" I cried. "What the devil do you mean by—"

He interrupted me with a low, steady voice.

"You cannot fight fire with fire, nor water with water. Listen, master! They have launched their boats. They are after us."

I was becoming impatient.

"Rot, man! We're nearly home."

Mascasenhass laughed a cold, mirthless laugh.

"Home? Did you say home? Is Hong-Kong

home to you? Can it ever be home to you or to me? Hong-Kong is Asia, though the Cross of St. George flies from the top of the governor's palace. And Asia can never be home to the white man. For rivers do not drink up their water, nor do trees eat their fruit."

Again he laughed; and the sound cut through me like a knife.

"Home? Will a crow become a swan by bathing in the Ganges? No, no, no! They would get us over there though a million soldiers, horse, foot, and the guns were camping in front of our hotel; though a thousand dreadnoughts were swinging at anchor in the bay, with decks cleared for action. They would get us and kill us even if we went to hide in the highest steeple of the English cathedral, or in the lowest cellar of the gunners' barracks.

"They would wait—a second, a minute, an hour, a day, a week—they would wait slowly and patiently, because they are Chinese—and they will not even have the mercy of the hooded cobra, which hisses before it strikes. They will strike at us suddenly, out of the dark, with weapons which you do not know, which your white man's mind has never dreamt of, will never dream of. We be

would never be such fools as to remain in Kowloon, on the mainland. But where can we go once we make Hong-Kong, even if we escape the net he is drawing around us, for a day or a week?

"We can take passage on board a steamer bound for America or for Europe. What of it? His henchmen will have searched the steamer and will have killed us before the captain gets his clearance papers. Yuan Kee will squat as a cat, and jump as a tiger, as we say in Goa. What then can we do, since both Kowloon and Hong-Kong are barred? I will tell you.

"A Portuguese steamship-line plies between here and Macao. Every night at midnight the little boats leave the outer wharf. They pass the narrows instead of taking the northern route, because thus they can do without a pilot, and can therefore save money. I know the boats. I know their skippers. Or, at least, they know me. At least, they know my name."

His voice throbbed with conscious pride.

"For the captains of these boats are Goanese. So am I. But I am a gentleman and an aristocrat in my own land. My father was Leopold Aloysius Mascasenhás. His mother's father was a Mercado. My mother's father was a Lyon-d'Sou-

Our oars dipped gently into the narrow channel which separates Macao from the mainland. Gossamer veils of lights and shadows floated about us, enveloping sea and land. The sun crept slowly from the horizon, and the first rays struck the summits of the distant hills with an almost transparent haze that mingled with the jasper tints of the sky.

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to all sides. But there was never a human being; hardly an animal, except once in a while a kite or a vulture flapping lazily overhead. The land was a desert.

I was getting tired; tripping and tumbling and tossing like a cock-boat in a short sea. But I kept on. There was my duty blazing ahead of me like a sacred Grail; not the thought of my own safety, but the clarion-call of a greater, deeper duty—the call of my appointed task, which I *must* achieve!

So I clenched my teeth and kept on.

We stopped to eat and rest, and I smoked my last cigar with lingering regret. Then we were off again.

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Once I thought that, a little to the west and leading in the same direction which we were taking, I could see deep ruts such as are made by heavy wagons and huge caterpillar-wheeled motor-trucks. I said something of the sort to the half-caste.

But he smiled and forged on without turning his head.

"Just a shadow, master of mine. Perhaps the mark of a dried river-bed. There are many such coming down from the hills with the spring monsoons. They die when the sand-storms sweep from the outer lands. But there can be no wagon-ruts here. Why, there's been nobody here since the days when Kublai Khan and his Tartars rode their horses into the ships to subjugate the Shoguns of Japan; except, perhaps, once in a while a Buddhist abbot or sage searching for the buried shrines of his faith."

I did not argue the point. I did not stop to investigate. The half-caste knew the country, I said to myself. But the impression refused to budge.

About an hour afterward we came through a basalt-field, across the rugged blocks of which we treaded our way slowly and painfully. My shoes were not meant for such sort of roughing, and my feet were bruised and bleeding.

At dusk we stumbled over the dwarf dikes of rice paddies; signs of habitation.

So we plunged again into the stoneland. It was a typical Bad Lands; a desert peopled only with echoes; a place of death for what little there was to die in it—a wilderness.

Mascasenas had the right description for it.

"*La Siwa Hu*," he said, pointing at the naked rock-ribs. Then he translated his words into English. "Yes, master; nobody lives here but God."

We made camp on a small hill shadowed by enormous, gnarled thorn-trees. Mascasenas pointed south.

"See, over yonder," he said. "We are nearly at the place of our destination. By to-morrow night we shall be there."

I rose and looked over the scene. Before me stretched a huge, gray flat, with long lines of basalt here and there seaming the surface, and with wide sheets of tufaceous gypsum which shone like mirrors in the russet frame of the desert.

A cool wind set in from the south. I opened my lungs wide to drink in the air. And then I gasped and shuddered a little. For on the wings of the evening wind came a strange, acrid, fetid odor.

It was an odor of neither man nor beast. Nor was it the odor of plants. It was unlike anything I had ever smelled, and I have smelled the forty-seven distinct and unholy smells of Calcutta during the hot season.

I could not make it out at all. But somehow

very vaguely and quite inexplicably it reminded me of a day, years ago, which I had spent with a friend of mine, a British army surgeon, on duty in a cholera-camp in India, beyond Rawalpindi.

I spoke of it to the half-caste. But again he smiled. He shook his head.

"Nobody lives here except the dead, master. Nobody will ever live here. Nobody will ever restore it. It is yesterday, this gray land—the dead land of yesterday. And you know the saying, that he who is able to restore what was yesterday, will plaster over the rays of the sun.

"It is but the smell of the sun steaming up decayed plants. Once they grew rice and ginseng and oil-beans in this valley, before the great river burst its bed and swept north into the Yellow Sea. The roots may be left, and now their smell is in the air—like corpses."

Late the next day we reached the farther ridge. The smell had become increasingly fetid and hot, but I accepted the half-caste's explanation. He knew the land.

On the right of us was a stony buttress, along the base of which a thin, black stream was swinging. On the left was a precipice; and opposite us the way seemed barred by piles of hills, crest

rising above crest into the far, blue distance. Day still smiled upon the upper peaks; but the lower and the river-bed were already curtained with gray shadows.

Mascasenas led the way with the quick, swinging step of the jungle-born, and I followed him painfully, cursing my luck and cursing my shoemaker. We climbed steadily for about two hours; then we descended. And suddenly, hidden away in a curious, baylike depression between steep, red dunes, the ruins came into sight.

At first they were absolutely uninhabitable. There was neither cave nor shelter; just a mass of bleached fragments of carved timbers and small, fissured fragments of stucco rilievs, probably the relics from some ancient Buddhist burial-place.

Then we came upon a bit of land where I could still trace the ground-plan, marked by the remains of walls made of plastered reed-matting. I could also trace the position once occupied by large pottery-jars sunk into the mud floor, and that of similar appurtenances of light, Mongol house-keeping. But all was half petrified, eroded away by wind and water.

We walked on.

Suddenly I stumbled over something. Instinctively I bent down and looked, and instantly gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Mascasenhas!" I cried. "See here, this thing is not of yesterday! It's of to-day!"

I handed him the thing I had found. It was the red clay bowl of a Chinese pipe, recently used. Mascasenhas examined it, sniffed it, then tossed it among the basalt rocks with a light laugh.

"Some nomad Mongol shepherd may have passed through here with his animals. You see, there are grazing lands to the west of here. No, no, master, we are safe."

Of course, the man was right. I was seeing specters in broad daylight, and the next moment I laughed at my own silly apprehensions. We walked steadily on, still in a southerly direction, and stopped in front of a mawlike opening among the ruins. Mascasenhas pointed down.

"We have arrived, Mr. Vandewater. Yuan Kee will never find us here. And my cousin will send us provisions from time to time. In a week, or a month, the Manchu will give up the search. He will think that our sampan overturned in the narrows, and that we were drowned. And then—presently—"

He talked on. But I was not listening. I hesitated at the entrance to the cave, and had all I could do to keep myself from crying out. For again the fetid, acrid, odor assailed and choked me, and this time it came from below my feet, from the very cave into which the half-caste was leading me.

At the same moment I imagined once more that a faint, gray shadow was following me, gliding batlike from boulder to boulder, but, cursing myself for a fool and a coward, I followed the half-caste.

The caves were in several rows, piled on top of each other.

We approached the upper row by a rough staircase cut from the living rock. Then, crossing a deep fissure of the rock by a rickety, time-worn rope-bridge, we arrived at a series of cave-temples communicating with each other.

Their walls were decorated with mural paintings in ancient, cracked, and gangrened tempora. A fretful shaft of light filtered through the fissures of the rock, and I could see that the paintings were very old and conventionalized, giving scenes from the Buddhist heaven, and the familiar figure of the Lord Gautama enthroned among Bodhisatt-

vas, who were standing on lotus-leaves and praying.

I was in a peculiar state of mind. My feet mechanically followed the half-caste. But my mind was detached from my bodily organs. Somehow, I felt that I had stepped into a hollow—not a hollow of the earth, but one of time; a hollow of the night which the centuries had overlooked, and where the powers of the unknown were holding me and sucking me in deeper and deeper in the stretch of their gigantic, changeless hands.

I was a prey to enormous, voiceless excitement. Yet my excitement was not tainted by the vicious tang of fear; hardly of nervousness. It was not located in my blood or my brain or my heart, but was spread thinly over my entire psychic being. It seemed to communicate itself to me from some outside influence, human if you will, but atrophied, amorphous, slimy; a network of feeling which connected me with unseen beings.

I came to feel it gradually, as a man in certain abnormal conditions feels the customary bodily processes going on in himself without definitely recognizing or locating them.

We walked on.

Mascasenhass knew his way perfectly. He swung sharply to the left, entered another, larger temple-cave, and then stopped short. He bumped against me, and I could feel him tremble.

"What is it, Mascasenhass?" My voice sounded hollow and unreal. He did not answer a word, but pointed a shaky finger.

I looked. I shivered a little.

Dead ahead, from a crack in the wall, came a light.

It was not the light of the sun filtering through from cave to cave. It was a dancing, flickering uncertain light—a light which spoke of lamps and torches moving about.

At the same instant my senses registered two distinct sensations which seemed to connect with each other. One was again the oppressive, fetid odor which I had smelled first, when I was within sight of the ruins; the other was a sound—a series of sounds.

Mascasenhass, about to speak, opened his lips, but, motioning him to be quiet, I listened.

Presently the sounds separated themselves from each other. I caught their drift and meaning. They were made by human mouths and throats; by human voices.

It was a shifting, twirling babel of many tongues, echoed from rock to rock. I listened more intently. I traced the different tongues to their origin, and I thanked my youthful ambition which had led me to make a thorough study of Oriental languages.

The first distinct phrase I heard was spoken in Behari:

"Mualo ghora ghans khala."

Then came spitting Armenian, soft, limpid Turkish, Georgian, and Tcherkessian, halting, twangy Chinese, sonorous Manchu, explosive phrases of virile Arabic, softgliding Persian words, harsh Pukhtu, oily Japanese, and the sharp, guttural exclamations of the bewildering, uncounted tribes which roam the steppes of Central Asia from Baikal to the Caspian.

The tongues strayed together, lost and bizarre, like fragments from some distant or forgotten world.

I motioned the halfcaste to follow me, and led the way toward the fissure in the rock-wall whence the light and the sounds were drifting.

I looked.

Below me, in a yet deeper and bigger cave, was the strangest scene I had ever beheld.

It was a symphony of all the races and tribes and faiths of Asia. Hundreds and hundreds of men were rushing and jostling about, some directing, others loading boxes and bundles on wheelbarrows, others again trundling them off through a large opening cut into the opposite wall of the cave; but all were working feverishly and hurriedly, as if their very life depended on the task which they were doing.

It was a gorgeous panorama of the Yellow Continent. There were wild, barbaric Afghans, white-skinned, hook-nosed, and bearded, with flashing eyes, dressed in flowing, black-silk yalats. There were broad, squat Turcomans, with cartridge-belts of silver and ivory gleaming across bulging chests, in the glare of the torches which were held by rings in the wall. There were flat-faced Kalmucks and Tchuktches, crowned with bashliks of white and yellow fur; rascally Circassians and Sarts, with evil-looking yataghans stuck in rich shawl-belts, and long rifles slung across supple shoulders; pale, furtive-eyed Persians walking softly in leather slippers; hairy Turks stepping like conquerors; countless Chinese and Tartars from all the Middle Kingdom; small, grinning Japanese; wiry Arabs from Yaman and

from Hijaz; and giant Uzbegs walking with a swinging swagger and roaring barbaric songs as they worked.

Mascasenhass gave a short cry; but I clapped my hand roughly over his mouth, and looked more intently.

I could not make out what they were doing. They were just lifting and sorting and trundling away boxes and bundles which seemed very heavy; and they handled them with speed, but with the utmost care, scrupulously avoiding the vicinity of the torches.

And as they worked, that same heavy odor, fetid and acrid and sickening, rose from the swaying masses. Yet I knew they were all men of clean races. I saw that there were many gentlemen, many high-castes among them, who rigorously observe the three daily ablutions prescribed by their faiths.

I looked more intently. And then quite suddenly I knew what the odor was. For I saw on every face down there in that babel at my feet blotches of scaly, silvery white. Some were but small patches, others were spreading over half the features, others again were blending into green

and purple, and covering necks and arms and bare feet!

I gave a quickly stifled exclamation of horror and disgust.

"*Lepers, lepers, lepers!*" I whispered into the ear of the half-caste. Then I clutched his arm and ran rapidly away, back in the direction whence we had come.

We ran at top speed, hardly noticing where we were going.

Finally my breath gave out. I sat down in a heap, and the Eurasian followed suit.

I closed my eyes for a moment; then I opened them wide and looked about me. We were in another cave, more roomy than all the others.

I turned to the half-caste.

"We looked for a safe place of refuge, for an asylum, and we found—"

"What, master?"

"Yes—what?" I repeated, and paused. Then I continued:

"Let's figure this out. Of course these lepers have been brought here from all over Asia. For they are of a dozen races, a dozen castes. You saw them. But tell me, what were they doing? What is in the boxes and bundles? Why the speed and

hurry? And why lepers to do the work?"

Mascasenhas looked straight at me.

"Master, you ask what they were doing. I ask—what are they guarding?"

"Guarding?"

"Yes. For can there be a safer guard in all the world than leprosy? It is the one thing you dread and fear, you men of America and Europe. But they, the men of Asia, they do not fear it. You know that."

"I know."

We were silent. I thought deeply; and as I thought I looked about me.

The walls of the cave in which we were, were painted with a typical scene of Buddhist iconography. On the left was Lord Gautama standing, dressed in a simple robe of that dark, red-brown color which Indian tradition since ancient times prescribes for ascetics and saintly preachers of all sects.

The halo and the characteristic topknot made it certain to me that the teacher was meant for Buddha. But then I noticed that the halo was of silver, and I considered that the ancient religious painters did not use silver; they always used gold. The painting was modern.

But the cave was old, very old. And I wondered. I looked more closely.

I saw that below the teacher the abbot-artist who had executed the work had painted six Arhats, or Buddhist saints, ranged in two rows, and wearing robes in a variety of bright colors. One, at the left end of the upper row, carried a white fan, probably meant for a Chauri or yaktail, the traditional emblem of sovereign power.

I scrutinized the figures of the Arhats intently. But they were all conventionally correct.

So I walked up to the wall and studied once more the figure of the Buddha himself. And then I noticed something strange. For while the right hand of the teacher was raised in the correct, traditional pose, known as that of Abhaya or Protection, the left, which should have been hanging flat against the side, was lifted in a pointing attitude.

Instinctively my eyes followed the direction in which the hand was pointing.

I looked. There was a small opening in the wall. I motioned to Mascasenhas to follow me, and stepped through the opening.

I found myself in a still larger and higher cave. But there were no paintings covering the walls.

Our oars dipped gently into the narrow channel which separates Macao from the mainland. Gossamer veils of lights and shadows floated about us, enveloping sea and land. The sun crept slowly from the horizon, and the first rays struck the summits of the distant hills with an almost transparent haze that mingled with the jasper tints of the sky.

We landed and struck rapidly overland, leaving villages and rice paddies to the left. Mascasenhás led the way. He seemed perfectly familiar with every stick and stone.

The country was deserted. For hours we traveled over a flat, thinly dotted with desert vegetation, and, halting early in the morning, slept till the late afternoon, taking turns in watching.

Then we were off again.

Late at night we passed a basaltic ridge, and then, entering a long, depressed saucer, we descended into a steaming valley, through which we paced for five tedious hours.

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About an hour afterward we came through a basalt-field, across the rugged blocks of which we treaded our way slowly and painfully. My shoes were not meant for such sort of roughing, and my feet were bruised and bleeding.

At dusk we stumbled over the dwarf dikes of rice paddies; signs of habitation.

So we plunged again into the stoneland. It was a typical Bad Lands; a desert peopled only with echoes; a place of death for what little there was to die in it—a wilderness.

Mascasenhass had the right description for it.

"*La Siwa Hu*," he said, pointing at the naked rock-ribs. Then he translated his words into English. "Yes, master; nobody lives here but God."

We made camp on a small hill shadowed by enormous, gnarled thorn-trees. Mascasenhass pointed south.

"See, over yonder," he said. "We are nearly at the place of our destination. By to-morrow night we shall be there."

I rose and looked over the scene. Before me stretched a huge, gray flat, with long lines of basalt here and there seaming the surface, and with wide sheets of tufaceous gypsum which shone like mirrors in the russet frame of the desert.

A cool wind set in from the south. I opened my lungs wide to drink in the air. And then I gasped and shuddered a little. For on the wings of the evening wind came a strange, acrid, fetid odor.

It was an odor of neither man nor beast. Nor was it the odor of plants. It was unlike anything I had ever smelled, and I have smelled the forty-seven distinct and unholy smells of Calcutta during the hot season.

I could not make it out at all. But somehow

very vaguely and quite inexplicably it reminded me of a day, years ago, which I had spent with a friend of mine, a British army surgeon, on duty in a cholera-camp in India, beyond Rawalpindi.

I spoke of it to the half-caste. But again he smiled. He shook his head.

"Nobody lives here except the dead, master. Nobody will ever live here. Nobody will ever restore it. It is yesterday, this gray land—the dead land of yesterday. And you know the saying, that he who is able to restore what was yesterday, will plaster over the rays of the sun.

"It is but the smell of the sun steaming up decayed plants. Once they grew rice and ginseng and oil-beans in this valley, before the great river burst its bed and swept north into the Yellow Sea. The roots may be left, and now their smell is in the air—like corpses."

Late the next day we reached the farther ridge. The smell had become increasingly fetid and hot, but I accepted the half-caste's explanation. He knew the land.

On the right of us was a stony buttress, along the base of which a thin, black stream was swinging. On the left was a precipice; and opposite us the way seemed barred by piles of hills, crest

rising above crest into the far, blue distance. Day still smiled upon the upper peaks; but the lower and the river-bed were already curtained with gray shadows.

Mascasenhas led the way with the quick, swinging step of the jungle-born, and I followed him painfully, cursing my luck and cursing my shoemaker. We climbed steadily for about two hours; then we descended. And suddenly, hidden away in a curious, baylike depression between steep, red dunes, the ruins came into sight.

At first they were absolutely uninhabitable. There was neither cave nor shelter; just a mass of bleached fragments of carved timbers and small, fissured fragments of stucco rilievs, probably the relics from some ancient Buddhist burial-place.

Then we came upon a bit of land where I could still trace the ground-plan, marked by the remains of walls made of plastered reed-matting. I could also trace the position once occupied by large pottery-jars sunk into the mud floor, and that of similar appurtenances of light, Mongol house-keeping. But all was half petrified, eroded away by wind and water.

We walked on.

Suddenly I stumbled over something. Instinctively I bent down and looked, and instantly gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Mascasenas!" I cried. "See here, this thing is not of yesterday! It's of to-day!"

I handed him the thing I had found. It was the red clay bowl of a Chinese pipe, recently used. Mascasenas examined it, sniffed it, then tossed it among the basalt rocks with a light laugh.

"Some nomad Mongol shepherd may have passed through here with his animals. You see, there are grazing lands to the west of here. No, no, master, we are safe."

Of course, the man was right. I was seeing specters in broad daylight, and the next moment I laughed at my own silly apprehensions. We walked steadily on, still in a southerly direction, and stopped in front of a mawlike opening among the ruins. Mascasenas pointed down.

"We have arrived, Mr. Vandewater. Yuan Kee will never find us here. And my cousin will send us provisions from time to time. In a week, or a month, the Manchu will give up the search. He will think that our sampan overturned in the narrows, and that we were drowned. And then—presently—"

He talked on. But I was not listening. I hesitated at the entrance to the cave, and had all I could do to keep myself from crying out. For again the fetid, acrid, odor assailed and choked me, and this time it came from below my feet, from the very cave into which the half-caste was leading me.

At the same moment I imagined once more that a faint, gray shadow was following me, gliding batlike from boulder to boulder, but, cursing myself for a fool and a coward, I followed the half-caste.

The caves were in several rows, piled on top of each other.

We approached the upper row by a rough staircase cut from the living rock. Then, crossing a deep fissure of the rock by a rickety, time-worn rope-bridge, we arrived at a series of cave-temples communicating with each other.

Their walls were decorated with mural paintings in ancient, cracked, and gangrened tempora. A fretful shaft of light filtered through the fissures of the rock, and I could see that the paintings were very old and conventionalized, giving scenes from the Buddhist heaven, and the familiar figure of the Lord Gautama enthroned among Bodhisatt-

vas, who were standing on lotus-leaves and praying.

I was in a peculiar state of mind. My feet mechanically followed the half-caste. But my mind was detached from my bodily organs. Somehow, I felt that I had stepped into a hollow—not a hollow of the earth, but one of time; a hollow of the night which the centuries had overlooked, and where the powers of the unknown were holding me and sucking me in deeper and deeper in the stretch of their gigantic, changeless hands.

I was a prey to enormous, voiceless excitement. Yet my excitement was not tainted by the vicious tang of fear; hardly of nervousness. It was not located in my blood or my brain or my heart, but was spread thinly over my entire psychic being. It seemed to communicate itself to me from some outside influence, human if you will, but atrophied, amorphous, slimy; a network of feeling which connected me with unseen beings.

I came to feel it gradually, as a man in certain abnormal conditions feels the customary bodily processes going on in himself without definitely recognizing or locating them.

We walked on.

Mascasenas knew his way perfectly. He swung sharply to the left, entered another, larger temple-cave, and then stopped short. He bumped against me, and I could feel him tremble.

"What is it, Mascasenas?" My voice sounded hollow and unreal. He did not answer a word, but pointed a shaky finger.

I looked. I shivered a little.

Dead ahead, from a crack in the wall, came a light.

It was not the light of the sun filtering through from cave to cave. It was a dancing, flickering uncertain light—a light which spoke of lamps and torches moving about.

At the same instant my senses registered two distinct sensations which seemed to connect with each other. One was again the oppressive, fetid odor which I had smelled first, when I was within sight of the ruins; the other was a sound—a series of sounds.

Mascasenas, about to speak, opened his lips, but, motioning him to be quiet, I listened.

Presently the sounds separated themselves from each other. I caught their drift and meaning. They were made by human mouths and throats; by human voices.

It was a shifting, twirling babel of many tongues, echoed from rock to rock. I listened more intently. I traced the different tongues to their origin, and I thanked my youthful ambition which had led me to make a thorough study of Oriental languages.

The first distinct phrase I heard was spoken in Behari:

"Mualo ghora ghans khala."

Then came spitting Armenian, soft, limpid Turkish, Georgian, and Tcherkessian, halting, twangy Chinese, sonorous Manchu, explosive phrases of virile Arabic, softgliding Persian words, harsh Pukhtu, oily Japanese, and the sharp, guttural exclamations of the bewildering, uncounted tribes which roam the steppes of Central Asia from Baikal to the Caspian.

The tongues strayed together, lost and bizarre, like fragments from some distant or forgotten world.

I motioned the halfcaste to follow me, and led the way toward the fissure in the rock-wall whence the light and the sounds were drifting.

I looked.

Below me, in a yet deeper and bigger cave, was the strangest scene I had ever beheld.

It was a symphony of all the races and tribes and faiths of Asia. Hundreds and hundreds of men were rushing and jostling about, some directing, others loading boxes and bundles on wheelbarrows, others again trundling them off through a large opening cut into the opposite wall of the cave; but all were working feverishly and hurriedly, as if their very life depended on the task which they were doing.

It was a gorgeous panorama of the Yellow Continent. There were wild, barbaric Afghans, white-skinned, hook-nosed, and bearded, with flashing eyes, dressed in flowing, black-silk yalats. There were broad, squat Turcomans, with cart-ridge-belts of silver and ivory gleaming across bulging chests, in the glare of the torches which were held by rings in the wall. There were flat-faced Kalmucks and Tchuktches, crowned with bashliks of white and yellow fur; rascally Circassians and Sarts, with evil-looking yataghans stuck in rich shawl-belts, and long rifles slung across supple shoulders; pale, furtive-eyed Persians walking softly in leather slippers; hairy Turks stepping like conquerors; countless Chinese and Tartars from all the Middle Kingdom; small, grinning Japanese; wiry Arabs from Yaman and

from Hijaz; and giant Uzbegs walking with a swinging swagger and roaring barbaric songs as they worked.

Mascasenas gave a short cry; but I clapped my hand roughly over his mouth, and looked more intently.

I could not make out what they were doing. They were just lifting and sorting and trundling away boxes and bundles which seemed very heavy; and they handled them with speed, but with the utmost care, scrupulously avoiding the vicinity of the torches.

And as they worked, that same heavy odor, fetid and acrid and sickening, rose from the swaying masses. Yet I knew they were all men of clean races. I saw that there were many gentlemen, many high-castes among them, who rigorously observe the three daily ablutions prescribed by their faiths.

I looked more intently. And then quite suddenly I knew what the odor was. For I saw on every face down there in that babel at my feet blotches of scaly, silvery white. Some were but small patches, others were spreading over half the features, others again were blending into green

and purple, and covering necks and arms and bare feet!

I gave a quickly stifled exclamation of horror and disgust.

"*Lepers, lepers, lepers!*" I whispered into the ear of the half-caste. Then I clutched his arm and ran rapidly away, back in the direction whence we had come.

We ran at top speed, hardly noticing where we were going.

Finally my breath gave out. I sat down in a heap, and the Eurasian followed suit.

I closed my eyes for a moment; then I opened them wide and looked about me. We were in another cave, more roomy than all the others.

I turned to the half-caste.

"We looked for a safe place of refuge, for an asylum, and we found—"

"What, master?"

"Yes—what?" I repeated, and paused. Then I continued:

"Let's figure this out. Of course these lepers have been brought here from all over Asia. For they are of a dozen races, a dozen castes. You saw them. But tell me, what were they doing? What is in the boxes and bundles? Why the speed and

hurry? And why lepers to do the work?"

Mascasenhas looked straight at me.

"Master, you ask what they were doing. I ask—what are they guarding?"

"Guarding?"

"Yes. For can there be a safer guard in all the world than leprosy? It is the one thing you dread and fear, you men of America and Europe. But they, the men of Asia, they do not fear it. You know that."

"I know."

We were silent. I thought deeply; and as I thought I looked about me.

The walls of the cave in which we were, were painted with a typical scene of Buddhist iconography. On the left was Lord Gautama standing, dressed in a simple robe of that dark, red-brown color which Indian tradition since ancient times prescribes for ascetics and saintly preachers of all sects.

The halo and the characteristic topknot made it certain to me that the teacher was meant for Buddha. But then I noticed that the halo was of silver, and I considered that the ancient religious painters did not use silver; they always used gold. The painting was modern.

But the cave was old, very old. And I wondered. I looked more closely.

I saw that below the teacher the abbot-artist who had executed the work had painted six Arhats, or Buddhist saints, ranged in two rows, and wearing robes in a variety of bright colors. One, at the left end of the upper row, carried a white fan, probably meant for a Chauri or yaktail, the traditional emblem of sovereign power.

I scrutinized the figures of the Arhats intently. But they were all conventionally correct.

So I walked up to the wall and studied once more the figure of the Buddha himself. And then I noticed something strange. For while the right hand of the teacher was raised in the correct, traditional pose, known as that of Abhaya or Protection, the left, which should have been hanging flat against the side, was lifted in a pointing attitude.

Instinctively my eyes followed the direction in which the hand was pointing.

I looked. There was a small opening in the wall. I motioned to Mascasenhass to follow me, and stepped through the opening.

I found myself in a still larger and higher cave. But there were no paintings covering the walls.

Instead there were tiers and tiers of boxes, thousands and thousands of them. I walked up and examined them. And I jumped back with a cry of fear and surprise.

The boxes were plainly labeled in Chinese and English. They contained dynamite and powder and cordite and picric acid. They contained every devilish explosive and material for the manufacture of poison-gas and bombs which Europe and America has ever thought of or has ever invented. They contained enough death-giving qualities to blow all the armies of the white lands into final oblivion.

Suddenly I understood the whole infernal, damnable riddle.

Here was the chief armory, the chief depot of the Yellow Man. And he guarded it carefully. He had buried it in a deserted ruin, and then he had brought lepers from all over Asia to guard the death-dealing treasure.

I understood the meaning of the wagon and motor-truck ruts I had seen two days ago when we were crossing the basalt lands. I understood the meaning of the little clay pipe-bowl I had found at the entrance to the caves. I understood the feverish speed with which the lepers back

yonder were working. I understood what was contained in the boxes and bundles which they were lifting and trundling in their wheelbarrows.

I turned to Mascasenhás.

"Come, Mascasenhás. We must go away—quick, quick—back to the coast—to Macao—to Hong-Kong."

I stopped short. For suddenly, from nowhere in particular, came again that lascivious insence-odor which I had associated in my mind with Yuan Kee, the blue-eyed Manchu. At the same time I caught the sound of awful, low laughter; a laughter that brought with it a wave of sighing—of deep, tired, old-world sighing.

The next moment Yuan Kee himself came round the corner of the cave. He moved slowly forward, his long, thin hands, which contrasted so strangely with his huge, fat body, outstretched in greeting; and on his bland, moonlike visage was a shining smile of ironic welcome.

"Ah," he purred gently in his faultless English. "Mr. Vandewater and Mr. Mascasenhás. So you have come to visit us in our worthless home? Welcome, my friends. It is yours—everything, everything!" He pointed at the tiers of explosives with a generous, circular gesture. "You must pay

us a long visit. Stay—ah, as long as you please. No, stay forever. Stay until you die!”

I interrupted him with a cry of rage, and turned to the half-caste.

“Let’s try to get away from here. Let’s make a fight for it, anyway. Come on, old friend!”

The Chinaman laughed.

“My white friend, do not exert yourself. Do not fight a torrent with the words of your tongue. Tell me, will a dead horse eat grass? If the naked dance can they tear their clothes? Will the cock who has gone from home for four days return as a peacock? Stay, my friends. You will be well guarded. You will have company of many races—the races of that great Asia which you love so, and which you try to benefit. And if they have the little scaly spots which you call leprosy—remember the precepts of your Christian faith—be kind to the sick and lowly!”

With another courtly wave of his hand, he turned to go.

But I stopped him with a shout.

“I’m afraid, Yuan Kee, that we cannot accept your charming hospitality. I think we will return whence we came, and you yourself will show us the way. We shall return to our own people.”

The Chinaman laughed.

"A little of your famed American bluff."

I laughed in my turn.

"No, my friend. This isn't bluff. I'm holding a pat hand. Four aces and—" I pulled the big Webley from my pocket and twirled the loaded chambers significantly—"a joker."

Yuan Kee paled. But at once he regained his composure.

"Shoot! It will not save your life, nor the lives of those for whom these little explosives are meant."

He folded his arms across his huge chest and smiled.

I spoke slowly, incisively.

"I shall not shoot you, Yuan Kee," I swung my weapon until I had a bead on a box containing about five hundred pounds of picric acid. "I shall fire into the arsenal!"

I waited for the Manchu's answer. All eternity seemed to roll by me in a whirling chaos.

Then the Chinaman bowed deeply.

"Yes, my friend," he purred. "You have indeed an unbeatable hand—this time."

He turned and motioned to me.

"Follow me."

He led us up a rickety flight of stairs which connected direct with the valley outside. I walked backward all the way, covering the store of explosives with my revolver, and stopped only when I had arrived on level ground. Then I gave my revolver to Mascasenhás.

"Keep that Chinaman covered for a few minutes."

Then I busied myself feverishly. Heaping up a huge mass of dry wood and fragments of timbers, I piled the mass against the entrance of the cave and put a match to it.

It flared up in the still air with a whistling roar.

"Hurry up, Yuan Kee, and call your guardians. In fifteen minutes the flames will be in the chamber of the explosives. Hurry!"

Yuan Kee rushed away as fast as his fat legs would let him, while I took Mascasenhás by the hand and ran with him up the hill, into God's clean air.

On our way back from the temple ruins to the coast we met the old half-caste servant of Manuel Mercado, who had come after us with the provisions for which we had arranged in Macao.

We told him of our grim plight, and he thought

rapidly. Then, with a shout of triumph, he asked us to follow him.

Late that night we arrived at a little wooden Catholic church, not far from the Macao anchorage, but on the mainland, and under Chinese jurisdiction. He entered the priest's house, and returned to us after a short colloquy.

"Come," he said, ushering us into the house, where we were cordially received by the aged, white-haired Portuguese priest. "You will stay with Father Jeronimo for a few days. You will be safe here. The Chinese do not persecute the holy men of other religions unless they try to proselytize. And this good priest does not. He is too old. He is past the years when one tries to catch the air in a net and to make noises with one's ears. He is much respected by the Chinese. You will be safe in his house. See! It is quite dark. Nobody has heard you come. Nobody has seen you come."

"And nobody will see us go," I interrupted with a light-hearted laugh; and then I gave him a commission to execute for me as soon as he reached Macao.

"Make haste," I added, "and bring back everything exactly as ordered. Senor Manuel Mercado

will know where to obtain the things. Make haste and return."

"Yes, my master."

Two days later he came back, again in the dead of night, and I proceeded at once to use the various articles which, according to my orders, he had brought back with him.

First of all I covered my face, my arms, hands, and neck, and then, on second thoughts, my entire body with a heavy walnut-dye.

I continued the beautifying process by blackening my hair and my beard with the well-known mixture used by the courtezans of Cairo—sulphate of iron, ammoniure of iron, henna, and gall-nuts, infused in distilled water. I surmounted my now blackened scalp locks by a white cotton skull-cap, and tied over it the kufyiah, a large square silk kerchief of dull-red with a bright orange border, from which depended tassels and twists of silk that reached my waist.

I fitted the kufyiah close to the back of my head with the help of the aakal, or twisted rope of hair, and projected it over my forehead so that it shaded my eyes and gave to my countenance that fierce and contemptuous expression on which true Arabs pride themselves. I dressed my body

in a simple cotton shirt, tight-sleeved, open in front, which covered me from head to foot, and which was confined at the waist with a handsome silk scarf supporting my silver-hilted, crooked Jambyiah dagger. Over it all I threw the aba, the long-skirted, sleeveless cloak of camels' hair, and inserted my feet into yellow leather sandals.

Thus, after a long and careful transformation, I changed into the Shaykh Moustaffa Ahmet, a traveling Arab merchant, and cousin, on his mother's side, to the Goanese Manuel Mercado.

A safe disguise, as there are many Muskat and Sokotra Arabs at the Chinese coast, trading into the interior. Mascasenhás had passed through a similar metamorphosis, and was now my cousin, philosopher and friend, the Egyptian, Mehme' Nur.

At once I felt myself thoroughly in the rôle I was going to play for a time. I embraced and kissed Mascasenhás with that exaggerated show of affection which is so typically Arab, and with loud shouts and thumpings on the back.

At first the half-caste was surprised. He had always known me as a direct, matter-of-fact, and slightly humorous American. Then he entered into the spirit of the thing with enthusiasm.

"*Yah Shaykh,*" he exclaimed, kissing me full on the mouth. "Live forever, O Most Excellent One! Live in the shadow of happiness during the hours of the night whilst the bird of the Tamarisk moaneth like the childless mother, whilst lightning flasheth fiercely in the firmament of al-Hijaz, and during the times of day whilst the west wind bloweth gently over the hills of Nijd!"

Yes. We felt safe in our disguise, and we entered the hospitable house of Manuel Mercado two days later in state, during broad daylight, as the honored guests of his divan. We lived there for over three weeks, waiting for a chance to get away into the interior, and trying, meanwhile, to collect every scrap of information in regard to the task which had brought me to China.

The accomplishment of this task had crystallized itself into a tug-of-war between myself and Yuan Kee, the blue-eyed Manchu. But while the latter had at his beck and call all the forces, the strength, the tortuous cunning, the sharp, cumulative energies of unknown, unknowable numbers of Chinese and Japanese and other Asians, I had only Mascasenhass as a helpmate, loyal and faithful and willing, half Asian himself.

In a way I could also count on Mascasenhass's

cousin, Manuel Mercado, the Goanese merchant whose mother had been an Hijazi Arab, and who had lived a lifetime in Macao. He had helped us at the time of our flight from Hong-Kong, and he stood ready to help us again.

There were finally the American and British governments at my back.

At least they should have been, for I was working for them.

They had given me *carte blanche*. They had commissioned me to find and to kill the One Man, the unknown man, who was residing somewhere in the heart of Outer Mongolia, and who was the central and directing energy in that seething caldron of Oriental intrigue.

But, as is their wont, the gentlemen of the Foreign Office, snug and comfortable in their red-plushed, wainscoted, cigar-flavored official atmosphere, drove me instead of supporting and assisting me.

They were so infernally fond of compromise, that fetish of Anglo-Saxon mediocrity, that they refused to compromise a single hair on their sacred official pelts. They were sacred of their own shadows. They were forever telling me what I should do; but their constructive advice was of the

negative variety. It wasn't there. And when I asked a categorical "How?" to their categorical "Do!" they were as silent as clams on a rainy day.

Yet, so far, my contest with Yuan Kee, and with the mysterious forces which he represented, had been a draw. At least, I had caused him to fail in his repeated little homicidal advances toward myself and Mascasenhás.

We lived and spoke and acted strictly in character. Nobody suspected us. We were Arab merchants, come to Macao to buy ginger and silk and ginseng, and perhaps a little opium. And so it was right and proper that to-day we should wend our way toward the feast on the outskirts of the Chinese settlement of Macao. For Arabs are of a race of sightseers. They are devoured by curiosity. They are the Yankees of Asia.

CHAPTER XII

We walked through the golden spring air of Macao, which cried us out to field and garden. We followed the direction of the sounds which came from a large open lot on the outskirts of the town, which had been prepared for the feast.

I felt like one of those specimens of *homo sapiens* whom, as a globe-trotting and sight-satiated snob, I have always despised. Yes, I behaved exactly like a tourist, gaping and joking and laughing, running to see and hear something which he considers very outlandish and therefore very ridiculous.

I laughed gleefully. And Mascasenhás was swept away by my merriment.

"Yes, master, the Turks say that the consolation of the poor is death. But here, among these yellow men of China, it seems that the consolation of the poor is noise. And lots of it!"

"Yes."

We quickened our steps in the direction of the

sounds, and followed long strings of pussy-footed Chinamen who were walking in Indian file, as is their wont, toward the outskirts of the town, chattering and shrilling and cackling.

But the next minute my sober mood returned. My merriment sagged in the middle, and then broke completely. The sounds became nearer; and there was a strange tang to them.

It was like the sing-song cry the wind whistles through a chimney; like the eery song of a spring storm over a sweep of grassy hills; like the swishing of the flood through the crannies of the Cornish coast, tuneless and yet searching.

There was some accent in it of a secret, dread sublimity, deeper than human ear could hear, than human soul could perceive, than human brain could classify and register, than human courage could dismiss. The terror of a great freeing force was behind it, a freedom awfully remote from personal existence and individual ambition.

For it was China. The sounds came from a gathering of Chinamen, making merry after the manner of their race. But this was a new China, a China in dim-groping travail, clenching and stretching its ugly yellow claw toward a high goal which meant destruction to the West.

And even the far-drifting sounds of their feasting merriment suggested to me a kind of primitive utterance which was before articulate speech was developed, which was when the emotions—love and friendship and hatred—were still too vague and too mighty to be caught and expressed by petty words and pettier phrases. The sounds expressed something enormous and uncomplex; a dread thing which was a part of the earth, and yet which was the throbbing whole of it.

Thus the message of my ears. But perhaps my heart was playing "follow the leader" with them. For I felt that the gathering, beneath the merriment and jollity, was alive with a seethe of invisible forces, charging and twisting and shaping.

But I also knew that I must carry my head above water. I knew that if I yielded for a moment to my nervousness I would be caught up and away in a maelstrom of my own making, swept from my moorings, and carried through high spaces into the feared and unknown.

And I could not afford that. For all my little, negligible personal sensations and emotions had to be tucked away and absorbed into the gigantic task which I was serving. A high and proud task if you will; since it permitted me to surprise his-

tory in the making, to assist at the very clouting of it. But not exactly an easy task.

Steadily the sounds were growing in volume and nearness. Steadily the drifting, swaying crowds increased. They passed us by with a broad, good-humored jest or two.

"Ho, paper-tiger," shrilled a little infant Yellow Peril, in derision of my fierce Arab mien, and using the Chinese simile for a harmless blusterer.

A smiling, moon-faced coolie poked me in the ribs, and compared me with a hunchback making a bow, meaning in his refined Mongol way that I was "rather overdoing things a bit," as our British cousins have it.

A venerable old dame, who should have known better, pointed at my gorgeous, silver-hilted dagger, and remarked, *a propos* of nothing, that in the estimation of some people the strings of their cotton drawers were equivalent to a mandarin's glass-button and peacock feather.

But the jesting was meant in a friendly spirit. After all, the half-caste and I were Asians to them. We were strangers, but not foreigners. For hundreds and hundreds of years, long before the days of the Dutch East Indies Company, long before Marco Polo, long before Albuquerque sailed his

proud, high-prowed frigates out of Lisbon, Arab merchants have traded with the Chinese littoral.

The burnoose and the kufyah have become more or less familiar to generations of Chinamen; and now, since the Russian-Japanese war, but chiefly since railroads, telegraph-lines, newspapers, and improved postal facilities have set the immensity of Asian distance at naught, the men and women of China have begun to understand vaguely the steely racial and geographical links which bind all Asia into a whole.

No. We were not foreigners, Mascasenhass and I. We were not "yellow-haired barbarians." That walnut-dye on my face was a pretty good one.

I was bewildered by the variety of sounds. Every one talked; and talking in Asia is always done in extremes, either in a cavernous whisper or in a high-pitched, ear-splitting scream.

And then there was the street cries.

"In thy protection, O my Head, O my Eyes!" shouted a blue-bloused peasant from the north to a Chinese soldier who was flogging him down the length of the street without any apparent reason.

"O Calamity, O Shame, O Dragon-Tooth, O accursed and especially illegitimate Duck-Egg!" shrieked a woman, as she yanked her tiny, pert-

eyed girl-child from beneath the crimson-paper partition of a sugar-candy booth which had opened up for business. The next moment she fondled and kissed her, "O Peace of my Soul," she cooed. "O Chief Pride of thy Father's House—though a girl!"

A high-caste mandarin, fat and leering and statuesque, moved through the crowd in state, preceded by half a dozen stalwart Tartar henchmen, who were shouting insulting and defying words at everybody, and belaboring with a beautiful, democratic impartiality the backs and thighs of merchants and peasants alike.

"O, thy right!" they yelled as they brought down their long, brass-tipped staves "O, thy left! O, thy face! O, thy heel!"—suited the swing of their sticks to the part of Mongol anatomy which they were striking. "O, thy back, thy back, thy back! Give way, ignoble and unmentionable ones!"

Then there were the vendors of food of all sorts and of sugared drinks, clanging their metal cups and plates together, and yelling out the nature and quality and price of their respective wares.

I was getting more used to the sounds. All my nervousness had disappeared. I was frankly

amused, and beginning to enjoy myself thoroughly.

Together with the yellow press we pushed and shoved and laughed our way toward the grassy plot where the feast was in progress.

And then suddenly I drew back a step. Perspiration beaded my forehead. I swallowed noisily, moistening my parched lips. Instinctively my hand clutched the silver hilt of my Jambyiah dagger.

For immediately in front of me I saw Yuan Kee, the blue-eyed Manchu!

His eyes were covered and shaded, as usual, by huge, horn-rimmed spectacles. He was dressed with his customary taste and nicety in gorgeously embroidered, plum-colored silk robes. He was surrounded by three or four elderly Manchus, evidently of the same high social status, and was conversing with them volubly.

The same moment he saw me.

My heart sank. My soul was appalled. Yet I was not afraid. My capacity for fear had been overstrained. But my nerves felt stifled. That's it. They were stifled.

Mascasenas gave a low groan that quickly

brought me to my senses. I thought very rapidly and very clearly.

Remembering that for weeks my disguise had been a safe one, that all Macao had accepted me as Shaykh Moustaffa Ahmet, the Arab cousin of Manuel Mercado, I took my hand away from the dagger slowly, leisurely, as if I had been toying playfully with the hilt.

I lifted my hand to forehead and mouth in Arab salute.

Yuan Kee bowed deeply, and a bland smile overspread his features.

"It is a pleasure," he said in Chinese, and in that self-humbling manner which is considered the acme of politeness in Peking. "It is a pleasure to see such distinguished and wealthy Arab traders in our lowly midst on the days of our very poor and miserable feasts. Partake freely of our wretched hospitality! Grace our dirty and contemptible abodes with the august glamor of your presence!"

He bowed again. Then he turned to his friends.

It was evident that he had not recognized me. I felt thoroughly sure of that.

But I was nervous. The suddenness of the meeting had broken something in my brain like a

globe of colored glass, and now the color-shooting fragments seemed to taint and lacerate my vision.

I was safe, safe! And yet a light had flashed down the subterranean passages of my inner consciousness, and made visible to me for one passing second something which I was too slow to grasp and understand. A whisper had come to me from beyond the knowable. It was dim, unintelligible, quite inaudible. But somehow, it continued to live in my mind, in spite of rational convictions of a contrary nature.

Slowly I returned to my normal state, jerking myself together with an effort, and turned to Mascasenhass who had gone gray under his coating of walnut-dye.

"All right, my boy," I said to him in Arabic. "There is nothing to be afraid of. Nothing at all. Our Manchu friend has not recognized us. If he had, he would have spoken."

"Yes," the half-caste interrupted, "he would have spoken. He would have spoken one little word to these teeming yellow thousands—and then—and then—" He gave a little groan and clenched his fists in a gesture full of grim meaning. "Then there would have been neither you

nor I. There would only have been a crushed semblance of two men oozing out their blood on the dusty ground. Master, I shudder at the fate which we have escaped."

"Well," I replied with a drawl, glad that the other's fear had given me back all my careless courage, "we did escape it. That's the main point, isn't it?"

"Yes"—the Eurasian's voice dropped to its normal key—"we did escape it—praised be the dear Lady of Guadalupe!"

So we walked on, together with the press of laughing, jostling Chinamen; and the next moment we had reached our destination. The feast was in full swing.

It was one of those feasts which Chinamen call the Feast of Universal Rescue, and which they give from time to time to hungry and destitute ancestral spirits who have no near male relatives surviving to make offering of food on their graves.

For the entertainment of the sainted vagabond ghosts the usual Spirits' House had been built—a rough structure about forty feet long and fifteen feet broad.

We shoved our way to the front and looked.

It was the regulation plastered and timbered af-

fair, ornamented with a profusion of red paper and tinsel, and divided into five apartments.

There was the room for the spirits of ladies, the one for those of gentlemen, a bathroom for each of the two sexes so that the weary, travel-stained ghosts could rest and clean up after their journey, and finally there was the middle-room, which the thoughtful Chinese reserve for the king of the spirits, and name after him.

In this room a ghost-king is supposed to be present, whose duty it is to prevent the plain and everyday spirits from quarreling over the good things provided. And, of course, Chinamen being Chinamen, and their sense of humor far outweighing their sense of pious and religious proprieties, they had fastened over the curved entrance of the building a huge red placard, covered with gold and purple ideographs which invited the wandering spirits to partake freely of all the food that had been spread out, but admonishing them at the same time to behave with decorum and not to fight.

All my nervousness had disappeared. My Yankee blood was up and screaming in curiosity. I wanted to know. So I looked and observed, enjoying myself thoroughly.

I noticed that the house had been erected with a proper regard for the science of Feng-shui, the wind and water superstition which is the bane of the European contractor in the Middle Kingdom, and that everything had been provided with typically Chinese generosity and efficiency; but also with their usual forethought.

For there were not only hundreds and thousands of slices of fowl and fish and pork for the ordinary ancestral ghosts; but, being a thoughtful race, they had prepared even a species of salted paste for those spirits whose bodies had left this world by the process of having their heads cut off. Since they have no teeth and no mouth to eat with, they are supposed to be able to get this porridge down their headless throats.

We pressed forward to look more closely.

Though the structure was rough, run up overnight, the color scheme was worthy of Leon Bakst himself. There were pinks and violets and blues and tawny oranges which our painters have never dreamed of. The artistry was supreme—being Chinese. But Chinese, too, was the calm, bland deceit which was being practised on the poor, hungry ancestral spirits.

For the Chinamen, supremely indifferent to

"little bittie lie pidgin" in order to be polite, and having evidently a low opinion of the intellectual capacity of evil spirits, presently removed all the fish and flesh and fowl with the exception of a thin layer of food. This they heaped up artfully in such a way over a stout framework of bamboo that it gave the appearance of a solid mass.

Then, with laughter and shouts and horseplay worthy of Coney Island, the living Chinamen began to help themselves to the things which had been meant for the ancestral spirits.

We joined in the festivities.

I was still a little nervous, but I have never let my nerves interfere with what is due to my inner man, and so, true to the manners and characteristics of the Arab Shaykh whom I was impersonating, I ejaculated a sonorous "Bismillah" or two, and dipped my hands in the savory messes. Mascasenhass followed suit. There was enough real Arab blood in him to prevent him from being outdone by anybody in showy bravado. So he shouted "Bismillah" even louder than I, and ate twice as much.

Several times I saw Yuan Kee in the passing, swaying crowd. Each time he greeted me courte-

ously, and I replied with a ceremonious Arab salute.

We finished our meal and strolled about. Passing behind a grove of sycamore-trees I came again upon the Manchu. But he had his back to me, and did not see me. I stopped, and motioned Mascasenhás to do likewise.

I looked and listened.

Yuan Kee was conversing with a magnificent specimen of Tartar manhood, a man of over six feet in height, broad in proportion, as straight as a lance at rest, and with the arms and neck of a Greek god. He was dressed with a certain degree of Pekinese foppery. But yet he was not a town-bred man. For he had a careless, free fling of the shoulders that rejected the cramped streets and the man-built houses.

The Manchu was speaking to him in a low, eager voice. I did not hear the complete sentences. Just a word or a combination of words here and there. But the little which I heard palsied my heart. A grim hand seemed to clutch my throat and squeeze it. For a moment I stood upon the borderland of madness, the frontier of dim, gibbering, mowing things. For this is what I heard:

“—both of them—but not together—a charm-

ing little sacrifice to Doorgha—supreme ordeal of torture—use one with the other—”

Here his voice was drowned in a wave of sounds which came from the Spirits' House, where Chinese musicians were beginning to tune their instruments. But a moment later they were silent again, and the Manchu's voice came more distinctly than before.

“—we must pander to them. We must pander to their silly Hindu superstitions. It is indifferent what you and I think of—”

Here again the instruments of the musicians broke in, with a wailing, quivering note. Then I heard the next words:

“I tell you, Sen Yat, I have always said that a hair's breadth at the bow is a mile beside the butt. I have lived up to it, have I not? Look at my work in Outer Mongolia.”

The Tartar answered, speaking very low. I could not catch a single word, though I strained my ears to the utmost. But some unguessed instinct of fear and divination swept the quickened fringes of my subconscious personality.

Doorgha! The sacrifices to Doorgha and the pandering to the Hindus! And then this talk about the butt and the bow, about the Manchu

having lived up to it—the allusion to his work in Outer Mongolia!

What did it all mean? Who was this blue-eyed Manchu? What was the connection between Doorgha and this present intrigue—between Yuan Kee and the One Man I wished to find and kill?

I did not endeavor any marvelous deductions after the manner of the writers of detective fiction. I was never very good of torturing my logic into straight channels. I have always depended more on intuition. And my intuition was in travail. I could sense its workings. One second more—and I would see, and would understand.

“Come,” I whispered to Mascasenhass. “Let us get away from here at once.”

At the same moment the Manchu turned around and saw us. Not a muscle of his face quivered. Again I was perfectly sure that he did not recognize us, and again my fears left me.

Whatever his talk about Doorgha and sacrifices, it had nothing to do with the two Arabs whom he was greeting. It had nothing to do with Mascasenhass and me. Perhaps I had even misunderstood his words. The modulations of the Chinese language are so delicately attuned that it is easy to make a mistake in listening.

The Manchu bowed deeply. He spread out his hands so that the sunlight danced and glittered on his marvelously long, gold-encased finger-nails. He came toward us with a silken swish of his heavy, embroidered robes.

Then he smiled at me. It was doubtless meant to be a bland, kindly smile. But perhaps he was overdoing it. For I had the passing sensation that his smile contained the hereditary unctuousness of a Hebrew usurer about to put the screw on a Gentile creditor.

"Will you not accompany me and my friend Sen Yat?" he asked, pointing to the gigantic Tartar, who came forward and acknowledged the introduction with a surly bow. "Will you not enter the wretched Spirit House which has been erected for our so silly festivities, together with your obedient slaves. Come! Enter! Eat! I know that the house is lowly, dirty, in execrable taste—a hovel not worthy of yourself and of your friend. But do come! For you must remember, great Shaykh, that the diamond fallen into the dunghill is not the less precious, and that the dust raised to the high heavens is not the less vile." He smiled again and bunched all his Pekinese politeness into one final, magnificent effort: "Come!

You are the diamond—and we—we are the dung-hill."

Calmly he turned and preceded us toward the house, evidently quite sure that we would follow him. For a moment I considered the advisability of making a dash for liberty. But then I noticed that the Tartar had unostentatiously dropped to our rear, and that several of his countrymen, all with the villainous features and the long, swinging arms of professional hatchetmen, had joined him.

I whispered to Mascasenhass:

"We're in for it. Might as well go without a struggle. If he has recognized us, and if we refuse to come along, those ruffians in back will cut us down at once. And if he has not recognized us, he will not harm us inside. For these people know the Arabs and like them. And if they don't suspect us, we'd be fools to refuse. Our refusal would be the very thing to make them suspect that something's wrong with us."

Mascasenhass smiled calmly, bravely. My heart went out to him. For I knew that he was conquering a horrible fear. I knew the curse of the half-caste in moments of great stress, when a catastrophe is about to overpower him.

We entered the house, passed through the other rooms, and went into the central apartment, that of the Spirit King.

The Manchu asked us courteously to take seats. He sat down across from us, while the Tartars grouped themselves about the walls.

For a moment there was silence, heavy, brown, sodden. A deep hush was about us. It was reflected even on the expressionless features of Yuan Kee.

Enormously vague sensations stung and scattered my mind with a rush that threatened to overwhelm me. Then, with a violent, wrenching effort, I tore myself away from the palsyng, unshaped thoughts. Once more I was the Arab Shaykh Moustaffa Ahmet, a peaceful trader, come to China to buy ginger and silk and ginseng and perhaps a little opium. And I remembered my Arab manners.

I touched forehead and mouth with the tips of my fingers and addressed the Manchu:

"Have I your permission to look?"

Yuan Kee smiled in assent, and I looked about me.

The room was a thing of beauty. In the center of the floor stood a pedestal of ebony and ivory

which supported a dragon, enamel and gold of the most exquisite workmanship of the Han period. In the corners of the room were huge vases of the same period, in the hues of the rainbow, but mellow, and blended to a degree of perfection compared to which the finest products of Meissen and Sèvres and Doulton seemed like crude ornaments of the Stone Age. Strewn about the room was a profusion of flowers. There were orange-flaming lilies, deep-red damask roses, and masses of feathery parrot-tulips of the most exotic shades, some green, some purple, some white-spotted and stained with crimson and violet, others so dark that they seemed black.

At the farther end was a tall screen of carved sandal-wood, with applique-work in nacre, silver, enamel, and semiprecious stones.

Again I touched my forehead and mouth with the tips of my fingers, after the manner of al-Hijaz. I addressed the Manchu.

"Have I your permission to examine the screen? It is a thing of beauty, such as we men of the desert but seldom behold in our own rude land."

Something like a shadow seemed to pass over the sneering, yellow face in front of me. But the

next moment a smile curled the thin lips. He extended his hand in a vast gesture.

"By all means, Shaykh," he purred. "Go and examine the unworthy object. It is an honor."

I rose and walked in the direction of the screen.

For from my chair I had noticed to the left of it a deep, yawning, black blotch, which somehow seemed like the edge of an open trap; and I wondered if the screen was there to hide it.

The Manchu did not say a word to the Tartars. Nor, try as I might, could I observe that any silent message passed between them, eye speaking to eye. Yet, as suddenly as I rose, four of the Tartars lifted the screen up and brought it to the center of the room, while the rest of them, with the exception of one who kept his position near the entrance door, grouped themselves quite unostentatiously about the spot where the screen had been before, hiding it from my view.

There was nothing forced or pre-arranged about their movements. They talked and laughed as they walked and grouped themselves. They never as much as looked at me.

I looked at the screen, and examined it with the mannerisms of a connoisseur. I had to. It was up to me to see my bluff through to the end.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" I exclaimed again and again. "*Allah Kureem!* This is a thing of beauty, indeed."

Yuan Kee rose. He came up to me and put his hand on my shoulder with a friendly gesture.

"It is a pleasing and fine thing," he said smoothly, "to see a man of Asia admire and like the products of Asia. Once I was in America. There they had a slogan. They said, 'America for the Americans.' You know? You have been there? No? Ah, my friend, a great and wonderful race. And they have taught me that little steely slogan of theirs. Only I change it—the least little bit, eh? I say, 'Asia for the Asians.' And see what we can do." He tapped the screen gently with his fan. "It is not badly done for a barbaric race. You look surprised? But no, my friend, for we are barbarians, undesirable barbarians. I was told that we were in that great land of America which you do not know."

He paused and offered me a cigarette. I lit it, and observing my hand which held the match, saw that it was steady.

"Come, Shaykh Moustaffa Ahmet," the Manchu continued; "you like the things of China. I see that you do. You are also an artist and a

craftsman. I shall show you more of them. Come with me."

He passed his arm through mine and led me toward the entrance door. My feet seemed weighted with lead. I made no reply. I glanced at Mascasenhass. He seemed turned into stone. His eyes were stark, glassy, like those of an opium-smoker. Then a fleeting expression came into his purple-black eyes; it was only half perceptible, but it told me as plainly as a spoken word that I must go, that it could not be helped.

Yuan Kee saw the looks which passed between me and the half-caste. He smiled his ghastly, bland smile.

"Your friend? Ah, I forgot," he purred. "But it is evident that he does not take the interest in the art of China that you do. It is, perhaps, because he is younger. We will not bore him with our little carved and painted things. My friends will entertain him until we return."

He looked at me. And I looked away. I found myself unable to meet the glittering eyes, magnified by his huge, horn-rimmed spectacles, which gave him a grotesque beetle-like expression.

I followed him, my right hand clutched convulsively around the silver hilt of my Jambyiah

dagger. I would at least kill that fat, sneering Manchu, I said to myself—at least him!

My thoughts gyrated and whirled in a mad chaos. I tried to straighten them into a semblance of common sense. Perhaps there was no ulterior meaning to all this. Perhaps he had not recognized us, after all. Perhaps all these were only crazy, incredible coincidences. Such things do happen. Once I had been witness at a murder trial. I know how evidence can pile on evidence, clear, startling, condemning—and yet demonstrate a lie instead of the truth.

We crossed the threshold, walked through a short, dark passage, and back into one of the front rooms.

At once I felt relieved. My fears flew away like rubbish in the meeting of winds. For several Chinamen were assembled in the front room around a small table, smoking and drinking tea. I knew them as peaceful burgesses of Macao; and at once they remembered me. They rose and greeted me with simple, friendly words.

I decided that I wasn't going to be murdered right then and there.

The Manchu showed me to a little table, and walking over to a carved rosewood cabinet, opened

it, and returned to my side with a handful of minute Chinese objects.

I examined them with real pleasure. Never had I seen finer Chinese objects of vertu. They were all very tiny and very exquisite. Some were of jade, both green and cloudy-white, others of soap stone, others again of ivory and nacre and gold.

Yuan Kee explained them to me, piece by piece. This man, whoever he was, was a great connoisseur. He handled the little things with loving care, and spoke about their fine points with an enthusiasm which fitted oddly with his bland features.

"Beautiful, are they not?" he beamed at me. "And now let us have a cup of tea and some sweets."

He clapped his hands. A servant appeared, bowed deeply, received his order, and returned a minute later with tea and confections. The tea was of the best Mandarin-blossom variety, mixed with dried, powdered jessamin, and the little cakes were the perfection of the Chinese cuisine.

My fears had completely disappeared. But, for all that, I felt wretched and lonely. I cursed China, including the Mandarin-blossom tea and

the little pink, frosted cakes. I longed for the amber depths of hospitable, cut-glass decanters, smacking of Kentucky's ripened and fermented corn. I longed for the crude aroma of a hearty, sterling-minded porterhouse steak. I longed for the mellow, fireside fragrance of a fat, black cigar.

Vain longings! And so I made the best of my present situation. I drank my tea and ate my cakes, conforming closely to the Arab Shaykh I was impersonating, with noisy smackings of my lips and with deep ejaculations of the name of the deity.

The Manchus conversed fluently, affably.

Suddenly I started back in my chair, utterly appalled.

A faint outcry split the air. From the direction of the main apartment—the central room where I had left Mascasenhass and the Tartars—it came.

A tremor ran through me, and I clutched at the table for support. But instantly I was myself again. An illusion, I thought. For the Manchu was talking as if nothing had happened. The Chinese merchants at the other table were perfectly undisturbed. They were sipping their tea and laughing gently among themselves.

I felt reassured, and opened my lips about to

make a casual remark to my host. But my words snapped off in mid-air. Again there was a faint frenzied shriek. I broke into a cold perspiration. My heart gave one wild leap; then suddenly it turned into stone. Came another shriek, a little louder, which struck me as an arrow might have struck me.

I have never swooned in my life. But I came near to it that day. I felt a horrible sensation of nausea. A purple mist floated before my eyes. The floor, the tables and the chairs rocked like cockboats in a gale. A huge hammer seemed to strike my lungs with rhythmic thumps.

Came again silence, sweeping through the room like a gust of wind. Very faintly—the silhouette of a voice—I could hear the Manchu's even, passionless words drifting as from a great distance.

I cursed myself for a gibbering, specterseeing idiot. I was imagining things. Perhaps the tea was drugged—perhaps

Another outcry trembled through the air. The sounds of a body falling, falling. And then my name shrieked out with an agony of despair and entreaty:

"Master! Master! Oh, for the love of the dear saints! Mas—"

The next second the voice was drowned in a chorus of dullbooming gongs—*thump, thump, thump, thump, thump*—reverberating, twisting up their hollow, grotesque tone waves until the sounds died away slowly; a low, muffled noise—dull, moaning sighs coming from across a great distance—the sound of someone being dragged—dragged—

I was utterly appalled. My heart seemed as still as freezing water. But I controlled myself and rose.

I have always had a constitutional distaste for leaping blind-folded; but this time circumstances were overriding it. I was a puppet in the swirl of fate, and I knew it. I also knew that my lone-standing strength would not keep me from drifting with the tide of it. But at least I would die game. I would at least try to get to the side of the man who had been my faithful friend, my loyal ally in the years that had gone.

Without turning, without saying a word, I rushed toward the door. I was about to turn the knob when I felt a restraining touch on my shoulder. At the same moment I heard Yuan Kee's silken voice purring in my ear.

"But, my friend—"

Whirling about, hand on dagger, I was about to plunge it into that obese, sneering face. But instinctively I resisted the impulse, and snapped the dagger back into its metal scabbard. For the Manchu was perfectly calm. He seemed neither frightened nor nonplused, and looked at me with a firm, steady-eyed impudence which seemed to hold the threat of some abominable menace.

He spoke slowly, with a light laugh:

"Are these Arab manners, Shaykh? To rise in the midst of a repast, without a 'By your leave,' and to repay the bread that has been broken and the salt that has been tasted with the swish of the dagger?" Suddenly his physiognomy expressed a somber and weary annoyance. His voice was pregnant with bitter sarcasm. "Is treachery acclaimed as a virtue among the black tents of your tribe? Why your excitement, primitive son of the desert?"

I did not reply, and shaking off his detaining hands, I opened the door and stepped into the landing.

He kept step with me. Again he asked smoothly.

"Whither away, Shaykh?"

My words came with a rush:

"To him—to my friend—whom you are murdering!"

The Manchu laughed.

"Murdering? Murdering? Do we of China murder the honored guests of our houses? Have you been dreaming? Has the slave put too much of the hasheesh cake in your morning's pipe?"

By this time we had crossed the length of the corridor and had reached the room of the spirit king.

The Manchu himself opened the door. He bowed and held it wide open with a courtly gesture.

"Enter, Shaykh," he said, and there was a fine, mocking irony in his voice. "Enter and see if a hair has been harmed on the head of your friend."

I looked. Then I rubbed my eyes. I was utterly bewildered, utterly amazed. Heaven only knows what scene of torture and bloodshed I had expected to find. But there was nothing—nothing!

Mascasenhass was sitting as I had left him, calmly smoking a cigarette. The giant Tartar had taken the Manchu's chair, and was talking affably to my servant, who was perfectly at his ease.

As soon as he saw me, he rose. He came to me with outstretched hands, laid them against mine in the Arab manner, palm to palm, and greeted me after the custom of al-Islam.

"*Alhamdulillah, yah Shaykh*—you have been long!"

For a moment I was speechless. I knew that only a few minutes before I had heard his voice raised in an agony of entreaty and despair. I knew that he had called for help, that he had cried out my name. I was positive of it. I was sane. I had heard it. There could not have been a mistake.

Then a curious thing happened. It was one of those moments, one of those thumping coincidences, when brain and nerves and muscles work at exactly the same instant, more quickly than it can be written.

All his life Mascasenhas had worn a small gold amulet around his neck. It contained, so he told me, a splinter of the Real Cross on which Our Savior had been crucified, and had been given to him many years ago by his uncle, the Bishop of Goa. Despite my entreaties, he insisted on wearing it, even after he had assumed Arab garb and speech.

"I must wear it, master," he had told me. "It has saved me in the past; it will save me again. Somehow, I know that it will stand between me and danger. It is a most precious and sacred relic." And then he had crossed himself.

And now I saw this little locket, the chain torn and twisted, directly at the feet of the big Tartar, while at the same moment I saw exactly the same locket around the neck of Mascasenhás as he bent forward, greeting me.

I said that my nerves and my muscles acted at precisely the same moment. It was so. I shook the half-caste's hands again and again with great fervor, and at the same instant I covered the locket on the floor with my right foot, and a second later, under a pretext of arranging my leather sandals, stooped and picked up the little glittering thing.

The touch of it convinced me that it had not been an hallucination of some sort. Again I looked at Mascasenhás and saw the identical locket around his neck. Then I acted.

I said to myself that two could play at the same game. For I was convinced at once that the man in front of me was an impostor, an impersonator, who was like the real Mascasenhás in every re-

spect, and who had been trained for weeks in his role with a wealth of detail and thorough patience which was truly Chinese. He would have deceived me. But here was the locket.

I did not jump to conclusions. I saw it all as clearly as in a vision of faith.

It was also clear to me that, for some reason or other, the Manchu had decided not to kill me just yet, as he easily could have done. I could still save my life. As to the real Mascasenhass—I was convinced that he had been killed—that his body had been dragged away!

CHAPTER XIII

I would do no good either to him who was dead, nor to myself who was alive, by revenging his death then and there with a thrust of the dagger. I must save myself. Here was the main consideration. For on my life, my energies, my strength and cunning, depended the destiny of the West, the destiny of Christianity. Mascasenas had been a friend of mine. But in the greater game he had only been a pawn; and a master chess-player had whisked him off the board. Here was no time for grief. Only time for rapid, steely action.

So I acted. I looked at the impostor, and there was deep love and friendship in my look.

"But"—my voice was low and broken—"I heard you cry—for help. I thought—"

The other smiled gently.

"I cry for help? I do not understand you. You must be mistaken."

I smiled to myself. All right, I thought, you

didn't cry; but you're going to cry presently.

Thinking rapidly, I pulled myself together and turned to the Manchu.

"Forgive my rude manners. You were right. It must have been the hasheesh in my morning's pipe. I shall speak about it to my pipe-wallah." I touched forehead and mouth with the tips of my fingers. "Peace on you."

The Manchu bowed. There was a strange smile on his face. He swept his right hand around as if to include the whole of the company.

"We thank you for the august honor you have brought into this dirty hovel. Come again, my friends!"

He saw us as far as the outer door. Again he bowed, and again he gave us courteous words. We left the place of the feast, and walked toward Macao.

The sun was gaping in the west like a great, red door. Everything was blotched with crimson and purple.

I looked at the man beside me. An impostor, I said to myself, but a brave man, a man who was playing a sharp, steely game for the love of his race and his land, as I was playing it for the love of mine.

It would not do to let him see that I was suspecting him in the least. So I talked to him affably, as I would have talked to the real Mascasenhás.

It was late when we reached the house of Manuel Mercado. A cheerful moon shone out, with an air of punctual and benign vigilance. I winked back at the moon and laughed. I would play the game, I thought, and I would play it with twice the strength, with twice the skill, since now I had to revenge the death of the half-caste, who had been my friend and ally.

I told the whole story to Manuel Mercado and to the old servant. They were for cutting the impostor's throat at once. But I pacified them.

"Your cousin is dead," I told Mercado. "But do what he would have wished you to do—help me. Treat the impostor as you would have treated Mascasenhás. You will not be cheated of your revenge."

There was an ugly smile on the lips of Manuel Mercado.

"All right, Mr. Vandewater," he said. "I shall do as you tell me to. But presently—presently—"

And there was an expression in his black eyes which did not bode well for the impostor.

I saw nothing of Yuan Kee during the days that followed. I felt perfectly secure. For I knew that Yuan Kee and his confederates would not kill me as long as their emissary, the impostor, had not discovered what he had doubtless been sent to discover.

And I took good care that he didn't. I went about freely. In my character as an Arab Shaykh and wealthy merchant I was able to move abroad without causing suspicion; and so I gathered a mass of information, military as well as economic, which I forwarded to headquarters while waiting for my chance to slip into the interior and to accomplish there my real task.

But I was always careful to mail my original report personally and immediately, and then to have the impostor take another report from my dictation, near enough to the real truth to be convincing to him and to his employers, but in reality a mass of cunningly embroidered lies. I knew that he would send a copy of this report to Yuan Kee.

It was the same thing with the replies from headquarters. I would read them aloud to the impostor, but change the contents in such a way that, while having the appearance of truth, they

would give him carefully edited information that was altogether false.

The impostor would also give me information, true to his assumed role as the real Mascasenhás. But I would turn it to good account by doing exactly the opposite of what he told me. It was thus, by going strictly contrary to his "advice," that I was able to warn the governor of Hong-Kong that a flotilla of Black-Flag pirate junks, acting under orders from the Central Simo-Japanese authorities, were about to attack and capture a steamer of the British-Chinese Coast Navigation Line, carrying among other valuable merchandise two million pounds sterling in gold specie for the Chartered Bank of Australia and China in Shanghai.

I played a double game through it all. I was watching the impostor as a cat watches a mouse, knowing that he, on his side was watching me; and I was also watching the trend of events in the Far East.

I discovered that the organization of this new Asia was a perfect machine, a machine that worked with absolutely French efficiency and logic. And I did not wonder. I have never underrated the yellow man. I have never had much

use or much respect for the valor of ignorance. I have never felt any sympathy with the ostrich, who buries his head in the sand and pretends that there is no danger because he cannot see it.

No. I did not wonder. I knew the Orient. I knew that the Asian builders who built the Alhambra and the Taj Mahal, the temples above the ghauts of Benares, the palaces of Jeypore, the irrigation ditches of Central Asia and ancient Mesopotamia, the waterworks of Damascus, and the fantastic towers of Nankin, would, when the need arose, show the same marvelous efficiency in building barracks and arsenals and railway depots.

I knew that the Asian craftsmen who created the minute exquisitenesses of Chinese porcelain, of Japanese enamel, of Persian tiles, of Damascene blades, of Tibetan soapstone puzzles, and of Trichinopoly gold chains, would apply the same minute details to the making of guns, or shrapnel timelocks, or delicate, deadly explosives and poison gases.

I have never believed with the cocky, self-satisfied Western tourist, who spends a week in Shanghai and two days in Calcutta, where he buys ancient Hindu gods made in Birmingham, that some strange fiat of arrest, due to mental exhaustion,

has condemned Asia to eternal reproduction of old ideas. I knew better than that. I had seen with my own eyes, but lately, the ruined temples in the desert flat near Macao the immense stores of explosives, the clock-like precision of work which obtained there.

I mingled a good deal with the local colonies of Central Asians, Punjaubis, Gulf Arabs, Bengali, and Madrassi, and found a peculiar undercurrent which seemed to weld together these widely separated races and faiths. There was something there stronger than either race or faith, stronger than the ancient enmity of the swinging centuries. I knew what it was. It was a geographical fanaticism; the fanaticism of a continent in the travail of hate.

But I was positively shocked when I discovered that some Ghuzzerati Hindus had recently erected a temple in Macao, where they worshiped the Hindu trinity, chiefly Doorgha, the malign goddess of destruction.

I spoke to the impostor about it quite casually, but carefully watching the expression of his face from under halfclosed eyelids.

"I know," he replied, and a shadow passed over his statuesque features which momentarily ex-

posed the depths of an unfathomable, wicked hatred. "I have heard." He paused, then he added with a little unconscious bravado: "And I have also heard that at the festival of the Doorgha-Puja they will consecrate the temple with a great human sacrifice—with the blood of a traitor."

The words haunted me for many a day, until finally I solved the riddle of them.

Meanwhile, I was arranging for my chance to make a getaway.

Sooner or later the impostor, whenever Yuan Kee gave him the word, would kill me. It was my plan to make a dash at the right moment, and I must make that dash toward the interior.

But it was not my plan to leave Macao without due and apparent reason. That would have caused suspicion, since the Arab merchants seldom leave the belt of the littoral; and all the articles of merchandise which, according to my oft-repeated assertions, I had come to purchase—silk, tea, ginseng, ginger, and opium—could easily be obtained from the big wholesale houses of Macao in any quantity.

So, after long considering, I finally told my friends that I expected to open up a market for

lichee-nuts in Arabia. They brought samples. But I decided that I did not like them. I wanted better fruit. I would go north and into the interior and buy the nuts direct from the growers.

I wrote to the British authorities at Hong-Kong to send me additional funds, as my own were running low, and I waited impatiently for their answer and remittance.

The waiting made me nervous. I felt horribly lonely, horribly cut-off. I was sick of being the Arab Shaykh Moustaffa Ahmet. I wanted once more to be Stuart Vandewater, of New York and Washington, D. C., and to gorge my inner man with the despised flesh of the pig and the hated juice of the grape.

Whenever I caught sight of myself in the mirror, I felt that an utter stranger was looking at me, and at such moments I would imagine that I was caught in the tail-end of my own life, like an outsider, a mildly interested observer.

Also, at times, when I looked at the impostor who was masquerading as my friend, the friend who had been foully murdered, a wave of horrible hatred would sweep over me. But I would control myself. I could not afford to have him suspect

that I knew. I had to play the game, regardless of my personal emotions.

But my hatred seemed to develop in spite of my brain, which tried to control it; it developed by its own inherent viciousness. And so I made a point of spending as much time away from the impostor as possible.

Frequently I went for long walks by myself.

And it was this horrible, hidden hatred of the man which caused me to go for a long stroll on that memorable night—Monday, the third of April—which I shall never forget.

The impostor had gone to bed, after asking me with his usual consideration (for he played the part of the real Mascasenhás with marvelous perfection), if there was aught he could do for me. I had forced myself to give him a kindly reply. For a while I smoked and read. I tried to close my eyes; but I felt horribly wakeful. I dreaded facing the darkness and silence that would follow the extinguishing of the lamp.

Finally I left the house.

It was a pinching, frosty night, the moon still low and shining far to seaward. I walked steadily westward, with no special aim or goal. The streets

were lonely and still. The air was clear and seemed bathed in a sea of powdered old gold.

I swung along, deeply in thought, not caring where I was going, and I was surprised when presently I found myself on the outskirts of the town, at the very spot where a few weeks ago I had been a spectator of the Feast of Universal Rescue.

The Spirits' House was still standing.

The scene which had taken place inside the house came back to me with a seethe and rush.

In this house Mascasenas had been killed. He had been my friend, loyal and devoted. He had been an invaluable ally. Now I was all alone in my bitter, grim fight with the forces of unknown Asia.

Instinctively I entered the house. The rooms were empty, like hollow sockets from which the eyes had been gouged out. But there was still a faint odor about them—a perfume of lascivious incense and rotting flowers; like the dead-sweet scent of cold, burnt-out desire.

Suddenly I remembered the screen; I remembered the trap which it had seemed to hide. Now was my chance to satisfy my curiosity. I walked into the center apartment. The moon had come up clear and bloated-white. I could see distinct-

ly, and walked over to where the screen had stood.

But there was no trap. Only I noticed that the flooring there was of a slightly different color, as if recently put down. I knelt and examined it. I tried to budge it. But it was perfectly smooth. There was no place which would give me grip or leverage.

Then I drew back, startled, frightened.

For from a very great distance, from a very great depth, I seemed to hear a voice--thin, wheezing, deadened, agonized, oppressed.

I bent still more closely to the flooring. I shouted at the top of my lungs.

"Hello! Hello there!"

A moment's silence. Then the answering voice, faint and thin.

"Help! Help!"

And the answering voice spoke in English.

It was the more frightful because it was muffled; because though distant, it was thick, palpable, horrible, entreating. That voice was more than a voice. It was akin to terror. It was terror itself.

I rose.

A tremor ran through me, and my body, my

very soul was rigid and tense. My skin was wet with cold perspiration. I ran to the window and examined it eagerly. It was cut in half by a stout steel rail, buried in the wood on either side, which had once served as a curtain-rod. I wrenched at it with a superhuman effort.

The wood gave and splintered and broke, and in a second later I found myself in the possession of a fine piece of metal which would do for a club.

Running back to the trap-door, I wheeled the metal club in both hands—once, twice, thrice—I crashed it down with all my might, and at every blow the flooring sighed and yielded. A fourth blow sent it rushing down the trap and far out into some dark place beyond.

I did not wait to think or consider. I let myself down, held on to the edge of the trap for a second, felt with my feet, encountering nothing but space, and then I let myself drop.

I did not drop very far. The voice sounded nearer, and I followed it, and then fell over something soft which squirmed and whimpered. I lit a match and looked, and just barely stifled a cry. My hand shook like a leaf. I dropped the match.

Good Heavens, could it be possible! Why—

I struck another match and held it steady with an effort.

That whimpering, squirming bundle in front of me was Mascasenhás!

It was a ghastly, pitiful caricature of Mascasenhás. He was thin, emaciated, and there were half-healed streaks and welts on his naked body which spoke eloquently of savage beatings with a heavy whip. His lips were blue and agonized, as if they had cried too much. His breath came in horrible, gurgling, staccato thumps. But it was the half-caste. It was Mascasenhás.

He was securely tied to a stout, wooden post, and a half-chewed leather gag was protruding from his mouth. I cut the ropes which held him, and withdrew the gag from between his stark jaws. He fell into my arms.

Gently I fanned his face. Then I thought of the little supply of opium-balls which I carried in a fold of my waist-band, in keeping with the character and customs of the traveling Arab Shaykh whom I was impersonating. I took one of the little black balls and forced it between the half-caste's lips and down his throat. A second later, opening his eyes wide, he recognized me, and,

sinking to his knees, kissed my hands again and again.

"Master! Oh, my master!" he sobbed with a broken, rasping voice.

I gave him a few moments to pull himself together. Then I asked the question which was trembling on my lips.

"What happened? I thought they had killed you."

His answer came hollowly and unsteadily.

"They—dragged me down here. I shouted—I called—but you did not come—you did not hear. And they—"

He shuddered and fell into another swoon. I gave him a second opium-ball, and he revived a little. Then I lifted him on my back, and, after a half a dozen attempts, shoved him through the trap into the room, and I followed.

It was half an hour before he could talk coherently.

Then he told me. He had been a prisoner down there since the day of the feast, and had been given to understand that he was being reserved as the chief human sacrifice for the coming Doorgha-Puja festival, which would be given at the Hindu temple in Macao.

He had been told, with savage beatings and insults and indignities, that he had been a traitor to Doorgha whom once he had served, and that his sacrifice would be a slight atonement. The men who had told him that, the men who had beaten him, had not been Chinese, but Hindus. Some of them had been priests, but all of them had been marked with the crimson caste-mark.

"The caste-mark!" he repeated over and over again. "The dread mark of Doorgha!"

A tremor ran through him, and he crossed himself. His hand felt for the amulet which contained the splinter of the Real Cross that had been torn from him in his struggle with the Tartars, and which I had surreptitiously picked up at the time.

Ever since I had carried it in the folds of my waist-band. Now I gave it to him, and the effect was instantaneous.

He held it to his lips, and visibly, as through the strength of faith, he became the old Mascasenas, speaking at once coherently, sensibly.

"It is fate," he said in a low voice. "The fate of my faith, my race—of myself. It is the ancient creed of my ancestors which speaks in this little precious amulet," he paused, then he turned to the worldly matters of the moment.

It was clear that a close connection existed between the man who was directing this new, mysterious, worldwide Oriental intrigue and the former intrigues of Hussian Khan. I also understood suddenly the enigmatic words of Yuan Kee which I had overheard:

"We must pander to the superstitions of the Hindus."

This pandering to Hindu superstitions meant the blood-sacrifice of Mascasenhás at the Doorgha-Puja.

I told the half-caste about the impostor who was at the house of Manuel Mercado, the impostor who was impersonating him in speech and dress and manners.

"What shall we do with him?" I asked. "How shall we escape? How shall we—"

The half-caste interrupted me. There was a baleful glitter in the depths of his purple-black eyes.

"I know, master. Wait and see."

We returned to the house by back streets and alleys, and going directly to the room of the impostor, we tied and gagged him.

I do not care to write down in detail what happened afterward. It had to be done. But I took

no personal part in it. It went against my white blood, against all my Caucasian instincts. Foolish of me, I have no doubt. For, as Mascasenhás says, with a laugh, whenever we speak of it:

"You cannot touch a scorpion with the hand of compassion."

But, then, I cannot help it. I suppose, as a white man, I have always had an idealistic conception of legality, wrapped up in scrupulous prejudices.

Suffice it to say that, with the savage and gleeful help of Manuel Mercado and the old servant, the Goanese skilfully transformed the impostor into an exact representation of himself. I kept my hands to my ears while the transformation was going on in the next room. But every once in a while I could hear the heavy swish of the whip as it kissed the naked skin, and the terrible, hollow, muffled sighs which forced themselves through the gag.

At the end of an hour Mascasenhás came to my room. He bowed deeply, deferentially. But in his eyes was a glitter which was like a pool of water in a dark forest.

"The servant has gone to the stable for the carriage. He will drive Manuel and I will take that

—that thing next door to the Spirits' House. We shall take wood along, and make the trap smooth as before—after we shall have tied that—that thing to the post where you found me. Thus Yü-an Kee and the priests will not know of my escape. Thus you and I shall both be safe—doubly safe." He laughed. "And that dog in there will be sacrificed in my stead on the night of Doorgha-Puja."

My voice was thin and trembling.

"But—but suppose he talks? Suppose he—"

Mascasenhas looked at me. There was laughter in his eyes, very gentle, very sweet—and very inhuman.

"Ah, my master, he cannot talk. He will never talk again." He laughed out loud. "For behold—his tongue—it is not there!"

And he bowed once more and withdrew!

CHAPTER XIV

Of course, the whole thing was very clear to me. Yuan Kee, the blue-eyed Manchu, had kidnapped Mascasenhass for a very good reason. He had given him over to his Hindu allies, to pander to their ensanguined superstitions. For once, Mascasenhass had been a servant of Doorgha. Once, his body had harbored the soul of Hussain Khan, the master ministrant of that organization of Oriental assassins, whom I had killed in Paris.

So the Hindus hated Mascasenhass as a traitor to their cause. They had intended to slaughter him as a human sacrifice on the bloodstained altar of Doorgha, whose yearly festival was upon us. In Mascasenhass' place Yuan Kee had substituted another man as my servant, the dead image of the half-caste; and he had trained him with truly Chinese patience until he was Mascasenhass' exact double in everything.

Which was a good thing. For now neither he nor the Hindus would be able to discover the second substitution; so much less so since Mascasen-

has had been careful enough to cut out the man's tongue before gagging him and tying him to the post in the cave below the Spirit House where he himself had suffered such agonies.

So the man whom the priests would sacrifice to Doorgha was not Mascasenhass, but the Bengali, Upendranath Chucker-jee, one of their own countrymen and coreligionists. I had found his name, together with the Macao address of Yuan Kee, among some scraps of paper which he had left behind him.

Inquiries made of the governor of Hong-Kong had brought me the information that the man was a notorious Babu seditionist, a former editor of a revolutionary newspaper in the city of Rawalpindi, that hotbed of discontent, who had endeavored to rectify the existing political conditions of India with a bomb thrown at the carriage of the lieutenant-governor of the Central Indian provinces, and who had been sentenced to death. But he had succeeded in escaping from prison.

Thinking of him, tied and gagged and tongueless in that save beneath the Spirits' House, I had considered with grim satisfaction that after all the man would die for his race and faith—but not the way he had expected to.

242 THE BLUE-EYED MANCHU

For a week Macao and the whole of Hiangshan Island had been raked by deluges of gray, gaunt rain blowing in from the coast of Kwantung. The roads had been sodden under their brown mantle of mud.

The Hindu colony had been in brooding despair. For the Doorgha-Puja festival was on, the celebration of the Trimurti, the Hindu Trinity of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, Shiva the Destroyer—all reincarnated into the wondrous birth of Pravati, the consort of Shiva, who is also Doorgha, the black-faced, many-armed goddess of dread form.

I had seen more than one old Hindu raise his lean arms to heaven and abuse the very gods in that childish rage which is so typical of their race.

"Ho, rascally gods—rascally and accursed gods, sending this rain to spoil the feast which we have prepared in your honor!"

But the priests had continued their preparations undisturbed by the inclemency of the weather. They had worked and prayed with a grim, sharp energy which somehow got beneath my skin.

Rigorously they had observed the ancient ritual.

The first four nights they had dedicated to the decoration of the goddess—to the adornment of her body. They had perfumed her stony limbs with oil of geranium and of jasmine; they had reddened her thick, lascivious lips; had heaped marigold at her feet; and had given a fresh coating of crimson to the caste-mark on her forehead. They had poured plentiful libations of clarified butter on her lap.

On the fifth day they had prepared her dress. They had robed her in shimmering black brocade shot with gold and purple and scarlet. They had fastened a brand-new necklace of human skulls around her thick neck.

On the sixth day the goddess had been awakened with savage glee. All night the tomtoms had thumped and the reed-pipes had wailed and shrieked. A heavy scen of marigold and jasmine—the smell of all India—had floated over the town like a sickening pall.

The noise of the awakening had made the night hideous as far as the Portuguese quarter. The very Chinamen, stoical and patient and sneering, had been affected. Even the old priests of the Collegiate Church of the Jesuits, who had known Asia and Asia's charming "religious" festivals for

nearly fifty years, had gathered in the streets and had discussed the event with nervous, acidulous voices, continually crossing themselves.

I had retired early that night, and had closed windows and door to shut out the racket. But it had drifted in with a great tumult, "like fifty thousand pannier-loads of devils with their tails chopped off," as Tristram Shandy says. It had been hours before I fell asleep. For I knew what the priests were preparing. I knew what was the meaning of the whisperings and the rumors which were sweeping through the Hindu quarter on silent, unclean feet.

To-day was the seventh day, the first of The Three Great Days, as the Brahmans call it; for on the night of the ninth day came the sacrifice of blood to propitiate the nostrils of the goddess. And to-day, with the sharp suddenness of the tropics, the sun was glaring down, merciless and coppery, bleaching everything white and brittle, driving the moisture in rolling waves up to the sky, and drying the sodden roads.

So a mantle of gladness fell over the Hindu quarter. It was to them as if the elements were now propitious, and as if heaven itself was making ready for the great sacrifice.

To me the gladness was tainted with terror and marred with lust and cruelty. For I knew the obscene horrors of the Doorgha-Puja rites. I thought of that shivering, maimed Babu in the cavern of the Spirits' House whose hour of agony was drawing near, and I had no special desire to see the celebration in the streets. But, then, both Mascasenhass and I were by this time known characters to the inhabitants of Macao. We were, of course, still in the disguise of Arab traders which we had assumed for the sake of safety several weeks before, and our Chinese friends would have thought it strange, if not suspicious, if we had not shown due curiosity about the Hindu festival.

There was still another, graver reason why I had decided to see as much of the celebration as possible. For I had noticed that during the last few days a steady stream of Indians had arrived in Macao. A good many of them were Rajas of the greatest rank and high-caste Brahmans; men who were polluting their caste by crossing the ocean, by going from India to Macao; and I had recognized among them members of the Tomara family of Delhi, who claim kinship with the flame, and Rathors of Kanauj who trace their descent back to

an indiscretion between the sun and the moon.

I had seen, driving through the streets of Macao, a son of the Travancores, a clan with a pedigree of four thousand years, who assert that they sprang from the legendary Emperors of Malabar, a family lost in the night of time; and by his side had been the Maharaja of Calicut, a comparative parvenu since he is only the eighty-eighth sovereign of his name and race.

Even if these men knew of the proposed human sacrifice, I could not persuade myself that the slaughter of a Goanese half-caste, though they considered him a traitor to Doorga, would be sufficient reason to explain the arrival of these great dignitaries of the Hindu church and state.

There was something else in the wind. Of that I was sure. I had become doubly sure of it the night before. For I had received a cipher cable from headquarters which informed me of a strange happening that had occurred several weeks before, but had only just come to the ears of the British authorities.

According to this cable, a native Mohammedan ruler of one of the greatest Indian states had disappeared. This particular Raja, the descendant of a Central Asian adventurer who had carved

out for himself a huge kingdom in Hindustan at the breaking-up of the Mogul Empire, was known for his utter loyalty to the British. He had been on a shooting trip on the northeastern border of India; had crossed the border into the Chinese province of Amoy, and then had disappeared. Doubtless he had been kidnapped; and the Secret Service had found out that the last person with whom he had been seen had been the Manchu amban of Amoy. No further trace had been discovered.

I am not a detective of fiction, and do not torture my logic into the channels of deduction until it screams for mercy and fresh air. I have always poked fun at the "criminal investigators." They remind me of those elderly archeologists who raise a graven stone containing a laundry bill in Babylonian cuneiforms to the zenith of a nation's forgotten annals, and who read into every broken crock the affinity of Israel's lost tribe.

I have always derided the biologists who, by presupposing the existence of a negligible little original cell, build up for you a whole edifice of evolution. I am a matter-of-fact sort of chap who relies on a blending of horse sense and a grain or two of intuition. But, when I received the cable,

I sloughed for once my sober Saxon common sense to give play to my imagination.

I convinced myself that Yuan Kee, the force which constituted the connecting link between the new Oriental intrigue and association of Hus-sain Khan which I had fought in former years, was at the bottom of the kidnapping. I did not then go so far as to believe that the Raja would be sacrificed on the altar of Doorgha; that this was the real reason for the presence of the many Brahmans and high-caste Indian rulers in Macao. But something was in the wind. And it was my duty to find out what it was.

So the chief thing to do was to keep a careful watch on the happenings in the Hindu quarter during the Doorgha-Puja.

Thus, accompanied by the faithful Mascasenhass, I followed the crowd to the Hindu town. To the Chinese and half-castes and Portuguese the occasion was one of gay curiosity. They thronged up to the Indian quarter, laughing and chattering. Even the Portuguese governor and his aids were coming to see the celebration in the streets.

I saw them leave the governmental palace, that strange old pile which looks like a Castilian castle

of romance with its deep-set windows, its corbels and turrets and golden vanes.

Mascasenhas and I pushed along with the crowd. We forced our way down the Amirante Road and were soon in the heart of the Hindu quarter. The scene there was one of jollity. Tents and ambulant coffee-houses were filled with men and women in their holiday best, listening to singers and musicians, smoking and chatting, and looking at jugglers, sword-twirlers, snake-charmers and dancing-boys in women's attire. There were eating-stalls, candy-booths filled with the nasty, greasy sweets which delight the palate of the Indian, and lemonade-stands.

There were of course the many cries of the street.

Friend would meet friend and greet each other with all the extravagance of the East, throwing themselves upon each other's breasts, placing right arm over left shoulder, squeezing like wrestlers, with intermittent hugs and caresses, then laying cheek delicately against cheek and flat palm against palm, at the same time making the loud, smacking noise of many kisses in the air.

Mild-mannered, suave, and sleepy-eyed, they would burst into torrents of rage at the next mo-

ment because of some fancied insult. Their nostrils would quiver and they would become furious as Bengal tigers. Then would come streams of obscene abuse, carefully chosen phrases of that picturesque vituperation in which the East excels.

"Owl! Donkey! Christian! Jew! Leper! Lizard-eating sweeper bereft of gratitude, understanding, and the decencies!" This from an elderly Hindu whose carefully trimmed white beard gave him an aspect of patriarchal holiness in ridiculous contrast with the foul invective which he was using. "Unclean and swinish foreigner! Eater of holy cows! May thy countenance be cold! May thou be born for a thousand lives in the bodies of crawling, venomous insects!"

Came the reply courteous:

"Basest of illegitimate hyenas! Son of three thousand and three fathers! Thy mother committed suicide because of the shame of having given birth to thee! Goat! Father of little goats! Truly I will torture thee the torture of the oil, the torture of the peg, the torture of the water! By Shiva and by Shiva and by Shiva!"

And then the final retort, drawling, slow-voiced, but containing all the venom of India:

"Ho, thy aunt had no nose, thou brother of a naughty sister!"

Then a physical assault, an exchange of feeble blows, until the laughing, spitting Portuguese policeman separated them and cuffed them both with cheerful impartiality.

It seemed as if all Hindustan had come to Macao. For there were men from Bengal, black and ungainly and oily with *ghee*, shuffling along on patent-leather pumps.

There were bearded Rajputs, wide-shouldered, wide-stepping. There were thick-chested, bow-legged men from the Punjab, furtive-stepping men from the Madras Presidency, with even here and there a massive Sikh, conspicuous because of his blue turban and the bit of cut steel which glimmered in its heavy folds.

There were red-faced, duffle-clad hillmen from the north, contemptuous and sneering, who still seemed scented with the acrid herbs of the hills. There were desertmen from Bikaner, stunted and thin and chocolate-brown, with mops of coarse, bushy hair burned red by the sun, with vicious eyes, frowning brows, and screaming voices. There were men from Hyderabad, mounted on lean, well-

bred ponies, riding as hard as Sussex squires, with a complete disregard for foot passengers.

Mascasenhas and I pushed into their very midst, playing up to our disguise, exchanging jokes and curses with the swaying, jostling crowd in Hindu and Arabic. All around us was laughter and jollity and excitement. But beneath it I sensed a tremendous undercurrent of dread and cruelty.

I thought of the Babu Upendranath Chuckerjee, maimed and speechless and waiting for his doom. I thought of the loyal Mohammedan Maharaja who had been kidnapped in far Amoy. I thought of Yuan Kee, the fat, sardonic Manchu, with his ancient eyes, his long, gold-incased fingernails, his yellow, crinkled skin, his soft, inhuman voice which was like the rubbing of an age-green temple gong.

But I banished the thoughts deliberately. I knew that I must brush my mind clear of fantastic cobwebs, of the dust of sympathy and fear, and said to myself that there is always tremendous excitement during Doorgha-Puja, during the celebration of that day when Pravati, Shiva's consort, because she killed the giant Doorgha who threatened the gods with destruction, had assumed

the giant's name in token of triumph and was ever after herself known as Doorgha.

On every street corner a scarlet-marked priest was reciting that chapter of the Vedas which speaks of the wondrous happening. Wherever we walked we could hear the ancient Sanskrit text declaimed with the correct scansion and rhythm of the ritual—rising and falling, gathering strength again and dying in a thin, quavering falsetto:

—“and first Pravati sent Kalavatri, the Black Night, to slay the giant and to restore everything to the appointed order. But Kalavatri, cowardly and—”

The crowd listened to the oft-told tale. It shivered and moaned. A gaunt, red-turbaned Punjaubi fell flat on his face.

“Wahuwa!” He screamed again and again, and there was foam on his lips. “Wahuwa! Oh, the blessed miracle!”

On another corner a Brahman on whose forehead was a caste-mark of diagonal stripes of black and white was chanting the praises of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, first-born of the sons of Shiva and Doorgha.

“Praise to thee!” chanted the priest. “Propi-

tious One, son of Shiva and Doorgha! Thou art manifestly the Truth! Thou art doubtless the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer! Thou art the Supreme Being, the King, the Eternal Spirit! We acknowledge thy Divinity, O Ekedanta, and we meditate on thy Countenance!"

And on the next corner a purple-marked priest was holding a sort of opposition revival. For he was droning the praises of the second son of Doorgha, of Kratikeya, God of War, telling to all the world how he was born on the banks of the Ganges to slay the evil demon Tarika.

We passed from corner to corner, from street to street. Finally, at the crossing of two streets, Mascasenas plucked at my burnoose. He stopped and looked cautiously about him.

"See," he whispered, "over there you can see the gilt roof of the Doorgha temple." He crossed himself surreptitiously. "And over there—no, a little more to the left, is the Spirits' House dedicated by the Chinese to the vagrant spirits of their ancestors. I told you that an underground passage connects the two buildings. It must run underneath our very feet."

"Yes?" I replied, and a hush fell on both of us. We looked at each other,

A peculiar sensation came over me. Again I looked at the two buildings; at the high, golden dome of the Hindu temple, and at the faint, gray outlines of the Chinese Spirits' House. Asia, I said to myself, Asia speaking to Asia, in the language of Asia, the language of blood and superstition. It seemed to me that an icy hand was plucking my nerves from their fleshy covering, twisting them this way and that, tying them into a hundred knots, and then replacing them.

Yet it was not fear. For, after all, I was in no immediate danger. I knew, of course, that Yuan Kee had seen through my disguise, and that he had dozens of watchers who were tracking me day in and day out. But I also knew that Yuan Kee and his confederates were convinced that Mascasenhass, the man at my side, was their spy and emissary; that he was the Babu Upendranath Chucker-jee.

I had figured out that they had therefore no intention of assassinating me for a while. I was to them a sort of involuntary, unconscious stool-pigeon. For they calculated that with one of their own men in such close attendance to me, a man whom I thought to be my old ally and servant, Mascasenhass, they would receive timely warn-

ing of whatever I intended to do and of whatever the government instructed me to do. And so I was worth more to them alive than dead.

I narrowly observed the scene around me.

I had noticed before that, dispersed through the streets and the market squares, were a picked lot of Tartars, huge, ruffianly fellows with the purple silk ribbon of their Chinese freemasonic lodge shewing beneath their blue blouses. They mixed with the crowd, laughed and joked with them. They tried to efface themselves as a unit. But my trained eyes and brain had convinced me that they were there to fulfil a special duty; that they were a sort of police—with rather discretionary powers, I imagined.

Now I saw that along this street, underneath which Mascasennas supposed the tunnel to run, these Tartar plain-clothes men were in extra large numbers. They shifted and surged with the crowd. But somehow, without effort or violence, without even concerted action, they managed to keep the crowd on the move; and they themselves never went beyond a certain point, as if this street were their regular beat.

They were thickest around a little, plain, white-washed house which was practically half-way be-

tween the temple and the Spirits' House. I looked at it, and almost at once remembered.

It was the residence of Yuan Kee, the Manchu.

I walked up to the house as closely as I dared, and to my surprise the Tartars made no objections. They made no attempt to keep me on the move. But the next moment my surprise vanished. For I remembered that they thought Mascasenhass to be Chucker-jee, their spy and confederate.

Presently I felt sure of it. For, rising sharply and suddenly from the babble of the street, I overheard the whispered greeting of a Tartar who was brushing close to Mascasenhass.

"Ho, Babu-jee—ho, talker among talkers"; the last word a nasty commentary on the notorious loquacity of the Bengali.

Another time a Tartar, who was walking behind us for several seconds, whispered a Mongol proverb into the half-caste's ear, commenting upon the disguise which he supposed the other to be wearing.

"The crow went to learn the walk of the goose—but lost its own."

Mascasenhass did not lose his nerve or his ready wit for a moment. He acknowledged the greetings

with low-voiced replies, making believe by frowns and winks that he did not want me to hear. The whole thing was rather amusing in its complexity, a regular comedy of errors.

I looked up at the house. And suddenly, for the veriest fraction of a second, it seemed to me that a face was appearing at one of the iron-barred windows of the upper story.

It was only a fleeting glimpse. For, the next moment, two clawlike yellow hands stretched forth from behind and plucked the face from the window. But I could have sworn that I had recognized the features. I knew that fine, curved, high-bridged Arab nose, those beautifully shaped lips and those high cheek-bones. I had seen them on many an English race-track, and had seen them reproduced in many an English illustrated weekly.

The man behind the iron-barred window was the native Mohammedan ruler who had recently been kidnaped beyond the Chinese border, in Amoy; the man who was famed for his unswerving loyalty to the King-Emperor, for his enlightened tolerance and justice and impartiality.

Fantastic plans of rescue evolved themselves in my brain. But what could I do? One wrong

movement, and I would be cut down by a dozen crooked daggers. I was helpless, utterly helpless, and I strained my despair through clenched teeth.

The next moment I heard sharp, warning voices; an imperious word or two.

"Ho, there! Give way! Give way to the Presence!"

I turned to see; and then I felt myself pushed away together with the rest of the crowd.

A calvalcade of Rajput horsemen came sweeping down the streets, pushing the people to right and left, cutting a broad swath with the flats of their sabers.

A sharp word of command. Then a carriage rattled rapidly into view.

It was a gorgeous affair, low and comfortable, drawn by four sable-colored Kabuli stallions. It was surmounted by a brodered canopy of two domes in gold and silver, one on top of the other. The wood part was tinseled and lacquered and ornamented with enamel which burned like a many-colored jewel. The side curtains were of black brocade with patterns of green and white. The coachmen and the outriders were in liveries of the same colors.

A hush seemed to fall over the crowd like a

brown, lethean pall. Then came a sobbing, a whispering, a moaning. A scarlet-marked Brahman priest fell on his knees with arms outstretched in a gesture of devotion and supplication. Another followed suit; still another—a dozen—then hundreds, until the street was a sea of curved swaying backs, and of foreheads touching the dust.

The carriage rolled swiftly past. It stopped at the house of Yuan Kee. A tall, slim figure, all in white, stepped from it and rapidly entered the house. I tried to see, but did not recognize the man.

I turned to Mascasenhás.

"Did you see him? Who is it?"

"I saw." The Goanese shook with awe. His voice was low and veiled. "It is he—the Rana of Oodeypore—Oodeypore himself."

"Oodeypore?" I gave a gasp of incredulous surprise. The Rana of Oodeypore, here, in Macao! What did it portend?

Never before, since the beginning of time, had a Rana of Oodeypore left the sacred soil of India; for, be it understood, the Rana bears to the vast organization called "Hinduism" a relation which is absolutely unique in the history of the world.

There is no equivalent to it in the long annals of Europe, not even in those of Asia. To the three hundred million Hindus he is more than the Aga Khan to the majority of Indian Moslems; than the Mikado to the people of Nippon; than the Dalai Lama to the Northern Buddhists.

For he is the descendant and representative of Rana, a king in whom Vishnu himself was incarnate and whose memory is so sacred that the mere repetition of his name, whether by a Hindu or by a trained parrot for him, is an act of merit and purification. He is so exalted that an insult to him would be a personal shock to three hundred million Hindus. He is so high that he is above caste. Compared to a Rana of Oodeypore, the Guelphs are but parvenus, the Hohenzollerns are nameless vagrants, the Cecils and Bourbons recent adventurers; and that in spite of the fact that the Rana rules a little principality which is hardly larger than Lancashire, and that his subjects number less than two million.

And this man had come to Macao!

CHAPTER XV

For the first time since, five thousand years ago, the white-skinned children of the sun came down from the peaks of the Hindu-kush and conquered India, a Rana of Oodeypore had left the sacred soil of India, had set foot on the polluting ground of the *Mlechhas*, the barbarians.

The reason for it? The reason?

The answer came to me with a sudden, palsyng shock. The reason was that man whose face I had seen for a fleeting moment pressed against the iron-barred windows of Yuan Kee's house. The ritual sacrifice of India's greatest Moslem ruler on the altar of Doorgha was reason enough to make even a Rana of Oodeypore break the graven law of fifty centuries; the Rana had doubtless come to Macao to behold the sacrifice.

Most likely the Brahmans had not considered India a safe place for their bestial rites. They were afraid of the British Secret Service. So they had compromised on Macao. Yuan Kee had shuffled

and dealt the cards. For the Manchu was the connecting link between the new, gigantic Sino-Japanese intrigue, which was threatening all the West with destruction and slavery, and Doorgha of the many arms, kinswoman to this Raja who was the descendant of the gods.

The unknown One Man in Outer Mongolia, who was the center of this vast intrigue, knew that he would need India's treasure and India's countless millions before he could deal a crushing blow to the West. He figured, and Heaven knows he figured rightly, that this sacrifice, which meant not only the death of India's most loyal ruler, and consequently the removal of one of the strongest influences against Indian national aspirations, but also showed to all India that the Rana of Oodeypore was giving his divine sanction to the scheme, would be the crowning cornice on his building of intrigue. Thus the thoughts of the One Man; and there was no doubt that Yuan Kee was high up in his councils.

My duty to stop it! My strength and cunning against the strength and cunning of Asia; and only a half-caste to help me.

Half a dozen wild ideas whirled in my brain. But I dismissed them all as futile and useless. I

needed quiet. No use digging for the pot of gold beneath the rainbow. I must think. And I must think rapidly and constructively.

I turned to Mascasenhás with a whispered word.

"Let's get out of this."

The half-caste bowed.

"Yes, master."

He followed me down the street. The crowds had become denser than ever. We pushed our way through them with knee and elbow. They hardly noticed. Their excitement had reached a pinnacle where mere physical sensations passed by unnoticed.

Those Hindus knew. They *knew*, every one of them. And every one of them was my enemy.

They had begun to drop their customary mask of humility. It was clear that the Portuguese policemen were becoming nervous and fidgety. The Portuguese governor, discreet man, was directing his coachman to drive back to the palace.

We passed rapidly down the street. At the corner of the Albuquerque Road a wild-eyed Brahman priest was delivering a spirited harangue. He was as one inspired. And to me, at least, it seemed that his words were prophetic.

"Ho, brothers," he cried. "Listen! For thirty

years I have kept the vow of Silence. Some of you have seen me sitting by the Gate of the Sorrows in the city of Rawalpindi—a holy fakir, ash-smeared, meditating on the sacredness of the Trimurti—and silent. Silent for thirty years! Then I came to this land. Speech came to me. Listen!”

A shiver ran through the crowd. A tall, gaunt Madrassi, with the deep eyes of the fanatic, raised his hands.

“Listen!” he yelled. “Listen to the words of the Inspired One!”

The priest made a wide, circular gesture with his hands. The loose sleeves dropped back, exposing thin, brown, emaciated arms.

His voice was low, and throbbing with horrible sincerity.

“Through fate, Brahma was compelled to work like some artificer in the interior of his egg. You know the tale of his blessed miracle. Through fate, Vishnu had to pass through ten extremely difficult incarnations. Through fate, Shiva was constrained to lead the life of a beggar; and through fate, the sun is forced to make his daily round of the heavens. Let us thus give reverence to fate—fate which comes out of the dark without jingle of bells—fate which is bound about our

foreheads"—his voice rose to a high pitch—"fate which strikes the low—and the high—the high!" he repeated with a scream; and he pointed a trembling finger in the direction of Yuan Kee's house.

The Hindus were pressing more closely around the priest. They were paying the strictest attention to his words, keeping up a Kentish-fire of approving words.

They seemed to me to be a unit, a fighting, destructive unit, that could be handled like a sword by the right man. There were millions and millions like them in far India, in Burmah, Central Asia, the Straits, Ceylon.

And there was Yuan Kee. There was also the One Man in Outer Mongolia, who would handle this sword, who would wield it, and bring it down with the crushing strength of Thor's Hammer.

Rapidly we passed by the crowd. The last I saw was the figure of a Rajput, tall, gray-bearded, onyx-eyed, sitting his thin, high-breasted Kabuli mare as a piece of her, hands crossed on the pommel. He was staring at the chanting priest with a facial immobility that had in it something monachal. A sword swung from his left side.

There he was, sitting his horse; a grim outpost of all Asia.

I was glad when we were once more in the Portuguese part of the town. The streets were deserted, since all the world had gone to see the celebration. There was hardly a sound; only once in a while a noise drifted across from the Hindu quarter—a curious noise of shouting, swaying mobs, like the explosion of heavy guns, which fell down with a great, flat blow of immense crunching power.

As we walked farther away, the booming noise gradually changed into a low humming, like that of thousands of angry bees. It became lower and lower till finally it whispered in a language of dread stillness, with dull, muffled beatings and throbbings.

We crossed the little park in front of Mercado's house, where we lived. A blue-winged bird was fluttering in the branches of a sycamore tree. It gave one sweet, long-drawn flute-cry.

A clean sound, I thought; a corking good omen; and, together with Mascasenhás, I entered our house.

I sat down in my room, carefully closing the shutters of the window which gave toward the

street. For the picture of a grave Arab Shaykh, with his feet crossed on the table in front of him, and a fat, black cigar protruding at a truculent angle from the left corner of his lips, would have awakened suspicions even in the stoical breasts of Chinamen, though they think all foreigners crazy, anyway.

And I needed that cigar as a psychic sedative. I needed three of them before I got through thinking.

I felt terribly sorry for the loyal Mohammedan Maharajah back there in the house of Yuan Kee. I would have saved his life if I could. But that was not the main part of the game I was playing; the game in which an individual life, noble and exalted though it may be, was only a negligible pawn.

I was playing for a bigger stake; one of the biggest man has ever played for. I was playing for the destiny of my race, my faith, my civilization, and I had to wrench my soul and my brain free from all sentimental, pink-and-white fastenings. I could not be mumming my strength and my energies in the speciosities of weak sympathy. I must stick to my real task, and strip it bare to the buff.

And my real task was the "getting" of Yuan Kee.

Of course, it was out of the question to use force. The man was carefully guarded. I had seen picked, stalwart Tartar ruffians patrolling the streets, and the dense crowds of Hindus and Chinese would fight for him at a word. I could not even use ordinary cunning, for it was clear that the Manchu had countless spies in his employ, who were watching my every footstep.

For a few minutes I felt rather dazed. The stark immensity of my task was oppressing me. Then suddenly I felt keyed up, out of my dazed and negative state, to a positive state of crass action. My will was stirring, and my nerves twitched to obey the voice of my will.

Because my brain was sharply focused on one fact—the fact that Yuan Kee believed Mascas-enhas to be the Babu Upendranath Chucker-jee, his trusted spy and emissary. Here was my weapon; my one weapon forged ready to hand. And I must use it. I must stand or fall by the swish and sharpness and worth of it.

I had the fullest confidence in the half-caste's loyalty. He had, it is true, passed through a peculiar stage several weeks ago, when, the prey to

his own bizarre superstition and the devilish psychic suggestions of the Manchu, he had for a day and a night believed that his soul was the soul of Hussain Khan, my dead enemy, and that his body must do as the strange soul which it harbored was commanding. But he got over his mad hallucination. To-day he was sane and, as I said, loyal to the very core. I had no fear on that account.

But I had not the same trust in his nerve, his cold, prosaic pluck. For the man was an Eurasian, of mixed European and Asian blood. His was the curse of the half-caste, which often makes a man lose his head in the midst of a nerve-test, on the edge of a catastrophe.

But there was no other weapon. It was Hobson's choice, and I called to him:

"Yes, master," he answered.

"Mascasenhass," I said, looking straight at him and purposely choosing a simple phraseology, "you are my friend. Would you help me? What would you do for me?"

He fell at my feet and kissed my hands. A light like a high-eddy flame came into his purple-black eyes. Suddenly the heat and stress of his Asian blood came up with a roar, and he an-

swerea me with all the exaggerated imagery of the East:

"I love you, master of mine. My heart is in the hollow of your hands. You ask me what I would do for you. Listen! If I were a warrior I would sully my sword for your sake. If I were a statesman I would speak out every secret in your presence. If I were a Brahman I would slaughter a cow, that one unforgivable sin, to save one of your eyelashes. If I were a staid philosopher, to win from you a smile, I would disport myself with the gestures of a Nautch-girl before you."

I smiled to myself. There was no doubt that the man was sincere.

"All right, old chap," I remarked dryly. "You show the right sentiment. Now let's get down to brass tacks."

I looked straight at him. Then I continued in a low, even voice:

"You know the house of Yuan Kee. You know that he and his henchmen believe you to be the Babu Uprendranath Chucker-jee. Isn't that so?"

"Yes yes." His voice was slightly faltering.

"All right," I continued rapidly, without giving him time to think, "You can get into that house

easily enough. The Tartars will let you through. There's no doubt of it. Very well. You go there. At once. Immediately."

"But—but why—"

I cut short his objections.

"Because you are my friend. Because we are both white, you and I. Because I need you."

I stopped, waiting for his answer, and it came in just two words:

"All right." His voice was hollow.

"You tell Yuan Kee that I have framed-up charges against him with the authorities at Macao, and that they, acting under pressure from the British Government, have decided to arrest him to-night. Tell him that these charges have nothing to do with the Doorgha-Puja, nor with the kidnapping of the royal rajah. On the contrary, they are a frame-up—such as running a gambling-house. For if he got it into his head that we were trying to interfere with the Doorgha-Puja he might throw all precautions to the winds, and brave the matter out.

"The Portuguese garrison is small and negligible, and, on the other hand, he needs the support of the Brahmans, to whom he has promised this sacrifice. But then, he is a Chinaman, slow and

patient. He will not strike without being completely prepared unless his hand is forced. And I know that Asia is not yet completely prepared. Therefore, he will choose the easier way; he will make his escape, convinced that the celebration of the Doorgha-Puja will go on without him. And that's where you come in. You will tell him that he must make his getaway to-night, after dark. He must go alone, on foot, without any retainers, so as not to attract attention. Tell him that you will meet him at the little village of Fan-Wai, to the west of Macao, and that you will have a boat ready to take him over to the mainland. Tell him that you will meet him there at eleven o'clock sharp."

"And you?"

I laughed.

"Don't be dense, Mascasenhass. I will be waiting for him at Fan-Wai—I and not you. I will be waiting, with a revolver, a gag, and a pair of handcuffs."

There was a heavy silence. I watched the half-caste closely. He was ashen-gray, his facial muscles quivered, his eyelids twitched, his hands opened and closed spasmodically. He was a picture of abject fear.

But gradually the fear that was paralyzing him seemed to pile up until it reached a pinnacle beyond which it could not rise. He had come to the point of saturation; the borderland of frenzied, clanking heroism; and, numb through an excess of fear, he was suddenly surprising himself and me by acting and by striking out. It was the inevitable law of equal action and re-action.

The color came back to his cheeks. His body straightened and stiffened. He walked to the door. There, he turned.

"You shall be obeyed, master."

The next moment he was gone.

I lit another cigar, and inhaled the mellow smoke slowly, luxuriously. I had launched my ship. It was beyond my control. All I could do was to sit tight and to pray that it might return safe to port. If all went well, my work would begin that night at the village of Fan-Wai; and I would need all my wits then, and all my nerve.

So, deliberately I set myself to cleanse my mind of the impressions and experiences that had accumulated there during the day. I proceeded to forget all about Yuan Kee, the One Man, and

Doorgha; turning on a sort of psychic vacuum cleaner, and it worked.

I smoked and amused myself by building castles in Spain, by deciding what I would do once I was safely back in America.

Never mind what I thought. But I sat there, wallowing in sticky, potential ecstasies that would have shamed a boy of twenty.

Finally I fell asleep.

It was late when I awakened, feeling thoroughly rested and refreshed, and, walking over to the window, I threw open the shutters and looked out.

A cool, evening breeze was shivering and moaning in the tamarisks; and, to the west, a film of silvery light was engrailing the shadowy lace of the hills. I looked in the direction of the Hindu quarter. It was a sea of red and golden lights, shining like many-faceted jewels. There was the dull, far-away noise of tomtoms and reed-pipes, with once in a while a high-pitched, quavering yell, which trembled on the wings of the breeze before it shot into space. There was a faint, sweet scent of jasmine and marigold and incense powder, and the acrid smell of smoking torches.

I closed the window and turned away from it.

The next moment Mascasenhás came silently into the room.

"What luck?" I cried.

The answer was low.

"Luck—yes—and yet." He paused ominously, I thought. "Listen, master. There is an ancient saying in India which marks the difference between fools and wise men. I give it to you. You must choose—folly or wisdom. We say that men are four. He who knows not and knows not he knows not; he is a fool, shun him. He who knows not and knows he knows not; he is simple, teach him. He who knows and knows not he knows; he is blind, warn him. He who knows and knows he knows; he is wise, follow him. Now, as to the third—"

I interrupted him angrily.

"Cut out the metaphors and talk like a white man. What happened?"

Mascasenhás bowed.

"I saw the Manchu. I spoke with him, and by the favor of the Deity, he did not recognize me. He thought me the Babu Chucker-jee. He reminded me how he had trained me to be like the man whom he wanted me to impersonate. In me he admired the result of his own patience, his own

sharp cunning: 'Behold,' he said, and he laughed, 'the cock goes from home for only four days, and returns a peacock. You are indeed the dead image of that Goanese pig. You are indeed, he and you, like twin babes rocked in the same cradle.' "

The half-caste paused. I hurried him up with an impatient word.

"I gave him the message we agreed upon—concerning the warning, the frame-up, the proposed arrest; concerning also his escape this night and the importance of his going on foot, by himself, to the village of Fan-Wai, where I would meet him with the boat so that he could reach the mainland in safety. To all this he agreed. But there was one condition."

"Go on."

"He said: 'Ask your stepson to do the things that hurt you, O, Babu-jee. I am the stepson. I am the sacrifice to the wishes of one Vandewater and those bleating, stinking goats of Portuguese. Be it so. I escape. But what of Vandewater?' I did not understand. So he explained. He said that he was tired of having to watch you day and night, tired of playing with you. He said that alive you would be of no more use to him. He said that a dead horse cannot eat grass, and that

a dead man cannot whisper words of love to a courtesan nor words of craft to those of exalted rank.

"Thus, he would kill you. Also he would profit by the killing. For he would give you over as the third sacrifice to the Brahman priests, who worship at the feet of Doorgha. I should therefore persuade you to come for a walk to-night. I should bring you near the Spirits' House on some pretext or other, attack you from behind, overpower you, and drag you inside, gagged and handcuffed. He will be there, in the cave alone, waiting for us.

"Afterward I should carry you through the underground passage to the temple of Doorgha. But he wants to see you before he makes his escape. For he said that it is right that the dying enemy should make sport for the living."

He was silent. Momentarily I was nonplused. My thoughts were in a turmoil. But clear above it was the fixed idea that I must "get" Yuan Kee.

Here was the way, pointed out to me. But was it safe? Was it safe to meet the Manchu on his own ground? What guarantee did I have that he had not seen through the fact that Mascasenas

was the real Mascasenhas, and not the Babu Upendranath Chucker-jee?

I was prey to a wilderness of sinister emotions and premonitions. But I knew that it was up to me to run the risk. So I smothered my nervousness with hard, dry words:

"All right, Mascasenhas. We'll be there to-night."

The Goanese looked at me. His hands shook. Half-formed words trembled on his lips.

"But—but—" Suddenly he burst into a shriek. "Holy saints, do you guard me against the darkness of the night when it overtaketh me!"

A tremor ran through his body. His mentality seemed to sink into inarticulate inertness, and his eyes were wide with fear and horror.

"I told you that we'll be there to-night," I repeated in a low, firm voice.

There was another long, clogging silence. Then the Goanese drew himself up to his full, slim height. A fanatic light came into his dark eyes. His whole attitude became proud and defiant. I smelled in it something like a musty odor of forgotten knight-errantry. The man was the descendant of crusaders, after all, I thought.

He came up to me and took both my hands in his.

"Master," he said, and there was a steely ring in his voice, "we shall be there to-night. I will be even as I used to be, before the poison of Hus-sain Khan entered my soul. For once years ago in Goa I was a man widewalking among men. *Ai ai!* A brawler and a swashbuckler on the blue hills of Goa was I!"

He raised his right arm and made a vicious thrust at an imaginary enemy. I smiled dryly to myself. But I knew that the man was sincere. I knew that I needed him, and that he would not fail me in the hour of decision.

"All right, old top," I said. "We'll be there, and, by gad, we are going to get Mr. Manchu as sure as the Lord made little apples. Now go to your room and sleep for a few hours. I'll call you."

CHAPTER XVI

Late that night we left the house. I had slipped revolver and handcuffs into my waistband.

We walked rapidly through the sleeping Portuguese town, and skirted the Hindu quarter. The celebration there was at its highest point. The shrieking and yelling was continuous. Those Hindus were having the time of their lives. They were fraternizing with their beastly, obscene divinities.

The priests were swaying them this way and that with readings and sermons from that cheerful faith of theirs which, instead of a sweet, golden rule like the Christian creed; instead of a clean, prosaic, man's law like the Mahommedan, is nothing but a sensuous representation of the mysteries and the cruelties of life.

We walked through Chinatown. It was quieter there; just a nocturno of drowsy murmurs and floating shadows, with here and there a yellow-gaping window. On and on we walked toward the

outskirts of Macao. Rapidly the farther hills sprang into view, flouting a brazen, harsh outline against the silver of the night.

We reached the Spirits' House. There, acting under my directions, Mascasenas mussed up his and my clothes to give evidence of a struggle. He gagged me with my handkerchief. Then he slipped the handcuffs over my hands, but without snapping the lock, so that I could get my hands out at a moment's notice.

Without a word we entered the central room of the Spirits' House, and walked up to the trapdoor which opened into the cave. Mascasenas knocked, and a second later the trapdoor opened.

A silken voice purred from below:

"Is that you, O, Babu-jee?"

"Yes."

"And you brought—our inquisitive American friend?"

"Yes."

"All right. Come on down."

A light flared up in the stygian darkness below, outlining the rungs of a rope ladder. Mascasenas, acting splendidly, went through another fake struggle with me. Then he pushed me down the ladder, and followed after.

The next moment other lamps were flaring up. I looked about me. I was in a large room. A closed door was at the farther end, and, directly to my left, part of the room was screened off by a heavy, crimson curtain. The Manchu was standing near me, dressed as usual in gorgeous robes of embroidered silk, and cooling his bland face with a delicate little fan.

He walked up to Mascasenhass and shook hands with him. Then he walked over to the screened-off part of the room. His clawlike, yellow hands were toying with the heavy folds of the curtain.

"Behind these curtains, O, Babu-jee, is that pig you know about. Soon he will be sacrificed."

He took a lamp from a bracket in the wall, lit it, and held it over his head. He drew the curtains apart. I looked, and a slight nervous tremor ran through my body. For, stretched on a string bedstead, I saw a huddled, agonized mass, twisting and moaning and sighing.

It was the Babu, the impostor whose tongue Mascasenhass had cut out, the man whom the Manchu believed to be Mascasenhass himself.

Yuan Kee went up to him. He touched him gently with his slippered foot—and laughed.

"For a week he has been like this—in a coma;

he is not even able to speak; he only makes horrible noises with his throat and lips. For some Hindu must have come during the night, some Brahman who specially hates him, and cut out his tongue." Again he laughed. "Too bad, too bad. Thus he will not make much of a sacrifice for those gods whom you worship, O Babu-jee." He dropped the curtains. "But never mind, my friend. Doorgha will be appeased. There will be other sacrifices. There will be the rajah—and there will be our old friend Vandewater."

He walked up to me; stood there for a moment, silent, grim, inscrutable; and I thought, with a little shudder, that few forms of death and torture were new to him.

"You have done well, O, Babu-jee," he said to the half-caste. "You have handcuffed him securely." Rapidly his long, yellow hands searched my clothes and to my dismay, he found my automatic. He turned to the half-caste. "Careless Babu. See, you have left him a weapon."

Again he turned to me.

"Silly Western weapon—machine-made." He laughed. "We shall not need it. For two nights from tonight we shall use the weapon of the Orient, up there, in the temple of Doorgha. We do

not need your little parvenu toys, my white friend."

He touched me on the cheek with a horribly soft, caressing gesture, and tossed the revolver into a corner, where it sank out of sight in a heap of dust and rubbish which had been swept together there.

Then he sat down comfortably in a carved teakwood chair, and looked at me.

"The end of the chapter, my friend," he laughed. "The end of the chapter, eh? Can you not answer? Forgive me; I forgot." He turned to Mascasenhass. "Ho, Babu-jee, remove the gag from between the lips of our American friend."

Mascasenhass did as he was told. As he bent over me I looked straight into his eyes. And the message which I read there was comforting. The man had all his wits about him.

The Manchu smiled blandly.

"See, Vandewater," he said. "When I see the sun and the moon delivered up by the eclipse to the power of the demons; when I perceive the bonds that fasten a serpent or an elephant; when I behold a wise man dwelling in poverty, the thought forces itself on me:

"How mighty is the power of fate! Ah," he

sighed, "and now I behold you, a Christian, a white man, a Caucasian, one of the greatest, cleverest, most sublime races on earth—far above us poor Asiatics in civilization, in culture, in progress, in achievements, in the decencies of life—and then, when I think that in two days your blood will redden the thick lips of Doorgha, I say again: How great is the power of fate!

"But you do not answer, my friend. You, a son of the American nation, so famed for their ready wit and their ready tongue!"

He gave another little mocking sigh. Then he continued with a gentle voice:

"Is it, perhaps, that you blame me? Can it be that you harbor black thoughts against me in your heart? Consider, my friend. It is not the fault of the springtime that the leafless tree does not bring forth leaves. It is not the fault of the sun that the owl cannot see by daylight. It is not the fault of the cloud that the rain does not drop into the mouth of the cuckoo. For who can interfere with what fate has written on the foreheads of all of us? Not I, my friend. And most assuredly not you!"

He paused. Then he rose from his chair and walked up to me. He looked at me for long,

dragging seconds. I caught, full in the center as it were, the black stream of venomous hatred and revenge that had been accumulating in his mind for so many months. I caught it—held it for an instant—then shot it back into the Manchu's brain with the added impetus of my own hatred behind it. But I did not answer a word.

He laughed.

"You have gambled, my silent friend," he said, "and you have lost. You have lost because of a half-caste, a man of mixed blood. You thought only of his white blood. But I remembered his Asian blood. I remembered that a mule, when asked who was his father, will always reply that the horse was his maternal uncle. I remembered that a blind man wants nothing but his two eyes. I remembered that a rotten plow is of no avail to a sound ox.

"So I played with you these long months, always remembering. Your life was mine all the time. It was as I wished it; a flame shifting to the breath of my nostrils; now flaring bright and bold, now blowing thin and blue—as I wished it; and presently, as I wish it, it will flicker out altogether. For there is the half-caste!"

He drew his arm through that of Mascasenhaz;

and suddenly I understood the game which he was playing. He was toying with me with all the cold, inhuman deviltries of his tortuous Mongolian brain. Himself believing the other to be the Babu Chucker-jee, he wished to poison my last hours by forcing me to believe that he was Mascasenhass, and a traitor. The comedy of errors amused me. I suppressed a smile.

My surmise was correct. The Manchu's next words proved it.

"You heard me address this half-caste as Babu-jee. Perhaps you wondered. But you must cease to wonder. For once this man was Mascasenhass, half white, half brown. You spoke to the white in his soul, and it came up whistling to do your bidding. Then, by the favor of the gods, his soul became the soul of Hussain Khan. As such I used it. But you beat me. You put the white soul back into the brown body. But I am a patient man. I am of China. I worked—and finally I won. For to-day the white soul of Mascasenhass is dead for all time. He has a new soul, a third soul, the soul of India, of all Asia, the soul of Kali, the soul of the Avenger; and this third soul is none other than the soul of the Babu Upendranath Chucker-jee, hater of the whites, hater

of the Cross!" He turned to Mascasenhass. "Let the soul of Chucker-jee speak for himself!"

I thought this the right moment to stop the Manchu's silly theatricals. Time was slipping away. So, when the Manchu's back was turned, I winked at Mascasenhass, flashing a message into his brain.

"Go on!" my eyes said. "Now is the time!"

I half rose, about to slip the handcuffs from my wrists and to attack Yuan Kee. But Mascasenhass motioned me with his lips to be quiet and to wait a second.

He walked up to the curtains and drew them apart with a jerk.

"Yes," he cried; "yes. Let Chucker-jee speak for himself. Ask him, Yuan Kee. Ask him. *For I am Mascasenhass!* With the soul of Mascasenhass! And the man in there, the maimed thing in there, is the Babu! So ask him—oh, ask him—"

A half-formed question trembled on the lips of the Manchu. He looked at me. He looked at Mascasenhass. He looked at the maimed thing on the bedstead.

Then the incredible happened.

The tongueless, mutilated thing rose on his elbows, straining his bonds. He moved his lips,

shook his head affirmatively, and then came a sickening, shocking gurgle, formed with throat and palate and lips—the one hollow and unreal word:

“Yes!”

The Manchu saw at once how he had been fooled; and seeing that the game was up, he made one jump for the door from which the underground passage ran to the temple.

Mascasenhass and I sprang for him at the same moment. We caught him, but we were too late. For his hands had touched and jerked a rope which was by the side of the door, and the next instant a sharp clanging of bells echoed down the passage.

I groped for my revolver, but I remembered that Yuan Kee had tossed it into the rubbish-heap in the corner, and I had no time to hunt for it, guessing well enough that the bell would bring the priests of Doorgha to the door in a few seconds.

I had not even time to strangle the Manchu with my bare fists, and I was at my wits' end when Mascasenhass saved the situation.

“Quick!” he cried. “Gag him!”

I obeyed, and none too soon. The next mo-

ment footsteps came down the hall, stopping in front of the door. A voice demanded:

"Yuan Kee?"

Mascasenhas walked to the door. He kept it closed.

"Yes," he replied to the man outside. "This is Yuan Kee speaking. Listen. Go you at once to the temple of Doorga, as quick as you can, and ask the priests there to send here the Raja—the man you and I know of—the cursed Moslem traitor who will be sacrificed at the altar of the propitious goddess. It is most important I must speak to him. Hurry!"

"Listen is obey," came the voice, and then the footsteps disappeared rapidly down the passage.

"What's your game?" I asked the half-caste.

He laughed.

"We shall take a Raja with us, my master."

"But what of Yuan Kee?"

"We shall leave him behind, alive, unhurt. The Brahmans will find him; but they will not find the Raja. They will not believe the Manchu's tale. They will think him a traitor. They will take care of him." Again he laughed. He touched the gagged, helpless Manchu with his foot. "Be merry, O, my friend. For perhaps there

will be a sacrifice on the altar of Doorgha after all."

He rapidly extinguished the lamps and took his post by the door. The next moment footsteps came again down the hall. A knock at the door.

"We have brought the Raja," said a voice.

Mascasenas opened the door enough to give passage to one man.

"Push him inside," he commanded. "Return to the temple of Doorgha. Come back here in an hour."

"Listen is obey," said the voice.

The next moment a man was pushed through the half-open door. The footsteps disappeared down the passage, and Mascasenas closed the door.

The man before us was the loyal Raja.

I spoke to him quickly, eagerly.

"You are with friends. I am an American, and this man is a Goanese. Come, quick! Ask no questions."

We rushed up to the trap-door, opened it, went up the rope ladder, and rushed through the house and out into the streets.

Outside everything was silent and deserted. We returned to the house as fast as we could,

and began to think out our plans for the future.

We had to think rapidly, too.

"Listen," I began.

But Mascasenhás burst into a gale of laughter.

"Ho!" he roared, slapping his knees. "The third soul of Mascasenhás! It has saved the day. It has saved this Raja! And perhaps it has condemned Yuan Kee to a slow, agonized death!" He seemed to get a vast amount of satisfaction out of that.

"The third soul of Mascasenhás!" he repeated.

And he burst into another gale of laughter.

CHAPTER XVII

His long, high-veined hands rose rhythmically, with a gesture of supreme gratitude and supplication. His body rocked and swayed. His fine, gray eyes shone with a flame of deep religious fervor. For many minutes, oblivious of mine and Mascas-enhas's presence, he droned the prayers of his ancient faith to Allah, the king of men.

"—by the angels who rank themselves in order, and by those who drive forward and dispel the clouds, and by those who read the book of the Koran for an admonition—verily I declare that there is no God but God, and that Mohammed is the Messenger of God! For thou art All-Understanding and All-Merciful. Thou art the King of the Day of Judgment. Thou art the Lord of Heaven and Earth and whatever is between them, and the Lord of the East. Thou hast adorned the lower heaven with the ornament of the stars, and hast placed therein a guard against every rebellious devil; that they may not listen to the

discourse of the exalted princes; except that he who catches a word by stealth and is pursued by a shining flame—”

His voice quivered. It died in a whisper. Then it rose again like the waves of the sea.

“I put my trust in thee, O Allah. Verily I betake me for refuge to thee O Lord of Daybreak, against the blackness of the night when it overtaketh me—”

His voice throbbed with piety and gratitude. And, after all, he had good reason to be grateful; he, the Maharajah of Hyderpore, to call him by his full, lengthy, jaw-breaking name—the Maharajah Asaf Jah Muzaffar-ul-Mumalik Rustam-i-Douran Arashu-i-Jaman Nawab Mir Asman Ali Abdul Khan Bahadur Fete'h Jeng.

Finally he finished his prayers. He made one last sweeping obeisance in the direction of Mecca. Then he came over to where Mascasenhass and I were sitting, conversing in an undertone.

The maharajah was a tall, broad-shouldered man, of light complexion, gray-eyed, sharp-featured, and beardless but for his short-cropped Mohammedan mustache. He had the curved, high-bridged nose and the prominent, predatory chin of the Arab; and only his heavy cheek-bones and

low, broad forehead betrayed the strain of Central Asian Tartar blood in his veins.

A moment ago he had prayed to his God with an ancient, sword-clanking fervor worthy of Abu Abdullah al-Shafe'i, the great Mohammedan divine, himself. And now I marveled to see the suddenness and skill with which he cloaked himself in the garment of Western speech and manners which he had acquired at Eton and Oxford.

If it had not been for the strange, typically Oriental contrast between his vehement gestures and the rigid, statuesque control of his facial muscles, he could easily have passed for a young Englishman of aristocratic family.

English, too, was the bored, affected drawl in his voice.

"By Jupiter, gentlemen," he said, "I did have a bit of a close shave, what? And I am deucedly grateful to both of you. Deucedly grateful." He smiled reminiscently and lit a cigarette. "And now what, pray?"

"Why—nothing," answered Mascasenhas; and there was an expression on his face as happy and self-satisfied as Zarathustra's famous triumphant pigs. "We have done everything possible—and impossible, by the Madonna! We have rescued

you from a certain and very painful death. You will not be sacrificed on the last day of the Doorgha-Puja. The scarlet-marked priests will be disappointed, and—" he laughed—"our blue-eyed Manchu friend is in a pretty little predicament, from which even Chinese ingeniousness and Chinese patience will not free him."

Again he laughed boisterously. After the anxious strain and heave of the last few hours a reaction had set in, and now he was as gay as a titmouse.

I agreed with him.

"Perfectly right. Yuan Kee is not going to hurt us—or anybody else, for that matter."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Vandewater," drawled the Raja in his best Oxford manner. "The Manchu is down there in the cave beneath the Spirit House, and presently the priests will come through the tunnel which connects the house with the temple of Doorgha, and they will discover him. Perhaps they have already discovered him."

He stopped for a moment; his slow, gray eyes flashed, and as his excitement rose, a tiny metallic accent crept into his faultless English; a subtle Oriental twist came into his careful phraseology.

"They will find him tied and gagged, trussed

up like a sheep in the hole of the sacred white cobra. Ay, by the red pig's bristles! But they will find him alive, alive! He will talk, the dog of a dog with a dog's heart! And that's exactly what is bothering me. Why did we not kill him when we had the chance? Why did we draw the saber of audaciousness and throw away the scabbard of precaution? By Khizr and Khizr, he will talk! You know what we say at home, my friends: 'Better a dead tiger for an enemy than a live rat.'

"Yuan Kee is alive. He has the sharp cunning of the rat." Suddenly he became quiet once more. The fire died in his eyes. Again he dropped into his ordinary, drawling English. "My word, old chap, we did come rather a cropper, what?"

Mascasenhas answered by singing a snatch from a decidedly mundane Calcutta bazaar couplet, which asserts the impropriety of anointing a rat's head with sweet-smelling oil of jasmine.

"Do not waste your thoughts on the Manchu," he said to the Raja. "He is not worth it. He is not dead—yet; but I wager that even now he is praying for quick death. Yuan Kee is harmless."

The Goanese was right. There was no doubt in my mind that the Manchu was perfectly harm-

less for all time to come; that he was doomed. And I proceeded to explain the reasons for my belief to the young ruler of Hyderpore:

"When I accompanied Mascasenhass to his rendezvous with Yuan Kee in the cave beneath the Spirits' House, the latter thought that our Goanese friend was not what he proclaimed himself to be. He thought he was his spy, the Babu Chucker-jee, whom he had trained into an exact double of the real Mascasenhass.

"I seemed to be handcuffed, evidently quite helpless, and so the Manchu hit upon the humane young idea to turn me over to the Brahman priests as an additional sacrifice for the last day of the Doorgha-Puja—for to-morrow. He found out his mistake when it was too late. You know all that.

"You know also how, just before we overpowered and gagged him, he managed to pull the bell-rope which connects the cave with the temple, and how the priests came hurrying to the door. You know, furthermore, how Mascasenhass, with great presence of mind, imitated the Manchu's voice, and ordered the priests to bring you to the cave, because he wanted speech with you, and to return in an hour. The priests obeyed. They

brought you, pushed you through the door, which was open just enough to let you in, without exposing the interior of the room. Well—and afterward we escaped, and here you are.”

“Right-o,” said that astoundingly Anglified young Oriental. “Here we are. But what of it? The priests have returned by this time. The Manchu is alive. He will tell the priests what happened.”

I smiled.

“Assuredly he will talk. But tell me—will the priests believe him? Can they believe him? A likely tale, they will say. The priest who answered the call of the bell-rope will swear that he heard the Manchu’s own voice commanding that you be brought. You were brought, and you escaped. Of course, they will find the Manchu tied and gagged. But they will think it a put-up job. The very first fact that we did not kill the Manchu will convince the Brahmans that he was in our pay; in other words, that he is a traitor.”

“They will kill him, then?”

“Yes; and I will tell you how they will kill him. Remember, this is the first time a Doorgha-Puja festival is being celebrated outside of India. The Hindu colony of Macao, of all the surrounding

part of China, are expecting an initiative ceremony worthy of the occasion. And the priests have promised great things to them. They cannot afford to disappoint them. The proper preparation have been made. The goddess is expecting a sacrifice of human blood. Listen."

Silently I pointed to the window.

Red and yellow lights were dazzling and dancing on the panes, reflections from the torches which were being carried about in the Hindu quarter of Macao, and borne on the wings of the night wind, like a roaring ocean of shoreless eternity, came a sea of sounds—wailing, shrieking voices, intoxicated with the hysterical cruelty of Hindu faith, the sinister rubbing of tomtoms, the ear-splitting shrill of the long, thin reed-flutes.

"Listen well," I continued. "You know the Hindus, you who rule a Hindu state, though you are a Moslem. You know what they are like when their religious fanaticism is roused."

"Ay," said the young Raja, and for the first time he spoke in Urdu. "I know them—cursed, infidel dogs, worshiping many and most powerless deities. Phew!"

"All right, then. And you know that the priests

have promised them a sacrifice of sacrifices—and I am not speaking of that shivering, mutilated Babu who is awaiting his doom down there in the cave. His blood will only be an appetizer to the goddess. No, my friend, the priests have promised that a great man will be sacrificed, one of the greatest—a Moslem—a man whom they hate because he proudly calls himself a friend of the English. No one knows that better than you do."

"Quite so," drawled the Raja, speaking again in English. "And I gave them the slip. Thanks to you. What of it?"

"They will sacrifice the Manchu in your stead. They will think him a traitor. But he also is a great man, one of the greatest in China. They will say that his blood will smell sweet in the nostrils of the goddess."

"Yes. Quite so."

"And there's more to it," I continued enthusiastically. "You are an Oriental. You know what Asia is like. You know the curse of Asia—the jealousies and bickerings and discords which have always prevented her from claiming her real place in the history of mankind."

A thoughtful look came into the fine gray eyes of the young Raja.

"Yes," he replied. "The bickerings and jealousies—you are right, my wise American friend."

"You know the men of Asia will die—for a caste, a creed, a dynasty. They will die for honor; they will die even for a prejudice. But they will not die for the love of their own continent. Being Asians, they lack the solidarity of feeling, the larger patriotism, which makes a continent really great."

I stopped momentarily, and, lighting a cigarette, I smiled at myself. It was becoming rather didactic—also a little tactless. For the young Raja was, after all, an Asian himself, in spite of his veneer of European culture, in spite of his Oxford drawl, in spite of the fact that he had once captained an English county cricket eleven.

"Look here," I continued. "The man who is at the back of this intrigue understood this weakness of Asia. So he tried to do away with it. He tried to draw Hindus and Chinese and Japanese together into one far-flung, iron net. He tried to forge a link between the ambitions of the Far East and those of India. And now he has failed. He failed last night. For now the Hindus believe that Yuan Kee is a traitor, that the Chinese party double-crossed them."

"There will be the old discords, the old jealousies and bickerings and hatreds. The Brahmans will pull one way, the Chinese the other. They will be afraid of each other, in great things and in small things. Why, I wager that right here in Macao, where they are in a thumping majority, they will be afraid to brave the Portuguese authorities. They will not dare hunt for you or for us in the white quarter. We are perfectly safe."

"A straight road," the Raja assented.

"Yes," broke in Mascasenhass; "and I never yet knew a man lost upon a straight road."

Still, I decided to make assurance doubly sure. Heretofore I had been afraid to force the Manchu and his confederates to a show-down. I had thus played my game on the quiet, matching cunning with cunning, without calling to my help whatever armed forces America or England had in the Far East. For I realized that they were hopelessly outnumbered. But now, knowing that dissension was rife in the camp of the enemy, I decided to avail myself of the *carte blanche* instructions which my own and the British government had given me.

I left the house and hurried down the Praya

Grande, toward the palace of the Portuguese governor.

The streets were silent and deserted. Only in the distance were the crimson reflections of torches, and, like the voice of chaos-doom, came the thumping of tomtoms, the shrilling of reed-pipes, the throaty, maddening yells of the Hindus, intoxicated with the frenzy of their lust-hungry faith.

A strange thing that, I said to myself; a Doorgha-Puja, meant to be the revival of all Asia, to be held here in Macao—that place forever associated with the greatest period in the history of the Occident; that place, redolent of the names of Xavier and Camoens, which is all that now remains to the Portuguese who first revealed to the West the water highway of the Eastern world, and whose influence was at one time paramount from Mozambique to Japan.

When I reached the palace, the half-caste servants at first absolutely refused to awaken his excellency, the governor. That worthy official seemed to have imbued his household with wholesome fear and respect.

Never, they declared with Portuguese exaggeration, would they dare call the Senor Luiz d'Albu-

querque de Montegazza before eight o'clock in the morning; not if the whole town burnt down; not—by the Madonna and all the dear saints—if a sheep with wings would fly over the moon, smoke a cigar, and commence to recite the *Lusiad*!

Finally, with fear and trembling, they did invade the governor's sleeping quarters, and a few minutes later I faced that irate and sleepy gentleman in his dressing-room.

The large potentate whose complexion told harrowing tales of too much cognac and curry, received me most superciliously, disdained all return of greetings, and, fixing upon me two little eyes like gimlets, demanded my business in terse terms.

I stated it as quickly as possible. He paled.

"I know nothing, nothing, nothing!" he shrieked. "I wish to know nothing. Let the Hindus do what they please. Let them sacrifice every mandarin in the Middle Kingdom. I am blind, deaf, dumb. Go away! Go away at once!"

I waited till his spasm had passed, and then I produced the *carte blanche* instructions with which the American and English foreign offices had entrusted me. At once a note of courteous-

ness crept into his manner, but still he refused to listen to me.

Finally I lost my patience.

"Listen, damn you," I said. "I do not need your help. I do not want it. All I want is your permission to use the official Portuguese wireless station. I wish to send a word to the British Chinese naval squadron. They are cruising somewhere along this coast. I want to ask them to send a few marines ashore, that's all, in case there should be any trouble about the escape of the Raja; in case the Hindus and Chines bury their differences and make a combined dash for the white quarter."

He agreed to that, visibly relieved, and gave me a line to the chief operator of the wireless station. I lost no time in hurrying there.

Half an hour later I was in communication with the *Guerriere*, the flagship of the British squadron. It seemed that the ships were only a short distance off shore; marines would be landed in a few hours.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was nearly morning when I reached home once more, and the sun was peeping over the edge of the horizon with a first heralding ray of gold and lavender.

The Maharajah of Hyderpore and Mascasenas were still up. They were both in the best of humor, swapping tales of their homes in far-off India.

That gay young Oriental prince amused me greatly. His ancestors were illustrious men, who had conquered and ruled by fear; but his sympathies were democratic and unconventional to a degree.

He had just finished a riotous Indian bazaar tale when I entered the room.

"—and so my Goanese friend," he was saying while he slapped the other's knee. "I turned to her and I said: 'Why, yes, my dear. But what can a pig do with a rose-bottle?' Clever of me, what?"

I cut into the laughter which followed the tale.

"It's all arranged," I said. "The marines will have landed by the time we have bathed and breakfasted. By to-night you, my friend, will be once more under the protection of the British flag, none the worse for your experience. And twenty-four hours later the Manchu will be about to say his last prayers to whatever Chinese deity he specially adores. And I—" suddenly I was more serious; a weary note crept into my voice—"I will be on the go once more."

"Where to?" inquired the Raja.

"To hunt the One Man in Outer Mongolia whom I was sent to find—and kill. He controls the whole situation. For the present his intrigues have failed, thanks to the jealousies and discords between the Hindu and Chinese parties. But what of it? He will not think himself beaten. Not he. He will—"

The Raja interrupted me. He smiled. His lean, high-veined hand shot out in a telling gesture.

"He will be dead—to-morrow night!"

I stammered with surprise.

"What—what do you mean?"

"Just what I said, old chap. I said that the One Man you speak of—the One Man you were sent to find and kill—will be dead to-morrow night. Why, I thought you had known straight along! Yuan Kee is that One Man!"

I was utterly amazed.

"Yuan Kee?" I shouted. "Yuan Kee? The blue-eyed Manchu? It can't be true."

Gravely the Raja inclined his head.

"It is true. I know."

"But how do you know? Good Lord, tell me. How do you know?"

The Raja put both his hands on my shoulders.

"Remember, I was in prison, back there in the temple of Doorgha, whence you freed me, you and Mascasenhass." Suddenly he continued in Urdu, his native language. "Yes, *sahib*, you freed me. Again I thank you for it. My life is yours, by the face of the Prophet of the True God—on whom Peace! At first when I understood what death these infidel Brahman dogs reserved me for; when I understood that I, a man, a Mohammedan, a believer in the One God, would be sacrificed on the altar of Doorgha to make sport for those accursed Hindu pigs, I am afraid that

madness took me by the throat and squeezed me—thus!”

He opened and closed his lean hands, as if clutching the throat of an enemy.

“I raved; I beat my breast; tears came from my eyes and rolled down my cheeks slowly, one by one—like nails driven into the coffin of the beloved one. And I cursed myself. Also I cursed the ninety-nine holy names of Allah, the King of men—may the saints intercede on my behalf! Ah, *sahib*, what does a blind man want but his two eyes? What does a prisoner want but his liberty?

“Then resignation came to me, like an *Ifrit* in the black of night. I said to myself that life is as uncertain as a Tartar’s beard. I said to myself that fate is a dirty feeder—she does not bite clean; she mauls and scratches. What is written is written. Rajas or peasants, alike we are the subjects to the sports of destiny. Thus Islam came to me. I was quiet and sane once more. I looked about me. I listened.”

He lit a cigarette and, inhaling the smoke slowly, continued:

“There is a statue of Doorgha in the temple, and its pedestal is hollowed out. A small place,

close and dark—there's where they kept me, tied and gagged—ah, the ignoble dogs, may their days be short! But I listened. They would meet in front of the goddess—the high-priests and the Manchu. I understood their talk. There was chiefly one Brahman, Krishnavana Appa Rao by name, to whom Yuan Kee gave much of his confidence. That's how I know. Ah, *sahib*, the dreams that Manchu had! All Asia he was going to forge into a weapon. And he was to be the leader.

“Tamerlane, Ghengiz Khan, Mahmoud el-Ghazi, Babar, Ranjeet Singh, Hyder Ali—great men they. Conquerors of olden days, who gave the sword when it was red and a land hissing with blood. But he, Yuan Kee, would be the greatest of them all. His empire would stretch from Kamtschatka to Moscow, from the Arctic to Ceylon. And America and Europe would be colonies, paying tribute. A great dreamer—an efficient dreamer! And now—” he smiled and flicked off his cigarette ashes with a negligent gesture—“now he is in prison, back there in the temple of Doorgha; and presently his blood will redden the thick lips of the goddess. Fate, my friend. What is written is written.”

It would be understanding the case to say that I was relieved.

I felt like a man who, flung into vast, wide-weltering chaos, is suddenly lifted up by his guardian angel and put on a sweet, clean shore where the sun is bright and smiling, the sky blue, and the flowers misty and odorous.

The past months had been months of work and worry and danger—often of despair. The world to me had been a great, sinister, mysterious house opened by countless doors which were continuously half ajar; and behind every door a hateful, grinning specter which threatened me, and which threatened my race, my land, my faith.

I had been under a terrific mental and physical strain. Every evening these past months, my brain had expected and received a compendious report of what I had heard and seen and said and done and undone during the course of the day, so that I could prepare for the morrow. And now suddenly the gray burden was lifted from my soul. The One Man whom I had been sent to find and kill was doomed. I was a free man once more. My work was finished. I could return to America, to my own land, to plant my turnips

and radishes, to be bored by my brother-in-law, and to spoil the young digestions of my nieces and nephews with candy.

I looked out of the window. The morning had come with a flood of pink and ochre. The crimson light of the torches in the Hindu quarter had died. There were still faintly audible in the distance the shrieks and yells of the faith-maddened Hindus, chanting obscene songs in honor of Kali, the grinning goddess with outstretched tongue who stands on the prostrate form of her husband Shiva, and of Doorgha, the dread image of lust and destruction.

Let them chant, I said to myself. Let them yell with their bestial hymns. What were they to me henceforth?

So I sat and smoked, happy satisfied, exchanging an occasional remark with the Raja and with my faithful Goanese. And when, half an hour later, I heard martial feet clicking and stepping in the distance, when I heard the excited shouts of the Portuguese who were rushing from their houses, crying: "The English! The marines, the marines—" I felt more happy and secure than ever.

They marched down the Praya Grande, thence

deployed through the side streets, occupying strategical positions. Half a battalion of them, with a couple of dainty little screw-guns bumping behind them on the cobblestones, marched past my windows to the sound of fife and drum and the insolent chorus of "The Dashing White Sergeant."

A few minutes later the British Admiral, Sir Hector Cave-Brown, was ushered into my room. A red-faced British knight he was, with bushy sand-colored eyebrows, a deep-sea walk, an explosive temper, an angular, quarter-deck manner, and full-flavored, nautical parlance. But he was entirely efficient and ready to help.

In a few words I explained the situation to him.

"All right," he said. "I don't suppose there'll be any trouble."

He pointed through the window at the marines. "My leather-collars will come up to the scratch if anything should happen. I shall leave the Terror and the Advance riding at anchor in the Inner Bay. Their guns can sweep anything on this part of the island. I shall take my flagship up to Hong-Kong." He turned to the Raja. "I

shall be glad to have you along, if you care to come."

The Raja accepted, and then the admiral turned to me once more, and proceeded to put a large, fat fly into my ointment of content.

"Look here, Mr. Vandewater," he said. "I don't want to do what you Americans call 'butting-in.' But, after all, you and I are both working for the same object. And I have been sailing up and down this confounded Chinese coast for more years than I care to reckon. I know my Chinaman. It appears to me that you are making one little mistake. You say that that blue-eyed Manchu devil is harmless. Quite so. And you say that your work is over. I doubt it."

"Why?"

"Because he is a Chinaman. Because he is patient and efficient and damnably long-winded. I wager he has left an organization behind him. What are they going to do? Are they going to cash in their checks simply because their leader is gone? They're going to try their best to make trouble. The concerted effort, the directing brain will be missing, with the Manchu gone. I grant you that. But it's my frank and unhappy opinion your work is just about beginning."

Of course, the admiral was right. Suddenly the picture of a peaceful chicken-ranch back home in America seemed farther away than ever.

I thought of the dragon's brood which that Manchu would leave behind him. I was not afraid. Not that. But I was utterly discouraged, utterly wearied. It must have shown in my face, for the admiral turned to me with a kindly smile.

"At all events, Mr. Vandewater, your work is done here, here in Macao. Come up to Hong-Kong with me on the flag-ship, you and Mr. Mascenhas. Hong-Kong is the logical place for you, and I will be glad to take you up."

I thanked him and accepted. He rose to go.

"Good morning, gentlemen. I shall have a launch waiting for you."

Then a revulsion of feeling came over me.

I said to myself that I had done my full share of the work. I had found the One Man, the directing genius of that All-Asian organization which was threatening the lands of the West with slavery and destruction. Let the others pick up the threads and continue the work. There were most likely branches of the organization in every capital of America and of Europe. They should be located and destroyed. That was the

work of the regular secret service of America and England; and if they were not sufficient they could turn to their Russian and French colleagues for help.

My free-lance commission was ended.

Still, I would accept the admiral's invitation and go to Hong-Kong. I would make a full report to the governor of that colony. Then I would take a Canadian Pacific steamer to Victoria, British Columbia, and thence the first overland train to New York.

I had a sudden desire to see Broadway, to dine at that little place at Fortieth Street, famous for its saddle of lamb *a la printaniere*, and to behold my favorite movie actress in a twelve-reel career of adventure and excitement.

"Let's get a move on," I cried to my two companions. "I am sick of this yellow hole."

Hurriedly we packed our few goods and chattels and sent them down to the waterfront. Mascasenhás bade a lengthy and highly emotional farewell to his cousin, who had been our host during our stay in Macao; and ten minutes later we were hurrying down the Praya Grande.

We could see the funnels of the *Guerriere* standing out sharply against the brazen sky.

We had our work cut out pushing our way through the crowds. The arrival of the British cruiser squadron and the landing of the marines had given additional zest to the excitement caused by the Doorgha-Puja. A mob of idlers, Portuguese and Chinese and half-castes, was packing the crooked, narrow streets; and toward the waterfront dozens of impromptu guides and rickshaw men were offering their services to the sailors who had shore-leave.

There were, of course, occasional rows between competing guides, bad language, sharply facetious insults, and, once in a while, a blow.

I noticed chiefly one young Tartar, a sturdy, round-headed, big-limbed ruffian, who was forever in our way, addressing sailors in pidgin-English and promising them new and strange sights. But though he shrieked and bargained and vociferated with the best, he never seemed able to come to terms, and kept steadily in our wake.

He was a typical Central Asian Tartar, evidently a Mohammedan, to judge by the string of blue beads, protection against the evil eye, which peeped from a fold in his blouse; and he had the restless, frowning eye and the bilious complexion of the *hashshashyum*—the hemp-drinker. In

his belt, contrary to the municipal regulations of Macao, there was stuck a cheray, the terrible knife of Central Asia.

Twice he bumped against me without apologizing. When he did it the third time I lost my patience, and turned on him with an oath.

"Where are thy manners, O he-goat, son of a burnt father?" I shouted, speaking in his native dialect.

The next moment I was sorry I had lost my temper, for these fellows are not exactly safe to meddle with and insult. I moved back a step, ready for action. But, to my surprise, the Tartar did not reach for the ever-ready cheray; instead he bowed low, smiled, and said:

"Thy forgiveness, master! There is meekness even in the son of a Tartar." He stopped; then he continued in a lower voice: "There is sense even in the written babbling of priests, O Head of Many Tongues."

I was amazed. For, in the metaphorical parlance of the Tartar, the last appellation means a polyglot—which I certainly am. But I had no time to ask questions.

For the very next moment the Tartar winked

at me, meaningly, deliberately. In the faintest whisper he said:

"To the right, O master."

And the same instant, to the right, from a little, squat Buddhist temple for Chinese sailors which huddled there, framed by go-downs and drinking-shops, an old Chinese priest came out.

He stepped directly into my path, brushed against me, and dropped his fan. I picked it up and returned it to him. Our hands met for a fraction of a moment, and in that infinitesimal space of time I felt that the old man was pressing a piece of paper into my hand.

I made no exclamation, no unnecessary gesture. We were far away from the Hindu quarter. The Manchu was out of the way, and there was strife between the Brahmans and the Chinese. But even so, there was a possibility that the Hindus were watching me. So I kept my own council.

I kept my hand closed, and, without looking to right or to left, continued with my friends to the foot of the Praya Grande.

The water-front was astir. The spring typhoon would soon be there, and so the Chinese were making ready for their annual trip to Siam and Burmah. Bales of silk and chests of tea were

heaped up house high. The harbor was crowded with the strange craft of Asia. There were huge Chinese junks with towering poops, constructed so as to act as sails in a gale of wind. There were needle-keeled sailing boats from Shanghai and the north, with a single mast provided with a huge triangular latine, very deep in the tack, and typically Chinese in the utter absence of the white man's nautical *vademecums*. For they had no compass, no log, no sounding lines, no spare ropes, not even the suspicion of a chart.

Dugouts, made from hollowed mango-trunks, hurried through the sailing fleet.

A bustling scene! And far to the southeast, the promontory beyond which the *Guerriere* was waiting for us, flashed into view with a sort of barbarous splendor. There was no verdure on that flat ledge. But under the purple and orange tints of the sky the chalky rocks became heaps of topaz and the sun-scorched ridges masses of amethyst.

The steam-launch belonging to the man-of-war was waiting for us. We boarded it, and a few minutes later we were chugging through the bay on our way to the flagship.

Once seated comfortably in the admiral's saloon, with a glass of "navy-red" at my elbow and a

cigar between my teeth, I opened the paper which the old priest had pressed into my hand.

It was a long letter, written in Chinese ideographs, and in the Mandarin dialect, the dialect of priests and princes.

The opening paragraphs were self-explanatory:

By the favor and courtesy of Krishnavana Appa Rao, the high-priest of the temple of Doorgha, and of Sardar Nowajee Pudumjee, Mahendra Pal Singh, and Mitra Kumar Sem-Gupta, priests of the same temple!

This is a message from Yuan Kee to Kwang Yat, Honored priest of the Buddhist temple in the street of the Leaning Willow, and once abbot of the Such-zen Monastery in the province of Amoy.

Greetings to thee! And thanks to the Brahmans who have granted me permission to receive before death—which I deserve, being a traitor—spiritual counsel by writing to thee, holy one, the confession of my faith.

So far the thing was clear. The Brahmans had granted the condemned man permission to confess to his priest in writing before they dispatched him into the beyond.

Then came the confession itself. It consisted of several paragraphs. Each of them was preceded by an introduction written in red ink and in the formal Chinese manner, while the contents of the paragraphs were distinct observations of a partly religious and partly mystic nature, with apparently no connection between them.

It was, of course, clear to me from the first that it was a message meant for me, and after much work I deciphered it. The Brahmans, with their genuine tolerance of other religions, had seen no harm in allowing the doomed man to send out a message of such evidently theological and spiritual nature, even though they could not understand it.

I shall give the message here, translating from the Chinese into English as literally as the ideographs permit, and giving the explanation to each paragraph as I deciphered it.

The first paragraph had the following introduction:

Three are the faiths of China—the faith of Buddha, the faith of Kong-fu-tse, the faith of Tao.

In three words have the sages condensed the wisdom of their teaching—in which Li, which is the ultimate law of right action; in Chu, which is the golden rule of tolerance and charity; in Chuntz, which is good manners.

Therefore it is clear that shining merit is in the number Three, and that the third is blessed by the gods. Observe, then, the number Three. Read it. Meditate on it.

Thus it says in the book of Lieh-Tzu, in the chapter of the Yellow Emperor.

Then came the paragraph itself, a short quotation from the above-mentioned book of Lieh-Tzu:

When forms shall move, it be that though burned to cinders, to oblivion of death, the shadow still shall remain foreign to oblivion. Can a sound save life?

The first thing which struck me as odd was the fact that this confession, though written to a Buddhist priest, spoke so freely of the other two religions of China. There was also no reason why Yuan Kee should speak at length about the number Three since, contrary to the superstitions of nearly all the other faiths, the prosaic Chinese attach no special significance, either good or bad, to any of the numerals. But the strangest thing of all was the quotation from the book of Lieh-Tzu, a mystic and heretic, whose very name would be anathema to an orthodox Buddhist priest.

To make a long story short, after trying half a dozen ways of reading the cryptic message, I took the writer's advice, and "meditated on number Three." Reading every third word of the quotation, I got the following result:

Shall be burned to death, still foreign can save.

Now, so it happens that in the Chinese script the same ideograph stands for both "foreign" and "foreigner." Therefore the message was most decidedly meant for me.

The second paragraph was preceded by the following introduction written in red ink:

Beside the merit of the mystic number Three, there is also merit in the words of the blessed Lord Gautama Buddha.

Once, O learned priest, thou and I spent the month of the plum-blossoms in the Such-zen Monastery.

In that monastery a Mi-Lei-Fo faces the outer door, dost thou remember? And dost thou remember the Sanskrit words graven on the pedestal? Aneka jati sansarm. Those were the words, meaning in our language: "Many are the births I have passed through."

Dost thou remember how thou didst explain to me the miracles of the Lord Buddha?

Listen. For I remember.

Came the paragraph itself:

There is one miracle. It is the flame. Everything is in flames. By what fire is it kindled? By the fire of desire, the fire of infatuation, pain, lamentation, sorrow, grief, despair.

Let, then, this flame be quenched. For there is still a second miracle, though often forgotten.

It is the miracle of water, the miracle of forgiveness and mercy and compassion.

For water kills the flame, if directed by an unerring hand. And great will be the reward.

For it is said that he who forgives and helps an enemy, be his sins as black as night, will receive as a reward the giving of many things, the telling of valuable secrets, the warning against other enemies.

Meditate on this, O holy one!

I didn't have to meditate very long. The meaning, though couched in religious and metaphorical terms, was quite clear. I was simply promised as a reward for "the quenching of flames," a "giving away of secrets," and a "warning against other enemies."

Beautifully simple and beautifully to the point.
And the next paragraph elaborated on it.

The introduction was as follows:

Thus the words of the Lord Buddha:

Through the eternity of countless existence
I have performed in sorrow my pilgrimage,
Not discovering the Builder whom I seek.
Now, Artificer, Thou art found.
Thou shalt not build me another house.
My rafters are broken,
My roof-timbers scattered;
My mind is detached.
I have attained to the non-existence of desire.

Then came the paragraph itself:

Thus it is with me, blessed abbot of Such-zen. For my life is ended. I shall never build me another house. For I have been a traitor. I am an outcast from my own land. If I should live, every hand would be against me. If I should live, I would have to seek a refuge in the house of the foreigner. My rafters are broken, my roof-timbers are scattered, my honor is gone, my mind is detached.

I shall die, and, dying, bless the Brahman priests who will give me the death of flames.

This wasn't even metaphorical. It was a simple statement that the Manchu, for reasons of his own, declared himself guilty of treachery—which he was not. Otherwise it was a statement of facts.

For it was certain that, even if he could be saved, he would ever after be an outcast in Asia, with everybody's hand against him. The Brah-

mans would see to that. Therefore, *nolens volens*, he would have to be loyal to me—*provided I could save him*.

The final paragraph bore as a short, formal introduction the few words which are said to contain in themselves the essence of Northern Buddhism:

Consider, blessed priest, the Dew on the Lotus Flower!

Then came the paragraph itself:

Think, learned abbot, of the day when returning from a feast given by the women and the little children to Kwang-yin, the goddess of mercy and motherhood, we stopped to pray at the famed monastery of Shao-lin in the province of Honan.

Dost thou remember how together we looked at the second tablet; how we meditated on the Sakyamuni, the flaming aureole, and the sacred lotus flower?

Is, then, our faith, our birth, and our death even as the mystery of the Buddha's flame? Does the fire pass from the lotus flower up to the aureole above the Buddha's head?

Oh, the Dew on the Lotus Flower! To be quenched? To save? To acquire merit by helping the enemy? Merit and the giving away of secrets?

Meditate, priest, for to-morrow night I die!

Thus the message ended, and I was puzzled at the last paragraph. The final admonition was easy enough to interpret. It simply repeated the demand of the preceding paragraphs, asking me to save Yuan Kee from a death of flames, and

thus to "acquire merit and the giving away of secrets."

But I was bothered by the allusion to the famed Monastery of Shao-lin. Years ago I had been there. It is one of the sights of that part of China. I remembered vaguely the two painted and carved tablets which it contained, but I could not remember them in detail.

I talked the whole thing over with Mascasenhass, the Raja of Hyderpore, and Sir Hector Cave-Browne. Finally the admiral, who had been on the China station for years and who had taken a great interest in everything connected with the Middle Kingdom, bethought himself of his library. It contained many works of travel and reference. He looked through the shelves, and found M. de Broglie's book about the province of Honan, which gave pictures and descriptions of the Monastery of Shao-lin.

We got the following information:

In the monastery are two ancient stone tablets inscribed with pictorial statements of the triunity doctrine of the so-called San-chiao; the three doctrinal systems of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. The second tablet shows a representation of the three faiths side by side, in a symbolic

and conventionalized manner. The place of honor in the center is occupied by the Sakymuni Buddha; to the left is Lao-chin, the legendary founder of Taoism, and to his right is China's perfect sage, Kong-fu-tse. Sakyamuni's head is surrounded by an aureole from which issues an upward-pointing stream of fire, while beneath his feet are lotus blossoms bursting into bloom.

So far, so good. But what did Yuan Kee mean by his cryptic allusion? He was too shrewd a man to waste any words in useless, written babbling.

We guessed all sorts of things. But they were all fantastic, futile, useless.

Suddenly the young Raja rose with a shout of triumph.

"My word, I've got it! I told you that after I got over my fit of despair, back there in the Doorgha temple, I used my eyes and my ears. There are three statues in the temple. Get the parallel with the three holy blighters in this picture?"

He pointed at the colored plate at which we had been looking.

"But wait. There's more to it. The middle statue is Doorgha herself. Kali is to the left, and Shiva to the right. All clear so far, isn't it?"

And there's still another resemblance between the statue of Doorgha and that of the Sakya-muni Buddha." He laughed. "It's rather a bit of a practical joke—or so at least the Brahmans consider it. One of them explained it to me. He was sort of chaffing me. Trying to make my last days on earth easy, and all that sort of rot. He told me that I would be burned to death—and in a novel manner, by Jove!

"You see, the whole inside of Doorgha is nothing but a furnace, open at the top to let the smoke escape. Get that? Just like the flaming aureole of the Buddha. And those beasts of Brahmans proposed to jolly well put me in the tummy of the goddess and roast me to death, damn them! And, just like the Buddha, so does Doorgha stand on a pedestal of lotus flowers. And that's where they start the fire. Sort of stoke-hole, eh? The priest told me they used a special brand of wood—deodar-wood from Darjeeling-way, I believe; went to all sorts of trouble in importing it. And the blighter who lights the wood considers himself especially honored and blessed."

I decided at once that I would try to rescue the Manchu. He would be the most valuable ally in the hunting down and the disposing of the

branch organizations. He knew all their secrets, since he had been their creator and directing genius. And he would be a safe enough man to trust. For from now on, if I could save him, he would be, as he said, an outcast in his own country, and everybody's hand would be against him.

But how could I save him?

I thought of a thousand and one ways, but I dismissed them all as foolish and impossible. Force was out of the question. Even if I could persuade the admiral to march against the temple with a battalion of sailors and marines, the Brahmans would be sure to cut Yuan Kee's throat before we got there. Cunning was out of the question, too; and the element of time—hardly thirty-six hours—was all in favor of the Hindus.

There remained exactly one way. I had to trade on the superstitions of the Hindus. I, or one of my associates, had to get into the temple of Doorgha somehow—and *perform a miracle* there.

It was the only way.

Finally, after a lengthy discussion with the admiral, the ship's surgeon, and the chief engineer of the *Guerriere*, I did succeed in conceiving the germ of a miracle compared to which even the

many and wondrous miracles of Yama—of Shiva himself—would fade into pale and inane mediocrities.

There was a long search through the stores of the ship. Followed two hours of solid work, and then the chief engineer rose with a laugh.

"Here's your bloomin' miracle, Mr. Vandewater," he said. "All cocked and primed!"

We retired early that night. For the next day both Mascasenhas and I would need all our wits, every nerve in working order, every last ounce of pluck and presence of mind.

Mascasenhas left early in the morning. I said *au revoir* to him as he was stepping down the ladder. I felt for him. A half-caste he was, with the curse of the half-caste. But he had come up to the scratch without a whimper, without a word of protest. To-day was the final test of his loyalty and friendship.

Even at this distance a faint noise drifted over from the Hindu quarter. For it was the last day of the Doorgha-Puja. To-night the grim goddess would get her beastly fill of sacrifices—human blood, human agony, human torture.

"Nerves in working shape?" I inquired as the Goanese swung himself down the rope ladder.

"Yes, master. Have no fear. I shall do as we agreed uopn. Also have no fear for me. The Brahmans will believe me. How can they help themselves? I come to them voluntarily, out of my own free will. I say to them 'I am Mascasenhass. Once I was a servant of Doorgha. I turned traitor. Now I repent. I come to you, asking the price of atonement. Grant it. Let me help in the preparing of the sacrifices.'"

He stepped into the launch.

"Got the dope all right?" I asked.

He patted a heavy, oblong package which was swinging beneath his loose, white robe.

"Yes, master."

"All right. Take good care of yourself."

The little launch chugged away.

After lunch I gave myself over to the ministrations of the young Raja. I demurred a little at first. But he laughed.

"My word, old chap, I know how the trick is done. I am the ruler of a Hindu state. I know how the blighters dress. Also, once I had an affair with a little Brahman girl. Shobhani was her name. I used to visit her at night, dressed as a Brahman. I tell you she was—"

I interrupted his amorous recollections.

"All right. Go ahead."

He managed beautifully. He arranged my turban with the touch of a master. He trained my loose robe into the orthodox folds. He arched my eyebrows in the Brahman manner by plucking out with tweezers the fine hairs around them, and drew broad lines of antimony down my eyelids. He affixed the scarlet sectarian mark of Doorgha on my forehead.

Then he bowed before me.

"Ho, Brahman among Brahmans!" he cried in the Urdu. "Thou art a Thrice-Born indeed. Yama and Shiva and Indra shine in thy countenance. May Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, be kind to thee! May the low acts of Shudras always be far from thy footsteps! May not the shadow of a Mahar fall across thy razor-blade, polluting thee! Ho, Parohita! Ho, Sanyasi! May thou be as Shridat, the Gift of Fortune!"

CHAPTER XIX

Late that afternoon the launch of the *Guerriere* took me over to Macao.

I proceeded directly to the Hindu quarter, passing unnoticed in the throng.

The religious frenzy of the people had reached its zenith. On every street corner a priest was haranguing the crowd. Men would shriek out suddenly in an outburst of religious exaltation and hurl themselves to the ground, foam on their lips, inarticulate words coming from their mouths. Others cried bitterly, like hysterical women, without rhyme or reason. In still others, Punjaubis mostly and wild-eyed Mahrattas, the fighting spirit was aroused. They "saw red," as the saying goes, and yelled insults at each other.

"Ho, owl of owls, gray-minded and disreputable! Ho, ox of oxen! Ho, foreigner!"

"Withered be thy hands, basest of he-goats!"

Then a blow; often a vicious, up-cutting knife-thrust.

I made straight for the temple, unostentatiously losing myself in the large retinue of a Raja, come from far India for the festival, who was mounted on an Arab stallion with splendid trappings—a saddle with burnished, emerald-encrusted gold peaks before and behind, covered with sheepskin dyed scarlet, girthed over fine Kashmere saddle-bags, whose enormous seed-pearl tassels hung almost to the ground, and which were doubtless filled with jewels and gold for the priests of the temple.

A heavy, sickly-sweet scent of marigold and jasmine hung over the town like a pall.

The throng got steadily denser. I found progress very hard, and I was still a goodly distance from the temple when suddenly, from nowhere it seemed, a whisper started. It passed from mouth to mouth. It went through the crowd like wild-fire:

"Into the temple! Into the temple! The sacrifice is about to begin!"

Pushing, fighting, kicking, I pressed on; and finally I gained the entrance of the temple. It had taken me a good many minutes to get there, and the service was already in full swing.

At first I could see nothing. The crowd in front

of me was too dense. Only, wreathed in incense-smoke, I saw, far in the interior of the temple, the head of a gigantic statue of Doorgha, whose fiendish eyes seemed to look straight into mine with an expression of demoniac glee.

Nor could I hear distinctly. Only a confused noise, like the roaring of the sea on a rocky beach. But presently the sounds crystallized into the dull, droning voice of a priest, chanting a Mantra in honor of the gods. The words became clearer and clearer:

"—thou who holdest a sword in thy lotuslike hands; who art fearless; who art black as the clouds; who wearest earrings consisting of two dead bodies; whose form is terrible; who dwellest in burning ground and standest on the breast of thy husband, Shiva—"

The crowd took up the last word in a ghastly, swelling chorus:

"Shiva! Shiva! Shiva!"

And then, clearly from above the maddening symphony, came the high-pitched voice of a faith-crazed Punjaubi:

"Ho, Kali! Ho, Doorgha! Ho, Devi! Ho, Shiva, Shiva, Shiva! Help me! Help me, for I am dying—for I cannot cross the Vaitarami, the

dread stream of death, without thee! Help me over the horrors of the utter darkness Tamisra, across the sword-leaved forest of Usipatra Vana!"

His voice was drowned in a fresh chorus:

"Shiva! Shiva! Shiva!"

And then suddenly an utter breathless silence succeeded to the uproar.

By this time, using old football tactics, I had pushed my way up to the first row of the worshipers, so that I stood directly in front of the statue of Doorgha. The four-armed, three-eyed idol was painted and dressed with barbarous splendor. Around its body was a girdle of human skulls. One of its hands held a sword; the second, the blood-dripping head of a bearded man, while its other two hands were empty, and raised to bless the worshipers. Before the idol's feet lay the utensils of worship—dishes for the offerings, lamps, jugs, incense, copper cups, conches, gongs—and all of them smelled of blood.

There was a thumping of drums, a clash of cymbals, a shrilling of reed-pipes — and a troupe of nautch-girls swept to the center of the floor—bending, swaying, twisting—dancing before the goddess with horrible gestures.

Came again silence. The nautch-girls disap-

peared, and a priest stepped forth. His long, lank arms were smeared with ashes. On his forehead was the scarlet caste-mark of Doorgha.

He clapped his hands and a hundred torches were lit. The torch-bearers danced through the temple, lighting up the interior with many colors. Huge purple clouds and patches and lines of glaring, white mist shot through the smoke from the incense, coursing up the black ceiling, and discharging fantastic threads and balls of gold and crimson, of pink and ochre and blue.

There was another long-drawn, wailing chorus:

"Ho, Shiva Ho, Kali! Ho, Doorgha, Doorgha!"

Once more the priest raised his arms, and all was still. The whole temple lay breathless, as if under a spell; as if awaiting something terrible, incredible, nameless.

The priest bowed before the statue of Doorgha. His voice seemed to come from very far away. Only once in a while did I catch a word:

"—before thy feet, O goddess of dreadful form—who as a destructress—O malign image of destruction—"

And again, this time with a clear voice and facing the crowd:

"A sacrifice, brothers! A sacrifice to Doorgha, the Mother!"

Three times he bowed. Then another priest handed him a human skull half filled with burning embers. He blew upon them till they shot forth tongues of crimson light. He bowed again, and, like a herald, announced:

"The sacrifice!"

There was another wail of cymbals and tom-toms, and two priests came from behind the statue of Doorgha. Between them, his hands tied behind his back, but erect and slightly smiling, walked the blue-eyed Manchu.

At that moment I forgot my enmity, my bitter hatred of the man. I admired him. In a strange, inexplicable way I respected him. For he could not have recognized me in the throng. He could never have guessed that I had come to save him. His message which had come to me through the hands of the old Buddhist priest had only been the last desperate throw of a gambler.

Yet he marched there to his doom; to a death of flames, of unspeakable agony. But he marched erect. A smile on his thin lips.

The man was fearless, fearless!

The two priests and their captive stopped in front of Doorgha.

The torches were extinguished one by one. Momentarily there was stygian darkness. Then a huge, shaded lamp was lit, and swung in such a position that all of its light was directed upon the scene in front of the idol, while the walls, the ceiling, all the other parts of the room were bathed in purple shadow.

Once more the high-priest commenced his abominable hymn, lifting his ash-smeared arms in angular motions. The scarlet caste-mark on his forehead seemed alive.

"Hail, Mother, Hail! Three-eyed goddess of horrid form! Hail, malign image of destructiveness! May this sacrifice smell sweet in thy nostrils!"

The fervor of the Hindus seemed to swell and bloat. It became a living, existing, pulsing thing—an animal with a toothy, obscene maw; and I hated it; I wanted to take it by the throat and crush its life out.

Came silence, thick, palpable.

And suddenly, directly above the group in the center, a faint sound—a sound inaudible except

in such dead, clogging silence—told of a metal door being opened.

I looked. I gave a low shriek, quickly suppressed.

The body of the idol had opened like a furnace. The next moment the two priests had lifted the Manchu up and had pushed him through the door into the body of the Doorgha.

A sharp, metallic click—and the door was shut. The crowd shivered and moaned. Here and there a long-drawn wail of "Doorgha! Doorgha!" quivered in the air.

Then two more Brahmans appeared, carrying swinging incense-burners which poured out a thick cloud of dead-sweet smoke, like an impalpable cloud of evil—the soul of their bestial faith in scented, vapory form.

Another clash of cymbals and drums. Another droned chant from the lips of the high-priest, and, dressed in white, the brilliant sectarian mark of Doorgha on their foreheads, six Brahmans of high degree came from the left, walking with stiff dignity. Each carried a heavy log of deodar-wood on his shoulder.

Behind them, a flaming torch carried high in his hands, walked Mascasenhas.

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He acted superbly. He bowed before the high-priest, kissing the hem of his robe; and the priest smiled and blessed him with outstretched hands.

One of the Brahmans bent down before the goddess. There was a rasping and creaking of metal against metal. The priest rose. He had opened the lotus-flowered pedestal of the idol, the stoke-hole of which the Raja of Hyperdore had spoken to me.

One by one the priests pushed the deodar logs into the hole.

Again a wail of drums and cymbals and reed-pipes rose shrilly, menacingly, in ear-splitting waves of sound. Again the high-priest commenced his abominable Mantra in honor of the goddess.

Then he turned to Mascasenhass.

"Thy atonement, O brother, O servant of Doorgha!"

Quickly Mascasenhass stepped in front of the stoke-hole. With a muscular sweep he brought the torch down on the piled logs of wood and held it there.

The crowd was breathless. An unclean atmosphere of cruelty and lust swayed them as a vagabond wind sways a leaf on a high place.

They waited, spell-bound, for the accomplishment of the sacrifice.

But the deodar-wood did not catch fire!

Once, twice, three times Mascasenhass pushed the crimson-flaming torch into the pile of wood. He blew on it; he fanned it with his loose robe. But there was never an answering flame; never even as much as a flicker.

A spirit of uneasiness came over the priests and communicated itself to the worshipers.

The high-priest himself took the torch from Mascasenhass. He pushed it through the hole again and again—twisting it, turning it.

But there was no result.

The crowd moved forward in a solid phalanx. I was in the front rank, swept along, as I wanted to be.

"A sacrifice!" they demanded; and there was a threat in their high-pitched voices. "A sacrifice!"

Unceremoniously a huge Jat jumped up to the priest and tore the torch from his hands. He pushed it into the stoke-hole.

"Burn!" he shrieked. "Burn! By Shiva and Shiva!"

But the logs were as before—cold, gray. There was neither flame nor flicker.

I smiled to myself. I thought of the heavy package which Mascasenhass had carried beneath the flowing folds of his robe. I thought of the "miracle" which I had prepared, with the help of the admiral, the ship's surgeon, and the chief engineer. Sulphate of ammonia it was, mixed with boric acid and borate of soda, and guaranteed to make even sacred deodar logs non-inflammable.

Then I jumped up with a yell. Now or never, I said to myself.

I lifted my hands high above my head.

"A miracle!" I shouted. "A miracle, brothers! A miracle, by Kali and Devi!"

I swung myself up to the pedestal of the goddess. I kept my presence of mind. Quickly, even as I turned to face the crowd once more, I located the position of the metal door through which the priests had pushed the Manchu.

"Behold the miracle!" I shouted at the top of my voice. "Obey the command of the blessed gods!" I bethought myself of the words which, years ago, I had heard used by ash-smeared fakirs in the towns of India. 'Obey the commands of the many gods, the commands of the four-armed rev-

erence! For the spirits are against you—Alays and Gumas, Baitals and Yakshas!—Dahinis, Yoginis, and Sharkinis of dreadful forms! Bless the miracle of the gods! For Smashana Kali herself has spoken!”

I jumped down again and tore the torch from the hands of the Jat. I pushed it into the stoke-hole.

“See!” I yelled. “The gods refuse the sacrifice. It is a miracle!”

The crowd surged forward in a solid mass. They took up the shout in a mad refrain:

“A miracle! A miracle! A miracle!”

They swept about the statue of Doorgha. They pushed the priests to one side. A thousand hands snatched at the deodar logs to break off a piece, a splinter—a bit of the sacred wood as a memory of the incredible miracle which they had beheld.

Pandemonium was loose. I pushed my way through the crowd. With a well-directed kick I upset the lamp which was still swinging from the hands of a dazed priest.

Blackness fell over the temple.

I fought my way back to the statue of Doorgha, climbing over bodies of hysterical, yelling men and women. Once my foot ground into an up-

turned face, and I had a quick, sickening sensation; but I paid no attention to it.

I fought on, half feeling, half guesing my way. Suddenly my hand touched cold metal. The statue of Doorgha, I said to myself. I swung myself up to the pedestal with superhuman effort. I wrenched open the furnace doors. My hands trembled and groped. They touched a human form.

"Quick!" I said. "Quick! I'm Vandewater!"

I helped the Manchu out and away. Side by side we fought our way through the maddened crowd.

A few minutes later we were outside the temple. Mascasenhass was already there, waiting for us, with a smile on his honest face.

We made the water-front in record time. Once more the launch chugged her way to the Guerriere.

CHAPTER XX

The Manchu kept his word.

Name by name, detail by detail, town by town, he gave me the secrets of the organization which he had started and directed in Europe, Asia, and America. He had worked with marvelous efficiency. Like an iron net he had flung his intrigues all over the world. He had worked with threats and with bribery. Wherever articulate speech was spoken, there he had a branch committee; there was one in New York, one in Berlin, in Paris, in London, in Moscow, in Calcutta. There were others in the smaller towns.

Calmly, patiently, he dictated, and I wrote.

He dictated for over an hour. Then he rose.

"It is finished. You know. I have told you all," he said with a weary smile.

"And you, Yuan Kee, where do you want to go?"

"I am an outcast in my own land," he replied slowly. "Everybody's hand is against me. If I

should follow the winds of dawn to their misty home, yet they would follow me, they would track me, they would find and kill me. There is only one safe place for me."

"Where?"

"A prison," he replied. "Solitary confinement in an American or an English prison. You have friends in exalted stations. Take me there, my friend."

I was amazed. But I understood. The man was right.

"You mean it?" I inquired.

"Yes, I mean it."

He looked at me out of his strange, cutting blue eyes. He raised both hands to his forehead with a nervous gesture, momentarily hiding from view the long, black que which he wore twisted around his head.

And suddenly his face assumed a different character.

I looked at him intently. A Manchu, I said to myself; a Manchu with blue eyes! But *was* he a Manchu?

For several seconds I stared at him.

Then a half-forgotten tale came to me—of a name great in England, a famous—

I rose with a shout of surprise.

"You—you are—"

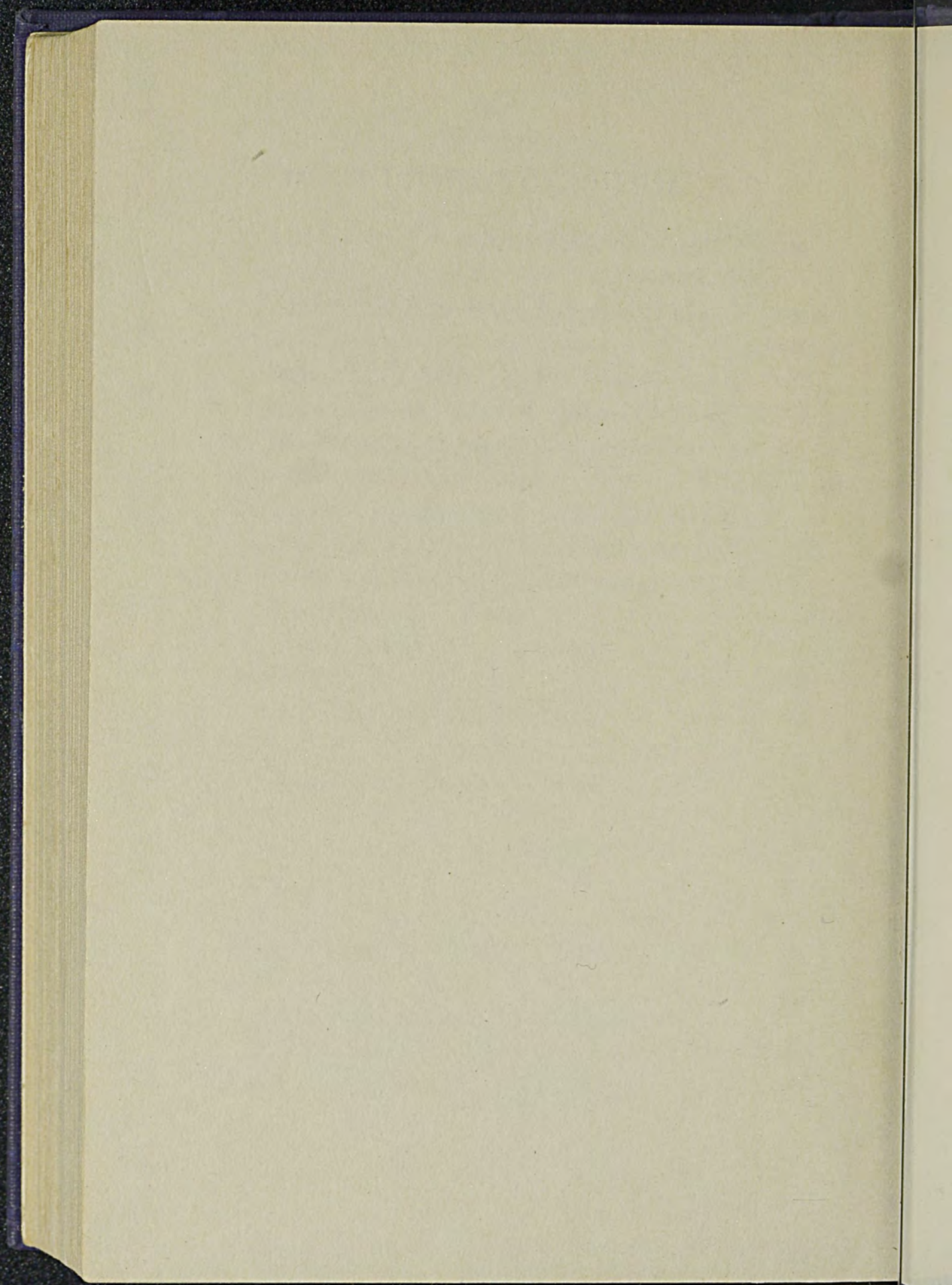
His blue eyes flashed fire, interrupting me imperiously.

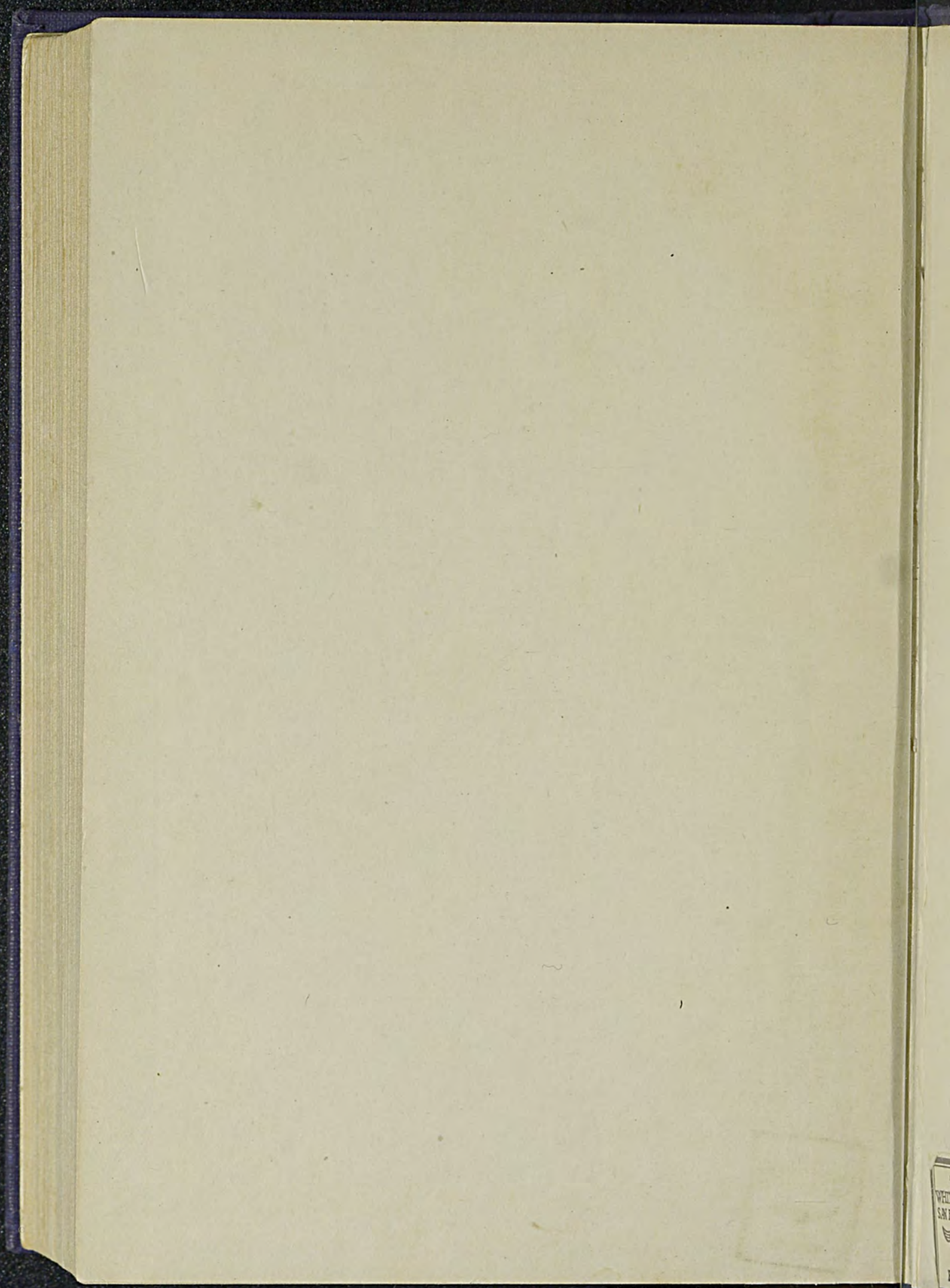
"Sh!" he said slowly. "I am Yuan Kee." His voice was low and steady. "I am the man who lost an empire—an empire," he repeated, and then was silent.

He slid a little fan from his voluminous sleeves.

For several dragging seconds he fanned himself slowly, rhythmically. Then he shut the silk-finality.

THE END







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