The Blue Eyed Manchu

Abdullah

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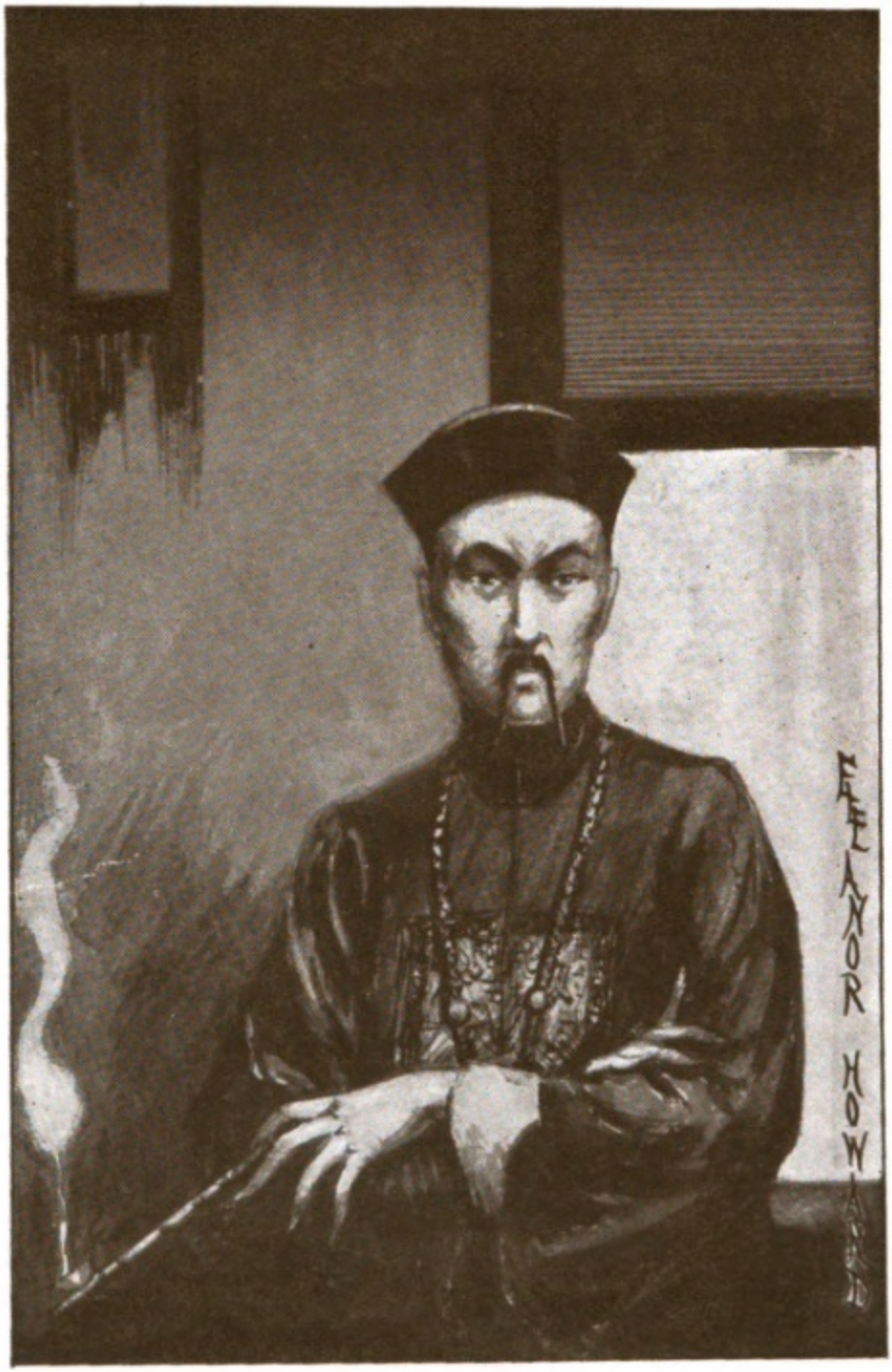

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THE BLUE-EYED BRANCH

ACHMED ABDALLAH

(Author of "Red Sunset over the Sea",
"The Lure of Yesterday", etc.)

NEW YORK
ROBERT J. SHORES
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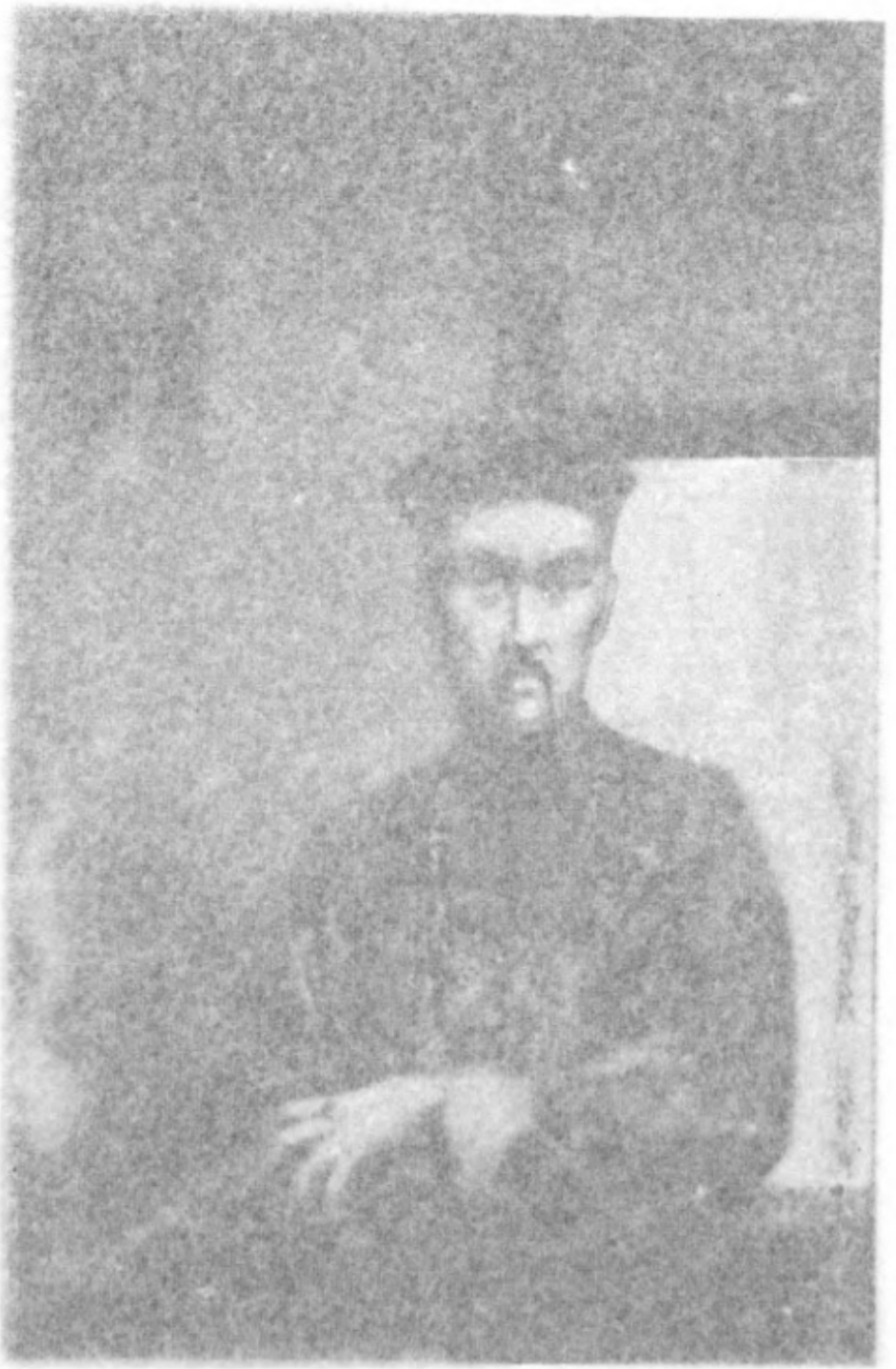

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BY

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To
ROBERT H. DAVIS
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THE BLUE-EYED MANCHU

CHAPTER I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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enigmatic, encircled by superstitious, sybilline speculations.

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

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

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

So matters drifted along for several sleepy weeks.

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

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

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

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

I spoke instinctively, without thinking:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER II

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

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

And China was a nation of over four hundred million!

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

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

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

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

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

I interrupted him. I was really thinking aloud.

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

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

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

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

"When can you go, Van?"

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

Lord Northmere laughed a thin, fine laugh.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His voice came slow and halting.

"To—Hong-Kong?"

"Right-o."

Again he asked:

"To Hong-Kong—to Asia—"

And his voice was pregnant with a moody uneasiness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mechanically I repeated the last words:

"Hussain Khan—"

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

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

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

But practically at once a quick thought came

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"White men—you and I."

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

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There he stopped short and faced me once more.

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

That was it; he could not speak.

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

He stepped back into the room as he spoke.

"Master, master—you—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And then he kissed my hands again and again.

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CHAPTER III

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

I took the last trolley back to Jersey.

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

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

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

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

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

Very softly I opened the library door.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But my mother was from Vermont, and so I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why?" I remarked laconically.

He smiled a little, thin, bloodless smile.

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

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

But I had no time to exchange epigrams.

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

He looked at me questioningly.

"Name it, *sahib*."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then he opened his eyes and looked straight at me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Only the least of his servants?

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

He followed up his advantage.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His voice came sharp and cutting:

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"Nami maralan nam la petu maralan pet la."

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

"I have decided."

He came up close to me.

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

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

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

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

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

"Who?"

Kishna Gose turned a grayish white. His voice

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

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

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

I returned to my room, shuddering a little.

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

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

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

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

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

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

And I smiled back.

That man was not a traitor. Not he.

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CHAPTER IV

"Doorgha!"
"Hussain Kahn!"
"Hussain Kahn!"
"Doorgha!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Still, I was bothered by the fact that Hussain

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Had I really seen it?

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

Was it possible?

Good Lord, was it possible?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"'Look,' he would say. 'There's France in

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hussain laughed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But let me continue in Mascasenhas' own words:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"His voice seemed to drone from across illimitable distances.

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

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

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

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

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

Thus Mascasenhas' tale.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER V

We reached San Francisco on the following Tuesday.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Vandewater."

He seemed to take my little curtain-lecture to

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Come in and see."

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

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

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

"Come in and see," he said again.

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

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

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

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

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

But the sensation passed quickly. I looked about me.

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

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

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

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"You take an interest in China?"

"I do, indeed."

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

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

He smiled.

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

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

I was rather nonplussed, rather uncomfortable.

"What do you mean?"

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

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

He paused. Then he continued:

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

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

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

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

"I also am white."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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But it was a good method.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER VI

Noon found us on board the City of Tokyo.

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

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

The voyage passed without incident. There

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Danger? Possibly.

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

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

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

We landed.

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

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

I devoted my afternoon to correspondence and

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

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

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

"Let me come with you, master."

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

His hands twitched. The man was terribly in earnest.

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

I laughed.

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

He reiterated his entreaties, but I cut him short.

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

I was off.

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

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

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

Mascasenhas met me at the door.

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

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

Then he spoke:

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

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

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

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

It was Krishna Gose, the Rajput.

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

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

"Yuen—he—he"—

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

He lifted his right hand in a supreme spasm

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

So he died.

I was deeply shocked, deeply grieved.

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

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

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

The wall paper was blue.

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

A European?

So I pondered.

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

I stepped up to it. There was a balcony outside

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the window connecting my suite with the next.

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

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

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

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

"And his eyes were blue, bright blue!"

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CHAPTER VII

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

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

So I sat there, smoking, thinking.

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

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healthy, clammy expectancy should be first favorite with me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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it for perhaps the biggest stake man ever played for.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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leaves scattered from the lap of some vagabond wind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER VIII

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

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

I turned and walked away from the window.

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

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

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

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

And I did follow.

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

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

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

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

What a fool I was!

But *was* I?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Continuously my thoughts swung in a circle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But as I crossed the threshold of the dining-

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

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

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

The room was in darkness.

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

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

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

It was Mascasenhas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I called once more, louder this time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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could hear the feverish pounding and pumping of his heart.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I looked at it more closely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then it came.

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

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

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

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I watched Mascasenhas in absolute fascination.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mascasenhas stepped back from the dressing

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