

PANDORA  
LA CROIX  
GENE WRIGHT





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PANDORA LA CROIX



# PANDORA LA CROIX

A NOVEL

BY  
GENE WRIGHT ✓



PHILADELPHIA & LONDON  
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1924

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For Nell Craig

DEDICATED TO  
NELL CRAIG  
MY GENTLEST CRITIC



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## PART ONE

*Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth  
didst make,  
And en'n with Paradise devise the  
Snake:  
For all the sin wherewith the  
Face of Man  
Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness  
give—and take!*

OMAR KHAYYAM



# PANDORA LA CROIX

## CHAPTER I

### THE NAIAD AND THE SATYR

LIKE a naiad Pan came out of the swirl of waters and perched upon the rock. Her one-piece slip of a dress reached just below her knees, clinging close to her and disclosing every lineament of her lithe and supple body. She perched there, shaking the water from her hair, and laughed gaily as a huge incoming wave shot its spray over her as if the amorous sea wished again to clutch her in its embrace. She bounded to her feet, and scampered off the rock and through the wild surf that seemed to enter into a merry game of tag, seeking to catch her before she could reach the rude bamboo shack that served as a studio for her father and a ludicrous apology for a home.

From earth and water, Vulcan, the crookbacked shaped a malignant scourge for men, giving it the lovely beauty of a maiden. In a prankish humor, mischievous Aphrodite, as a joke on humans, endowed this Thing of mud with a tricksey mind and shameless manners, the power over painful desire and for breaking hearts. She sent this Pandora forth to prey on virtue with an inextricable snare of golden chains and, like a tribute from the bottomless pit, a breath that distilled from a kiss a soul-quelling poison that made mankind submit its reason to her lure.

Many centuries later either a god-child and namesake, or one of the many incarnations of old Vulcan's vampire herself, was spewed up out of the coral-ribbed maw of a South Sea island. A dissolute French artist, absinthe sodden and drug enslaved, who had sought oblivion and lurid vistas in the South Seas, and a half-breed Marquesan woman were the progenitors of this half-naked sprite, mascot of a low café, whose amorous kisses were as commercial as the liquid poison that went over its bar. Rakehells, bullies of the port, fought for her even as Kipling's uncouth sailors pommelled and slashed at each other for the smiles of "Anne of Austria" the fickle light o' love of the water's side. This was Pan—Pandora La Croix.

When she entered the hut she saw her father sitting on a broken-down couch, his hair dishevelled, unshaven, hollow eyed, and sunken cheeked. His feet were bare, his trousers and smock a mass of filth. With his face twisting from one hideous contortion to another, he was muttering unintelligible sounds over a grain or two of cocaine that he was sifting on the back of a shaking hand. She was trying to imitate his grimaces when she caught sight of her mother, fat and bestial, like a huge billiken, half sitting, half sprawled on the floor, her head resting upon one end of the couch. She was fast asleep and snoring loudly, a myriad of flies crawling and leap-frogging over her face, with now and then an adventurous one that darted in or out of her gaping mouth. She had evidently been eating, for her face and fingers were bedaubed with *poi*, and



a half-famished cat, with its head buried in the depths of an earthen bowl that rested in her lap, was ravenously devouring the remains of the meal.

Pan's brows puckered into a perplexed frown. Her estimation of a woman's value was one of the flesh alone—beauty, soft, clinging arms, passionate dancing eyes that spat forth hell or heaven at will, a supple nerve-wracking body that quickened the senses of men into mad insatiate desire, changed human brutes into supplicating lovers, and amorous Lotharios into cursing furies as one aroused anticipation, seemingly consented and then, with an exultant laugh, was away like a flash to hide in the shadows of jasmine and coco palms. Was not that *all* that there was of joy in life for a girl! Had she not known this since she was ten years old. It was all—*all!* This and an hour's revel in the languorous waters of her beloved lagoon.

If this was so, why had this *cochon*, this sweating pig of a woman, so long encumbered her father's hut? She appraisingly regarded him. If he would comb his hair, cut his whiskers, and wash his face—" *hein zar* would be a dam' fin' feller, heem, mon pere!" There would be many girls, lithe limbed and full of fire, who would give that which had long since been burnt out of the gluttonous mountain of flesh she called her mother. Maybe the hut would be cleaned, too. It would no longer smell of sour *poi* and putrid fish. It would cease to be a litter of filthy things stewing under a sun-beaten sheet iron roof. It would be a place that she would *like* to come to. Her father would

have much fun. Now he had only his absinthe and “ze white powdair zat he stick in hees nose zat mak’ heem happy.” She saw to that—always. It was part compensation for her services in the dive of Tom, the Chinaman. There was seldom balance due, more often still a debt. The celestial saw to *that—always*, and Pierre La Croix, drinking and sniffing, daubing flaming crimson, yellows, and purples on unsaleable canvases, never questioned as to the means.

With a shrug of her shoulders her unsolvable problem was unceremoniously chucked into oblivion. She tiptoed to a little shelf, then half turned, and gave an apprehensive glance toward her father. He was still interested in his cocaine, and she slyly reached for a little image, a horned satyr—half man, half goat. Thorough pagan, she had always thought it a thing of life, a talisman of luck, a “little devil” whose everlasting smirking smile ever invited her whispered confidences and to whom she could brag of sinful conquests. The consuming desire to always have it with her as a protection against “bigger devils” had ever been vigorously tabooed by her father in extravagant Parisian profanity. Did she not know that it was a work of art—a *masterpiece*—and did a worthless *fille* like her know anything about art? Did she not know that it was a sacrilege for her even to look at it? Was it not all that he had saved when his villainous creditors had seized his beautiful château, all that he had to remind him of his dear Paris, of the time when he had not been the father of such a little fool? To all of

which she had bobbed her head and patiently waited. Now her chance had come, but scarce was it in her hand when a fellow thing of clay, a bust of Voltaire, came crashing to the floor. She sprang from the shelf, switching the satyr within the folds of her dress, but the smash of old Voltaire had aroused her mother into action and Pan and the cat flashed through the door at the same instant that the half-emptied bowl of *poi* smashed and splattered against the door frame.

She came upon a group of hovels in a paradise of coco palms and pandanus. They were picturesque even in their dilapidation, some standing on stilts and wobbling creakingly back and forth in the merest breeze, others on the ground tipsily leaning each to the other as if seeking support against the next tornado completing the havoc of the last, and puffing them like straws across the narrow strip of beach and into the lagoon.

Clucking hens, goats, a sow with a litter of pigs edged mechanically out of her way. Half-starved dogs left off the savage gnawing of flea-infested rumps to growl a vicious warning, yet slinking cowardly back just out of reach of the girl who strode along so suspiciously unafraid. Chattering children, complexions black to lemon yellow, some with a mere rag of clothes, others as naked as the fish in the sea, came running helter skelter in a ferment of curiosity over the thing that she held in her hand. She held it up for their inspection.

“Zis ees a good little devil,” she told them. “An’

yo' know what heem say? Zat eet ees ver' nice to be bad, an' I believe heem, me."

Lazy males, the lords of the huts, who were smoking, gaming, or enjoying a siesta in the shade of a tree, caught sight of her and started to approach, but slunk back as the mothers came rushing out with angry remonstrances against the impudent invasion by this troublesome lure of their men. The children scampered into a half score of hiding places from which they peeked out like rabbits from their holes, while Pan danced tauntingly before the women.

"Yo' are jealous, yes?" she giggled in triumph.

"Poof! I laugh, me, I do! Yo' theenk I can't get 'em eef I am such a crazee fool? Huh! I jus' weegle my fingair so, an' so, an' so——" Her little finger snapped back and forth like a miniature piston. "I say, come peegie—peegie come wiz me—poof! Eet ees so ver' easy eet mak' me laugh!"

With a swish of her skirts she whirled about and danced along the beach, singing an exhortation to her satyr.

"Little devil, love of mine! Be ver' good to yo', Pan! Breeng me to zat Toni, an' mak' hees woman ver' mad, so I can laugh an' mak' me a face at her!"

She found him at his boat. He was mending a net and her eyes danced mischievously as she saw his frightened glance in the direction of his hut. To her it was a waggish adventure quite to her liking, but for him *quite* another thing. Toni was big, broad chested, muscular of leg and loin, and quite the strutting peacock

among the island's dark-eyed houris, but a sorry rooster on his own dunghill, for his woman was keen of eye and had a tongue as sharp and deadly as a razor blade. The café, or a spot where only the moon laughed over them, where there was no sound but the swish of the sea, the call of a night bird, or the clicking claws of a marauding cocoanut crab, was quite *the* acceptable locale for a tête-à-tête with Pan, *but* to have her visit him in the close vicinity of his own vine and fig tree was too much of a temptation of Providence for even the hair-brained Toni.

Pan sat down beside him, and cuddled close. "Yo' ees ver' glad zat I am here, eh, my Toni?" she cooed.

He did not look up but edged away from her, bending his head over his work, and a low mutter of unintelligible sounds was all that she got in reply. With a little slide, her head again rested on his shoulder. She sighed in deep contentment—little ecstatic "ah's" and "oh's"—and covertly watched him as he vainly endeavored to draw up and tie a broken cord in the net.

"Eet ees ver' nice zat yo' are so glad!" she exclaimed with a little giggle of delight.

His only reply was an incoherent grunt, another edging away, and another recovery of distance upon her part.

Then all her power of alluring coquetry came into play. She arranged her dress so that no contour of her desire-tickling body would lose an iota of its tantalizing attraction; and shapely leg and arm were so disposed as to contribute their full share to the artistic

ensemble. She made each move deliberately, carefully noted the effect, and nodded her head in critical approval. With each move she looked at him with a demure expression, yet stifling with difficulty her wild desire to shriek with laughter.

“Look at me!” she commanded.

He sensed her waggish scheme to cause a family war, and knew that the slightest remonstrance would precipitate the catastrophe. His face was deluged with sweat. His tongue completely lacked its usual power to wag, and he could feel little Arctic chills playing snap the whip from one end of his spine to the other.

“Toni, yo’ *mus’* look at me!”

This time her tone was peremptory. He groaned, inwardly praying to every god of his pagan island to deliver him from the girl who was bedeviling him. But the gods don’t answer prayers on short notice, so there was nothing else to do but to look. He did so, furtively, rolling his eyes desperately toward the spot from which he expected, each awful second, the jezebel of his bosom to burst forth.

“Some other time, some other place, mebbe I see you,” he sputtered. “I am busy an’——”

“*Oui! Oui!* Yo’ are bizee wiz me!” she retorted. “’Nother time, ’nother place eet ees not necessaire! Zis ees a fin’ place! Zis ees ze bes’ time! An’ *now* yo’ *mus’* kees me!”

She tilted her head back and pursed her lips.

“No, no! Pleas’, pleas’, my Pan!” he stuttered, almost hysterically.

“I yell, by dam’ I will!” she raised her voice shrilly.

In a great terror he made a quick peck at her lips and, with her head wagging disgustedly from side to side, she contemplated him in perky indignation.

“Yo’ theenk yo’ are a chicken, an’ me I am jus’ a bug zat you ketch!” she angrily exclaimed. “Kees me more long zan zat!”

Before he could prevent it her arms were around his neck, and her lips glued tight to his. He snivelled in his misery, the tears, streaking down, mingled with the sweat, and coursed over the end of his nose like an old-fashioned water spout.

Then came the tornado, ushered in by a feminine shriek with the reverberation of an Indian war-whoop. Both scrambled to their feet, and Pan, leaning against the gunwale of the boat, burst into a peal of joyous laughter, frantically kissing her “little devil” for giving her her wish. Toni’s woman *was* mad. Screaming the most obscene invectives at her lord and master, she opened up hostilities by hurling a heavy earthen bowl that but missed his head by the breadth of a hair. Like Adam of old who proclaimed the woman the tempter, he outstretched his arms with the tearful declaration: “My Mimi, she try to steal your Toni!”

But Mimi wasn’t to be conciliated, nor could he divert her plan of attack to Pan. He was to be attended to first, and the job was to be a *thorough* one. She darted at him like a wild cat with claws extended, while he dodged and circled around her with a continuous flow of hysterical appeals. Then some old Pagan god played a joke on him, or perhaps it was Pan’s

“little devil,” for his feet became entangled in the net and he sprawled into it head first. He rolled over and over in a desperate attempt to get on his feet, and only succeeded in enmeshing himself the more. The stout cords held him with the tenacity of a devil-fish, and so completely enveloped him that he quite resembled a bale for shipment that only required the tag.

With a yell of triumph, Mimi seized a stick of driftwood and leapt at him, bringing it down with furious whacks upon any part of his anatomy that might be uppermost for the moment. He wiggled, cursed, and begged alternately, as he frantically tore at the net, she madly dancing around him, her stick fairly whistling as it cut through the air. Finally he succeeded in tearing away the mesh that seemed to have supernatural consciousness as an ally of his better half. Wildly leaping away, he cleared the boat at a bound and ran, slipping and stumbling over the rocks, nor did he stop until he had reached old Tahiti Tom's place at the further end of the beach.

“Me, I theenk zis fat ol' Mimi, she jus' bus' wiz love for her Toni!” Pan solemnly informed her “little devil.”

The frenzied woman turned upon her with the furious epithet, “You spawn of a shark!”

But the words were scarce out of her mouth before Pan had dropped her satyr near the boat and sprang upon her. Neither heeded the steep bank and Pan's assault carried them down, rolling and tumbling, pommelling and clawing, until they landed into the lagoon



with a splash. Here the fight continued, the antagonists now in view, now out of sight, the water heaving and foaming as if two pugnacious fish were having a battle to the death. A crowd of men, women, and children, who had been attracted to the spot and egged on the contestants from the beginning, watched proceedings breathlessly. When Pan came triumphantly out of the water, they drew back out of her way. She gave two or three threatening little jumps towards them and laughed gleefully as they fell over each other in a wild scramble for safety. Then she picked up her satyr.

“Yo’ an’ me, we have ze gran’ time!” she exclaimed with a joyous laugh.

Singing and dancing, she disappeared over the rocks just as Mimi, clothes in tatters, and puffing and blowing, pulled herself painfully out of the water.

## CHAPTER II

### G'RILLA

TAHITI TOM was a Chinaman, old and wrinkled, his place a hell of iniquity, his patrons the scum of the earth. A large "L"-shaped room, its walls and ceiling of rough boards festooned with the cobwebs of many years, with a scattering of rudely constructed tables, benches and chairs, and a makeshift bar filled with demijohns, jugs and kegs of every high-powered liquid under the sun, was the principal part of the establishment. Off the smaller part of the "L" was a room with several bunks and stalls, which served as the sleeping quarters of the "hotel" and for such other uses as even the unmoral island relegated to privacy. A third room, a mere cubby, contained an altar with its squatting joss before which was the ever smoking, stinking incense, and before whom Tom confessed his sins, piously praying for celestial blessings while acting as His Satanic Majesty's ambassador plenipotentiary to the island in the commercial part of his abominable rookery.

A Magyar, super-ugly specimen of ferocious cut-throat, whose fangs, ever grinning, simian like, disguised the fact that his chest was the tomb of the heart of a toad, slid the liquor across the bar to a duo of frowsy barmaids, one of whom boasted of direct lineage to old French nobility, and a string of lovers that began with a spend-thrift prince and finished with

the before-mentioned Magyar—an amour of an Alexandria brothel. The other, who aped the manners of a duchess, proclaimed herself a former lady in waiting of a Balkan court. Her “sensuous beauty” had fired the blood of an amorous and senile old king and he had installed her in a palatial château in the Pyrenees with five times as many servants as the old reprobate allowed his own queen. She was very reticent as to just why fate had ultimately shot her into the cook’s galley of a bug-ridden copra schooner, and from there to the position of barmaid and mistress of the wrinkled old Chinaman. Both women were monumental liars, but even degradation of the nth degree is entitled to its romance, entitled to cover the sordid smudge of a “what was” with beautiful colors, even as untempted Chastity builds its castles of air, its “what will be’s” that a draught from the Inferno may blow into Nothingness.

Tahiti Tom’s was always filled with a boisterous horde who, in a flood of ribald billingsgate, argued and caroused in the reek of tobacco smoke and rum. Bloody brawls were a common occurrence, murder a diversion that came with the mere passing of the lie or a foul epithet spat through the teeth of some rum-crazed ruffian. Life was cheap, frightfully cheap, and Death but a dancing clown who amused the rabble. There were coast-runners and traders—keen wizards of bartering—just back from long cruises among the ten thousand islands that dot the southern seas. These conscienceless Blackbeards, rakehells all, with disease

and death ever following in the wake of their hulks, spun wild yarns of beastly revels among barbarians, of the looting of villages, of stolen native girls that had been sported for a day or so, and then chucked over the schooner's side to silence their ceaseless whine. Groups of lithe fishers of shell, smelling like rotten fish, bragged of impossible battles underseas with the tiger fish or the eight armed demon lurking in the murk of a coral cave.

Beachcombers, derelicts of civilization, troublesome outcasts doomed to perpetual exile by families of noble blood, drowned their everlasting loneliness in rotgut, their remittances from home ever and always disappearing into the capacious maw of old Tom's treasure chest. There were shifty-eyed fugitives from justice, petty thieves to murderers, slum gunmen to aristocrats, who disappeared into the undergrowth like frightened hares at every appearance of a steamer in the harbor, and did not return until the last whiff of smoke from the steamer's stack had wafted away in the air of the distant horizon.

Here and there a group of pearlers told of fabulous beds that yielded a priceless gem to every hundred shell, and cursed long and loudly over the superstition of native divers that stubbornly refused to enter the water until a brace of half-gutted sharks had been loosened so that other man-eaters, taking wisdom from the fate of their kind, would switch tails and clear out to less dangerous hunting grounds.

A dozen painted women, dowdy bawds, mingled

with the men, patiently waiting—watching vulture like—until the drunkenness of the male brought blindness to the lack of feminine charm—rouge-plastered slatterns who blasphemed their Creator at every other breath, and scraped into the muck of their mother tongue for foul quips, or a phrase suitably filthy to point a salacious story. There was music, too, at times; a wheezy accordion and the clink-clank of a banjo measured off the time whenever any of Tom's clientele were sober enough to stagger through a dance, or tongues were of sufficient looseness to wiggle through the verses of an obscene song.

The door opened, and a huge bulk of a man lurched in with the waddling gait of one who had spent a lifetime of hurricanes on the rocking deck of a wind-jammer. His arrival caused a low murmur among the groups at the tables, some that were cursing protests against a nuisance, some that were exclamations of dismay as if an arch-enemy had popped into view. There were lusty greetings, obsequious fawning, while here and there one cringed down in his chair and bent low over his table as if fearful that the roving glance of the newcomer's pig eyes would light upon him. One or two slunk stealthily into the smaller part of the "L" and out through the door, never drawing a full breath until it had closed behind them.

"Hell'll be a poppin' now that G'rilla Bagsley's in port!" a little trader whispered to the "Duchess" who was serving him.

“What’s th’ odds,” she laughed in reply, “s’long’s he leaves his coin here?”

The nickname of “G’rilla” fitted him well. He liked it, answered to it, was proud of it. It was recognition of his brute strength, of a ferocity that instilled fear into the heart of man. He loved to make men afraid, to batter them down, to gloat over the snap of bone, and needed only the flimsiest excuse—ofttimes none at all. His flailing arms and huge hands, with muscles that were hair embedded and squirmed over each other like knotted snakes, reached even below his knees. His head, the shape of a bullet, a forehead that receded from the bulge of his brows, a negroid nose with twitching nostrils that seemed to be forever scenting something to prey upon, ears that were cauliflowered symbols of a hundred fistic encounters, and a hideous scar, a purple rut that zigzagged from between his eyes and across nose and cheek until it was lost in the stubby growth of hair that covered his jaws and bulging chin, surely entitled him to the cognomen even if it did grossly libel the monarch of apedom.

He lumbered across the room, growling a coarse greeting here and there. With an unprintable epithet that at the same time dubbed her “beautiful,” he seized the lady of “French nobility” around the waist and swung her clear of the floor, the tray of glasses that she was carrying crashing and splattering in all directions. Holding her tightly clasped in his arms he rained loud smacks upon her lips. To further amuse himself he scrouged his beard back and forth in the

hollow of her neck while she squealed angry protests and vainly struggled to free herself. This sent the rabble off into gales of laughter, which was quite as much to flatter the bully as an evidence of their appreciation of the humor of the thing. Even the Magyar laughed, for his code was an easy one when men played Lothario with his woman, especially men with money in their pockets. Finally G'rilla released the girl, plumping her down upon one end of the bar with a force that made her grunt, prefixing her tearful whine that she had bitten her tongue.

He crossed to a table, joining two men who had evidently been expecting him. The greetings were mere growls and, as a prelude to conversation, a bottle of rum was shoved towards him. He filled a tumbler to the brim and tossed it off at a gulp, then picked up a pack of greasy cards from the table and started to shuffle them mechanically, with an angry rumble that seemed to well up from the depths of his chest. Finally his mouth twitched into an evil sneer.

“Passed the *Lark* at Rikeuru,” he growled with an oath.

The men leaned forward expectantly.

“Passed *it!*” one of the men exclaimed. “Didn't *you* make Rikeuru?”

“What'n hell was th' use?” he angrily retorted, “the Sphinx was there, dam' 'im! With that bastard in th' offin' a blarsted Kanaka 'll look yer goods over as if they wasn't worth a busted rivet in th' door o' hell; jus' grin like a dam' sissy cat. ' Me wait for Cap'n

Clay,' he'll say, an' toddle back t' 'is 'ut like a bloomin' king! Don't yuh know that, yuh swabs?"

He gripped the bottle of rum, and half its contents disappeared down his throat. He choked and sputtered, and gave his mouth a perfunctory wipe with his hairy paw.

"Look't ther deal I got up in the Paumotus!" he went on. "Old chief Tipo had a heapin' half pint o' pearls, one on 'em, shape o' a pear, what'ud fetch ten thousand rhinos out o' a bloomin' idol, let alone a Jew. *Me* jes achin' ter get 'em in me fist! *Me* with me goods spread out an' a playin' an alarm clock as a big offer, an' every bloomin' Kanaka just goin' loco a listenin' ter th' thing tick! Mebbe thought 'twas a god that was canned up like sardines fer all I know! I had ter swing a club ter keep 'em from bustin' th' thing wide open. Curious as hell they wuz! Old false face wuz jus' a goin' ter hand over th' pearls, an I'm a seein' m'self a walkin' down Piccadilly with me belly stickin' out like a bloomin' alderman, when in walks th' Sphinx a totin' a phonygraph. Sets th' dam' thing a goin', too, blarst 'im! Sounded like forty cats with their tails tied together, clawin' an' spittin' at the bottom o' a barrel. Th' Sphinx tells 'em it's th' god o' happiness what has breathed his breath in th' box! *Some* liar, but by cripes they *believed* 'im! They git a strangle hold on one tother, an' start a dancin' like a herd o' highsterical kangaroos, an' th' Sphinx jus' a chunk o' stone, never crackin' a smile, jus' damn sure o' himself, the hellion! Did I *kick*? I'll say I *did*! Did it git *results*? I'll



say it *did!* Th' old cannibal jus' slammed me on' th' bean with th' clock. It never made 'nother tick, quit dead! Seein' there wuz no chance o' trade, I mooseyed along toward th' beach, kinder fast like—jus' about two jumps ahead o' th' first forty of 'em! By gawd, that can o' jazz seemed t' make 'em hanker fer meat! I could smell m' self cookin'!"

The last of the rum went the way of the first, and he hurled the bottle at the head of the inattentive Magyar with a stentorian roar for another to take its place. The Magyar ducked under the bar as the bottle shot over his head and cascaded into fragments among the demijohns and kegs. He instantly bobbed up again with the rebound of a rubber ball, bringing with him another of G'rilla's favorite brand, which he slid across the bar to the waiting "duchess." It was efficiency with a capital "E," a mingling of expert service with safety first on the split second—a stunt that betokened long experience in dodging missiles during many riotous moments in old Tom's dive.

As the "duchess" served him, the G'rilla cursed her roundly for being a "bloomin' snail," adding a snarl of epithets that were hideously unclean and reeking with beastly criticism of her womanhood. Her flippant retort, an insult in kind, brought a vicious slap with the back of his hand that drove her backwards, screaming, against the bar, with blood on her lips and the mark of a huge paw reaching from chin to ear like a purple brand.

There were murmurs of protests at the other tables,

but no one seemed particularly anxious to avenge the girl, neither the Magyar, nor Tahiti Tom, who, ever fearing a bloody brawl, chattered a shrill reprimand for her daring to wag her silly tongue at such an "exalted prince of a customer as the honorable G'rilla." As for Bagsley, he ignored the Chinaman's abject apology, and defiantly glared around, challenging, his jaws thrust forward, and his slit of a mouth distorted into a malignant grin.

The orchestra started up with a screeching whine and several couples began to dance inside the square of tables. In one corner, a quartette of sailors broke out in song. They were Italians, their song a rollicking chanty of the Bay of Naples, of seamen outward bound in the red glare of old Vesuvius. It was a bedlam of noise, a saturnalia of wheezy instruments, the thump of prancing feet, the boisterous gutturals of the singers in a prankish desire to drown out the accordion and banjo and throw the dancers out of step. There was no resentment, just gales of laughter while making desperate efforts to measure awkward hops first to one tune and then another, with an occasional feminine shriek as some clumsy man made a pedestrian tour over the toe of a woman's shoe.

The G'rilla and his companions had now quieted down, and their conversation was so low that it reached the cocked ears of those at the neighboring tables in a mere rumble of sound. At intervals they caught the word "Sphinx" linked with a profane adjective.

Ways and means of reprisal were being discussed, the chance of linking profit—the looting of treasure—with a merciless and bloody squaring of accounts with this man of mystery, this marvel of silence in a world of blatant and talkative men.

They called him the “Sphinx” because of his taciturnity, his reticence concerning his past, and partly for his methods at a poker table when stakes were high, his competitors in an inferno of suppressed emotions, and he—a man of stone. He had left vivid memories in every port in the South Seas, memories that were romance emblazoned, and passed from mouth to mouth on many a turbid waterfront. There were tales of indomitable pluck; of gangs of poachers faced single handed and driven from his pearl beds in ignominious and bloody retreat; of a fierce descent upon a village of cannibals to drag from their cooking pits a member of his Kanaka crew, leaving them with enough of *their own meat* to furnish them with a year of banquets; of his headlong dive into the lagoon at Mao to rescue his Chinese cook from a school of sharks. They were wild, weird tales that popped the eyes of natives, and brought fulsome awe to the rogues of the sea although they muttered blasphemous disbelief. Some called him a pearl pirate—a “killer,” some men whispered. They watched his fleet, little schooner, the *Lark*, as she cut through the phosphorescent water of the lagoon and finally disappeared beyond the horizon, and wagged their heads sagely over the object of her cruise. Per-

haps months later they would knit their brows and mutter wild conjectures as the vessel would quietly slip into her berth, and its owner again take up his abode in the low rambling structure on his island plantation. This was the object of G'rilla's anathema—John Clay, a bronze giant of thirty-five, or fifty if the deep furrows of his face and the gray sprinkled so plentifully through his hair were to be considered a standard of age.

## CHAPTER III

### ENTER THE SPHINX

TONI, quite the wreck of his usual devil-may-care self, was drinking with a couple of his cronies at one of the tables. He was very busy trying to explain the why and wherefore of a huge red lump that stuck out on one side of his forehead like the stub of a horn. He was sore, was Toni; aches and pains were shooting through his body from a score of black and swollen bruises, and every one of his muscles was sending forth stinging protests against his slightest movement. But his friends were curious, and his reputation as an unconquerable cock of the walk must be preserved at all costs. So he, stifling his groans, found one pain-free spot upon his body that he could sit upon and launched into a vivid narrative of an adventure that held his audience agreeably spellbound; their gasps of astonishment encouraging him to even more astounding Munchausenian flights of fancy. He lied so glibly and told it so convincingly that before he was half through he believed it himself.

It was a tale of a ferocious devil-man, nine feet tall and four times as big as Toni. His eyes were of fire and he blew clouds of smoke through his nostrils as a sort of smoke screen to disguise his movements. This devil-man had cast covetous eyes on Toni's beautiful Mimi, and had come down from the hills to carry her

off. Many times he had danced around her, making weird signs and muttering the most blood-curdling incantations, hopping up and down so fast that it made her dizzy watching him. She was getting weaker and weaker, and was just about to be dragged away when he, Toni, appeared on the scene *much* to the devil-man's surprise.

"An yo' no skairt mos' to def?" one of the two breathlessly asked.

Toni waved a disdainful hand back and forth, his expression one of petrified amazement that such a thing could be imagined for a single moment.

"Skairt? *Me?* Huh! I say to my Mimi, go in the house an' I—I will fix this feller. But Mimi, she is 'fraid! Oh, you should know that woman! She is *so gentle!* She *never* wan' to see somebody hurt for she has one *big* heart! She shiver! Her tooths go click—click—click! She say 'my Toni you are a ver' strong mans. You have the big muscle! Mebbe you will kill this devil-man an' that will be ver' bad!' I say no, I will jus' bus' him up a little! She say 'ver' well, Toni, jus' a little bit then!' So I hit my fist with hees nose. It is all squish'! I hit hees mout's an' he squeal like a pig! He say, 'I mus' go see a feller!' I say, 'there is more that is not finish,' an' I roll him up in my net. Ho, ho! you should see him! Even my Mimi she laugh! I get me a club. It is a big one! I whack that devil-man twenty, mebbe ten times, anyhow a plenty. You should see the funny places where I hit that feller. I bet you he is sore

some place! Bimeby he say 'pleas', pleas', *nice* Toni, it is only a little joke that I make you! Pleas' be so kin' as to let me go; I will be a ver' good devil-man sure!' An' *then*, what you t'ink——?"

He stopped suddenly, for he noted that there was a switch in the attention of his auditors. They were looking past him, so he turned in his chair. With head thrown back, and arms akimbo, her nose uptilted and her mouth drawn into a withering sneer, Pan was scornfully regarding him. *But*, however inopportune her appearance might have been, Toni never batted an eye, nor did the red of embarrassment show through his skin, nor did he stutter or stammer in his effort to relieve the situation. Not he! Not the unconquerable Toni!

"'Ello, 'ello!" he brazenly greeted her. "I am jus' tol' my frien' why I have not the happiness—'cause the lofely Pan she is not here!"

He reached for a chair that she might sit with them, but she contemptuously refused it.

"Your Mimi, she was ver' dirtee, an' now, by golly, she is wash'!" she declared triumphantly.

With a wagging of head, a shrugging of shoulders, and a waving of hands and arms, he sputtered a volley of excuses. He would not have left her with "that Mimi" if he had not had to see a "feller" on business. Then he had met his two friends who had invited him to have a drink and he had to be polite. That very moment he had been on the point of starting back,

with the intention of showing "that" woman that he was the boss.

"My Mimi? Pooh, pooh! She is one dam' ol' louse!" he declared, "but you—you, my Pan, you are a boo-tee-ful sunfish, an' I lofe you!"

She seemed to melt at once. Her face was suffused with smiles; her eyes dancing with delight. Her hand gently patted and smoothed his hair as she crooned, "My Toni! My beeg, boo-tee-ful Toni!"

He sighed, soulfully, inwardly complimenting himself on being such a devil with the women. He managed to dart a triumphant glance toward his cronies with an almost imperceptible lifting of his eyes by which he tried to inform them that no one could really blame the girl. But one avowal was not enough for Pan. She wanted another.

"Yo' are ver' sure zat yo' love me, my Toni? Yo' ees not lie, ees yo'?"

"My heart she bus' for you!" he fervently assured her. "When I see you, my Pan, I am tickle' from my foots to my hair! When I kees you my lips go crinkle, crinkle with the tickle! By golly, I am tickle' now! An' *why* am I tickle'? You should ask me *that!*"

"An' yo' ees ver' sure?"

"Sure!"

Her jaws came together with a vicious snap, her sinewy little fingers twisted into the mat of his hair, and his head was jerked back until the bones almost cracked. She looked down into his eyes—her own



were blazing—and seizing his glass of liquor with her free hand, she raised it aloft with a gurgling laugh.

“ My lovair,” she drawled maliciously, “ I am teekle zat yo’ ees teekle! I give yo’ ze gran’ toas’! Here ees to yo’ ver’ good go-to-hell! ”, and swish, she dashed the contents of the glass full in his face.

He roared lustily, pawing the fiery aguardiente from his eyes, while she, catching the time of accordion and banjo, whirled away in a few steps of a sensuous native dance.

As she darted a triumphant glance backward at the discomfitted Toni, a coast trader seized her by the arm and drew her into a chair beside him. He had just raised an arm to beckon a barmaid to him when G’rilla Bagsley slouched across the room. Without a word he lifted the trader and chair a full five feet from the floor, and chucked him out of it as if he was dumping out the contents of a sugar scoop. Whatever unnameable selection the “ orchestra ” was playing ended in a discordant screech. Dancing stopped. The groups at the tables pushed forward, everyone eager to get a first row view of the expected scrap; but the trader scrambled to his feet, and only assuaged his injured feelings by a muttered flow of imprecations as he slunk away.

Paying no attention to him whatever, G’rilla put the chair down, and planted himself beside Pan. Punctuating each word upon the table top with a thumping forefinger, he growled out: “ When *I’m* here, me purty one, *there ain’t no others!* Savey? ”

She started up defiantly, and he as quickly seized her to draw her into his lap. They both came to their feet in the struggle, and the rabble again surged forward, eager for the new diversion. It was something less bloody perhaps than their recent disappointment might have been, but funnier, excruciatingly funnier, to see the frenzied efforts of this girl in a hopeless attempt to free herself from the grip of such a Goliath as G'rilla Bagsley. One waggishly counselled her to "hit him in the wind," another suggested "a stiff wallop under his chin," while a third called attention to the fact that "G'rilla was groggy and going fast." "G'rilla" was thoroughly enjoying himself. Despite her fighting with the ferocity of a wildcat, clawing, biting, kicking to free herself, he held her in a bear-like hug, fairly belching the unnameable things that he intended to do to her when she had worn herself into helpless submission.

With a sudden twist in his arms, she managed to get her knee into the pit of his stomach and, with it as a catapult, she tore herself loose, and hurtled him over against the table. As she whirled to dart away, he recovered his balance and sprang after her. Thoroughly frightened and cowering against the wall, she could almost feel his claws upon her. The door opened and John Clay stepped between them.

There was a moment of dead silence. Even "G'rilla" came to a sliding stop before he had covered half the distance to the terrified girl. He seemed rooted to the spot, his mouth agape at the abrupt appearance

of the very man who had been the subject of his execrations but a short time before. The rabble thrilled with expectancy. Intuition told them that he was there for action, that Chance had not written him into the play to have him sink his identity into one of the mob; he was a new character arriving at a crucial moment to drive this boisterous comedy into a whirlwind, heart throbbing, melodramatic climax.

The first one to break the tension of the situation was Tahiti Tom. "G'rilla's" affair with Pan had given him no uneasiness. It had amused his customers. It was purely entertainment. But now he sensed the inevitable battle. *That* would be expensive, for he knew only too well the destruction that always followed. He pushed his way toward Bagsley.

"Exalted one!" he chattered. "Pleas', oh pleas' do not raisem hell in the house of a poor toad!"

"G'rilla's" hand shot forward and, with hands spread claw-like over the Chinaman's face, he hurtled him backward into a huddled heap on the floor. Tom uttered a shrill cry as he scrambled to his feet and, sobbing and groaning, tore his way through the crowd in a wild dash for the little cubby where he threw himself before his joss in a frenzied jumble of supplications in slobbering Chinese.

"G'rilla," with a vicious snarl, waved Clay out of the way much as he would an insignificant weakling, but if he expected compliance he was doomed to disappointment. Clay remained immovable, as wordless and smileless as the stone image after which they had

nicknamed him. The bully sprang forward with a frightful volley of oaths. With one battering onslaught he intended to crush Clay to the floor, and complete with his boots the havoc of his hammering fists. Defeat never occurred to him. He was *G'rilla* Bagsley. The girl could wait. Later he would teach her her paces. Now had come the opportunity to make this silent one pay for beating him out of that half pint of pearls, and for many other tricks that he had played on the rogues of the sea. It would be a revenge so complete that it would never be forgotten in old French Oceania. Those of the ports that had found so many thrills in the lies that were told of this fourflushing man of stone would have the opportunity of being entertained by a crippled fool that he, "G'rilla" Bagsley, would send among them. He'd just tear the man out of him and let him live.

Pan screamed and covered her face with her hands as he struck the floor with the rebound of a rubber ball and his huge fist shot out. Simultaneously came a concerted yell of amazement, a pandemonium of cheers from the rabble as they wildly scrambled on to the tables and chairs to get a better view. Bagsley had measured his length on the floor with a crash that set old Tom off with renewed vehemence in his delirious appeal to his god, appeals that were mixed with shrill curses upon the "white devils" who were changing his perfectly "heavenly abode" into a shambles.

There was a yell of warning from Pan as "G'rilla" leaped to his feet with a knife in his hand. He lunged

toward Clay, the knife held for a deadly upward slash—a butcher's trick—but Clay's right hand clamped over his wrist and a quick wrench sent the knife spinning across the floor. Again Bagsley went down, one jaw crushed under the terrific impact of Clay's fist. Instantly, with a lightning whirl that for one of his bulk was unbelievable, using arms and legs for propulsion, he spun around upon his buttocks like a grotesque pinwheel. Clay leaped to one side in an effort to save himself, but, caught by one of "G'rilla's" thrashing legs, he, too, plunged to the floor.

"G'rilla" leaped to his feet with a bellow of triumph: He plunged forward with the intention of switching attack from fists to boots—murderous boots that had stamped and kicked the life out of many a luckless trader and Kanaka, sometimes with the ghost of a reason, sometimes as a mere mountebank seeking to amuse a crowd. But this time he met his Waterloo, for Clay had rolled away, and was again on his feet before "G'rilla's" boots had struck the spot where he had lain. Again his fist crashed into that broken jaw, and it was only by a superhuman effort that "G'rilla" kept his footing. Again he lunged forward, this time more wary, less confident, and with an immeasurably greater respect for his antagonist. He was worried, was "G'rilla"! It didn't look as if the king was to send a crippled jester for the men of ports to laugh at.

It had now ceased to be a fight if it ever had been one. It was one man punishing another, mercilessly

beating him down, whimpering for quarter, amid a wreck of tables and chairs. The rabble, a veritable wolf-pack licking their chops at a feast, wildly cheered each terrific smash and, rising shrill above the pandemonium, were the lamentations of old Tom in the little cubby off the "L." Only once was Clay struck, a glancing blow that he did not heed.

At last Bagsley went groggily to the floor, and apparently elected to remain there, for he made no effort to rise. To his very evident disgust, for he screamed a protest, he was deftly caught by the nape of the neck, unceremoniously yanked to his feet and, with a mighty shove and kick, flung through the door and into the roadway.

Then the island's entire police force came—two of them—fast running and full of official ginger. They stopped short and critically surveyed Clay as he stood in the doorway, his hand resting on one side of its frame. Their courage oozed as copiously as their perspiration, for, although the peace must be maintained, he was so formidable that assault and seizure would be perfectly ridiculous without numerous reinforcements and—*Mon Dieu*, there were none. He solved their problem by throwing several coins at their feet.

"I pay tribute unto Cæsar," he told them grimly, "and I *expect* Cæsar to be a gentleman!"

The coins were quickly gathered up, and the mighty "G'rilla" yanked to his feet and dragged away.

Pan crept under Clay's arm. She pressed her body

close to his side, and demurely looked up into his face. He paid no attention to her and she pouted a little. Wasn't she the prize for which he had fought? Wasn't she his woman now by right of conquest? Shouldn't he give her "jus' one littl' look anyhow"? She edged over in front of him and raised her hands until they rested on his shoulders. Even this failed to arouse him from the drift of his sombre reflections, and she consoled herself with the thought that she could leave matters to her "little devil" who had so far very successfully managed her affairs. So she nestled close, and waited.

## CHAPTER IV

### THROUGH REEFS OF CORAL

IF John Clay had been asked why he had come to Tahiti Tom's he would have been plunged into a maze of bewilderment. He could not have adduced one tangible reason for his going there, and yet he had taken the shortest cut, and hurried over the ground as if everything had depended upon his covering the distance in the shortest possible time. The ever-purposeful and all-intelligent Energy that men call God often directs a man's footsteps into a place never frequented before, and seldom unfolds the reason until the spot is reached. However, John Clay the skeptic, would have ridiculed this as an inane blaming of the foibles of an absent-minded man to the freakish whim of his Creator. Yet he *had* come, and he had been plunged into a combat in defense of a girl that he had never seen before, at whom he had not even given a glance as he struck the first crushing blow that had sprawled "G'rilla" Bagsley at his feet. Even after it was all over he would not have admitted that the girl had been a factor in the affair. The bully had needed a thrashing on general principles. He had administered it. Kismet!

There had been no reason for his schooner coming to anchor before the cluster of flimsy buildings, with rickety, weatherbeaten landing-place and rat-infested



warehouse that had been dignified into an occasional port-of-call by steamers plying between Australia and countries far to the North and East. The cruise of the *Lark* had been long and arduous. She had pushed her way through the Marquesas, Societies, the Paumotus, even to the far Astral. She had found many strange havens, uncharted, dangerous, where a score of huge drums had ofttimes summoned a horde of shrieking savages to the circus-like tiers of stone seats under the spread of a sacred Banyan tree, there—with bodies saffron smeared to throw in high relief the arabesque of fantastic tattooing that covered them from head to feet—to wait the signal for a bacchanalian orgy, the epicurian tidbit some luckless white man that ill-fortune had thrown among them.

She had only pointed homeward when the first squall of the hurricane season had whistled its shrill warning through her rigging and bold intrepid seamanship was required to negotiate the maze of coral reefs and atolls that sprang up and disappeared before the advancing prow like living things—sirens of destruction sporting in a swirl of angry waters. Now, when the home-berth was in sight, he had astonished Jim Hayes, his superintendent and erstwhile mate, by directing the course of the schooner past the island whereon he ruled as a veritable potentate—for although a French possession, through an amicable understanding, no one interfered with him in the conduct of its internal affairs.

But Hayes asked no questions. He grumbled pro-

fanelly and plunged into a fit of sulks, while the Kanaka crew gazed longingly at the jaws of coral that enclosed the little harbor and the phantasmagoria of cloud-wreathed cliffs that had loomed up so majestically inviting and were now fading to a mere blur, and chattered their disappointment at the unexplainable delay of the festival that had always celebrated the homecoming of the master.

There was always feasting and dancing under the ungainly coco palms. The dances were centuries old, amorous, suggestive, proscribed as unclean on the other islands but unprohibited here. John Clay had never allowed a priest or missionary to set foot upon his domain, consequently there had been no forced change of ancient habits and customs—changes that had depopulated islands and caused the native stoically to regard death as a welcome relief from a frightful *ennui*. Here, no blundering white, fanatically waving a crucifix as supreme authority for interference, could declare unclean and immoral the customs of ages that had made these people the physical superiors of every other people on the face of the earth. Nothing was proscribed, not even a fig leaf as a *toilette de luxe*, nothing but cannibalism, and the use of opium with which white and yellow have enslaved so many of the brown.

And he respected their *tapus*; those twice a hundred laughable superstitions of what must be done and what not done, all carrying a dire penalty, injury, sickness, death in some awful form, perhaps a visitation of the dreaded *vehinehae*, those hungry ghosts of canni-

bal ancestors who lay in ambush in the shadows of a road and seize upon the living as victims for their cooking-pits.

Whatever John Clay's reputation among his own kind, he was literally worshipped by the hundred odd children of nature that made up the folk of the little village a quarter of a mile from the big house that he called home. Even this house was held sacred, a shrine to which they brought their ills, their petty quarrels, their childish complaints, and from which they never departed unsatisfied, even wagging their heads in approval when judgment had been rendered against them.

This house, a commodious one-story structure of many rooms, was built upon a *paepae bae* or terrace that was a hundred feet in length by perhaps seventy in width. The *paepae bae* was raised a full eight feet from the ground and was reached by a broad flight of steps. Both terrace and steps were constructed of black volcanic rock, hewn square and fitted without cement, but with an ingeniousness that made the structure impervious to the most terrific hurricane, even against the havoc of time itself. Around the outer wall of the house a broad space had been left for a veranda, and this was edged with pillars of unbarked palm that supported the overhanging roof.

The *paepae bae* occupied the centre of a huge garden, an acre in extent, and this was surrounded by a nine foot wall was built of the same volcanic rock as the terrace. Two heavy gates, topped by a flaring beacon,

gave entrance to the enclosure and opened out upon the beach, a crescent of white sand that partly enclosed the saucer-like spread of the lagoon. A quarter of a mile seaward were the two menacing jaws of iridescent coral, jagged, cruel as shark's teeth, and ever glistening in the sun with diamond-like flashes of blues, and crimsons, and yellows. Between these jaws was the entrance to the haven, hazardous in foul weather, even in fair weather barely wide enough for the *Lark* to creep cautiously in.

With the exception of the coral jaws of the harbor and a thicket-lined path in the rear of the compound that led to the plantation and native village, the place was entirely surrounded by towering cliffs—here, dropping sheer down for a thousand feet, the growling waters at the base ever threatening the conquering storm to come; there, colossal carvings of the elements that resembled the lightning and quake-split fragments of some ancient temple, among which were squads of ungainly giants who stood grimly upright guarding for eternity the sacred ruins. Close to the garden wall a stream, whipped white as snow, leapt over a stairway of rock and fell with an incessant roar into the waters of the lagoon.

Few visitors had ever been received at the big house. Even Jim Hayes had his quarters in a small bungalow at the landing place, and only entered when some exigency of the plantation required a consultation or orders were to be given. One servant alone, Fung Shui, a wiry old Chinaman, performed every service

from cook to valet with the periodical assistance of one or two of the natives—but *never a woman*. No woman had ever been allowed to cross its threshold.

An official in Sydney, with whom Clay had some business at one time, had informed his cronies at the club that Clay had a peculiar antipathy toward the female of the species—that he had undoubtedly mentally created a female Frankenstein to whom he had given all the faults, frailties, and vices of every woman that he had encountered in his life, not even excluding the harridans of the ports, and long association with this creature of his imagination had brought him the belief that it was the living prototype of the “noblest work of God.” Perhaps the official exaggerated, lied for the sake of a laugh, but it was certainly true that he avoided them whenever it was possible.

If Clay lived the solitude of a recluse it was his choice and he resented intrusion. When not away on a cruise the routine of one day never varied from another. He rode over the plantation for an hour or so each morning, and would then return to the huge living-room with its almost barbaric furnishings. Here were queer things that had been brought from strange nooks and crannies of still stranger lands—the crude freakish art of savages, rugs and draperies of mystical inscription and design, scores of weapons of fighting men from the asp-headed *nulla-nulla* of monkey-like Australian aborigenes to the most improved of modern implements with which civilized men go a-killing.

He spent many hours with his books, for he owned

a rare collection. Now and then he drifted into the garden. Smileless, deep in reverie, he would slowly pace the labyrinth of shell paths that wound about in an ocean of color, only pausing perhaps to observe a blackbird fluting in a brush of bamboo, or solemnly to reply to the screeching welcome of a gorgeous cockatoo that perched among the giant maroon-hearted poppy-like blossoms of a *pura* tree. Fung Shui alone seemed to understand this silent, emotionless man. Perhaps he shared his confidences, not audibly given but telepathic thought-waves that seemed to register in the sensitive brain of the Chinaman, for the Chinese are a mysterious race from whom little that matters is hidden.

Perhaps this faculty was the reason for Fung Shui's dislike for Jim Hayes, a spineless sycophant scrupulously performing his duties, it is true, yet never in the sight of the Chinaman but that every expression of his face or movement of his body was followed by piercing eyes that glittered beneath lids closed to a mere slit—menacingly expectant eyes that were alert for the inevitable appearance of yellow or crooked streak. Not that Fung Shui expected any overt act against himself. Not he! It would be far better for Jim Hayes first to select the spot where he wished to “rest in peace,” and upon which he, Fung Shui, would be glad to place a bowl of rice and a roasted chicken that Hayes might not grow hungry as he made his journey across the Styx.

This unexplainable dislike for Hayes was even shared by the natives. He had never abused them, yet

they always received him sullenly, the women hiding behind the men, the children scudding away into the undergrowth as if they were frightened at the appearance of a bogey-man.

“ Jim Hay’ him no good ! ” Poni, the mate, one day declared to Fung Shui. “ Him bad boy ! Eyes go sneak-sneak ! T’ief mebbe ! I don’ know ! No likem ! Bimeby, him, John Clay, him fin’ out sure ! Him slam Jim Hay’ bam-biff like hell, I bet you ! ”

The autocrat of Clay’s household, with a sarcastic reference to the stupidity of mates and Kanakas in general, had shrilly expressed his annoyance that anyone could imagine that Clay would infringe upon what was so clearly a prerogative of *his office*. Did the wooden-headed Poni not know that it would be beneath the dignity of the “ Honorable Clay ” ?

“ No ! No ! That is for *me* ! ” Fung Shui exclaimed, tapping his breast importantly. “ John Clay him glentleman ! Savey ? Him no bamee-biffee ! Him slay ‘ Fung Shui yo’ raisem hell Jim Hay’ scoot ! ’ jus’ like him say ‘ Fung Shui clup cloffee,’ an’ me, I raisem hell Jim Hay’ ! ”

It was pure brag but it registered, for Poni had wagged his head and chuckled delightedly, “ I bet yo’ Jim Hay’ him be dam’ seek man ! ”, which Fung Shui had taken as a compliment, benignly patting the mate’s shoulder, a mute assurance that although he might be a bad man to arouse and his wrath most disastrous, yet Poni need never fear for himself. No, he, Fung Shui, was always kind to *inferiors*. A cake, hot from his oven, was a further proof of his amity.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NEWSPAPER CLIPPING

PAST John Clay's Eden the *Lark* had plowed defiantly through the spume of the sea under the urge of the tail end of a gale that was whistling through the rigging and buffeting against the spread of canvas with staccato, gun-like explosions—a now impotent fury that still lingered under the croaking protests of swinging blocks and whine of straining ropes.

Unmindful of the heave and toss of the vessel, John Clay sat at the table in the little cabin. Before him were a number of account books, and a small tin cash box that had been dented and battered by long usage. From a buckskin bag he had poured a fortune in pearls that were now spread out upon the table in an iridescent circle of satiny lustre over which there was a constant play of fleeting, elusive tints—flashes of pinks, of saffron, and of the blue of the noonday sky, specks of yellow, and of purple that sported in the light rays from heliotrope to violet. Flimsy baubles these that for centuries had been the quest of rough men who had braved the sea's fury, death in the shark's maw, who even murdered each other for the mere spread that an annoyed oyster had splashed over an intruding nuisance—for the tomb of a worm to ornament the breast of a woman.

From the centre of the circle he picked up a pear-



shaped pearl of great size and brilliancy. He turned it about on the tips of his fingers, allowing the light rays to bring out all the beauty of its color and lustre. Even with the closest scrutiny under a jeweler's glass, it proved to be flawless, a gem the like of which had seldom been found in all the history of South Sea pearling. Yet so far as any expression of his face was concerned, one might have thought it a pebble that he had picked up on the beach.

Hayes entered from the passageway to inform him that they were through the reefs of Mao, and would make port within an hour. His report was received with a mere nod, and Hayes was about to turn away when he caught sight of the pearl in Clay's hand. Pearls and the wealth they would bring had become an obsession with him, and he stopped, completely fascinated, shifting uneasily on his feet, his lips twisting in an effort to speak a word of its beauty—anything that would give him an excuse to stay a moment longer and feast his eyes upon this wonderful thing that seemed so alive, so jovially blinking, so *inviting*. Every gleam of radiance was a temptation, a suggestion of possibilities, a promise of opportunities that would come—if it were *his*; independence for life, escape from endless waters and filthy islands, a return to the civilization that had banished him. He had never been clever. Fickle fortune had made quite a fool of him. Past dabblings in financial matters—an embezzlement—had resulted disastrously. Another experiment, with a drunken trader at Singapore, had proven that

there was little satisfaction to be obtained from the dribblets of a snatched purse. Yet he still had his dreams of sudden wealth—picked up without much effort—such as this might be.

The more he centred his gaze upon the gem the more its insidious lure twisted his reason. It robbed him of his caution, and stripped away the mask of hypocrite and thief. He became oblivious of his surroundings, of Clay's presence, a monomaniac whose one thought was the potential riches lying just beyond the reach of his fingers. Step by step it drew him toward the table. He came slowly, noiselessly, holding his breath until his lungs pounded an angry protest. No hypnotist ever played a more ludicrous prank upon a subject. The one thought of the crack-brain was to seize the gem, that it was his for the taking; his one fear that it would dissolve in the air before he could get it into his possession. Then something seemed to snap in his brain and left him weak and trembling from head to feet. The perspiration streamed down his face. A grip on the table was all that kept him upright. He could feel Clay's eyes boring into him, unerringly reading his thought, and he was afraid, terribly afraid. It was as if he had really stolen the pearl, had been convicted, and was in the dock awaiting the first word of the sentence. It seemed an age before Clay spoke.

“It is a temptation, so I do not blame you,” he said, coldly. “Perhaps *that* is its mission!” He regarded it reflectively, then went on, “A conspiracy between

an oyster and a tapeworm to enslave women—and destroy men! There is grim humor in that thought—and much tragedy!”

Hayes reached for his handkerchief to mop his face, and found that he didn't have one. He was denied even this sustaining prop, and anyone can understand how disconcerting it is not to have a pocket handkerchief when one needs it. He tried to pull himself together, to assume an injured air, to deny that he had been tempted, to assert with dignity that he had been cruelly misunderstood, to proclaim his utter contempt for things material; but he caught the sarcastic gleam in Clay's eyes, and his fumble for words ended in a stammering, inane—

“It's a very pretty pearl, in fact, a—deucedly pretty pearl. Oh, yes, indeed! It must be worth a lot of money—a huge sum!”

“Yes—in the ducats of a fool!”

Hayes laughed sillily. Not that he was filled with joy. He would have admitted, himself, that he was quite uncomfortable, and that the deck was far more pleasant than this cursed cabin. But he was floundering around, trying to think up the way to make a graceful exit, and the laugh only filled in a portion of an atrocious gap of silence while he thought of something else to say.

“And Mapiao Tipo gave it for a *thirty-dollar* phonograph!”

Again the silly laugh—almost a cackle. He expected that it would be taken as a compliment and was

sorry he couldn't give Clay a jovial nudge as he said it, but, unfortunately, the table was between them. Clay caught the *intended* subtlety, the easing of conscience of a potential thief, that as the pot and kettle were of the same color they should dwell together in amity.

“And *ten* cakes of soap!” he corrected, with mock earnestness. “You forget the *soap!* He is a shrewd bargainer, is Mapiao—a hard, a *very hard* man to do business with, exacting, very! He has much wisdom—tattooed on his skin. He will have a deal of comfort with his music box—as long as the needles last. I must send him a supply, and a few records. Remind me of it!”

A gesture was sufficient to inform Hayes that the room he occupied was preferable to his company, and he started for the door with an alacrity that annihilated space even if it did lack dignity. He stopped in the passageway as he closed the door, and drew a deep breath. He felt as if he had been chased over a succession of fences by an enthusiastic bulldog and had just managed to escape its teeth. He glowered at the door and muttered a curse—a curse upon Clay's good fortune, and upon his own damnable ill-luck that had ever made him a lackey of the men who *do things*. What just that one pearl would mean to him if he could but manage to get it into his possession! But how? That was the rub. He realized that he had made a fool of himself, that he had *very nearly* betrayed his weakness for other people's property. He must watch his step. Clay had an uncanny power in

sniffing out a thief, and was altogether too much of a Tartar when he caught someone fingering his property. Yet there must be some way to get that pearl. Of course one had to be clever—*very clever*. He went up on deck, turning over one plan after another and rejecting each in its turn.

Clay placed the pearls in the buckskin bag, and dropped this into one corner of the tin box on the table. In doing so, he dislodged some of its contents, which scattered over the floor. He gathered them up—old bills, documents, papers concerning long-forgotten transactions—and threw them carelessly upon the table. He filled his pipe, lit it, and leaned contentedly back in his chair. Between puffs he told himself that this would be his last cruise—at least on business. He was quite weary of adventure. It no longer beckoned to new sensations. It was just an interminable run of the same old play, its scenery a desert of monotony—its characters lifeless puppets that forever mumbled the same old lines and did the same old things to the same old cues—the kick of its climaxes no longer tragic or inspiring, but just buncomb, something to amuse a crutch-bound fool. Hereafter he would remain upon his island, revelling in its solitude, easing out the remaining years of his life to the melody of the seas that foamed over his coral reef. He thought of Hayes and his eyes narrowed, his lips grimly pressed to a thin line. Whatever he thought it passed quickly, giving place to a chuckle of amusement, a shrug of his shoulders. He would *watch* Hayes and—do something for him, poor fellow.

He happened to glance toward the floor and caught sight of a tattered old wallet. He picked it up and started to examine its contents. He had about emptied it when he came across a newspaper clipping, yellowed with age and worn through the edges of its fold. It was the headline of a press dispatch from Calcutta, India, to an English journal, and ten years had gone by since its publication.

GREAT EXCITEMENT IN EAST INDIAN MILITARY  
CIRCLES! MURDEROUS ASSAULT! SAFE  
LOOTED! COLONEL SIR EDWARD CARRING-  
FORD, THE VICTIM! THE REGIMENTAL SUR-  
GEON, MAJOR JOHN CRAIG, ACCUSED!

For a long time he stared down at the clipping like one rudely shocked out of a pleasant dream and drowsily trying to comprehend the cause. Then a raucous laugh issued from between his twisted lips. What a rare joker this little slip of paper with its reminder of Carringford. *Carringford!* How the name burned into his brain! What hideous memories it resurrected, memories of a soul-destroying agony, of hope annihilated with all a man holds dear, worth fighting for. Carringford the victim! The *victim!* What a quaint humorist was he, the man that penned that line!

Then came a bitter retrospect of events that whirled in a kaleidoscopic revel—of characters that stepped out of the mist of years to reënact the tragedy that had come into his life. They stalked through the drab quarters of a military post, through the dense shadows of jungle paths, through the avenues and palaces of

a city of nightmares—a weird city that stewed in the heat of an Asiatic sun, and where one breathed freely only when the vagrant breezes of the bay lifted its stink above the level of a man's head as it filtered through the dusty streets.

Tragedies need mobs—even as this—mobs to howl, and cackle, and jeer; to hold thumbs down as the signal for the *coup de grace* to be given the weakling that had gone down under the stabbing blows of freakish fortune. Here they came, strutters in uniform and their frivolous scandal-mongering women, idlers, male and female, anticking clown-like in the haunting witchery of an East Indian moon. Then the puppets entered—the first player, himself, John Craig, a poet's model for "A Fool There Was?" He had preferred soldiering for a living in the capacity of an army surgeon, first, because he was intensely patriotic, his blood mounting to a temperature of 110° every time he heard the band play "God Save the King," and secondly because it was far better than starving to death as Doctor Quack in civil life. Then followed the "Prig," Edward Carringford, with a "Sir" prefixed to his name by a benevolent ruler, and debonair commandant of the regiment by virtue of His Majesty's very royal commission and the ducats of his family—a conceited popinjay forever prancing upon the balls of his feet, and perpetually swinging a swagger-stick in his right hand to balance the monocle sticking in his left eye. Then comes the girl of Craig's dreams, Gloria Gordon, the daughter of an English commissioner and the rage

of the barracks, whose sole intellectual attainment was a knowledge of her beauty—a coquette, which is a twin sister to the “vamp,” only one is subtly clever and the other just bluntly immoral.

Even now, after all these years, with all that he had suffered, he still thrilled at the mental vision of her loveliness, and the same old longing gripped his heart—the longing to hold her in his arms again, to kiss the gold of her hair and the coral of her lips, again to experience the rapturous bliss of that moment when she had promised to be his wife.



## PART TWO

*The Moving Finger writes; and  
having writ,  
Moves on; nor all your Piety nor  
Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half  
a line,  
Nor all your Tears wash out a  
Word of it.*

OMAR KHAYYAM



## CHAPTER I

### THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

“THAT Gordon girl” was in everybody’s mouth. Everyone conceded that she was very beautiful—some with mental reservations. The latter were principally women. They couldn’t quite believe that she was as good as she looked and, besides, the men were altogether *too positive* in their admiration, and it wouldn’t do to encourage them. “Men are bloodhounds in scenting naughtiness,” Mrs. Hicks had declared, and as Mrs. Hicks claimed to be psychic, and as Hicks was a general and commanded the brigade, her opinion had weight. Mrs. Captain Brownley had wagged her head in aggressive agreement, for Captain Brownley had but recently referred to Miss Gordon as a “ripping pippin” while his endearing term for *her* was “Punkins,” and there was altogether too much contrast between the fruit and the vegetable. Of course the younger element among the ladies were even more perturbed—tearful too at times—for swains grew uncommonly cold whenever the Gordon came into view. She was so indifferent to *property* rights that they seized every opportunity to show their resentment—friendly little insults that only received a bewildered stare in answer, a snub that was honey coated.

Few women condemned to an Anglo-Indian military and civil settlement can escape *Zolamania*, the

impudent nosing into the most intimate details of each other's lives, and the broadcasting of wicked stories about their neighbors while maintaining an otherwise cordial relationship. A fluent tongue and a piquant imagination are "gifts" when there is nothing else to do to kill an oppressive *ennui* except an occasional ball, a "gabfest" at the club or hotel, a bridge party, or bumping over the impossible lanes of a monotonous country in a rickshaw. The only woman who escapes the malady is the one with no observation—those who were bewildered at birth, and have remained so ever since.

So far Miss Gordon seemed to be scandalproof, or rather she was in a state of development as a subject, theoretic at present, but the ladies were hopeful. They contented themselves with criticizing her style of dressing, her stride as she swung down the Mall, the way she sat a horse and danced with the men at the club receptions. Her drawl was too "musically coaxing," her gait was "inviting," her dress was *over*-suggestive of feminine charms, and the way she lowered her head, and drooped her lashes, and "peekabooed" out of one corner of her eye, and blushed so rosily whenever a man spoke to her, was certainly *proof* that she wasn't *exactly* what she ought to be.

As for the men, all raved over Gloria Gordon with but one exception—Renshaw of the Military Police. He was a "nut" on Art, and daubed at an occasional canvas. No one ever knew why he excepted. He conceded everything but her nose and ears. Her nose

was a fraction of a point too *retroussé*, and her ears were too far apart by at least three millimetres—an unforgivable blemish to one of his æsthetic temperament. Perhaps his opinion was biased, for he had been trying to solve a “mystery” for some time, and Miss Gordon was “it.” So far he had failed, despite methods that would have aroused the envy of Scotland Yard—at least he thought so.

Gloria Gordon was supposed to be the daughter of an English commissioner who had installed her in a quaint little bungalow up in the hills where she lived with no woman companion save her *ayah*, a Burmese maid, and the small retinue of native servants she had brought with her, not one of whom could speak English, and from whom nothing could be wormed, by trick or otherwise, that would give knowledge of her antecedents. It isn't at all difficult to gain admission into Anglo-Indian society. A blot or two on the escutcheon furnishes too rare entertainment for the bearer to be denied *entrée*. They are supercritical but not *exclusive*. Gloria Gordon seemed to be plentifully supplied with money which gave her a rating as “A 1” on the tradesmen's books, her superlative beauty and undeniable good breeding won her the same rating among the men, and the women had to take her up to save their faces.

Mr. Gordon had only been seen about the place on two occasions—once when he arrived with his daughter, and a few weeks later when his visit had lasted but a few days. Even then he had rarely left

the bungalow. He was a well-preserved man of sixty odd years, a handsome intellectual type, and rather aristocratic in his bearing. Only once had he and his daughter appeared together in public, and then it was at tea in the hotel café. The curious Renshaw had seized this opportunity to scrape his acquaintance, and had been most graciously received when Gloria had introduced them. Much to Renshaw's disappointment, the conversation that ensued was two sided, Mr. Gordon taking no part in it save by an occasional smile or nod of head. Finally Renshaw determined to turn on the pump.

“ You are in the civil service, I believe ! ” he said.

“ When ? ” Mr. Gordon asked in apparent surprise, which of course was no answer at all, and, for some reason, Miss Gordon seemed to be secretly amused.

“ Why,—er—at present ! ”

“ I don't think that my opinion would be of any value, sir,” Mr. Gordon declared after a moment's very deep thinking. “ The theory has been long since exploded. Some day, a thousand or so years from now, they will be digging the remains of Westminster Abbey out of fifty or sixty feet of dirt, and trying to estimate just how far toward civilization an Englishman had advanced, but——” He paused, knit his brows, and then with an emphatic gesture of finality, he exclaimed, “ I frankly declare that I do not believe a word of it—it's ridiculous ! ”

Renshaw's mouth dropped open with astonishment, and Gloria laughed.

“Father is very deaf, Mr. Renshaw,” she explained. “Archæology is his hobby, outside of his own *private* affairs.”

Renshaw grew very red, for the “private” had been just a wee bit emphasized, and his intuition told him that Mr. Gordon had understood him perfectly, that he had been very delicately told to “mind his business.” It suddenly occurred to him that there *was* some of his own that needed his immediate attention.

“How time flies,” he exclaimed, as he hastily got up from his chair.

“Merely another theory, sir!” Gordon blandly declared. “You can’t rely on it! I might say that it is purely an optical illusion!”

He gripped Renshaw’s hand very cordially, expressing his “delight” for the opportunity afforded him of meeting a “friend” of his daughter’s. Gloria was even more gracious.

“You really *must* call upon father before he leaves,” she said, her voice bubbling with enthusiasm. “I know that you two gentlemen would have a perfectly *stunning* time together. There is so much in common that you could talk about, intellectual things that are quite beyond poor me. Oh, father is a perfect *mine* of information, and I will arrange it so you can have him all to yourself. Now, please, promise me, and don’t stand on ceremony.”

He stammered his thanks and hurried away, giving a sigh of relief when he reached the hotel veranda. He had brains—even if he *was* in the Police—and

realized that he had been "exquisitely" ragged without the opportunity of a "come-back."

"I am a *thorough* ass," he angrily muttered. "Now I suppose I'll always be a reminder to her of something funny, dammit!"

It was quite natural that Gloria Gordon should eventually come under the critical observation of the debonair Colonel Carringford, and that he should arrive at the conclusion that she was decidedly worth while. He was quite as good a critic of feminine charms as the curious Renshaw, but he did not confine himself to noses and ears. Having set his stamp of approval, it was also in the order of things for his satellites, a certain toadying clique of officers, to retire from the field and give him clear sailing. The many wicked stories about him that floated around among the women of the station, stories of many an escapade and even dishonored native huts, evidently made no impression upon the girl, for she often received him at her bungalow and he acted as her escort at several of the polo games and club receptions.

Of course there were several of the officers in the cantonment who did not recognize that the colonel had any special privileges, particularly when it came to paying court to a beautiful woman, and one of them was the regimental surgeon, John Craig. But the surgeon's rivalry apparently gave Carringford no very great concern. He was egotistically sure of himself in everything that wasn't connected with active service—as for that, the result of an effort of his perturbed



family to get him as far from home as possible, he consoled himself that he looked pretty on a horse.

“ A prig! ” Major Jim Gridley explosively remarked to Nanak Singh, the *ressaldar* major. “ A prig, sir, that thinks that it was a favor to God ’lmighty for having allowed him the supreme pleasure of being his Creator! ”

John Craig, up to his ears in a fatiguing round of professional duties, plugging new arrivals in the army full of drugs, fighting the ever-prevalent enteric fever, and spending hours at surgical work in the military hospital, in addition to the many cases in the disease-infested mud huts of the natives, found little time for social affairs. He was seldom a visitor at the club or hotel and, although a lover of athletics and a splendid horseman, he was never seen at the outdoor sports or the polo games. He hadn’t time. His staff was small and the days were often many hours too short. The son of a struggling country curate who had beggared himself to give his son a profession, he depended solely upon his pay as an army officer, and he could not afford the fast pace set by the clique of wealthy sprigs headed by Carringford, even if he had been considered socially eligible. There is a deal of snobbery in the Army, and Englishmen who serve under the colors are quite Brahmanish when it comes to a question of caste. Outside of this clique he was a great favorite among the officers, English and native, and, as for those in the ranks, Tommy, Sikh, and sepoy, no other officer had succeeded in instilling the same confidence—a faith

that had brought as many of them out of the shadow of death as the medicines he prescribed or the instruments he used.

He had had very little to do with the bungalow colony except an occasional call to give treatment. Still he was not unwelcome, and many were the inviting glances cast upon him by the girls, and they were nice girls, too, sensible, vivacious, and a credit to any man's household. Perhaps he might have formed an attachment if ambitious and impecunious mothers had not been as cognizant of the amount of his worldly goods as himself. Perhaps he might have even surmounted this barrier if it had not been for his diffidence, his rather boyish bashfulness, whenever he came in contact with the "female of the species," for he was a handsome, well-built chap of unquestionable culture, and that goes a great ways toward winning a woman under thirty—over that she is quite likely to mix mathematics with sentiment, especially a woman condemned to India.

If it had not been for an accident it is doubtful if John Craig would have ever become acquainted with Gloria Gordon. Early one morning she started away from her bungalow for a horseback ride in the hills. She skilfully eluded the eternal vigilance of her coterie of admirers and felt that, for once, she could canter around the winding paths without being compelled to keep up a chatter of conversation or listen to silly compliments. For some time she had experienced a feeling of unrest, a revolt against the monotony of her existence—which is a very dangerous mental state for a woman, especially if she is young and beautiful. She is

likely to make a fool of herself if she has "red blood" in her veins, and Gloria had a-plenty. She was tired of the unceasing grind of petty social affairs, of being tagged after by the men, of smiling sweetly over the politely injected venom of the women. She wanted to be alone, to be able to think without interruption, to recover her poise. An hour or so of solitude would be a tonic, she decided, and that the solitude would be complete she refrained from even the service of her *syce*.

She had quite recovered her spirits when she topped a hill and stopped her horse to look down upon the station, the cluster of bungalows, the dumpy cantonment buildings, and the dusty Mall with its bizarre bazaar and town hall. She drew a long breath of relief that she was where she was and not down in the splotch that was just coming to life to face the dreary monotony of another day. She started to sing, lines of Keats, to an air that she improvised.

"Oh, Solitude! if I must with thee dwell,  
Let it not be among the jumbled heap  
Of murky buildings! Climb with me the steep,—  
Nature's observatory—whence the dell  
In flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,  
May seem a span; let me thy vigil keep  
'Mongst boughs pavilion'd, where the deer's swift leap  
Startles the wild bee from the foxglove bell."

Her eyes drifted from the station to the bridle path that curved and twisted down into a little valley. It was very steep and tempting, and a wild impulse seized her to spur her horse to top speed in a harum-scarum ride down the dangerous incline. The danger never occurred to her, but in her hysterical frame of mind

it would have made no difference if it had. "Anything for a thrill" she laughed as she sent her horse leaping along. Once started there was no stopping, for the animal had seized the bit in his teeth and taken charge of affairs with a vengeance. She lost her hat in its first bound, and her mass of wonderful hair surged down upon her shoulders and spread out in the wind like a lace of gold. But wild as the ride was, she was unafraid, abandoning herself to the intoxication of terrific speed and urging the animal to still greater efforts while singing snatches of every galloping song that she could think of.

If John Craig had been a fraction of a second later in spurring his horse into a ravine there is no telling what would have happened to either himself or the girl. As it was there was only a hand's breadth between the runaway and his own horse. He had been compelled to act so quickly that he but dimly realized that the rider was a woman. He quieted his mount and rode back upon the bridle path, sending him at a gallop in the direction taken by the runaway, for he realized that it would be a miracle if she escaped being thrown, or if horse and rider should not plunge headlong into one or another of the deep ravines that bordered the bridle path. A few minutes later, his conjectures were verified. He came upon them, she lying unconscious in a clump of brambles and the horse nibbling unconcernedly at the foliage a few rods further on.

He quickly dismounted and carried her out of the brambles. A cursory examination was encouraging, and he arrived at the conclusion that, beyond a possible

shock to her nervous system and a few minor bruises and scratches, she had miraculously escaped serious injury. He immediately set to work applying restoratives and, in a few minutes, she opened her eyes and gazed rather dazedly about her. The first really clear thought that came to her mind was that a very handsome man was anxiously bending over her.

“What happened?” she finally asked.

“You were thrown from your horse,” he said. “Fortunately you have escaped serious injury. Your fall was luckily broken by a clump of brambles.”

A faint smile flickered on her lips.

“I guess I have been making a fool of myself!” she ruefully declared.

“But your horse——”

“Oh, there were two of us, one quite as silly as the other. I grant him my absolution.” She stretched out her hand, “Would you—would you mind picking up the pieces?”

He assisted her to her feet and, as she was still quite dizzy, he was forced to hold her tightly in his arms to prevent her from falling. When she had become more certain of herself he released her and stepped back, and she noticed that he was very red, actually blushing. Perhaps another girl but the enigmatical Gloria Gordon would have laughed. She, strange to say, admired him for it.

“You are Doctor Craig?” she asked, but it was more of an assertion than a question. He had been the only man at the station who had ever appeared to be in a hurry, or different from the lackadaisical

types that had flocked around her. He had given her but a casual glance whenever they had passed—which was entirely out of the usual order of things. It had piqued her and, very naturally, she had been curious, and when a woman is curious, she asks questions. So Gloria knew a great deal about Doctor Craig. She could have surprised him.

He bowed gravely.

“I could not possibly have met you under more auspicious circumstances,” she exclaimed with a laugh. “Let me introduce you to a madcap, Miss Gloria Gordon!” She courtesied, or tried to, but straightened up with a *moue* of pain.

“We had better start for your home at once,” he hastily counselled.

He did not wait for her reply but quickly caught her horse, and assisted her to mount. With his own mount following them, he strode along by her side up the long incline and down to her bungalow. There was little conversation between them for a reaction had set in and he was compelled to hold her in the saddle, and once they stopped while he gave her a stimulant. She was feverish and hysterical when they finally reached her home, and he snapped her *ayah* into action, got her to bed, and administered a sedative. An hour later, he was sending his horse at a headlong gait in the direction of the military hospital. He was somewhat annoyed that his schedule for the day had been hopelessly turned topsy-turvy.

## CHAPTER II

### WHEN THE RING ARRIVED

JOHN CRAIG attended Gloria until she had entirely recovered, and then gave the bungalow colony a new subject for gossip. He became a daily visitor at her home, and worked far into the night that he might steal the time to escort her to the club receptions, and the outdoor sports and polo games. They rode out together and the goal was always that clump of brambles into which she had been pitched head over heels. It seemed to possess a sentimental interest to them both, and they grew very serious when they reached it, for he realized that he was hopelessly in love, and that he had nothing to offer this wonderful girl but the drab life of a military post, while she, reading his thoughts and intensely practical and worldly wise, mentally warned herself that she was beginning to like him altogether too much for her own peace of mind, and was eager to get away from a spot that seemed to be bewitching them both.

Of course there were many jealous comments by the men who had flocked around her, and who now found that she was "indisposed," or "engaged," or "not at home" whenever they presented themselves to the *chuprassie* guarding her entrance hall. Not even a bribe to this autocrat of her door-sill was at all efficacious. True, it was taken with sour dignity and stowed away,

but the answer remained the same. She was still "not at home," or "still engaged," or she had "not yet returned." The girls at the station soon made the happy discovery that the epidemic of fickleness that had caused them so much anguish had been permanently wiped out by this very skilful doctor. The mesdames marvelled at his "blindness" and were practically unanimous in their prophesies of the result of his "infatuation for that Gordon girl."

"She is playing with him just as she has been playing with all the others," Mrs. General Hicks declared at the end of a long social session on her front veranda, at which the Gordon-Craig *affair* had been thoroughly discussed. "For the very life of me I can't understand how men can make such fools of themselves! Why, would you *believe* it, the General—oh, a perfect martinet when it comes to *morals*—smirks like a silly school boy every time he sees her," she laughed sarcastically. "As far as *that* goes, the *poor man*"—she stopped suddenly, just escaping making embarrassing admissions—"well, I'm sure it wouldn't do the chit a *particle of good*, so there!"

"For *my* part," Mrs. Captain Brownley contributed, "I can't understand *what* she sees in *him*! Why, he's a perfect iceberg!" Mrs. Captain Brownley had called Major Craig on several occasions when she had been "ill"—nervous attacks she called them. The captain had been *absent*.

Mrs. Hicks regarded her severely.



“Humph!” she said, or rather grunted, and Mrs. Brownley blushed, and bit her lips in vexation. Much to her relief Mrs. Hicks abruptly changed the subject.

If Gloria Gordon had really wished to escape the possible consequences of a daily association with John Craig, she did the worst thing that she could do—she tried to avoid him, and instructed her *chuprassie* that when he called he was to be told that she was not at home. This state of affairs lasted two days—an eternity for him—and it plunged her into that same feeling of unrest, that hysterical revolt against the everlasting “do nothing but amuse herself” that had prompted that wild plunge down the incline. She was tired of the rôle of a butterfly yet powerless to direct herself into another. She felt that she was a mere automaton wound up for an existence among mortals as mechanical as herself, where inane compliments, topics of conversation, and exaggerated courtesies never varied one day with another, and smiles, gestures, and polite phrases were all standardized by custom to the inflexibility of a rule of Hoyle in a game of cards. She wanted a change and was ready to plunge into any avenue that promised it, and was even indifferent where it led to.

As for Craig, he had been quite content with the hour or so each day that he had been privileged to revel in his world of romance. She was still *in* his life, even if he had quixotically decided that he could not ask her to condemn herself to the humdrum existence of a soldier’s wife. It had never occurred to him that

this happy state of affairs could end, but those two lonely days had awakened him to the disheartening truth. It was against all reason that this platonic friendship could go on indefinitely. There would surely come the suitor who was worthy of her, to whom she would give herself. And with the thought that he might lose her came the fogging of his notions of "a surgeon's pittance," and the station in life that Gloria was "entitled" to. He determined to ask her to marry him, and let *her* be the judge as to whether she could face these conditions with him. The first day he called at her home five times, double that the second, and always with the same result—her *chuprassie* salaaming very low and informing him that the "mem-sahib" was "not at home." But, to his unbounded joy, early on the third day she sent for him.

She gave no reasons for not receiving him, and he asked no questions, too happy that they were together again. As usual they rode out into the hills, and, as usual, the goal was that clump of brambles. Here they dismounted and let their horses graze along the bridle path. A cloud of minas swirled into the air with a babel of shrieking protests as they climbed a small hill-ock. When they reached the top they dispossessed a trio of squirrels that were confabing on a rock, and sat down. Both were unusually quiet, he trying mentally to unravel a confusion of things that he wanted to say to her, and she intuitively sensing the coming avowal, and in an agony of embarrassment because she felt that she was betraying her *expectation* by the rather

erratic rising and falling of her bosom, and the hot flush on her cheeks that she knew must be as red as the breast of a bullfinch, saucily regarding them as it teetered on the edge of a mango leaf. She was nervously tapping the toe of her riding boot with her crop, when he reached for it and laid it on the rock beside him, retaining her hand in his own.

“There has never been any other woman in my life but my mother,” he began, struggling against his self-consciousness. “My people were very poor—poorer because of me—giving me my education, my profession. They are both dead now, and I am quite alone. I have never thought that I could give a wonderful girl—like you—the life that should be hers—the comfort of money—and the social position that it brings. Yet I love you beyond the power of my poor words to express it, and I am going to place myself entirely in your hands. I will respect your judgment either way—and love you none the less. Gloria, will—you marry me?”

The flush had died from her cheeks, leaving her skin of ivory whiteness. He felt her hand tremble in his, and his heart throbbed with pain when he thought that she was going to withdraw it. He waited anxiously until the seconds of silence had stretched into a minute, and the minute had seemed an age. She felt as if she was at the top of a hill, and again looking down on a dangerous road, and wondering if she should take a chance. She knew *him*, knew that he was honest and loyal, and that she could trust him, but could she

trust *herself*, her *own loyalty*, when it came to the sacrifice of things that had always seemed so necessary. But the spirit of adventure within her was holding high carnival, and she looked up at him with a wistful smile.

“I fear that you are overrating me,” she said, “I am a selfish—a very frivolous girl. It is you who are giving much for very little, but I do love you, John, love you very dearly, and if you want me I will marry you, and do my best to make you happy—*my best*,” she repeated in a whisper when he had taken her in his arms.

It was Blagrove of the Civil Service who had the temerity to rag Colonel Carringford for his apparent loss of prestige with Gloria Gordon. Of course this was flagrant *lese-majestie* in the eyes of the two captains and the young subaltern who were fellow participants in a card game in the colonel's quarters. But then Blagrove was a coarse person with red hair and freckles, and a man with red hair and freckles isn't expected to be diplomatic in the presence of his superiors. Naturally, Colonel Carringford's pride had been stung to the quick. The one thing that he was particularly jealous about was his “reputation” with women. Even that had been an asset, a sort of voodooic charm that they couldn't resist. They came, they saw, *he conquered*. He wasn't in very good humor anyway when Blagrove made his stupid *faux pas*. The cards had been going against him, and there were *other* reasons. It had been very hard for him to retain his habitual *sang froid*, but he congratulated himself that

he had succeeded. It had been a deuced bore, however. Blagrove had been such a perfectly silly ass!

Blagrove had trimmed him out of a considerable sum; not only his own money had gone, but a portion of a fund that had been placed in his hands to meet the expenses of a regimental ball and reception that was to be given in honor of the visiting C. O. Not that he could not make this up out of the allowance given him by a stubborn old gentleman on condition that he stay out of England, but the draft would not arrive for some time and he would be compelled to borrow—which was also a bore, for it hurt his pride.

The game had become so monotonously disastrous that he finally threw down his cards.

“Well, gentlemen, I guess that lets me out!” he exclaimed ruefully.

“Your play hasn’t been up to its usual standard,” Blagrove laughed as he raked in a pot of more than ample proportions. “You are out of sorts to-night. In fact, you have seemed to be upset about something for several days! Your friends have been anxious.”

“That’s very nice of them, I’m sure!”

Blagrove winked at the others.

“Now the only thing that I can think of that would jar our friend, the colonel, off his equilibrium is—a woman!”

Carringford had gone to the buffet and was pouring a drink.

“Now you are spoofing me,” he drawled.

“Oh, come now, Colonel, you might as well admit

that a certain young lady, to whom you were paying a great deal of attention, has scratched you off her visiting list because of her deep interest in another officer in your regiment. Everybody knows it! It's common gossip!"

Carringford turned from the buffet and, adjusting his monocle, stared owlishly at Blagrove, who had carefully folded the heap of bank notes that he had won, and was placing them in his wallet. The subaltern leaned forward expectantly, while the two captains glared in astonishment at his impertinence in alluding to the Colonel's private affairs.

"I suppose you refer to Miss Gordon?" Carringford asked smoothly.

"Why—yes—if we *must* mention names!"

"But you quite astonish me, dear fellow! I did not know that I had been scratched from her visiting list."

"Oh, Colonel, what's the use——"

"On the contrary," Carringford interrupted with a significant smirk, "we are very *good* friends, I assure you, and I am not at all afraid that Major Craig has or will supplant me in *her* regard."

Blagrove gave him a sharp glance. The conversation seemed to be taking a turn that was distasteful to him for he was scowling.

"No?" he questioned indifferently.

"Decidedly *not*! I may say that the lady is *more* than *kind* to me, but she is a *sensible* girl, and probably considers it good judgment to show an interest in

someone else and," he shrugged his shoulders, "the major is as good as any other. Oh, of course, my little—er—*confession* is to be considered absolutely masonic for the lady's sake," he hastened to add, "'he who filches from me my good name robs me of that'—you know old Shakespeare?"

Blagrove regarded him contemptuously.

"You are boasting now, and I'm damn sorry I opened up the subject for discussion," he declared half angrily.

"Boasting, Blagrove?"

"Certainly you are! Let's drop the matter!"

"Boasting about *what?*" Carringford persisted, in apparent astonishment. "I certainly haven't attributed——"

"But you have inferred—and left the rest to our imaginations, and, by God, it's caddish!"

Carringford gave a sickly laugh.

"If you choose to understand——"

"I understand you perfectly," Blagrove hotly retorted. "Your confession? Hell! She has chucked you and you're cut up about it. I hate that sort of an animal that will plume himself at the expense of a woman! I don't know this Miss Gordon! She's nothing to me, and it's damn well good she isn't, but I am a sport, and I'm for a woman, and I've a hundred pounds to back that girl!"

Carringford coolly waved the others back to their seats, for they had come to their feet at Blagrove's angry outburst. Of course the colonel couldn't under-

stand how Blagrove could be so touchy about women. It was so ridiculous.

“Now, now, *my dear fellow*, keep your temper,” he drawled. “Your championship of the young lady is—er—commendable and—all that. It’s a very pretty code—yes, indeed! But nevertheless I’ll take that wager! A hundred pounds even that she hasn’t chucked me! Let me see! How shall I satisfy you? Ah, yes, the regimental ball! She’ll lead the grand march with me! Will that be proof enough?”

“Yes—and get *this* fixed in your mind, you cad—if she *doesn’t* I’ll publicly tear that uniform off you, and—I’ll make you eat it, by God!”

He slammed the door behind him, leaving the four of them as fixed as statues. Finally Carringford laughed.

“Oh, he—he means—er—figuratively speaking, of course,” he said. “Now let’s have a drink!”

The engagement ring arrived from Bombay, a magnificent thing of diamonds and rubies that must have cost at least six months of a surgeon’s screw. Nanak Singh had been in John Craig’s quarters when it came by Post, and mentioned it to Major Gridley. Gridley whistled with astonishment.

“So it’s as serious as that,” he exclaimed explosively. “I’m sorry, *damn* sorry! I think that he is making a great mistake! It takes a lot of money to indulge in the luxury of a girl like her, and he’s poor—he has only his pay to depend upon.” Screwing his



eyes up in a ferocious scowl, he gripped the end of his moustache in the tips of his fingers and bent it down until the end touched the point of his chin—a habit of his when he was confronted by an unsolvable problem. “D’you know, somehow, I can’t get her angle of it at all!”

Nanak Singh twisted at his beard, and Gridley eyed him expectantly, much as he would a clairvoyant going into a trance, for the Sikh had often surprised him with his uncanny foresight, exactly as he had surprised many foolish hill tribes that had tried to ambush him. Gridley moved uneasily, for Nanak Singh always took a long time to formulate an opinion. At last the meditation came to an end, and the Sikh spoke.

“With her, he is an adventure. He will be as important as a single flower to a bee, or a convenient limb in the flight of a bird. He would be more sure of a temple girl—he would know what to expect. Much better if he put a ring in her nose instead of on her finger. She would understand that she was his—for a *long* time. You are his friend, Sahib Major—warn him!”

Gridley laughed sarcastically.

“Now that would be a *jolly* experience, wouldn’t it?”

“‘John, you really mustn’t marry this girl because you are only a convenient limb!’ Huh! I’ll see myself!”

The greatest moment in John Craig’s life had been when Gloria promised to marry him. He had lived

in a fool's paradise up to the next, which was when he brought the ring to her in the old walled garden and slipped it on her finger in token of their engagement. From the smile of satisfaction that followed her critical examination of the jewel, he concluded that he had not been swindled.

"It is lovely, John," she exclaimed, and permitted him to kiss her after a roguish dance around the fountain. It occurred to him that most of her kisses came to him at the end of a steeplechase, but she had always looked so marvellously rosy and kissable at the finish that he couldn't voice his dislike for mixing athletics with romance. Besides, those days had been the happiest when her spirit of mischief had been rampant, for she had been moody at times, often dismissing him with no excuse but a wish to be alone.

They would have ridden out that morning if Satan hadn't taken it into his head to stroll into John Craig's Garden of Eden in the person of Colonel Carringford.

"Greetings to the fairest lady in all India," the colonel exclaimed with a low bow, and swinging his cap with the flourishing sweep of a fourteenth century cavalier. "The *elusive* lady, I might say, who has never been at home when one of her *most devoted* admirers has knocked at her portal." He turned to Craig whose heels clicked together in a salute, and wagged back a lifeless hand. "Ah! Major Craig! Good morning!" He looked from one to the other in pretended anxiety. "Am I—er—intruding? Must I apologize for interrupting a tête-à-tête?"

“Not at all, Colonel,” Gloria hastened to assure him. “You know that you are always welcome.” And John, much against his will, felt compelled to voice an affable agreement, while fervently wishing that his snobbish superior was in Gehenna.

“Ah, but I fear I have,” Carringford grinned back at him, and turned to Gloria. “I crave a boon, dear lady, and after you have *granted* it I promise to take myself away, and leave the field to my friend, the major.”

“A boon?”

“Perhaps I am too late,” he glanced toward Craig, “but I came expressly to beg the honor of being your escort to the regimental ball. The committee have expressed the desire that *we* lead the grand march together, and I cannot tell you how unhappy I will be if you have made any other arrangements.”

“I am sorry to disarrange any plans of the committee,” Craig put in quietly, “but Miss Gordon is going with me.”

The colonel adjusted his monocle more firmly, and favored him with a stony stare.

“Really now,” he drawled, “but that’s unfortunate—for *me*, of course!”

But Gloria interrupted him. Craig had betrayed altogether too much assurance, and she revelled in the opportunity of taking him down a peg by playing one against the other. She shook a reproving finger at him.

“You negligent boy!” she laughed mischievously, “why, you haven’t even asked me yet!”

Now John Craig had not been negligent. Love and the ring had been uppermost in his mind, and he presumed that the rôle of a fiancé carried with it the *exclusive* right to act as her escort.

“ I ask you now,” he said earnestly.

She glanced uncertainly from one to the other, and her apparent indecision nettled him.

“ It is my *right*,” he added impetuously.

“ Right!” echoed the colonel. “ Why—er—I really didn’t suppose for an instant that Miss Gordon wasn’t *free* to do as she liked—that any man had the *exclusive* right to her society!” He studied his swagger stick with the apparent intention of covering his embarrassment. “ Indeed, I may be excused for expressing my surprise, but it never occurred to me that a lady of Miss Gordon’s personality would submit——” As if he realized that his remark had been injudicious, he brought his hand up to his mouth. “ Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Gordon, I have not received *your answer*.”

Which of course decided the matter. She determined to let Craig know, once for all, that being engaged didn’t imply ownership. It was too good an opportunity to let pass. He must thoroughly understand his position in the future. Besides the honor of leading a column of gold-bedecked officers and society ladies who were writhing with envy and jealousy was far preferable to holding a position several paces in the rear. She didn’t show any temper, for she thoroughly enjoyed the situation. There was a thrill to it—and it pleased her vanity.

“The colonel has asked me first,” was her smiling decision, “and I will go with him.”

The colonel bowed ceremoniously.

“You have made me very happy, Miss Gordon.”

Gloria watched Craig uneasily as he crossed to a rustic bench, and picked up his cap. He did this very deliberately that he might gain time to conceal the grievous hurt that her choice had given him.

“Pardon me for my presumption,” he said very quietly. “I merit your punishment. And now, if you will excuse me, I must get back to the hospital!”

His hand snapped to a salute, and he whirled about and started for his horse. She watched him rather ruefully as he disappeared down the path that led to the Mall.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FALL OF AN IDOL

THE night of the regimental ball Craig sulked in his quarters. He had not seen Gloria since the episode in the garden, for he had angrily assured himself that he would never again lay himself open to the accusation of presuming an "exclusive" right to her society. An hour after he had left Gloria and Carringford in the garden his anger had cooled, and he was deluding himself with the idea that she had only meant to tease him, and that she would ultimately recall her promise to Carringford, and send him a penitent little note begging him to come to her. He could not see that this would cause her any embarrassment, for the announcement of their engagement would be an excuse to which the colonel could take no exception. But the note never came, and her not doing the thing that he thought she would do only added to his hurt—it was as keenly disappointing as her choice of escorts.

He heard the regimental band playing in the huge ball-room of the hotel, and gloomily pictured the triumphant colonel hovering over Gloria and simpering his repertoire of silly compliments into her ear. He recalled the many wild tales of Carringford and his "ways" with women, and marvelled what influence had kept him in the army, and at the phenomenal luck that had saved him from a bullet or a knife. Dwelling

on this "reputation" he worked himself into a fury of fear that swept away his faith in the strength of character of the girl. Self-pride alone saved him from making a fool of himself. It stifled his inclination to go to the ball and insisting upon her coming away with him, even if it caused a scene, even if he had to recount the nasty scandals in which Carringford had been involved, for it never occurred to him that she knew as much about these *affairs* as he, himself.

He finally left his quarters, bareheaded, and wandered aimlessly through the deserted roadways, seeking distraction from the foreboding thoughts that now beset him. Chance directed his footsteps. He passed through the silent Mall, and up the hill to the cluster of bungalows. Gloria stood like a ghostly shadow in the murk of foliage, and there was no sign of life except far back in the garden—a dim light in the servants' quarters. Even the sight of the deserted house—*her* home—was a solace to him, a salve for the oppressive loneliness that enmeshed him, and for a long time he stood there, leaning over the gate, and living again the many happy hours that had been his since the fateful day when she had introduced herself to him as a "madcap." When he finally turned away he had quite recovered his spirits. Carringford no longer loomed as a menace to him or a danger for her. Her choice of escorts became a "mischievous joke," her silence a punishment that he richly deserved. Tomorrow he would go to her and do whatever penance was required for absolution. He caught the air of

a waltz that the band was playing, and whistled it as he went down the hill.

Following a sudden impulse he turned into a path that led to the hotel gardens. It seemed to him quite possible that, by keeping well in the shadows, he could make his way unobserved to a large window that commanded a view of the ball-room. He had no intention of spying. He only wanted a comforting glimpse of her before he returned to his quarters—to see how beautiful she was in this witchery of music, and tinsel, and lace. He knew that it was a perfectly ridiculous thing for him to do, but there was no one to call him a fool but himself. Just as he was cautiously nearing the window a door opened, and in the shaft of light he saw Gloria with Carringford at her heels. They came out on the hotel veranda and she was about to sit down on one of the settees when Carringford said something to her in a low voice. She laughed, and they both started down into the garden. They came directly toward him and he was compelled to dart behind the shrubbery to prevent them from seeing him.

As they drew near he pressed close to the foliage, for he saw that his shadow was dimly outlined upon the ground and was fearful that it would betray him. Even then they could have seen it, for they passed within arm's length of him. His breath came in quick gasps, his lungs pounding a vigorous protest against his effort to control it, for he expected each moment would bring the signal for his discovery. To his great relief they passed on, finally stopping within twenty feet of



him, and behind the same group of shrubs that was furnishing him a refuge. Here they were in full view, though screened from the hotel.

He saw her suddenly place a hand on Carringford's arm and glance suspiciously about, her eyes resting so long upon the spot where he stood that his heart leaped with the fear that she had discovered him.

"Oh, it was wrong for me to come out here," she exclaimed. "Please let us go back!"

"But why?" the colonel asked in surprise.

"I don't know! Premonition, presentiment, what you will! I have a feeling that I can't explain! It frightens me! Suppose—suppose some one should see us here? What could I say? What could I do?"

Carringford's laugh was low and insinuating.

"Craig?"

"No-o!" she replied a bit uncertainly, "and yet—somehow—I have an intuitive warning that he—he is not far off! Oh, if he should——"

"Pshaw! You have no reason to be nervous. Craig is doubtless in his quarters or at the hospital. Why worry your head about him? As for Mrs. Grundy—she is in there and thoroughly enjoying her own little affairs."

"And her principal enjoyment seems to be Gloria Gordon," she said bitterly. "They are talking, wickedly, insinuating the most shameful things about us, and they are taking no pains to lower their voices when I am near them! Surely you have heard them? Oh, I

would have left long ago if it hadn't been for the humiliation of being driven out by——”

“ You are letting the cats get on your nerves, my dear! Come, come, let's forget them! Isn't this the first moment that we have had together all the evening that we could call our own? *My* moment! You certainly don't begrudge me that? ”

“ No, but——”

“ You *do* care for me just a little? ”

“ Why yes, certainly, or I wouldn't be with you! ”

“ And I *love* you, you wonderful girl, and my love is generous—it leaves you free! Surely then you can give me a little of your time—alone—and allow no thought of Craig or any other to mar the few minutes of happiness allotted me? Can't you, Gloria? ”

Her reply was a whisper that Craig could not hear, and he saw Carringford draw her into his arms, saw her lips meet his without resistance, saw that fears, premonition, gossip, were forgotten in the ecstasy of her passion. The unexpectedness of it stunned him. It was as if a sword had struck at him out of the dark, and the curtains of blackness had closed up again, giving him no chance to defend himself. Whatever came afterwards he neither saw nor heard. His one thought was to get away, for his soul was inflamed with a murderous impulse fast leaping beyond his control.

Back in his quarters he gave full vent to his rage, walking the floor like a wild man. A dozen resolutions were solemnly made, amended, and discarded. Suicide,

murder, resigning his commission and leaving India, all had their turn. But with all his storming, in the intervals when his tortured mind was dwelling on Gloria alone, her "spirit of mischief," her teasing coquetry, seemed a logical explanation for her surrender to Carringford's caresses and, undoubtedly, if she had come to him at that moment he would have forgotten and forgiven everything, so great was his infatuation.

A loud thumping at the door brought an end to his wild pacing. At first he determined to pay no attention to it, but it became so persistent, so emphatically admitting of no refusal, and repeated again and again with such increasing violence, that he jerked the door open in sheer desperation. It was Major Gridley who teetered in unsteadily with a salute that almost threw him off his feet. Now Gridley was loquacious, and a hundred per cent. insult proof when in his cups, and despite Craig's protests that it was late and he wished to retire, he waved him unceremoniously aside and, sprawling contentedly into a chair, vociferously proclaimed his thirst.

"Mos' 'trocious c'lamity," he sputtered, "but I'm shimpashetic feller offisher, an' I wan' a drink!"

Craig betrayed no curiosity about the calamity, for he was anxious to get rid of him. He impatiently strode to a cellaret and brought back a decanter and glass, plumping them down before his unwelcome visitor.

"Shanks!" Gridley grinned at him and, unsteadily

filling the glass, he tossed it off at a gulp, following with an unsuccessful attempt to wipe his mouth with the back of his hand. He leaned back in his chair and squinted at Craig through half-closed eyes.

“Mos’ ’trocious c’lamity!” he again declared.

Craig was again pacing the floor, and he skidded back and forth on his chair in an effort to follow his movements.

“’Tenshun!” he finally bellowed. “Companee—Halt! Hell! Makes me dizzy! I’m shimpashetic feller offisher, but not a dam’ teetotum, no shir!”

Craig stopped in his tracks and glared at him.

“If you don’t like it, Gridley, you can get out!” he snapped angrily.

Gridley arose uncertainly to his feet and placed a hand on Craig’s shoulder, partly in a pacifying spirit, partly as a means of support. Craig scowlingly turned his face away but Gridley twisted his head and shoulders around until he could look up in the surgeon’s face.

“Now, now, Major, I’m shimpashetic feller offisher, an’ you—you are a bird on a limb”—he stopped with a perplexed scowl—“no—no—you are a bee on—on a shingle, yes shir, a bee on a shingle, an’ you mus’n get mad at old Grid! You didn’ go to the ball?”

“No!”

“I did! Saw Carringford an’ your girl there!”

“I know, I know! Let’s not talk about it!”

“Got to! Shimpashetic feller offisher! Let’s have a drink!”

“You’ve had enough! You had better go to your quarters!”

“No shir! No shir! Never have ’nough when I’m shorry for frien’ of mine! ’S only way I can con-control my emoshuns! Huh! ’S hell of a ball!” he growled contemptuously. “Every old she-wasp gabbing about Carringford taking your girl away from you! Tickled ’em to death! Laughed at you, Johnny, gave you the rash—rashberry! Old Hicks said your love affair was all over but the posh mortum! Old ass! Had to take a whole lot of drinks to keep from pulling the nose of my ’sperior offisher! ’S fact!”

Craig had released himself from Gridley’s clinging arms, and was again pacing the floor. Gridley watched him with a ludicrous expression of pity, his head wagging solemnly, and two big tears coursing down his cheeks.

“’S too bad, ’s too bad, Johnny! Dam’ skunk, Carringford! Ruined the life of besht little woman in England. Wan’ know shecret, Johnny? It’ll s’prise you! Lishen! He’s my brother-in-law!”

“Your brother-in-law?” Craig exclaimed in astonishment.

This set Gridley’s garrulity galloping.

“’Sh! It’s a shecret! Never tell anybody! Jus’ keep it to yourshelf! ’S hell of a disgrace! I never tell anybody, no shir, an’ he—I told him if he ever mentioned it I’d kill him—an’ I would! I’d blow his brash buttons clean through his belly, yes shir! We only shpeak in the line of duty—an’ little of that! He knows

better! My shister jus' dug up a dam' parshnip when she married him, jus' a little school girl with an ass of a brother that didn't know enough to stop it!"

He turned to the decanter, but Craig took it from him with a gesture of refusal and carried it back to the cellaret. Gridley made no protest but sank back in his chair.

"Your sister divorced him?" Craig questioned quietly, for the recital had stilled the tempest within him, and his hope had flamed with the thought of the probable effect of the news on Gloria. Gridley shook his head.

"Religious little puss! You know—'whom God hath joined'! Shilly rot, blaming it on God'lmighty," he said disgustedly. "She left him. His family wanted to make her an allowance. Huh! As if they could fling their shillings at Jim Gridley's shister!"

He nodded off in a drowse and Craig shook him.

"Guess you'd better go to your quarters, Grid!" he said gently.

He assisted the major to his feet, and led him to the door and out upon the porch, again receiving the information that "She jus' dug up a dam' parshnip, tha's all!"

He watched Gridley as he made his way unsteadily down the roadway, and he was just a little ashamed that he had been so brusque in his welcome, or rather lack of welcome, to this rough explosive companion-at-arms who had given such a convincing proof of his friendship. His arrival had found Craig in a condition that

bordered on lunacy, his mind gnarled and twisted in an agony of jealousy and wounded pride. His departure had left him with a clear vision and a repose of spirit, a feeling that his romance had only suffered a temporary snarl that the morning would unravel, and that ever afterward it would run smoothly on to the happy termination that he had dreamed of. "Shimpashetic feller offisher," he repeated softly to himself as he saw Gridley disappear into his quarters, "I must never forget what I owe him." Lost in a flood of happy reflections, he paid no attention to the purr of a motor and the flare of headlights as it glided by, but when he turned to his door, he saw that it had come to a stop before the colonel's quarters, a few rods away and on the opposite side of the road.

A native chauffeur got out and swung open the tonneau door. Carringford followed and turned to assist a woman to alight. The motor was then driven on a short distance. It was stopped in the shadows at the end of the roadway and the lights were snapped out. Craig uttered an exclamation of amazement, for, even at the distance and in the darkness, it was impossible not to recognize the athletic stride of Gloria as she entered the colonel's quarters. He had believed her thoughtless, a little cruel to others in following her inclinations, coquettish, yes, for he had suffered from it, but all this he had attributed to her youth and the babying adoration of men. But that she would deliberately defy conventions and compromise herself by going to a man's rooms late at night was so unbelievable

that he was utterly crushed and dumbfounded. Then came his renunciation. His rage had spent itself, and he was weary of it all. With a gesture of surrender to the hopelessness of the situation, he again turned toward his door. With his hand on the knob he stopped impulsively. Even if his romance had come to an end, he loved her too devotedly to see her fling herself to social destruction without making a heroic attempt to save her. With this resolve came action, and he darted diagonally across to the colonel's quarters.

Carringford had neglected to lock his door, and Craig threw it open, stepped quickly in, and drove it shut with a backward kick. Carringford, after removing Gloria's cloak had thrown it across the back of a divan. He was now standing at the buffet, and was in the act of opening a bottle of champagne. Gloria was lazily lying back in the depths of an arm chair. At Craig's entrance she had sprung to her feet with a cry of dismay, and was grasping the back of the chair for support. Carringford's mouth was ridiculously ajar, and he blinked owlshly at Craig. Even his speech was beyond control, and confined exclusively to a stuttering volley of "ahs," "ohs," and "by gads."

"Wha—wha—what do you—you mean, sir," he finally managed to bluster, "by impudently bursting through my door unannounced and uninvited? G-go back to your quarters, sir, at once!"

Without replying Craig crossed the room, picked up the cloak from the divan, and turned to Gloria, who



stood with her eyes cast down, her cheeks flaming with humiliation and shame.

“You are going home, at once,” he said sternly. He placed the cloak across her shoulders and strode back to the door. She glanced uncertainly at Carringford, but he was twisting nervously about feeling that he should say or do something but too flabbergasted to determine what it should be. His monocle was perturbing him, too—it wouldn’t stick where he put it.

She tried to speak, but her lips moved soundlessly and, covering her face with her hands and choking back the sobs, she weakly crossed to the door. With a shrug of his shoulders, Carringford picked up his cap and started to follow, but Craig peremptorily ordered him back.

“Stay where you are, you cad!” he snapped, “Miss Gordon will go *alone!*”

Gloria threw her arms around him, sobbing her excuses.

“I shouldn’t have come here,” she exclaimed hysterically. “I know it, oh, I know it! It was a mad freak that I can’t explain—but I had no intention of doing wrong. You believe that, John, surely you do, you *must!* Your love is strong enough not to condemn me for such a silly little thing!”

But he contemptuously disengaged himself, and threw open the door.

“You will find the motor a little way down the road,” he told her coldly.

When she had gone he slammed the door shut and listened until the whir of the motor told him that she was on her way. Carringford had managed to regain a portion of his habitual insolence and he laughed, a laugh that he meant to be jovial, but he was a bit uncertain that he was intriguing Craig with his humor.

“A ducedly awkward situation but you carried it *magnificently*,” he exclaimed, “and I congratulate you even if I *am* one of your—er—victims! Oh, I hold no grudge! Not at *all*! Even if you have been a little impudent to your superior officer. Now you are a man of the world—and *sensible*, by jove,” he grinned amiably, “and of course you don’t blame me for taking advantage of the frailties of such a pretty girl?” Then Craig struck out. It was a smashing blow, and behind it was all the pent-up rage that had been consuming him from the first note of the orchestra that had whined out a requiem to all his hopes of happiness. It took the colonel on the point of his chin and sent him crashing to the floor, his head striking a corner of an iron safe that stood at one side of the room. Without a glance at the sprawled figure that lay so ominously quiet, Craig turned on his heel, and passed through the door.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE COURT-MARTIAL

EARLY the next morning Nanak Singh came to Gridley's quarters. He was so gruff and scowled so fiercely that Ram, the major's man, was unable to muster the courage to tell him that the Sahib Major could not be disturbed, that he invariably appeared at a certain minute, and visitors must wait until that minute had arrived. This was the major's imperative order, and it wasn't very pleasant to have a boot thrown at one's head, especially if the boot carried a spur—a habit of the major's unless Ram remembered to put his boots out of his reach. As it was, he hesitated so long that the impatient Sikh strode threateningly towards him.

“Must I put speed in your legs?” he exclaimed angrily. “Go! Tell the Sahib Major it is Nanak Singh! Tell him that I must speak with him at once, that the matter is urgent.”

Ram vanished, and the Sikh crossed to the window and stood, with arms folded, looking gloomily out into the roadway. From the adjoining room came a husky roar from Gridley, the thud of something against the wall, and Ram's voice shrilly piping the Sikh's message. Then the hindoo came back, and salaamed with becoming gravity. His eyes held a triumphant glitter, for he had managed to duck the boot.

“The Sahib Major says to wait,” he said, and disappeared.

When the major came in he was hastily drawing on his coat. He bore no evidence of his little “tope” of the night before, or that he had just been aroused from sleep. He was wide awake and ready for action, and a little concerned about the object of the Sikh’s call, for Nanak Singh was not given to frivolous things, and he knew that only some serious matter would have brought him to his quarters. They exchanged salutes and he motioned the Sikh to a chair.

“Well, *Ressaldar* Major, what’s on your mind?” he asked.

“I have just stationed a guard at Sahib Major Craig’s quarters!”

Gridley stared at him unbelievably, his brows contracted into a puzzled frown.

“Say that again, please!”

“A guard at Sahib Major Craig’s quarters,” the Sikh repeated, “he has been placed under arrest!”

“Arrest? Johnny Craig under arrest? Good God, what for?”

“Assaulting a superior officer and—worse!”

Major Gridley’s hands clawed vigorously through his hair, he stared searchingly about the room, and then at Nanak Singh.

“Well!” he said grimly, “I’m here, and you’re here, and you don’t look like anything that I have ever seen in a dream, so I think that I can consider myself

in a state of consciousness—barring my natural dementia. Perhaps you had better give me all the details.”

“Very early this morning, the *chuprassie* of Sahib Colonel Carringford found him lying unconscious before the safe in his quarters with a gash in the side of his head. The safe door was wide open and its contents scattered about the floor. The *chuprassie* ran out of the house, arousing the families of several officers with his screams as he raced for Sahib Major Craig. But the Sahib Major was not there—or did not answer. In the meantime the Sahib General had arrived with one of the company surgeons. After the cut was dressed, the Sahib Colonel was questioned. “I was there!” the Sikh’s eyes snapped angrily. “Krishna, how he lied! I know it, for he had the eyes of a cobra when he told it—a cobra that is about to strike!”, his lips twisted contemptuously, “and the poor worms believed him.”

“You mean that he lied about Major Craig?”

“May I be yoked to a bullock if it is not so! He said that he had been awakened in the night by a noise, that he had gotten out of bed and had made his way cautiously into the office. As he snapped on a light he saw a man kneeling before the safe. It was open, and papers and books were scattered about the floor. He had caught only a flash of this for the moment he snapped on the light the man had hurled himself upon him. He had no time to defend himself. He had been struck down, and supposed that he had lost conscious-

ness, for he remembered nothing that had occurred from then until the time that he found them bending over him. They asked him if he knew the man. He hesitated—but they did not see the look of triumph in his eyes. He said that he *had* recognized him—a brother officer that he had always held in the highest esteem. It filled him with such sorrow that he would rather let the matter rest. Of course they insisted—as he *knew* they would—and he gave the name—as he intended to!”

“And you mean to tell me that he accused Johnny Craig?” Gridley fairly thundered the question.

The Sikh nodded.

“Wha—why—the—the God damned lying cur, the—the—” but the Major’s outburst ended in an incoherent sputter, and, for sheer dearth of words that were expressive enough to suit him, he beat the top of his desk with his fist and hurled books and papers about the room. Then he thought of the safe.

“The safe,” he roared, “what about that?”

“They checked the contents. Carringford said that a hundred pounds were missing, a portion of a regimental fund—and again I knew he lied!”

For a time Gridley sat as one utterly confounded by the tragedy of the affair. He, too, believed that Carringford had lied. He had too great a faith in Craig to believe otherwise. But Carringford was clever. He had taken advantage of some *truth* to build up his sinister story. He had seized upon some

impulsive act of Craig's and created a syrt of convincing details into which the surgeon would be engulfed. Question after question leaped through the major's mind. What was this *truth*? What had Craig really done? That he had struck him, perhaps—yet this seemed so unlikely of this soft speaking, unaggressive surgeon. That he had taken a single shilling from Carrington's safe was too preposterous to be given any consideration whatever. This nut had a kernel, if they could only crack it.

“There is a key to this puzzling situation,” he finally exclaimed, “*you* believe that, Nanak Singh! Tell me—what do you think it is?”

“Sahib Major,” he said impressively, “the key is a *woman*—that Gordon girl!”

The major nodded a grim agreement. A quarrel over this girl seemed to be the only logical conclusion. But why this detail of the looted safe? Even the psychic Nanak Singh could find no answer for that.

“What does Major Craig say?” Gridley asked.

“Nothing! He is strangely silent. He wants to see you. The Sahib General said that you should go to him.”

Gridley quickly rose to his feet and picked up his cap from the table.

“You had better come with me,” he said, “perhaps, when we get his story, we may find a way to get him out of this damnable mess.”

When they reached Craig's quarters, they found

him apparently unperturbed over his serious situation—ominously so, Gridley thought. He greeted them cordially, motioned them to seats, and was about to bring the decanter from the cellaret, but Gridley motioned it away.

“I asked Nanak Singh to come with me,” he said. “I did not think that you would object.”

“Not at all! I am glad that he is here.”

“The *Ressaldar* Major tells me that you wished to see me?”

“It was kind of the general to relay the wish. I suppose that you have heard the news, and know of the mess that I am in. I shall need some one to handle my case when it comes before the court-martial. I thought of you. Of course, if it is at all distasteful——”

“Distasteful!” Gridley echoed. “You know better, my friend! Although I have no confidence in my ability as an advocate, I will be happy to do anything that you wish me to do.”

“I *knew* you would, Grid!” He laughed a little dryly. “I am asking you to father a forlorn hope, though. I have been reviewing all the unpleasant details and—well, I am afraid that you will lose your case. The outlook isn’t at all promising.”

Gridley stared at him in astonishment.

“Surely you are not *guilty* of these charges?” he exclaimed.

“Of striking him, yes. Of the supposed breaking into his safe, no. I really can’t understand that phase



of his accusation," he shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "However, he's made it."

"Did you have a quarrel?"

Craig laughed ironically.

"You would hardly call it that."

"But why did you strike him?"

Craig's jaws came together with a determined snap.

"You will pardon me but—I do not wish to answer that question."

"But when you come before the court-martial you will be asked why you went to Carringford's quarters, why you struck him," Gridley persisted.

"I shall not answer!"

"But good God, man, that would be your defense, the only defense against the charge of breaking into that safe! Can't you see that?"

"I shall simply deny it!" Craig said impatiently.

"Your denial would be of no value unless you gave the reason for your being there. You *were* there—and that is damning. Your reasons, Craig, why did you go there?"

"I have told you that I would not answer that question."

"I cannot understand you," Gridley exclaimed, completely nonplussed at Craig's strange attitude. He glanced at him sharply. "Perhaps it is your intention to make Carringford *prove* that you *were* in his quarters, and that you struck him? If he has no witnesses——"

"Surely, Grid, you credit me with as much moral

courage as brute courage?" Craig said in smiling reproof. "Of course I shall admit that I was there, and that I struck him. The why doesn't matter. Nor am I at all penitent."

Gridley glanced toward Nanak Singh. He felt that he needed support to combat this astounding stubbornness. One of the Sikh's eyelids fluttered. It was barely perceptible but Gridley intuitively guessed its prompting. He turned on Craig and abruptly shot his bolt.

"Why are you vicariously sacrificing yourself for this girl?" he sharply demanded.

Craig stiffened and grew white about the lips—and Gridley knew that he had hit the target. But Craig quickly recovered his poise.

"What girl?" he asked in apparent surprise.

"The Gordon girl," Nanak Singh put in quietly.

"Nonsense! It's ridiculous!" he retorted, trying hard to prevent a flare of temper from creeping into his voice. "There is no girl in it—Miss Gordon or any other. The matter is entirely between Carringford and myself. Understand this, Grid, I refuse, *positively*, to have Miss Gordon drawn into the case. *That is final!*"

"Well—I will respect your wishes, of course," Gridley said with a deep sigh. "I will do all I can for you—you *know* that. But I will tell you this, if you insist upon maintaining the stand you are now taking *nothing can save you!* The judgment of the court-martial will be against you—your straps will be torn from your shoulders—you will be degraded, man,

and you will spend the rest of your life in the Andaman penal settlement. *And that's final!*"

Craig stood for some time staring into vacancy. His face had turned ashen gray, his jaws were firmly set, and his lips drawn into a thin line. They both watched him, hoping that the all too apparent struggle would end in a change of his inexplicable decision. But he only shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"They need doctors there," he said with a wry laugh.

Although Major Gridley had promised not to bring Gloria Gordon into the case, he decided that Craig could make no objections to her bringing herself in. Certainly if they were engaged she would be willing to do all she could for him. If a quarrel had resulted because of her, she would be able to give testimony that would play havoc with Carrington's accusations. Nanak Singh agreed with him.

"The girl *knows!*" he declared. "There was no man at the safe! There was no money taken! Even his unconsciousness was feigned! He scattered the papers himself to give the appearance of burglary. It was revenge for the blow. The safe was an old iron box that locked with a key that he says he kept in his desk. His desk—with much money in the safe? Bah! He is not such a fool!"

The night before, Gloria Gordon had reached her home in an agony of hysteria, but it had soon given place to a tumult of rage at Craig's presumption in "spying" on her, and driving her so ignominiously

from Carringford's quarters. She determined that his ring would go back to him in the morning with a curt note breaking their engagement. But the note was never sent, for the next morning brought the news of Craig's trouble, his arrest, and the astounding accusation that she could not understand. It was a shock, it is true, but her own precarious position was paramount to any thought of him. If she was drawn into the scandalous affair, if Craig told of her indiscretion, or Carringford, she saw herself catapulting into social ruin. She would be scorned by the women, and ridiculed by even the men who had capered at her heels. She was in the midst of these volcanic reflections when her *chuprassie* announced that Major Gridley was at the door.

She knew that he was Craig's friend, that his call could have but one object, and her impulse was to scream an angry refusal to see him. But her good sense prevailed. She determined to make him wait until she had become quite calm, and then she would trust to her wits to get her out of the scrape that she was in. She told her *chuprassie* to show the major in, and hurried to her dressing table. Her *ayah* might have told a sad story of the things that happened in the next forty-five minutes, for that was the time that Gridley waited.

When she finally came into the living room she was quite at her ease, and evidently bent upon making a good impression. Facial mechanics had removed all traces of her conflicting emotions—humiliation, fear,

anger—and her gown had been cleverly chosen—a simple thing in white that was startlingly suggestive of “innocence.” Gridley was punctiliously polite and soft spoken. It would have been a treat for his Tommies. But he would have explained that he had “a cat to skin” and didn’t want the cat to object, so he had smoothed her down a bit. When he thought the time was ripe, he got down to the matter that had brought him there.

“You are a friend of Major Craig’s,” he began.

“Why—yes!” she drawled it very prettily.

“You know that grave charges have been preferred against him?”

Her answer was coldly matter of fact, and betrayed no interest.

“I suppose that there isn’t a person in the station that hasn’t heard of them. Of course I—I am very sorry for Major Craig.”

“Enough to help him if you could?” he asked earnestly.

Her eyes flashed open, wonderingly, with just a hint of surprise.

“I? But how can I?”

“I don’t know,” he frankly admitted, “I thought that, perhaps, you might know something that we might hang a hope upon. Major Craig visited you. You often rode out together. For several weeks he has been your escort—your constant companion”—he paused for a moment, then added significantly—“except on one occasion, the regimental ball.”

If he expected her to betray herself he was disappointed. Her laugh was low, and tantalizing.

“Surely, Major,” she said with a little pout, “you don’t deny me the privilege of accepting *any* gentleman as my escort?”

“No, no! Not at all! But—suppose Major Craig considered that he had a paramount right and——”

“Surely he has not inferred——” She was just a little petulant now.

“I assure you that he has not mentioned you in connection with the case.”

She sighed with apparent relief, and cuddled back in her chair.

“Oh, I didn’t think he would—he—he couldn’t.”

“But we do not believe that his visit to Colonel Carringford’s quarters was for the *purpose* of breaking into his safe. There was no reason for that. He had no pressing debts, and more than sufficient money for his needs. We admit that he went there, that for some reason he lost his temper and struck the colonel. Unfortunately he refuses to tell us what that reason was.”

“Ah, I was wondering why you didn’t ask him!” It was a malicious little thrust, but her relief had not escaped him.

“We can reach no other conclusion than that they quarrelled over—a *woman*,” he went on, a little angrily for his temper was rocking, “and that this woman can do a great deal toward clearing the major of the infamous charge of safe-breaking, and furnish a mitigating excuse for the assault.”

“And this woman that you are speaking of?” her voice now had an ominous drawl.

“Frankly, the lady that Colonel Carringford escorted to the ball—*yourself*.”

His blunt statement cut her to the quick, and she flared angrily.

“How dare you suggest such a thing,” she exclaimed imperiously. “It isn’t fair, it isn’t chivalrous to drag me into the horrid affair! I—I had nothing to do with it—nothing at all! If Major Craig is in trouble it is his own fault. Because of—my unfortunate acquaintance with him, my accepting him as my escort on a few occasions, or receiving him here, does that give the inference that I have any knowledge of the reason for his brutal attack upon Colonel Carringford, or of his turning himself into a burglar?”

“*Unfortunate acquaintance!*” Gridley explosively exclaimed, “are you not engaged to *marry* Major Craig?”

“Has he said so?”

There was no doubt of her anxiety now, but Gridley abhorred a lie.

“No,” he admitted.

“Then ask him!” she retorted with a defiant laugh.

She did not wait to call the *chuprassie* but went to the door herself and threw it open. She was a woman, and for once Major Gridley faced a situation that left him speechless.

From that moment the Craig-Carringford case sped on to its inevitable end. There were many hot argu-

ments, even fistic encounters, both in the club and hotel; for, despite the weight of circumstantial evidence, Craig had many champions. The curious Renshaw offered him his services, and spent much of his time deducing impossible motives and following ridiculous clews. The bellicose Blagrove offered Craig the limit of his bank account as a defense fund, and openly declared his disbelief that there was even a shilling in Carrington's safe.

But opinions do not count in a court-martial. Nine officers composed it—five of them of Carrington's clique. A Deputy Judge Advocate General came up from Headquarters to keep the wheels of justice properly greased, and to see that the accused got what was coming to him. Carrington told his story with studious hesitancy—which convinced the judges of his deep sympathy for the accused. He suavely and smilingly dodged Gridley's hammering attacks, and left the stand with his usual unruffled *sangfroid*. Craig's testimony was brief. He admitted the assault but stubbornly refused to give his reason. The charge of safe-breaking he hotly denied. Miss Gordon's name was not mentioned once during the proceedings. The judgment of the court was exactly as Gridley had predicted—public degradation, the tearing off of shoulder straps and cutting off of buttons, and transportation to the penal settlement on the Andaman Islands.



## CHAPTER V

### THE ESCAPE

HIS patient was a Sikh—a sergeant in the native troop that guarded the convict settlement. The injury was a bruised hand that needed but a simple dressing, a mere excuse, for the Sikh had whispered a message from Nanak Singh. How the message had reached the Andamans was a mystery that John Craig made no attempt to solve. He knew that it had been relayed across India—one native whispering it to another—and that was all.

Perhaps Blagrove, the bellicose, could have told something about that message, but one would have been several kinds of a fool to ask him, for Blagrove was red headed and had freckles, and a man with red hair and freckles is liable to be very *tabascoish* if one betray too much interest in his affairs. Anyhow, Blagrove made a trip to Calcutta, and went down to the Hoogly docks to visit an acquaintance of his—one Fung Shui, a Chinaman. When he returned from his trip he was closeted a long time with Nanak Singh—and that same night the message started.

A few hours after his patient had delivered the message, John Craig was passing native guards who turned their backs upon him. He went on, blindly trusting to the mysterious friends who were guiding him to freedom. If he became puzzled at the twist of a path some invisible one whispered a word that set

him right. He passed through a clump of *padouk* brush and along the edge of a mangrove swamp. Finally he reached the sea.

With growing impatience he stared into the wall of blackness. Minutes had passed when he uttered an exclamation of relief. Far out he saw a faint blur and, without hesitation, he plunged in and swam for it. It was a long, gruelling tug and at times he was compelled to float on his back to rest himself. But he reached it at last. A rope was thrown to him and he was drawn on deck. Then the sails were noiselessly hoisted on Fung Shui's junk, and the vessel put to sea.

## PART THREE

*The Wordly Hope men set their  
Hearts upon  
Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,  
Like Snow upon the Desert's  
dusty face,  
Lighting a little hour or two—is  
gone.*

OMAR KHAYYAM



## CHAPTER I

### THE WHIM OF AN ECCENTRIC

CLAY sat at a table in Tahiti Tom's, the girl before him, immovable, her eyes never leaving his face. Order had been restored; a couple of chairs and a table that had been reduced to kindlings under the catapulted impact of "G'rilla" Bagsley's hurtling body had been removed; Tahiti Tom had come from his cubby, casting back a reproachful glance at his joss; the little trader, whose experience with the bully had been so ignominious, was now buying drinks for the "orchestra," one of whom was casting accusing glances at Clay's broad back as he whined a querulous lament over an accordion that had explosively collapsed under one of "G'rilla's" flailing feet.

Business had started up with a spurt that brought back Tom's cackling good humor. The Magyar was sliding filled mugs through the slush of the bar with the rhythm of an automaton. Barmaids scurried from table to table, flinging back brazen retorts to the impatient roars of the gabbling rabble who had scrambled back to their seats, with throats clamoring for lubrication, as the thoroughly thrashed "G'rilla" had volplaned head over heels into the roadway.

In one corner sat Toni, a discredited Don Juan. He was unresponsive to the urge of his companions to drink and be merry, for he was gloomily reflecting upon

both the possibilities and probabilities of the warm reception that Mimi would give him when he came within the shadow of his own vine and fig tree. He promised himself that never again would he become enmeshed in the snares of a woman. They were tormenting devils, and not worth the snap of his finger. Hereafter he would be satisfied with the one he had, even if she *was* fat and peppery. Having *her*, a man was a fool to *want* any other. But his eyes persisted in drifting Pan-ward. Ah, such a spritely little beauty, such a merry little devil, with her black eyes that were limpid as a pool in a bowl of coral, eyes that were bewitchingly winning, ever sparkling with mischief, and yet so meltingly tender at times, and her blue-black hair that was as soft and fine as the cocoon of a butterfly, her ears that were as delicate as the shell of a paper nautilus, her seductive body with its sheen of satin and the smoothness of alabaster that set every nerve a-tingle. A "pooh, pooh" for Mimi! *She* was a torment, the snapping dragon of his fireside, while Pan—he drew a long disconsolate sigh, and wondered if she wasn't just a wee bit sorry for having treated him so cruelly.

But, however much that Toni was thinking of Pan, he had ceased to exist so far as she was concerned. When the fight was over, Clay had pointed to a chair and bluntly told her to sit down. He had said it without a smile, and with a snap that was far from encouraging. Anyone who had ever wanted Pan to do anything before had always had to talk very sweetly, coax long and arduously, argue down a multitude of objections, and agree to as many con-

ditions, even if it were something that she dearly wished to do. It was a little system by which those who begged for favors might appreciate the *largesse* of her concessions, and it gave her much giggling satisfaction. Now, for the first time in her life, she obeyed an order. She fairly precipitated herself into the chair and sat mute and primly upright, watching every expression of the grim-visaged man who had flung himself into a seat on the opposite side of the table.

She knew that, sooner or later, he would look at her instead of staring into space, his eyes flaming with an inexorable passion. She wondered, when he did so, if the hard, cruel lines that netted them would disappear, if the flame would die out, if his stubborn, aggressive face would soften and break into smiles. Would he speak to her softly, kindly, or would his voice be sharp and rasping as it had been when he had so bluntly ordered her to sit down? And would she *look good to him?*

A great fear gripped her as she realized that her dress was a tattered ruin, thanks to her fight with Mimi and her struggle with "G'rilla." One sleeve was gone, the other hung in ribbons, and in the skirt were a score of gaping holes. No doubt her hair was askew, her face begrimed. Even now, with eyes crossed, she contemplated with dismay a black smudge on the end of her nose. That spot was a *calamity*, the last straw, for it would surely make him laugh. Any girl would look like a fool with a spot on her nose, and if *he* laughed at her——. Oh, what she would not give for

one short minute to primp up a bit, to rub out that awful spot, and if she only had a few pins to hide the tatters, and a flower, a flaming hibiscus, to nest in the blue-black of her hair, and then—one soul satisfying peek into the still clear waters of the pool that she knew so well, unto which she had so often ran that she might tell her troubles to a good Pan who popped to its surface and laughed with her over the intimate details of her *trionphes d'amour*, and was as enthusiastic over her vain little hopes, her dreams, as herself. She wished herself at the pool now for the sympathy she so much needed but could only sit, pitifully forlorn, waiting for Clay to look and condemn.

She told herself that she must be as quiet as a fish dozing in the mud of the lagoon. So she waited, breathlessly, conscious that her heart was pumping noisily, and fearful that it would disturb him, even arouse an angry order for her to keep it still. The “duchess” came to her and, with a seductive leer at Clay, bent down and whispered in her ear—

“Tom wants you! He has a friend——!”

Pan paled, and, with an apprehensive glance toward Clay, gave an almost imperceptible shake of her head and an appealing gesture for her to go away. She was conscious of a stabbing emotion, something strange, inexplicable, that added to her misery and made her frightfully ashamed.

But Clay had neither seen nor heard. The room was a blur, the moving figures but vague shadows, silhouettes a little darker than the sordid background. He was giving no thought to Pan, no thought to his



recent fight for the name "Carringford" was still hammering in his brain, the face of Gloria smiling cynically at him through the mist of years. Only once his face lighted, when he thought of Gridley who wore the cross and had won the straps of a major in Afghan hills. Good old Gridley, the only officer in the regiment who, in defiance of conventions and the snobbish criticism of his fellow officers, had remained so staunchly loyal to him through all the awful scenes that had climaxed his life's tragedy, and who, struggling to keep back the tears, had assured him that every Tommy in the regiment was with him to a man, and that it would be well for the "prig" if he never succeeded in mustering up nerve enough to lead his regiment into action. If he did there was certain to be a vacancy among its commissioned officers. Where was Gridley now? Was he still a major? Was he still the same amiable nuisance when in his cups?

Carringford? Was he still the regimental commandant? Was he still strutting among the women with that everlasting smirk, forever taking an imaginative x-ray for hidden charms through that ridiculous monocle and looking for all the world like an ape squinting through a knot hole? *Ten years*—and Gloria! Was she still the same alluring beauty? Did men still rave over her, go mad for a smile, for a kiss on her finger tips, even as he? Was she still the deceitful cheat, the superlative falsehood, so capable of dealing deadly blows to their hearts, yet cringing from the slightest thrust that was aimed at the worthless thing that she called her reputation? Had Time and Re-

morse branded her as Time and Hatred had branded him? If there was a God she must have paid the score, and yet—he had many pleasant memories of her, of many Elysian hours spent in that old walled garden, and hoped that the lash fell lightly.

Pan, watching the constantly changing expressions on his face, at first with a forboding fear, for she believed herself the subject of his thoughts, now intuitively guessed that the mental tempest that was raging within him was caused by some great grief, some terrible thing that had happened to him. With eyes that were moist with tender sympathy, she fidgeted about in her chair, striving to gain courage, to find a word or two that would let him know that she was very sorry for him. She thought of the satyr in her pocket, and stealthily reached for it. With many misgivings, she slid it toward him across the table top.

“Yo’ look ver’ mad wiz somebody zat yo’ hate,” she faltered, “an’ zis good little devil, mebbe she help yo’! Me, all time, like to-day!”

He stared at her so long, and with such a scowl, that she timidly drew it back, fearful that her presumption had aroused his ire.

His eyes slowly drifted from her to a close inspection of the room, and his brows knit into a puzzled frown as the shadows apparently dissolved, and the café and its inmates came sharp and clear to his vision. With fingers raking nervously through his hair, he tried to solve the enigma of his presence here, of his absent-mindedly plunging along an unfrequented path into the nauseous reek of a filthy place that he had never entered before. The *Lark* had dropped anchor in the harbor

and he had left for the landing place in the small boat! Why? Why had he come to the harbor at all! The whole proceeding was incomprehensible and utterly silly. Of course there was that newspaper clipping that had driven him into an ungovernable fury, but it was ridiculous to imagine that a fit of temper would have rendered him temporarily insane. Yet here he was, like a night-stalking somnambulist who had suddenly been awakened.

He tried to recall his actions from the time he left the schooner, and out of the maze came the spectacle of an abominous brute that had ordered him out of his way, and a terrorized girl crouching against the wall. His eyes drifted back to Pan, and he studied her for a moment. Finally he spoke and, to her great relief, his voice was neither sharp nor rasping.

“Who are you?” he asked.

She swallowed hard, her fingers nervously folding over the ragged edges of a huge tear in her waist.

“Pan, me!” she answered diffidently.

“Is that all, just Pan?”

“Sometime eet ees Pandora!”

He nodded gravely.

“Ah yes, the girl that Vulcan made.”

“Who?” she raised her voice in astonishment.

“Vulcan—he was a blacksmith.”

“How yo’ know zat?” she demanded incredulously.

“Oh, I heard it a long time ago.”

There was a sharp intake of her breath.

“Ees yo’ ver’ sure?”

“Oh yes! There isn’t any doubt about it.”

For a moment she gazed at him in utter stupefaction. This was startling information.

“Mebbe, *mon pere*, he should know zat!” she exclaimed, breathlessly. “By golly, eet would mak’ heem ver’ mad.”

Her tongue clucked against the roof of her mouth as she pictured the ruction in the La Croix household if she should decide to loose the family skeleton. Then a little doubt crept into her mind.

“Mebbe eet ees ’nother Pan?” she ventured.

“This Pan was a girl that was very cunning,” he soberly informed her. “She played tricks on people, especially on men. She made fools of them! They got into fights with one another because of her.”

“By golly, zat is me!” she exclaimed, now thoroughly convinced.

“Undoubtedly! But I wouldn’t tell father if I were you.”

“*Non?*”

“No! As long as we know ’it, that’s enough.”

She nodded her head in agreement. The idea of sharing a secret with this wonderful man, to have something in common with him, was a very pleasant thing to contemplate.

“*Oui!* We know eet, zat’s ’nuff,” she giggled, then her eyes blazed threateningly. “But eef zat *grasse femme*, aga’n she t’row some *poi* at me, zar will be some fun.”

But a very persistent old Vulcan was still creating considerable havoc in her mind. There was something

very funny about "zis feller wiz ze funny name." How was it that she had never heard of him before. She glanced toward Clay with just a little suspicion that he had been "stringing" her, but her doubts were shattered by the sober expression of his face upon which she could not detect the faintest wrinkle of a smile. She wondered if he ever did smile.

"I theenk me zat I mak' heem laugh jus' a little bit anyhow!" she decided.

She lifted her skirt a little that he might see the tears.

"Yo' see dose dress?" she questioned.

His glance travelled to the skirt and back to her face. He nodded.

"Yo' see dose nose?" she wrinkled it up and pointed to the black smudge that tipped it.

He contemplated it seriously for a moment, then he nodded again.

"Mimi!" she declared with an impressive gesture.

"Mimi?"

"Toni's woman! I mak' me a beeg fight wiz her. Toni, he theenk he ees one gran' roostair! Heem theenk I am stuck wiz heem!" she gave an indignant shrug of her shoulders. "He ees jus' one Kanaka, *hein*, an' *me*, I am some French! I am one aunt's sister wiz Napoleon ze beeg. *Mon pere*, heem tell me zat when he have ze powdair in hees nose." She paused, expectantly, waiting for him to express his opinion of Toni's presumption.

“ I can understand your annoyance,” he assured her, “ he is not your social equal.”

“ Mebbe!” she said with a puzzled frown. “ I don’ know zat. He ees one beeg fool, anyhow! I pay heem plenty. I mak’ love wiz heem so hees woman can see.” She laughed gaily as Toni’s miserable experience in the net recurred to her. “ When she lick heem good an’ he run away, she call me a name—ough, a bad-d-d one—an’ for zat I tumble her in ze watair, I mak’ her sit down on her head, I rub-b-b her nose in ze mud, zen what yo’ theenk? ”

From the expression on her face he knew that something startling had occurred, and he leaned forward with an interest that gratified her immensely.

“ I haven’t the least idea!” he said.

“ All ze feeshes come, whiz, whiz, t’rough ze watair.” She paused just a moment as if expecting an exclamation of disbelief, but he seemed so credulous, so intensely interested, that she went on brazenly, “ Zey ha! ha! wiz zair mout’s, an’ weegle zair tails so, an’ so, an’ so,” she waved her hands back and forth in imitation. “ One ver beeg feesh, I call heem—what ees eet zat I call heem? Oh, I call heem Antoine. He ees ver’ much entertain’. Hees belly shooks wiz joy. I say to heem—‘ Antoine, what yo’ theenk, ees zat ’nuff for zis Mimi?’ Heem thenk jus’ little bit. Heem scratch heemself wiz hees tail. Heem say—‘ *Mon fille*, mebbe yo’ should give her jus’ a little bit more,’ an’ I do eet.”

She gave a crow of delight, and clapped her hands

frantically, as he threw back his head in a burst of spontaneous laughter.

“Yo’ *laugh!* Oh, I have mak’ yo’ laugh!” she cried.

“Now, now yo’ are happee, an’ me I am ver’ glad!”

“You seem to be on very intimate terms with these fishes,” he said, with a chuckle.

“*Oh, oui!* Dose feesh are my ver’ good frien’!” she said, earnestly. “When I go in ze lagoon, zey are nevair, nevair afraid wiz me. Zey weenk me ze eye like zey say—‘ello Pan, we are ver’ glad zat yo’ come to swim wiz us!’ Zey know I nevair hurt zem, I nevair take zem out of ze watair zat zey love, zat I will nevair *eat* zem, nevair, *nevair!* Zey are too happee, dose little fellers!”

She stopped, her forehead wrinkled into a little puzzled frown, and he sensed that she was groping for words to express another thought, something potent, something that was of tragic import to her, and that she wanted *him* to know. For a brief moment she ceased to be the care-free will o’ the wisp. In the shadow of the girl he saw the woman, wistfully forlorn as if yearning hopelessly for a thing unattainable, a thing that was cherished as a sweet dream that could never come true though the heart cry ever so loudly. He did not speak, but waited until the struggle for words had ended.

“Eet ees ver’ funny but sometime’ I am ver’ sorry wiz mysel’,” she went on. “Mebbe I am seek, mebbe I am hungree, *mon pere* he no care, *ma mere*—tchick,

tchick—*zat* woman! Nobody care! Nobody wan' me—only mebbe some mans' cause I am a *girl*. Oh, eet ees righ' *zat* a girl ees for ze mans. I do not care for *zat*. Eet ees bettair as *not'ings!* But sometime' eet mak' me ver' emptee here," she brought her hand to her heart, and her voice faltered. "Sometime' I like somebody to wan' me 'cause I am *jus'* Pan. Zen eet ees *zat* I come to dose feesh an' zey are sorry wiz me. Zey weegle over my foots, an' zey teekle my toe' so I will laugh, so I will know *zat zey* love me, love me for *not'ings*, 'cause I am *jus' me!* Zen no more I theenk me of *mon pere* or *ma mere*, I snap me ze fingair at dose mans, an' I am happee ag'n, me and dose feesh!" Her eyes had filled with tears, and she impatiently brushed them away. She giggled, hysterically, as she looked up at him. "Am I not one beeg fool, me?" she exclaimed, with a gesture of disgust.

He thought of another girl, an English aristocrat, boasting the culture of a dozen centuries, a scintillating star among the "who's who" of the social world, who had only to wish for a thing to have some modern Alladin snap open a magical purse to bring it into being, and, underneath the lingerie and silks, just a heartless thing of clay, a living falsehood, a bawdy prude to whom men's love, homage, worship, were mere pleasantries to wile away a beauty's idle hour.

Here was stark tragedy—a girl, half barbarian, making no pretense, satisfied with a flower to decorate her hair or a string of sea shells to hang around her neck, just a perfect product of wild nature too royally



savage to lie; her one comforting amusement to drive her lithe body through the rippling billows of the lagoon, to disport in the spume of the tide, as it whirled among the rocks. With head proudly erect, unashamed, this girl accepted her destiny—the rightful game of lusty animal men, even revelled in it as a substitute for the unattainable spiritual love, the love that comforts, that is a refuge when one is sorely buffeted, that raises man to kingship over the world of brutes.

He thought of the mockery of cathedral bells that clanked brazen praise to the wisdom of God, a god that was so egotistically good, so boastfully just, and so utterly careless of the souls created in his own image that they fell through the ether like chips from a workman's bench, helter skelter, light where you may, one landing into Elysian ease and luxury, every desire a never failing magnet, another falling into one of the two hells he had so lovingly created for it, one above ground and the other subterranean.

An eccentric idea flashed through his mind. Why not correct one of the mistakes of this unexplainable God? Pan was startled by his raucous laugh, and the smash of his fist upon the table top.

“How would you like to be a lady?” he asked.

She swallowed hard, staring at him in bewilderment. Then she cocked her head on one side, and her brows puckered into a little questioning frown.

“What ees eet, a lady?” she asked, suspiciously.

He started to speak, then stopped, and scratched his head behind one ear, just a little perplexed to find an

answer that she would understand. He thought of Gloria—the mold of his misanthropy.

“A lady,” he drawled, “is one who hates with a smile—who can stab deep with soft words—who can lie without a blush. She can be a huzzy at heart with a prayer book in her hand. If she has a hidden beauty she can strip it naked to the world, dangling it before men as a bait, and laugh when, in clutching it, they damn themselves.”

“Me, I theenk zat would be ver’ easee!” she declared.

“Of course, this don’t stop us from using some ideas of our own—we *could* make improvements if we wanted to.”

“Sure, *we* could fix zat,” she nodded her head importantly, with no distinct idea of what it was that needed fixing.

“If you go with me——”

She clapped her hands with delight, her eyes sparkling, and her face radiant with joy. “How would you like to be a lady,” hadn’t seemed to promise anything very definite, but now it assumed proportions that were beyond her wildest dreams.

“Oh, I go wiz yo’?” she cried, rapturously.

He nodded.

“But you *understand*,” he said, impressively, “from this moment you are not to think of any other man but *me!* *I, alone*, am to be your man!”

“Oui!” she agreed, solemnly. “*Nobody else—nevaire—Nevair!*”

“It will not be very easy for you to be a lady. Perhaps you will be very lonesome sometimes, for you can never come to this place again, never set foot upon this island, never see your father and mother. No matter what the road may be, you can never turn back, you must follow it to the end, no matter where it leads. Perhaps that will be too hard for you?”

“I do not care, me!” she exclaimed, imploringly. “Pleas’, pleas’ take me! I will stay wiz yo’ ’till I die!”

He got up, and held out his hand, into which she trustfully placed her own. He felt the pounding leap of her pulse as it throbbed beneath his finger tips, and he marvelled that his every nerve seemed electrically alive, and strangely thrumming a requiem to the Thing that had obsessed him—the memory of Gloria.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RIFT IN THE LUTE

A MAN may get out of bed in the morning, after a night of dreamless, refreshing sleep, with a roseate view of the world, and a Christian love for its people. He can sit down to a breakfast feeling that it is of epicurian daintiness, the grape fruit a golden ball of lusciousness, the bacon a marvel of artistic cookery, the eggs masterpieces of hencraft, and the coffee Mochoian nectar. He may start for his office, his lips puckered into whistling melody, firmly convinced that he is the most fortunate mortal in the universe. Perhaps he will cock a delighted ear to the singing of a bird, his head will nod in responsive friendliness to the wagging tail of a stray dog, the newsboy on the corner will receive a fatherly pat on the head, even the spattering mud from the wheels of a passing motor will in no way disturb his perfect equanimity, then—. Suddenly he recollects some unpleasant episode, some trivial disagreement, something that *could or might* happen, and presto—his sun ducks behind a cloud, the world becomes a sizzling hell and all its people fiendish conspirators against his peace, his stomach gleefully sports with ptomaine, he drives a lusty kick at the dog, barks back at the newsboy, prays fervently that the motor be sent to everlasting smash and the chauffeur sent up for life. Mouthing the epithets of an unleashed madman,

he reaches his office in a blind fury of temper that lasts until he forlornly tumbles into bed at night. All of which is proof of the psychological fact that a man can *think* himself into a state bordering upon insanity, and that what really arouses his frenzy may be a shadow that is purely chimerical, or something that has gone before, ceased to exist, and that should, for sanitary reasons, be entombed with all other things that are dead.

Thus it had been with Clay when that newspaper clipping had slipped from between the folds of the old wallet. It was as if a hideous spectre had burst through the sod of an ancient grave to croak through its fleshless jaws the stern reproof, "Oh thou fool! Dost thou not know that the penalty thou must pay for loving a woman is—*Thou shalt never forget.*" He thought he *had* forgotten. The first years of the ten he had ruthlessly assailed and crushed out every human emotion save that of hate. Longings, regrets, even conscience itself had been stifled into silence. Now a draft, as from the inferno, had relumed the smoldering fires as these phantasmagoric creatures re-enacted their old rôles to the most insignificant detail. Again he heard Gloria's voice, musical as the far echoes of temple bells, so treacherously sweet as she gave him her betrothal promise. Again he saw her in the arms of the strutting Carringford, an ominous shadow in the moonlight. He had raged ten years before, but it had been like the rage of a bewildered child—a child that was desperately afraid. Now his rage was that of a

man seared in the fires of hell—a man who would never forget, would never forgive, a man that could kill.

For a second time he crouched in the musty hold of Fung Shui's junk that was swashing and creaking along toward the China Sea in the glow of silver gray that heralded the approach of another day. Suddenly the movement of the vessel seemed to cease, he heard sharp orders, the patter of running feet, and the swish of the anchor as it struck the water. It was several minutes before he succeeded in spanning the years, and realized that the *Lark* was gently rolling in the swells of the lagoon. Forgetting the box, and the papers strewn across the table top, even the bag of pearls and the pear-shaped gem, he mechanically reached for his cap and climbed the few steps that reached to the deck. Here, he curtly ordered Poni to row him ashore.

A long blaring blast of a steam whistle had brought Fung Shui to the door of his galley. Just beyond the reef the huge liner the *City of Bombay* had anchored, and a lighter was drawing up to its side for the purpose of taking off a few pieces of freight that had been consigned from Sidney. Nearby, bobbing about in the water, was the dingy little launch that carried the few passengers embarking for northern ports. As Fung Shui turned to go back he caught sight of Hayes standing near the bow and intently gazing shoreward. Now Fung Shui's bump of curiosity was abnormally developed. He wanted to *know* things. Even those that were trivial and very insignificant interested him. Most of his wisdom had been acquired from the study

of the things that other men would pass over as unimportant. He would have told you that everything that was *big* started from something that was *little*, that it took an acorn to grow an oak, and that if one were interested in *little things* a study of Jim Hayes was certainly worth one's while.

He saw that Hayes was watching the small boat that Poni was driving through the water with sturdy strokes, and that his eyes followed Clay from the time he stepped upon the wharf until he disappeared around the corner of the warehouse. Fung Shui wondered why he was waiting, with such apparent impatience, for Clay to get out of sight, holding his body tense and rigid much as a thief of the night waits in the shadows for a watchman to pass.

He saw Hayes turn and regard the liner, his mouth twisted into a triumphant grin. His sharp ears caught the grunt of satisfaction as the superintendent whirled and started quickly across the deck in the direction of the passageway that led to the cabin. Hayes had traversed half the distance when he caught sight of the Chinaman lazily leaning against the port rail. With a muttered curse, he slackened his pace and made an almost imperceptible move to turn back but, evidently concluding that this might arouse Fung Shui's suspicions, he again started for the cabin, this time walking slowly as one who rambles about with no particular object in view. There was just the slightest twitch in one corner of the Chinaman's mouth, a mere flash, and

again his face became as expressionless as the one of stone on a Buddha image.

As Hayes got to the foot of the passageway he came to an abrupt stop. His heart pounded viciously for he thought he heard the stealthy pad of footsteps that seemed to be approaching the top of the stairway. He listened, ears keenly alert, but there was no sound except the sucking swish of water against the hull, and the echoing thud of moving freight that came across the lagoon from the liner. He concluded that he had been mistaken. After all, why should he be watched. It was quite the usual thing for him to enter the cabin; his own state-room opened off of it. With Clay absent, he was in full charge of the vessel, and answerable to no one for his actions—particularly that *damned Chinaman*. Hadn't he actually *suffered* thinking about those pearls—suffered acutely because he couldn't see just how he could get them into his possession and make a safe get-away, and now that the apropos arrival of the steamer and Clay's departure shoreward had given him his opportunity shouldn't he grasp it? There was absolutely nothing to fear, nor any reason that his hands should shake in this ridiculous fashion, or his knees seem so weak. He had had nerve once, plenty of it, but that was before a little needle had become so necessary to his existence. It was a bad habit, and he would stop it—sometime—but he wished that he had a "shot" now. It would steady him, send the blood leaping through his veins. He was a fool for not carrying a greater supply, but it was a waste of time dwelling



upon that now, and every minute of time was precious. The *City of Bombay* made but a short stop—generally got under way in half an hour. There was little chance of Clay returning until long after that. He could easily force the lock of the strong box set against the wall near the door to Clay's stateroom. It would probably take him fifteen minutes if he worked fast. With the pearls in his possession, he could board the liner before it weighed anchor, and be safe on his way before Clay would discover his loss. There would be no chance of pursuit until the arrival of the next steamer three weeks later. By that time he would have landed in Bombay, and be making his way into China where he could catch a boat for the States.

Still afraid of the silence of the things that were beyond his line of vision, he gave a reassuring glance up the stairway. Then he opened the door, noiselessly tiptoed in, closed it ever so carefully, and turned the key in the lock; all this with the perfect technic of a professional sneak thief, although he could have openly entered the cabin as he had done a hundred times before, and would have been unquestioned even by Clay himself. But of course it makes all the difference in the world what a man is thinking of when he opens a door.

He whirled toward the table, but as quickly came to a standstill with a sharp exclamation of astonishment. He stood, fairly rooted to the spot, blinking unbelievably at the litter of papers and the tin box that were on the table. He glanced toward the strong box

that sat against the wall. It was open, and the lid thrown back. The whole thing seemed so ridiculously impossible. He could not convince himself that the ever reticent and methodical Clay would leave his personal papers about for the inspection of any chance comer, or leave the pearls——! He gave a groan of disappointment. Of course Clay had taken the pearls with him. After all his well-laid plans he had been checkmated. He muttered fierce imprecations, words bitter with acid rage, as he turned to leave the cabin. Then, with renewed hope, he made up his mind that he would be foolish not to examine the contents of the box. First, of course, he must assure himself that there was no one in either of the two staterooms. It wasn't at all likely, but it was as well to make sure. He opened both doors and glanced within. There was no one there. He quickly crossed to the table, and pawed through the contents of the box, almost screaming with delight as he brought out the buckskin bag. All the pearls were there, even to that wonderful pear-shaped gem. He gloated over them, running them through his fingers, and babbling half crazily about the things that he would do now that he was rich. Nothing could stop him. The rest were mere details—Bombay, China, the States, and ease, and luxury. He dropped the bag into his pocket and started for the door. He turned the key in the lock.

Suddenly the scraping sound of notes, an air that at first was dismally weird, penetrated the wall and vibrated through the cabin. It was a menacing,

unearthly sound, and rose, *a la crescendo*, to a prolonged screeching wail that was very much like the snarl of a jaguar as it prepares to leap. Its effect upon Hayes was startling. At the first note he stiffened as if he had been flicked by a live wire, and his face turned a pasty white. A queer chill zigzagged between his shoulder blades. He knew that it was but a bow scraping across the solitary string of a Chinese fiddle, but he also *knew* that Fung Shui's hand held one end of that bow. He tried to convince himself that it was only a coincidence, that it was nothing unusual for Fung Shui to scrape out hideous noises on that ridiculous fiddle but, however, he reasoned, his nerve was gone. If Fung Shui suspected him he was quite likely to exercise his uncanny humor in sending a warning or a threat. It wouldn't do to take any chances. He had always had an instinctive fear of the Chinaman, a death fear that he was never able to throw off, and he had religiously sidestepped any chance of an open rupture between them. Very nervously, his eyes flirting apprehensively about, he walked back to the table and dropped the bag in the box. Instantly there came two notes, courteous little notes, a "thank you" much as a cat might say it. He snarled a curse, a defiant one, but the trip to the States was indefinitely postponed. He decided that, at the first opportunity, he would appeal to Clay to have that damned instrument destroyed or, at least, to have him prohibit that malicious Chinaman from playing it within one mile of any human being.

He started to gather up the papers with the intention of placing them in the strong box together with the pearls that had so sorely tempted him. As he was doing so, he caught sight of the newspaper clipping that Clay had carelessly dropped upon the table. He read it again and again, his brows knit in a puzzled frown.

GREAT EXCITEMENT IN EAST INDIAN MILITARY CIRCLES! MURDEROUS ASSAULT! SAFE LOOTED! COLONEL SIR EDWARD CARRINGFORD, THE VICTIM! THE REGIMENTAL SURGEON, MAJOR JOHN CRAIG, ACCUSED!

“John Craig? A *surgeon*?” he muttered.

A startling thought surged through his mind. It seemed preposterous, and yet—*Clay was a surgeon*. He had freed his island from the devastating epidemics that had depopulated many of the other islands. He had performed many operations among his natives—a most difficult one that had saved the life of the old chief, Taipi Kinino. Could it be possible that John Craig and John Clay were one and the same man? He told himself that stranger things than that had happened, that the South Seas had ever been a safe asylum for outlaw and cut-throat from time immemorial. Clay an ex-convict! Clay a prison bird! He maliciously rolled the terms over on the end of his tongue. It seemed to raise him in his own estimation. No prison had ever *gotten* him. *He* had been too clever.

He saw another clipping sticking from the folds of

the wallet. He seized it greedily, and read it with an exultant grin.

LIFE PRISONER MISSING! JOHN CRAIG, FORMERLY OF HIS MAJESTY'S GUARD ESCAPES FROM PENAL SETTLEMENT.

Again mere headlines and no details. Hayes' eyes snapped with vicious delight. This seemed to settle the matter beyond all doubt, and explained the reason for the idiosyncrasies of this silent Mister Clay. He was a fugitive, a man wanted. No doubt there was a *price* on his head, a reward to whoever would give him up—or *give information*.

He crossed to the port hole, his mind in a riot as he tried to evolve some plan that would allow him to turn to profit the information that Clay's carelessness had placed in his hands. It must be something in which he, himself, would be thoroughly hidden in the background. It would not do for *him* to be too conspicuous. He could picture Clay's swift reprisal. His roving eyes fastened upon the wireless extension that reared itself above the upperworks of the *City of Bombay*. He uttered a sharp exclamation. His problem was solved. He hurried the papers and pearls into the strong box and, after locking it, quickly ascended.

As he reached the deck, he paused again, seized with an unaccountable dread, for Fung Shui was but a pace away, and leaning idly over the starboard rail. He managed to conquer this feeling and, with a defiant stiffening of his shoulders, crossed the deck. Poni had just brought the small boat to the side of the *Lark*.

“Wait!” Hayes called to him, “I want you to row me over to the steamer.”

Fung Shui crossed the deck, and watched the small boat as Poni sent it bobbing through the water. His eyes were drawn to mere slits, and a hiss, sharply sibilant, issued from between his teeth, as always when he suspected hidden evil and found it difficult to solve the mystery.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MAGDALEN ACCUSED

TONI, a breathless messenger with startling news, darted through the underbrush, leaping the green scum of stagnant pools, and tearing himself loose from the clutch of aromatic vines, orchids, and pandanus that netted his way. Heedless of scratch and bruise, he was eager to gain, by a short cut, an advance on Pan and Clay who were coming along the beach. Pan was leaving the island with a white man—he who was silent—the Sphinx. This had been the whisper that had percolated through the ramshackle café as she and Clay had passed through its door. And *this* was the news that Toni had seized upon so eagerly as an open sesame to Mimi's good graces—something that would divert her attention from himself even if the armistice was but brief.

As he neared the hut, he loitered, and waited for Pan and Clay to come into sight at the brow of rock that dipped into the scoop of land that divided the cluster of hovels from the lagoon. He had no desire to arrive too soon, to allow Mimi any time to get into action. Finally they appeared, and, with a heartfelt sigh of an ended suspense, he again started forward, and fairly flew through the door of his hut.

“Mimi, my Mimi,” he cried, “what you t'ink——?” But what Mimi thought was all too apparent. Out of

the hut shot Toni, his eyes bulging with fright, and alternately pleading and dodging a catapulted flight of household goods that whizzed through the air with the force and speed of a tornado. Then followed Mimi, a cauldron of fury, shrieking dire threats, and lunging at him like an enraged wildcat. He bowled her over as he dived for a tree, a huge palm that cast its peaceful shade over the scene of war. He wildly gripped the stubs of long-gone fronds, and lurched hysterically upward as Mimi leaped for his heels, clutched, caught, and yanked. Back and forth she swung like an eccentric pendulum as he kicked frantically to free himself. His shoe came off in her hands and, as she sprawled backwards, he uttered a derisive yell and quickly scrambled upwards, managing to find a crotch in which he could squat and recover his breath.

“When I come down,” he blustered, “I bus’ yo’ sure!”

“Yah, yah! When you come down!” she yelled back, triumphantly. “I bring yo’ down!”

She darted for a long pole that stood leaning against the hut, and back she came with the swing of an all-conquering Amazon. She poked, prodded and slashed at him, driving him, slipping and clutching, from crotch to crotch, and squealed with delight every time the pole found its mark, and at every yelp of pain when the saw-toothed edges of the huge leaves bit into his hands and face or dug viciously through his shirt and trousers.

Every man, woman, and child of the neighboring



huts had gathered in a semi-circle at a safe distance from the pirouetting pole. They had squatted, monkey-like, waiting patiently for Toni to be poked from the tree, thoroughly enjoying his predicament but anxious for the climax that they realized would be even far more entertaining. The women shrilly applauded Mimi at every whack that landed successfully, every poke that threatened to hurtle him groundward, while the men egged Toni on, cheering him vociferously every time he succeeded in getting the pole in his grip and returning poke for poke with a vengeance. But the hiatus in Mimi's attack was generally brief; each time she had almost jerked Toni from the tree, and had landed a resounding thump on his head before he could recover his balance.

He begged for help from his friends, but there were no volunteers and much dubious advice—that from the women raising gales of cackling laughter.

“An' Père Lauren' he mak' me marrie dat woman!” he sobbed. “He say I no marree her I go to hell sure! Ouch! Ouch!!” he bawled, for the pole had fetched him a lusty crack that almost knocked him from the tree. He shook his finger at her as if this was the last straw. “*Now, now*, I go to dat Père Lauren'! I say, ‘took dat woman, I *wan'* to go to hell, queek, by golly!’ It mak' me seek to be a good mans. What I get for it?” he shouted at her, “eh, yo' Mimi, tol' me what I get—ouch, ouch—yo'—yo' dam—leezard-d-d! When I am all res' I slam my foots fifty, mebbe *ten* times where yo' sits!”

There is no telling how disastrously the affair might have resulted, but, to Toni's good fortune, Pan and Clay arrived on the scene, and the every-day occurrence of a family war sank into insignificance. Mimi instantly dropped her pole, and pushed herself to a front-line position among the gaping Kanakas, and Toni, with a grunt of relief, instantly seized the opportunity of sliding groundward out of the tree that had given him every assurance of being a safe refuge from wifely wrath, yet had proven to be nothing but a diabolical trap. He did not join the group, but put a considerable distance between himself and the redoubtable Mimi. He fairly oozed into the landscape with many an apprehensive glance backward. To the utter disgust of a score of scolding blackbirds, he found retreat behind a clump of bamboo where he gingerly fingered his many bruises, and voiced, vociferously, his opinion of the superlative hellishness of women—Pan and Mimi in particular—to the only thing that seemed sympathetically inclined to give him audience—a chameleon, whose darting eyes followed his every gesture, and whose body changed from a dark brown to a brilliant scarlet as he tearfully asked for its unbiased opinion of a woman who would so cruelly attack a defenseless man in a tree top.

Pan was supremely happy in the sensation that they caused among the tatterdemalions as she and Clay passed through the cluster of hovels. He was preoccupied, looking neither to the right or left, while she darted triumphant glances at one or another of the puz-

zled rabble. That they might thoroughly understand the situation, she reached out with an air of proprietorship and grasped Clay's hand, uptilting her nose as she strutted along, now and then taking little jerky steps to even up with the length of his stride.

She had no idea where he was taking her, nor did she care. She was *his woman*, and he *her man*, "ze mos' won'erful man" that she had ever met. He was big, and he was handsome, and he had whipped "G'rilla," and he was going to make her a lady—whatever that was. What more could any girl ask, unless she was a *fou* like the "duchess" or Toni's Mimi?

A great responsibility seemed to have slipped away from her. No longer was Tahiti Tom's a necessity. No longer would she carry the self-imposed burden of supplying her father with absinthe and cocaine. No longer would she be compelled to fly from him when he was drunk, nor listen to his maudlin dissertations on the purity of his own blood and his sobbing lament that his half-breed offspring had no jot of resemblance to her Napoleonic ancestor.

"*Regardez votre mere!*" he would blubber, dismally.

"*Mon Dieu!* Some day you will look like her!" which had ever sent her scudding to her pool to submit her nose, cheeks, chin, eyes, every feature to the closest scrutiny to see if she in any way resembled the bestial creature of whose earthly use she was so uncertain. Now she tripped along, indifferent to the *Things*

that might come in the next hour, joys or tears, rapturously satisfied with the glorious *Now*.

The very air seemed vibrant with peace and happiness, stilling her throbbing heart even from her puzzled conjectures as to just what the process would be in making her into a lady. The trilling of the birds in the underbrush, blackbird and jay; the gorgeous butterflies that winged along the path, a fairy escort of undulating, quivering red, of royal purple, of golden yellow spangled with the vivid green of forest glades; majestic gulls silently wheeling in graceful curves against the azure background of a cloudless sky; the sportive dolphins, far out in the lagoon, that alternately leaped and dived, sending up a spray that glistened in the sun's rays like miniature geysers of diamonds, of sapphires, and rubies; the spume of the sea that surged against the coral crags, now like the softened notes of a flute, now a mere whisper of waters, again like a mighty blow struck on the head of a monster war drum—all this seemed to her but an impromptu fête of her friends in honor of the great joy that had come to her.

Curiosity aroused to a fever point, the natives fell into line behind them, chattering conjectures, or tittering hopefully over a neighbor's ribald prophecy of an unusual or improbable dénouement, yet warily keeping at a safe distance. There were women with babies perched grotesquely upon their hips, toddlers clinging to their mother's skirts and bawling shrill protests at undue haste, a half-grown tugging at the end of a rope

in an endeavor to drag along a balky goat that stubbornly bucked and slid along in a whirl of dust in its effort to free itself, and then butted furiously with an utter indifference upon whose posterior he landed. The men slouched along in the rear, followed by a half score of enthusiastic curs that yelped and snarled, occasionally piling up in a hurried battle to decide a question of precedence.

To Pan's amazement, Clay turned into the path that led to the little mission church that sat on a square of volcanic rock overlooking the sea. Half inclined to draw back, she opened her lips to speak, to ask why they were going there, but closed them again and gazed apprehensively at the gaunt figure of Père Laurens as he paced back and forth in the compound, piously reading his breviary. She had a wholesome fear of this militant clergyman. Time after time he had caught her in sin—venial and mortal—and had dragged her by sheer force, kicking and screaming, into his confessional, where he had sternly insisted upon the most solemn promises—which she had always defiantly broken the moment that he had set her free.

From time to time Père Laurens would pause on a point of rock and gaze seaward, always in the direction of his *La Belle France* and the Gascon hills of his boyhood that he had not seen for so many years. He was very lonesome at times, and very weary; his work among the lascivious and care-free Kanakas brought him so few triumphs and so many disappointments. Under the gentle impulse of a caressing tropical breeze,

his cassock flapped loosely against his skeleton-like frame. His face was of lifeless whiteness, and, beyond the exceedingly sharp and penetrating eyes that set deep back beneath his bulging temples, and a thin line of a mouth that foretold a relentless, even cruel determination, a mere breath seemed all-sufficient to waft him into the infinite.

Clay threw open the gate in the wall and entered with Pan. She hung back just a little, utterly bewildered, her heart beating a wild tattoo, and sorely tempted to bolt and run. The natives grouped at a respectful distance, their eyes popping with expectation, but awed into silence by the presence of the much-feared priest. Père Laurens had advanced a few paces, and then stopped with a questioning frown on his face. Standing there so immovable, he reminded one of a study in black and white of some grim old judge of a mediæval inquisition in solemn lucubration as to whether the thumb screw or the rack was the most efficient instrument of enforced repentance. Yet he was kind—coldly so, perhaps. As far as his slim purse would allow he obeyed the scriptural injunction to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. He had jeopardized his life by nursing the sick through many terrible epidemics. Far into the night, in fair weather or in the hurricane season, he might be found making his way, with the aid of a smoky lantern, along the tortuous paths of the jungle to give his ministrations to the dying. For this he expected no praise or thanks from humans. He would shrug his shoulders as if he did not know

what they were talking about. *But* he didn't want any oversight upon the part of the recording angel.

Père Laurens ruled his people by *fear*—fear of the hereafter and, what flattered him the more, fear of himself. The picture of a thorn-crowned Saviour nailed to a cross made little impression upon these descendants of the old torture-loving cannibals that had overrun these islands. They bluntly affirmed that the Nazarene had been foolish to allow himself to be caught. But Père Laurens' vivid description of an active Satan and an army of assisting devils toasting sinners over a sizzling brimstone lake *did* appeal to their superstitious imaginations, much more than a prospective eternity of twanging harps and song-praise to a God that loved to be flattered. Of course they couldn't understand why God should be so mad at them for dancing in the way of their grandfathers, or for not wearing clothes that they weren't used to, or for doing the Thing that seemed so obviously plain that He intended them to do, or why a few words spoken by Père Laurens made a thing right that was wrong before. So they often backslid, and as often Père Laurens yanked them back upon the straight and narrow path—sometimes by moral suasion, and sometimes by muscular force.

Père Laurens presumed that Pan had been up to one of her sinful pranks, and that Clay had brought her there that a confession might be wrung from her, and a stern rebuke administered. He advanced, judicatorially solemn, and responded to Clay's greeting with the

one word "M'sieu" uttered in a deep sepulchral voice, his head tipping forward in a punctilious bow. The next instant it flew back with a jerk as he caught Clay's most astounding request.

"We have come to be married," he bluntly told him, "and, I will be gratified if you will make the ceremony as brief as possible."

It was like the dropping of a bolt from a clear sky. Even the rabble were stunned into bewildered silence. The priest stared aghast at Clay, then glowered at Pan, whose mute lips trembled nervously as she regarded Clay with even greater astonishment than that of Père Laurens.

A real marriage had been beyond her wildest dreams. No man from civilization *ever* brought the woman to a priest before leading her to his home. It wasn't necessary. No woman of the island expected it. It was a personal triumph if a white man desired her, a bounteous gift from her gods. She was quite content to live with him for a fortnight or a lifetime, even for one nocturnal orgy of lust. Other girls would envy her, delight her with their jealousy. If he chose to keep her she would give him the devotion of a dog, and practice every conceivable sexual lure to hold him. He could beat her unmercifully, as he generally did, and she would love him the more. He could kick her out and enthrone a successor in her place and, while it might break her heart and make her an object of ridicule among those of her kind, she would never question his right to do so. Venery was as conven-



tional with them as chastity and virtue were moral laws of the white woman and, however much one might denounce as bestial their natural trait of unbounded lasciviousness, it found its equal in the promiscuity and violent passions of the average white man. Even in Pan's case, it was a whispering instinct alone, a heritage of centuries of French ancestors, that gave her even a faint realization of the boon that was offered her.

Père Laurens still glowered accusingly at Pan. It seemed so incredible that this imp of Satan had practiced her hellish arts upon this man with such subtlety that he was quite content to make a monumental fool of himself, and the frightful insidiousness of her lure was made all the more apparent by the fact that Clay seemed to him to be perfectly sober. Words of biting anathema welled to his lips but he stilled the desire, instinctively sensing the headstrong will of this man, and deciding that he must meet the issue very diplomatically if he wished to avert a calamity, the wrecking of a *white* man's life. Pan giggled nervously as she watched the nonplussed priest. At another time she would have been very much afraid of him, but now, reassured by the thought of the ease with which Clay had manhandled "G'rilla," she pressed close to his side, thoroughly convinced that he would settle the matter in short order.

"I cannot believe it possible, M'sieu, that you would marry *this—girl!*", the priest said gravely, dwelling most significantly upon the words "this—girl."

Clay's reply was quick and sharp, even resentful,

for he was in a hurry, and had no desire to quibble nor intention of explaining his motives.

“Would you have me take her—*without?*” he demanded.

“No, no! Heaven forbid!” Père Laurens hastened to reply as he lifted a protesting hand. “*But* I would not wish to see you make a very grave mistake. I fear you have not reflected upon the serious consequences that might ensue. Pardon, M’sieu, if I am taking a liberty. You are free, of course, to do as you like, but I *warn* you that this young creature, young as she is, is an adept at luring men into unholy desire.”

He noticed Clay’s impatient gesture and quickly placed a hand upon his shoulder.

“It may be worth your while to listen, my son. It may seem beyond the power of human belief, but I—I, *myself*”—three times he struck his breast in deep contrition—“I, M’sieu have been a victim of her godless blandishments.”

Clay glanced questioningly at Pan. She was staring at the priest, her mouth agape, a look of absolute astonishment upon her face. She looked up at Clay, and, hunching her shoulders, slowly shook her head, mutely expressive pantomime that she did not know what on earth Père Laurens was talking about. Clay turned to the priest.

“Blandishments? *You?*” he exclaimed, unbelievably.

“Even I!” He bowed his head as one most thor-

oughly ashamed, and two red spots flared on his cheekbones.

“ You would not believe it—but—a week ago——”

He stopped, breathing heavily. He closed his eyes as if to shut out a repetition of an awful sight, then flashed them open with an emphatic snap, and shrugged his shoulders courageously as if he had determined to tell the story no matter what reflection it might have upon himself. Had not he, Père Laurens, been innocently, *guilelessly*, strolling along the beach, one hand holding his cotton sun-umbrella, the other his breviary that he was reading as usual. Could he, for one moment, *imagine* that the devil was walking by his side, triumphantly leading him, a celibate of sixty-two years, to where this elfin Pan, *sans* even a fig leaf, was bathing—in all the privacy of the South Seas. To suppose such a thing was quite preposterous.

He had come upon Pan with startling abruptness. She was standing knee deep in the water with her back to him. He had rigorously forbade any woman from entering the water without some garment to screen her nakedness. He had had much trouble in his attempt to stop the pernicious practice of bathing in the nude that prevailed among the unregenerate females of this licentious island. He had flattered himself that he had been successful, but here was open rebellion by a girl who had been the bane of his life. His righteous wrath had gotten the better of his discretion. In fact, he had not figured at all upon *results*. He had ordered Pan to come out of the water and put on her dress. And she

had *obeyed*. Mon Dieu, yes! She had turned, and came leaping shoreward, and shoreward was toward *him*. With a shriek of dismay he had lowered his umbrella, a flimsy bulwark between them and, with eyes closed tight—this he could truthfully assure M'sieu—with eyes closed tight, he had snapped it open and shut, furiously jerking the frame back and forth on the handle, and ordering her to go instantly back into the water.

“Yo' say come out—go in! How I know what eet ees zat yo' wan'?” she had demanded.

“Child of sin,” he had stormed at her from behind his breastwork, “cannot you realize how you look, you—you—you dirty girl!”

“I look al' righ', me!” she had exclaimed, indignantly, her head wagging furiously, and her eyes flashing fire. “An' I am not dirtee-e. I am clean, me! What I go in ze watair eef eet ees not to wash me, mysel'? Look! Jus' look!” and she started to circle the umbrella with outstretched hands.

With an unsaintly imprecation, he had turned and fled along the beach. But even the umbrella seemed to enter into the conspiracy to undo him, for the wind rushed into it and tugged and pulled him so forcibly backward that, in sheer desperation, he was compelled to abandon it. It landed in the water and was erratically bouncing and wobbling over the swells, like a rudderless schooner, with Pan in pursuit, as he raced for the shelter of an intervening rock. Here he dropped weakly down and mopped his perspiring brow. Saint

Anthony and *his* temptation! Pooh! Had not he, Père Laurens, almost died with apoplexy in getting out of sight.

It was with great difficulty that Clay succeeded in controlling the desire to laugh outright at the absurd predicament that the priest had fallen into, and Pan, who had watched the changing expression of Clay's face with many misgivings as the narrative progressed, gave a sigh of relief when she saw that he did not seem to attach much importance to the matter. He could see that the humor of the situation had been as utterly lost upon her as it had been upon Père Laurens, that the priest, ever fearful of Mephistophelean ambush, had taken her indignant demand that he look to assure himself that she was not "dirt-e-e" as only the mischievous trick of a libidinous siren to lead him astray. Even the mutinous umbrella was but another snare of the Autocrat of Subterranea in the attempt to play the same hideous joke upon him as His Wiggling Highness had played upon the First Man in the Garden of Eden.

"It is rather embarrassing when a man finds himself intruding upon a young lady when she is taking a bath," Clay gravely conciliated.

"But, M'sieu, I was *not* intruding!"

"Are you not constantly intruding?" Clay retorted. "Are you not trying to force these people to give up habits and customs that have been theirs for ages? It is too bad that our code of morals is not hitched to a mind that could not picture *so vividly* the licentious-

ness that it abhors. Without such a mind the exposed human body would be neither immodest nor flagrantly immoral."

Père Laurens attempted to interrupt with a stern rebuke, but Clay stopped him with an imperious gesture.

"My dear sir," he continued with disconcerting gravity, "if you concentrated your mind on the souls of these people instead of their stomachs and organs you would be doing a work more in unity with that of the Nazarene. He was quite successful, you know. Convert these people? Good God, you are destroying them! However, I can see no reason why your adventure should effect the question of this marriage. I am not a stickler for conventions, and would not ask for it if it were not to protect the legal interests of this girl. Otherwise the same over-righteous white man's code would assuredly have sufficient exceptions to the golden rule to permit the grabbing of all that morally belonged to her, should anything happen to me."

"I warn you again, she is a wanton!" Père Laurens exclaimed, with a contemptuous disregard of Clay's criticism. His temper now precariously uncertain, he pointed an accusing finger at Pan, and continued in a voice that was raucous with scorn. "*A wanton that has sold herself for money!* It is not what I *think*, but what I *know!* Even when scarce twelve years of age—with the mate of a merchantman! *Think of it, M'sieu!* I"—his hand thudded vigorously against his breast—"I forcibly led her to her father—the painter La Croix—accused her, and she did not

*dare deny!*” He turned fiercely upon Pan. “Speak girl,” he sternly commanded, “is it not the truth?”

Her face ashen, and cringing under the priest’s lashing accusations, Pan raised her hands in supplicating appeal.

“*Non, non!* Pleas’, oh, pleas’ Père Lauren’,” she cried, then covered her face with her hands, her little body shaking under a paroxysm of hysterical sobbing.

“Answer him!” Clay said quietly, and gently placed his arm around her shoulders.

It was some minutes before she could control herself, and he waited patiently, while Père Laurens, stiffly erect, scowled triumphantly down upon the grief-stricken girl. Her tears were not of shame for what she had done. That seemed so little to blame her for. But it was a complete surrender to what seemed to be the inevitable result of Père Laurens’ persistent and determined opposition—the driving away of her “won’erful man.”

“*Oui, eet ees true!*” she said in a low, hesitating voice, stopping from time to time to choke back the sobs. “*Mon pere*, heem wan’ ze absint’. Oh, heem ees ver’ mad wiz ze wan’! Heem tell me to get eet, or mebbe heem will die—an’ zare ees no monee. Me, I go ver’ queek, I am so ’fraid. I meet ze man of the sheep an’—after—after—heem give me ze monee—*oui!* Père Lauren’ heem fin’ eet out. Toni, heem ees mad wiz me, an’ heem tell heem. Père Lauren’ catch me, heem pull me to *mon pere*, heem say ‘La Croix, yo’ mus’ wheep zis girl, she ees a shild of sin, she

go wiz ze man of the sheep for monee! wheep her ver' good, La Croix!' *Mon pere*, heem take a stick—oh, a ver-r' hard stick. Heem hit me, many time' heem hit me! Oh, how eet hurt! I fall down. I roll so zat heem can not hit me some more. Père Lauren' heem sit in a shair like a man zat ees dead. Hees eyes zey are like ze fire, heem ees so mad wiz me. Heem say 'more, more, La Croix,' wheep her some more, eet will be good for her.' Zen *mon pere*, heem hit me so hard zat I go to sleep."

She stopped for a moment, and then broke out in an eager apology for her father.

"Oh, *mon pere*, heem would not do zat eef Père Lauren' heem no mak' heem! Yo' see—yo' know—*mon pere* heem ees ver-r' drunk wiz ze bottle of absin' zat I breenged heem—zat I got wiz zat monee zat ze man of the sheep gived me!"

She uttered a low moan, and half collapsed in Clay's arms. He soothed her gently, sternly regarding Père Laurens who seemed to be far from comfortable. Now that Pan had so vividly described her harrowing experience, it did not seem quite the ecclesiastical triumph that he had thought. Clay broke a silence that was fast becoming intolerable.

"Quite a spiritual conquest for you!" he said, his voice stingingly ironical.

"Withhold not correction from the child," Père Laurens quoted, dramatically. "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from sheol."

"Ah, quite an authority against pandering, these



hypocritical babblings of a biblical old roué. I should suggest a study of the methods of the gentle Mediator of Nazareth. You will find them quite interesting—and *effective*. May we not bring this disagreeable scene to a close? Now that you have ‘hurled the stone’ cannot this girl be allowed to enter sanctuary?”

“You are still determined?”

“Very! We have wasted much time.”

With a gesture of resignation, Père Laurens turned toward the church.

“Come,” he said, wearily, much the same as Pilate called for an ewer of water.

They followed him through the door and up the aisle. Pan clung desperately to Clay’s arm, still uncertain and fearful that Père Laurens would change his mind. The rabble, who had been awed and silent spectators of the unusual scene, entered helter skelter at their heels, and clattered into the rude benches that served for pews. As Père Laurens strode along the aisle, his eyes caught the figures in a little stained glass window above the altar—a Magdalen at the Saviour’s feet. They were thrown out in vivid colors by the strong rays of sunlight that even flooded the altar. His eyes drifted to a wooden cross and its sombre image of the Man who had lived through the agony of a great betrayal, and the priest’s head sank upon his breast, and three times his hand struck contritely against his heart.

A shaking lad, in a ragged pair of trousers, grinning broadly to hide his self-consciousness, held a

sputtering candle, while a proud and very nervous mother sitting in the front pew, pantomimed angry rebuke every time the candle dipped to an awkward angle. The marriage service began, a ring that Clay removed from his own hand duly blessed. As he slipped it upon her finger, she caught his hand with a sob, and pressed it to her lips.

“*Dominus Vobiscum,*” the priest intoned in a deep voice.

And the lad stammered a shrill response—“*Et cum spiritu tuo.*”

## CHAPTER IV

### “ BESIDE STILL WATERS ”

IMMEDIATELY after the ceremony at the little mission church, there was a second or civil marriage before the French Resident, after which Clay and Pan hastened to the wharf. At a signal, Poni came with the small boat and carried them to the *Lark*. Clay's appearance on deck with the girl aroused no comments from the crew of Kanakas as it was in no way unusual for him to transport a passenger to his island, perhaps some chance visitor to relatives in the native village.

Hayes was out of sight, and had not noted his arrival. Quite unconscious of his surroundings, he was sitting, hunched down at the bow, his eyes watery, mouth lolling, and every nerve shrilly shrieking its demand for morphine. He had long since ceased to gloat over the brilliancy of his scheme, or plan the things that he would do when the prospective reward was in his hands. He found that one of the prerequisites of the office of a Judas was most disconcerting, that with the thirty pieces of silver came wild terror—a phantasm of ghastly consequences. Whenever his twisted brain slipped back into a rational cog, he realized that he might be stirring up a hornet's nest in which the whole colony would perniciously light upon his own hide, an inevitable certainty if that newspaper clipping

should happen to refer to some one else besides the master of the *Lark*.

His visit to the wireless operator, and the message that was flashing through space to the military commander at Calcutta notifying him that if he would seek John Clay he would secure information that would enable him to take into custody an escaped military convict named John Craig, had long ceased to give him a decimal part of the satisfaction that he had figured it would. The one dangerous flaw in what he had considered a brilliantly conceived plan was now glaringly apparent. It was the fact that the message could be traced direct to him, for the operator was well acquainted with him through an occasional visit ashore. This had not occurred to him until Poni was rowing him back to the *Lark*.

His panic had increased with every stroke of the oars until, finally, he had ordered Poni to swing the small boat back so that he could retrieve the message, but, when within twenty yards of the liner, its screw propeller had begun churning the water, and there was nothing to do but to return to the *Lark*. Perhaps it is stating a paradox, but now his craving for the solace of his drug had the same narcotic effect as the drug itself. It deadened the terror that surged within him.

To the delight of the impatient crew, Clay gave orders for the vessel to be gotten under way. He conducted Pan to the cabin, and summoned Fung Shui from his galley.

“This is Fung Shui, my steward,” he told her,

“and I know that he will be ready to serve you at all times with whatever you will require for your comfort.” He turned to the Chinaman, “Fung Shui, this is my wife, Mrs. Clay.”

Not the least shadow of astonishment appeared on the stoical face of the Chinaman. Fung Shui had long practiced the art of self-repression. It would have been an ethical error to have betrayed any more amazement at the arrival of a wife than at the bringing aboard of a sack of flour. He bowed very low to her.

“Slervant!” he said.

Pan soberly ducked her head.

“Me too!” she responded, and Clay chuckled.

Her face reddened with embarrassment as she saw that he was closely contemplating her dress. She had quite forgotten the ragged tears and rips, and now they seemed to be even more glaringly conspicuous. But her “won’erful” man seemed capable of solving any sort of a problem.

“Perhaps Fung Shui will be able to find something or other among the trade goods that will provide you with a change of costume——”

“Sure, sure!” Fung Shui quickly interrupted, “I know! I fin’ vlelly good t’ing.”

“And while Mrs. Clay is changing, you can prepare something for us to eat.”

“Sure! Plenty fine slomet’ing!”

She watched him as he padded out of the cabin, and made up her mind that she was going to like this

little yellow man. She felt more at ease, too, now that the matter of clothes had been settled.

“No doubt you are hungry,” Clay said. “We have had a very exciting time, we two.”

“We have one—what ees eet zat yo’ call——?” she stopped, her brows knitted, seeking for an expression that she had heard at Tom’s, and slapped her hands with delight as it popped back into memory. “*Oui*, I git heem, eet ees one—rip-p-ping-g-g beeg tim’ zat we have, don’-cha-knows, by golly!”

“As you so aptly put it,” he agreed, with a hearty laugh.

“Ah-h, yo’ laugh! Aga’n one tim’ yo’ laugh! Zat ees ver’ gran’, an’ me, now I go to mak’ yo’ laugh all tim’. All tim’ yo’ will be happee. Nevair, *nevair* will I mak’ yo’ sorree wiz yo’self, *nevair, nevair!*”

Her voice was vibrant with her earnestness, and he abruptly turned away to hide his emotion, nor did he trust himself to speak until he had reached his state-room door, and thrown it open.

“Here you will find comb, brushes, soap, and any other things that you may need,” he told her. “Not the array of ‘my lady’s dressing room,’ but quite sufficient. Make yourself thoroughly at home, and when you are quite ready, tell Fung Shui to call me.”

He left her to herself and went on deck. The *Lark* was edging through the reefs that partly enclosed the haven. Poni was at the wheel, the Kanakas standing ready for the chance mishap in getting through the dangerous passage. He watched until the vessel was

clear and headed homeward. Then he crossed to an awninged space, and sitting in an arm chair, lighted a cigar and lapsed into a review of the events of the day.

The path that he had traced seemed preposterously unreal now that he had settled down to calm reflection. His marriage to Pan had been but the result of an eccentric whim—the quixotic desire to experiment. She was a child of dreams, a soul grasping for a shadow. Why not make her dreams come true? She represented Truth to him, even if in this case Truth *was* sordid and immoral. If Falsehood could prance in silks and satins, and sip the honey of life, why not give Truth the chance to do the same? Why not? Certainly this one good deed would never impair the notorious reputation that men had given him.

He found a great pleasure in conjecturing what the result would be, of prospective happy hours spent in its attainment. Laughter would ring through the great house on the *paepae bae*, laughter that would drown the monotonous tick of the huge clock that had so long measured off its otherwise unbroken silence. He had no intention of assuming intimate marriage relations. He had simply given her his name, which he considered of questionable value. She would have every advantage his wealth could give her. His reward would not be the gift of her womanhood, but his seeing Truth climb, step by step, from the ragged Magdalen of the water-side to that throne of virtue before which clean men and women do homage. And yet, he was strangely uncertain that *he had willed these things*. It seemed as

if it had been the result of an unconsidered impulse—the hand of Divinity moving, with inexorable surety, human figures on a Karmic chessboard.

When Pan came from the state-room, she found Fung Shui just putting the finishing touches to an appetizing spread that he had laid out upon the cabin table. There was a chow-chow of mangoes, bananas, guavas, and pineapples, over which he had poured a sauce of sweetened wine, and there was a salad of palm hearts, hot biscuits, and, by some unaccountable legerdemain, a huge cake frosted with chocolate.

In rummaging among the trade goods he had been exceptionally successful. She was now arrayed in a sort of kimono or robe of violet silk, cut v-shape at the neck, and exquisitely embroidered in jade green and gold. Around her waist was a wide sash or obi of a darker shade of green, also richly embroidered. It was tied at the side, the ends almost reaching the floor. On her feet was a pair of soft-soled Chinese slippers, a perfect match to the color of the dress, and as beautifully worked in twining vines and flowers. Though probably intended originally to catch the eye of some native chieftain's wife or daughter, the robe perfectly served its unexpected purpose. Though much too long and full, it was surprising how she had succeeded in giving it the appearance of having been really intended for her. She had perched herself upon a camp chair, a collapsible thing of great uncertainty, and had twisted precariously about on the tips of her toes so that she might catch sight of herself in the rather small looking



glass, the sole purpose of which, heretofore, had been as an auxiliary to Clay's daily shave. A final pirouetting about had brought a rapturous sigh, the verdict that she was quite the most glorious thing that she had ever seen.

“Meesus Clay, yo' ees one gran' keed, by golly!” was the critical comment that went with her final survey of herself.

When she appeared in the cabin, Fung Shui stopped in the act of placing the cake on the table.

“Look!” she commanded, and slowly swung before him like a revolving manikin.

He soberly regarded her from head to feet, so long in fact that the triumphant smile faded from her face, and she looked herself over apprehensively. With his head cocked on one side, he slowly circled her, gave a hitch or two to the obi, then stood off and again surveyed her with all the critical cocksuredness of an expert, a connoisseur before a work of art.

“Tell me how I look!” she impatiently demanded. “By golly, yo' tak' one dam' long tim'!”

“Ai, ai, ai, ai!” he exclaimed, with many approving nods of his head, then lapsed into Mandarin Chinese to more fully express himself. “Thou art as lovely as a lotus flower in a clear pool. Thy gown is beautiful. Thou needst have no anxiety; the Honorable Clay will be very proud of thee. He will think as I, myself.”

She had no idea what he was talking about, but

somehow or other it sounded very assuring, and she sighed contentedly.

“Me, I t’ink so, too! *Oui*, ver’ much!” she said with complacency.

“Wait!” he suddenly exclaimed, and padded from the room. In a moment he was back again, carrying a wonderful string of variegated jade. It was of pure *feitsui* that is so highly prized by Chinese, and had a carved pendant, with an inscription cut in relief in the pictorial writing of ancient China, and perhaps of strange import even to Fung Shui himself. It was centuries old and very valuable, and no doubt one of his most prized possessions. With a ceremonious bow, he hung it around her neck.

“Wledding plesent flor yo’! Vlelly wise Chinaman, he makee that,” he pointed to the inscription, “Mlebbe bling yo’ vlelly good luck, eh?”

“Eet ees ver’ *won’erful!*” she exclaimed, delightedly.

“Yo’ are ver’ good to me! I t’ink I will like yo’ ver’ much!”

He bowed very gravely, and had turned to the table for a last inspection when she called him again. She had a slip of paper in her hand, and held it up that he might glance it over.

“Yo’ see heem?” she asked, importantly.

He nodded his head.

“Heem say I am *la femme*, ze wieeve of my John Clay, now what yo’ know ’bout zat?”

“’Stifficate,” he said.

“Mebbe! Eet ees a ver’ beeg t’ing anyhow, zis stiff cat. I mus’ keep heem alway’. Eef I loose heem I am no longair ze wieeve of my John Clay; ze mar-riahj eet would be all bus’ to ’ell, an’, by golly, I would be ver’ mad wiz mysel’!”

“Glet ’nother,” he suggested.

“Oh, eet ees ver’ hard-d-d to git zis one. I would not wan’ to git marree aga’n. Eet tak’ too manee fellers to mak’ heem stick, Père Lauren’ an’ zat French resident. Yo’ hav’ to be such a beeg fool to be marree. Yo’ shooks in yo’ tooths, yo’ legs zey weegle so yo’ t’ink yo’ fall down. Eet ees tairreebul! *Non, non*, I wil tak’ me ze good-keep wiz zis stiff cat!”

She carefully pinned it on the inside of her robe, then, after watching Fung Shui for a moment, seeking again for an elusive word, she exclaimed triumphantly:

“I git heem! ’Usband! ’Usband! Eet ees ze gran’ word! Will yo’ pleas’ tell my *’usband* zat I am ready for—ze eats?”

She waited for Clay with the jumping nerves of an actor making a first appearance. Hitching the robe here and there, and twisting at the obi, she darted into the state-room and leaped upon a chair for a last reassuring inspection in the looking glass. She raced breathlessly back into the cabin, and placed herself, after much study and many changes, in such a position that his eyes would first fall upon her when he opened the door. Even the pendant on Fung Shui’s string of jade was subjected to many little pokes and prods until

it rested upon a spot on her breast that she felt most likely to meet his critical approval.

Though he responded at once to Fung Shui's summons, it seemed interminably long before she heard his quick footsteps as he descended the passageway. Her eyes were feverishly bright, her cheeks flushed to a rosy pink, and her heart pounded furiously as she faced what seemed to her the biggest moment in her life. Would she come up to his expectations now that her rags were gone? Did she really look as well as she thought she did? Was there any little detail that she had overlooked? She was on the point of again dashing for the looking glass when he opened the door.

He stood stock still, marvelling at the change, the ravishing beauty of the transformed girl. With lips that were mute and tremulous, eyes that were wistfully pleading, and swallowing hard to keep back a hysterical sob, she waited for his verdict.

"You are very beautiful," he finally said, "and I am proud of you."

A wild joy seized her, a joy that she could not express. She longed for the encircling arms of this awe-inspiring man, feeling that then she would not fumble so desperately for the elusive words that would express her gratitude for the great happiness that he had given her. She came to him timidly, even bashfully, but the solace of his arms was denied her, and, to cover up her keen disappointment, she called his attention to the string of jade.

“Heem gived eet to me,” she said, indicating the silent Fung Shui.

He instantly realized the import of this generous gift. It was a highly prized keepsake, an heirloom of many generations of Fung Shui’s kinsmen, and there was no doubt but that it was coupled with cherished memories of unique and mysterious incidents of a long-gone past, for such things are ever the symbol of mystic romance in the land of the dragon. It was *now*, indeed, a symbol, startlingly expressive, of Fung Shui’s approval of the girl.

“I know what this means, old friend,” Clay gravely said to him, “and I cannot tell you how much I appreciate it. It is much too valuable, I am afraid.”

But Fung Shui’s face wore the expression of one who had no intention of understanding. His hands swung outward in an impatient gesture, and he rather noisily pushed the dishes about as a broad hint that there was altogether too much conversation to suit him. As he had spent his time in a far from frigid galley in preparing this spread for them, he expected it to be eaten without any further delay. The hint was instantly taken.

The *Lark* plowed swan-like through the calm sea bearing Pan on her odyssey into a strange world—a world that her imagination had enveiled in an ineffable glamour of romance. The vessel’s deck was swathed in the golden rays of the late afternoon that were shaded but once by a fast-flying cloud of koio or

blackbirds. Beyond that, the azure sky was only dotted now and then by a whirling seahawk or a tropic bird that spiralled so close to the deck that its rose-colored body and the carmine of its majestic sweep of wing could be plainly discerned. In the gathering twilight the island came into view, its towering cliffs standing dark-purple against the blood-red of the setting sun. One by one the stars came out, specks of light that were lost in the infinite. Myriads of flying fish leaped and plunged before the advancing prow like scintillating spangles on the deep blue of the water. As the vessel neared its harbor, it seemed to plunge into a sea of swelling quicksilver. Before it stretched a league of waters that glittered in coruscating phosphorescence, alive with that lowest of creatures, the prolozoam, a world of them in a single drop, through which the *Lark* plowed a huge furrow of swirling fire.

Just as the slumbrous shadows fell, the jaws of coral came into view, swells combing over them and breaking into spray like the flurry of lace and dancing fairies. As they edged through the narrow and tricky passage that was now exposed in the glare of the beacon on the compound gates, there came the sound of a swelling song of welcome, a hundred voices of rejoicing men, women, and children of Clay's native village who had waited for many weeks for the return of the master, and had received the news of the *Lark's* approach from a lookout that they had never neglected to maintain upon the cliff that towered over the reef.

When the vessel had wharfed, the natives crowded upon the deck, clamorously greeting Clay and the crew, and it was with great difficulty that he finally succeeded in getting away from them, and leading Pan into the house. When they learned that she was his wife, they broke into a hubbub of exclamations: Some started dancing while others sang the words of an alluring and dulcet melody, a dancing love song that they called the “*upanpahura*.” Nor could they be denied the privilege of ceremoniously rubbing their noses against hers as a token of sincere affection, and a pledge of loyalty to the girl that the master had chosen.

After they had lugged the strong box into the living-room, the crew followed the natives into the narrow path that led to their village—there to spend the night in a skylarking revel, a joy-glutting of girls, to drink from cocoanut shells the wine of the palm, to feast on roast pig, *poi*, and the epicurean delicacy, a ragout of devil-fish and crabs. Through all the excitement of landing and boisterous reception, Hayes was sprawled grotesquely upon the forward deck, his mouth lolling gargoylishly, and hooting and tooting a nasal solo of vibrating whiffs, whoofs, and grunts—a snorting oblivion that he had attained through the gulped contents of a bottle of brandy. Here Poni found him. He contemptuously prodded him with his foot, but Hayes only moved uneasily and muttered an unintelligible jargon. So the mate courteously consigned him to the tender mercies of his ghostly ancestors

and their cooking pits, and hurried after the rest of the crew.

Pan was given no opportunity to delve into the mysteries of the huge living-room. Clay immediately directed Fung Shui to show her to her room, a chamber on the left, and with a "good night and pleasant dreams" he abruptly turned and passed into his own room on the opposite side, closing the door behind him. The movement was so brusque, so astonishing, that it quite took her breath away. It was decidedly contrary to her expectations. Rather upset then, in fact. A blunt "good night," a brief survey of a disappearing back, and the click of a door latch, was far from comforting—especially to a bride. It is not what she expects. It's disconcerting, very!

Keenly disappointed, yet surrendering to what seemed inevitable, she mournfully crossed to her own door. Fung Shui, candle in hand, had already opened it for her. Here she stopped, and gave a disconsolate glance toward Clay's room.

"Pleasant dream' heem say," she exclaimed disgustedly, then whirled on Fung Shui. "Eet tak' two fellers to git me zis pleasant dream', and now, *now* zat I git eet, what I do wiz eet, jus' tole me zat?"

"Angel clome slometime in dleam!" he blandly consoled her.

"Angel! *Angel!* What I do wiz heem, eh?" she stamped her foot angrily. "Fung Shui, by golly, I am deesgus' wiz yo'!"



With a sarcastic shrug of her shoulders, she turned to her door.

“You plut kilmona here,” he said, indicating a chair. “Mlebbe, tonight, I fixem plenty!”

“Oh-h-h, al’ righ’!” she answered, indifferently. “Me, I no care! I am ver-r-r sorree wiz mysel’!”

She took the proffered candle, passed slowly into her room, and closed the door.

It was quite large and comfortably furnished with a sanitary couch, two wicker chairs, a huge old-fashioned dresser, and a soft rug covered the floor. A screened casement window opened out upon the compound, and through this came a soft breeze from the sea, and the perfume of the flowers and aromatic shrubs in the garden.

She began to disrobe. The dress found its way to the chair on the outside of the door and, with a last long-drawn sigh, she blew out the candle, and crawled disconsolately into bed. For several moments she lay very still—moments of silence that were only broken by the monotonous ticking of the huge clock in the living-room—then she moved about uneasily, finally sitting upright in the couch.

“So zis ees a ladee?” she exclaimed, sarcastically, then finding herself utterly lacking words to express any further opinion on the subject, she contented herself with a disgusted—

“Oh-h-h, ’ell!” and flounced back under the sheets. Another interval of silence. Again an uneasy flopping about, and again she bobbed up.

“Mebbe, zat angel will be heem,” she whispered hopefully.

But the minutes slowly passed and the angel did not come. Hope fled and the tears came in its place; tears gave way to anger, and anger to defiance. She leaped from the couch with grim decision and, with shoulders swinging aggressively, she started for the door. But when she opened it she found the dress she sought had already been taken by Fung Shui. But her dilemma was quickly solved. She flew back to the couch and stripped off a sheet, winding it around her much as the natives wear a *pareu*. Again she started through the door and across the living-room. Her progress was cautiously slow—a long stealthy step on the tips of her toes, a pause, a balancing precariously as she cocked an ear for the slightest sound, then a deep breath, another step, another pause, another period of listening. Her heart was beating frantically as she had almost reached Clay’s door.

*Then* the silence of the room was broken by a sharp snap, and a cuckoo clock broke out in a fusilade of shrill “cuckoos” that fairly lifted her from the floor. With a stifled scream, she whirled madly about, and leaped for her own door. Half-way there the grandfather’s clock boomed out in a pandemoniac duet with its fellow, and she threw herself bodily into her room, and slammed the door. With a running dive, she landed in the couch, and drew the bedclothes over her head.

The din had long since ceased, and silence reigned again. Ten full minutes passed. Then, very cautiously, she drew the sheet from her face, her eyes darting apprehensively about. Gathering courage she addressed herself in a tremulous defense to her piping, booming accusers in the living-room.

“Don’ yo’ know zat I have a *stiff cat*, me?” she sobbingly exclaimed.

## CHAPTER V

### THE RADIOGRAM

JIM HAYES' message was relayed to the big hill station that had been India's summer capital for many years. Its arrival at Calcutta had caused much warm discussion between various military gentlemen at headquarters and several of the "high and mighties" that were entitled to subscribe "I. C. S." after their names, for there has ever been a lively friction and profound jealousy between the lords of the civil service and the folk that tote sabre and carbine. Dusty files had to be lugged out of vaults, and huge masses of documents fingered and thumbed in the search for something that might identify John Craig and give some information as to *why* he should be wanted, and while they sweated and fumed over the task, they showered maledictions upon this Hayes whose radiogram had so rudely disturbed their usual summer routine of "do nothing" in the time of the year when the city was as hot as a blast furnace and its stink at the very apex of its odorous ineffability.

At last they found it—over ten years back—and they fairly gasped at the *peculiar* details of the case. It was a most disconcerting affair, a "knock out" for the departmental heads. They were plunged into heated arguments over the intricate points of criminal jurisprudence that were involved. Their gorge rose into

bilious frenzy at the disturbing and utterly uncalled-for resurrection of a man who was figuratively dead, should have remained dead in all decency, and whose unwarranted popping up out of his grave had knocked into a cocked hat all established precedents in affairs of this kind, and given them no other choice than to become "rotters" if they upheld the law of Britain and the majesty of the king. In the end, responsibility was brazenly shunted to the shoulders of a very testy commanding general to whom they relayed the radiogram and packed off the mess of musty records. Having thus satisfactorily disposed of the affair, they settled back into the "do nothing" state.

Now General Septimus Ortimus Bangg had just arrived at the summer capital over a branch line that for seven weary hours had crawled around a monotony of interminable hills. The thirty odd previous hours he had spent *expressing* it over the main line at fifteen miles an hour—a prodigious speed for India. He was tired, and hot, and peevish, and in no mood to become enthusiastic over the scenery spread before him. In succession had come the giant cactus trees, great pines that prophesied the hills to come, and groves of solemn deodars that fringed the distant snow peaks of the Himalayas. A glittering white tonga road squirmed around the foot of the hills, and over this was an endless procession—drove upon drove of loose-lipped camels, bullock carts that were chauffeured, steered, and accelerated by the driver's ceaseless twisting and twitching of the bullock's tail, creaking tongas that

swung precariously around curves, the blare of their horns rising shrill above the clatter of the lumbering train and scattering, right and left, groups of pedestrians in a *bizarrerie* of fantastical costumes. There were jats, martial rajpoots, stalwart sikhs with their hair coiled and pinned together with an ugly knife that had been ground to a razor edge. An occasional punjab ryot came a-strutting along, a dirty rag for a loin cloth his only raiment, yet glorying in the shade of a huge cotton umbrella that represented the attainment of his life's ambition. And there were rajahs, not always as lordly as the name may sound, for some of them are queer mortals who strip naked for dinner and would sooner be caught with their breeches off than their turbans, who believe that a mouthful of meat would send them to hell, and who plaster their floors with a mixture of cow dung and earth because they do not consider wood clean enough to eat upon.

The journey over the main line had been insufferably hot, great waves of heat swirling about the train and raising the temperature of the carriages to that of a puddler's pit. This had not been conducive to either the amiability or comfort of a general officer with a hair-trigger temper as hot as tabasco. He was returning from a week's "leave of absence" that he had given himself, and was bringing back stinging recollections of a pig-sticking affair in which the Chief Importance of the British-Indian Army had been tread by an obstreperous boar whose inclinations had become permanently fixed on murder. Now Septimus Ortimus

Bangg on a horse was a sight for the gods. He had always felt that some day he would be done in bronze and he rode accordingly. But Bangg thrown into a *nullah* by a silly mount and then chased up a tree by a pig was quite another matter. It "played hell" with his dignity. And there had been complications that very maliciously annoying, even worse than being rescued by an enlisted man, Sergeant Major Gannon, who had had the impertinence to titter hysterically as he eased the general out of the tree.

"Who wouldn't 'av?" the sergeant major had defended himself. "'E didn't say much a goin' hup, leastway nawthin' that meant hanything to hanybody 'cept 'imself—hextemporaneous remarks Hi calls hit! But *when* 'e got there th' things 'e said about that pig—my gord! Horful! 'Orrible! You see e'd snagged th' seat of 'is britches on a bit of a limb. 'Twas a flutterin' ruin from 'ip to 'ip an' all th' way down. Frontways 'e wuz haccordin' to reg'lations but backways 'e 'ad only th' legs of hit. Jist as Hi gits 'im down th' crowd gallop hup, an' with 'em that messy old hen, Lady Tugge. You know 'er, gord she's fat, weighs eighteen stone, smokes seegars like a man, an' ain't got no call to go on a 'unt any'ow! 'Fore 'e kin reverse 'imself she slants th' *catstrophy*, yanks a needle an' thread out of a bag she's carryin' and hinsists on sewin' 'im hup, an' 'im goin' purple an' backin' away. Hi always carry th' fixin's, sez she, a lookin, at 'im jist like ol' Mullen does when 'e's goin' to saw off a leg, an', by cripes, Hi spected to see 'er yank 'im across 'er

knee an' set to work, she's that hinsistant an' 'e bein' such a little squirt. But 'e backs agin a tree an' makes a noise like a frog by which Hi knows that 'e defies 'er. Course I laughed. Heverybody did!"

Unable to stand the raillery at the club, the outrageous giggling of the fair ones when one or another, with sugary sympathy, would insist upon the most minute details of his mishap, the general had flown to the first train out. But the ghost of the torn breeches had followed him, and the pig, and the grinning sergeant, and the ogress Tugge; and whether he was napping or awake they insisted upon reënacting the farce like continuous vaudeville in a music hall—one performance over and another began. He knew that the horrible event had already become a date to reckon time by. "Let me see," one club gossip would say to another, "this happened the day after the general tore his breeches," or "my son was married exactly one month after the pig chased Bangg up a tree." Such is fame. Another man up a tree wouldn't amount to a hill of beans—but *Septimus Ortimus Bangg*, that was a national calamity.

In the hill station only a few privileged persons were allowed to ride in carriages. The rest were compelled to foot it, or go horseback, or *via* rickshaw, for the streets were mere paths, and the paths were narrow, and zigzagged and twisted up into the hills where most of the cottages were. Hypercritical persons had said that, "meaning no offense to the road-builders," they thought a cow could have done much



better, although they were free to admit that the road-builders couldn't have done much worse. However, the road was there, and you could take it or leave it, and 'twas pitiful either way.

Of course a general *is* a privileged person, but he was two days ahead of time, and had neglected to send word of his coming, so there was no one at the station to meet him. Therefore his only choice of conveyance was between one rickshaw and another, and as far as looks went, they were as disreputably alike as two crows. Of course if he wished to know anything about the stability and runableness of the one he *did* choose he could find that out from the proprietor of the one he *didn't*. The idea of a rickshaw didn't improve his temper, for he felt that Bangg in one was but one degree removed from Bangg up a tree, but by this time his vocabulary had sagged and he clambered in, rather weakly commenting upon the backwardness of a country that would tolerate such a ridiculous means of locomotion.

“To the hotel!” he snapped, and “g-g-garump-p-d” very much as he did when he roared an order at dress parade.

Away they went, two bantam-legged *jhampanis* jerking the contraption along while two others pushed behind, the four parts of the engine enthusiastic and merry, and the general looking like an ancient cherub being wheeled out for an airing in an overgrown perambulator.

A second later he barked for speed, and got it—a

breakneck speed. Besides a *jhampani* everything that is swift in India is a snail. Down hill and around corners the vehicle bumped and swayed among the scattering pedestrians, the *jhampanis* shrieking for gangway, and the feet of the foremost scarcely touching the ground once in twenty feet. Grinning ghurkas took to the guard rails, scarlet-coated government *chaprassis* sprinted into the shops, Indians of high rank, and others who were rank and had no rank at all, wildly jumped for the nearest opening. Horses reared and plunged in spite of the efforts of drivers. Some that were white and had gorgeous pink tails and manes lost quite as much of their reserve as those whose appendages were of the *hoi polloi*. Parrakeets and cockatoos shrieked as they flashed by, and a huge gray ape took a flying leap from a wall to the top of the rickshaw, bending over its edge to chatter an indignant remonstrance, but sprang for a tree as the general whacked with his cane.

“The impudent ass!” he sputtered. “Why—why—Hey! Demmit——”

He shuttlecocked from the seat to the top as the rickshaw skidded a corner on one wheel, causing a street barber to come very near slicing off a customer’s ear. A moment later the rickshaw swung before the porch of the hotel and, if it had careened another inch the Chief Importance of the army would have been flung head over heels into a lobby. Strange to say he never uttered a word of rebuke. He was too glad to be out of the “hellish contrivance.”

Two hours later the general had quite recovered his

usual genial testiness. He had bathed, and shaved, and changed from mufti to a comfortable uniform. During the operation he had consumed five cherry brandies, and the pursuing breeches, and pig, and ogress had faded away in the distance. He had tiffined, and there is something particularly soothing to a man of uncertain temper when he is noiselessly and ceremoniously served with his favorite dishes by a barefoot waiter in white trousers, a long coat, and turban and wide sash of bright-colored silk. After tiffin he had strolled over to the club, found a cosy corner in the lounge, and settled back in an easy chair with a sigh of contentment. A subtle hypnosis came creeping over him. The whole world brimmed with peace, and the sweet voice of a koel in the club gardens trilled him a lullaby. He snored lustily.

Heeri Lall, the solemn-faced club *chuprassie*, stood before the general as immovable as one of his idols. He had been standing there a good half hour, his black eyes glaring unwinkingly at the closed eyelids of the sleeper. It was the only way to awaken him, for a *raj*, particularly the exalted General Bangg, could not be rudely shaken by such a poor worm of the dust as Heeri Lall. Finally his patience was rewarded, for the general wiggled uneasily about, then slowly opened his eyes and drowsily regarded him. Heeri Lall salaamed, very obsequiously as befit his station, then extended a message, salaamed again and silently stalked away.

Forty-five seconds later General Bangg stormed the

lobby, calling for messengers. He wanted three of them that were not blanketty-blank snails and who got what they went after. The three forthcoming, they were dispatched to the quarters of as many officers, old veterans in the Indian service. Two of them were Colonel Cruikshank of the Light Horse, and MacLaren of the Fusileers, and the other a Sikh, Ressaldar Major Nanak Singh, who had but lately reached the cantonment after a month's foray with his *sowars* in which he had shaken the hell-tantrums out of a tribe of fanatical Ghazis who were winning a ticket into Paradise by a promiscuous cutting of infidel throats. These officers were to be informed that General Bangg wanted them to come to the club *at once* regardless of any other engagements. The *chuprassies* on their way, he impatiently paced the floor, intermittently looking at his watch and glowering at the message—the relayed radiogram from Calcutta.

The officers all arrived at the same instant, *Ressaldar* Major Nanak Singh heralding their approach by the metallic clink of his steel-shod boots upon the tiles. His movements were as active as a young subaltern, and his eyes flashed an unbeatable energy, although his hair and the bristles on his chin and cheeks were a grizzly gray. His massive frame towered above the other two. Cruikshank's legs were bowed by twenty-five years in the saddle, and MacLaren, tall and spare, if he would admit it, just a trifle too old for active service.

The general hurried them to an alcove where they

would be free from intrusion. He was nothing if not dramatic, offering no explanation for his unusual summons until he had ordered the drinks, and they had been served. Then, without comment, he spread the message before them. MacLaren read it, an expression of amazement creeping over his face.

“Good God!” he exclaimed, and passed it on to Cruikshank.

The cavalryman received it gingerly. The all-too apparent perturbation of his confrères proclaimed it a very disconcerting bit of paper, mysterious too, and he didn't like mysteries. He adjusted his glasses and read it through, then stared blankly from the general to MacLaren.

“A pretty kettle of fish,” was his only comment as he handed it to Nanak Singh.

If they expected the Sikh to show any astonishment they were doomed to disappointment. He studied it much as he would a circular from headquarters, emotionlessly, without a change of countenance unless it was a sudden flare in his eyes that might have meant pleasure or amusement for all they knew.

General Bangg drummed impatiently upon the arm of his chair.

“Well, well!” he exclaimed testily. “Have you nothing to say?”

“And what is there to say?” the Sikh coolly questioned.

“I want *advice!* I want to know what *you* would do if you were faced by a damnable situation like this?”

“Every dog has his own fleas,” was the blunt reply, “I am *not* a general.”

“But you were all in the service when this Carrington affair occurred, and you, MacLaren, if I remember rightly, were one of the officers that sat in the court-martial that convicted this John Craig.”

“I have no apology to offer for *that!*” MacLaren broke in petulantly.

“None is required,” the general snapped back, “nor is the case being reviewed. But you are well aware of the scandal that besmirched the great record that the army had won for itself, of the flood of accusations and mudslinging of newspapers and the people in private life who are ever ready to slam at the one branch of the government that makes for safety in India, and you certainly recall the stinging criticism of the meddling authorities in London. Though the court-martial judged impartially and according to the evidence, you know only too well that not one of its members were very boastful of that fact—say one year later.”

“But general, that is all past—and forgotten!” Cruikshank put in.

“Forgotten until something happens to rake over the muck. What will be the result if the truth of this radiogram is investigated, and even if it sends us off on a wild goose chase? The whole damn scandal will go into a second edition even nastier than the first. Will a single smudging detail be left out? No, gentlemen, not even the peculiar circumstances that climaxed

the affair—*peculiar* I say, so damned peculiar that it discredited everybody concerned but John Craig.”

Nanak Singh leaned across the table.

“And what do you expect of *us*, my general?” he asked.

“You have cleverly reminded me that a commanding officer should decide his own problems,” General Bangg retorted with a tinge of sarcasm. “Were this in the line of my regular duty I should ask no advice, and bear all the consequences with no obligation to either of you.” He snapped this, glaring defiantly from one to the other. “But the matter concerns you, the whole army, including every Tommy and sepoy as well as myself. An ill-advised action upon my part will rebound upon it, again discredit it though the case is ten years old, and yet—there is the dominant question of *justice*. You are veteran officers, comrades as old in the service as myself, and I have called you in to help me to decide what I should do. I know what my heart tells me to do, but hearts are never trumps in a soldier’s game. It’s a mess,” he added wearily, “and the last two days have proven how insignificant I am—there was a pig, dammit,—but never mind that now.”

They apparently didn’t notice the diversion. For a long time the silence remained unbroken save for the hum of conversation in the adjoining lounge, and the click of balls in the billiard room. All seemed mentally fishing for a solution of the general’s problem, save Nanak Singh, who apparently refused to burden his

mind with the matter. Finally, MacLaren broke the silence.

“A year after the court-martial it was decided to *presume*, for the good of the service, that John Craig was dead. This radiogram is no proof to the contrary.”

“And if we choose to consider his—er—*demise* as a fact——” Cruikshank added, significantly.

“But there’s the *radiogram*,” the general interrupted.

“Tear it up!”

“Scrap it!” put in MacLaren, “nobody’ll know the difference.”

“But don’t you realize that it has gone through a dozen hands in Calcutta!” the general exclaimed. “Dammit, the I.S.C. know it. The records have already been searched, and are being forwarded to me. Read the message again.”

MacLaren scanned the paper.

“Hell!” he growled, and flicked it back on the table.

“Begad, it *is* a rotten mess,” Cruikshank declared with a deep sigh.

There was another long period of silence, Generals Bangg, MacLaren, and Cruikshank being lost in a maze of gloomy reflections. Nanak Singh, apparently quite unconcerned, had filled his pipe and was contentedly puffing and blowing rings of smoke into the air. Occasionally he would glance from one to the other, and audibly register a thought by a grunt that was peculiar to himself, and which he varied a trifle to signify his reception or rejection of an idea. Finally he spoke.



“Yesterday I saw an old man steering a krait out of his path with a long stick, salaaming low to the snake, and politely begging its pardon for his impertinence. Afterwards the man went on his way, a great joy in his heart that he had not aroused the anger of his gods by killing it.”

“And what has your krait to do with this?” the general growled, tapping the message with his forefinger.

“It is a stinging thing that I would steer into the path of another!”

All three snapped to attention, regarding the Sikh with a puzzled expression, for they could not follow the drift of his meaning.

“Steer it into the path of another,” the general echoed his words. “Your parable is confusing. I do not understand you.”

Nanak Singh turned to MacLaren.

“Who defended John Craig at the court-martial?” he asked.

“Why—er—it was Jim Gridley!”

“Colonel Jim Gridley knows more about this case than you’ll find on paper,” the Sikh declared. He scornfully flipped the message with his forefinger. “Steer this krait into his path, and do not tie his hands with silly instructions. *He* will not fear the gods.”

The general looked uncertainly from MacLaren to Cruikshank. They had snapped out of their gloom, whether from the finding of a happy solution to the

embarrassing problem, or the unlooked-for opportunity of shifting responsibility.

“Colonel Gridley is *more* than a good soldier,” the general declared after a thoughtful pause, “but he is impulsive, takes wild chances, and often skirts good judgment by a hair’s breadth. Besides, you must realize that I cannot *compel* him to assume the responsibility. He may tell me to chase my own snake. It would be very like him.”

“He *will* assume it,” Nanak Singh was emphatic, “and it does not matter *how* he handles it, it will be *right*.”

General Bangg turned to the others.

“Well, gentlemen, what do you advise?”

Both nodded acquiescence, a little eagerly. The mountain had become a mole hole.

“I’d leave it to Gridley,” said Cruikshank, sagely.

“Surely, leave it to Gridley,” MacLaren parroted.

Thus the troublesome matter was again disposed of. The next day the relayed message and the records of the case were on their way to Colonel Gridley, who was stationed at Peshawar impulsively skirting good judgment, but commanding the unbounded respect of the accomplished murderers of the Afghan hills who often hurled themselves upon his command with the abandoned fury of a hurricane, coming in hundreds and going back in scores—the result of his impetuosity, the wild chances he took.

## CHAPTER VI

### WITH THE DAWN

THE first gray glow of the coming dawn had just appeared above the rim of the sea when Pan scrambled out of bed. She found her kimono waiting for her where Fung Shui had replaced it after working far into the night with his scissors and needle. It now fitted her perfectly, and she gave a contented sigh as she surveyed herself in a much larger glass than the one in the *Lark's* cabin before which she had so nervously twisted and squirmed the day before. She was strangely subdued and quite unlike her usual hoydenish self when she entered the living-room. Fung Shui was already setting the table for two, and bowed very low, chattering a picturesque greeting in his quaint pidgin-English.

Through lids drawn into a critical squint, every detail of clinging robe and obi was subjected to his closest scrutiny. She soberly waited for his verdict, and it came in a rattle of exclamations, a jabber of mandarin, and many little nods of approval.

“Yo' t'ink so?” she questioned, anxiously.

“Ah, ai!” he exclaimed. “Honorable Clay he likem! Yes, yes! Vlelly muchee!”

She flamed with pleasure, and her eyes, brilliantly glistening, darted quickly toward the closed door. He noted the peach bloom that glowed on her cheeks, the sharp intake of her breath between the amorous fluting

of her lips. Even to the passionless Fung Shui there was an indescribable charm in the delicate outline of her profile against the silvery gray shadows of the living-room, a defiant witchery in the slightly upraised chin, a superlative daintiness from the wanton ripples of her blue-black hair to the arches of her little feet.

“Bletter you smile!” he suggested. “Look plenty fine you stickem flower in hair, mebbe in obi.”

He padded toward his kitchen and turned to look back. She still stood, immovable, regarding that closed door. It was the pose of a bewildered child, yet with a strange and subtly enticing dignity.

“Alway’ havem song here for Honorable Clay,” he said, very softly, as he placed his hand over his heart, “you clome topside sure!”

When he returned to the living-room he found that she had acted upon his suggestion. There was a flower in her hair, and a cluster fastened in her obi. Somewhere she had found an empty pickle bottle and a couple of fruit jars. These she had filled with blossoms that she had gathered in the compound, and much to Fung Shui’s amusement, she placed them as close as possible to the three sides of Clay’s plate. As an extra touch, she stuck a huge red hibiscus in the prongs of his fork. She was singing as she worked, a cooing, rhymeless improvisation in her quaint patois in which “my John Clay” was poetically termed a “boo-tee-ful feesh wiz a silvery tail” in one line, and a “preetee little bird wiz yellor an’ red fedders” in another. His armchair next came under her critical observation. She seized a

cushion from a divan, and energetically punching it into shape, placed it in the seat. This she subjected to a trial performance, tentatively wiggling about in it, while Fung Shui solemnly watched proceedings and awaited a verdict.

"She ees a ver' nice soft sit," she finally declared as she fluffed out the impression that she had made in it, and a chuckling "ai, ai" indicated not only his satisfaction, but his relief from suspense. She found Clay's pipe and, filling it to overflowing with tobacco, placed it beside his plate together with a huge handful of matches.

Fung Shui had crossed to Clay's door to summon him to breakfast, but she ran to head him off.

"*Non, non!*" she exclaimed. "Zat ees for me!"

He immediately stood aside and she, quite breathlessly, approached the door. Then her nerve failed her and, with a nervous giggle, she edged away and motioned him to take her place. The faintest of smiles flickered across the bland face of the Chinaman. He shook his head.

"Muchee bletter you!"

"Pleas'!"

"You no do, Honorable Clay no eatee!" he emphatically declared with a stubborn shrug of his shoulders, and away he went to his kitchen. This was an unforeseen calamity, and she gazed quite helplessly at the closed door. But the harrowing thought of the empty condition of Clay's stomach was a most masterful urge, and she finally managed to muster up courage.

It was a timid little knock but it served its purpose. The awe inspiring door swung open, and Clay stepped briskly into the room. She looked up at him, wistfully, like a dog waiting for the caress of a master, but he only smiled and, with a cheery, "good morning," crossed to the table. Just a flash of disappointment, a little pout, came to her face, but it disappeared as she crossed after him, eager for a look, a word of recognition of the little things that she had done for him.

As he sat down, he felt the cushion under him and was impatiently reaching for it when he caught her expectant regard, a flash of eyes that darted from his face to the cushion that he was about to proscribe. With instant recognition, and in all gravity, he expressed his appreciation of her thoughtfulness for his comfort.

"It was very good of you to think about it," he declared, and then, quickly rising, he crossed to the other side of the table, and pulled back the chair. "Oh, pardon me," he said contritely, "I have been so long alone that I quite forgot."

At first she did not grasp his meaning, and she gazed at him a little bewildered until he motioned to the chair. Swallowing hard in an unsuccessful effort to thank him, flaming red because she thought she should but couldn't, she timidly seated herself and he returned to his place.

As he reached for his napkin he caught sight of the floral decorations, the barricade of pickle bottle and fruit jars, and the hibiscus in the prongs of his fork.

He could feel her eyes upon him eagerly watching every expression of his face. His imperturbability cracked under the strain. He desperately tried to control his desire to laugh, and only escaped from mortally offending her by a pretended fit of coughing, burying his face in his napkin in a gale of husky "ha's" and "ho's" that brought her around the table in a perfect terror of anxiety. It was with great difficulty that he succeeded in convincing her that he was quite all right, that there was no cause for alarm, and, even then, she returned to her seat extremely perturbed over the likelihood of an immediate recurrence of what he had termed a "mere attack of —er—humor."

Looking over his barricade he saw that she was wistfully watching him. He felt the keen sting of self-reproach, a shame that he had so grievously blundered in not recognizing the real truth behind her pathetic attempt to please him. Somehow the floral decorations ceased to be so absurdly ridiculous. They seemed to vibrate a message that the old solitude was at an end. Even the unlovely pickle bottle and fruit jars were so majestically apropos that the substitution of any of the priceless cloisonné or faience vases in his collection would have been a sacrilege. The huge room pulsed with a soothing contentment, and stealing over him came the consciousness of a singular comfort in her presence.

"Your flowers are very lovely," he told her. Her laugh was velvety, low, and very sweet.

“Zey smell fin’, eh?” she exclaimed, her eyes fairly dancing with delight.

“Very!”

“Me, I t’ink dose little fellers zey are ver’ happee zat yo’ like ’em.”

“And you?” he queried, with a smile.

She bashfully lowered her eyes. Her reply was low, a mere whisper that barely reached his ears.

“Eet mak’ me so happee wiz mysel’ zat I almos’ bus’.”

His face softened as he saw her smiling down at the ring that he had given her, and which she was turning around and around on her finger. He thought of the other woman, and of her appraising regard of a ring that he had given *her* in an old walled garden in India.

Fung Shui entered with the coffee percolator, a piece of machinery that was quite wonderful to Pan, and, after the why and wherefore of its mysterious purlings had been *thoroughly explained* to her in a volley of pidgin English that she *could not* understand, she concluded that the turning of the faucet was all that mattered anyhow, and peremptorily dismissed him, insisting on serving her “lord and master” herself. Busy with his toast, Clay failed to notice the four heaping spoonfuls of sugar that she shovelled into his cup, nor her stopping and bending upon him an appraising, even rapturous regard, nor did he see the three spoonfuls that quickly followed—“sweets to the sweet” with a vengeance—so he added two more himself. One sip would have been all sufficient if it hadn’t



been for those watchful eyes of hers. She *expected* approval, and he felt that it was up to him to give it.

“Nectar!” he exclaimed with a wry grin, and his nose disappeared into the depths of the cup.

Noticing that the toast was gone, she seized the empty plate and tripped out into the kitchen. The moment the door closed, he went to the window and threw the contents of the cup into the garden. He returned to the table, refilled the cup, sweetened it to his liking, and settled back in his chair. Suddenly he straightened up with a blank look of astonishment. He realized that his movements had been very *rapid*. In fact he had *sprinted* from the table to the window and back to the table; his fingers had been all thumbs when he manipulated the percolator faucet; he had scattered sugar over the table when he sweetened his coffee; he had spilled more cream on the table-cloth than in his cup and, his face flaming guiltily, he had flung himself breathlessly into his chair, his heart thumping unmercifully with a great fear of being caught. It had been a ridiculous gallop with the lack-dignity of a thrashed gamecock.

He muttered an impressive “damn” under his breath. He had figured upon being her guiding genius, coldly platonic, devoid of silly sentiment, and she had *him* dancing around like a performing bear on the end of a rope. This preposterous condition of affairs really couldn’t go on—and yet, even now the room seemed uncomfortably vacant. He felt the ache of an oppressive loneliness, and caught himself anxiously watching

the kitchen door, impatient for her return. Suddenly he heard the sound of an altercation, Pan's voice, angry and shrilly threatening, the voice of Hayes in a roar of expostulation and fear.

Miraculously recovered from his debauch of the night before, Jim Hayes had fairly breezed into Fung Shui's kitchen on his way to receive his usual daily instructions from Clay. The dismal pessimism of a fast fleeting "drunk," and the terror of speculation upon the possible disastrous recoil upon himself of his radiogram to India, had given place to the cumulative optimism of two "shots of hop," and to plans for a future bacchanalian existence that would have bankrupted the Forty Thieves of old Bagdad. Even the saucy cockatoo, who hated him thoroughly and who invariably met him at the gates and followed him up the path, squawking profane epithets and protesting his every step by viciously digging at the calves of his legs with an all-too-efficient beak, failed to arouse him from the delights of his mental orgy beyond a speculative kick or two that landed nowhere, and brought forth a shriek of contemptuous laughter from the belligerent bird.

As he entered the kitchen, swinging the door back quickly to shut out the obstreperous foe who stubbornly refused to recognize the sanctity of either *paepae bae* or house, he stopped short and gave a gasp of astonishment at the sight of Pan picking up the slices of bread that Fung Shui had toasted. At first he thought it was an optical illusion, a freak of the drug. It had

often served him that way, introducing him to strange faces and strange places that had always dissolved into nothingness like a fleece of mist in the hot rays of a summer sun, but when he heard her laugh at a whispered remark of the Chinaman he decided that, for once, a beautiful vision was substantially material, real "honest to goodness" flesh and blood. Even with this assurance, his astonishment rather increased than diminished; the presence of the Real was far more bewildering than that of the Unreal.

Of course the idiosyncratical Clay always messed up a person's calculations by never doing what he was expected to do, but it was unbelievable that he, who so savagely detested the female of the species, should have brought a girl—a deucedly pretty one—into his Eveless Eden. The *only* logical explanation must be that he had finally been inspired with a "glimmer of sense" and realized that Fung Shui "was a palsied old skeleton liable at any moment to totter head first into his own soup kettle," and had installed this girl as "official life-saver."

Mouth agape, he studied her. No detail of her trim little figure, or delicate chiselling of outline of profile, escaped him. His mouth twitched lecherously.

"What a panacæ for insomnia!" he muttered.

Rendezvous and amatory trysts with the native girls of the village had always been sternly tabooed by Clay, much to Hayes' dissatisfaction. This ultimatum carried with it an *unexpressed* penalty, but he *knew* that the squeamish autocrat of the island could be

depended upon to improvise one that would be both effective and superlatively disconcerting, so he *religiously* kept away from them. Here, however, seemed to be an opportunity "within the law," a piece of unclaimed property that one could annex without as much as a "by your leave." His quarters were lonely and the girl was a beauty. Why not? A superintendent had some prerogatives that even the monarchic Clay must recognize. Those cute little atoms, or electrons, or what not of Morphia cunningly counselled him to grasp the opportunity and, when Pan picked up the toast and started back to the living-room, he did so—grasped it around the waist with all the abandon of an amorous Lothario.

"Some little housemaid," he chortled.

The result was volcanic. Had he kicked an overpopulated hornet's nest he would not have succeeded in stirring up more trouble for himself. She twisted out of his arms and, with an angry scream, caught up a huge wide-bladed butcher's knife from the table, and pressed the point against his ribs. He uttered a howl of fright, and unsuccessfully attempted to seize her hand. Under a lightning play of the knife, little threatening jabs toward him, a dizzying piston-like play of steel before which he frantically wiggled and squirmed, she backed him against the wall.

"Don' yo' know I am a ladee, me?" she blazed at him.

"It—it was only a joke!" he sputtered.

"Oh! *So! Oui!* Eet ees a shoke, eh?"

"Yes, yes! A joke, I tell you!"

“Zen, by golly, yo’ *mus’ laugh!* Queek, queek! Say ha-ha, he-he!”

At first he balked, and the knife flashed dangerously close to the pit of his stomach. In sheer desperation he made the attempt, but it sounded like the husky remonstrance of a decapitated fowl. She straightened up in indignant disapproval.

“*Zat ees not for a shoke!* Eet *mus’ be more loud zan zat!* Mebbe I preek yo’ wiz zis little knieeve yo’ will feel more funnee, eh?”

He swore lustily, and voiced a wild plea for the Chinaman to come to his rescue. But Fung Shui did not move. He stood with head cocked on one side reflectively studying the position of the knife.

“Mlebbe bletter yo’ stickem two, t’ree inch higher!” he suggested to Pan, with the air of an expert.

“No, no, don’t you do it!” Hayes screamed. “He don’t know anything about it. It wouldn’t be better at all, not a damn bit better!”

Clay, listening on the other side of the door, and finding great difficulty in restraining a wild desire to laugh, now concluded that the moment had come for interference. As he stepped into the room Fung Shui whirled quickly to his work and a rattle of pots and pans proclaimed him quite the busiest man in the South Seas. Pan had stepped back, a little abashed, while Hayes broke out in a voluble stutter of accusations that Clay sternly silenced.

“I advise you that silence is golden in this matter,” he said, and there was a glint of contemptuous laughter

in his eyes. "That you may thoroughly understand the situation, this girl is Mrs. John Clay—*by book and ring!* It will be well if you remember that in the future."

He quietly motioned to Pan, and held the door open for her to pass into the living-room. He stopped on the threshold, and again turned to the dumbfounded Hayes.

"Hereafter do not enter the compound unless I send for you," he snapped.

He turned into the living-room and, for a full minute, Hayes stood, eyes popping and mouth agape, gazing blankly at the closed door. That "Mrs. John Clay" was a "knock out." Then Fung Shui's cackling laugh, shrilly derisive, cut through him like the slash of an ox gad. He whirled furiously, and started toward him, spitting invectives with all the venom of an infuriated ape.

"Laugh at me, will you, you yellow bastard," he roared. "By God, I'll——"

*But* the guileless Fung Shui was busily scraping that unforgettable knife back and forth along the surface of a butcher's steel, and Hayes' explosion ended in a rabid jumble of profanity as he swung about and bolted into the compound.

Clay finished his breakfast in silence, covertly watching Pan who ate but little and seemed lost in rather sober and unpleasant reflections. He asked no questions, but waited for her to vouchsafe, of her own accord, an explanation of the episode in the kitchen. But there were neither explanations, accusations, nor excuses. Finally, she looked up into his face and,

after a moment's hesitation, contritely voiced the one thing that was uppermost in her mind.

“Mebbe a ladee she would not do zat?”

He gravely shook his head.

“No, I don't think she would.”

She nervously twisted the corner of the table-cloth, her brows knit in a perplexed frown.

“What ees eet zat a ladee would do?”

The blunt question rather staggered him for a moment.

“Why—er—under the circumstances—she—well, she would call for help.”

“Oh, she loose ver' much tim'!” she exclaimed.

“Oh, *oui, oui*, she can say pleas', pleas' feller be so kin' as to wait one little tim' so I git me some help, *mais, mais*, eef zat feller he ees in one beeg hurree, ough, ough, eet will be ver' deaf—deef—fee—cul' to be a ladee!”

“But if she has an able-bodied husband?”

She burst out in a ringing laugh, clapping her hands delightedly.

“Oh, oh, zat ees ver' funee! Zat ees one beeg, beeg shoke for me! All tim'—all tim' wiz zat feller I forgit my 'usband! Oh, I am so ver' sorree! I mak' yo' loose one ver' nice fight! Zat ees too bad-d!”

“I realize that, in the stress of excitement, you could be excused for forgetting a husband.”

“Mebbe I mak' 'nuther fight wiz heem, zen I call for yo',” she exclaimed, hopefully, as a sort of propitiating salve for any disappointment that he might feel.

“No, no, it is not necessary,” he hastened to assure her, and added with a chuckle, “besides I am afraid it will be difficult to induce him to become a party to the affair.”

He arose from the table and crossed for his hat.

“I am going to the village,” he told her. “I have some little remembrances for our people. They always expect them after a cruise, and if you wish to come along, you may distribute them for me.”

She gave an exclamation of delight, then suddenly remembering her reception of the night before, her hand went to her nose. She tentatively twisted it about apparently trying to convince herself that it was still intact.

“Mus’ all dose fellers rub my nose some more?” she anxiously asked.

“You do not like it?”

“Oh, zare is so manee! Rub, rub, rub! I t’ink she ees wored out, dose nose!”

“Well, it will be safe this time,.” he assured her. “They thought that they were doing you a great honor. You know it is their way of accepting you as one of their own blood, to show you that they love you.”

“’Onest? ’Cause zey love me?”

He nodded.

“Zat ees ver’ nice!”

She dropped her head, bashfully, to one side, and nervously traced the pattern of the rug with the toe of her slipper.



“Do yo’ rub ze nose when yo’ love someone *ver’ much?*”

It wasn’t very difficult to guess her meaning, and, very self-consciously, his face flaming red, he kissed her on the forehead—a mere peck but it cost him an effort. She brought her hand up and lightly fingered the spot. Then she carried her fingers to her lips.

“*Me*, I put eet *zare!*” she whispered, and, blushing furiously, she hid her face in her hands.

“I *think* that we had *better* get out in the air!” he said, and started for the door.



## PART FOUR

*Up from Earth's Centre through  
the Seventh Gate  
I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn  
sate,  
And many a Knot unravel'd by  
the Road;  
But not the Master-knot of Human  
Fate.*

OMAR KHAYYAM



## CHAPTER I

### THE MAN FROM MANILA

AT four o'clock in the afternoon the island's transients came to life and anchored around the tables of the hotel veranda. Among these impudently curious groups came a lazy drift of residents—retired traders, ex-pearlers, others that were still engaged in the what-not of the island's commercial life. When the veranda was quite filled—never before—the French Commissioner, resplendent in generously gold-braided white flannels, would pompously strut across from his office, and seek a seat as near the centre of the stage as possible, where, with a chronic air of official boredom, he would indolently sip a mixture of iced gin and absinthe, a much needed stimulant after an hour or two's arduous occupation in the affairs of his picayune government. The remaining chairs at his table were invariably tipped against it to preclude invasion by the undesirable *hoi polloi*, and were only filled when a condescending wave of his hand indicated to an expectant "who's who" that he or she was of sufficient social standing to be permitted to publicly hobnob with His Official Importance.

As regularly came Captain Ezra Bulfinch, a ponderous mass of flesh that shook like an agitated jelly fish as he waddled wheezily up the steps onto the veranda. His face had the mottled tint of a stale boiled lobster,

and his one hand, a huge muscular thing of knots and scars, was forever petulently swathing a head as devoid of hair as the back of a turtle. He was a character, was Ezra Bulfinch, cantankerously obstinate and stubbornly opinionated. Boy and man he had sailed the Seven Seas for threescore of years. He had been a blackbirder when blackbirding had been considered an industrial necessity and necessity the Law, a filibuster when guns were a highly profitable commodity in South Africa and the Philippines, a raider of pearl beds when he conscientiously felt that the shell was any man's—which had been often. He had scars as plentiful as freckles, for he had been hacked at and shot at by every conceivable kind of a weapon, not excluding the exceedingly effective kris of Malay pirates with its blade rubbed in the rotten liver of a wild pig, or spears that were quite as deadly that had been hurled from the proas of Dyak head-hunters, or the little feathered darts, lethal as the fang of an East Indian cobra, that were spouted through a twelve-foot sumpitan or blow-gun from the tangled web of a Borneo jungle. A mine of information for tourists, his imagination a ludicrous riot when he sensed the gullible, his activities had now simmered down to the prosaic navigation of a staunch little sea-going launch that was much in demand for pleasure trips around the island.

The town was quiet as usual, and, as usual, anything that made any progress at all seemed to be going backward. True, there was the raucous exhortations and pathetic entreaties for an all-potent "seven" from

a group of crap shooters squatting on the weather-beaten wharf, the boisterous rooting of a crowd of natives and a sailor or two that circled around an impromptu cock-fight in a clearing back of the hotel, and the shrill laughter of naked women engaged in the family wash at the water-hole a quarter of a mile away, with an occasional breeze-carried interpolation of twanging banjo and wheezy accordion from Tahiti Tom's at the far end of the lagoon. But all this was so monotonously usual that it was unheard and unseen, as was the undulating ribbon of living color, the fifty feet of scintillating purples, crimsons, and yellows, thousands of gorgeous butterflies that silently circled the veranda like an army of fairies and disappeared around the curve of coral roadway.

Under the wooden awning of a store, two weazened old men, immovable as gargoyles, stared unblinkingly down at a checkerboard, only occasionally making a grumbling protest when one or the other disturbed calculations by unconsciously twitching about on the soap box that served as a seat. Every hour or so one would startle the other by moving a checker with great uncertainty from one square to another and his patriarchal opponent would spend the next half hour staring suspiciously at the courageous one.

A limping skeleton of a man, naked save a chowat or breech cloth, a mummified Methuselah with a skin like sun-baked leather, crawled at a snail's pace back and forth in front of the veranda, his joints cracking ominously, and the four yellow fangs that still remained

in his cavern of a mouth clicking like castanets at every step. His eyes constantly darted from one to the other of the loungers, for he was seeking the little black box that so often brought a rain of coins into his withered palm. But even this opportunity to snap a picture of a genuine, guaranteed, hoary old cannibal, a twenty-two carat ex-conjurer of all kinds of voodooic hellishness, failed to arouse the enthusiasm of a single tourist. He, too, had become as monotonously inconsequential as the little red lizard that was stalking a bug through the moss that edged the lily pool, and he finally disappeared. He might have disintegrated for all they knew.

Even the sea rolled lazily and soundless against the outer reef. The few vessels that were in the lagoon seemed like miniatures, toys that had been set in a field of glass, and the circle of water glittered like a huge amethyst under the reflected blue of the sky and the kiss of the sun.

Yet there was life here, pulse-leaping life, mysterious, eerie, blood-quickenning, though noiseless. It required time for it to unfold its romance, to spread its gifts before the neophyte; time for the spell of the *Tiaro* to waft one into forgetfulness of that brain-cracking, body-wrecking Thing called Civilization; but the lure was indomitable, unconquerable, and the wanderer had surely come to the end of his road, and all, *all* that was away seemed but a dreary, forbidding wilderness.

But the spell of the *Tiaro* was not for the transients, the pop-in and pop-out kind that occupied the



hotel veranda. It was a silly superstition to laugh about, and not to be taken seriously by that sophisticated bird of passage, the superciliously impudent globe trotter. These people had come "a-slumming," a mere hop off between boats. They were equipped with white flannels and an imagination—a very *naughty one*. Here was lasciviousness in the nth degree—sensuous permissuity—every dark-skinned maid a Circe of insatiate passion—the island, Nature's wild bagnio of sloe-eyed odalisques. Old Noah Webster, and the guide books, a hundred writers of yarns had spread the glad tidings. The boasted *Tiaro* had two shapely legs, was full chested, had red, red lips, the very "divil" of a pair of coaxing eyes, and an undulating glide, a mischievous swing of the hips that didn't mean a particle of good. The very atmosphere oozed concupiscence, every sylvan dell whispered of a thousand rendezvous, every purling brook and lace of water tumbling over rock lusty nature's veil to obscure the gambols and laughing chatter of wantons. Gloriously *entertaining* depravity, always hidden from prying eyes and cocked ears, 'tis true, yet so vividly picturable to the psychical minds of the cultured, the pure in heart, and the righteously moral.

A group of chattering native girls that were passing the hotel veranda on their way to the beach furnished a stimulus for wagging tongues to renew the swopping of delectable titbits of naughty romance, salacious stories of unholy gladness and joy that one or another of the tourists had harvested, and now retailed with color-

ful exaggerations that were considered quite permissible. A soap maker from London, Sir Sylvester Cobb, who purveyed it to His Majesty the King, and was a vestryman of a fashionable church, swung about in his chair and excitedly adjusted his eyeglasses, as keenly alive to feminine charms and *capabilities* as a Turk bent on replenishing his harem. Archibald, his heir, a callow youth with an amorous ambition and a smutty moustache, darted precipitately to the veranda rail, and furiously smirked and winked at one of the girls who happened to glance toward him with what he considered an expression of furtive expectancy. His sister Clarice, a tall and willowy brick-tinted blonde who had inherited a few of her father's weaknesses, and just doted on the unconventional, was a close and enthusiastic second. The Very Reverend Barclay Poindexter, who being a bishop had been considered an eligible addition to the Cobb world romping party, pursed his lips in owlish disapproval, while Lady Sylvester glared from one to the other of her troublesome family, her tongue clicking vigorous reproof against the roof of her mouth.

“*Sillee-e! Archibald-d! Clar-r-ricce!*” she ran it in a diatonic scale, tapping peremptorily upon the table with her fan.

It was a command to right-about face, and a promise of a sizzling rebuke the very moment that she got them out of the earshot of strangers. Father's glasses tobogganed down his nose and he skidded about in his chair; Archibald reluctantly left the rail with

an angry glance toward the Very Reverend Poindexter, who he somehow suspected of having put up a job on him; while Clarice, to the secret admiration of her father, did exactly as she liked—which was to remain where she was. Lady Sylvester gazed solemnly at the clergyman, mutely calling attention to the heft of the cross that she had to bear, and he nodded back understandingly.

“The *perfectly scandalous stories* that I have heard about these people! Ough! I will be a happy woman when I have seen the last of this awful island!” she declared, and it sounded as if she thought that this was the last sad thing that could happen to it.

Captain Bulfinch leaned across from a neighboring table.

“Mail boat’ll be in any moment now, ma’am!” he told her, with a sarcastic grin.

She favored him with a withering glance.

“So *good* of you,” she drawled, her lip curling with supreme contempt for the little Thing that had spoken.

“Yes’m!” he agreed, composedly turning his back and addressing himself to the French Commissioner.

“*Puffectly scandaluvius stories*, sez she! Did ye notice th’ funnel shape o’ th’ ol’ gal’s ears? Kin ye eemagine th’ riot she’ll be when she gits back among them *puffectly* nice dames t’ hum? I’m plum’ sorry fer Archeebawled, ’n’ Clareese, ’n’ poor ol’ what’d she call him—Sillee? Sillee! Ain’t that a hell of a name?”

As Captain Bulfinch predicted, the Indo-Australian

southbound mail boat arrived in a little less than ten minutes, heralded by a long, hoarse blast of her whistle that continued until her black bows, her decks awninged in red and white, and her saffron-colored funnels had appeared around the arm of the harbor. Craps, the cockfight, even the everlasting game of checkers, came to an abrupt end, the participants hurrying to the wharf as noisily and excitedly as small boys who had been waiting for the arrival and unloading of a circus train. Quite a few of the tourists, including the Cobb party, gathered up their wraps, and, after much handshaking and "hopes-to-meet-again," started for the launch that was waiting to carry them out to the vessel, and were followed by the porters carrying their hand baggage.

Jim Hayes sat, quite alone, in a secluded corner of the hotel veranda, and watched the vessel as it came to anchor. The day before he had asked for a leave of absence, a week or two to recuperate, which Clay had granted, and the *Lark*, with Poni in command, had carried him to town. From his arrival he had kept to his room, ceaselessly pacing it for hour after hour, and waiting, with hysterical impatience, the moment when the jaws of his trap would close on Clay. The mail boat should bring Clay's nemesis in the shape of an officer from Calcutta *if* his deductions had been correct—if John Clay *was* John Craig. But if he was wrong, if he had jumped to a ridiculous conclusion, if his own evil genius had played a cruel little joke upon him, if John Clay *was* not John Craig, his only salvation was to board this same boat and place as many

leagues of sea between himself and the Sphinx as possible. John Clay would strike—viciously: he always did. He had seen him mercilessly flailing down four times his weight in human brutes who had chosen mutiny as a fitting climax to a drunken revel; he had heard the gun-like crack of a sjambok of hippopotamus hide as it cut clothing to shreds and bit deep into the flesh of a shrieking Judas who had betrayed the secret of a rich pearl bed, and once a man had attempted to abduct one of his native girls, even had her aboard his vessel when Clay struck. The girl was rescued, the vessel now laid in ten fathoms of water just outside the reef, and—*perhaps*—the crew succeeded in swimming the fifty or sixty odd leagues to the next island.

Reflections upon these episodes brought wild terror. He cursed himself for a lunatic that had planned his own destruction. A creak on the stairway sent him cowering against the wall, nervously fingering his revolver, and obsessed with the hallucination that Clay had already started to hunt him down. For a long time he would stand eyeing the door, then he would stagger weakly to the table for brandy or morphine; huge gulps and doses, enough to kill a man and yet—so utterly ineffective. Only when the whistle announced the vessel's entrance into the harbor did he leave his room and make his way down to the veranda.

But one passenger disembarked from the vessel. He carried little baggage, a Gladstone bag and a suitcase, which augered a hurried trip and a short stay. Hayes watched him with feverish impatience as he

climbed from the launch onto the wharf. He jumped to the conclusion that this was the government agent who had been sent in response to his radiogram and the crushing weight of his depression lifted. His mind ceased to snap from one terror to another. Now that the Law had come he no longer felt so infinitesimally small, so fearfully alone and afraid. He no longer need skulk in the shadows, cowering in fright before a relentless John Clay who, though leagues away, seemed to be towering over him, an unconquerable spirit using no sjambok on this second Judas, but destroying him by the sardonic threat of an inconceivable revenge, driving him into sheer insanity because he could not *conjecture* just what John Clay would do.

As the man drew nearer, Hayes' eyes popped unbelievably, and he snarled an oath between his teeth. This fellow couldn't possibly be a government agent—a puny little runt of a man who stumbled along uncertainly, each foot seemingly propelled forward only by a herculean effort of will, his face deathly white, his eyes dark-circled and glittering feverishly. *Mal de mer* evidently, and Hayes could neither conceive the Majesty of Britain's Law as runtish or subject to seasickness.

It was a forlorn hope, but he followed the newcomer into the hotel lobby, and worked his way to the registry desk so that he might get a glance at his signature. It was scrawled with much difficulty.

*John Watkins, Manila, P. I.*

Hayes turned away with an oath on his lips. It would be two weeks before another boat, two weeks of associa-

tion, night and day, with the spectre of vengeance that was driving him into madness. Something whispered to him to get away "while the going was good," to board that mail boat in the harbor. He started quickly for the door but a glance told him that its screw was already churning the water. He turned back, the old terror gripping him, and, flinging unprintable epithets at himself for having ever sent that cursed radiogram, he made his way to the stairway that led to his room. He had scarce reached it when he heard an exclamation of alarm from the clerk. Watkins was leaning against the desk, his hand clutched to his side, an expression of intense agony on his face.

Watson quickly recovered and, as the clerk handed the room-key to the bell boy, he asked a question that startled Hayes and brought him to a quick right-about.

"Are you acquainted with a man named John Clay?" he was asking. "I understand that he has a plantation on some one of these islands."

"I guess John Clay is known all over the South Seas," the clerk told him. "If you want to see him you'll have quite a jaunt, though. It would take a fast motor boat at least five hours to reach him."

"How do I get there?"

"It isn't a regular stopping place for coast vessels. Sometimes one can catch a trader going that way. Don't know of a chance now, though. His own schooner runs in here once in a while, but you can't depend upon that. It don't show up for three months sometimes. The only suggestion that I could make is

to charter a launch. Captain Bulfinch has one that is very speedy. I guess you will have no trouble in making arrangements with him."

Satisfied that the undersized Watkins *was* a government detective, Hayes had stealthily edged toward the door. He had no desire to remind the clerk of his presence in the hotel, and, above all, heartily wished to avoid any questions that Watkins might ask. He had done his part, and the arm of the law could reach Clay as best it could—swim for all he cared. From now on he proposed to keep his conscience clear. He negotiated the passage to the door with his nerves snapping desperately, and heaved a great sigh of relief, when he had managed to slip undetected through it, and out upon the veranda.

At Watkins' request to be put into immediate communication with the launch owner, Captain Bulfinch was summoned from the veranda and introduced by the clerk.

"This gentleman wishes to be carried to John Clay's plantation," he told the captain.

"You surely don't want t' go there, t'night?" the captain queried in surprise.

For some moments Watkins did not answer. Lost in thought, he weakly leaned against the desk, apparently trying to decide between an immediate departure and waiting over until the next day. The others watched him apprehensively, for they realized that he was only keeping himself on his feet by sheer strength of will.



“Ye’r a sick man!” Bulfinch sympathetically exclaimed, “better rest up for a day or two. Ye needn’t worry none but that ’ere island’ll stay right there. Ain’t moved a bit in a dang long while. Couldn’t git there ’fore long arter ten nohow, an’ Clay’ll be none too tickled t’ have us come a bustin’ in on him at that time o’ night. Don’t like t’ be pestered none t’ much in th’ daytime. Dang *pee-coo-ler* cuss! Besides the job o’ gittin’ into that lagoon in the dark ain’t no job fer a good Christian. T’morrer, sez ye?”

“I am not well,” he agreed, “and that is all the more reason that I should get there quickly. My business is urgent—*very urgent*. We will have no argument about your price, so let us start at once.”

“Well,” Captain Bulfinch shrugged his shoulders in surrender, “if ye find yerself a sittin’ on a lump o’ coral, don’t blame *me* if it hurts!”

“I must take that risk,” Watkins grimly replied.

Directing the bellboy to take the suitcase to his room, he picked up the Gladstone bag, and followed the launch owner out of the hotel. From a corner of the veranda, Hayes watched them as they made their way to the wharf. Then, with a chuckle of triumph, he started along the beach toward Tahiti Tom’s.

## CHAPTER II

### MOONLIGHT MADNESS

“SENTINEL HILL” they called it, a cliff that towered a full thousand feet above a sea that surged and pounded through acres of grotesque rocks at its base, only to dash into a shrieking inferno of sheeted spray high up the sheer side of the cliff itself. It had left strange figures, the sculptures of an æon of centuries, that leered down at its impotency—caves in which the gull and sea hawk, with the majestic indifference of folk of the air, had found either nest, a momentary resting place, or box seats when nature, becoming hysterical, choose to stage one of her melodramatic spectacles and the waters run amok.

This cliff was reached from the compound gates by a path of crushed coral that now gleamed like a ribbon of phosphorus under the reflection of the moon. The path ended at the foot of a stairway of crude steps that had been cut in the landslide of the cliff, and this stairway, winding precariously at times, reached to its summit, a flat space perhaps twenty feet square that was entirely clear except for two boulders carved into rude but picturesque settles.

One side of the cliff overlooked a little valley, and here was a semi-circle of bamboo and palm-thatched huts, each on its own *pæpæ bæ*, that housed the native help of Clay’s plantation—a tribe in itself,

with its own chief freely administering its tribal laws, and free to enjoy its ancient customs without the interference of the impudently proselytizing white man.

In the glare of a half dozen fires, a full hundred of natives were holding a gala celebration in honor of some one of their many pagan gods. Old men and women were chanting weird melodies to the thump of tom-tom and log drum, the shrill notes of wooden pipes and the ear-splitting screech of crude stringed instruments, to which Fung Shui, a guest of honor, was contributing his more than mite, with great dexterity, upon the instrument that Jim Hayes abhorred, his one-string Chinese fiddle. Semi-nude girls and youths, flower-bedecked and paint-bestreaked, were wildly dancing in the centre of the circle, their lithe bodies flashing like burnished gold in the red glare of the fires. Every step of supple leg or wave of shapely arm, every fling of head or flash of eye, or ripple of sinew and muscle, was but a part of a wordless drama, a joyous romance of the wild, and dim old eyes squinted from the surrounding circle as keenly critical as the *blasé* of a London pit.

There was palm wine a plenty, *namu enata*, passed around in cocoanut shells, and, back in the shadows, *kava* in preparation—that mule-kicking liquor made from the yam-like root of a pepper plant. It was pure “bootleg,” too, for Clay emphatically proscribed it—that was the reason that it was made in the shadows. Matrons were scraping the roots into a kind of slaw, and four or five of the healthiest girls, whose teeth had

passed a hundred per cent. the scrutiny of the medicine man, were busily chewing and spitting this slaw into cups of banana leaf. Presently these would be emptied into a trough, cocoanut juice poured in, a net of cocoanut fibre swept through to clarify the mixture, after which quick fermentation—and a hysterical dabbling into saturnine immoralities that even Lady Sylvester Cobb would have given her eye-teeth to have been able to retail to her friends at home.

Clay was sitting upon one of the stone settles. He was smoking his pipe and watching Pan, who half reclined at the edge of the cliff. Her chin was resting in the palm of her hand and her eyes were flashing from one to the other of the troll-like groups below. She lay very still, her body held tensely rigid. Under the reflecting moon rays her face gleamed like sculptured ivory against the deeper shadows of the night. She made no sound except now and then a sigh that was as quickly stifled. Clay sensed her struggle against the allure of savage music, and a half-amused smile flickered on his lips.

A fortnight had passed since the marriage at the little mission church, and he admitted to himself that the fortnight had been replete with keen enjoyment, and a comfort that he had never known since he had left his boyhood home in the hills of old Canterbury. Never once since that first night had she betrayed the disappointment gnawing at her baffled heart. No slave had ever served a potentate so faithfully. She seemed to be possessed of a psychic power in antici-

pating his every wish, and when the old moods came—his desire for solitude—far less frequently now, however, she quietly drifted away to chum with her friend, the cockatoo among the flowers of the compound, or out to Fung Shui's kitchen to putter away with his pots and pans. She was learning to read—in her *own way*—by firing questions at him, broadsides that kept his brain a-jumping. It seemed to him that she wanted to find out what *he knew* rather than any knowledge that she sought for herself—pure curiosity but with most astonishing results. Her primer was the very largest book in his collection—she was “no piker,” was Pan. She had selected it because it *was* the largest, and had the finest binding. A paragraph conquered, and out she would fly to the kitchen, and read it to Fung Shui. It was a laborious but triumphant task to show Fung Shui how very smart “my John Clay” was that he was able to read “dose t'ings.”

“Heem know a beeg, beeg lot, eh?” she would ask when she had finished, and Fung Shui always nodded his head, with many enthusiastic “ai, ai's” by which he won a position next to Clay's in the matter of intelligence. Yet, with it all, Clay was still uncertain that the wild blood that leapt within her would long submit to curb, that pagan *Truth* could ever become thoroughly civilized.

There was a sudden change of tempo in the barbaric music below. It became faster, a veritable frenzy of shrieking, twanging, and thumping. This savage attack on melody aroused the dancers to unbelievable

feats of leaping, kicking, and spinning, a bouncing toward or away from one another, as they grotesquely twisted and contorted their bodies into poses that were of a tradition as ancient and as interpretable as the sculptures carved on the walls of the buried temples of old Luxor. A masterpiece of the ages was now being brought to its climax, its master scene, and the musicians wheezed asthmatically between every bulge of cheek or swing of arm. Sweat in great globules oozed out upon the well-oiled bodies of the dancers, and the voices of those squatting in the outer circle rose into a babel of shrieks—squeals from sopranos and tenors, grunts and howls from bassos—for enthusiasm, and palm wine, and *kava*, had made mere words of no consequence whatever, and this pandemonium of noise echoed and re-echoed through the surrounding crags as if a hullabaloo of mimicry from a myriad of spooks roistering in their shadows.

Clay was aroused from his reflections by an exultant cry from Pan. Her blood aflame, her nerves snapping arcs of living fire, she had succumbed to the diablerie of uncanny music and song, the eerie symphony of the echoing hills, the delirious whirl of the elvish bacchantes. He saw that she had come to her knees, her face aglow with a supreme joy, and her body pivoting at the hips in sinuous voluptuous curves. At times she bent far back until her hair swept the ground, then swinging forward, her forehead would almost touch her knees, while her arms and hands were extended and rippling like quicksilver in undulating

rhythm with the barbaric fantasia. It was the supreme of breath-taking grace, tantalizingly inviting; the earthly replica of a nymph of paradise in sensuous courtesy to the god of forbidden delights, and Clay, a little resentful of this relapse of his protégé, could voice no word of reproof, and found, to his amazement, that he was wonderingly awaiting the climax of her plunge into this maelstrom of volcanic emotions.

She bounded to her feet and whirled toward him. With an alluring, seductive smile on her lips, lips fringed with the gleam of ivory and provocative of kisses, she covered the ground as lightly, as noiselessly as a butterfly tipping an orchid. Her throat pulsed with the trill of a wordless song; her eyes, with lids half drooping, flared with the smouldering fire of insatiate passion, and her arms flashed toward him an appeal so magnetic that it was only by a superhuman effort that he controlled the wild urge to leap toward her, to seize her in his arms, to take reprisal for the many years of love that he had lost. It was a half savage Salome dancing before her suzeraine, not for the head of a wandering philosopher, but for the heart of the king himself—and the king was slipping, and his crown of wisdom was very much awry. Maddening memories again raced through his brain, memories of a serpent bulging with venom that had been concealed in that old garden of dreams, and with these memories came, for the first time, a realization of the devastating, ravening starvation of his heart—a heart that,

after so many years, and now in fierce rebellion against being used solely as a repository for an undying hatred.

She had tucked the skirt of her robe in the folds of her obi that her legs might be free, and he marvelled at the grace of reflexing muscles, the poesy of swinging knee, and the little feet that seemed never to touch the ground. She seemed to float toward him like a dryad perched on a wave, her eyes dazzlingly persuasive, her arms mischievously offering unnamable delights that only the next instant would be provokingly withdrawn. He suddenly straightened up, and she instantly sensed his desire to seize her. She throated a tantalizing trill, a "catch me if you can." He reached out to snatch and draw her to him, but uttered an exclamation of amazement, so quickly did she flash beyond the reach of his hand. It seemed as if it had passed through a phantom that floated in the air, an ethereal shape that he likened to an impenitent peri that had been ousted out of Heaven, and was now baiting with the very thing that he despised.

Her laughter rang clear as she bounded away, its triumphant mockery stinging him to the quick. But acquiescent defeat had never been written in his code. He chuckled grimly, and settled back with pretended indifference to throw her off her guard. She was whirling now, spinning like a top. She had slipped her arms from the loose sleeves of her robe, and it now swung at her waist, her nude torso radiating from the silver of a moonbeam to the flickering tint of burnished gold reflecting from the fires below. Nearer and nearer



she came, her bosom pulsing to the cadence of swinging leg and arm. His hand snapped forward, and again closed on the empty air. She had darted under it, and thrown herself before him, lying back across his knees, and reaching up to twine her hands about his shoulders. When a man's a furnace the vows of a monk are twaddle. He caught her to him, fiercely, with an unleashed passion all the more irresistible for having slumbered so long, and he felt her heart's strong throb against his shoulder as his lips caressed her soft young flesh.

But the lure was a moment's flash. Came swift reaction, pounding thoughts of Tahiti's Tom's, the "G'rilla," Toni the breed, the muck of humanity before whom this girl had danced even as she had just danced for him. Now struck him with cruel force the unheeded warning of Père Laurens—"She is a wanton—a girl that gave herself for money," the priest had said. He started up, angrily pushing her away, and, turning his back upon her, he strode to the edge of the cliff where he stood gloomily looking out to sea, bitterly disappointed in her, searingly contemptuous of himself.

Pan did not move from the huddled heap into which she had fallen. The contemptuous harshness with which he had pushed her from him filled her with a vague terror that even eclipsed the hurt, and she was hurt, cruelly so, in that one thing that even civilization and culture cannot render invulnerable. In a woman—the pride of sex appeal. "A girl was jus' for ze mans" was Pan's crude philosophy. Mere Man has evolved

a cleaner code—or was it Woman in revolt—a law against a *Law* decreed by that great breath that breathed out of chaos a universe of worlds, and bawdy Nature-frolics with the presumptuous dust-made thing that a trillion years or so ago was nothing but a worm. Primitive child of nature, Pan's philosophy held no thought of soul. "Me" was but a physical body that won its mate by the lure of its beauty, even as the gaudy color of a flower entices the pollen-laden bee to the nectar in its heart. That lure had clashed with a code that she could not understand, and, as she had ever resented trickery herself, she jumped to the conclusion that Clay resented the deliberate trick of seduction that she had played upon him.

Twice she called to him, but he did not answer. Her nerves snapped under the strain of his ominous silence, and, burying her face in her arms, she burst into a paroxysm of convulsive weeping. Finally came the muffled sound of her voice, sob-choked and trailing along uncertainly.

"Me—I—I—wuz ver' happye t'—dance for yo'! Oh, *oui*, ver' much! Ver', ver' happye zat yo' tooked me in yo' arm—an' kees me!" Her voice broke into a little wail. "Eet wuz ver' nice!" There was a pause. "Don' yo' t'ink so—*don' yo'?*" She waited for his answer, but it did not come, and she continued just a little defiantly. "Ees eet so ver' bad-d zat I wan' t be love'? Pleas'—will yo'—be so ver' kin' as t' tole me zat?"

He was so quiet that she raised her head, fearful

that he had gone. His uncompromising back assured her, and she heaved a long tremulous sigh. Then came a sharp intake of her breath. She had caught sight of the moon just dipping into the western horizon. It was rather rakishly tipped to one side, and its prankish old face seemed to her to be twisted into a malicious grin. She straightened up, her face aglow with the discovery of the cause of all her troubles. Her eyes snapped angrily, and she shook an accusing finger at it.

“*Cochon! Cochon!*” she cried, and then excitedly called to Clay, “*Ze moon! Ze moon! Yo’ see heem? You see zat feller? Mon pere heem say—oh-h-h he is a ver-r-r smart mans, mon pere——*” this to impress Clay with the superlative wisdom of her father. “Heem say eet sometim’ mak’ a mans—*oui*, eet *ver-r much sometim’ mak’ a girl crazee—crazee jus’ like a bug-g!* Now! *Now!* Yo’ see, *yo’ see?* Eet ees not *me, mysel’!* Eet ees zis dam’ o’ moon zat do eet!” She hunched her shoulders, and her head bobbed from side to side in self-condemnation. “Tchick, tchick! I am disgus’ wiz mysel’ zat I am such a little fool!”

She made a little gesture that indicated that, as the matter had been thoroughly explained, and, of course, nicely settled, there was nothing further to be worried about. She favored his back with a winsome smile.

“An’ now—zat yo’ have—excoosed me—mebbe eet ees alrigh’! Yo’ t’ink so?”

She rose to her feet and quickly crossed to him. He stood close to the edge of the cliff, with his hands on

his hips, and she was compelled to bend under his crooked elbow that she might look up into his face. Her voice was naïve but tremulously pleading.

“Eet will be ver’ nice if yo’ will t’ink so, my John Clay.”

Disarmed by the pathetic efforts that she was making to reinstate herself in his good graces, his sense of humor rocked by the naïvete of her alibi, he somehow felt a reversal of positions, that *he, himself*, had been the culprit—a case of the “Moth and Flame,” he the flame, and quite willing to perform its office. Why then blame the girl when the bulwark of his moral code had been so easily assailed.

She saw that the flame of anger had gone from his face, and her joy bubbled up into a little nervous laugh that sank to a whisper when he began to speak. His voice was very gentle, and he faltered as he searched for words that she would understand.

“It is not the Pan of Tom’s café that I want—the Pan “G’rilla” fought for—the one that Père Laurens told me so much about. It is another Pan who is very sweet and lovable—but she is like a butterfly; she gives me a glimpse of her to let me see how very nice she is, and then—away she goes. *She* is the Pan I want, and I am waiting until she comes to stay—for *always*.”

“Ze Pan zat ees a ladee?” she asked, breathlessly.

“The Pan that is a lady.”

She nervously clutched and drew up the trailing waist of her robe, holding it close to her body.

“Pleas’ don’ look!” she begged, and he obediently turned his back. The lady had come again.

## CHAPTER III

### PUPPETS OF FATE

As they made their way down the path they could hear the last feeble outbursts of the revelers, a woman's laugh, the remnant of song, the faint whine of Fung Shui's fiddle, and the snapping and snarling of dogs fighting over the remains of the food. Now that the moon had dipped out of sight, the strip of crushed coral was but vaguely outlined as it curved among the shrubbery, the groups of lemon hibiscus, lacebark, and umbrella ferns that bordered it. Here and there a tao, or tilting cocoanut palm, towered above them and cast antic shadows under the impulse of a light breeze that drifted across the lagoon, and Pan clung tightly to Clay's arm, not quite sure but that ghosts, hobgoblins, and other unfriendly what-nots might be lurking in the murk of foliage.

As they came into the clearing before the entrance to the compound, they heard the swish of water cut by the bow of an approaching vessel, and the hum of its engine. A moment later the gray outline of a launch shot out of the velvet blackness of the night into the halo of light cast by the beacon on the gate. It eased up to the wharf, and, simultaneous with its thud against the pilings, came a stentorian hail that was sharply imperative. Clay's answer was none too cordial.

"Who's there?" he challenged, caustically.

“It’s Cap’n Bulfinch o’ th’ ‘Gull’! ’S that you, Mr. Clay?”

Clay snapped an affirmative, and strode toward the wharf with Pan at his heels.

“You know that I don’t want anyone lying in here after dark——,” Clay began, angrily.

“I *told* th’ cuss so,” Bullfinch retorted, peevishly, “but——”

“Told *who*?”

“This feller I got in th’ cabin. ’S name’s Swotkins, er Botkins—came from Maniler. Said he had *partickeler* business with you, an’ chartered me t’ fetch him. He kinder looked sickish afore we started—wobbly on his pins an’ green complected. ‘Belly ache,’ sez I t’ m’self, an’ tells him he’d better lay to till mornin’. He’s plum’ stubborn though, an’ ’taint human natur’ t’ argufy agin a man with a fist full o’ money. About two hours out he’s doubled up and cussin’ scandaluous. ‘Better turn back,’ sez I. He twists himself out o’ a half hitch into a marlin’spike knot, which howsomever he tried didn’t look none too dignified. ‘You keep a goin’, he barks, ‘that’s what you’re paid for,’ same bein’ sure enough gospel. About a hour ago I hear a thumpin’ an’ a crashin’. ’Pears to me he’s clearin’ decks fer action, an’ I come a bustin’. Here he is a standin’ on his pins a wavin’ a gun permiscus. ‘What’s this?’ sez I, none too comfortable. ‘I’ve been a chasin’ him fer ten years,’ sez he, an’ pints in th’ corner. I looks, an’ ’taint anythin’ but my ol’ oilskins a hangin’ on a hook. ‘Chasin’ who?’ sez I, an’ I’m

feelin' a hull crew of jiggers a skippin' up my spine. He hooks his finger in his eyelid an' pulls er down with a knowin' grin. 'A singin' whale,' sez he, an' swings th' gun on me. 'Bugs, b'gawd,' sez I, an' beans him with a stool. Then I calls t' my boy t' fetch a rope. Better come an' look him over; he's sure one hell of a mess.'

The guard placed by Bulfinch, a very nervous and sweating Kanaka, gave a great sigh of relief when they entered the cabin, and seized the first opportunity to bolt for the deck. Watkins was lying on the floor, his hands and feet securely tied and his head resting on a cushion. His face was flushed with a high fever; his eyes rolled vacantly from side to side, while from his colorless lips came an incessant mumble of incoherences. From time to time he strained against his bonds, only to relax helplessly, and whimper like a child. The captain's ministrations had been confined to a wet towel placed on his forehead, and this had slipped to one side, disclosing the purple welt where the stool had struck him. Pan had stopped at the door. Her face was deathly white and her lips trembling with sympathy, as Clay knelt beside the sick man. His examination was but cursory, and he lost no time in an endeavor to form a diagnosis.

"Know him?" the captain asked.

Clay shook his head.

"We must get him into the house at once," he said.

Between them they carried him into the living-room. Here, he was laid on a couch and the ropes

removed from feet and hands. Pan had followed with the Gladstone bag which Bulfinch had handed to her before leaving the cabin. This she laid on a chair, and turned to watch Clay who had seated himself beside the couch. Minutes passed, the silence only broken by an occasional restless movement of the sick man, the suppressed breathing of the watchers, and the ticking of the two clocks, one sharp and quick, poignantly suggesting the Nothingness to come, the other in a stately measuring off of a requiem to passing time.

Watkins uttered a sharp moan, and his hand clutched at the right side of his abdomen. Instantly Clay was on his feet, his diagnosis verified, and grimly issuing orders in a crisp tone that forbade the loss of a second's time in useless questions. Bulfinch and Pan hurried to obey. The table was stripped of its furnishings, covered with blankets brought from the store-room, Watkins carried to it, and disrobed. A kerosene stove was brought in, and upon it was placed a kettle of water. A smaller table was drawn up, and upon this Clay placed a case of surgical instruments that he had brought from a cabinet in his own room, together with several bottles containing medicines, a flask of ether, a gauze mask, and several rolls of anti-septic bandage.

At the sight of the surgical instruments, Bulfinch turned a pasty white. He wet his lips nervously, and glanced enquiringly toward Pan, who was rummaging among the contents of the Gladstone bag.



“Whatcha goin’ t’ do?” he asked Clay, his head bobbing grotesquely as one afflicted with the palsy.

“Operate.”

Bulfinch sucked in a deep breath.

“Gawd!” he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper.

Clay did not look up, but went on arranging his instruments.

“His only chance—*one in a hundred*,” he said, quietly, “and there’s not a second to lose. You’ll help me, of course?”

The captain’s eyes wavered blankly from Clay’s face to the man on the table. Stark fear filled him to his stuttering teeth, and he retreated backwards, bringing a weak arm up in a gesture of repulsion.

“I—I—I can’t!” his voice was husky, and his face flushed with shame at the contemptuous expression on Clay’s face. “You may think I’m an unfeelin’ brute, but I ain’t! I ain’t squeamish in a fair fight—man to man! I’ve mauled, an’ shot, an’ cutlassed ’most all my life—it’s had more’n its share o’ blood, an’ I never funk—*never!* But with this feller here, *so damned helpless*, why Mr. Clay, I jus’ couldn’t, I ain’t got th’ guts!” He started for the door, but he stopped when half way there. “When he comes out of it,” he faltered, “tell him I’m almighty sorry I beaned him with that stool.”

He hesitated, waiting for an answer, but none came, and, with a gesture of helplessness, he lurched out upon the veranda. Clay neither called him back nor looked up from his work. He was placing a damp towel

over the eyes and around the face of the patient, and adjusting the gauze mask into position.

He laid his open watch upon the table, and, with fingers grasping the sick man's wrist, began to administer the ether. He paid no attention to Pan, still engrossed in the solution of the mysteries of the Gladstone bag. In one of the pockets she came across a packet of papers that were held together by a rubber band, and, among these, she found a cabinet-sized photograph. This caused her to utter a little cry of delight, and she excitedly crossed to Clay and held it across the table for his inspection.

"Oh see," she exclaimed, "zis ees yo', my John Clay!"

He gaped at it in amazement. It was, indeed, a photograph of himself in uniform. It was one that he had had taken the day that he had arrived in Peshawar, in the far north of India, where he had been sent to join the staff of British army officers in charge of a regiment of Alfridis. The posing had been the whim of a moment, the wish for a souvenir of this one glorious day in his career, a step up in grade, and a chance for his first active service under the colors. A dozen copies had been made, and all save one had been sent to friends and relatives in England. The one that remained he had given to Gloria Gordon some two years later.

The shock of surprise and his utter bewilderment at the theatric appearance of the photograph gave place to a riot of questions that surged through his mind for

which he could find no logical answers. How did it come into the sick man's possession? For what purpose was he carrying it about in his baggage? What connection did a photograph of John Craig have with the important business that had urged this stranger, despite his illness, to seek John Clay in the dead of night? As he took the picture from Pan's hand, he caught sight of a typewritten slip pasted on its back, and, as he read the first line or two, his composure crumpled under the strain of an astounding discovery. The words danced before his eyes, and, like a man beaten down, he was compelled to shake his head vigorously in a desperate effort to clear away the fog.

It was a complete description of himself, together with the date of his escape. The color of his eyes and hair, his height and weight, characteristics of gait and speech, not one point necessary for identification had been omitted—not even the crease from a bullet, a memento of Khaiber Pass and a fanatical, crag-intrenched Mohammedan who had run amok, and was seeking eternal salvation and God's everlasting gratitude by the killing of an infidel.

Pan wondered at the change in him, and, just a little frightened, she came around the table and clutched at his sleeve; but he was oblivious of her presence. His face was ashen gray, and he grasped the edge of the table to hold himself upright, the picture dropping from his nerveless hand and hurtling to the floor. A man without *physical* fear is often a coward under a shock, and shock had flooded John Clay's soul with stark fear,

a fear akin to that of one hot gruelling day in the Punjab when his horse had stumbled, and he had been thrown under the swaying head of a great gray cobra, its hood raised and ready to strike.

Watkins suddenly moaned, stirring about uneasily. Its effect upon Clay was voltaic. The fear that had gripped him was annihilated; the misery that had struck at him with its sardonic ache disappeared under the impetus of his iron will. He straightened up, his brain clear, ready to cope with the desperate situation in which he found himself. His eyes flashed down upon his patient, a smile twisting at one corner of his lips. So the *important* business that this fellow had with him was to place him under arrest, to bring him back to Calcutta; and he, John Clay, was now called upon to use all his skill so that this "chaser after singing whales" should be able successfully to turn the trick. Long years in a penal settlement as a surgeon's fee! If imps know anything of the doings of Earth, how they must laugh at him in hell. He thought of the Sikh of his regiment who had saved his life in the Punjab—hurling a knife that had pinned the cobra's head to a tree—and he fingered the scalpel that lay at his side, grasping it as one would a stiletto.

He saw that Pan was staring at him in amazement, even drawing away a little frightened that she had raised the storm by bringing the picture to him.

"I—I not know——" she began, tremulously, but his eyes had flashed from her to the flask of ether, and whatever else she said seemed to trail off into a mere breath so faintly did it register among the sinister

thoughts that now engrossed his mind. *The Ether?* Suppose he let *her* administer it? *Just drop by drop* to ease this man's soul across the styx? Bulfinch, his Kanaka crew, and many others perhaps, knew the serious condition of his patient. Death on the operating table had climaxed many a case, so no one would be able to condemn—and no one would see him *kill*. *That* was a hard thing to do when eyes were *looking on*, especially Pan's eyes that filled with tears at every glance that she gave toward the man that was stretched on the table.

For a brief moment he struggled against the thing that he would do, and then, with grim decision, he turned to her.

“Would you like to help *me?*” he asked, and, although he smiled, his voice was hard and strained.

“Oh, *oui, oui*, ver' much! Eet will mak' me ver' happy!” she exclaimed, her eyes dancing with eagerness.

Again he felt the caress of her hand upon his sleeve. Conscious of the thrill of its contact, he edged away, his face flaming with shame, but inexorable in his determination. He drew a deep breath—a necessary stimulant against his increasing weakness—and handed her the flask. He explained just how the liquid was to be dropped, warning her against its volatile character and the liability of disastrous results to herself if she bent too close to her patient. That she might hold herself upright, he brought a low stool for her to stand upon, and watched her as she dropped several drops into the mask.

“Alrigh'?” she turned to him and questioned.

He nodded, and she giggled nervously, but broke off abruptly with an embarrassed bob of the head to the sick man.

“Excoose me, M’sieu Man,” she said contritely.

As she again started to feed the liquid into the mask, Clay slipped out upon the veranda. He took his station close to an open window, but kept his eyes averted that he might not see the tragedy that had begun in the living-room. Here he paced his Gethsemane, now gloating over the ingenuity by which he was destroying the Thing that menaced him, now in dumb agony over the thought that he would never again feel safe, that ultimately he would be forced to leave his island, its comforts, the retirement that he had so long looked forward to, and start out again on the long gruelling trail, forever dodging and doubling back and forth to keep out of the clutches of those who relentlessly hunted him as in those first years after his flight from India.

Even in the volcanic rage in which he was plunged, he caught the sound of Pan’s voice, and stopped his frenzied pacing, drawing close to the window. She was singing—crooning rather—something that was much like a lullaby.

“Don’ be ’fraid! Don’ be ’fraid!  
 Jus go a sleep. M’sieu Man, jus’ go a sleep!  
 Zen good John Clay, my *won’erful* John Clay,  
 Heem come ver’ queek—heem mak’ yo’ well!  
 So go a sleep, an’ don’ be ’fraid!”

The effect on Clay was galvanic, and he never knew how he reached the sick man's side—perhaps he went through the window—for at the last word of the lullaby he had seized the flask from her hand, and hurled the mask across the room. He gripped the sick man's wrist, and, a moment later, gave a great sigh of relief. Pan was frightened, almost in tears, over the harshness with which he had pushed her out of his way, but his smile reassured her.

“ I drop heem alrigh' ? ” she asked, anxiously.

“ Splendid! Couldn't be better! ” he told her, and patted her shoulder.

It was John Clay the unemotional, the Sphinx that feared no man, that picked up an instrument with the cool, impersonal bearing of a surgeon who knew that he could bring his patient safely out of the Valley of Death, and Pan watched him soberly as he immersed it in the boiling water on the kerosene stove.

“ We are goin' t' mak' heem well, eh, my John Clay? ”

“ Yes, *you* and me! ” he answered gravely.

She hesitated a moment, and her cheeks softened to a quickening bloom.

“ Zat ees ver' nice! ” she said, and bobbed her head, importantly.





## PART FIVE

*And when like her, oh Saki, you  
shall pass  
Among the Guests Star-scatter'd on  
the Grass,  
And in your joyous errand reach  
the spot  
Where I made one—turn down  
an empty Glass!*

OMAR KHAYYAM



## CHAPTER I

### THE HOUSE OF FORBIDDEN DELIGHTS

WATKINS, leaning back against the cushions of a reclining chair, was watching Clay correcting the faulty mechanism of a double-barrelled fowling gun. Having adjusted it to his liking, Clay inserted a shell in each of its chambers and returned the weapon to its place across two pegs in the wall just outside of his own room. He noted the surprise with which Watkins had regarded the loading of the gun, and a flash of amusement flickered across his face.

“You are wondering about the *loaded* gun?” he said.

“Well—I understand that there is little or no game on these islands, so, naturally, the question arises—why?”

“It is a habit bequeathed to me by my forefathers, I suppose,” Clay replied. “In their uncertain times they no doubt found many occasions when it was very convenient to have a weapon at hand that was all primed and ready for business—hawks in the poultry yard, a thieving fox, wolves even, or an obstreperous neighbor or moss trooper who edged too far over a boundary line. You know that a man’s worst enemies are not always four footed. The sight of my father’s gun—an old flintlock that was his father’s before him—hanging upon two pegs above the old stone fireplace, is

one of the most vivid memories of my boyhood. It was such a security to an imaginative little fellow against the ghosts and bogey-men that make stairs creak o' nights, and knock over furniture, and rattle pots and pans, as they prowl about in the dark of the moon. Many a night I've crept down stairs with my hair on end and the feel of an icy hand in the small of my back, and I've curled up under it, not that I could reach it, or fire it if I could, but it was comforting to be just near it, it looked so all-sufficient. Perhaps that is the reason for this one hanging there—the symbol of a memory, and a security against—shadows.”

He crossed to the table and filled his pipe. After lighting it he leaned an elbow against a cabinet, silently puffing away, and regarding Watkins with such a cold impenetrable stare that the man was forced to resort to the subterfuge of fussing with the cushions to cover up his nervousness. It was several moments before Clay spoke, and when he did, it was an abrupt change of the subject.

“Your progress toward recovery has been remarkable, and you have now reached the stage when you no longer need a physician. All you need is exercise and fresh air. I would suggest a ramble along the beach, or in the compound, which you can gradually lengthen. In a day or so you can visit the village and the copra mill. You will find much about the island that will be of interest. I have no doubt but that Mrs. Clay will be glad to accompany you.”

“I shall certainly follow your advice,” Watkins

replied. "It will be mighty good to be about again. I know that I have been a great nuisance both to yourself and your wife, and that I can never repay what you have done for me. I owe my life to you."

Clay shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Oh, I have enjoyed you immensely," his lips were smiling but his voice was hard. "You have been a very interesting subject to experiment upon, and you can thank whatever god you like that the experiment was a success. In a few days you will be quite fit enough to resume your business affairs—particularly that very important one that made you so anxious to connect with me."

Again came the rage against the trick that fate had played upon him, and he whirled about and reached for his hat, feeling that he could no longer control the hot blood that surged within him. His hands clenched until the nails bit into the flesh as he fought back the same murderous impulse that had come over him when his photograph had so dramatically popped into view. Watkins sensed his struggle, but regarded him unflinchingly.

"You know who I am," he said quietly.

"I do," Clay snapped sarcastically. "You are a captain in the British-Indian Army working in the department of military police; in other words, a secret service officer. You are seeking an escaped military convict named John Craig. At first this was only my presumption brought about by the chance finding of a photograph, but later, owing to your stubborn insis-

tence upon dying on my hands, it became necessary to rummage among your effects for further information about yourself, a forwarding address for the corpse, so to speak, and the presumption was verified."

"It is all quite true."

"And I suppose that you are quite satisfied that I am the John Craig that you are seeking?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, what then?"

There was a faint suggestion of a smile upon Watkins' face.

"I shall try to *induce* you to go back to India with me."

Clay's laugh was like a snarl from a jungle.

"Well, now, that's *real good* of you! Perhaps you will tell me just how you propose——"

Watkins raised a protesting hand.

"I can well understand your bitterness," he said with a sympathetic nodding of his head, "and, under the circumstances, I marvel that you let me live. I said 'induce you to go back,' I did not mean as a prisoner. Major Craig, within fifteen months after your escape your innocence of the crime for which you were court-martialed was completely established. It was found that you had been the victim of a dastardly frame-up."

Clay stood as one transfixed, staring at Watkins in amazement and, for the moment, quite unable to utter a sound. He clutched uncertainly for a chair at his side and, finally gripping it, pulled it behind him and sank down, covering his face with his hands, his body

convulsing under the throe of his well-nigh superhuman efforts to control the flooding tide of his emotions. Pan had just entered from the garden, and, sensing something wrong with him, flew across the room, the armful of flowers that she had gathered scattering about her as she dropped on her knees by his side.

“What ees eet? What ees ze matter, my John Clay?” she exclaimed, in an agony of anxiety.

He patted her hand, shaking his head to reassure her, then lifted his eyes to Watkins.

“Tell me about it,” he said, and his voice was husky, almost a whisper.

“I was commissioned on the case immediately after your escape,” Watkins began. “I trailed you for a year. At Singapore, Cairo, Tunis, I was exactly one day behind you, and, I am free to admit, I thoroughly enjoyed your seemingly hopeless efforts to get away from me.” He chuckled at the reminiscence. “But you weren’t playing the ‘giddy goat’ at all. You had gained two weeks at Rio de Janeiro, and the trail was cold, so chillily so that you quite annoyed me. It took me six months to pick it up again in South Africa; I think they called the ungodly place Somabula. It’s in Rhodesia. There I learned that you had cleaned up a fortune in the new diamond fields. The rest was a weary treading of blind alleys and, keenly sore at my failure, I returned to Calcutta.” Apparently there was no relish in this recollection, for Watkins scowled and his face flared crimson. “Oh, I got the ‘big bird’ all right,” he continued half angrily, “they didn’t

pin any medals on me when I got there. Well, all that's past and gone. I needn't ask if you know old Grid?"

"Jim Gridley?"

"That's him! Well, one night I met Colonel Gridley at a Government House reception—he was a major then. 'Get him?' he asks. 'No,' I answered. 'Congratulations,' says he, 'let's get out of this infernal mess. Do you like Johnnie Dewar? No, don't answer! 'Taint necessary! To deny affection for good Scotch is *lese majestie*. We'll have a drink, several of 'em, bedad, and then I'll tell you why you shouldn't have caught Johnny Craig.' Now the *last* man I wanted to talk about was Johnny Craig. You'll pardon me for saying it, but I had had quite *enough* of him. But you know Gridley. I fancy he'd even run old Bangg out of that ballroom by the scuff of the neck if he wanted a private conference. So we called a *ticca gharrie* and went to his quarters. When we got there he sent for a *ressaldar* major, a sikh named Nanak Singh. Know him?"

"Next to Gridley, my best friend."

"I *know it!* Well, after the ceremony of a drink or two, we lighted cigars and Gridley opened up, startling me with a terse outline of a new angle of the case which had not been investigated at the time of your arrest, and the more I listened the more respect I had for that French maxim—*cherchez la femme*."

"'There *was* a woman,' Gridley declared, 'much as Johnny Craig denied it and balked me at every turn



when I wanted to bring it before the sapheads that made up that damned court-martial. Watkins, I'm telling you that Carringford framed him as sure as God'lmighty made little apples. He didn't loot that safe. Nobody'd believe it but the bunch of snobs that lickspittled Carringford, and bastardized public opinion against Johnny. Now listen! Johnny had been paying attention to a girl named Gloria Gordon. How far the affair had gone I don't know, but he was certainly sappy about her. But she was a girl with a wandering heart. Now on the night of the regimental ball Carringford was her escort, and Craig remained in his quarters. I found him there, and I have a hazy recollection of his doing a devil's promenade about the room, gnashing his teeth, and looking for something to bite. Our lady-killing colonel had captured his girl, see? *Now*, at the court-martial Carringford swore that Miss Gordon had complained of illness, and, at her request he had escorted her home, and had gone direct to his own quarters.' 'He lied,' Nanak Singh put in, 'Miss Gordon returned alone. I saw her enter her house. She was excited and crying. There was no one else in the motor but the worm that drove it.'

" 'Did you so testify at the court-martial?' I asked.

" 'Major Craig swore me to secrecy,' he replied, 'and I ask no questions when my *friend* demands a service.'

" 'But the driver of the car! Surely he was called as a witness,' I exclaimed. 'We have never been able to find him,' Gridley replied with one of those

peppery expletives for which he is noted. ‘Carringford sent him away! Can’t you see it? Now why did Johnny insist upon Nanak Singh’s silence? A one-eyed octogenarian owl could see it, sir! They had quarrelled over this Gordon girl,—and she was there,—not at the ballroom, not at Craig’s quarters, but at Carringford’s. Craig found her there and, realizing that the girl’s reputation was at stake, he casts himself for the rôle of Don Quixote,—keeps mum with prison staring him in the face, and that’s as sure as scripture!’ ”

“But I don’t see what all these deductions amount to,” Clay interrupted impatiently, “there’s Carringford——”

“Carringford is—*dead!*”

“*Dead!*”

“In a mad fit of jealousy over this same Gloria Gordon he shot himself.”

By this time Clay had quite recovered his habitual imperturbability, to all appearances, the startling news made no impression upon him. Carringford’s death seemed inconsequential, and if he experienced any thrill at all, it was because he found neither vindication nor pleasure in the fact that Carringford had acted as his own executioner and the girl the part of the Nemesis that had brought about the catastrophe.

“How did *that* establish the fact that I had been made the victim of a frame-up?” he asked impatiently.

“About a week later I received a message from Gridley. Nanak Singh wanted me to accompany him

to a place called 'The House of Forbidden Delights.' It was located on one of the narrow streets, mere lanes, in fact, that made up that rather dangerous slum quarter of the city, back of the Lal Bazaar. Nanak Singh had given no reason for his request, Gridley said, but he assured me that the Sikh never spent his time in seeking frivolous amusements, and he felt that the trip would be decidedly worth my while. 'There is much wisdom beneath the big fellow's turban—follow Nanak Singh and you *learn* things,' he said with a laugh. As my curiosity was aroused, I agreed to go.

"Nanak Singh came for me just after tiffin in a *ticca gharrie*. Unusually taciturn, he gave me no inkling of the object of our trip, but growled a laconic 'you will see' to every question. The cart clattered through the muggy blackness of the rain, past the wretched shops and drinking hells that lined the narrow streets. I caught only an occasional shadow, an ogreish silhouette of a sailor, mendicant, or woman of the scavenger class, that lurched now and then into the circle of a flickering light. It wasn't a pleasant ride. It was like splashing through a tranquil pool of mud. A strange foreboding that we would see much evil before the night was done tempted me to insist upon turning back, but the incomprehensible Sikh seemed so unconcerned that I was—well, ashamed to reveal my cowardice. At last we came to a stop in some one of a twist of streets that I can only liken to a pretzel. Here, we alighted and Nanak Singh dismissed the *ticca gharrie*—at least I thought so. He then led me through a stone

arch, and down an interminable passage that ended into a small flagged court, and, in the blackness of that slice between buildings, I am positive that we passed several humans, for I heard whispers, a mere word, apparently to Nanak Singh, although, so far as I know, he made no answer. At one side of the court were several steps leading to a door, and over this hung a dimly-lighted lantern, a flare of light that was even more ominous than the dark itself. 'Is this the House of Forbidden Delights?' I whispered. He grunted an affirmative, and I laughed—*inwardly*. We lost no time in ascending the steps, and the Sikh motioned me to one side as he pulled at a bell-knob."

It was so evident that Watkins thoroughly enjoyed each minute detail of his adventure that Clay, despite his impatience to have him get to the point in which his innocence had been established, determined to let him tell his story in his own way. Pan still sat at his feet, soberly drinking in each word, and wondering what it was all about.

"The door opened a bare six inches," Watkins continued, "and I got a mere flash of a mass of whiskers, a hooked nose, and a glare of beady eyes topped by a turban, for Nanak Singh had hurled the door open, sending the *chuprassie* bouncing against the further wall. The next instant we were both inside and the Sikh had kicked the door shut with his heel. Our *chuprassie* came back at him with snake-like suddenness, but Nanak Singh clutched him by the throat, lifting him until he stood on the tips of his toes. He

flirted his knife back and forth, clipping hairs from the fellow's beard. 'Shall I shave you?' he asked, none too graciously. A woman appeared at the top of a stairway and uttered a sharp command to the *chuprassie* who backed against the wall when the Sikh released him.

"As she descended the stairs I saw that though not young she was very beautiful—an exotic vision in fluffy gauze and jewelled slippers—her trousers and jacket of gold-embroidered silk. She advanced toward us with a swaying glide, and a sarcastic curl to her lips. With her hands on her hips, she eyed him contemptuously, measuring him from his turban to his steel-shod boots. But she might as well have made faces at the wall for all it mattered to Nanak Singh. 'We come to taste the delights of thy house,' he told her, 'and we come in peace.' 'My house is but for *my friends*,' she scornfully declared, and pointed to the door. He shrugged his shoulders indifferently. 'Twenty of mine await me just outside thy door,' he said significantly—and I will admit it made my breath come easier. He did not wait for an answer but stalked by her, motioning me to follow. We ascended a stairway and from a landing at the top passed into a huge room.

"I gasped in astonishment, so different was it to the sombre, even dingy appearance of the exterior of the house. Its floor was a beautiful mosaic of glass and porcelain. Its walls were hung in priceless tapestries. There were many deep-seated divans, and cushions of richly embroidered upholstery, tables that were deli-

cately carved and inlaid with silver, ivory, and gold, with many bronzes and paintings that suggested the satyric idiosyncrasies of the establishment, and each worth a fortune in itself. Several arches led off into other rooms and, as we passed by one I caught the sickening smell of opium and knew it for one of the *delights*—a screened alcove or two were flagrantly suggestive of *another*. In the centre of the room a score of half-nude nautch girls were weaving about to the music of a turbaned orchestra squatted on the floor just beyond them. There were fully a half hundred outsiders there, some of whom I recognized—a tea-planter from Darjeeling, the president of a big steamship line, an English commissioner from an up-country district, some that were supposedly respectable, and many of the *demi-monde*, each with the usual satellite tagging at her skirts. I knew now the character of 'The House of Forbidden Delights.' It was an 'exclusive' rendezvous for highflyers, admittance granted only to the favored few.

“The woman had followed us, apparently resigned to the inevitable. She had no intention of *arousing* those twenty Sikhs that lurked about her doorway. Perhaps she thought that Nanak Singh had lied, for when we left the house we found two of her *chuprassies*, bound and gagged, lying in the passageway. Sikhs are given to subtle *hints*, so we were undisturbed. She motioned to a *khidmatgar*, and he preceded us, salaaming and motioning us to unoccupied places, but Nanak Singh strode on, his eyes flashing from group to group.

Finally he pointed to a small divan and table near a curtained nook. 'Reserved,' the *khidmagyar* murmured. 'For us,' the Sikh growled back and waved him aside.

"The curtains of the nook were drawn back and I saw two people—a man named Bouvoir, half Frenchman, half Arab, a fabulously wealthy scamp with a peculiar attraction for women. He had been buried to the neck in the muck of many a scandal. The other was a woman, a tall statuesque blonde of such magnetic beauty that I could hardly draw my eyes away. Nanak Singh saw this and a chuckle rumbled in his throat. 'The Gordon girl,' he whispered."

Clay jerked forward, his hands grasping the arms of his chair with such force that white spots flared at the knuckle joints, and the play of muscles around his jaws and lips revealed his struggle to maintain composure at the mention of the name. He opened his mouth to speak, but evidently thought better of it, and settled back again, motioning Watkins to go on with his story.

"We had probably been there an hour. The woman of the place was performing a solo dance with her nautch girls grouped picturesquely about her, and I was rather enjoying it, for it had a certain witchery. Suddenly Nanak Singh uttered a low grunt of satisfaction and pointed toward the entrance. I saw Carringford standing in the arch, and my intuition told me that the Sikh had something to do with his being there, that he was a mere pawn in a deadly game, as

devoid of volition as an ivory figure in a game of chess. Somehow I pitied him, though I could not tell why. As he came toward us, I saw that his eyes, glittering like pin points, were rivetted upon the pair in the nook. He was very pale, there were dark circles under his eyes, and a peculiar twitching of his head and shoulders, yet his gait was steady, a springy walk with heels scarcely touching the floor.

“When he had reached them he carefully adjusted his monocle, and, with a contemptuous glance at the girl, bowed very low to Bouvoir. It was a superlatively stately bow—insultingly so. ‘The King is dead,’ he said, ‘long live the King!’ An amiable smile twisted at his lips—too amiable by far. His voice was smooth, velvety I might say, and we had to keep our ears keenly alert to hear what he was saying. Bouvoir was plainly frightened and would have left the table if the girl hadn’t placed a restraining hand upon his arm. As for her, the only evidence of a lack of perfect composure was a bewildered look in her marvellous eyes as if it was past all understanding why he had taken the trouble to intrude. She even pouted a bit, with the intention, no doubt, of letting him know that she was very much annoyed.

“He snapped the curtains together, shutting out our view. I looked at Nanak Singh, and he chuckled. ‘She has been deceiving him,’ he said, ‘so I create a situation and await results. Pray to your God to make him mad, for madmen sometimes babble truth.’ I knew then that the Sikh had sent a message that had brought



him there. I could not distinguish what Carringford was saying, and only once I heard the girl's voice. 'You are very tiresome,' she said in a weary drawl. Then he laughed, an ugly laugh that sent the chills scurrying up and down my back. A shot rang out, followed by a piercing scream, and the next instant Bouvoir came dashing through the curtains, his face a pasty white, and his eyes bulging with terror. He hurtled the dancers right and left as he plunged for the stairway. Several of the men tried to stop him, but Carringford had staggered through the curtains dragging the girl with him.

" 'Let the poor fool go,' he shouted, with a wild laugh, 'he's well out of it!'

"The crowd were stunned into silence and circled around him, yet kept at a distance, for they saw that he held a gun in his hand. He was weaving back and forth, apparently holding himself upright by sheer force of will. The girl was huddled at his feet in an agony of hysterical sobbing. He brought his monocle up to his eye and grinned down at her. 'So you *can really cry*, dear heart of stone,' he said, 'and the other man, the man we ruined—*you and I*—did you cry for *him*?' He turned to the crowd. 'Get her to tell you about it after my—*exit*! Get her to tell you the story of John Craig—another fool like myself—but *he* was a *decent* fool! Ah, this wanton has played a merry game with hearts!'

"But he told it himself, told it from start to finish in spite of all her pleading. He told of her coming

to his quarters and offering herself as the price for the lie he had told. The open safe and the scattering about of papers had been a stage set not only to accomplish his revenge for the blow you had struck, but an explanation for his shortage in a regimental fund. He was getting weaker and weaker as he told it, and his voice faltered as he reached the end. 'So you see I am the villain of the play,' he said with a laugh that trailed off to a husky whisper, 'and now—the Prompter has signalled for the curtain, so—let the music start up!' and he sprawled forward on the floor. Nanak Singh nudged me. 'Come,' he said sharply. The girl had fainted. He gathered her up in his arms, and no one barred his way as he carried her from the room and down the stairway."

## CHAPTER II

### SOLDIERS THREE

FOR a long time Clay sat in moody silence. He was hardly conscious that Watkins was detailing the events that quickly followed the death of Carringford. Nanak Singh had carried the girl to Colonel Gridley's quarters despite her hysterical protests. There, she had spent a very unhappy hour with the aggressive colonel, and it had culminated in her corroboration of all that Carringford had said. Armed with her sworn affidavit, together with those of the witnesses of the tragic scene in the "House of Forbidden Delights," Colonel Gridley had carried the matter to the Judge Advocate General against great opposition, and even laid himself liable to court-martial by going over official heads and obtaining an audience with the King himself. The argument of his opponents had been that Clay was an escaped convict, a crime in itself, and that nothing could be legally done in his case until he had voluntarily given himself up. Even when Gridley had won his point and secured the intercession of the King, hostile influence had been so tremendously effective that all efforts to find the wronged officer had strangely ceased and Watkins had been assigned to another case.

"But about a month ago," Watkins went on, "I received a message from Colonel Gridley directing

me to proceed here, at the earliest possible moment, and interview a certain John Clay from whom I would undoubtedly learn of the whereabouts of Major Craig. This order was countersigned by General Bangg. If I found you I was to use every means to persuade you to go back with me to India, where your wrong would be publicly righted, and you would be restored, with all honors, to your former rank in the army. As soon as I had located you I was to notify him. I have already done so, by wireless, from the vessel that brought me here. You see I had no difficulty in establishing the fact that the photograph that I carried was that of John Clay. Major Craig, many of your old comrades are looking for your return, and planning a reception seldom accorded to an officer in the army. Your staunch friends, Colonel Gridley and Ressaldar Major Nanak Singh, have worked indefatigably in your behalf, and their only repayment will be to see you again in His Majesty's service, to sit down again at the same mess with you. Will you not go back with me? ”

Pan had remained breathlessly quiet during all of Watkins' long recital, but now, when he seemed to be trying to take her John Clay away from her, she sprang to her feet and faced him, her eyes blazing and her little body shaking with excitement.

“ What yo' mean? Yo' tak' my John Clay 'way? ” she demanded.

“ I hope to take him back to his old friends, ” he replied with a smile.

She turned upon Clay with a cry of alarm.

“An’ yo’!” she exclaimed tremulously, “yo’ will tak’ me wiz yo’, my John Clay?”

He did not answer her, seemingly trying to sift something tangible out of the confusion of astonishing events that had been detailed by Watkins. Her eyes snapped fire as she glared at the officer.

“By golly, yo’ can be ver’ happée zat I am a ladee,” she blazed at him, then clutched at Clay’s sleeve in an agony of fear. “Yo’ no tak’ me wiz yo’ I swim after ze sheep an’ mebbe—I will be *drownded, me!* An’ *oui*, mebbe a *sharks* she will get me—mebbe more as *zat*—seeks, mebbe two ver’ *beeg-g ones*, an’ zen, *zen* yo’ will be ver-r sorree wiz yo’ sel’! Oh, dam’, yes!”

He was now on his feet and nervously pacing the floor, but giving no consideration to the question of going back, nor experiencing any joy in his vindication. He was still in a daze, his nerves strained to the uttermost, and his mind in such a chaos that he was unable to bring it into a rational consideration of the thing that he should do. Pan dropped on the floor, and sat rocking back and forth on her haunches, the picture of abject woe.

“Mebbe zis Eendia, she will love yo’ more better as me!” she sobbed.

He came to her, and raised her to her feet.

“Do not worry,” he said gently, “wherever I go you will go too, be sure of that!”

He turned away to greet Hayes who had just entered by way of Fung Shui’s kitchen with a sheaf of papers in his hand. The superintendent had returned

that morning from his leave of absence, having overstayed by two days the time allotted him. He had learned little or nothing of the run of events except that Captain Bulfinch had delivered Watkins at the island in a dying condition, and that it had required all of Clay's skill to save his life. Nothing else seemed to have happened, and he finally reached the conclusion that he had been made the victim of his own wild imagination, and that the "escaped convict," and expectations of "reward" were but part and parcel of the fantasies of a fool. Between the hotel and Tahiti Tom's his money had gone, and, cursing the twist of his brain that had suggested his investment in a silly radiogram, and as empty in stomach as he was in pocket, the *Lark* had been a gladsome sight when it pushed its way into the harbor with Poni in command.

He had entered the room in trepidation, and was trying his best to maintain an air of nonchalance, but his face was flushed, his legs aggravatingly jumpy, and his beady eyes darted from one to the other in his uncertainty as to whether he had come into a friendly atmosphere or stumbled into a hornet's nest. Clay's quiet greeting, as he handed him the papers, quite reassured him, and his breath came easier.

"Captain Watkins, this is my superintendent, Jim Hayes," Clay said in introduction, and he had turned to scan the papers—reports of the output of the copra mill—when he heard Watkins sharply repeat the name.

"Jim Hayes! Is there any other Jim Hayes around here?"

“Not that I know of,” Hayes replied, a little apprehensively.

“Then *you* are the man that sent that radiogram to General Headquarters at Calcutta!”

Clay whirled about, and saw that Hayes was backing away, his face green with fright.

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” he stammered. “I didn’t send that—any radiogram——”

Watkins voice was vitriolic.

“Why lie? Do you think I passed anything up? It turned out all right, but I hate a Judas. What did you expect for betraying Major Craig? Why did you want to send him to a penal settlement? Was it for reward, or are you just naturally a rotten polecat? By God, if I was a well man I’d—I’d tear you to pieces.”

Neither Clay nor Watkins had seen Pan’s quick glide across the room. But Hayes, furtively casting about for an avenue of escape, caught an agonizing glimpse of her out of one corner of his eye. She had bounded on to a chair and had clutched the double-barrelled fowling gun from its place on the pegs. With a yell of terror, he started on a run for the veranda as Pan volplaned from the chair and scudded after him. Just as he got to the door she let drive with both barrels. The explosion was instantly followed by a deafening crash. A large cabinet in one corner of the room, filled with pottery, glassware, and bric-a-brac, had erupted with the force and crash of a miniature Vesuvius as Hayes skidded to safety with the agility of a loping crane. The heavy gun kicked Pan head

over heels, and there was a resounding thud as her buttocks struck the floor. Clay, who had vainly tried to stop the charge of *light* artillery, ran to her in alarm. She looked up at him with a mirth-provoking expression of amazement.

“Mebbe zat gun she keek, I t’ink,” she explained. “By golly, where I sits eet ees not so ver’ good! Did I keel heem?”

At the report of the gun, Hayes had wildly leaped the steps of the *paepae bae*, and a jack rabbit couldn’t have beaten him through the compound gates. He hadn’t the least doubt but that Pan would come charging out of the house, and he was hysterically spinning about seeking for cover when he caught sight of Captain Bulfinch’s launch just pulling away from the landing place. Babbling incoherent relief as he dived for it, he nearly bowled over the two passengers that had just landed, and hurdled the six feet of water that already intervened between the wharf and vessel, spreadeagling himself before the astonished captain. He was unceremoniously yanked to his feet and roundly shaken.

“Consarn ye,” Bulfinch roared, “what’s th’ idear o’ yeh tryin’ t’ slam a hole in my deck?”

“For God’s sake get me away from here,” Hayes chattered, his voice fairly crackling with fear, for he realized that he was still within gunshot. Bulfinch, perceiving the fellow’s fright, let go of his collar.

“Leavin’?” he questioned with a knowing squint.

“Yes, yes! And I’m in a hurry!”

Bulfinch chuckled.



“ I see ye are! Well, I’ll give th’ engine a talkin’ to. It allers chugs up a bit when it sees me a-comin’.” He looked him over quizzically, then nodded toward the house. “ Heard a hulabaloo up there. Ain’t never calculatin’ t’ stick my nose in t’other feller’s soup, but I’ll admit I’m a cureeus cuss. Anybody hurt? ”

“ Nobody *could* be but *me*,” Hayes retorted with an injured air. “ I was treated *outrageously!* ”

“ Ah, huh! ” Bulfinch nodded understandingly. “ From the hell-tootin’ sound I jedge he fired ye! Oh, I don’t blame ye fer squawkin,’ fer it must be plum’ aggervatin’ t’ have a feller shoot off a hull battery at ye when he thinks ye ought t’ resign. Don’t seem amiable *a tall!* ”

“ It was the girl! ” Hayes angrily exclaimed. “ She tried to murder me—murder me in *cold blood*, and he never raised a hand to stop her. Lets her do anything she wants and thinks it’s funny! ” He had quite recovered his confidence, for the launch was speedy and they had reached the centre of the lagoon.

“ It is the second time that the vixen has assaulted me—the first time was with a knife. Think of it! With the point right up against my chest! I overlooked that, but *this time* the worm has turned. I quit on the spot—*quit*, do you understand? You don’t suppose I’d let him fire *me*? No siree, not *Jim Hayes!* ”

“ No, I don’t specks ye would,” Bulfinch said, and turned away with a grin.

The two men that disembarked from Bulfinch’s launch were both in white mufti. One wore a pith

helmet, and the other a turban. One was of massive frame, and was dark skinned, and with a jet black beard, and the other was pudgy, tanned to a leathery hue, and had a moustache that sprawled erratically over his lips. Both were upstanding men and walked as befitted soldiers, for one was the redoubtable Colonel Gridley, and the other a *ressaldar* major, Nanak Singh. At the sound of the gun and the smash of glass and pottery both had stopped short, glancing from one to the other, each wondering what it was all about, and then had come the catapulting Hayes and only a quick sidestepping had saved them both from being hurtled into the lagoon.

“Appears to be in a hell of a hurry,” Gridley remarked. “Precipitous, very!”

Nanak Singh twisted at his beard and stared at the house.

“Sounded like a shot,” he said.

“Reminded me more of an Afghan serenade up in the Pass. Maybe it was somebody celebrating his exit,” Gridley suggested. “Shall we go forward under a flag of truce, or had we better deploy right and left and advance as skirmishers?”

“I follow *you*, Sahib Colonel,” the Sikh answered with the glint of a smile in his eyes.

“Not by a damn sight, you’re going to be right alongside of me. Come on.”

Fung Shui had come bounding in from the kitchen at the sound of the crash, and his face had clouded with disappointment when he learned that he had missed the pleasure of joining in the assault on Hayes.

Assured that Pan had escaped serious injury, Clay had replaced the gun on the pegs, making no comment about the damage done to his collection. He even did the thing that she liked to see him do, he laughed—and Watkins laughed, which relieved her from her embarrassment—and Fung Shui laughed because they laughed—and she laughed, a joyous laugh, because she had done the thing that had made them all so “happee.” Of course Fung Shui was curious, and she chattered a vivid description of the affair while they were gathering up the litter.

“Zat Jim Hay’, heem ees a sneaks,” she scornfully declared. “Heem do somet’ing to my John Clay. Oh-h, eet ees somet’ing zat ees ver-r-r *beeg-g-g!*” Her forehead puckered into a puzzled frown. “I don’ know what she ees—but—she *ees* any’ow! I gets ze gun, an’ when I am keeling zat feller, by *golly*, she shoots at *me*, an’ dose dishes!” Her eyes blazed, and her head bobbed from side to side in withering contempt. “*Such* a fool ees zat gun! I am slam on ze floor. *Such* a bump! Ough, *oui*, ver-r much! I am ver’ glad she ees where I sits. Eet ees more better zan someplaces where she ain’t!”

Clay happened to glance toward the doorway as he was listening to Watkins’ recital of the events that had followed the receipt of the radiogram. He tried to get on his feet, to swing a hand up in salute, but his legs and arms seemed set in a cast, and a mist so clouded his eyes that the faces of Colonel Gridley and Ressaldar Major Singh blurred grotesquely. It was only when Watkins had called them by name that he

was able to snap out of the grip of his surprise. He sprang to his feet and rushed toward them, seizing each by the hand, his own sputter of greeting lost in the thunderous one of Colonel Gridley and the booming of that of Nanak Singh. They all talked together, laughing like hysterical women, neither paying any attention to what the other was saying; the babble of tongues being quite as satisfying and heart-filling as a college yell to roistering students.

Pan blushed furiously when Clay introduced the two officers and their heels clicked together as they saluted her. If they were surprised that he was married the expression on their faces did not betray it. It was rather one of frank admiration, for even the phlegmatic Nanak Singh marvelled at her beauty.

“It is absolutely the happiest moment of my life to be permitted to meet you,” Gridley declared, and the Sikh salaamed very low.

“An *honor*, memsahib,” he said.

“An’ me, I am ver’ happye mysel’,” she timidly replied, “an’ I t’ink I shall lik’ yo’ ver’ much.”

“A *cute* little package,” Gridley told himself as they crossed to Watkins who had been quite forgotten in the excitement of the meeting. Both officers shook hands with him.

“From what I hear, you can thank Johnny Craig for the extreme pleasure that you feel at seeing us,” Gridley exclaimed with a laugh. “That appendix of yours, or whatever it was, has kept me in the very devil of a pickle. I got your wireless, and *expected* another. Couldn’t understand why I didn’t get it. Peeved me a

bit! Wanted action—and a lot of it. So I hunted up Nanak Singh, and we argued old Bangg into a leave of absence. You see, I wasn't sure that you could induce our Johnny here to come back, but now, with the three of us——” he turned to Clay who was lost in thought. “Oh, we understand that it will take some little time for you to settle up your affairs, so we intend to sponge on you for a week or two, and then—you'll come back with us, surely? We want you back. Your old regiment wants you. It's due the army that it be given a chance to square itself. You can't refuse for it's all arranged—the King's pardon, and all that.”

Clay snapped out of his reverie.

“The King's pardon?” he exclaimed in amazement.

“For running away! The Judge Advocate General couldn't hurdle that technicality, but the King was gracious. Oh, we became quite ‘pally,’ and he issued a pardon.”

All the injustice that Clay had suffered came back in a flood, and his face flamed with a passion that he found hard to control.

“What a silly quibble!” he contemptuously exclaimed. “The King should ask for *mine!*”

“But John, don't——”

Clay's laugh was bitter, biting in its sarcasm.

“The crowning insult—a pardon!”

Gridley was plainly distressed, and turned helplessly to Nanak Singh, but the Sikh ventured no word, nor did Watkins. It was Pan who broke the tension. She sensed that Clay was disappointing men who were his staunchest friends, men who had done something very

wonderful for him, and, while it was all quite past her comprehension, anyone who did anything for her John Clay was a “ver’ good feller,” and she didn’t want him “to be sorree wiz heemsel’.” She placed a hand on Clay’s arm, looking up into his face, and struggling for a word to quiet the storm.

“Père Lauren’, heem say—forgives dose zat *do* us—so—so heem can do us *some more*,” she said, sentimentiously, “mebbe, *zat* ees more better for yo’, my John Clay.”

Clay’s arm went around her shoulders and he drew her to him. So this was his little peacemaker—this girl of the waterfront that his ignoble impulse had almost made an instrument of murder, whose crooning over a sick man had saved him from the brand of Cain. If these men—Gridley, Nanak Singh, Watkins—only knew! What would they say? Would they still be his friends? Would they want him to come back? And if he went back what would there be for him in India but bitter memories, and here—here was peace, and atonement. It was some moments before he could trust himself to speak.

“My good friends,” he finally said, “do not think that I am insensible of your loyalty, or ungrateful for the great things that you have done for me. But this day has been an eventful one, and I have been under a great strain. Let us not discuss this matter now. There is much more to be considered than you think—some things even that I could not tell you. Let us leave the answer until—tomorrow. Let us be merry that we have met again.”

## CHAPTER III

### THE MOMENT SUPREME

AGAIN the *City of Bombay* lay just outside the lagoon. Inside the reef the *Lark* rode at anchor. Aboard one was the confusion of moving freight and the embarking and disembarking of passengers, and the only sign of life aboard the other was Fung Shui leaning idly across the rail. Behind a rock that sheltered him from the sun, Hayes lay half sprawled, his eyes following Poni who was rowing Captain Watkins to the steamer in the small boat.

It is a short road from a comfortable berth to the fate of a beachcomber in the coral seas, but a long road back, and seldom traversed. A short week had played havoc with Hayes. A faded calico shirt and a pair of dirt-encrusted dungarees, even more tattered than the shirt, had been the "boot" of a commercial transaction with Tahiti Tom in which his good clothing had been sacrificed for liquor and drugs. A pair of rude sandals of cocoanut coir and a weather-beaten straw hat that looked as if it had been trodden in mud by nothing less than an elephant, had been "thrown in" by the generous Chinaman who had ultimately "thrown out" the recipient of his *charity* as soon as liquor and drugs were gone and Hayes had become importunate.

Nature certainly frolics with mortals who defy her, and whether or no it took her a hundred or so thousand

of years to raise man up from the ape, she can, if given reasons, skid him apeward in less time than it takes her to pop the moon from a quarter to a half. She was certainly doing her best with Hayes. That part of his face that was not covered with the scraggy blotch of a two weeks' growth of beard was the color of earth; his hair was a tangled mop, his eyes were cavernous, and were contracted to pinpoints that glittered feverishly; his shoulders were hunched up in a vain effort to offset the chills that racked through him despite the heat of the day, and face, hands, and limbs twitched convulsively as nerves viciously clamored for the Thing that now stood between him and oblivion. Now and then he would tightly close his eyes and, after a moment, open them again and stare uncertainly out at the two vessels and the small boat, for his eyes had been playing him strange tricks that morning, picturing many things that did not exist, and fooling him so often that he wondered if he was going crazy.

A blast of the whistle of the *City of Bombay* announced her departure, and he laughed with relief—he could still trust his ears. He scrambled to his feet and shouted a curse at the *Lark*—an obscene one that was emphasized with a shaking fist. But even this rage was a flash in the pan, for presently he was vacantly staring about, pondering over the one problem that was left to him—what to do when there was nothing to do, and where to go when one place was as dreary as another. Mechanically he turned toward Tahiti Tom's, forgetting that but the day before he



had been thrown bodily into the roadway and warned to keep his filthy person out of the Chinaman's "honorable abode."

When Hayes entered Tahiti Tom's he would have gone right out again if the Chinaman had had his way; for, despite his squealing protests, he had been spun around by the Magyar, and Tom was hurrying to provide the aperture to throw him through. But the line of projection was rudely interrupted by "G'rilla" Bagsley, who neatly clipped the Magyar behind the ear with baffling unexpectedness, and, while Tom and the "Duchess" fanned the bartender back to consciousness, placed a protecting arm around Hayes and led him to the table at which he had been sitting with several of his cronies.

"T' think thet a blarsted furriner 'ud lay a paw on a friend o' mine, a puffect gentl'man like *Mister Hayes!*" he roared, with a broad wink at the others, who lost no time in expressing their own indignation with many oaths and mighty thumps upon the table. One of the men filled a mug to the brim with raw gin and shoved it toward the derelict.

"Lush up," he said, "that'll put heart in yuh, an' from ther looks of yuh, yuh sure need it."

For some time "G'rilla" and his cronies had been discussing a very important business proposition. It had to do with a much desired revenge for which Bagsley hungered as a partial payment for a sound thrashing that he had received several weeks before, and it held the additional promise of considerable pecuniary benefit—

not only in money, but in a collection of pearls of great value—provided conjectures turned into realities. The only thing lacking in an otherwise effective and fool-proof plan was a knowledge of a means of quick entry into that house on the *paepae bae*, and the exact location of the loot. Championship of the “down and outer” was no part of “G’rilla” Bagsley’s code of social ethics. His interruption of the Chinaman’s bouncing programme had been purely selfish. The opportune arrival of Hayes promised a happy solution of these problems.

Hayes grasped the mug and raised it to his lips, but set it back untasted, and motioned it away.

“I don’t want *that*,” he grumbled, and nervously rubbed a forearm. Bagsley grinned understandingly.

“Want dope, eh? Out of it?”

“Yes—and God, how I need it! I’m in agony! This yellow hound got all my money—all my clothes, too—and then refused me credit—threw me out!” His hope mounted. Perhaps Bagsley might be induced to go still further in the rôle of Good Samaritan.

“Lend me some money, will you? I’ll pay it back sure,” he added eagerly. “I’ll give you—big interest—double it! Please—please!”

But “G’rilla” ignored the outstretched palm.

“So ther Sphinx fired yuh?”

“No—I quit! Will you——”

Bagsley slowly filled a foul-smelling pipe from the contents of a dirty pouch, pursing his lips as he rammed the tobacco into the bowl. His digging of a match

out of his pocket, close inspection of its business end, and final scratching of it across the top of the table was quite as aggravating as deliberate. With a noisy sucking he finally succeeded in lighting the pipe. Puffing huge clouds of smoke ceilingward, he screwed his eyes together in a ferocious scowl as if Hayes' request was a brain twister of the nth degree. Hayes waited for his decision in a torment of suspense, while "G'rilla's" cronies leered from one to the other with no effort to hide their keen enjoyment of the pathetic importunity of the one and the drollish affectation of the other. Finally Bagsley shook his head.

"No—no! Can't be did! Make it a rule never t' lend no money," he said, "—loses friends fer a feller,—an' I jis' can't afford t' lose yuh," he turned to his cronies. "I leaves it t' yuh—could I afford t' lose the friendship o' *Mister Hayes*?"

They emphatically agreed with him. Of course they were *sorry* for *Mister Hayes*, but a rule was a rule, and nobody could blame *Mister Bagsley*. Hayes slumped despondently back in his chair. After a few more reflective puffs, "G'rilla" nudged the fellow next to him, and again gave a significant wink.

"Any money comin' t' yuh?" he asked.

This sounded encouraging, and Hayes snapped upright.

"A lot! He owed me—a huge sum," he lied glibly, "—didn't stop to get it,—I—I was in a hurry. But as soon as I do—as *soon as I do*—"

“ He’s a purty rich feller,” “ G’rilla ” interrupted. “ I’ll betcha he’s got a heap o’ th’ rhino——”

“ He has! In his strong box—thousands in money—and pearls, too! He’s rich, rich, I tell you—and how did he get it? *My* brains, *mine!* Every soumarques he’s got *I* made for him!” His outburst passed into a garrulous babbling of vain boasting and idle threats, and his voice rose to such a pitch that Bagsley clapped a hand over his mouth to silence him.

“ ‘Sh! Keep yuhr gab down,” he growled. “ D’yuh want all creation t’ hear yuh? Now flap yuhr ears t’ me! Yuh’d like t’ finger some of thet cush, wouldn’t yuh—an’ git a share o’ those pearls? ”

Hayes wearily shook his head.

“ It’s no use thinking about that.”

“ But if *we* could make it easy fer yuh? ”

Hayes stared at him for several moments, quite uncertain that Bagsley was serious. He wet his lips nervously.

“ How? ” he finally asked.

Bagsley cast a wary glance around to satisfy himself that there were no cocked ears in close proximity to them, then lowered his voice.

“ *Yuh* kin show us the best way inter th’ house, an’ jis where this ’ere strong box *is* what yuh are a talkin’ about, can’t yuh? Now, suppose we drop in there—say t’night, late, eight o’ us, countin’ yuh? Yuh lead th’ way t’ th’ strong box—*that’s all!* It’ll be share an’ share alike, ceptin’ th’ big pear pearl he’s got—an’ th’ girl! I want *her*—they both come t’ me ’cause I fur-

nish th' schooner, understand? Now, jis between friends, what d'yuh say?"

Hayes' expression was one of bewildered indecision. Not that he quibbled over sharing another man's property, but he was chary of possible consequences. He revered his own skin, and Clay *would fight. What then?*

"You'd *murder* Clay?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Who—*me?* Why Mister Hayes, how could yuh think it?" "G'rilla" appeared to be deeply hurt by the imputation. "Why I'll treat him like me very own twin brother!"

Still Hayes hesitated, for another possibility had occurred to him.

"We'd be caught!" he objected.

"Leave thet t' me! Yuh ain't dotty about these 'ere parts, are yuh? Ain't yuh git nary ambishun? D'yuh want t' die out there on th' beach? How long d'yuh think yuhr a goin' t' last, huh? Why yuhr damn near buzzard fodder now! Chip in on this 'ere an' what'll yuh git—a wad o' rhino thet 'ud choke a whale, an'——," he leaned across the table with *the* clinching argument, 'an' *hop too!* Yuh could squirt a gallon o' th' stuff in yuh whenever yuh minded. Now, if yuh was reasonable—*if yuh was reasonable*—I *might*, as friend t' friend, mind yuh—git yuh a little shot now."

Bagsley had cast the winning card.

"Now! Will you?" "Quick!" Hayes exclaimed eagerly.

But "G'rilla" was again scowling in ferocious meditation.

"Now ain't that a damn shame," he finally growled. "'Ere me good feelin's is a runnin' away with me brains. Why, don't yuh see, Mister Hayes, 'tain't business a payin' fer a thing 'fore she's done—now is it? But I'll tell yuh what I'll do. As soon as we're aboard, an' say half way there, yuh'll git it."

"No, now! Now! I'll go, honest, I promise you!" He was almost hysterical in his pleading. "But give it to me now! I'm in agony! You don't know how a fellow suffers when he can't get it! For God's sake!"

Bagsley sadly shook his head.

"I dunno! Seems kinder foolish o' me—but I'm soft hearted, allers was mushy, an' I'll leave it t' our pals 'ere," he turned to them, "what say, fellers?"

His wink was a signal and, of course, they shook their heads. He turned to Hayes with a grimace of disappointment.

"Yuh see 'ere th' cuss o' partnership," he said with a gloomy shake of his head. "'Ere yuh an' me is plum' out-voted. I'm damn sorry, Mister Hayes but——" his face crooked into a conciliatory grin, "we jis can't quarrel with 'em, now kin we?"

Hayes mouth twisted into an oath but stopped when he saw the ugly frown on Bagsley's face. He tried to raise from his chair, to get away from them, but if he had been roped to his seat he would not have been more powerless, so thoroughly was he in the thrall of

the sardonic magnetism of the ruffian who leered across the table. He blinked desperately as a relief from the steady drilling of "G'rilla's" eyes, and his mouth dropped ajar. "G'rilla" laughed, and so did the others. Perhaps they saw the joke; he couldn't. From that time he did what he was told, weakly and trembling. He found what solace he could in the thought of his share of the loot, and the things that he would do—particularly that delayed trip to China and the States. "Castles in the Air" Bagsley could have told him, for there wasn't the least intention that he should benefit a farthing's worth.

They gave him no chance to get out of their clutches, but led him to the wharf and aboard "G'rilla's" filthy little two-master. When the moon had dropped from sight, sail was raised and the vessel eased noiselessly out of the lagoon—but Hayes soon found that his hour of Elysium had been postponed despite his whimpering protests. He would get his drug when the job was done, "G'rilla" decreed, and profanely advised him to "go through clean" or "a squirt o' th' stuff" wouldn't be lingering on his mind to any extent whatsoever.

Like a faint blur in the darkness of the night, the schooner finally came to anchor just beyond the reef. There was no time lost in piling into the long boat, and they put off for the shore with oars cutting soundlessly into the water. They drove the boat along at the speed of a mere drift, hugging close to the cliff, and managing by careful manouvring to keep well out of the glare of the beacon on the gates.

They were within a half dozen boat lengths of the beach when, with startling suddenness, the mournful howl of a dog split through the night air. It was unearthly, repeated again and again, and chorused by the hills. Oars instantly struck the water in a backward stroke that jerked the boat to a standstill. If it had not been for "G'rilla's" paw clamping across Hayes' jaws the derelict would have shrieked in his terror. The raiders stared from one to the other with mouths lolling, the perspiration dripping from their faces yet chilled to the heart, looking for all the world like so many ghouls frightened by the shriek of a banshee. Some were stunned into silence, others shook their heads in superstitious awe, and it required all of Bagsley's tact and whispered persuasion to prevent them from whirling the boat about and speeding back to the schooner. Even *his* nerve had been sorely shaken, much as he tried to hide it, and, as they pushed forward, his eyes flitted apprehensively about in an effort to pierce the shadows, wary of the unseen Thing that the howl presaged. They finally drove the boat upon the beach and, finding the gates locked, they were guided by Hayes around the compound wall in the direction of the cascade. Here the rocks gave a rather uncertain foothold to an elevation even with the top of the wall, from which it was comparatively easy to drop down into the garden.

Fung Shui had been up to the native village visiting Old Chief Takao. He had stayed rather later than



usual, which he considered quite excusable, for he had been royally entertained with the choicest of the old fellow's repertoire of folk tales, and had drunk many soothing draughts of palm wine that had just the delectable twang that suited his fastidious taste. He might have been a little bit uncertain on his feet as he made his way homeward, but his ears were still substantially dependable, and, when he caught the unusual sound of oars dipping over-carefully into the water, he hastened forward to investigate. He reached the edge of the clearing just in time to see the raiders' boat slide up on the beach and the men leap out. He counted eight of them as they stood grouped before the gates like so many silhouettes against the lighter background, and when they glided noiselessly around the corner of the wall, it struck him that there was something very familiar about the black splotch that guided them. A hiss issued from between the Chinaman's teeth, or it might have been a man's name much as a snake would say it, and he whirled about and raced back to the village.

"G'rilla" Bagsley had carefully planned the raid. First the loot was to be noiselessly secured, the greatest care being taken not to awaken the inmates of the house. This seemed easy, for Hayes had told him that the doors leading into the living-room were never locked, the compound wall being considered ample protection. When the strong box was safely aboard the long boat, Clay and Fung Shui were to be "put out of the way," and the girl seized, after which the *Lark* was to be driven on to the reef to prevent pursuit by

the natives and to delay the knowledge of the crime reaching the French commissioner. The one flaw in an otherwise fool-proof plan was his ignorance of the presence in the house of a supervaliant *ressaldar* major and a fire-eating colonel of the British Army—and, besides, the wisest sometimes make mistakes even as he did when he decided, despite the emphatic protests of his companions, to make a slight change in his original programme, and devote *his* attention to the immediate securing of the girl. So, while Hayes guided the others into the living-room, he crept around the *paepae bae* to the window of Pan's room. Here he found a balky screen and became impatient—which was another mistake.

Awakened by the noise of ripping window screening and the thud of "G'rilla's" boots as he slid across the sill, Pan sat bolt upright in bed. Even in the darkness of the room she recognized the ape-like bulk of the intruder, and uttered a cry of alarm. He snarled a threat as he lurched toward her, "to 'snuff her light out" if she uttered another sound, and it was only when his hands had almost gripped her that she found strength enough to leap from the bed and dart for the door leading to the living-room. He quickly headed her off and snatched for her, but her nightdress ripped in the grip of his hand and, tearing loose, she dodged under his arm and retreated to the further end of the room, frantically trying to slide the heavy dresser between them.

At the touch of her young body, the slipping of

satiny flesh under his fingers, his blood flamed with an unconquerable passion for the instant gratification of which he would have gambled not only his chances for profit, but even the lives of his companions. The contour of her half-nude body had become clearly outlined as his eyes became accustomed to the dark, and they snapped with anticipation, his breath coming in labored gasps and his lips hanging loose and wet. He promised himself a rare treat, and a most ample revenge as soon as he could get his hands upon her. Money and pearls, even danger to himself, were forgotten in the mad desire for the woman.

“Yuh needn’t look fer yuhr friend Sphinx,” he snorted triumphantly, “he’s bein’ ’tended to, me purty one!”

If he expected an answer he was disappointed. She had quite recovered her wits, her spirit of combativeness, and mutely eyed him, her fingers twisting nervously in the obi that lay across the dresser top.

“Might jis as well give up,” he went on, “when I’m wild, I’m *wild*, an’ what I wants, I *gits*, spite o’ hell. *An’* when it’s a cute little heifer like—*Huh! I got yuh!*”

But he hadn’t. He had been advancing very slowly as he was speaking. He was even congratulating himself that he had so terrorized her that she was failing to notice that he was drawing nearer. As he came within arms-length his hand shot out. But, much to his surprise, she wasn’t *there* at all. She was on the bed—an end of the obi in each hand, and whirling it

into the semblance of a rope. As he lurched toward her, she swung the loop over his head so quickly that he was undone before he realized his predicament. A lightning twist or two, and a perfect noose encircled his neck so tightly that his eyes popped and his tongue shot out between his teeth. With his neck as a fulcrum, and clinging tightly to the ends of the obi, she parachuted out of the bed to the floor behind him with such momentum and force, plus the weight of her body, that he was jerked backward, his neck bones fairly snapping under the strain. As he sprawled on the floor she spat contemptuously at him.

“I get me my John Clay,” she angrily exclaimed. “Yo’ will fin’ heem ees one more cute littl’ heifair as me, by golly!”

She whirled for the living-room, leaving him madly digging at the obi and squeaking a loquacious jargon of complaints and curses.

Pan’s scream as “G’rilla” had slid through her window had aroused Clay. He hastily drew on a dressing gown and started to investigate. When he entered the living-room he caught the reflection of a flashlight, and saw several men lugging the heavy strong box toward the doors leading to the veranda. He quickly seized the fowling gun from its place on the pegs and, covering them, shouted a crisp order for them to drop the box and throw up their hands. It was instantly obeyed, but Hayes, who had been hugging close to the wall, leaped for his back, screaming to them to come to his aid. As they rushed toward him Clay

gripped the fellow by the neck and, giving a mighty hunch of his shoulders, hurled him over his head and half-way across the room. They were desperately close and raging like so many wolves when he again raised the gun and pulled the trigger—but the hammer only snapped on an empty shell. He instantly realized that he had neglected to reload it the day that Pan had wrecked most of the contents of the cabinet and, clubbing the weapon, he swung it viciously in an effort to beat off the raiders.

A superstitious one would have thought it a charge of the ghostly *vehinehae* if he had caught sight of the leaping shadows that came rushing down the path that led from the native village to the compound. They came with the onrush of a raging blizzard, yet soundlessly save the swishing pad of naked feet and the whistling breath of men and women coming at top speed. Leading them was Fung Shui with an ugly knife, and old Takao carrying a war club that was a century old, and there was Poni, too, and he was armed, and so were the others, with clubs, and axes, and coconut knives, and some with only a stick that had been hurriedly caught up, but all-too-sufficient when swung by a muscular arm. And there was desperate need of them in the big house on the *paepae bae*.

As Pan came running from her room, she saw Clay go down under the onrush of raiders. Screaming for help, she darted frantically toward the room occupied by Nanak Singh and Colonel Gridley, but she had barely reached it when the door was flung open and

they rushed out, instantly leaping to Clay's assistance. Bagsley had burst out of Pan's room with the roar of a frenzied bull and leaped forward to intercept them, but Pan seized a chair and skidded it in front of him. Despite his frantic dodging, his legs became hopelessly entangled and he pitched headlong to the floor. The next instant she was astraddle his back, her fingers entwined in his hair, and smashing his face on the floor with the thudding rhythm of a pile-driver.

Clay was now on his feet and he and the two officers were employing every aggressive tactic of the football field. It was tackle and rush, pound and flail, Nanak Singh cracking two of the ruffians' heads together until they had permanently resigned from any further bellicose activities, and Colonel Gridley administering an anæsthetic to another with a mighty clip of the gunstock. In this mêlée, this battle-torn room of broken furniture and shredded hangings, through every door and window, natives came pouring with a yell, and it was all that Clay could do to prevent the total annihilation of the raiders. Those that remained on their feet were driven into a corner, and Bagsley and two others that were *hors de combat* were unceremoniously flung after them.

In the confusion Hayes had managed to eliminate himself. Unnoticed he had crawled across the floor to a desk and, dragging himself to his feet, was fumbling in one of the drawers. Suddenly he whirled about, his eyes blazing with fury. He had gripped an automatic in his hand, and aimed it at Clay with a string

of curses. Pan, with a scream, rushed between the two. Then came the explosion, and she crumpled to the floor at the instant that a knife, hurled by Fung Shui, cut the air and buried itself in Hayes's breast. He sprawled backward over the desk, clutching at the hilt of the weapon. Natives, raiders, stood spellbound. In the intense silence Clay raised the girl in his arms, his face drawn in a great grief. She began to laugh, and he looked down at her in amazement, believing for the moment that she was unharmed.

"Zis ees one ver' beeg-g joke on yo'," she said, "for I jus' wan' t' be in yo' arms."

But her face grew very white, and her little body trembled under a spasm of pain, the laugh dying on her lips. A crimson stain flamed on the breast of her robe. He could do nothing for her; she was dying. She weakly placed a hand on each of his cheeks.

"Am I—a ladee—now, my John Clay?" she asked, wistfully.

His choking answer brought an expression of ineffable joy to her face.

"Zat ees—ver' good! She didn't tak' ver' long tim', did she?" Her eyes closed and she nestled back in his arms. "I t'ink zat—I am ver-r tire', me," she finally faltered.

He carried her into his own room, and laid her on the bed, kneeling down and taking her hand in his. For a moment she lay very quiet, then her eyes opened and she stared, wonderingly, about her. Slowly came the realization that the one great happiness denied her

was hers at last—her “stiff cat” had been honored! Two red spots flamed on her cheeks. He felt a slight pressure of her hand, and bent close to hear what she was saying.

“I—I am ver-r happy wiz mysel’,” she whispered, “mebbe—yo’ wil hol’ me ver-r close?”

He drew her to him, gently, tenderly, fearful that he hurt her.

“Now eet ees—all fix’,” she whispered again, and this time it was like a mere breath. “Yo’ are ver-r good t’ me, my John Clay.”

A few minutes later he appeared in the doorway. They saw that questions were useless, for his lips were trembling, and his eyes were moist. For some time he stood there, seemingly oblivious of their presence, and staring into space. Then came a sagging of his shoulders, and his head dropped forward on his breast. Wearily he motioned for them to clear the room.



## CHAPTER IV

### EPILOGUE

JOHN CLAY still lives on that South Sea island. Loyalty to the friends who had been so loyal to him had impelled him to journey to India where he had been restored to his rank in the army, but he had immediately resigned and returned to his people. Some years have passed since then and, although his hair is grayer, they have dealt with him most kindly. He is quite a different Clay now—the name of the Sphinx, his taciturnity, his aggressiveness among men, and his fierce hatreds, are no longer stories of the moment but reminiscences of the past. There is no gloom, no brooding silence in the big house on the *paepae bae*, for Colonel Jim Gridley, retired, is a member of the household and, where he is, there is ever a healthy exhilarating noise, and Watkins is there, too, ill health having driven him out of the service.

Pan lies upon the cliff where she danced for her John Clay. The place is taboo now, sacred to the natives. In spirit she has danced for him many times since then, and given him “a nice soft sit,” and decorated his place at table with flowers from the garden and—has *sung that lullaby*. He will tell you that she is very much alive and ever by his side, an elfin spirit keeping love in his heart, and she will never be dead to him until he, too, has started on his journey across the Styx.

Across the dining table, and facing him, is ever a chair, *her chair*, and a glass turned down, and, although the idea may amuse you, he really sees her there. And when the twilight steals over the hills, and the crimsons and blues fade from the waters, and the fire dies out of the coral in the reef, Old Fung Shui comes to his kitchen door and stands like a veteran at attention while the three men raise their glasses in a standing toast to "Our Little Lady."

THE END



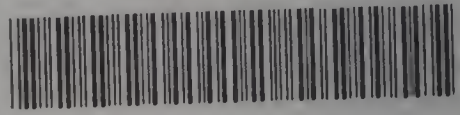






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