

Fraser William Alexander

The Three Sapphires



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PART ONE

Chapter I

From where they were on the marble terrace that reached from the palace to a little lake – the Lake of the Golden Coin – Lord Victor Gilfain and Captain Swinton could see the intricate maze of Darpore City's lights down on the plain, six miles away.

Over the feather-topped sal forest behind the palace a gorgeous moon was flooding the earth with light, turning to ribbons of gold the circling ripples on the jade lake, where mahseer and burbel splashed in play.

Rajah Darpore was leaning lazily against the fretwork marble balustrade just where the ghat steps dipped down under the water. He was really Prince Ananda, the *shazada*, for down in the city of glittering lights still lived his father, the maharajah; but it had become customary to address the prince as rajah.

A servant came and took their empty sherry glasses.

Prince Ananda was saying in his soft Oriental voice that the Oxford training had set to truer rhythm: "After that gallop up in

the tonga I always find it restful to come out here and have my sherry and bitters before dinner."

"It's ripping; I mean that." And Lord Victor Gilfain stretched his slim arm toward the blinking lights of Darpore.

"I hope you're comfortable in the bungalow," the prince said solicitously. "I hadn't time when you arrived this morning to see just how you were placed. I haven't any bungalows up here, either; they're all in the cantonments."

"We're fitted up regal," Lord Victor answered; "horses, servants – everything."

"Well, I'm very glad you came," Ananda said. "At Oxford we often talked about the shooting you were to have here, didn't we?"

"Rather."

"But I never thought Earl Craig would let you come. Having lived in India in his younger days, I fancied he'd be gun-shy of the country."

Lord Victor laughed. "I got marching orders from the gov'nor."

The prince tapped a cigarette on the marble rail, lighted it from the fireball a watchful servant glided into range with, blew a puff of smoke out toward the little lake, and, with a smile, murmured dreamily: "I wonder if I knew the girl?"

"You didn't, old chap; though you've pipped the gov'nor's idea all right. Swinton here is my keeper; he's supposed to be immune."

"Well, you're safe at Darpore. There's absolutely nobody here just now. Everybody's in Calcutta."

"I fancy the gov'nor cabled out to ask about that before he packed me off." And Gilfain chuckled, a tribute to his reputation for gallantry.

"I should say you're in good hands, too." Ananda's white teeth showed in a smile that irritated Swinton. When Prince Ananda had met them at the train Swinton had seen his black eyes narrow in a hard look. He had been wondering if the prince knew his real position – that he was Captain Herbert, of the secret service. But that was impossible. Probably the prince was mistrustful of all Europeans.

Then Ananda resumed, in an introspective way: "That's England all over; they're as much afraid of breaking caste by marrying lower down as we are here. In fact" – Darpore raised his hand and pointed to the distant city – "the maharajah is sitting yonder, probably in his glass prayer room, listening to some wandering troubadour singing the amorous love songs of 'Krishna and the Milkmaids,' and his mind is quite at rest, knowing that the Brahman caste is so strong that it protects itself in the way of misalliance."

"But you?" Lord Victor blurted out boyishly. "Damn it, prince, you put your caste under the pillow at Oxford!"

Ananda laughed. "Personally it is still under the pillow. You see, when I crossed the 'black water' I broke my caste. When the time comes that it is necessary for the welfare of Darpore

state that I take it on again – well, I may. To tell you the truth, the maharajah is not a Brahman at all; he's something very much greater, if he'd only think so; he's a rajput of the Kshatri caste, the warrior caste."

Swinton, sitting back in his chair, had closed his eyes, experiencing a curious pantomimic effect in listening to the English voice leisurely drawling these curiously startling sentiments; then when he opened them suddenly there was the lithe figure of the Oriental, the Indian prince. It didn't ring true; there was a disturbing something about it that kept his nerves tingling. Perhaps it was that he had come to delicately investigate.

"And this," Ananda continued, indicating the palace and the sal forest beyond. "I mean my desire for this and not that" – and the ruby point of his cigarette enveloped with a sweeping gesture the city in the plain – "is because of a Raj Gond cross away back. They were primitive nature worshippers – tiger gods and all that. Listen!" He held up a finger, his eyes tense, as from high up on the hills, deep in the forest, came the hoarse, grating call of a leopard. Immediately from just behind the palace the call was taken up and answered by another leopard.

"By Jove!" Gilfain sprang to his feet.

The prince laughed. "That's one of my captives; I've got quite a menagerie. We'll see them in the day, first time you're out. That's the Raj Gond taint. I couldn't stand it down there, so the maharajah let me build this bungalow up here. This whole plateau we're on contains a buried city. Who built it or who lived

in it nobody knows. The marble you see in the palace was all taken from the buildings beneath the roots of these sal trees. I'll show you something; we've got time before the others arrive for dinner."

He led the two men down wide, marble steps to the water's edge, and indicated a cable, the end of which, coming up out of the lake, crept into the bank beneath a large marble slab.

"What's it attached to?" Lord Victor asked.

"This lake is artificial. If it were daylight, and we were up on the bank, we could see seven of them. The story of this cable runs that when the king of this city that is buried was dying he commanded that all his jewels and weapons and his body be placed in a golden boat and sunk in the centre of this lake. They say the boat is attached to the other end of this cable; I don't know."

"Has anybody ever tried to pull it up?" Swinton asked, still feeling that he was helping on the pantomime.

"Yes; once an avaricious nawab got together several elephants and many men, and, fastening to the cable, started to pull the boat up. It came easily at first, but just when they all got very careless and were starting to rush it the magic thing slipped back, pulling them in, and they were all drowned. There's a legend that if a holy man stands here at midnight of a full moon when the mhowa tree is in bloom, with the three sacred sapphires of our mythology in his hand, the king will rise in his golden boat if the holy man has been ordained of the gods to be a leader of his people."

Back on the terrace, Prince Ananda asked: "Were you in the service out here, captain?" Very inconsequential was the tone of this query that was so pointed in reality.

"I was on the Bombay side for a time; my health petered out, and I had to go back to Belati."

"I see the lights of Major Finnerty's dogcart coming up the hill," Ananda announced.

"Coming to dinner with us – any ladies, prince?" Lord Victor queried.

"No; this is what I call a *pilkana* or play dinner. After we've dined I'm going to show you some Indian *tamasha*. I asked Finnerty because he's great on these jungle friends of mine – should be able to find you some tiger; I don't shoot."

The moon showed an apologetic smile curving the lips clear of his brilliant white teeth as Ananda, turning to Swinton, added: "I never kill any of them myself; I'm a Buddhist in that way."

"Do you believe in reincarnation, prince?" Gilfain questioned.

"I'm afraid I don't believe in anything that's not demonstrable; but I do know that it is a good thing to not take life. Finnerty is the government keddah sahib here, and I'm going to ask his help in giving you some sport, Gilfain. My private archæologist, Doctor Boelke, is coming for dinner also. The trouble about him is the more he drinks the more Teutonically sombre he becomes."

The prince excused himself, saying: "I think they're pretty well coming together."

The two men could hear a heavy tonga clatter up, followed

by the light, whirring grind of dogcart wheels and a medley of voices. As a group came through the palace, Swinton could hear the heavy guttural of a German's "*Ach, Gott!*" about something unpleasing.

There was a brief introduction and an immediate departure to the dining room.

After dinner, as they sat at little tables on the moonlit terrace over their coffee and cheroots, Major Finnerty, taking from his pocket an oval stone the size of a hen's egg, said: "I've got a curiosity, prince; I wonder if you can read the inscription on it."

"What is it, major?" Darpore asked as he held it toward an electric lamp on the table.

"It's a very fine sapphire in the rough. Where the end has been cut it is of the deepest pigeon blue."

"I can't read the characters because they are Persian, and I only know the Devanagari, but Professor Boelke can," and Ananda passed it to the German.

"Yes, it is Persian," Doctor Boelke said. With a pencil he wrote on a piece of paper some strange-looking characters. "It means *Rikaz*, and is nothing of mystery."

Swinton, who was watching the German's eyes, felt that they were passing some hidden meaning to the prince.

"*Rikaz* means a mine," Doctor Boelke continued; "a place where stones or metal are found; dot's all."

Swinton intercepted the stone on its way back, and after examining it passed it on.

"Dot is a big sapphire, major," Boelke said; "where did you get it? And for vat is der hole on der other end from der inscription?"

"It's a curious story," Finnerty answered. "A jungle *hethni*— female elephant — came down out of the forest and walked right in on us, by Jove! I'll describe Burra Moti; that's what we call her, the Big Pearl. She's a female with large tusks; she has four toes on each hind foot, and I haven't another elephant that has more than three. She's different in other ways; has two fingers on the end of her trunk instead of one; she has immense ears and a hollow back; she never lies down."

Doctor Boelke leaned forward, adjusted his big glasses, and said: "My friend, you haf described an African elephant."

"Yes," the major answered; "that's what Burra Moti is."

"I admit it's some mystery," Finnerty said slowly; "it has bothered me. All I know is that Burra Moti, who is undoubtedly an African, came down out of the jungle to the keddah because she was going to calve. What taught her that she'd be safe with her calf in the keddah I don't know; where she came from I don't know. Around her neck was a strap of sambur skin to which was attached a bell, and morning and evening, at a certain hour, Burra Moti would reach up with her trunk and ring the bell. Last evening the mahout didn't hear it at the usual hour — eight o'clock — so he went down to where Burra Moti stood under a big tamarind tree and found a native — looked to be a hillman — crushed flat where she had put her big foot on him. Beside him lay the bell, and the strap had been cut with a sharp knife. The

bell was flattened out of shape, Moti in her rage evidently having stepped on it. The clapper of that bell was this sapphire, hung by the little hole in the end."

"By Jove!" Lord Victor ejaculated. "My gov'nor would give a few sovs for that Sapphire; he's entirely daffy on the subject of Indian curios."

"If it's for sale I'll give a thousand rupees for it, major," the prince added.

"I've got to fix that bell up again for Burra Moti," Finnerty answered; "she's been in a towering rage all day – keeps slipping her trunk up to her neck like a woman looking for a necklace she has lost."

"Oh, I say!" Gilfain expostulated. "Rather tallish order, old chap, don't you think? Almost too deuced human, what?"

Major Finnerty turned in his leisurely way to Gilfain: "If a chap spends several years with elephants he'll come devilish near believing in reincarnation, my young friend." Then, addressing Darpore more particularly, he added: "I want to tell you one extraordinary thing Burra Moti did when her calf was born. The little one was as though it were dead, not breathing. With her front foot the mother pressed the calf's chest in and out gently – artificial respiration if you like, gentlemen – and kept it up until the calf breathed naturally. But I'm sorry to say the little one died next day."

Swinton waited for some comment on the sapphire-clappered bell. He now asked: "Do you suppose, major, it was just a bell

that the thief wanted?"

"No; that native had never been seen around the lines before. It's not likely he would slip into a strange place and take chances of being killed for a thing of not much value – a bell."

"Perhaps it's one of those bally sacred things," Lord Victor interjected.

Swinton saw Ananda's eyes send a swift glance to the German's face.

"Well," Finnerty said meditatively, "I think the thief knew of the sapphire stone in that bell, and it may have belonged to some temple; I mean Burra Moti may have been a sacred elephant."

"If that were the case," Darpore objected, "they'd come and claim the elephant."

"The stone being in the rough, there must be a mine near where the elephant was equipped with the bell," Swinton suggested.

"I had an idea," Finnerty said, "that if I rode Burra Moti off into the jungle and let her drift she might go back to where she came from; I might find the mine that way."

As Finnerty ceased speaking the high-pitched voice of a woman singing floated down to them from higher up on the hill. Ananda clapped his hands; a servant slipped from a door in the palace, and, salaaming deeply, listened to an order from the prince. When he re-entered the palace the row of lights that had illumined the terrace went out, leaving the sitters in the full glamour of a glorious moon.

Ananda made a gesture toward the hill from which the weird chant came. "That is the Afghan love song," he explained. "The girl represents a princess who was in love with a common soldier. After a great battle she went out on the plain, searching for him among the wounded and slain; so now this girl will come down in her singing search."

The listeners could now make out the weird music of the many-stringed fiddle that a companion played as accompaniment to the girl's voice. The prince swept his hand toward the great disk of silver that had lifted above the sal trees, saying: "My people believe that luminous, dead planet up there is the soul, *purusha*, of Brahm the Creator; fitting light for the path of a princess who is singing out of the desolation of her soul."

Nearer and nearer came the wailing plaint of the girl looking for her dead soldier. Once its vibrant tone stirred the leopard in his cage, and he called: "Wough-wa, wough-wa, wah!"

"That's 'Pard's' mating call," the prince explained. "Even he, jungle devil, feels something in that love song – in the sorrowing voice that does not anger him."

A peacock, wakened from his sleep by the leopard, sent out a warning call to jungle dwellers that a killer was afoot. "Meough, meough, meough!" he cried in shrill discordancy.

The song of love-search drifted in from the sal trees, through the mango tope beyond the palace, along the banks of the Lake of the Golden Coin, and up the ghat steps to the terrace.

In the moonlight the girl's face, as she came slowly up the

steps, was beautiful; her grace of movement was exquisite. Followed by the musician, she passed along the terrace with no notice of the prince or his guests. At the far end, she dropped to her knees beside a figure that had lain there – her slain soldier lover. She lifted his head into her lap, and the song rose in an intensity of lament; then it died down to a croon; the desolate woman's head drooped until her luxuriant hair shrouded the soldier's face. Suddenly the crooning chant was stilled; the girl's face thrust up through its veil of hair, and the eyes, showing a gleam of madness in the moonlight, swept the vault above.

"She has become crazed by the death of her lover," the prince explained softly. As the girl commenced a low chant he added: "She now asks of the gods what she must do to receive back his life. She thinks, in her madness, they answer that if she dances so that it pleases Krishna the soldier will be restored to life."

Tenderly the girl laid the head of her lover down, kissing him on the staring eyes, and then commenced a slow, sinuous dance, the violin, with its myriad wire strings, pulsating with sobs. The soft, enveloping moon shimmer lent a mystic touch of unreality to the elfin form that seemed to float in rhythmic waves against the dark background of the sal forest. Faster and faster grew the dance, more and more weird the wail of the violin, and the plaint from the girl for her lover's life became a frenzied cry. Now she had failed; her strength was gone; death still held in its cold fingers the heart of her lover; she reeled in exhausted delirium, but, as she would have fallen, the lover rose from death

and caught her to his breast.

But the gift of the gods – his life – had been but transitional – a bitter mockery – for the princess lay dead against his pulsing heart. Smothering the unresponsive eyes and lips with kisses, he gently placed the girl upon the ground, and, standing erect, defied the gods – called them to combat.

Prince Ananda interpreted the words and gestures of the gladiator as the moonlight painted in gold and copper his bronze form.

In answer to his challenge a sinister form glided from the shadow of the wall.

"Bhairava, the evil black god, who rides abroad at night," Ananda explained, adding, as the combat began: "They are two Punjabi wrestlers. The lover is Balwant Singh, which means 'Strong Lion;' Bhairava, whom you see is so grotesquely painted black, is Jai Singh, 'Lion of Victory.'"

The struggle was Homeric, as Balwant Singh, the muscles on his back rising in ridges, strove to conquer the black god. In vain his strength, for the god, sinuous as a serpent, slipped from the lover's grasp with ease. At last Jai Singh's black arm lay across the lover's throat, anchored to the shoulder by a hand grip; there was a quick twist to the arm, a choking gasp from Balwant Singh, and, with startling suddenness, he was on his back, both shoulders pinned to the mat.

The tragic drama was at an end. The lover, slain by the gods he had defied, lay beside his dead princess.

"Ripping!" Lord Victor cried. "In Drury Lane that would cause no end of a sensation as a pantomime. Hello! By Jove! I say!"

For even as the young man cackled, some heavy shadow, some mystic trick of the Orient, had faded from their eyes the three figures of the drama.

Prince Ananda, with a soft laugh at Gilfain's astonishment, said: "Bharitava, the evil god, has spirited the lover and the princess away."

"My friends, dot to me brings of importance a question," Doctor Boelke commented. "How is it dot a few Englishmen rule hundreds of millions, and we see dot der Hindus are stronger as der white man; no Englishman could wrestle those men."

"I fancy it's hardly a question of what we call brute force where England governs," Swinton claimed.

"Oh, of course!" And Doctor Boelke laughed. "England always ruling people because of philanthropy. Ah, yes, I hear dot!"

"Do you mean to say, sir" – and Lord Victor's voice was pitched to a high treble of indignation – "that we have no wrestlers at home as good as these Hindu chaps? Damn it, sir, it's rot! A man like Fitzalban, who was at Oxford in my last year, would simply disjoint these chaps like wooden dolls."

The doctor puffed his billowy cheeks in disdain, and Finnerty contributed: "Don't underrate these Punjabi wrestlers, my young friend; there are devilish few professionals even who can take a fall out of them."

"The major should know," and Darpore nodded pleasantly; "he has grappled with the best that come out of the Punjab."

Gilfain, his spirit still ruffled by the Prussian's sneer at England, declared peevishly: "I wish there was a chance to test the bally thing; I'd bet a hundred pounds on the Englishman, even if I'd never seen him wrestle."

Boelke, with a sibilant smack of his lips, retorted: "You are quite safe, my young frient, with your hundred pounds, because, you see, there is no Englishman here to put der poor Hindu on his back."

"I'm not quite so sure about that, Herr Doctor."

Boelke turned in his chair at the deliberate, challenging tone of Finnerty's voice. He looked at the major, then gave vent to an unpleasant laugh.

"There is one thing a Britisher does not allow to pass – a sneer at England by a German." Finnerty hung over the word "German."

"Vell," the doctor asked innocently, "you vil prove I am wrong by wrestling der Punjabi, or are we to fight a duel?" And again came the disagreeable laugh.

"If the prince has no objection, I don't know why I shouldn't take a fall out of one of these chaps. It's a game I'm very fond of."

"And, Herr Doctor, I'll have you on for the hundred," Lord Victor cried eagerly.

"Just as you like, major," the prince said. "There'll be no loss of caste, especially if we sit on our sporting friend over there and

curb his betting propensities."

"Right you are, rajah," Finnerty concurred. "We wrestle just to prove that Britain is not the poor old effete thing the Herr Doctor thinks she is."

Prince Ananda sent for his secretary, Baboo Chunder Sen, and when the baboo came said: "Ask Jai Singh if he would like to try a fall with the major sahib."

Balwant Singh came back with the baboo when he had delivered this message. Salaaming, he said: "Huzoor, the keddah sahib has his name in our land, the Land of the Five Rivers. We who call men of strength brothers say that he is one of us. No one from my land has come back boasting that he has conquered the sahib. Jai Singh, in the favor of the gods, has achieved to victory over me, so Jai Singh will meet with the sahib."

"Fine!" Finnerty commented. "I'll need wrestling togs, prince."

"The baboo will take you to my room and get a suit for you."

Finnerty put the sapphire in a silver cigarette box that was on the table, saying: "I'll leave this here," and followed Chunder Sen into the palace.

"Devilish sporting, I call it; Finnerty is Irish, but he's a Britisher," Gilfain proclaimed. "He'll jolly well play rugby with your friend, Herr Boelke."

"In my country ve do not shout until der victory is obtained; ve vill see," and the doctor puffed noisily at his cheroot.

But the fish eyes of the professor were conveying to Prince

Ananda malevolent messages, Swinton fancied. The whole thing had left a disturbing impression on his mind; Boelke's manner suggested a pre-arrangement with the prince.

The doctor's unpleasing physical contour would have furnished strong evidence against him on any charge of moral obliquity. He sat on the chair like a large-paunched gorilla, his round head topping the fatty mound like a coconut. His heavy-jowled face held a pair of cold, fishy eyes; coarse hair rose in an aggressive hedge from the seamed, low forehead, and white patches showed through the iron-grey thatch where little nicks had been made in the scalp by duelling swords at Heidelberg. He was a large man, but the suggestion of physical strength was destroyed by a depressing obeseness.

A tall, fine-looking rajput came across the terrace toward Darpore.

"Ah, Darna Singh," the prince greeted, rising; "you are just in time to see a *kushti* that will delight your warrior heart. This is my brother-in-law, Nawab Darna Singh," he continued, turning to Swinton and Gilfain and repeating their entitled names.

The rajput salaamed with grave dignity, saying the honour pleased him.

"Have a seat," Ananda proffered.

"I have intruded, rajah," Darna Singh explained, "because there is trouble at the temple. The mahanta is at the gate –"

"Show him in, Darna. I can't see him privately just now; the keddah sahib and Jai Singh are going to make *kushti*."

While the rajput went to the gate for the mahanta, Prince Ananda said apologetically: "Even a prince must show deference to the keeper of the temple."

Darna Singh returned, accompanied by an animated skeleton of mummy hue. Draping the skin-covered bones was a loin cloth and a thread that hung diagonally from one shoulder to the waist.

With a deep salaam, the mahanta, trembling with indignation, panted: "Dharama comes in the morning with his Buddhistic devils to desecrate the temple by placing in it that brass Buddha – accursed image! – he has brought from the land of Japan."

"Ah!" The exclamation was from Lord Victor as Finnerty appeared.

"Here, Darna," Ananda cried, "hold the mahanta till this is over; I don't want to miss it."

Darna Singh led the Brahmin beyond the table at which the sahibs were grouped, explaining that Prince Ananda would speak to him presently.

Now Finnerty, coming into the light, slipped a robe from his shoulders and stood beside Jai Singh, looking like a sculptured form of ivory.

Swinton caught his breath in a gasp of admiration; he had never seen such a superb being. Jai Singh, that a moment before had seemed of matchless mould, now suffered by comparison. Each move of the Irishman was like the shifting of a supple gladiator. The shoulders, the loins, the overlapping muscles of his arms were like those of Hercules.

Lord Victor was muttering: "My word! Poor old decadent England – what!"

Several times as he sat there Swinton had felt vibrant thrills, as if eyes that blazed with intensity were on him, and always as he had turned in answer to the unseen influence he had instinctively looked to a jalousied balcony above them. Now he caught the glint of white fingers between the leaves of the lattice as if a hand vibrated them. He could have sworn Finnerty's erect head had drooped in recognition.

From the first grapple there was evident savagery on the part of Jai Singh. He had toyed leisurely with Balwant; now he bore in like a savage beast.

"By gad!" Lord Victor growled once, "that Hindu bounder is fighting foul!"

Finnerty had gone to his hands and knees in defence. The Punjabi, lying along the arched back, thrust his right hand under the major's armpit as if seeking for a half-Nelson; but his hand, creeping up to the neck, straightened out to thrust two fingers into Finnerty's nostrils, the big thumb wedged against the latter's windpipe. In a flash the white man was in a vise, for Jai Singh had gripped the wrist of his fouling arm with his left hand, and was pressing the forearm upon the back of his opponent's neck.

In his foul endeavour Jai Singh had lost defence. A hand took him by the left wrist, a corkscrew twist broke his hold, and he commenced to go over forward in tortured slowness, drawn by the wracking pain of his twisted joints. One of his shoulder

blades lay against the mat when, by a mighty wrench, he freed his wrist and pirouetted on his round bullet head clear of Finnerty's clutch.

Again, as they stood hand to shoulder, making a feint as if to grapple, Jai Singh tried a foul. The heel of Finnerty's palm, thrust with dynamic force upward, caught him under the chin with such power that he all but turned a complete somersault backward.

This was too much for Lord Victor. With a cry of "Well bowled, old top!" he sprang to his feet, in his excitement careening his glass of whisky and soda, the liquid splashing across the fat legs of Doctor Boelke.

Like a hippopotamus emerging from a pool, Boelke reared upward; the table, at a thrust from his hand, reeled groggily on its frail legs and then volplaned, shooting its contents over the marble floor.

"Never mind," Prince Ananda admonished; "leave it to the servants."

Finnerty was wrestling with caution – waiting for the inevitable careless chance that would give him victory.

Jai Singh's foul tactics confirmed Swinton's suspicion that the bout was a prearranged plot; the Punjabi was acting under orders. The captain had served in the Punjab and knew that native wrestlers were not given to such practices. He watched Prince Ananda, but the latter's immobile face gave no sign of disapproval.

A startled gasp from Lord Victor caused him to look at the

wrestlers. He had seen enough of wrestling to know what had happened. Jai Singh's weight rested on one leg he had crooked behind Finnerty's knee joint, and he was pulling up against this wedge the major's foot by a hold on the big toe. It was a barred hold in amateur wrestling; a chance to administer pain, instead of an exhibition of strength or agility. The captain felt, with a sense of defeat, that Finnerty must yield to the pain or have his leg broken.

There was a hideous grin of triumph on the face of Jai Singh. Then, almost before Swinton's brain could register these startling things, the leer of victory vanished; the Punjabi's lips framed some startled cry; his hands fell to his side; his torso drooped forward, and he collapsed as though his legs were paralysed.

Finnerty half rose and turned the Punjabi over on his back, pressing his shoulders to the mat; then he took the black nose between finger and thumb and tweaked it.

"Topping! Ripping!" Gilfain shouted the words. "It was coming to the cad!"

The others sat numbed to silence by the extraordinary suddenness of the collapse. Each one understood the debasing retribution the keddah sahib had meted out to his foul-fighting opponent.

Swinton, watching, saw consternation pall the heavy-jowled face of the Prussian. The debonair air had fallen away from the prince. To hide his chagrin he called Darna Singh to bring the mahanta to him. He spoke rapidly in a low voice to the priest,

and when he had finished, the latter departed, accompanied by Darna Singh.

When Finnerty came back to them Prince Ananda had regained his sangfroid; he smiled a greeting, holding out his hand, and said: "You deserve to win."

"I should say so!" Gilfain added. "That rotter would have been mobbed at a bout in London."

Boelke mumbled: "You are very strong, major."

Finnerty, peeping into the silver box that had been replaced by the servants on the table, asked: "Any of you chaps got that bell clapper? I left it here."

Nobody had; nobody knew anything about it. Instinctively each one felt his pockets to be sure that, in the excitement of the struggle, he hadn't put it away; then each one remembered that he hadn't seen it since the major deposited it in the silver box.

"The table was upset," Swinton said. "Look on the floor."

Even Prince Ananda joined in the search. Then the servants were questioned. They knew nothing of its whereabouts; all denied that they had seen the keddah sahib put it in the box.

A little constraint crept into the search. Prince Ananda's brother-in-law and the temple priest had been there and had departed; the prince's servants had been going and coming.

"It may have rolled off the terrace into the water," Prince Ananda suggested. "In the morning I'll have the lake searched at this point."

"It doesn't matter," Finnerty declared.

"It does, my dear major," Ananda objected. "I'll put pressure on the servants, for I'm very much afraid one of them has stolen it. At any rate, you've been looted in my house, and if I don't find your sapphire you shall have the finest jewel Hamilton Company can send up from Calcutta."

"My young friend was too enthusiastic," Doctor Boelke said with a mirthless grin; "he has also soaked my legs."

The savage wrestling bout and the mysterious loss of the sapphire brought a depressing vacuity of speech. The guests were soon waiting in the courtyard for the tonga.

Swinton stepped over to where Finnerty waited in his dogcart while a servant lighted the lamps, saying: "Prince Ananda has arranged that we are to call on the maharajah at ten o'clock to-morrow, and I'd like to ride over to see your elephants later on."

"Come for tiffin," the major invited.

As the tonga carrying Lord Victor and Swinton was starting, Ananda said: "I've told the driver to show you the Maha Bodhi Temple and a pagoda on your way; it is there that Prince Sakya Singha attained to the Buddha. Good night."

Halfway down the tonga stopped, and their eyes picked up, off to the right, a ravishing sight. A gloomed hill, rising like a plinth of black marble, held on its top a fairy-lined structure. Like a gossamer web or a proportioned fern, a wooden temple lay against the moonlit sky; beside it, towering high to a slender spire, was the pagoda, its gold-leafed wall softened to burnished silver by the gentling moon. A breeze stirred a thousand bells that

hung in a golden umbrella above the spire, and the soft tinkle-tinkle-tinkle of their many tongues was like the song of falling waters on a pebbled bed till hushed by a giant gong that sent its booming notes reverberating across the hills as some temple priest beat with muffled club its bronzed side.

"Devilish serene sort of thing, don't you think?" Lord Victor managed to put his poetic emotions into that much prose banality.

The driver, not understanding the English words, said in Hindustani: "There will be much war there to-morrow when they fight over their gods."

As if his forecast had wakened evil genii of strife up in the hills, the fierce blare of a conch shell, joined in clamour by clanging temple bells, came across the valley, shattering its holy calm.

"My aunt! What a beastly din!" Lord Victor exclaimed.

"War," the driver announced indifferently.

Human voices pitched to the acute scale of contending demons now sat astride the sound waves.

"Gad! Dharama has stolen a march on the mahanta and is sneaking in his Buddha by moonlight," Swinton declared.

The tumult grew in intensity; torches flashed and dimmed in and out about the temple like evil eyes.

"Shall we take a peep, old top?" Lord Victor asked, eagerness in his voice.

Swinton spoke to the driver, asking about the road, and

learned that, turning off to the right at that point, it wound down the mountainside and up the other hill to the temple.

Just at that instant there came from down the road the clatter of galloping hoofs and the whirling bang of reckless wheels. In seconds the keddah sahib's dogcart swirled into view; he reined up, throwing his horse almost on his haunches.

"That mongrel Buddhist, Dharama, is up to his deviltry; I've got to stop him!"

He was gone.

At a sharp order from Swinton the tonga followed, the driver, eager to see the fray, carrying them along at perilous speed. At each sharp turn, with its sheer drop of a hundred feet or more on the outside, the tonga swung around, careening to one of its two wheels, the other spinning idly in the air. The little ruby eyes in the back of the dogcart's lamps twinkling ahead seemed to inspire their driver with reckless rivalry.

When they arrived at the temple the battle had reached its climax. The brass Buddha, its yellow face with the sightless eyes of meditation staring up in oblivious quietude to the skies, was lying all alone just within the temple gate. Without, Dharama and his Buddhists battled the smaller force of the mahanta, who led it with fanatical fervour.

They saw the keddah sahib towering above the fighting mob, his spread arms raised as if exhorting them to desist from strife. The combatants broke against his body like stormy waves, his words were drowned by the tumult of the passion cries.

Swinton and Lord Victor dropped from the tonga, and as they ran toward the riot something happened. A native close to Dharama struck at Finnerty with a long fighting staff, the blow falling on an arm the Irishman thrust forward as guard. Like an enraged bull bison, the keddah sahib charged. Dharama and the man who had struck were caught by the throats and their heads knocked together as though they were puppets; then Dharama was twisted about, and the foot of the big Irishman lifted him with a sweeping kick. He catapulted out of the fray. Then the keddah sahib's fists smote here and there, until, discouraged by the fate of their leader and the new re-enforcements – for Lord Victor and Captain Swinton were now busy – the Buddhists broke and fled.

"Faith, it's a busy night, captain!" Finnerty exclaimed as he wiped perspiration from his forehead. He turned to the mahanta, and, pointing to the yellow god, said: "Roll that thing down the hill!"

In a frenzy of delight the temple adherents laid hands upon the brass Buddha. It took their united strength to drag and roll it to the edge of the sloping hillside a hundred feet away. The sahibs stood on the brink, watching the image that glistened in the moonlight as it tumbled grotesquely over and over down the declivity till it plunged into the muddy waters of Gupti Nala.

"There'll be no more trouble over installing that idol in the temple for some time," Finnerty chuckled.

Then they climbed into tonga and dogcart, and sped

homeward.

Chapter II

The bungalow Swinton and Lord Victor occupied was in a large, brick-walled compound, in the cantonments, that was known as the Dak Compound, because it contained three bungalows the maharajah maintained for visiting guests.

The tonga, finishing its clattering trip from the Maha Bodhi Temple, swung through the big gate to a circular driveway, bordered by a yellow-and-green mottled wall of crotons, here and there ablaze with the flaming blood-red hibiscus and its scarlet rival, the Shoe flower. Swinton took a deep draft of the perfumed air that drifted lazily from pink-cheeked oleander and jasmine; then he cursed, for a brackish taint of hookah killed in his nostrils the sweet perfume.

To his right lay one of the guest bungalows, and a light, hanging on the veranda, showed a billowy form of large proportions filling an armchair. Somebody must have arrived, for the bungalow had been empty, the captain mentally noted.

In bed, Swinton drifted from a tangle of queries into slumber. Why had the German drawn Finnerty into wrestling the Punjabi? Why had some one stolen the uncut sapphire? What was behind the prince's pose in religion? Who was the woman behind the lattice – yes, it was a woman – Then Swinton drowsed off.

It is soul racking to awaken in a strange room, startled from sleep by unplaceable sounds, to experience that hopeless lostness,

to mentally grope for a door or a window in the way of a familiar mark to assist one's location. When Captain Swinton was thrust out of deep slumber by a demoniac tumult he came into consciousness in just such an environment. Lost souls torturing in Hades could not have given expression to more vocal agony than the clamour that rent the night.

Swinton was on his feet before he had mentally arranged his habitat. He groped in the gloom for something of substance in the sea of uncertainty; his hands fell upon the table, and, miraculously, a match box. Then he lighted a lamp, pushed out into the passage, and saw Lord Victor's pajamaed figure coming toward him.

"What a bally row!" the latter complained sleepily. "Must be slaughter!"

Out on the veranda, they located the vocal barrage; it was being fired from the bungalow in which they had seen the bulky figure in white. Perhaps the vociferous one had seen their light, for he was crying: "Oh, my lord and master, save me! Tiger is biting to my death! I am too fearful to explore across the compound. Heroic masters, come with guns!"

"Oh, I say! What a devilish shindy!" Lord Victor contributed petulantly. "Is that boulder pulling our legs?"

"It's a baboo, and a baboo has no sense of humour; he doesn't pull legs," the captain answered. "But he does get badly funky."

Another voice had joined issue. Swinton knew it for a "chee-chee" voice, a half-caste's.

"Yes, sar," the new pleader thrust out across the compound; "we are without firearms, but a prowling tiger is waiting to devour us."

He was interrupted by a bellowing scream from his companion, an agonised cry of fright. As if in lordly reproach, the clamour was drowned by a reverberating growl: "Waugh-h-h!"

"Gad, man! Devilish like a leopard!" And the captain darted into his room to reappear with a magazine rifle. A bearer came running in from the cook-house, a lighted lantern in his hand, at that instant.

"Here, Gilfain," Swinton called, "grab the lantern. If it's a leopard he'll slink away when he sees the light, so we may not get a shot. Come on!" He was dropping cartridges into the magazine of his rifle. "Pardus is probably sneaking around after a goat or a dog. Come on; keep close behind me so the light shines ahead."

"I'm game, old chappie," Lord Gilfain answered cheerily. "Push on; this is spiffen!"

The gravel was cruel to their bare feet, but in the heat of the hunt they put this away for future reference. As they neared the other bungalow the captain suddenly stopped and threw his gun to his shoulder; then he lowered it, saying: "Thought I saw something slip into the bushes, but I don't want to pot a native."

They reached the bungalow, and as Swinton pushed open a wooden door he was greeted by wordy tumult. Screamed phrases issued from a bedroom that opened off the room in which they

stood.

"Go away, jungle devil! O Lord! I shall be eaten!"

"Don't be an ass! Come out here!" the captain commanded.

The person did. One peep through the door to see that the English voice did not belong to a ghost, and a baboo charged out to throw his arms around the sahib, sobbing: "Oh, my lord, I am safe! I will pray always for you."

Pushed off by Swinton, he collapsed in a chair, weeping in the relief of his terror.

The baboo's prodigal gratitude had obliterated a companion who had followed him from the room. Now the latter stood in the radiancy of Lord Victor's lantern, saying: "Baboo Lall Mohun Dass has been awed by a large tiger, but we have beat the cat off."

The speaker was a slim, very dark half-caste clad in white trousers and jaran coat.

"It is Mr. Perreira." And Baboo Dass stopped sobbing while he made this momentous announcement.

"What's all the outcry about, baboo?" the captain asked.

"Sar," Baboo Dass answered, "I will narrative from the beginning: I am coming from Calcutta to-day, and Mr. Perreira is old friend, college chum, he is come here to spend evening in familiar intercourse. We are talking too late of pranks we execute against high authority in college. Kuda be thanked! I have close the window because reading that mosquito bring malaria – ugh!" With a yell the baboo sprang to his feet; Perreira, leaning against the centre table, had knocked off a metal ornament. "Excuse me,

masters, I am upset by that debased tiger." He collapsed into a chair.

"What happened?" Swinton queried sharply, for his feet were beginning to sting from the trip over the gravel.

"We hear mysterious noise – tap, tap; some spirit is tickle the window. I look, and there, masters, spying at me is some old fellow of evil countenance; like a *guru*, with grey whiskers and big horn spectacles. But his eyes – O Kuda! Very brave I stand up and say, 'Go away, you old reprobate!' because he is prying."

"Oh, my aunt!" Gilfain muttered.

"Then that old villain that is an evil spirit changes himself into a tiger and grins at me. Fangs like a shark has got – horrible! I call loudly for help because I have not firearms. Then I hear my lord's voice out here in the room and I am saved."

"Yes, sar, that is true," Perreira affirmed. "I am not flustered, but hold the windows so tiger not climbing in."

Lord Victor, raising the lantern, looked into the captain's eyes. "What do you make of these two bounders?"

"You'd better go back to bed, baboo," Swinton advised; "you've just had a nightmare – eaten too much curry."

But Baboo Dass swore he had seen a beast with his hands on the window.

"We'll soon prove it. If the tiger stood up there, he will have left his pugs in the sand," Swinton declared as he moved toward the door. He was followed by the baboo and Perreira, who hung close as they went down the steps and around the wall.

As Gilfain passed the lantern close to the sandy soil beneath the window, Swinton gave a gasp of astonishment, for there were footprints of a tiger, the largest he had ever seen; their position, the marks of the claws in the earth, indicated that the great cat had actually stood up to look into the room.

"Well, he's gone now, anyway," the captain said, turning back to the driveway. "You'd better go to bed, baboo; he won't trouble you any more to-night."

But Mohun Dass wept and prayed for the sahib to stay and protect him; he would go mad in the bungalow without firearms.

"I say, Swinton," Lord Victor interposed, "these poor chaps' nerves seem pretty well shimmered, don't you think? Shall we take them over to our bungalow and give them a brandy?"

The captain hesitated; he didn't like baboos. But when Perreira acclaimed: "Yes, sar, a peg will stimulate our hearts – thank you, kind gentleman; and his highness, the rajah, will thank you for saving me, for I am important artisan," his dead-blue eyes glistened.

"Come on, then!" he said, picking his way gingerly over the gravel.

Inside the bungalow, Swinton tossed his keys to the bearer, saying: "Bring – " He turned to Perreira: "What will you have, brandy or whisky?"

The half-caste smacked his bluish lips. "Any one is good, sar."

But Lall Mohun Dass interposed: "Salaam, my preserver, I am a man because of religious scruples teetotal, and whisky

is convivial beverage; but brandy is medicinal, prescribed by doctor."

Swinton nodded to the bearer, and when the latter, unlocking the liquor cabinet, brought the brandy and glasses, he said: "Put it on the table and go." Then, at a suggestion, Perreira poured copious drafts for himself and Baboo Dass.

As the water of life scorched its way through the thin veins of the half-caste he underwent a metamorphosis. The face that had looked so pinched and blue grey with fear took on a warmer copper tint; his eyes that had been lustreless warmed till they glowed; his shoulders squared up; the jaran coat sagged less.

"Ah, sahib, you are kind gentleman." Without invitation, he dragged a chair to the table and sat down. At a nod from Swinton, the baboo drew up another. The captain and Lord Victor sat down, the latter rather puzzled over his companion's mood. He knew Swinton's rigid ideas about association with the natives; particularly what he called the "greasy Bengali baboo."

The brandy had quieted Mohun Dass' terror. His eyes that had constantly sought the open door with apprehension now hovered benignantly upon the bottle that still graced the centre of the table.

"Yes, sar, kind gentleman," Perreira said; "if I'd had a hooker of brandy like that and a gun like that 'Certus Cordite'" – he pointed to the weapon Swinton had deposited on the floor – "I would go out and blow that fool tiger to hell."

Baboo Dass gave a fatty laugh. "Do not believe him, kind

gentlemen – he make ungodly boast; he was crawled under the bed."

"And you, baboo?" Perreira questioned. "Major sahib – "

"I am not a major," Swinton corrected; "we are just two Englishmen who have come out here for some shooting."

This statement had a curious effect on Mohun Dass. All his class stood in awe of the military, but toward the globe-trotting, sporting Englishman they could hardly conceal their natural arrogance. A look of assured familiarity crept into his fat countenance; he showed his white teeth with the little, reddish lines between them, due to *pan* chewing. "You are globe-trotter gentlemen – I know. Will you writing book, too?"

The captain nodded.

"You will get Forbes Hindustani dictionary and spell bungalow '*bangla*,' and the book will stink like the lamp because of academic propensity. Never mind, kind gentleman, the public will think you know about India and caste, too."

The captain noting Perreira's eyes devouring the bottle shoved it toward the half-caste. Gilfain, with a sigh of not understanding, rose, went along to their rooms, and returned with slippers and some cheroots.

Perreira had helped himself and the baboo to another generous drink, the latter protesting weakly.

"I see you know about guns, Perreira," Swinton said, lifting the rifle to his knee. "How do you happen to know this is a Cordite?"

"Cordite? Ha, ha!" And the half-caste's cackle was a

triumphant note. He put a pair of attenuated fingers into the top pocket of his jaran coat and drew from beneath a very dirty handkerchief a lump of something that resembled an unbaked biscuit. He flipped it to the table as though he were tossing a box of cigarettes. "Yes, sars, that is cordite – dynamite, whatever you like to call him."

"Good God! I say, you silly ass!" And Lord Victor, pushing back his chair, stood up.

Baboo Dass, who had been sitting with his feet curled up under his fat thighs, tumbled from the chair, and, standing back from the table, cried: "*Mera bap!* Tigers eating and explosives producing eruption of death. O Kuda, my poor families!"

Swinton checked an involuntary movement of retreat, and the compelling void of his eyes drew from the half-caste an explanation:

"Take seat, kind gentlemans and Baboo Lall Mohun Dass. This thing is innocent as baby of explosion. It is cordite not yet finish. I was in the government cordite factory here in – " He checked, looked over his shoulder toward the front door, and then continued: "Yes, sar, I was gov'ment expert man to mix cordite. If you don't believe, listen, gentlemans. Cordite is fifty-eight parts nitroglycerin, thirty-seven parts guncotton, five parts mineral jelly, and, of course, acetone is used as solvent. Now all that is mix by hand, and while these parts explode like hell when separate, when they are mix they are no harm. And I was expert for mixing. I am expert on smokeless powder and all kinds of

guns because I am home in England working for Curtis & Harper Co. in their factory. That why Rajah Darpore engage me."

Swinton's eyes twitched three times, but he gave no other sign.

Baboo Dass drew himself into the conversation. "This mans, Perreira, been at school in Howrah with me, but I am now B. A., and trusted head krannie for Hamilton Company, jewel – "

With a gasp he stopped and thrust a hand under his jacket; then explained: "Sahib, I forgetting something because of strict attention to tiger business. You are honourable gentleman who has save my life, so I will show the satanic thing, and you can write story about some ghost jewels."

He unclasped from his neck a heavy platinum chain, and, first casting a furtive glance toward the door, drew forth a pear-shaped casket of the same metal, saying: "You see, sar, not so glorified in splendour as to seduce thieves, but inside is marvel of thing."

He thrust the casket toward Swinton, and laughed in toper glee when the captain explored vainly its smooth shell for a manner of opening it. "Allow me, sar," and, Baboo Dass touching some hidden mechanism, the shell opened like a pea pod, exposing to the startled captain's eyes an exact mate to the sapphire Finnerty had lost.

Lord Victor, his unschooled eyes popping like a lobster's, began: "Oh, I say – " Then he broke off with a yelp of pain, for Swinton's heel had all but smashed his big toe beneath the table.

"I am bringing for the maharajah," Baboo Dass explained. "The old boy is gourmand for articles of vertu."

"Articles of virtue!" And Perreira leered foolishly. "Prince Ananda is the Johnnie to collect articles of virtue; he imports from Europe."

"Mr. Perreira is gay young dog!" Baboo Daas leaned heavily across the table. "Perhaps Shazada Ananda is in big hurry to sit on the throne."

"There's always a woman at the bottom of these things, sir," and Perreira twisted his eyes into an owl-like look of wisdom.

"You see, sar," the baboo elucidated, "Prince Ananda has give this to the maharajah, and it is accursed agent of evil; because of it I am nearly eated of a tiger."

On the sapphire was the same inscription Swinton had seen on the stolen stone.

"That is Persian characters, sahib," Baboo Dass declared ponderously. "It is used for 'mine,' but in learned way *madun* is proper name for mine, and *Rikaz*, this word, means buried treasure. I am learned in dead languages – Sanskrit, Pali. It is sacred stone. If you possessing patience, sahib, I will narrative obscure histories of Buddhism."

"Oh, my aunt!" The already bored Lord Victor yawned.

But Captain Swinton declared earnestly: "If you do, baboo, I will place your name in my book as an authority."

Mohun Dass' breast swelled with prospective glory.

"I say, old chappie, if we're to sit out the act I'm going to have a B. and S.," and Gilfain reached for the bottle.

"We'll all have one," declared the captain to the delight of

Perreira.

"Kind sar," Baboo Dass pleaded, "do not speak these things to-morrow, for my caste frowning against bacchanalian feast."

"We promise, old top!" Lord Victor declared solemnly, and Swinton mentally added: "The Lord forbid!"

"Now, sar," began Baboo Dass, "in Buddhist book '*Paramamsa Maju*,' is describe the Logha, the earth, telling it rests on three great sapphires, and beneath is big rock and plenty oceans. And according to that book is three sacred sapphires knocking around loose. If any man have them three together he is the true Buddha and rules all India. Prince Sakya Singha got those sapphires and became Buddha; that was up on the hill where is Maha Bodhi Temple. The sapphires got hole because one is to hang in the temple, one hangs on a sacred elephant that guard the temple, and one round the Buddha's neck."

Baboo Dass lifted his glass, his heavy ox eyes peering over its top at Swinton, who was thinking of Finnerty's elephant that had the sapphire.

Baboo Dass resumed: "And here, kind gentleman, is the hell of dilemma, for one sapphire is Brahm, the Creator; one Vishnu, the Preserver; and one Siva, the Destroyer. So, if a man got one he don't know if it is loadstone for good fortune or it brings him to damnation."

"But, baboo," Swinton objected, "those are Brahman gods, and Buddhists have practically no gods."

"Sar, Buddhism is kind of revolted Brahmanism, and in the

north the two is mixed."

The baboo pointed gingerly at the sapphire in its platinum case: "That is the Siva stone, I believe. Maharajah Darpore is sending to my company in Calcutta by special agent for them to find other two stones like it. See, sahib, he is foxy old boy. We make that chain and casket – his order. That special agent disappeared forever – he is vanish the next day; the workman that fitted the stone in the case died of cholera; some devil tried to steal the sapphire; all the workmen get a secret it is evil god and they strike. The manager, Rombey Sahib, swear plenty blasphemy and command me: 'Baboo Dass, you are brave mans, take the damn thing to old Darpore and tell his banker I must have rupees twenty thousand; they owe us sixty thousand.' Rombey Sahib knows I will give the dewan a commission, and the old thief will write a money order."

"What did the maharajah want of the three sapphires?" Swinton asked innocently.

Baboo Dass leaned across the table, and in a gurgling whisper said: "Because of this foolish belief that he would rule all India. The Buddhists would think he was a Buddha. That word *Rikaz* means, in theologic way, that in the man possesses the three sapphires is buried the treasure of holy knowledge."

Swinton, turning his head at a faint sound, saw his bearer standing in the back doorway.

"Did master call?" the servant asked.

"No. Go!"

Trembling with apprehension, Baboo Dass slipped the case back in his breast. A revulsion of bibulous despondency took possession of him; he slipped a white cotton sock from one of the feet he had pulled from their shoes in his exuberancy, and wiped his eyes.

"Baboo Dass is right," Perreira declared, thrusting into the gap. "On the hill I am working like mole in the ground, but I got my eyeteeth looking when I am in the light. I am Britisher – Piccadilly Circus is home for me – if I work for native prince I don't sell my mess of pottage."

Perreira tapped the breast pocket of his jaran coat. "I got little book here – " The half-caste gulped; a wave of sea green swept over his face; he gurgled "Sick," and made a reeling dash for the verandah. At the door, he recoiled with a yell of terror. The baboo dived under the table.

Thinking it was the tiger, Swinton grabbed his rifle and sprang to the door, discovering a native standing against the wall.

"What do you want?" the captain asked in rapid English.

"Sahib, I am the night *chowkidar* of the compound."

"Sit on the steps there!" Swinton commanded.

Back at the table, he said: "Baboo, you and Perreira go back to your bungalow now with the *chowkidar*, but I warn you he understands English."

Trembling, Perreira whispered: "That man spy. Please lending me rupees two."

Baboo Dass revived to encourage the deal, saying: "Mr.

Perreira is honest man; I endorse for him rupees five thousand."

Suspecting that the requested loan had something to do with the eavesdropping *chowkidar*, Captain Swinton went to his room, returning with the silver, which he slipped quietly into Perreira's palm, saying in a low voice: "Come to see me again." He stood watching the three figures pass down the moonlit road, and saw Perreira touch the *chowkidar*; then their hands met.

Going to their rooms, Lord Victor said: "Don't see how the devil you had the patience, captain. Are you really going to do a book and were mugging up?"

"I may get something out of it," the captain answered enigmatically.

Chapter III

Captain Swinton had told his bearer to call him early, his life in India having taught him the full value of the glorious early morning for a ride. Lord Victor had balked at the idea of a grey-dawn pleasure trip on horseback, and Swinton had not pressed the point, for he very much desired to make a little tour of inspection off his own bat, a contemplative ride free from the inane comments of his young charge.

At the first soft drawn-out "Sah-h-i-b!" of his bearer, the captain was up with soldierly precision. His eyes lighted with pleasure when he saw the saddle horse that had been provided for him from the maharajah's stable. He was a fine, upstanding brown Arab, the eyes full and set wide. When Swinton patted the velvet muzzle the Arab gave a little sigh of satisfaction, expressing content; he liked to carry men who loved horses.

The bearer, officiously solicitous, had rubbed his cloth over the saddle and bridle reins, and, examining the result, said: "Huzoor, you have clean leathers; it is well. Also the steed has lucky marks and his name is Shabaz."

Shabaz broke into a free-swinging canter as the captain took the road that stretched, like a red ribbon laid on a carpet of green, toward the hill, whereon, high up, gleamed a flat pearl, the palace of Prince Ananda.

On the hillside was a delicate tracery of waving bamboos,

through which peeped cliffs of various hues – rose-coloured, ebon black, pearl grey, vermilion red; and over all was a purple haze where the golden shafts of the rising sun shot through lazy-rising vapours of the moist plain. The cliffs resembled castle walls rising from the buried city, mushrooming themselves into sudden arrogance. To the north a river wound its sinuous way through plains of sand, a silver serpent creeping over a cloth of gold. Back from either side of the river lay patches of wheat and barley, their jade green and golden bronze holding of grain suggesting gigantic plates of metal set out in the morning sun to dry.

To the westward of the river lay Darpore City, looking like a box of scattered toys. Beyond the white palace the sal-covered hills lay heavy, mysterious, sombre, as if in rebuke to the eastern sky palpitating with the radiancy that flooded it from the great golden ball of heat that swept upward in regal majesty.

Yawning caves studding a ravine which cut its climbing way up the hillside shattered the poetic spell which had driven from Swinton's mind his real object in that solitary ride. The cave mouths suggested entrances to military underground passages. He was certain that the pearl-like palace was a place of intrigue. The contour of the great hill conveyed the impression of a stronghold – a mighty fort, easy of defence. Indeed, as Swinton knew, that was what it had been. Its history, the story of Fort Kargez, was in the India office, and Prince Ananda must have lied the night before when he said he did not know what city lay

beneath the palace.

Fort Kargez had been the stronghold of Joghendra Bahi, a Hindu rajah, when the Pathan emperor, Sher Ghaz, had swept through India to the undulating plains of Darpore.

Gazing at the formidable hill, Swinton chuckled over the wily Pathan's manner of capturing Fort Kargez by diplomacy. He had made friends with Rajah Bahi, asking the favour of leaving his harem and vast store of jewels in that gentleman's safe custody till his return from conquering Bengal.

Such a bait naturally appealed to the covetous Hindu. But the palanquins that carried the fair maids and the wealth of jewels had also hidden within enough men to hold the gate while a horde of Pathans rushed the fort. But Rajah Bahi and many of his soldiers had escaped to the underground passages, and either by accident or design – for the vaults had been mined – they were blown up, turning the fort over like a pancake, burying the Pathan soldiers and the vast loot of gold and jewels. Then the jungle crept in, as it always does, and smothered the jagged surface beneath which lay the ruined walls. Many of the artificial lakes remained; they were just without the fort.

Climbing the zigzag roadway, Swinton fell to wondering if all the prince's talk of a desire for removal from the bustle of Darpore City was simply a blind; if his real object weren't a systematic exploration for the vast store of wealth in the buried city and also the preparation of a rebel stronghold.

On the plateau, he took a road that forked to the right, leading

between hedges of swordlike aloes to the palace gardens. At a gateway in a brick wall, his guide dropped to his haunches, saying: "There is but one gate, sahib; I will wait here."

Turning a corner of an oleander-bordered path, Swinton suddenly pulled Shabaz to a halt. Twenty yards away a girl sat a grey stallion, the poise of her head suggesting that she had heard the beat of his horse's hoofs. A ripple of wind carried the scent of the Arab to the grey stallion; he arched his tapering neck and swung his head, the eyes gleaming with a desire for combat. A small gloved hand, with a quick slip of the rein, laid the curb chain against his jaw; a spur raked his flank, and, springing from its touch, he disappeared around a turn. Piqued, his query of the night before, "Who was the woman?" recalled to his mind, Swinton followed the large hoofprints of the grey. They led to within six feet of the garden wall, where they suddenly vanished; they led neither to the right nor to the left of the sweeping path.

"Good old land of mystery!" the captain muttered as, slipping from his saddle, he read out the enigma. Back, the greater stride told that the grey had gone to a rushing gallop. Here, six feet from the wall, he had taken off in a mighty leap; two holes cupped from the roadbed by the push of his hind feet told this tale. Swinton could just chin the wall – and he was a tall man. On the far side was a fern-covered terrace that fell away three feet to a roadbed, and just beyond the road the rim of a void a hundred feet deep showed.

"No end of nerve; she almost deserves to preserve her

incognito," Captain Swinton thought, remounting Shabaz.

On his way out the captain passed a heavy iron gate that connected the garden with the palace. And from beyond was now coming a babel of animal voices from the zoo. Mingling with the soft perfume of roses a strong odour of cooking curry reminded him of breakfast. At the gate he picked up his man, and, riding leisurely along, sought to learn from that wizened old Hindu the horsewoman's name.

There came a keen look of cautious concealment into the man's little eyes as he answered: "Sahib, the lady I know not, neither is it of profit for one of my labour to converse about fine people, but as to the grey stallion we in the stables allude to him as Sheitan."

"He jumps well, Radha."

"Ha, sahib; all that he does is performed with strength, even when he tore an arm out of Stoll Sahib – he of the Indigo."

"How comes the lady to ride such an evil horse?" the captain asked.

"The stallion's name is Djalma, sahib, which means the favour of sacred Kuda, but to the mem-sahib he comes from the maharani's stable, which is a different thing."

"To bring her harm, even as Stoll Sahib came by it?"

But Radha parried this talk of cause leading to effect by speech relating to Djalma. "It might be that the matter of Stoll Sahib's hand was but an accident – I know not; but of evil omens, as twisted in the hair of a horse, we horsemen of repute all know.

The grey stallion carries three marks of ill favour. Beneath the saddle he has the shadow maker, and that means gloom for his owner; at the knee is a curl, with the tail of the curl running down to the fetlock – that means the withdrawal of the peg. That is to say, sahib, that his owner's rope pegs will have to be knocked out for lack of horses to tie to them."

"He seems a bad lot, Radha," Swinton remarked as the attendant stopped to pick a thorn from his foot.

"Worst of all," the little man added dolefully, "is the wall eye."

"Has the grey stallion that?"

A smile of satisfaction wreathed the puckered lips of Radha. "The sahib knows, and does the sahib remember the proverb?"

"That not one will be left alive in your house if you possess a horse with one white eye?" the captain said.

They now slipped from the hill road to the plain, and the Arab broke into a swinging canter.

The captain's breakfast was waiting, so was Gilfain and also – which caused him to swear as he slipped from the saddle – was Baboo Lall Mohun Dass.

In the genial morning sun the baboo looked more heroic in his spotless muslin and embroidered velvet cap sitting jauntily atop his heavy, black, well-oiled hair.

"Wanting to speak to master, sar, this morning," he said. "After debauch, in the morning wisdom smiles like benign god. I am showing to master last night property of maharajah, and he is terrible old boy for raising hell; I am hear the sahib will make

call of honour, and, sar, I am beseeching you will not confide to his highness them peccadillos."

"All right, baboo. But excuse me; I've got to have a tub and breakfast."

When Lord Victor and Captain Swinton had finished their breakfast a huge barouche of archaic structure, drawn by a pair of gaunt Waler horses, arrived to take them to the maharajah. On the box seat were two liveried coachmen, while behind rode the syces.

As they rolled along the red road through the cantonments they overtook Baboo Mohun Dass plugging along in an elephantine strut beneath a gaudy green umbrella. When they drew abreast he salaamed and said: "Masters, kind gentlemen!" The coachman drew the horses to a walk, and the baboo, keeping pace, asked: "Will you, kind gentlemans, if you see a vehicle, please send to meet me? I have commanded that one be sent for me, but a humbugging fellow betray my interest, so I am pedestrian." His big, bovine eyes rested hungrily on the capacious, leather-cushioned seat alluringly vacant in the chariot.

"All right, baboo!" Then Swinton raised his eyes to the coachman, who was looking over his shoulder, and ordered: "Hurry!"

The big-framed, alien horses, always tired in that climate, were whipped up, and a rising cloud of dust hid the carriage from Baboo Dass' glaring eyes.

Indignation drove a shower of perspiration through the

baboo's greasy pores. He turned toward the sal-covered hills, and in loud resentment appealed to Kali, the dispenser of cholera, beseeching the goddess to punish the sahibs.

Baboo Dass was startled by a voice, a soft, feminine voice, that issued from a carriage that had approached unheard. He deserted the evil goddess and turned to the woman in the carriage. She was attractive; many gold bangles graced her slender arms; on her fingers were rings that held in setting divers stones, even diamonds. A large mirror ring indicated that she was coquettish, and yet a certain modesty told that she was not from Amritsar Bazaar.

Her voice had asked: "What illness troubles you, baboo?"

Now, as he salaamed, she offered him a ride into Darpore town.

Baboo Dass climbed into the vehicle, expressing his gratitude, explaining, as they bowled along, that he was a man of affairs, having business with the maharajah that morning, and that by mischance he had been forced to walk. In reciprocal confidence the lady explained she was the wife of a Marwari banker.

The baboo's resentment welled up afresh; also a little boasting might impress his pleasing companion. "To think, lady," he said, "last night we are roystering together, those two sahibs, who are lords, and me, who am a man of importance in Hamilton Company, and now they are coming in the maharajah's carriage and they pass me as if I am some low-caste fellow in their own country that works with his hands."

"That is the way of the foreigners," the Marwari woman answered softly; "they will put the yoke on your neck and say 'Thank you.' On their lips are the words of friendship, in their hand is the knotted whip."

"When they see I am important man with his highness they will not feel so elegant."

"I will take you to the drawbridge where it crosses the moat to the gate in the big wall," the Marwari woman offered.

"It is undignified for a man of my importance to approach the palace on foot," declared Baboo Dass.

The Marwari woman smiled, her stained red lips parting mischievously. "But also, Baboo Dass, it would not be proper for you to arrive with me. I have a way to arrange it that will save both our good standing. We will drive to my place of banking, then my carriage will take you to the palace, and the sahibs will not see you walk in."

The baboo was delighted. In India opulent people did not call on rajahs afoot; also the carriage was a prosperous-looking vehicle, and the two country-bred horses were well fed.

As they neared the palace, that lay hidden behind massive brick walls, they left the main thoroughfare, and, after divers turnings, entered a street so narrow that their vehicle passed the mud-walled shops with difficulty. A sharp turn, and the carriage stopped in a little court.

Four burly natives rose up from the mud step on which they had been sitting, and, at a word from the Marwari woman, seized

her companion. The baboo struggled and sought to cry out for help, but the lady's soft hand deftly twisted a handkerchief into his mouth, hushing his clamour. He was torn from the carriage none too gently, hustled through an open door, and clapped into a chair, where he was firmly held by his four attendants.

A little old man seized a cup wherein was a piece of soap, and with his brush beat up a lather, saying softly: "Do not struggle, baboo; it is for your good. These fevers burn the liver and affect the brain; in no time I will have taken the accursed fever from your head."

Then with a scissors he nimbly clipped the profuse locks of the baboo's head, the latter, having managed to spit out the handkerchief, protesting that it was an outrage, that he was a jewel merchant from Calcutta waiting upon the rajah.

"Yes, yes," the little man told the four stalwarts as he whipped at the lather, "it is even so; his wife spoke of a strange fancy he was possessed of that he was a dealer in jewels, whereas he is but a clerk. And no wonder, with a fever in the blood and with a crown of hair such as a mountain sheep wears."

Then he lathered the scalp, stroked the razor on the skin of his forearm, and proceeded to scrape.

The baboo yelled and struggled; the razor took a nick out of his scalp. At last the blue-grey poll, bearing many red nicks, was clear of hair, and he was released. His first thought was of the jewel. His searching palm fell flat against his chest; it was gone! With a cry of despair he made for the door; the carriage had

vanished.

Whirling about, he accused his captors of the theft. The barber, to soothe the fever-demented one, said: "Of a surety, baboo, your wife has taken the jewel because it was an evil stone that but increased the fever that was in your blood."

The plot dawned upon Baboo Dass. He flung out the door and made for the palace.

"It does not matter," the barber said; "his wife is a woman of business, and this morning when she spoke of bringing the sick man she paid in advance." He put in the palm of each of the four a rupee, adding: "The afflicted man will now go home and sleep, his head being cooler, and the fever will go out of his blood, for so the doctor told his wife, who is a woman of method."

Chapter IV

Prince Ananda had welcomed Lord Victor and Captain Swinton on a wide, black-marble verandah from which two marvellously carved doors gave them entrance through a lordly hall to a majestic reception chamber.

"This is the 'Cavern of Lies,'" Ananda said, with a smile, "for here come all who wish to do up the governor – and he's pliant. That, for instance" – he pointed to a billowy sea of glass prisms which hid the ceiling – countless chandeliers jostling each other like huge snowflakes.

"No end of an idea, I call it – fetching!" Lord Victor acclaimed.

Prince Ananda laughed. "The governor went into a big china shop in Calcutta one day when Maharajah Jobungha was there. The two maharajahs are not any too friendly, I may say, and when the governor was told Jobungha had already bought something he took a fancy to, he pointed to the other side of the store, which happened to be the lot of glass junk you see above, and told the shop manager to send the whole thing to Darpore. Ah, here comes the maharajah!" the prince added.

At the far end of the reception room heavy silk curtains had been parted by a gold-and-crimson uniformed servant, who announced in a rich, full voice: "His highness, the Maharajah of Darpore! Salaam, all who are in his noble presence!"

A king had stepped into the room; a reawakened, bronze-skinned Roman gladiator was coming down the centre of the room, his head thrown up like some lordly animal. He was regal in the splendour of his robes. Above the massive torso of the king, with its velvet jacket buttoned by emeralds, the glossy black beard, luxuriantly full, as fine as a woman's hair, was drawn up over the ears, its Rembrandt black throwing into relief a rose tint that flushed the olive-skinned cheek. Deep in the shadow of a massive brow were brilliant, fearless eyes that softened as they fell on Ananda's face. In the gold-edged head-dress a clasp of gold held blue-white diamonds that gleamed like a cascade of falling water. A short sword was thrust in a silk sash, its ruby-studded hilt glinting like red wine.

When Prince Ananda presented Swinton and Lord Gilfain, the latter as the son of Earl Craig, the maharajah's face lighted up; he held out his hand impulsively with simple dignity, saying in Hindustani: "Sit down, sahibs. The young lord's father was my brother; at court his ear heard my heartbeat."

A turmoil of vocal strife fell upon their ears from without. The baboo had arrived.

"Oh, murder!" Swinton groaned, recognising the Dass voice demanding admittance.

The rabble sound was coming down the hall as ineffectually two attendants clung to the ponderous Bengali, mad with his affliction. The words: "The maharajah's jewel is stolen!" caused Prince Ananda to dart to the door. Seeing him, the servants

released their grasp of Baboo Dass, and the prince, not daring to leave the king's presence, allowed the half-crazed man to enter the room, where he groveled before the maharajah, bumping his forehead to the marble floor and clawing at the royal feet.

When, at the king's command, the baboo rose, Lord Victor clapped his hand over his mouth to smother his mirth, gasping: "Oh, my aunt! That head!"

Like the rattle of a machine gun, Baboo Dass poured out his tale of wo. When he had finished, the maharajah said calmly: "It doesn't matter," and with a graceful sweep of his hand suggested that Baboo Dass might retire.

Once more the baboo's voice bubbled forth.

"Begone!" And the handsome face of the maharajah took on a tigerish look. For a second it was terrifying; the change was electric. Baboo Dass recoiled and fled.

Then the maharajah's voice was soft, like a rich-toned organ, as he said in Hindustani: "India has two afflictions – famine and the Bengali."

Beside the rajah was a magnificently carved teakwood chair, a padlocked gold chain across the arms indicating that it was not to be used. The carving was marvellous, each side representing a combat between a tiger and a huge python, the graceful curve of whose form constituted the arm. At a question of interest from Gilfain, Prince Ananda spoke in Urdu to his father. The latter nodded, and Ananda, crossing to a silver cabinet, unlocked it and returned bearing a gold casket, upon the top of which was inset

a large pearl. Within the casket was a half-smoked cigarette.

As if carried away by the sight of this the maharajah, speaking in Hindustani, which he saw Swinton understood, said: "That cigarette was smoked by the Prince of Wales sitting in this chair which has since been locked. He shook hands with me, sahib; we were friends; he, the son of the empress, and I a king, who was also a son to the empress."

His voice had grown rich and soft and full; the fierce, black, warlike rajput eyes were luminous as though tears lay behind. The maharajah remained silent while Swinton translated this to Lord Victor. "Ah, sahibs, if kings could sit down together and explain, there would not be war nor distrust nor oppression. When your father" – he turned his face toward Gilfain – "was a councillor in Calcutta, close to the viceroy, I had honour; when I crossed the bridge from Howra as many guns would speak welcome from Fort William as did for Maharajah Jobungha. But now I go no more to Calcutta."

If Swinton had been troubled in his analysis of the prince's motives and character, he now swam in a sea of similar tribulation. The maharajah was big. Was he capable of gigantic subtlety, such as his words would veil? He could see that Prince Ananda was abstracted; his face had lost its jaunty, debonair look; worry lines mapped its surface. The loss of the sapphire had hit Ananda hard, but if the robbery had affected the king, he was subtle in a remarkable sense, for he gave no sign.

The maharajah now rose, clapped his hands, and when a

servant appeared gave a rapid order. The servant disappeared, and almost immediately returned with a silver salver upon which were two long gold chains of delicate workmanship and an open bottle of attar of rose. The maharajah placed a chain about the neck of each sahib, and sprinkled them with the attar, saying, with a trace of a smile curving his handsome lips: "Sometimes, sahibs, this ceremony is just etiquette, but to-day my heart pains with pleasure because the son of my friend is here." He held out his hand, adding: "Prince Ananda must see that you have the best our land affords."

Chapter V

Swinton was glad when he saw his dogcart turn into the compound to take him to the keddah sahib's for tiffin. Lord Victor had been hypnotised by the splendour of Maharajah Darpore; he went around the bungalow giving vent to ebullitions of praise. "My aunt, but the old Johnnie is a corker! And all the tommyrot one hears at home about another mutiny brewing! Damn it, Swinton, the war chiefs who want every bally Englishman trained to carry a gun like a Prussian ought to be put in the Tower!"

An hour of this sort of thing, and with a silent whoop of joy the captain clambered into his dogcart and sped away, as he bowled along his mind troubled by the maharajah angle of the espionage game.

After tiffin with the major, and out on the verandah, where they were clear of the servant's ears, Swinton asked: "Who is the mysterious lady that rides a grey Persian?"

He was conscious of a quick turn of Finnerty's head; a half-checked movement of the hand that held a lighted match to a cheroot, and as the keddah sahib proceeded to finish the ignition he described the woman and her flight over the brick wall.

"She's Doctor Boelke's niece; she has been here about a month," Finnerty answered, when Captain Swinton had finished.

"I wonder why she risked her neck to avoid me, major?"

"Well, she's German for one thing, and I suppose she knows there's a growing tension between the two peoples."

Captain Swinton allowed a smile to surprise his always set face. "Do you know why I am here, major; that is, have you had advice?"

"Yes," the major answered.

"Very good," Captain Swinton declared. "I'll give you some data. Lord Victor's father, Earl Craig, is under-secretary to India. There was some extraordinary jumble of a state document intended for the Viceroy of India. Whether its misleading phraseology was carelessness or traitorous work on the part of a clerk, nobody knows, but it read that the sircar was to practically conscript Indians – Mussulman and Hindu alike – to fight against the Turks and Germans in the war that we all feel is about to come. This paper bore the official seal; had even been signed. Then Earl Craig's copy of it disappeared – was stolen from Lord Victor, who was acting as his secretary. A girl, with whom the young man was infatuated, was supposed to have taken it for the Prussians for use in India. The girl disappeared, and Lord Victor was sent out here for fear he would get in communication with her again. Neither Lord Victor nor the earl knows I am a secret-service man. Maharajah Darpore is marked 'low visibility' in the viceroy's book of rajah rating, and, as Earl Craig wanted an Anglo-Indian as a companion to his son, this seemed a good chance to investigate quietly. There's another little matter," the captain continued quietly as he drew from his pocket a sapphire

in the rough.

"Where the devil did you get that, captain? I thought that old professor pirate had stolen it," Finnerty gasped.

"That's not the stone you lost last night, major."

Finnerty looked at Swinton incredulously as the latter handed him the sapphire, for it was exactly like the stolen stone, even to the inscription.

"Let me explain," Captain Swinton said. "Some time since one Akka, a hillman, came down out of Kululand into Simla leading a donkey that carried two bags of sapphires in the rough. Nobody knew what they were, so, of course, he found it hard to sell his blue stones. That night the stones disappeared, and Akka was found in the morning at the bottom of an abyss with a jade-handled knife sticking in his back. He must have dropped over the rocks so quickly the killer hadn't time to withdraw his knife. About Akka's neck, hidden under his dirty felt coat, was hung this sapphire, and it was given to me, as I was put on the case. I took a trip up into Kululand with a hillman who claimed to have come in with Akka as guide. I got a very fine bharal head – almost a record pair of horns – and a bullet in my left leg that still gives me a limp at times, but as to sapphires in the rough I never saw another until last night."

Finnerty laughed. "India is one devil of a place for mystery."

Swinton related the incidents of the night before, and Baboo Dass' story of the three sapphires, adding: "Of course that's Hindu mythology up to date, the attributing of miraculous

powers of good and evil to those blue stones."

Finnerty shifted uneasily in his chair; then, with a little, apologetic smile, said: "I'm getting less dogmatic about beliefs and their trimmings – absolute superstition, I suppose – and if a sapphire, or anything else, were associated in my mind with disaster I'd chuck the devilish thing in the river."

"At any rate, major, the main thing, so far as my mission is concerned, is that if Prince Ananda happens to get possession of the three sapphires every Buddhist – which means all the fighting Nepalese – will believe the expected Buddha has arrived."

"By gad! And the three sapphires are in Darpore – the one that was stolen from me last night, the one stolen from Baboo Dass, and this one."

"Prince Ananda has yours; I saw Boelke purposely tip over that table. But who stole the one from the baboo I don't know; it couldn't have been a raj agent, for it belonged to the maharajah."

"Where did they come from?" Finnerty queried.

"Yours, of course, was on Burra Moti's neck, and she must have been attached to some temple; Akka probably murdered some lama who had this one about his neck; where Prince Ananda got the third one I don't know."

"By Jove!" Finnerty ejaculated. "It was a hillman that Moti put her foot on. He had been sent to steal that bell, as he couldn't carry the elephant."

"Here's another thing," Captain Swinton said. "In the United States there has been arrested a clique of Hindus who have sold a

great quantity of rare old jewels, gold ornaments, and sapphires in the rough. Machine guns and ammunition were bought with the money obtained, and quite a consignment is somewhere on the road now between China and India."

"Great Scott! Up this way – to come in through Nepal?"

"The stuff was shipped from San Francisco to Hongkong, and though the British government had every road leading out of that city watched, they never got track of it. Our men there think it was transshipped in Hongkong harbour and is being brought around to India by water."

"Does the government think the maharajah is mixed up in this?"

"I'm here to find out. He mystified me to-day. Gilfain thinks he's magnificent – as natural as a child. But he's too big for me to judge; I can't docket him like I can Ananda. He was as regally disinterested over the disappearance of that sapphire as the Duke of Buckingham was when his famous string of black pearls broke and scattered over the floor at the Tuileries; but the prince was seething."

Finnerty waved his cheroot in the direction of the palace hill. "The trouble is up there. Ananda is wily; he's like a moon bear he has there in a cage that smiles and invites you to tickle the back of his neck; then, before you know it, the first joint of a finger is gone."

A little lull in the talk between Swinton and Finnerty was broken by a turmoil that wound its volcanic force around the

bungalow from the stables. Finnerty sprang to his feet as a pair of Rampore hounds reached the drive, galloping toward a tall native at whose heels came a big hunting dog.

"Faith, I was just in time," Finnerty said as he led the two hounds to the verandah, a finger under each collar; "they'd soon have chewed up that Banjara's dog."

The Rampores were very like an English greyhound that had been shaved; they were perhaps coarser, a little heavier in the jaw. A panting keeper now appeared, and the dogs were leashed.

Seeing this, the native approached, and in a deep, sombre voice said: "Salaam, Sahib Bahadur!" Having announced himself, the Banjara came up the steps and squatted on his heels; the long male-bamboo staff he carried betokened he was a herdsman.

"What do you want, Lumbani?" Finnerty queried.

"Yes, sahib, I am a Banjara of the Lumbani caste. The sahib who is so strong is also wise in the ways of my people."

"I wonder what this will cost me in wasted time," the major lamented in English. "I judge his soul is weighted with matters of deep import." Then, in Hindustani: "That's a true Banjara dog, Lumbani."

"Yes, sahib, he is one of that great breed. Also in the sahib's hands are two thoroughbred Rampores; they be true dogs of the Tazi breed, the breed that came from Tazi who slept by the bedside of Nawab Faiz Mahomed five generations since. The sahib must be in high favour with the Nawab of Rampore, for

such dogs are only given in esteem; they are not got as one buys bullocks."

"What is it you want?" queried Finnerty.

The Banjara looked at Swinton; he coughed; then he loosened the loin cloth that pinched at his lean stomach.

"This dog, sahib – Banda is the noble creature's name – has the yellow eyes that Krishna is pleased with; that is a true sign of a Banjara." He held out his hand, and Banda came up the steps to crouch at his side.

At this intrusion of the native's dog, the patrician Rampores sprang the full length of their leash with all the ferocity that is inherent in this breed. A pariah dog would have slunk away in affright, but the Banjara's yellow eyes gleamed with fighting defiance; he rose on his powerful, straight legs, and his long fangs shone between curled lips.

"Good stuff!" Finnerty commented, and to his groom added: "Take the hounds away. He's a sure-enough Banjara, Swinton," he resumed in English. "Look at that terrier cast in the face, as though there were a streak of Irish or Airedale in him."

Indeed, the dog was a beauty, with his piercing bright eyes set in the long, flat head that carried punishing jaws studded with strong teeth. The neck was long, rising from flat, sloping shoulders, backed up by well-rounded ribs and arched loins leading to well-developed quarters. The chest was narrow and deep, and the flanks tucked up.

"They're game, too," Finnerty declared. He turned to the

owner. "Will Banda tackle a panther?"

"He and his sons have been in at the death of more than one; they will follow a leopard into a cave."

"How much will you take for him?" Swinton asked.

The native looked his scorn. He turned to Finnerty as though his sarcasm might be wasted upon this sahib who thought a Banjara would sell one of the famous breed. "Perhaps the strange sahib will go to Umar Khan, at Shahpur, and buy one of the Salt Range horses – a mare of the Unmool breed. When he has I will sell him Banda."

Swinton laughed, and, taking a rupee from his pocket, passed it to the native, saying: "Food for Banda. The sarcasm was worth it," he added in English, "an Unmool mare being above price."

"All this talk of the dogs," Finnerty declared, "is that our friend has something on his mind. He was studying you, but you've broken the ice with your silver hammer."

The native salaamed, tucked the rupee in his loin cloth, and the questioning, furtive look that had been in his eyes disappeared. He turned to the major:

"Huzoor, I am a man of many buffaloes, robbing none, going in peace with my herds up into the hills in the hot weather when the new grass comes green and strong from the ashes of the fire that has been set out in the spring, and coming back to the plains when the weather is cold."

"Where is your country?" Finnerty queried.

"Where my grain bags and my cooking pots are is my country,

my fathers holding that all lands were theirs to travel in. For fifteen years in this moon have I remained down yonder by the river with my herd, just where the heavy kagar grass makes good hunting for tiger, and always on good terms of friendship with him."

"Gad! I thought so," Finnerty ejaculated. "We'll get news of a kill in a minute."

"If we met in the path – that is, your slave and tiger – I would say: '*Khudawand*, pass here, for the thorns in the bush are bad for thy feet,' and if tiger was inclined he would pass, or he would turn. Often lying on the broad back of a buffalo as we crossed where the muck is deep I would see tiger lying in wait for pig or chinkara, and I would call, '*Kudawand*, good hunting!' Then what think you, sahib, if after years of such living in peace, this depraved outcast, begotten of a hyena, makes the kill of a cow?"

"A tiger, like a woman, is to be watched," Finnerty declared, quoting a tribal adage.

"And all in the way of evil temper, sahib, for the cow lies yonder with no mark beyond a broken neck, while in the jungles rajah tiger is growling abuse. A young cow, sahib, in full milk. For the sake of God, sahib, come and slay the brute."

The Banjara had worked himself into a passion; tears of rage stood in his eyes. "And to think that I had saved the life of this depraved one," he wailed.

"You saved the tiger's life, Lumbani?"

"Surely, sahib. Of the Banjaras some are Mussulmans –

outcasts that lot are – and some are Hindus, as is your servant, so we are careful in the matter of a kill, lest we slay one of our own people who has returned. This slayer of my cow always took pleasure in being near the buffalo. Why, huzoor, I have seen him up in the hills looking as though he had felt lonesome without the herd. Noting that, it was in my mind that perhaps a Banjara herdsman had been born again as a tiger. That is why I saved his life from the red dogs of the jungle; nothing can stand before them when they are many. From the back of a buffalo I saw one of these jungle devils standing on high ground, beckoning, with his tail stuck up like a flag, to others of his kind."

"I've seen that trick," Finnerty commented.

"The tiger had been caught in a snare of the Naga people as he came to partake of a goat they had tied up, as he thought, for his eating; the sahib knows of what like a snare is to retain a tiger. A strong-growing bamboo, young and with great spring, had been bent down and held by a trip so that tiger, putting his paw in the noose, it sprang up, and there he was dancing around like a Nautch girl on the rope that held his wrist, being a loose bamboo too big for a grip of his teeth; it spun around on the rope. The red dogs, hearing his roars, knew he was trapped, and were gathering to settle an old dispute as to the eating of a kill. They would have made an end of him. A mongoose kills a cobra because he is too quick for the snake, and they were too quick for the tiger; so, taking pity upon him as an old friend, with my staff I drove them off; then, climbing into the bamboos, cut the rope."

"Did you tackle them alone, Lumbani?"

"Surely, sahib; jungle dogs run from a man that is not afraid."

Finnerty's shikarri, Mahadua the Ahnd, who had come to the verandah, now said: "The tiger this herder of buffalo tells of is 'Pundit Bagh;' he is well known to all."

"And you never brought word that we might make the hunt," Finnerty reproached.

"Sahib, we Ahnd people when we know a tiger is possessed of a spirit do not seek to destroy that one."

"Why is he called Pundit? Is he the ghost of a teacher?"

"This is the story of Pundit Bagh, sahib: Long ago there was a pundit that had a drug that would change him into an animal, and if he took another it would change him back again."

The Ahnd's little bead eyes watched his master's face furtively.

"One day as the pundit and his wife were walking through the jungle a leopard stepped out in the path to destroy them. He gave his wife one powder to hold, saying: 'I will take this one and change into a tiger, and when I have frightened the leopard away give me the other that I may change back to myself.' But the poor woman when she saw her tiger husband spring on the leopard dropped the powder and ran away; so the pundit has remained a tiger, and is so cunning that it will be small use to make the hunt."

"But coming and going as he must, Mahadua, how know you it is the same one?"

"By the spectacles of the pundit, sahib; there is but one tiger that wears them."

Finnerty laughed. "Does he never drop them, little man?"

"Sahib, they are but black rings around his eyes – such as are on the back of a cobra's head – like unto the horn glasses the pundit wore."

"Baboo Dass declared the tiger that peeped in his window wore spectacles; it must have been this same legendary chap," Swinton remarked.

An old man came running up the road, between its walls of pipal trees, beating his mouth with the palm of his hand in a staccato lament. At the verandah he fell to his knees and clasped Finnerty's feet, crying: "Oh, sahib, Ramia has been mauled by a tiger the size of an elephant, and from the fields all have run away. Come, sahib, and slay him."

"Pundit Bagh keeps busy," the major said; "but by the time we make all our arrangements it will be near evening, and if we wound him we can't follow up in the dark. Go back and keep watch on the tiger; to-morrow we will make the hunt," he told the old man.

To the Hindu to-morrow meant never; when people did not mean to do things they said "to-morrow." Perhaps the sahib was afraid; perhaps he had presented the tiger in too fearful a light, so he hedged. "Come, protector of the poor, come even now, for we are afraid to go into the grass for Ramia. The tiger is not big – he is old and lame; one ball from the sahib's gun will kill him. Indeed, sahib, he is an old tiger without teeth."

Finnerty laughed; but the Banjara flamed into wrath at this

trifling. "Son of filth! Skinner of dead cattle! Think'st thou the sahib is afraid? And did an old, toothless tiger kill a buffalo of mine? Begone! When the sahib goes to the hunt, he goes."

The Ahnd now said: "Have patience, man of buffaloes; perhaps another, a leopard, is the guilty one. Pundit Bagh acts not thus; in fact, in the little village of Picklapara, which he guards, more than once when the villagers have made offering to him of a goat has he driven away a leopard that had carried off an old woman or a child."

"Fool! Does a leopard break the neck of a bullock? Does he not slit the throat for the blood? And always does not a leopard first tear open the stomach and eat the heart and the liver? I say it was the tiger," and the Banjara glared at Mahadua.

"It was a small, old tiger," the Hindu declared again.

"Seems a bit of luck; evidently 'Stripes' is inviting trouble," Swinton observed.

"You'll want Lord Victor to have a chance at this first tiger, I suppose, captain?"

"If not too much trouble."

"I fancy our best way will be to make the hunt from elephants," Finnerty said musingly. "We can beat him out of the grass." He spoke to the old Hindu sternly: "Tell me the truth. Is Ramia still with the tiger?"

The Hindu blinked his eyes in fear. "It may be, huzoor, that he ran away to his home, but there is a big cut in his shoulder where the beast smote him."

"Sahib," the Banjara advised, "if the Presence will go on foot, even as he does many times, I will go with him, carrying the spare gun; the tiger knows me well and will wait till we are able to pull his whiskers."

"These Banjaras haven't a bit of fear," Finnerty commented. "Is it good ground for elephants?" he asked.

The Banjara's face clouded. "Sahib, the elephants make much noise. Perhaps the tiger will escape; perhaps if he comes out in an evil way of mind the elephant will run away."

"Well, Swinton, if you'll ride back and get Gilfain – what guns have you?"

"I've a Certus Cordite and my old .450 Express."

"Good as any. Soft-nosed bullets?"

"Yes, I have some."

"Well, use them; we'll be pretty close, and you'll want a stopping bullet if the old chap charges. What's Gilfain got?"

"A battery – a little of everything, from a .22 Mannlicher up to a double-barrel, ten-bore Paradox."

"Tell him to bring the Paradox – it won't take as much sighting as the rifle; Gilfain has probably done considerable grouse shooting. He's almost sure to miss his first tiger; nerves go to pieces generally. I'll get two elephants – you and Lord Victor in one howdah, and I'll take Mahadua in the other."

"If you've got a bullet-proof howdah I'd use it, major; I've seen that young man do some bally fool things."

"I wish I could take Burra Moti," Finnerty said regretfully;

"she's a good hunting elephant, but without her bell I couldn't depend on her."

"Use the stone I've got for a clapper."

"No, thanks."

"Why not? It will be under your eye all the time. You can take it off at night and put it in your box. Besides, nobody will suspect that there's another sapphire in the bell."

"I won't have time to have a goldsmith beat the bell into shape to-day."

Chapter VI

Swinton drove back to get Lord Victor. When his two elephants were ready, Finnerty, with the Banjara marching at his side, took the road that, halfway to Darpore City, forked off into a wide stretch of dusty plain that was cut here and there by small streams and backwaters; these latter places growing a heavy rush grass that made good cover for both the tiger and his prey – swamp deer and pig.

Swinton and Lord Victor were at the fork in the road, the latter attired in a wondrous Bond Street outfit. "Awfully good of you, old chap," he bubbled. "Devilish quick work, I call it; I'll feel like cabling the governor in the morning if I bag that man-killer."

"If I had Burra Moti under me, I'd think that we as good as had the tiger padded," the major declared; "but I don't know anything about my mount to-day. I don't know whether he'll stand a charge or bolt. Keep your feet under those iron straps; they're the stirrups, Lord Victor."

"Right-o."

They went down off the hill, with its big rhododendron trees, and out onto the wide plain, directed by the Banjara. In an hour they came to a small stream fringed by green rushes; along this for half a mile, and the Banjara pointed with his bamboo to a heavy, oval clump of grass, saying: "The outcast of the jungle is in that cover, sahib."

"Now this is the plan," Finnerty outlined to Swinton. "Stripes is evidently pretty well fed, and hasn't been shot at, so he's cheeky. He won't leave that grass in this hot sun unless he has to – that's tiger in general – but this cuss may have some variations. He's quite aware that we're here. Hark back on this road that we've come by till you reach that old, dry river bed, and go down that till you come to a *nala* that runs out of this big patch of grass. I'll wait till you're posted there, then I'll beat in slowly through the grass from this side, not making much fuss so that Stripes won't think I'm driving him. When he breaks cover from the other end he'll make for that *nala*. Don't shoot till you're sure of your shot; just behind the shoulder, if possible, but raking forward – that's the spot."

"Sahib," and the Banjara pointed with his bamboo to where a small bird was circling and darting with angry cries above the canes.

"Yes, that's where he is," Finnerty declared; "that's a bulbul – pugnacious little cuss – trying to drive Stripes away."

Finnerty waited until he was quite sure Swinton and his companion would be in position; then at a command his mahout prodded the elephant with a hooked spear, crying: "Dut-dut, king of all elephants, dut-dut!"

With a fretful squeak of objection the elephant, curling his trunk between his tusks for its safety, forged ponderously ahead. Like a streamer from the topmast of a yacht the bulbul, weaving back and forth, showed Finnerty the tiger was on the move. The

major did not hurry him, knowing that if pressed too close he might break back, thinking he was being driven into a trap.

The Banjara, anxious to see the finish of the beast that had slain his cow, worked his way along the grass patch, watching the bulbul and Finnerty's howdah, which just showed above the canes. As the tiger stealthily slipped away from the advancing elephant other jungle dwellers in the kagar grass moved forward to escape from the killer. Knowledge of this movement of game came scenting the wind that smote on the Banjara hound's nostrils. He was a hunting dog; his very living depended on it. He saw a honey badger slip from the reeds and disappear in a hole in a bank; he caught a glimpse of a mouse deer; and all the time his master was shaping his course and timing it by the bulbul. Where there were so many small dwellers of the jungle afoot there surely would be some eating, so the hound slipped into the cane and drifted ahead of the tiger.

The wind that had been blowing across the grass now took a slant and came riffling the feathered tops of the heavy cane from the opposite point, carrying a taint of the Gilfain party.

The tiger, who had been slowly working his way in that direction, stopping every few feet to look back over his shoulder, threw up his head and read the warning message – the sahib scent that was so different from that of the coconut-oiled natives.

The sun, slanting in between the reeds, threw shadow streaks of gold and brown and black. The tiger knew what that meant – that with his synthetic-striped skin he was all but invisible at

ten paces. He circled to the left, and when he had found a thick tangle of cane that promised cover, burrowed into it like a jungle pig. With his head flat to his forepaws, hiding his white ruff – so like the chin whisker of an old man – he easily might be passed without discovery.

The bulbul eyed this performance thoughtfully; a tiger lying down for a sleep was something not to waste time over. With a little tweak of triumph he settled for an instant on the bare arm of a leafless, leper-marked dalbergia tree; then, catching sight of something he disliked even more than a tiger, and still in a warlike mood, he continued on with the dog.

When Gilfain's mahout pointed with his goad to the bulbul's squawking approach, the Englishman cocked both barrels of his Paradox and waited.

The dog gradually worked up to the edge of the cane, and lay down just within its cover, ready for a sudden spring on any small animal that might come ahead of the tiger.

"There is the tiger, just within the tall grass. He has seen us and will not come out," the mahout advised.

"What shall we do, captain?" Lord Victor asked. "Go in and beat him out?"

"No; he'll break back or take to the side for it. If we wait till Finnerty beats up, the tiger will make a dash across to that other big stretch of heavy grass on our right. There's a game path between the two, and he'll stick to that."

"But I can't hit him on the gallop – not in a vital spot."

"If you get a chance at him before he breaks cover let go; if you don't bowl him over I'll take a pot shot."

Suddenly Lord Victor, quivering with excitement, his heart beating a tattoo that drowned something Swinton whispered, drew a bead on a patch of rufous fur that showed between the quivering reeds.

Back in the canes sounded a squealing trumpet note from Finnerty's elephant. With his keen scent he had discovered the tiger. Their elephant answered the call, and Lord Victor, fearing the animal his gun covered would break back, pulled the trigger. Unfortunately, and by chance, his aim was good.

A howl of canine agony followed the report, and the Banjara's dog pitched headfirst out of the cover, sat up on his haunches, looked at them in a stupid, dazed way, then raised his head and howled from the pain of a red-dripping wound in his shoulder.

Pandemonium broke loose. Down in the cane there was the coughing roar of a charging tiger; the squeal of a frightened elephant; the bark of a gun; and out to one side the harsh voice of the Banjara calling, the growing cadence of his tones suggesting he was approaching with alacrity.

Lord Victor, a presentiment of ribald retribution because of his too excellent marksmanship flashing through his mind, sprang to his feet just as the elephant, excited by all these wondrous noises, commenced a ponderous buck; that is to say, an attempt to bolt. At the first stride a huge foot went into the soft, black cotton soil, and the young nobleman, thrown off his

balance, dove headfirst out of the howdah. The soft muck saved him from a broken neck; it also nearly smothered him. Eyes, nose, mouth full – it was squirted in large quantities down his spine.

Swinton started to swear, angered by the mess Lord Victor had made of things; but when that young man pulled himself like a mud turtle out of the ooze and stood up, the reproach trailed off into a spasm of choking laughter. But the Banjara arriving on the scene checked this hilarity; indeed it was probably Gilfain's grotesque appearance that saved his life.

Finnerty, too, hove hugely onto the scene, a little rivulet of blood streaming from his elephant's trunk. "Were there two tigers?" he called as he emerged from the cane.

His circling eye fell upon the black-mucked nobleman. "Gad, man, what's happened?" he queried, clapping a hand to his mouth to smother his laughter. Then he saw the dog and its owner, and hastily dropping from the howdah pushed over beside Lord Victor, saying: "Get back on your elephant."

"Look, huzoor!" And the Banjara spread his big palm in a denunciatory way toward the dying dog. "I, having had my buffalo slain by a tiger that I had befriended, and bringing the word to the sahib that he might obtain a cherished skin, now have this accursed trial thrust upon me. Why should the young of the sahibs go forth to do a man's work, huzoor?"

"It was an accident," the major replied. "Come to the bungalow to-night and you will be given the price of two dogs."

"Better make it the price of five dogs, major," Swinton called.

"I'll pay for a whole pack of hounds; I'll stock a kennel for him. I was too devilish quick on the trigger." Lord Victor emptied the black muck from his ears.

The Banjara, not understanding English, looked suspiciously at Finnerty, who hedged: "The sahib says you will be given the price of three dogs."

"Sahib, how shall we fix the price of Banda, that is a Banjara? Such are not sold. I have dogs that are just dogs, and if I had known that this sahib was young in the ways of the hunt I would have brought them for his practice. And was there a kill of tiger, or did the sahib also shoot somebody's dog?"

"Be careful!" Finnerty took a step toward the ironical one, who backed up. Then the major said in a mollifying way: "We'll kill the tiger to-morrow."

Muttering "*Kul, kul*— it is always to-morrow for a difficult work," the herdsman took under his arm his wounded dog and strode angrily away.

"Too devilish bad! He's fond of that cur," Lord Victor said mournfully.

"I had a corking good chance at Stripes," Finnerty offered, "but I muddled it when my elephant almost stepped on the smooth old cuss, who was lying doggo; he got up with a roar of astonishment and took a swipe at the beast's trunk. I was holding the ten-bore, loaded with shot to fire across the cane should Stripes try to break back, and, rattled by his sudden charge, I

blazed away, peppering him with bird shot. So, you see, Gilfain, we're all liable to blunder in this game. We'll go back now and take up the hunt to-morrow."

As they went back Mahadua put his hand on Finnerty's foot and asked: "Did you see the spectacles on Pundit Bagh?"

Finnerty nodded, for he had seen the black rings when the tiger lifted his head.

"And did sahib put down the ball gun and take up the one that is for birds and shoot over Pundit's head because he, too, thinks that it is the spirit of a man?"

"It is not good to offend the gods, Mahadua, if one is to live with them, so we will save the killing of the pundit for the young sahib who soon goes back to Inglistan, where the anger of the gods cannot follow him," Finnerty answered solemnly.

In the other howdah, Lord Victor, in whose mind rankled the dog's shooting, brought up in extenuation this same matter of Finnerty's confessed blunder, for he had not caught the chivalry of the major's lie. "I didn't miss like the major, anyway," he began.

"No, you didn't – unfortunately." Swinton was holding a cheroot to a lighted match.

"Really, captain, I wasn't so bad. Fancy an old hunter like him getting fuddled and banging at a tiger with bird shot."

Swinton shot a furtive look at the thin, long-nosed face that was still piebald with patches of caked lava; then he turned his eyes away and gazed out over the plain with its coloured grass

and wild indigo scrub. A pair of swooping jheel birds cut across, piping shrilly: "Did you do it, did you do it!"

"That'll be a corking fine yarn for the club when I get back," Lord Victor added.

"And will you tell them about the dog you shot?"

"Rather! I didn't miss, and the major did."

Swinton turned his brown eyes on the cheerful egoist. "Gilfain, you're young, therefore not hopeless."

"I say, old chap, what's the sequel to that moralising?"

"That probably before you get out of India you'll understand just how good a sportsman Major Finnerty is."

Their elephant had been traversing a well-worn path along the bottom of a hollow, and where it left the *nala* to reach the plain they suddenly came upon the Banjara's encampment. It was a tiny village of dark-coloured tents; to one side of this was a herd of buffalo that had come in from the plain to be milked. They could see the herdsman sitting moodily on his black blanket, and beside him lay the dead dog.

The young Englishman viewed not without alarm the women who wore belts beneath which were stuck old-fashioned pistols and knives. This was the Banjara custom, but the guilty man feared it was a special course of punishment for him.

Finnerty's elephant had overtaken them, and now again the major had to explain that the dog would be paid for three times over, and the tiger would be surely shot on the morrow.

At this promise, a ponderous woman who had the airs of a

gipsy queen pointed to the slayer of the dog and said: "Tomorrow the sahib will hunt again!"

The youngsters whooped with joy, catching the satire.

Finnerty ordered the march resumed.

At a turn, Mahadua pointed to some little red-and-white flags that fluttered above a square plinth of clay upon which was the crude painting of a vermilion tiger, saying: "That is the shrine of Pundit Bagh, and if the sahib wishes to slay him, it being necessary in the law of the jungle, it might avert evil if sacrifice were made at the shrine."

"An offering of sweetmeats and silver?"

"No, huzoor. If a goat is purchased by the sahib and a bottle of arrack, Mahadua will take the goat to the shrine, pour the wine on his head till he has bowed three times to the god, and cut his throat so that the blood falls upon the shrine to appease the god. Also I will hang up a foot of the goat."

"What becomes of the goat?" the major asked.

"We will make kabobs of the flesh in the little village yonder, and hold a feast to-night."

Finnerty remained silent, and the Ahnd, to secure a feast, fell back upon tangible arguments. "Sahib, if the villagers are full with feasting and happy because of a little arrack warm in their stomachs, they will not go forth in the early morning with conch horns and axes to beat upon trees to drive Pundit Bagh up into the hills so he may not be slain."

"All right, Mahadua, I'll furnish the goat."

PART TWO

Chapter VII

They had come to where the open plain gave way to patches of jungle and rolling land clad with oak and rhododendron.

The other elephant came alongside, and Finnerty suggested: "We might walk back to my bungalow from here on the chance of getting some game for the pot. There's quail, grey and painted pheasants, green pigeon, and perhaps a peacock – I heard one call up in the jungle. I've got shells loaded with number six for my 10-bore."

"Good!" Swinton answered. "I'm cramped sitting here."

"I'm game," Lord Victor agreed.

Finnerty sent the elephants on, keeping Mahadua, the shikari.

A hot sun was shooting rapidly down close to the horizon, glaring like a flaming dirigible. A nightjar was swooping through the air like a swallow, uttering his weird evening call, "Chyeece, chyeece, chyeece!" as they went through a fringe of dwarf bamboos and up into the shadow of the trees.

Here Finnerty checked, saying: "I'm afraid I'll have to keep in the lead." He lifted a foot, showing a boot made of soft sambar skin with a cotton sole. "Every creature in the jungle is on the qui vive, and for stalking on foot one has to wear these silent

creepers."

They had not travelled far along the narrow jungle path that had been worn smooth by the bare feet of natives crossing from village to village when Finnerty stood rigid and beckoned gently with a forefinger; and when they had reached his side they could hear the jabber of monkeys scolding angrily far up the path. Between them and the jungle discord was a large monkey sitting on the limb of a tree, with his face turned away and his long tail hanging down.

Finnerty put a finger to his lips, and, slipping forward with the soft stealthiness of a leopard, undetected by the monkey, who was intent on his companions' squabble, gave the tail a pull. The startled and enraged lungur whisked about and thrust his black face, with its fringe of silver-grey whiskers, forward pugnaciously, pouring out a volley of simian oaths. Seeing a sahib, he stopped with a gasping cry of fright and raced up the tree to take a diving flight to another.

"No end of a funny caper!" Lord Victor laughed.

"No use of keeping quiet now," the major declared; "those noisy devils have stirred up everything. If I were following up a tiger I'd know they had spotted him."

"Behold, sahib!" And Mahadua pointed to the trunk of the rhododendron.

When Finnerty had closely examined some marks about the height of his head in the tree, he said: "Even if our friend Pundit Bagh hasn't an evil spirit, he has a sense of humour; he's

sharpened his claws here, and not long ago, either."

"Really? Oh, I say, old top, you're spoofing. No end of a good draw, though." And Lord Victor chuckled.

"I'm in earnest," Finnerty declared crisply. "A rhododendron has a bark like rough sandpaper – it's a favourite whetstone for the cat tribe; and this was a big tiger, as you can judge by the height of the marks."

"There are no pugs on the path, sahib," Mahadua advised, after a search.

"We'll keep close together for a bit," Finnerty advised, starting on.

At Finnerty's elbow the shikari whispered: "Tell the sahibs to talk, so that we come not in a startling way upon the Pundit, that he may escape in peace."

The major conveyed this message to his companions.

For a hundred yards they walked through a jungle that was now silent save for their voices and the slip of their feet on the smooth earth. From a tangle of raspberry bushes ahead a king crow rose in excited flight.

"That's a bird that always gets in a rage when tiger is about," Finnerty explained; "so keep your eye open – the jungle's thick here."

The major had taken a knife from his pocket, and he now ran its sharp blade around two 10-bore shells, just between the wads which separated the powder from the shot, saying, as he slipped first the shot half and next the powder half into his gun: "That

is now practically a ball cartridge, for the shot packet will carry like a bullet for a good many yards. I don't think we'll see him, though. Ah! Mistaken!"

A magnificent striped creature slipped without noise from some thick undergrowth twenty yards ahead, and now stood across the path, his huge head turned so that the questioning yellow eyes were full upon them.

"Pundit Bagh – see his spectacles, sahib!" Mahadua gasped.

The curious black oval markings added to the sinister malignity of the unblinking eyes.

"Don't move, you chaps; he's only bluffing. If you weaken he'll charge," Finnerty cautioned.

"I will speak to Pundit Bagh," Mahadua said, stepping a pace forward. "Kudawand, Protector of the Village, go in peace. Did not the sahib this day give you back your life? Did not the sahib put down the rifle and take up the bird gun and shoot in the air over your head? Go in peace, Kudawand, lest the sahib now smite thee with the ball gun."

"Have you a box of matches, Swinton?" the major asked, a quick thought coming to him that probably the tiger, in his migrations to the hills, had learned to dread the fire line of the burning grass.

Something of this scheme registered in Swinton's brain, for he answered: "I've got a newspaper, too."

"Give the paper and matches to Mahadua." Then to the servant he added: "Roll the paper like a torch and light it."

The tiger watched this performance with interest. There is no dweller of the jungle but is a victim of curiosity – the unusual will always arrest their attention; and the tiger's attitude assured Finnerty that he really had no fixed purpose; it would take very little to make him either attack or retreat. If it had not been for the Banjara's buffalo, killed out of pure devilry, and the mauled native, Finnerty would have had no hesitation in thinking the tiger would turn from the path if they kept steadily advancing.

When Mahadua struck a match on the box, its snapping hiss and flare of light caused an uneasy shift of the spectacled eyes. When the paper showed its larger flame, the look of distrust and suspicion increased; the bristled lips twisted in a nervous snarl; the powerful tail that had been swinging in complacent threatening from side to side now stilled and dropped.

"Move on!" Finnerty commanded, stepping slowly forward, the 10-bore held waist-high, both fingers on the triggers.

Mahadua, holding the burning paper straight in front of him, kept pace with his master, Swinton and Lord Victor following close.

The sinister ominousness of this performance, its silent aggression, wakened in the tiger's wary mind the dominant thought of his lifetime – caution, suspicion of a trap. It was a supreme test of unheated courage between two magnificent creatures, each of his own species – the gigantic man and the regal tiger; and the physical advantage was with the beast. Step by step, slow-measured, Finnerty and the shikari pressed forward.

The Pundit now swung his lithe body with sinuous grace till he stood aggressively straight in the path, his head lowered so that a little furrow showed between his shoulder blades and the red-green eyes slanted evilly upward through the spectacles.

Finnerty read the sign. If the tiger crouched flat to earth, ready for a spring, it would be well to halt and try still further his courage by calmly waiting his attack. The big tail had ceased its rhythmic swing, but did not stiffen in ferocity; it curved downward. Even that beat of the pulse of events Finnerty gauged.

At ten yards Lord Victor had ceased to breathe; he wanted to scream under the cracking strain. He felt a hand on his arm – it was Swinton's. The paper torch palpitated in the native's trembling hand; but he faltered not, though the vicious eyes were ever on him and the fire. Nine yards, eight yards – all a hell of silent, nervous strain. Seven yards – the tiger turned in a slow, voluptuous glide, his ominous eyes still on the torchbearer, and slipped through the bushes to the jungle beyond.

Finnerty quickened his pace to a fast walk, saying: "Put the light out – save the paper."

Presently Mahadua touched Finnerty's elbow and held up a hand. Listening, the major heard the "miouw" of a peacock – not the usual, droning note, but a sharp, angry screech. Immediately the alarmed belling of a sambar came from the direction in which the peacock had called, followed by a short, muffled roar from the tiger.

"Missed him!" Finnerty commented. He turned to his

companions. "Our shooting has been spoiled; we'll just push on to my bungalow."

Chapter VIII

Captain Swinton and Lord Victor remained with Finnerty for dinner, and after that meal, sitting on the verandah, the latter asked: "What sort of bally charm did that shikari repeat when he made that ripping address to the tiger, major?"

Finnerty looked at Swinton and the latter nodded violently; but the major answered curtly: "I forget."

"Oh, I say! I want to know, old top – it'll go well when I tell the story in London." He turned to Swinton. "Captain, perhaps your memory is better."

"If you must know," Swinton answered, in mock resignation – for he was most anxious to interpret the native's words – "Mahadua told the tiger to play the game, for Finnerty had purposely put down his rifle, taken up the shotgun, and fired over his head to spare his life."

"That's when you made the fumble in the howdah, eh, major? It would have been quite on the cards for him to have mauled you to-day. You should have potted him when you had a chance on the elephant."

Tried beyond patience by Gilfain's obtuse egotism, Swinton blurted: "Mahadua lied to the tiger; he was concealing the fact that Major Finnerty spared his life that you might have the glory of the kill later on."

"But, I say, this is no end of a draw; the major told us he got

rattled and pumped bird shot into Stripes."

With a sigh, Swinton gave up the hopeless task; and Finnerty, to change the venue, said:

"I don't think we were in any danger, really. A tiger is considerable of a gentleman; all he asks is to be left alone to kill his legitimate prey. And if it weren't for him the wild pig and deer would eat up the crops of the poor."

"But tigers kill a lot of human beings," Lord Victor contended.

"About two in every million are killed annually by tigers in India – that's statistical. Wolves, leopards, hyenas kill far more. Also a very few tigers do the killing, and generally it was man's fault in the first place. A griffin comes out to the service, makes a bad shot in the dark, and the tiger is wounded; the rankling wound makes him ferocious and he kills any human that comes within his reach. If he recovers he may be incapacitated for killing game – who are either strong or swift – and, driven by hunger, he takes the easiest mark, man."

The Banjara had come up the road unnoticed. He now stood at the steps, and, with his black eyes fixed on Lord Victor, said, in heavy gravity: "*Salaam, shikari sahib.*"

"Will you pay the beggar for that dog, major? I'll send the money over," Lord Victor said, missing the sarcasm.

When, after much bargaining, the blood debt had been wiped out at twenty rupees, the Banjara, ringing each coin by a spin in the air with his thumb nail, broached the matter of his deferred revenge.

"What of the slaying of that debased killer of my cow, O sahib?" he asked. "I will tie up a young buffalo, so be it the sahib will pay for it, and, as the tiger has got in this way of amusing himself, he will come. But" – and he cast a scornful glance at Lord Victor – "do you make the kill, major sahib?"

"It is too late. We will take a dozen elephants to-morrow and make a wide beat, driving the tiger up to the guns."

But the native shook his head. "The sahib knows that if the elephants are not trained to the hunt they are no good, and tiger knows it. When he smells that it is a trap, he will break back, and some of the elephants will not stand. But if the sahib will pay me and my brothers we will take all our buffalo and drive tiger ahead of them. He will not break back through the buffalo, for I will take them first to smell of the blood of the cow he has slain."

"A good idea," Finnerty declared; "the buffalo make great beaters – Stripes won't face them. All right!" he told the Banjara. "I'll post the sahibs on elephants. Get your men and buffalo ready for two o'clock – it will take me till that time to get things ready."

"The tiger will be in the same grass, huzoor," the Banjara said; "but if the young sahib shoot a buffalo or another dog, that also he will be required to pay for. My brothers will be behind the buffalo, walking slowly, that they do not come too sudden upon the tiger, and they are men of passion."

Then the herdsman went clanking down the road, feeling that he had done all that could be done in the way of insurance.

They sat for an hour planning a grand hunt for the next day.

Prince Ananda must be invited; as they were shooting over his grounds, it was only proper courtesy. The prince would bring his own elephant, of course, but reliable hunting elephants were scarce. The one Lord Victor and Swinton had used that day had shown either a white feather or too excitable a temperament; he would only do to put on the side of the cane belt as a stop to keep the tiger from cutting out. Finnerty's elephant had proved fairly steady, but he needed another; he would give that one to Swinton and Lord Victor and in the morning get a goldsmith to beat out Moti's bell, putting a metal clapper in it. The maharajah had elephants, but none well trained for a drive, because the maharajah never shot anything.

Before leaving Swinton took the major into the bungalow and gave him the sapphire to use in the bell should it be necessary, insisting that it was as safe with Finnerty as it was with him. At any rate, he did not value it highly, not placing any faith in its miraculous power.

The moon had risen when the two drove back to their bungalow in the major's dogcart. As they swung to enter the gate, the horse recoiled with a snort of fear; the check was so sudden that Swinton, to avoid a headfirst dive, jumped, cannoning into a native, who, his face covered by his loin cloth, dashed from the compound. Instinctively Swinton grabbed the fleeing man; but the latter, with a dexterous loosening twist of his garment, left it in the captain's hands and sped away. On the ground lay a white envelope and a small notebook that had fallen from a fold of the

cloth, and these Swinton put in his pocket, saying: "That man has been up to some deviltry." To Finnerty's syce he added: "Take the tom-tom back; we'll walk to the bungalow."

"I say, old chap," cried Lord Victor, "don't you know this is no end of a risky caper; that urban tiger dashed that fellow – what!"

"We'd be in a hat if we stuck to the tom-tom in that event; that flooey-headed horse would kill us if the tiger didn't."

At that instant the captain's foot caught something that projected from the crotons. A look disclosed a pair of legs. There was something familiar about these white-trousered limbs that terminated in canvas shoes, and their owner must be either very drunk or dead. Swinton grasped the projecting feet and pulled their owner to the drive, where he lay on his back, the moonlight glinting the glazed eyes. It was Perreira – and he was dead. His neck showed an abrasion as though a rope had scorched it; and when Swinton lifted the dead man's shoulders the head hung limp like the head of a rag doll.

"That old Thug trick!" Swinton declared. "Somebody caught him from behind with a towel across the throat, threw him to the ground, put a foot on his back, and with one twist broke his neck."

"Murdered!" Lord Victor gasped.

"Yes. That native I met at the gate did the trick." Raising his voice, the captain called: "*Chowkidar!* Watchman!"

There was an answer from somewhere in the compound, and the evil-faced native they had seen the night before came

hurrying to where they stood.

"If the half-caste sahib is dead he must have fallen from a horse and broke his neck," the watchman declared.

"Call the servants and carry him into the bungalow where the baboo is; then go at once down to the police and tell who killed this man," Swinton commanded.

At that instant Baboo Dass, who, startled by the clamour, had waited in fear on the verandah, now ploughed through the bushes, saying: "Please, sar, I will be frightened if defunct body is brought within. This place is too much evil-spirited. If tiger is not devour I am head-shaved like a felon and burglar of jewel."

But Swinton turned away and proceeded with Lord Victor to their bungalow, leaving Baboo Dass wrangling with the watchman.

Lord Victor was in a captious mood over the rapid succession of stirring episodes. "No end of a somnolent old India – what!" he said ironically, sitting on Swinton's bed. "I'm bally well dashed with all the floaty creeps. We've only been here twenty-four hours, and we've dined with the rajah, seen a topping wrestling bout, been at a temple riot, chevied a tiger out of our front yard, entertained a baboo flooey on Hindu gods, had a drive for a tiger – "

"Shot a Banjara dog," Swinton interrupted, because he wanted to go to bed.

"Rather! And made a devilish good shot. Then we were spoofed by Stripes, and found a murdered man on the doorstep.

A tallish order, I call all that. Going some – what!"

Swinton yawned sleepily, and when Lord Victor had gone to his room he took from his pocket the notebook and letter he had picked up. The letter was addressed to himself and contained two rupees. The notebook contained curious, ambiguous entries. To a casual reader they would have meant nothing, but to Swinton they were a key to a great deal. With a small screw driver he took the shoulder plate from the butt of a gun, and, wedging the book in the hollow with some paper, replaced the plate.

Undoubtedly the little black book had something to do with Perreira's death. He would have been closely watched since the watchman had listened on the verandah the night before, and it would be known he was coming to see the captain.

Chapter IX

Next morning Swinton again rode alone, Lord Victor declaring he would have enough exercise in the hunt that day.

As Shabaz came out of his loping canter and steadied to a leisurely gait up the palace hill, Rada, the groom, overtook his master.

"Put a hand on the stirrup," Swinton commanded, "for the hill is long and your legs are the legs of experience."

"As the sahib wishes; but I know little of her who rides the grey stallion," Rada replied, grasping the iron. Swinton chuckled at the naïve admission that the servant took it for granted he was to talk, being thus favoured.

"It is the way of my people," Rada resumed, when his breath came easier, "that when we make speech with a sahib we watch his eyes for a sign, and if it is one of displeasure we then tell lies to avert his anger; but with the captain sahib this may not be done."

"Why, Rada?"

"Sahib knows the karait – the snake with an eye that is all red?"

"Deadly as a cobra."

"Yes, sahib; and our people say that if one looks for a long time into that red eye that never shifts nor blinks nor gives a sign, he will go mad."

"Delightful! And mine are like that, Rada?"

"No, sahib; only so far as that they give no sign. So if I make

speech that is displeasing, the presence must command me to be still."

After a time Rada said: "The Missie Baba will not ride the grey stallion to-day?"

"Why not?"

"I know not, except that she has reported that the stallion is lame; but the groom says he is not lame."

Reaching the plateau, Swinton followed a road that swung around the Place of Roses. Over the brick wall floated the sweet perfume of myriad flowers, to give place presently to the tang of animal life as they came to the tiger garden. A jungle clamour vibrated the morning air; cockatoos and parrakeets called shrilly beyond the brick wall; a hornbill sent forth his raucous screech; pigeons of all colours, green, blue, grey, fluttered free in the air, waiting for the grain that would presently be scattered by the keepers. The unpleasant, sputtering laugh of a hyena, raucously grating, mingled with the full, rich-toned monologue of leopards that paced restlessly their cages, eager for their meal of blood-dripping meat.

Then the road crawled restfully into the cool of a noble sal forest. To the right it branched presently, and he caught the glint of white marble splitting the emerald green.

"The lady who rides the grey stallion lives yonder with the large sahib who is her uncle," Rada explained; and as they came to a path on the left a little beyond, he continued: "This leads to Jadoo Nala, wherein is a pool."

Captain Swinton turned Shabaz into the path, following it to the edge of the plateau and down its winding course to the pool.

Pointing to a machan in a pipal tree that overhung the pool, Rada said: "That is the rajah's, but no one makes a kill here – it is but for the pleasure of the eye. Knowing this, the dwellers of the jungle come to drink of the waters that are sweet with salt, and depart in peace; though it is said that at times a spirit, in the shape of an evil leopard, creeps from yonder cave and makes the kill of a deer or a sambar. In the cave yonder, Buddha, who was once of our faith, lamented on the sins of the world till his tears made the stream sweet with salt, and so it has remained. The cave is an abode of evil spirits; lights have been seen, and deep noises heard such as the hill gods make."

"Who comes to the pool, Rada – for there is the machan?"

Rada lifted his small, black, twitching eyes to the placid, opaque ones of Swinton. "The sahib knows what talk over a hookah is, each one trying to show great knowledge; but it is whispered at such times that the Missie Baba, who fears neither horse nor spirit, comes here at night."

"For what purpose – to meet some one?"

"Of that Rada knows nothing; that the evil gossips say it is the rajah is perhaps a lie."

Swinton turned Shabaz up the path, and at the top rode a little tour of inspection, following a road that circled above the winding stream. Overlooking the Jadoo cave and the path that wound down the hillside was a heavy wall built of stone that had

been taken from the buried city.

"Most delightful place to plant a machine gun, or even a 'three-inch,'" the captain muttered.

A reverberating tiger roar shook the earth as Swinton rounded the Place of Roses on his way back, and past its wall he came suddenly upon Lord Victor in active controversy with a lop-eared native horse he was more or less astride of. Evidently the sudden tiger call had frightened the horse, for he was whirling, with his long ewe neck stretched high in air, his lop ears almost brushing the clinging rider's face. Lord Victor had lost his stirrups; he was practically over the pommel of the saddle, sitting the razor-bladed wither. A country bred's neck is like a piece of rubber hose, and Anglo-Indians have learned to sit tight and let him have his head; but Lord Victor climbed up the reins, pulling the brute's head into his lap, and when to save himself he threw an arm around the lean neck, down went the head and he was sent flying, to sprawl on his back, where he lay eyeing the smiling captain.

Having unseated his rider, the country bred, forgetting all about the tiger, stood looking with complacent vacuity at the groom, who now held him by the rein.

"Thought you weren't riding this morning," Swinton remarked, as they went down the hill.

"Changed my mind. You didn't happen to see a young lady on a grey stallion this morning, did you, old chap?"

"I did not. And the earl expects you to ride away from spins, not after them, out here."

"The governor is optimistic. This is only curiosity – to see the girl Ananda is going to make his queen."

"Where did you hear that rot?"

"The usual source – my bearer."

"Bad form. It's all idle gossip, too; she's the niece of old Boelke."

"Oh, now I know why you ride up on the hill every morning. Did *your* bearer tell you? Earl Craig expects *you* to keep away from skirts while – By Jove! What's the bally shindy – are they planting another brass god in the temple?"

Lord Victor's sudden change in discourse had been caused by sounds of strife that came from a Hindu village that lay between Maha Bodhi Hill and Darpore City.

"The men of the temple and others who are followers of Mahadeo live yonder in Chota Darpore," Rada said.

As eager as a boy at the clang of a fire bell, Lord Victor, his eyes alight with sporting fervour, cried: "Come on, captain; every bally hour in this land of the poppy has its spiffing thrill."

Arrived on the scene, a unique battle lay before their eyes. The centre of the conflict was a silk-skinned, terrified little cow tied to a stake. A fanatical Mussulman priest, ordained to the bloodletting, waited with a sharp knife behind a battling line of Allah men for a chance to slit the cow's throat. With the followers of Mohammed were ranged the adherents of Buddha in a battle line that checked the Hindus, who, with fierce cries of "*Maro, maro!*" fought to rescue the cow and stop this offence against

their gods – the slaying of a sacred animal.

Heads cracked beneath the fall of staves, and red blood spurted from a knife thrust or the cut of a tulwar. Swinton smiled grimly as he saw here and there a man in a green-and-gold jacket bring his baton down on the neck of a Mussulman – always a Mussulman, for these men of the green-and-gold jackets were the Hindu police of the maharajah.

Encouraged by their gaunt leader, the Hindus charged fiercely, and, seizing the cow, bore it toward their village, fighting a rear-guard action as the Mussulmans, with cries of "Allah! Allah!" charged over the bodies of men who lay in the silent indifference of death, or writhed in pain. There was a desperate mêlée, a maelstrom of fanatical fiends, out of which the Mussulmans emerged with the sacrificial victim to fight their way backward to the slaughter mound.

The tinkle of a bell, the "phrut-phrut" of an elephant, caused Swinton to turn toward the road. It was Finnerty on Burra Moti.

The mahout, at a command from the major, drove Moti into the fray, where she, with gentle, admonishing touches from the mahout's feet against her ears, picked up one combatant after another, tossing them without serious injury to one side. But the fanatics, religion-crazed, closed in again in Moti's wake and smote as before. One Mussulman, whose red-dyed beard bespoke one who had been to Mecca, threw a heavy Pathan knife at Finnerty, just missing his mark.

Suddenly a shrill voice rose in a screaming command; there

was terror in the voice that came from the lips of a gigantic Tibetan priest, who stood with extended arm pointing to the tinkling bell on Moti's neck. As though strong wind had swept a field of grain, the Buddhists ceased the combat and stood with bowed heads. Even the Mussulmans, realising from the priest's attitude that it was something of holy import, rested from warfare.

"It is the sacred elephant of the Zyaat of Buddha Gautama!" the priest said, when the tumult had stilled.

Then spoke Finnerty, seizing upon this miraculous chance: "Cease from strife! You who are of Chota Darpore, go back to your village; you who are followers of the Prophet, the grace of Allah be upon you, go your way, for even some of you are servants of mine at the keddah. As to the disciples of Buddha, the bell on the sacred elephant recalls them to peace. I will take away from strife the cow, so that there be no killing."

He called to one of his Mussulmans, saying: "Come you, Amir Khan, and take the cow to the keddah."

The scarlet-whiskered Pathan who had thrown the knife stepped forward, and in his rough voice said: "Sahib, these infidels, these black men, have desecrated the shrine of Sheik Farid by tying there a pig, therefore it is injustice if we be not allowed to crack a few heads and spill the blood of a cow on the doorstep of their village."

"You threw the knife, Hadjii; you're a poor marksman," Finnerty answered.

"Yes, sahib, it was an unlucky throw; but a man fell against my elbow at that point, or the sahib would have received my gift. Perhaps the next time I will have better luck."

With a smile at the Pathan's grim humour, Finnerty said: "The spirit of a saint like Sheik Farid is not disturbed by the acts of infidels. I will speak to the rajah and have the village fined a matter of many rupees to be paid to your people, Hadjii."

From the Buddhists, who stood in a semicircle eyeing Burra Moti with reverence, a priest came forward, saying: "We have fought with the idolators because the shrine rests on the 'Rock of Buddha,' and so is sacred to us, too. The sahib has seen in the flat rock the footprint of Prince Sakya Sinha where he stood and became Buddha?"

"But Buddha commanded peace, not strife," Finnerty reminded the priest.

At that instant Burra Moti, undoubtedly bored by inaction, reached back with her trunk and tinkled the bell. It was like a voice crying out of the temple. The Buddhists in silence went away; Amir Khan, at a command, departed with the cow of discord.

Burra Moti was turned, and, with Lord Victor and Swinton riding at his side, Finnerty swept regally down the road.

"Your elephant seems deuced happy, major; she's got a tooty little gurgle that suggests it. Where did you find your sapphire bell clapper?" Lord Victor queried.

"Oh, this isn't – " Finnerty caught the import of Swinton's

gasping cough in time to switch, adding: "This is a clapper the old goldsmith fixed up for me, and it's doing beautifully. Moti is like a woman that has found a necklace she had lost." This latter for Captain Swinton's edification.

"Why doesn't Prince Ananda sit on these bally fire-eating worshippers – why do you have to keep them in hand, major?" Lord Victor wanted to know.

Finnerty pondered for a minute. He could have told the captain in a very few words his idea of Ananda's reasons for keeping out of the matter, but with Lord Victor he would have to answer cautiously.

"The rajah's police *wallahs* were there," he answered; "but they're never any good. As for my part in it, the Maha Bodhi Temple is really under government supervision, being practically a national Buddhist institution. The government never interferes with either Hindus or the Buddhists there unless it might be in just such a case as this, to stop a riot. To tell you the truth, I've rather exceeded my authority, acting without an invitation from the maharajah or an order from the government; however, as it was a drawn battle, nobody will appeal to the powers. The keddah is something in the same way," Finnerty added, as they jogged along; "it's in Darpore territory, but the government has an arrangement with the maharajah, as this is an ideal spot as a centre for our elephant catching all through the Siwalik Hills."

At the fork in the roads the major called back: "After you've had breakfast, get your hunting kit all ready, captain. I'll meet

you with the elephants at the same place as yesterday, at one o'clock. We mustn't keep the old Banjara waiting – we're to be on the ground at two – his buffalo might stir up Stripes before we arrive."

Chapter X

There was a scowl on his face as Lord Victor, looking so pink and white after his bath, sat down to breakfast, growling: "There's a bally London fog of that attar fume in my room; somebody's been pawing my letter case, kit bag – everything. It isn't my bearer, for he smells chiefly of dried fish and opium."

"The attar would suggest a woman – a jealous woman looking for love letters; but you haven't been here long enough, Gilfain," the captain remarked.

A servant entered with a broiled fish, and Swinton switched Lord Victor to a trivial discussion of food. When the servant reappeared later with curry, the captain said: "Leave it on the table, Abdul, and sit without." Then, rising, he added: "I'll be back in a minute."

"My stuff has been censored, too," he said, on his return.

"What's the devilish idea – loot?"

"No; nothing missing."

"Who's doing it – servants?"

"This is India, youth; here we don't bother chasing 'who;' we lock up everything, or destroy it."

"I'm going to dash the bearer with an exam," Lord Victor said decidedly.

"You'd get nothing but lies; you'd draw blank."

The captain lapsed into a moody silence, completing a

diagnosis of this disturbing matter mentally. The attar suggested that somebody on intimate terms with Prince Ananda had investigated. Doctor Boelke would do it; he could read papers written in English and assimilate their contents. If Swinton were under suspicion, Prince Ananda would look for proofs as to whether he was a secret-service man or just the companion of Lord Victor.

Later, when, with Finnerty, they arrived at the hunt-ground, the Banjara, who was waiting, said: "My brothers have taken the buffalo to the west of the big growth of tall grass wherein is the slayer of my cow, because from that side blows the wind and it will carry the scent of the buffalo, and the tiger will move forward, not catching in his nostrils word of the guns which the sahib knows well how to place. When the sahib is ready, I will give the call of a buffalo, and my brothers will make the drive. Where will be the place of the young sahib, that I may remain near in the way of advice lest he shoot one of my people, or even a buffalo?"

"Where will the tiger break to, Lumbani?" Finnerty asked.

The Banjara stretched his long arm toward the north. "At that side of the cane fields lies a nala that carries a path up into the sal forest, and the tiger knows it well. If he is not annoyed with hurry, he will come that way out of the cane; and if the young sahib's elephant is stationed in the nala, the tiger will come so close that even he can make the kill."

"That's the idea," Finnerty declared. "Swinton, you and Lord

Victor take your elephant to the nala – the Banjara will show you the very spot to stand; I'll post the prince on our left when he arrives; I'll keep the centre, and if the tiger is coming my way I can turn him off with old Moti – I'll shoo him over to you. Here comes the prince now. Heavens, you'd think he was going to a marriage procession! Look at the gorgeous howdah! And he has got old Boelke and the girl, too."

The howdah was a regal affair, such as native princes affect on state occasions. The girl was almost hidden by the gilded sides of its canopied top; indeed, her features were completely masked by a veil draped from the rim of her helmet. The heavy figure of Doctor Boelke bulged from the front of the howdah.

"Where are we stationed, major?" Ananda called, the mahout checking their elephant some distance away.

"To the left, beyond the pipal tree."

Swinton chuckled, observing Gilfain stretching his long neck as the prince's elephant plodded on; evidently there was to be no introduction.

"We'd better get placed at once," Finnerty declared; "the buffalo may get out of hand – anything may happen. The elephants that will act as stops are already in place on the two sides; I sent them on ahead. The natives on their backs will keep tapping on gongs to prevent the tiger from breaking through the sides; if he does break through, they'll blow shrill blasts on their conch shells. Away you go, Swinton!"

And at an order from the mahout, their elephant trudged over

to the point of honour, accompanied by the Banjara. In a few minutes his voice rose in the plaintive squeak of a buffalo, and in answer down the wind that rustled the feathered tops of the cane came a mild clamour of buffaloes, being driven, and men's voices crying:

"Dut, dut! Gar! Aoi-aoi!"

The buffalo were in a huge fan, advancing in a crescent troupe slowly, so that the tiger, not suddenly overrun, would keep slipping along in front.

Finnerty sat with his .450 Express across his knee, his eyes fixed on Gilfain, whose head he could just see above the bank of the nala, which was shallow where it struck the plain.

The turmoil of buffalo noises and their drivers' cries, drawing near, had increased in the cane. To the left, on one of the stop elephants, a native beat vigorously on his brass gong, followed by voices crying from a stop elephant: "The tiger passes!" Then a conch shell sent out its warning screech.

"Gad! He's broken through!" Finnerty growled.

Prince Ananda, thinking the tiger was escaping, had the elephant driven forward to give Boelke a shot at the fleeing beast; but just as they reached the grass there was a coughing roar, a flashing turmoil of brown and gold in the sun, and the elephant, terrified by the ferocious onslaught, whirled just as Boelke's rifle barked. Straight back for the fringe of trees where Finnerty waited the elephant raced, the tiger clinging to his rump and striving to reach the howdah.

Burra Moti knew the elephant was running away, and, at a command, shuffled forward with the intent of peeling the tiger from his perch with her trunk. But the fleeing animal, taking Moti for a new enemy, swerved to the right under the pipal, a long arm of which swept away the howdah, leaving Herr Boelke sprawled on the limb like a huge gorilla and yelling: "*Ach, Gott! Hel-lp!*"

The tiger was carried away in the wreck, and now, thirty feet away, was crouched, his tail lashing from side to side.

The girl had struggled to her feet and stood dazed, clinging to the wrecked howdah. The tiger was in a nasty mood; he would charge the first move the girl made, Finnerty knew, and nothing but a miracle shot through the heart or brain could stop him in time to save her. Ordering the mahout to pick the girl up, he dropped to the ground. Holding his gun from the hip, both barrels cocked, he slipped past the girl to stand between her and the snarling brute, saying: "Keep cool! Keep your face to the tiger and step back; the elephant will pick you up."

His blue, fearless, Irish eye lay along the gun barrels, looking into the yellow eyes of the tiger as he spoke to the girl. Well he knew how straight his shot must be, or that flat, sloping forehead, with its thick plate of bone, would glance the bullet like armour plate.

A little cry of pain, the thud of a falling body, told him that the girl had gone down at the first step. For a fraction of a second his eye had wavered from the gun-sight, and the tiger, with a hoarse

growl, rose in his catapult charge. Both barrels of Finnerty's rifle blazed as he was swept backward by a push from Moti's trunk, and the tiger landed upon two gleaming ivory swords that, with a twist of the mighty head, threw him twenty feet into the scrub.

With a roar of disgruntled anger he bounded away toward cover in the cane, pursued by Gilfain, whose mahout had driven the elephant across at the sound of the tiger's charge.

Finnerty, telling the mahout to make Moti kneel, turned to the girl, who sat with a hand clasping an ankle, her face white with pain; and as he lifted her like a child, like a child she whispered with breaking passion: "You, you! God – why should it be you again?"

Then Finnerty commanded the mahout to retrieve Herr Boelke from his perch, pick up the prince, who had scuttled off some distance when he fell, and take them home.

When the prince had been lifted to the howdah on a curl of Moti's trunk, he waved his hand to the major, calling: "Devilish plucky, old chap; thanks for the elephant."

The elephant bearing Lord Victor and the captain returned, and the major tossed up a gold cigarette case he had found beside the broken howdah, saying: "You can give that to Prince Ananda; fancy he dropped it."

It looked familiar to Lord Victor. "Yes," he said, "I'm sure it's his. I know I've seen it at Oxford."

Plodding homeward in the solemn dejection of an unsuccessful hunt, even the ears of their elephant flapping

disconsolately like sails of a windless boat, Finnerty suggested: "If you chaps would like it, we can swing around to your bungalow across the plain."

"Topping!" Lord Victor cried. "I'm so despondent I want a peg."

At the bungalow Finnerty alighted for a whisky and soda; and Gilfain, after reading a note his servant had handed him, advised:

"The prince wants me at the palace for dinner, and a confab over old Oxford days; the note came after we had gone to the hunt. Devilish fuzzy order, I call it – what! I can't leave you to dine alone, old boy."

"The captain can come with me – the very thing!" Major Finnerty declared eagerly.

The arrangement suited Swinton perfectly; it would give him an unplanned chance to talk with the major. And Gilfain would, of course, have to honour the prince's invitation.

It was a somewhat tame dinner for two; though Ananda plied his lordship with wine of an alluring vintage, for he had a "hare to catch," as the native proverb has it. He was most anxious to discover as much as possible about Captain Swinton's mission. By a curious chance he had learned who Lord Victor's companion was – that he was Captain Herbert, a secret-service man.

But Lord Victor was automatically unresponsive to the several subtle leads of his host for the simple reason that he didn't even know that Captain Swinton was in reality Captain Herbert; and

as to the mission – any mission – why, it was to shoot game, to keep out of England for a season. Prince Ananda was puzzled. Either Lord Victor was cleverer than he had been at Oxford, or he knew absolutely nothing. Indeed, the subject of Captain Swinton bored Gilfain; he saw enough of his companion in the day. He was wishing Ananda would say something about the mysterious lady.

It was when the cigarettes were brought that he remembered the gold case. Drawing it from his pocket, he said: "Oh, devilish stupid! I forgot – brought your cigarette case."

But Ananda disclaimed the ownership. "That's not mine," he said.

"Rather! Finnerty picked it up at the broken howdah. It's the same one you had at Oxford, I think; I remember seeing it, anyway."

Prince Ananda took the gold case and examined it thoughtfully; then said: "By Jove! I didn't know I'd lost it; thought it was in my shooting togs. Thanks, old chap."

Of course, as it had been found at the howdah, it must belong to the girl – the Herr Boelke smoked cheroots – though the prince did not remember having seen it with her. But he said nothing as to its true ownership as he slipped it into his pocket.

Lord Victor, somewhat puzzled by Ananda's denial of ownership and then the admittance of it, concluded that the prince was still upset by the cropper he had come off the elephant.

But all down the hill, on his return, this curious incident kept recurring to him. He wasn't a man to follow problems to a conclusion, however, and it simply hung in his mind as a fogging event. Just as he was falling asleep, wondering why the captain had not returned, it suddenly dawned upon him with awakening force that perhaps the gold case belonged to the girl. Of course it did, he decided. The prince had treated the case as a stranger; his face had shown that he did not recognise it. And yet Gilfain had seen it in England, as he thought, in the prince's possession. He fell asleep, unequal to the task of wallowing through such a morass of mystery.

Chapter XI

After Finnerty and Swinton left Gilfain in the evening, the major said: "If you don't mind, we'll stick to this elephant and ride on to the keddah, where I'll take the bell off Moti; I won't take a chance of having the sapphire stolen by leaving it there all night. I am worrying now over letting Prince Ananda have Moti – I forgot all about the stone, really."

"Worked beautifully to-day, didn't it?" Swinton commented.

"Yes. I fancy it saved the girl's life, at least; for if I'd not had Moti I'd have lost out on the mix-up with Stripes. I'll get a metal clapper to-morrow, but I doubt its answering; it will clang, and the sapphire has a clinking note like ice in a glass. And, while an elephant hasn't very good eyesight, he's got an abnormally acute sense of hearing. Moti would twig the slightest variation in the tone of that bell that she's probably worn for a hundred years or more – maybe a thousand, for all I know. There's a belief among the natives that a large elephant has been wandering around northern India for a thousand years; it is called the '*Khaki Hethi*' – brown elephant."

Swinton looked curiously at the major. "Do you believe that?"

"Each year in this wonderland I believe more; that is, I accept more without looking for proofs. It is the easiest way. Yes," he added, in a reflective way, "I'll have trouble with Moti, I'm afraid; elephants are the most suspicious creatures on earth, and she is

particularly distrustful."

"Don't bother about the sapphire," Swinton objected.

"Oh, yes, I will. I've got to take off the bell, anyway, to find some substitute. If I don't, somebody'll poison Moti if they can't get the sapphire any other way."

At the keddah the two dismounted and walked over to where Moti was under her tamarind tree. Swinton became aware of the extraordinary affection the big creature had for Finnerty. She fondled his cheek with the fingers of her trunk, and put it over his shoulder, giving utterance to little guttural chuckles of satisfaction, as though she were saying: "We fooled the tiger, didn't we?"

Finnerty called to a native to bring him some *ghie* cakes – little white cookies of rice flour and honey that had been cooked in boiling *ghie*, butter made from buffalo's milk – and when they were brought he gave the delighted elephant one. She smacked her lips and winked at Finnerty – at least to Swinton her actions were thus.

In obedience to the mahout she knelt down; but as Finnerty unlaced the leather band that held the bell she cocked her ears apprehensively and waved her big head back and forth in nervous rhythm. Patting her forehead, Finnerty gave Moti the bell, and she clanged it in expostulation. Then he took it away, giving her a *ghie* cake. Several times he repeated this, retaining the bell longer each time, and always talking to her in his soft, rich voice.

Finally, telling the mahout to call him if Moti gave trouble,

he said: "We can walk to the bungalow from here; it isn't far, captain."

After dinner, as they sat on the verandah, Finnerty's bearer appeared, and, prefaced by a prayerful salaam, said: "Huzoor, my mother is sick, and your slave asks that he may stay with her to-night. The sahib's bed is all prepared, and in the morning I will bring the tea and toast."

"All right," the major said laconically; and as the bearer went on his mission of mercy he added: "Glad he's gone. I've a queer feeling of distrust of that chap, though he's a good boy. He never took his eye off that bell till it was locked up in my box. The mahout told me at the keddah that Rajah Ananda was particularly pleased with Moti; had a look at the bell and petted her when they got to the palace." Finnerty laughed, but Swinton cursed softly.

"That means," he said, "that we've got to look out."

"Yes; can't use the sapphire on Moti again."

Finnerty rose, stretched his bulk, travelled to both ends of the verandah, and looked about.

Swinton was struck by the extraordinary quiet of the big man's movements. He walked on the balls of his feet – the athlete's tread – with the graceful strength of a tiger. Coming back, he turned with catlike quickness and slipped into the bungalow, returning presently, drawing his chair close to Swinton as he sat down.

"You remember my tussle with the Punjabi wrestler?"

Swinton laughed. "Rather!"

"It wasn't a Punjabi – a European."

The captain gasped his astonishment.

"One of Boelke's imported Huns." Finnerty gave a dry chuckle. "Ananda isn't the only man that can get information. I knew there was a Prussian wrestler here, and that he was keeping fit for a bout with somebody; I had a suspicion that somebody was myself. You see" – and the major crossed his long legs – "in spite of all our talk about moral force in governing, physical superiority is what always appeals to the governed – Ananda knows that deuced well. Now, hereabouts I have quite an influence over the natives, because, while I give them a little more than justice in any dispute, I can put their best man on his back."

"And Ananda, not being able to have you removed, wanted to shatter your prestige?"

"He thought that if I were humiliated in being beaten by a supposed native I'd ask to be transferred."

"Then it was all a plot, the other bout furnishing Boelke a chance to taunt you?"

"Yes, and clever. That final scene in the 'love song' doesn't belong there at all – I mean where the lover is resuscitated to challenge the gods to combat; that emanated in Ananda's brain; and when I saw the second wrestler come out painted black to represent Bhairava, I was convinced there was devilry afloat and that it was the Hun."

Swinton laughed. "He got a surprise, major, though he was a

dirty fighter. I saw the toe hold, but didn't see what happened to him."

"I gave him a paralysing something I had learned from a Jap in Calcutta. If you stand up, I'll show you."

Finnerty clutched the captain's hip, and, with the tip of a finger, gave a quick pressure on a nerve in the "crest of the ilium" bone. The effect was extraordinary; a dulling numbness shot with galvanic force to the base of Swinton's skull – needles penetrated his stomach.

"Marvellous!" the captain gasped, as he almost collapsed back into his chair.

The major smiled. "That was a new one on my Hun friend, for I cracked him there with the knuckles – almost brought the bone away."

"How many Huns has Boelke got?" Swinton asked.

"I don't know – three or four, and they're all service men; one can tell the walk of a Prussian, soldier or officer. Nominally, they are archæological men. Our paternal government actually supplied the prince with Doctor Boelke, for he was in government service in Madras Presidency, exploring old ruins."

"The prince is subtle."

"He is. All this temple row is his. This Dharama who wants to put the brass Buddha in is really a half-caste – a tool of the prince's. Ananda's plan is so full of mystery, neither I nor any one else can get head or tail of it. He doesn't appear in these rows, therefore the Buddhists think he is not a bigoted Hindu. So do

the Mussulmans; and no doubt he will tell these two sects that I, as the British raj representative, fought against them. I think he's trying to get these two fighting peoples, the Mussulmans and the Nepalese, with him against the British if he comes out as a liberator. He's planning a propaganda so big that these three sects will bury their differences under a leader who does not stand for Brahmanism alone. I believe he's almost insane on this idea that he can unite the natives, Mussulmans, Hindus, and Buddhists, against the British raj. He bids for the Mussulman support by removing himself from that nest of Brahmanism, the maharajah's palace in the old fort, and secretly letting it be understood the Brahman's sway, with their tithe of a sixth of Darpore revenue, will cease when he sits on the *guddi*. There is an Asoka pillar in the Place of Roses that doesn't belong there; he stole it from a temple, I fancy. On its polished sides is a line of weathering showing that it was buried deeper than it is now for centuries. He put it there to show the Buddhists that his palace is in a sacred place – the true spot where Buddha received knowledge. He knows that his own people will stick to his rule – they can't do anything else – and he hopes to win the Buddhists by a crazy pose that he is the new Buddha – a war Buddha, ordained to the task of giving them liberty."

"With German help?"

"Yes, if the rumours of war between Germany and Britain come true and all Europe flames into a blaze, you'll see Ananda strike."

"Gad! If we could only nip him – find him with the guns!"

"That's what he's afraid of; that's why he wants to get rid of me."

"I have a feeling that he wishes I had not come," Swinton said. "I fancy he suspects me. It's all mystery and suspicion. He'll hear about the Buddhists' veneration for Burra Moti and you'll have her stolen next."

"Not without the sapphire in the bell – I won't put it in again. And I warn you, captain, that you'll stand a good chance of getting a Thug's towel about your neck, for they'll know you have one of the sapphires."

"Yes; the servants have it on their tongues now – they've been spying on us, I know."

"That reminds me!" Finnerty rose, went to his room, opened his steel box, turned up the low-burning lamp, and unlaced the sapphire from the bell. Raising his head, he caught a glint of a shadowy something on the window; it was a shift of light, as though a face had been suddenly withdrawn.

"Damn it!" the major growled, locking the box.

"Either somebody is peering over my shoulder all the time or this mystery is getting on to my nerves."

He went along to the verandah, and, putting the sapphire into Swinton's palm, hiding its transference with his own hand, said: "Slip that quietly into your pocket, and when you get home hide it."

"I don't value it much," Swinton answered.

With an uncertain laugh, Finnerty declared: "I'd throw it in the sea. Like the baboo, I think it's an evil god. I mean, it will be if Ananda gets the three sapphires together; he'll play up their miracle power; they'll be worth fifty thousand sepoy to him."

They smoked in silence till Swinton broke it: "I found a little notebook the murderer of Perreira dropped that evidently belonged to a British officer, though leaves had been torn out here and there for the purpose of destroying his identity. The man himself didn't do this, for there were entries in a different hand at the pages these leaves had been torn from – sort of memos, bearing on the destroyed matter."

"If the identity were destroyed, captain, how do you know an officer owned it?"

"For one thing, he had used an army code, though changed so that I could only make out bits of it; and in two or three places the other has written the word 'captain.' One entry in code that I've partly worked out is significant: 'Darpore, March.' And that entry, I gather from other words surrounding it, was written in England. The second handwriting wasn't Perreira's; I have his on that envelope he addressed to me. The latter entries are in a woman's hand."

Strangely there was no comment from Finnerty. He had pulled the cheroot box toward him and was lighting a fresh smoke.

"What do you really know about the Boelke girl, major?" the captain asked pointedly, his blue-coloured wax disks of eyes fixed in their placid, opaque way on Finnerty, who, throwing

away the match he had held interminably to his cheroot, turned to answer: "She popped into Darpore one day, and I don't think even Doctor Boelke, who is supposed to be her uncle, expected her. You know India, captain – nothing that pertains to the sahibs can be kept quiet – and I hadn't heard a word of her coming. Boelke gave out that she had been living in Calcutta while he was up here, but I don't believe that; I think she came straight from Europe. I probably would not have met the girl – Marie is her name – but for an accident. Up on an elephant path that leads to an elephant highway, a great, broad trail, we have elephant traps – pits ten feet deep, covered over with bamboos, leaves, and earth that completely hide their presence. One day I was riding along this trail, inspecting, when I heard, just beyond a sharp turn in the path, a devil of a row, and, driving my mount forward, was just in time to throw myself off, grab that grey stallion by the nostrils, and choke him to a standstill. He had put a hoof through a pit covering and gone to his knees, the sudden lurch throwing the girl over his head; and there she was, her foot caught in a stirrup, being dragged in a circle by the crazed beast, for she was gamely hanging onto the rein."

"She'd have been trampled to death only for you. And to-day you saved her life again."

The major gave a dry laugh. "I think she was in a temper over it, too."

"What's this station gossip about Ananda's intentions?"

"The girl doesn't seem like that; to me she's the greatest

mystery in all this fogged thing. She speaks just like an English girl."

"Perhaps she's one of Ananda's London flames, and the relationship with Boelke is only claimed in a chaperoning sense. He couldn't marry her, having a princess now."

"Rajahs arrange their domestic matters to suit themselves. Much can be done with a pinch of datura, or a little cobra venom collected in a piece of raw meat that has been put with a cobra in a pot that sits over a slow fire. But if Ananda tries that game – You saw his brother-in-law, Darna Singh?"

Swinton nodded. "A Rajput!"

"Yes. Well, Darna Singh would stick a knife in the prince, knowing that he would become regent till Ananda's little son came of age; that is, of course, after the maharajah had been settled, for in spite of all his magnificent appearance he's just a shell – the usual thing, brandy in champagne and all the rest of it."

The trembling whistle of a small owl coming from behind the bungalow caused Finnerty to turn his head and listen intently. He rose and slipped along the wall to the end rail, where he stood silently for two minutes. Then he dropped over the rail and came back to Swinton from the other end, having circled the bungalow.

"An owl, wasn't it?" the captain asked.

"No; it was the call of an owl badly done by a native. There's some game on."

As he ceased speaking, there came floating up the road from a mango thicket the dreary, monotonous "tonk, tonk, tonk, tonk!"

of the little, green-coated coppersmith bird. It sounded as if some one tapped on a hollow pipe.

"What about that? Is that a bird?" Swinton whispered.

"A two-legged bird." They both laughed softly. "I mean a native. If it had been a coppersmith bird, he wouldn't have stopped at four notes; he'd have kept it up. That fellow is tapping off on a piece of metal an answer to the owl."

"Here comes my tom-tom," Swinton said, as a groom, leading a horse in the shafts of a dogcart, appeared, coming up the road. Rising, he touched Finnerty on the arm and went into the bungalow, where, taking the sapphire from his pocket, he said: "I wish you'd put this in your box for to-night; I've got a curious, flabby streak of depression – as if I'd lose the thing."

"Have a peg – there's the Scotch on the table – while I put it away," and the major darted into his room.

"That's not my horse; I've been driving a chestnut," Swinton exclaimed, when they stood beside a cow-hocked, hog-maned bay whose eyes showed an evil spread of white.

"Yes, sahib; other pony going lame," the groom explained.

"One of those devilish, fiddle-headed Cabul ponies – less brains than a coolie," Finnerty growled. "You'll have to watch him going downhill, or he'll put you over the kud; I never saw one yet that wouldn't shy at a shadow." He stood watching the scuttling first rush of the horse, the groom madly scrambling to the back seat, till they had vanished around a corner.

The watchman, having heard his master's guest depart, now

came from the servants' quarters to place his charpoy beside the door for his nightly sleep. Throwing away his cheroot and taking a loaded malacca cane from a rack, Finnerty said: "Gutra, there are rogues about; sit you in my room while I make a search."

Reaching the mango thicket, he stood behind a tree from where his eye could command the moon-lighted compound that surrounded the bungalow. At that instant from down the road floated up the call of a voice; there was a crash, and the high-pitched scream of a horse in terror. Finnerty was off; rounding a turn, he came head on into a fleeing syce, who was knocked flat, to lie there, crying: "Oh, my lord, the sahib is eaten by a tiger!"

Finnerty grabbed the native and yanked him to his feet. "Stop the lies! Tell me what's happened! Where is the sahib?"

"Have mercy on me, a poor man, huzoor; the tiger sprang from the jungle and took the sahib in his mouth like a leg of a chicken and went back into the jungle. I tried to frighten the tiger away by beating him with my hands; then I am running to tell you, my lord."

But Finnerty was speeding on before the man had finished.

Where the road swept sharply around the edge of a cliff, Finnerty almost stepped on Swinton, lying quite still beside a white boulder on the road. With a groan, he knelt beside the captain, apprehension numbing his brain; but the latter's heart was beating with the even pulsation of a perfect motor. He tipped back an eyelid; the dull blue eyes were as if their owner slept. He ran his fingers along the scalp, and just behind an ear found a

soft, puffy lump, but no blood.

"Good old chap! You've just got a concussion – that's all," welled in relief from the Irishman.

Some chafing of the hands, a little pumping of the lungs by lifting the torso gently up and down, and, with preliminary, spasmodic jerks, Swinton sat up, rubbed his eyes, looked at Finnerty, and asked: "What time is it? I – I've been asleep – " Then, memory coming faster than his hesitating words, he rose to his feet, saying: "The pony and cart went over the kud."

"That Cabuli donkey thought the boulder a crouching wolf and shied, eh? The syce said a tiger had eaten you."

"He never saw the chita. Back around the turn I felt the dogcart tip up and knew the syce had jumped down, as I thought, to run ahead to see that the road was clear at this narrow turn. When I saw the boulder I looked around for him to take the pony's head, but he had vanished. As I walked the Cabuli up to the boulder, he suddenly went crazy with fright, and at that instant, with a snarling rasp, a chita shot from the bank just above our heads there, and, lighting on my pony's back, carried him over, the sudden whirl of the cart pitching me on my head."

"And you went out?"

"No, I didn't; not just then. I staggered to my feet – I remember that distinctly – and something hit me. That time I did go out."

"Good heavens – a plant! The syce, knowing what was going to happen, funked it and bolted – feared the leopard might make

a mistake in his man."

"Looks like it."

"Then, as you didn't go over the bank, somebody tapped you from behind, thinking you had the sapphire in your pocket. We'll go back to the bungalow and come out in the morning and have a look."

As they tramped along, Finnerty remarked: "You said a hunting chita. There are none of them in these jungles; it must have been a leopard."

"No; I could see quite distinctly in the moonlight his upstanding, feathered ears and his long, lank body. I had a year at Jhodpore, and went out after antelope many a time with a hunting chita chained on a cart till we got within striking distance."

"Gad! That's why the brute took the pony for it – force of habit. And they sent that fool Cabuli – they knew he'd go crazy and topple over the bank. The stone was placed in the road, too."

As they went up on the verandah, Finnerty turned sharply, and, putting his hand on Swinton's arm, said: "Gad, man! That's why Ananda asked Lord Victor to dinner and left you out of it; he knew you'd dine with me here. They either meant to put you out of action or got to know you owned the sapphire that was used on Moti to-day and hoped to get it off your body."

"Looks rather fishy, I must say. The prince would not take a chance on an inquiry over the death of an officer unless, as in this case, it could not be taken for anything but an accident."

"The chita was his; he's got a couple in his zoo – well-trained

hunting chitas the Nawab of Chackla gave him – and there are no wild ones about. It was a lucky touch of superstition that prompted you to have me put the sapphire back in my box; I saw a face at my window when I took it from the bell to give you. But we sold them out. How's your head?"

"It aches. Think I'd like to turn in, if you've got a charpoy for me."

Finnerty awakened from a sound sleep with a sense of alarm in his mind, drowsily associating this with the sequel of the frightened horse; then, coming wider awake, he realised that he was in bed and there was something unusual in the room. He was facing the wall, and a slight noise came over his shoulder from the table on which was his cash box. A mouse, a snake, even a lizard, of which there were plenty in the bungalow, would make as much noise. Turning his head and body with a caution bred of the solemn night hour, his bed creaked as the weight of his big frame changed. By the table there was the distinct click of something against tin, followed by the swish of a body moving swiftly toward the door. Finnerty sprang from the bed with a cry of "Thief! Thief!" meant to arouse the watchman. Just ahead of him, through the living room, a man fled, and out onto the verandah. Following, with a rush like a bull in the night gloom, Finnerty's foot caught in the watchman's charpoy, which had been pulled across the door, and he came down, the force of his catapult fall carrying him to the steps, where his outstretched hand was cut by broken glass. The thief having

placed the charpoy where it was, had taken it in his stride, vaulted the verandah rail, avoiding the steps, whipped around the corner of the bungalow, and disappeared.

Scrambling to his feet, Finnerty was just in time to throw his arms around Swinton and bring him to an expostulating standstill.

"Glass!" Finnerty panted. "This way!" He darted to the wall of the bungalow, wrenched down two hog spears that were crossed below a boar's head, and, handing one to Captain Swinton, sprang over the end rail of the verandah, followed by the latter. They were just in time to see the brown figure of an all but naked native flitting like a shadow in the moonlight through a narrow gateway in the compound wall. From the jungle beyond the other wall came the clamorous voice of a native, calling for help; but Finnerty swung toward the gate, saying: "That's a decoy call to save the thief. He's gone this way."

As the two men, racing, passed from the compound, they swung into a native jungle path that led off toward the hills. There was little sense in their pursuit; it was purely the fighting instinct – Finnerty's Irish was up. A hundred yards along the path, as they raced through a growth of bamboos, something happened that by the merest chance did not spill one of their lives. Finnerty overshot a noose that was pegged out on the path, but Swinton's foot went into it, tipping free a green bamboo, four inches thick, that swept the path waist-high, catching Finnerty before it had gained momentum, his retarding bulk saving the captain from a

broken spine. As it was, he, too, was swept off his feet.

Picking himself up, the major said: "If I had put my foot in that noose I'd been cut in two. It's the old hillman's tiger trap – only there's no spear fastened to the bamboo. We can go back now; the thief is pretty well on his way to Nepal."

A cry of terror came from up the path, followed by silence.

"Something has happened the thief," Finnerty said. "Come on, captain!"

Again they hurried along, but warily now. Where a wax-leafed wild mango blanked the moonlight from their path, Finnerty's foot caught in a soft something that, as it rolled from the thrust, gleamed white. He sprang to one side; it was a blooded body – either a big snake or a man. Thus does the mind of a man of the open work with quick certainty.

The wind shifted a long limb of the mango and a moon shaft fell upon the face of Baboo Lall Mohun Dass. Beside him, sprawled face down, the body of a native, naked but for a loin cloth. Cautiously Finnerty touched this with his spear. There was no movement; even the baboo lay as one dead. The major's spearhead clicked against something on the native's back, and, reaching down, he found the handle of a knife, its blade driven to the hilt.

Finnerty held the knife in the moonlight toward Swinton, saying: "It's the 'Happy Despatch,' a little knife the Nepal hillmen carry for the last thrust – generally for themselves when they're cornered."

"It has a jade handle," Swinton added. "It's an exact duplicate of the knife they found in Akka's back at the bottom of the ravine in Simla."

"This is the thief we've chased," Finnerty declared, as he turned the body over; "but the sapphire is not in his loin cloth."

Swinton was kneeling beside Baboo Dass. "This chap is not dead," he said; "he's had a blow on the head."

"Search him for the sapphire," Finnerty called from where he was examining a curious network of vines plaited through some overhanging bamboos. This formed a perfect cul-de-sac into which perhaps the thief had run and then been stabbed by some one in waiting.

"It isn't on the baboo," Swinton announced, "and he's coming to. I fancy the man that left the knife sticking in the first thief is thief number two; must be a kind of religious *quid pro quo*, this exchange of a jade-handled knife for the sapphire."

Baboo Dass now sat up; and, returning consciousness picturing the forms of Swinton and Finnerty, remembrance brought back the assault, and he yelled in terror, crying: "Spare me – spare my life! Take the sapphire!"

"Don't be frightened, baboo," Swinton soothed. "The man who struck you is gone."

Realising who his rescuers were, Baboo Dass gave way to tears of relief, and in this momentary abstraction framed an alibi. "Kind masters," he said presently, "I am coming by the path to your bungalow for purpose of beseeching favour, and am hearing

too much strife – loud cry of 'Thief!' also profane expostulation in Hindustani word of hell. Here two men is fight, and I am foolish fellow to take up arms for peace. Oh, my master, one villain is smote me and I swoon."

"You're a fine liar, baboo," Finnerty declared crisply.

"No, master, not – "

"Shut up! I mean, tell me why you sent this thief, who is dead, to steal the sapphire?"

"Not inciting to theft, sar; this thief is himself steal the sapphire."

"How do you know he stole a sapphire?" Swinton asked quietly.

Baboo Dass gasped. Perhaps his mind was still rather confused from the blow – he had been trapped so easily.

"Perhaps there was no other," Finnerty suggested seductively. "I believe you murdered this man, baboo; I fear you'll swing for it."

This was too much. "Oh, my master," he pleaded, "do not take action in the courts against me for felonious assault or otherwise. I, too, am victim of assault and battery when this poor mans is slain. I will tell, sars, why I have arrange to take back my sapphire in this manner."

"Your sapphire?" Finnerty questioned.

"Yes, sar – the sapphire that I am suffer the head shave for. Good authority is tell me it is in the bell on the elephant when Rajah Ananda is go to the palace."

"Phe-e-ew!" Finnerty whistled. "I see! Mister Rajah, eh? Did he tell you that I had the sapphire you lost?"

"Please, sar, I am poor man; let the good authority be incognito."

"Why didn't you come and ask for the sapphire?" Finnerty questioned.

"Master, if I come and say you have the sapphire has been looted from me with head shave, that is not polite – you are shove me with foot from verandah because of accusation."

"Listen, baboo!" the major said, not unkindly. "Prince Ananda has duped you. He made you believe that I had your sapphire, which is a lie, because it was another. Then he persuaded you to hire a thief to steal it – "

"Not persuading, sahib; he make threats. I will lose my place with Hamilton Company, also the Marwari woman who plotted to me the head shave is murdered, and I am fearful of knife."

"A fine mess of things, now, major," Swinton observed. "Looks to me as if that woman stole Baboo Dass' sapphire for the priests; then Ananda had her murdered, recovered the jewel, and put our friend, here, up to stealing this last one; that would give him the three."

"I think you're right, captain." Finnerty turned to the baboo. "You bribed this thief to steal the stone out of my box, some servant having told you it was there, and you waited on the trail here for him."

Finnerty had forgotten about the bamboo trap; now it came

to his memory with angering force. "You black hound!" he stormed. "You were a party to putting up that bamboo trap that might have killed us!"

But the baboo denied all knowledge of ways and means; the thief had represented himself as a man quite capable of arranging all details – all Baboo Dass was to do was hand over twenty rupees when the thief delivered the sapphire on the jungle path. At any rate, he was now very dead and could not dispute this story.

"Sahib, I am too much afraid; this evil jewel is bring too much trouble. I will go back to Calcutta. Please, sar, forgive because I am too polite to make demand for the sapphire."

Finnerty pondered for a minute. There was absolutely nothing further to do in the matter. No doubt a temple man had got Swinton's sapphire now and they probably would never see it again.

He turned to the native. "I think you had better go away, baboo; Darpore is not a healthy place for men who cross our gentle friend up on the hill."

"Thank you, kind gentlemans. Please, if I can saunter to the road with the sahibs because of jungle terrors."

Eager in pursuit, the men had run blithely over the ground in their bare feet; now they hobbled back, discussing the extraordinarily complete plans the thief had made beforehand. The broken glass on the step was an old dodge, but the utilisation of a tiger trap to kill a pursuer was a new one.

While they had been away, the servant had found Gutra, securely bound and gagged, lying in the compound, where he had been carried. He had been wakened, he declared, by the thrusting of a cloth into his mouth, but was unable to give an alarm.

As Finnerty gazed ruefully into his empty box, he said: "I knew the thief was after the sapphire; that's why I raced to get him. Too devilish bad, captain!"

"I don't understand why he took a chance of opening the box here; the usual way is to take it to the jungle and rifle it there," Swinton said.

"Oh, I was clever," Finnerty laughed. "See, I put four screw nails through the bottom of the box into this heavy table, knowing their ways, and somebody who knew all about that and had opportunity to fit a key did the job, or helped. The watchman hadn't anything to do with it. They're all thieves, but they won't steal from their own masters or village."

Finnerty had the broken glass that littered the steps brought in, saying, as he picked out a gold-draped bottle neck: "A man is known by the bottle he drinks from. The villagers don't drink champagne to any large extent, and there are several pieces of this caste. Here's half a bottle that once held Exshaw's Best Brandy, such as rajahs put in a glass of champagne to give it nip. Here's a piece of a soda-water bottle stamped 'Thompson, Calcutta,' and everybody in Darpore but Ananda drinks up-country stuff."

"Which means," Swinton summed up, "that the glass is from

Ananda's place – he outfitted the thief."

Finnerty replaced the glass in the basket, putting it under the table; then, as he faced about, he saw that Swinton, leaning back against the pillow, was sound asleep. He slipped into a warm dressing-gown, turned out the light, left the room noiselessly, and curled up in an armchair on the verandah, muttering: "It must be near morning; it would be a sin to disturb him."

Chapter XII

Finnerty had slept an hour when he was wakened by the raucous voice of a peacock greeting dawn with his unpleasant call from high up in the sal forest. A cold grey pallor was creeping into the eastern sky as the major, still feeling the holding lethargy of the disturbed night, closed his eyes for a little more of oblivion. But Life, clamorous, vociferous, peopling the hills, the trees, the plain, sent forth its myriad acclaim, as a warming flush swept with eager haste up the vaulted dome, flung from a molten ball that topped the forest line with amazing speed.

A flock of parrakeets swooped like swallows through the air with high-pitched cries; from the feathered foliage of a tamarind came the monotonous drool, "Ko-el – ko-el – ko-el – ke-e-e-e-el!" of the koel bird, harbinger of the "hot spell;" a crow, nesting in a banyan, rose from her eggs, and, with a frightened cry, fled through the air as a hawk cuckoo swooped with shrill whistle as if to strike. The cuckoo, dumping from the nest a couple of the crow's white eggs, settled down to deposit her own embryo chick. From the kennels came the joyous bark of Rampore hounds, and from a native village filtered up the yapping cries of pariah dogs.

Far up the road that wound past the bungalow sounded the squealing skirl of wooden axles in wooden wheels, and the cries of the bullock driver, "*Dut, dut, dut, Dowlet! Dut, dut – chelao Rajah!*" followed by the curious noise that the driver made with

his lips while he twisted the tails of his bullocks to urge them on.

Finnerty thought of the stone on the road, and, passing into the bungalow, wakened Swinton. "Sorry, old boy, but we'd better have a look at that stone – there are carts coming down the hill."

"Bless me! Almost dropped off to sleep, I'm afraid!" and the captain sat up.

When they arrived at the scene of Swinton's adventure, Finnerty, peering over the embankment, said: "The dogcart is hung up in a tree halfway down. I expect you'll find that chita at the bottom, kicked to death by the Cabuli."

Swinton, indicating an abrasion on the boulder that might have been left by the iron tire of a wheel, said: "My cart didn't strike this, and there are no other iron-wheel marks on the road; just part of this beastly plot – to be used as evidence that the stone put me over the bank."

"They even rolled the boulder down to leave an accidental trail. There's not a footprint of a native, though. Hello, by Jove!" Finnerty was examining two bamboos growing from the bank above the road. "See that?" and his finger lay on an encircling mark where a strap had worn a smooth little gutter in the bamboo shell two feet from the ground. Both bamboos, standing four feet apart, showed this line of friction. "Here's where they held the chita in leash, and, when you arrived, took off his hood and slipped the straps. We'll just roll that boulder off the road and go back to breakfast."

"Oh, Lord!" the major exclaimed, as, midway of their

breakfast, there came the angry trumpeting of an elephant. "That's Moti, and she wants her bell. She's an ugly devil when she starts; but, while I don't mind losing some sleep, I must eat."

"The devil of it is that all this circumstantial evidence we're gathering isn't worth a rap so far as the real issue is concerned," the captain said from the depths of a brown study.

"I understand," Finnerty answered. "It proves who is trying to get rid of us, but the government is not interested in our private affairs – it wants to check Ananda's state intrigues."

"And also we won't mention any of these things to our young friend whom I hear outside," Swinton added, as the voice of Lord Victor superseded the beat of hoofs on the road.

As he swung into the breakfast room, Gilfain explained cheerily: "Thought I'd ride around this way to see what had happened; my bearer heard in the bazaar Swinton had been eaten by a tiger – but you weren't, old top, were you?"

"My dogcart went wrong," Swinton answered, "so I stayed with the major."

"What made me think something might have happened was that the bally forest here is pretty well impregnated with leopards and things – one of Ananda's hunting chitas escaped last evening and he was worrying about it at dinner; says he's a treacherous brute, has turned sour on his work, and is as liable to spring on a man as on a pronghorn."

"Was the prince anxious about me in particular?" the captain asked innocently.

"Oh, no; he didn't say anything, at least."

Finnerty sprang to his feet as a big gong boomed a tattoo over at the keddah. "Trouble!" he ejaculated. "Elephant on the rampage – likely Moti."

The bungalow buzzed like a hive of disturbed bees. A bearer came with Finnerty's helmet and a leather belt in which hung a .45 Webley revolver; a saddled horse swung around the bungalow, led by a running syce.

The major turned to Swinton. "Like to go?"

"Rather!"

Finnerty sprang down the steps, caught the bridle rein, and said: "Bring Akbar for the sahib, quick!"

Soon a bay Arab was brought by his own syce. "Come on, Gilfain, and see the sport!" And Finnerty swung to the saddle. "It's not far, but the rule when the alarm gong sounds is that my horse is brought; one never knows how far he may go before he comes back." To the bearer he added: "Bring my 8-bore and plenty of ball cartridges to the keddah."

When they arrived at the elephant lines, the natives were in a fever of unrest. Mahadua had answered the gong summons and was waiting, his small, wizened face carrying myriad wrinkles of excited interest. Moti's mahout was squatted at the tamarind to which she had been chained, the broken chain in his lap wet from tears that were streaming down the old fellow's cheeks.

"Look you, sahib!" he cried. "The chain has been cut with a file."

"Where is Moti?" Finnerty queried.

"She is down in the cane," a native answered; "I have just come from there."

"She has gone up into the sal forest," another maintained. "I was coming down the hill and had to flee from the path, for she is *must*."

"Huzoor, the elephant has stripped the roof from my house," a third, a native from Picklapara village, declared. "All the village has been laid flat and a hundred people killed. Will the sircar pay me for the loss of my house, for surely it is a government elephant and we are poor people?"

Finnerty turned to the shikari. "Mahadua, which way has Moti gone?"

"These men are all liars, sahib – it is their manner of speech. Moti went near to Picklapara and the people all ran away; but she is now up on the hills."

The mahout stopped his droning lament long enough to say: "Sahib, Moti is not to be blamed, for she is drunk; she knows not where evil begins, because a man came in the night and gave her a ball of *bhang* wrapped up in sweets."

"We've got to capture the old girl before she kills some natives," Finnerty declared. "If you chaps don't mind a wait, I'll get things ready and you'll see better sport than killing something."

First the major had some "foot tacks" brought. They were sharp-pointed steel things with a broad base, looking like

enormous carpet tacks. Placed on the path, if Moti stepped on one she would probably come in to the keddah to have her foot dressed. Four Moormen, natives of the Ceylon hills, were selected. These men were entitled to be called *panakhans*, for each one had noosed by the leg a wild elephant that had been captured, and very lithe and brave they looked as they stepped out, a rawhide noose over the shoulder of each. A small army of assistants were also assembled, and Raj Bahadar, a huge bull elephant.

Finnerty sent the men and Raj Bahadar on ahead, saying that Moti might perhaps make up to the bull and not clear off to the deep jungle. Giving them a start of fifteen minutes, the three sahibs, Mahadua, and a man to carry the major's 8-bore elephant gun followed. They travelled for an hour up through graceful bamboos and on into the rolling hills, coming upon the tusker and the natives waiting.

Gothya, the mahout, salaamed, saying:

"We have heard something that moves with noise in the jungle, and, not wishing to frighten Moti, we have waited for the sahib."

"It was a bison," one of the men declared. "Twice have I seen his broad, black back."

"Sahib," the mahout suggested, "it may be that it was a tiger, for Raj Bahadar has taken the wind with his trunk many times, after his manner when there are tiger about."

"Fools, all of you!" Finnerty said angrily. "You are wasting

time."

"Sahib" – it was Mahadua's plaintive voice – "these men, who are fitted for smoking opium in the bazaar, will most surely waste the sahib's time. It is better that we go in front."

"I think you're right," Finnerty declared. "Go you in front, Mahadua, for you make little noise; the ears of an elephant are sharp, and we ride horses, but we will keep you in sight." He turned to the mahout. "At a distance bring along Bahadur and the men."

The shikari grinned with delight; he salaamed the major in gratitude. To lead a hunt! He was in the seventh heaven.

As noiseless as a brown shadow, he slipped through the jungle, and yet so free of pace that at times he had to wait lest the sahibs should lose his trail. Once they lost him for a little; when they came within sight he was standing with a hand up, and when they reached his side he said: "Sahib, sometimes a fool trips over the truth, and those two, who are assuredly fools in the jungle, have both spoken true words, for I have seen the hoofprints of a mighty bison and also the pugs of Pundit Bagh who has a foot like a rice pot. I will carry the 8-bore, and if the sahib will walk he may get good hunting; the matter of Moti can wait."

"You'd better dismount, Lord Victor, and take the shot," Finnerty advised. "A tiger is evidently stalking the bison, so perhaps will be a little off guard. The syces will bring along the ponies."

Swinton dismounted also, saying: "I'll prowl along with you,

major, if you don't object."

As Lord Victor slipped from his horse, Finnerty said: "If you don't mind, I'll give you a couple of pointers about still stalking, for if you're quiet you have a good chance of bagging either a tiger or a bull bison. I can't do anything to help you; you've got to depend on yourself and the gun."

"Thanks, old chap; just tell me what I should do."

"You will keep Mahadua in sight. If you hear anything in the jungle that would cause you to look around, don't turn your neck while you are moving, but stand perfectly still – that will prevent a noisy, false step. Don't try to step on a log in crossing it – you might slip; but sit on it and swing your legs over if you can't stride it. When Mahadua holds up a finger that he sees something, don't take a step without looking where you are going to place your foot, and don't step on a stick or a stone. If it is the tiger, don't shoot if he is coming toward you – not until he has just passed; then rake him from behind the shoulder, and he'll keep going – he won't turn to charge. If you wound him when he's coming on, it's a hundred to one he'll charge and maul you, even while he's dying. As to the bull, shoot him any old way that brings him down, for the bison's ferocity is good fiction."

Finnerty had given this lesson in almost a whisper. Now he thrust the 8-bore into Lord Victor's hand, saying: "This shoots true, flat-sighted, up to fifty yards; but don't try to pick off that tiger at over twenty. The gun is deuced heavy – it weighs fifteen pounds – so don't tire your arms carrying it at the ready. It fires

a charge of twelve drams of powder, so hold it tight to your shoulder or it'll break a bone. It throws a three-ounce, hollow-nosed bullet that'll mushroom in either a tiger or a bison, and he'll stop."

Mahadua took up the trail again, not following all the windings and zigzag angles of its erratic way, for they were now breasting a hill and he knew that the bull, finding the flies troublesome, would seek the top plateau so that the breeze would blow these pests away. The wind was favourable – on their faces – for the wise old bull travelled into it, knowing that it would carry to him a danger taint if the tiger waited in ambush.

"We'll carry on for a little longer," Finnerty said; "but if we find the bull is heading up into the sal forest we'll give it up and go after Moti; she won't be far away, I fancy."

They followed the bison's trail, that had now straightened out as he fled from the thing that had disturbed his rest, for fifteen minutes, and Mahadua was just dipping over the plateau's far edge when a turmoil of noises came floating up from the valley beyond – a turmoil of combat between large animals. Quickening their pace, Finnerty and Swinton saw, as they reached the slope, Mahadua wiring his way into a wall of bamboo that hung like a screen on a shelving bank.

"Come on!" Finnerty commanded. "There's such a fiendish shindy down there we won't be heard, and the wind is from that quarter."

Creeping through the bamboos, they saw Mahadua, one hand

in the air as a sign of caution, peering down into the hollow. Finnerty gasped with surging delight as his eyes fell upon the regal picture that lay against the jungle background. A mighty bull bison, his black back as broad as a table, stood at bay with lowered head, his red-streaked, flashing eyes watching a huge tiger that crouched, ready to spring, a dozen feet away.

"Pundit Bagh – see his spectacles, sahib!" the guide whispered.

The torn-up ground told the battle had waged for some time. With a warning finger to his lips, Finnerty sat quivering with the joy of having stumbled upon the life desire of every hunter of big game in India – the chance to witness a combat between a full-grown tiger and a bull bison. On one side ferocity, devilish cunning, strength, muscles like piano wire, and lightning speed; on the other, enormous power, cool courage, and dagger horns that if once well placed would disembowel the cat.

Every wary twist of the crouching tiger's head, every quiver of his rippling muscles, every false feint of the pads that dug restlessly at the sward, showed that he had no intention of being caught in a death grapple with the giant bull; he was like a wrestler waiting for a grip on the other's neck, his lips curled in a taunting sneer.

With a snort of defiance the bison suddenly charged; and Pundit Bagh, his yellow fangs bared in a savage growl, vaulted lightly to the top of a flat rock, taking a swipe with spread claws at the bull's eyes as he passed. The bull, anticipating this move,

had suddenly lowered his head, catching the blow on a strong, curved horn, and the Pundit sat on the rock holding the injured paw in the air, a comical look of surprise in his spectacled eyes. As the bison swung about, the tiger, slipping from the rock, faced him again, twenty feet away.

Spellbound by the atmosphere of this Homeric duel, the sahibs had crouched, motionless, scarcely breathing, held by intense interest. Now, suddenly recalling his hunting mission, Lord Victor drew the 8-bore forward; but Mahadua's little black eyes looked into Finnerty's in pathetic pleading, and the latter placed his big palm softly on the hand that held the gun. Lord Victor had been trained to understand the chivalry of sport, and he nodded. A smile hovered on his lips as he held up the spread fingers of two hands and then pointed toward the bison.

Finnerty understood, and, leaning forward, whispered: "You're on for ten rupees, and I back Stripes."

"Sahib!" So low the tone of Mahadua's voice that it barely reached their ears; and following the line of a pointed finger they saw on the rounded knob of a little hill across the valley a red jungle dog, his erected tail weaving back and forth in an unmistakable signal.

"He's flagging the pack," Finnerty whispered. "Now we'll see these devils at work."

Whimpering cries from here and there across the valley told that these dreaded brutes, drawn by the tiger's angry roars, were gathering to be in at a death.

The keen-eared bull had heard the yapping pack, and as his head turned for the fraction of a second Pundit Bagh stole three catlike steps forward; but as the horns came into defence he crouched, belly to earth, his stealthy feline nature teaching him that his only hope against his adversary's vast bulk was some trick made possible by waiting a charge.

Like Medusa's hair which changed into serpents, the screening jungle thrust forth its many sinuous tentacles. Lean, red, black-nosed heads appeared from thorny bush and spiked grass, and step by step gaunt bodies came out into the arena. Some sat on their haunches, dripping tongues lapping at yellow fangs as though their owners already drank blood; others, uttering whimpering notes of anticipation, prowled in a semicircle, their movements causing Pundit Bagh to hug closer the bank with its jutting rocks.

Both combatants in the presence of this new danger stayed for a little their battle; they knew that the one that went down first would have the pack against him.

Finnerty whispered: "The cunning devils will wait, and if Pundit Bagh wins out, but is used up – which he will be – the dogs will drive him away and eat his dinner. If he's killed, they will devour him when the bison departs."

"I wouldn't have missed this for a thousand guineas!" Lord Victor panted in a husky whisper.

Finnerty, patting the gun, said: "We'll probably have to settle it with this yet; so have it ready for a quick throw to your shoulder."

He picked up a stick from the ground and thrust an end into a clump of growing bamboos, adding: "There! That 8-bore is mighty heavy; rest it across this stick. We won't shoot the bison, no matter what happens; he's like a gentleman assailed by a footpad. It will be Stripes or the dogs; so take your time drawing a bead – I'll tell you when it's necessary."

As if during this little lull following the jungle pack's advent the bison had thought along the same lines as Major Finnerty, and had come to the conclusion that if he turned tail dogs and tiger would pull him down, lowered his head, and, with a defiant snort, charged. A stride, and Pundit Bagh, who had plotted as he crouched, shot into the air, a quivering mass of gold and bronze in the sunlight. But he had waited the fraction of a second too long; he missed the neck, landing on the high, grizzled wither. Like a flash his mighty arms were about the bull, and his huge jaws, wide-spread, snapped for a grip that, if secured, would break the vertebra – it would go like a pipestem in the closing of that vise of arms and jaw. But the little shift from wither to neck caused him to miss the spine; his fangs tore through flesh and he was crushed against a rock, his hold broken.

The dogs, eager in bloodthirst, dashed in, snapping at the tiger's rumps, and, as he whirled, sprang at his face. One blow of a paw, like the cut of a gold scimitar, and a dog landed ten feet away – pulp.

A sigh of relief escaped from Finnerty as the dogs slunk back and Pundit Bagh, seemingly none the worse, crouched again for

battle.

"That is their way," Mahadua whispered; "they seek to cut Bagh in his vitals behind, while in front others spit poison in his eyes to blind him; the white froth that spouts from their mouths when they fight is poison."

Blood was dripping from the bison's neck as he faced about, but the snap at his neck had not discouraged him; his actions showed that he would battle to the end. The taste of blood had broken the Pundit's debonair nonchalance. Before he had been like a cat playing with a mouse; he had purred and kinked his long tail in satirical jerks. Now he lashed his sides or beat the ground in anger. From his throat issued a snarling "W-o-u-g-h-n-ng!" Again he waited for his antagonist's charge, slipping to one side as the black mass came hurtling toward him to swipe at the eyes, cutting clean away an ear and leaving red-blooded slits from cheek to shoulder, his damaged paw once more suffering from contact with that hard skull.

The dogs had edged in as the two clashed, but dropped back to their waiting line as tiger and bison faced each other again, the latter shaking his massive head and pawing fretfully, as if angered at his enemy's slipping away when they came to close quarters. Something of this must have stirred his own strategy, for, as he thundered in a charge, he swept his head sidewise as the tiger swerved, catching Stripes a crashing blow, the sharp incurve of the horn all that saved him from being ripped wide open. Half stunned, he was pinned to earth as the bull swung

short to a fresh attack; and, seeing this, taking it for the end, the dogs, with yaps of fury, closed in, snapping with their cutting teeth at flesh, wherever found.

With a bellow of rage, the bull backed away three paces, and a dog that had gripped his neck was ground to death against the earth. Pundit Bagh thrust his body up through a dozen dogs that clung like red ants, and, whether in chivalry or blind anger, the bull, with lowered head, rushed on the yapping, snarling, lancing pack, at the first thrust his daggerlike horns piercing a dog. The outstretched black neck, the taut, extended spine almost brushing Pundit's nose, flashed into his tiger mind the killing grip. Forgotten were the dogs in the blind call of blood lust. The wide-spread jaws crunched astride the neck, and, with a wrench that he had learned from his mother when a cub, the bull was thrown, the dogs pouncing upon him with hunger in their hearts.

At the first treacherous snap of the tiger's jaws, Finnerty had acted. With the subservience of a medium, at the word "Now!" Lord Victor pressed the gunstock against his shoulder; his head drooped till his eye ranged the barrels; and, penetrating the booming thump of his heart, a calming voice was saying: "Take your time; aim behind the tiger's shoulder. Stead-d-y, man!" His finger pulled heavily on the trigger, the gun roared, and a sledgehammer blow on his shoulder all but sprawled him; then the gun was snatched from his hands. Half dazed, he saw Finnerty send another bullet into something. There was a "Click! Snap!" as two fresh shells were slipped into the barrels, and again the 8-bore

thundered twice.

Springing to his feet, Gilfain saw a great mass of gold and brown flat to earth, and the black rump of a bison bull galloping off into the jungle. Then his fingers were being crushed in the huge hand of Finnerty, who was saying: "My dear boy, a corking shot – straight through the heart; he never moved! I shot two or three dogs!"

"Demme!" was all the pumped-out Lord Victor could gasp, as he sank back to the knob of earth he had been sitting on.

"One never knows," Finnerty said, shoving a fresh cartridge into the 8-bore, "if a tiger is really dead till he's skinned. Come on; we'll look."

Mahadua, saying, "Have patience, sahib," threw a stone, hitting Pundit Bagh fair on the head. There was no movement. Then, striding in front, Finnerty prodded the fallen monarch with his gun muzzle. He was indeed dead.

"I got a couple of those vermin, anyway," and Finnerty pointed to two dogs the big 8-bore bullet had nearly blown to pieces.

Mahadua, on his knees, was muttering: "Salaam, Pundit Bagh!" and patting the huge head that held the fast-glazing yellow globes set in black-rimmed spectacles. There was a weird reflex of jungle reverence in his eyes as, rising, he said, addressing Finnerty: "Sahib, Pundit Bagh did not kill men nor women nor children; this was the way he fought." And then, when there were no eyes upon him, he surreptitiously plucked three long bristles

from the tiger's moustache, slipping them into his jacket pocket to be kept as a charm against jungle devils.

Lord Victor had come down the hill, dead to sensation; he had walked like one in a dream. The fierce press of contained excitement had numbed his brain; now he loosened to the erratic mood of a child; he laughed idiotically, while tears of excited joy rolled down his pink cheeks; he babbled incoherent, senseless words; he wanted to kiss Finnerty, Pundit Bagh, or something, or somebody; he would certainly give Mahadua a hundred rupees; he fell to unlacing and lacing his shoes in nervous dementia. What would the earl say? What would the fellows at the London clubs say?

Finnerty had a tape out, and, passing his notebook to Swinton, he, with Mahadua at one end of the tape, rapidly ruled off the following measurements:

	Feet	Inches
From point of nose to tip of tail	10	
Length of tail	2	10
Girth behind shoulders	4	4
Girth of head	3	4
Girth of forearm	1	10
Height at shoulder	3	6

"There!" And Finnerty put his tape in his pocket. "Pundit Bagh is a regal one. I feel sorry we had to shoot him in just that way; but the dogs spoiled a good fight. Fancy your getting a skin

like that to take back, Lord Victor – it's luck! And remember, gentlemen, we must spread this mandate that a bull bison with one ear goes free of the gun, for he was a right-couraged one."

"Rather!" Lord Victor ejaculated. "To-night we'll drink a toast in fizz to the one-eared bull – a thoroughbred gentleman!"

"We'll need the elephant up to pad this tiger," Finnerty said. Mahadua, who was sent to bring on Raj Bahadar, had not been gone two minutes when from their back trail came, upwind, the shrill trumpeting of two elephants, and mingling with this was the harsh honk of a conch shell.

"That's Moti, or wild elephants tackling Raj Bahadar," Finnerty declared. "I must get back. The tiger will be all right here for a little – those dogs won't come back – and I'll send Mahadua and the elephant after him."

PART THREE

Chapter XIII

It was a stirring scene that greeted the three sahibs on their arrival at the conflict. Like a family of monkeys the natives decorated the tree, while below was Burra Moti giving lusty battle to the tusker. Either out of chivalry or cowardice, Raj Bahadar was backing up, refusing to obey the prod of his mahout's goad, and charge.

As Moti came at the bull like a battering-ram he received her on his forehead, the impact sounding like the crash of two meeting freight cars, and she, vindictively cunning, with a quick twist of her head, gashed him in the neck with a long tusk.

"Come down out of there, you women of the sweeper caste!" Finnerty commanded. The natives dropped to the ground. One of them, uncoiling his rawhide rope, darted in behind Moti, noosed a lifted foot, and ran back with the trailing end.

Raj Bahadar, discouraged by the thrust in his neck, wheeled and fled, pursued by Moti, the native lassooer, clinging to the trailing noose, being whipped about like a wind-tossed leaf. With a shout Finnerty followed, the others joining in the chase.

A thick growth of timber checked Raj Bahadar, and, as Moti slackened her pace, the man with the rawhide darted around a

tree with the rope; Finnerty and the others grasped the end, the rawhide creaked and stretched, and as Moti plunged forward her hind leg was suddenly yanked into the air, bringing her down. Another man sprang in to noose a foreleg, but Moti was too quick for him; she was up to stand for a little sullen meditation.

The native flashed in and out, almost within reach of her trunk, trying to make her raise a forefoot that he might noose it and slip his rawhide about a tree, when Moti, tethered fore and aft, would be helpless.

"Be careful!" Finnerty called as the noose man slipped in and flicked Moti on the knee with no result but the curling up of her trunk, as if out of harm's way. Again he danced in, and as the long trunk shot out like a snake darting from a coil he sprang beneath the big head, giving a laugh of derision; but Moti struck sidewise with a forefoot, and with a sickening crunch the man dropped ten feet away.

Uttering a squeal of rage, the elephant whipped about and charged back, the rawhide noose breaking like a piece of twine. Finnerty was fair in her path, but with a grunt, as if to say, "Get out of the way, friend," she brushed by him, and would have gone straight off to the jungle had not a man, in a sudden folly of fright, darted from behind a tree only to stumble and fall before he had taken a dozen steps. Down on her knees went Moti, seeking to spear the fallen man with her tusks, but at the first thrust one went either side of his body, and, being long, the great, crushing head did not quite reach him. Grasping both pillars of this ivory

archway, the man wriggled out and escaped as Moti, pulling her tusks out of the soft earth, rose, cocked her ears, drove a whistle of astonishment through her trunk, and then scuttled off to the jungle.

"We won't follow her up," Finnerty declared; "the noosing has flustered the old girl and we'll not get near her again to-day; she'd keep going if she heard us and we'd lose her forever up in the hills."

Mahadua advised: "If the mahout will tickle Bahadar with his hook so that he speak now and then, perhaps Moti, being lonesome and remembering of cakes and home, will come back like an angry woman who has found peace."

Thinking this a good plan, Finnerty gave the mahout orders to entice Moti in if she came about. A dozen men were sent to bring the tiger, slung from a pole, to the bungalow; they would bring back food to the others.

Telling the natives he would join them in the hunt next day, Finnerty and his companions mounted their horses to ride back.

Coming to the road that wound through the cool sal forest, they saw Prince Ananda riding toward them.

"What luck?" he greeted when they met. "I heard that an elephant had taken to the jungle." He wheeled his Arab with them, adding: "You look done up. Come along to the palace and have a cooling drink."

Lord Victor ranged his horse alongside Ananda's Arab as they started, but as they drew near the palace grounds Darpore halted

his horse, and, pointing his hunting crop across the broad valley below in which lay the town, said: "Yonder was the road along which, so many centuries ago, Prince Sakya Singha's mother came when he was born here in the Lumbini Garden."

Swinton, in whose mind the prince was arraigned as a vicar of the devil – at least as a seditious prince which, to a British officer, was analogous – felt the curious subtlety of this speech; for, sitting his beautiful Arab, outlined against the giant sal trees, their depths holding the mysteries of centuries, he had an Oriental background that made his pose compelling.

Lord Victor moved a little to one side, as if his volatile spirits felt a dampening, the depression of a buried past; and Prince Ananda, turning his Arab, drew Swinton along to his side by saying: "Have you come in contact with the cleavage of religious fanaticism in India, captain?"

"My experience was only of the army; there the matter of Hindu or Mussulman is now better understood and better arranged," Swinton answered cautiously as he and Ananda rode forward side by side.

The captain was puzzled. Training had increased the natural bent of his mind toward a suspicious receptivity where he felt there was necessity. He had decided that the prince, with Oriental lethargy, never acted spontaneously – that there was something behind every move he made; his halt, back on the road, was evidently to make a change from Lord Victor to himself in their alignment. Temporarily the captain fancied that the prince might

wish to draw from him some account of the preceding night's adventure. Indeed, as a Raj horse had probably been killed, Ananda could not have missed hearing of the accident.

It was Lord Victor's voice that stirred these thoughts to verbal existence. "I say, Prince Ananda," he suddenly asked, "did you hear that my mentor had been devoured by a tiger last night?"

As if startled into a remembrance, Ananda said: "Sorry, captain, I forgot to ask if anything did happen you last night. My master of horse reported this morning that your pony was found with a broken leg at the foot of a cliff; then I heard that you had gone off with the major, so knew you were all right. You see, well" – the prince spoke either in genuine or assumed diffidence – "as it was a Raj pony that came to grief I couldn't very well speak of it; that is, knowing that you were all right."

"When I heard it," Gilfain broke in, "remembering what you had said about the hunting leopard, I was deuced well bashed, I assure you."

"Was there – anything – in the report of – a tiger trying to maul you?" the prince asked, and Swinton, tilting his helmet, found the luminous black eyes reading his face.

But Swinton could have been plotting murder behind those "farthing eyes" for all they betrayed as he answered: "I don't know what frightened the animal; he suddenly shied and I was thrown out, coming a cropper on my head which put me to sleep for a few minutes. When I came to the pony and cart had disappeared and there was nothing for it but go back to the major's bungalow

for the night."

"Then there was nothing in the tiger story," the prince commented.

"I saw no tiger, anyway," Swinton declared, and Finnerty chuckled inwardly, for, like the captain, he had been mystified by Darpore's sudden interest in the latter.

The prince had presented something akin to a caste aloofness toward Swinton; now the change had tensed Finnerty's perceptions so that he took cognizance of things that ordinarily would have passed as trivial. He saw Ananda deliberately ride past the road that would have taken them to the magnificent courtyard entrance of the palace, the beautiful red rubble road that wound its way through crotons, oleanders, and hibiscus around the fairy Lake of the Golden Coin to cross the marble-arched bridge. Now they were following a road that led through the zoo to the back entrance. As they came to a massive teakwood gate, from the left of which stretched away in a crescent sweep a wall of cages – the first one at the very gatepost holding a fiend, a man-killing black leopard – the major pressed his mount close to the rump of Swinton's horse, upon the right of whom rode Prince Ananda. A guard saluted, an attendant swung the teakwood barrier inward, and while it was still but half open Ananda pressed forward, his horse carrying Swinton's with him into a holocaust of lightning-like happenings.

Swinton turned toward the prince at some word, and at that instant the latter's horse swerved against his mount, as if stung by

a spur on the outside; a black arm, its paw studded with glittering claws, flashed through the bars of the cage with a sweep like a scimitar's, striking Swinton full in the chest, the curved claws hooking through his khaki coat and sweeping him half out of the saddle toward the iron bars against which he would be ripped to pieces in a second. With an oath, Finnerty's whip came down on his horse's flank, and the Irishman's body was driven like a wedge between the leopard and his prey; the thrusting weight tore the claws through the cloth of Swinton's coat, and, still clutching viciously, they slashed Finnerty across the chest, a gash the width of his chin showing they had all but torn through his throat.

Swinton pulled himself into the saddle and looked back at the major's blood-smeared chin and on beyond to the sinister black creature that stood up on his hind legs against the bars of his cage thrusting a forepaw through playfully as though it were only a bit of feline sport. He shuddered at the devilishness of the whole thing that looked so like another deliberate attempt. The prince would know that that black fiend, true to his jungle instincts, would be waiting in hiding behind the brick wall of his cage for a slash at any warm-blooded creature rounding the corner. They were a fighting pair, this black, murderous leopard and the prince. Finnerty was checking the blood flow on his chin with a handkerchief; his eyes, catching Swinton's as they turned from the leopard, were full of fierce anger.

There had been an outburst of grating calls and deep, reverberating roars as leopards and tigers, roused by the snarl of

the black demon as he struck, gave vent to their passion.

As if stirred to ungovernable anger by the danger his friends had incurred through the gateman's fault, Ananda turned on the frightened man, and, raising his whip, brought it down across his back. Twice the lash fell, and two welts rose in the smooth black skin; this assault accompanied by a torrent of abuse that covered chronologically the native's ancestry back to his original progenitor, a jungle pig. Ananda's face, livid from this physical and mental assault, smoothed out with a look of contrite sorrow as he apologised to his companions.

"I'm awfully sorry, major; that fool nearly cost us a life by frightening my horse with his frantic efforts to open the gate. He's an opium eater, and must have been beating that leopard with his staff to have made him so suddenly vicious. Your coat is ripped, captain; are you wounded?"

"No, thanks!" Swinton answered dryly.

"You are, major."

"Nothing much – a scratch. I'll have to be careful over blood poisoning, that's all."

"Yes," the prince said, "I'll have my apothecary apply an antiseptic."

As they wound between a spurting fountain and a semicircle of iron-barred homes, a monkey dropped his black, spiderlike body from an iron ring in the ceiling, and, holding by a coil in the end of his tail, swung back and forth, head down, howling dismally. Bedlam broke forth in answer to this discordant wail.

"Delightful place!" Finnerty muttered as he rode at Swinton's elbow.

"Inferno and the archfiend!" And Swinton nodded toward the back of Prince Ananda, who rode ahead.

In the palace dispensary Finnerty brushed the apothecary to one side and treated his slashed chin with iodine; a rough treatment that effectually cleaned the cut at the bottom, which was the bone.

They did not tarry long over the champagne, and were soon in the saddle again. Finnerty asked his companions to ride on to his bungalow for an early dinner. Lord Victor declined, declaring he was clean bowled, but insisted that the captain should accept. As for himself, he was going to bed, being ghastly tired.

As Swinton and the major sat puffing their cheroots on the verandah after dinner, the latter gave a despairing cry of "Great Kuda!" as his eyes caught sight of the Banjara swinging up the road, evidently something of import flogging his footsteps. "We shall now be laughed at for not having bagged that tiger yesterday." Finnerty chuckled.

But the Lumbani was in no hurry to disburse whatever was in his mind, for he folded his black blanket on the verandah at the top step and sat down, salaaming in a most grave manner first. Finnerty and Swinton smoked and talked in English, leaving the tribesman to his own initiative. Presently he asked: "Is the young sahib who shot my dog present?"

Relief softened the austere cast of his bony face when Finnerty

answered "No."

"It is as well," the Lumbani said, "for the young have not control of their tongues. But the sahib" – and the Banjara nodded toward Swinton, his eyes coming back to Finnerty's face – "is a man of discretion, is it not so, huzoor?"

To this observation the major agreed.

"And the sahib will not repeat what I tell?"

The Lumbani rubbed his long, lean hands up and down the length of his staff as though it were a fairy wand to ward off evil; his black, hawklike eyes swept the compound, the verandah, as much of the bungalow interior as they could; then pitching his voice so that it carried with wonderful accuracy just to the ears of the two men, he said: "There was a man beaten to-day at the gate of the tiger garden."

Neither of the sahibs answered, and he proceeded: "The gateman who was beaten is a brother to me; not a blood brother, sahib, but a tribe brother, for he is a Banjara of the Lumbani caste."

"By Jove!" The major clamped his jaws close after this involuntary exclamation and waited.

"Yes, sahib" – the Lumbani had noticed with satisfaction the major's start – "my brother has shown me the welts on his shoulder, such as are raised on a cart bullock, but he is not a bullock, being a Banjara."

There was a little silence, the native turning over in his mind something else he wished to say, trying to discover first what

impression he had made, his shrewd eyes searching Finnerty's face for a sign. Suddenly, as if taking a plunge, he asked: "Does the sahib, who is a man, approve that the servant be beaten like a dog – even though the whip lay in the hands of a rajah?"

Finnerty hesitated. It is not well to give encouragement to a native against the ruling powers, whether they be black or white.

"And he was not at fault," the Banjara added persuasively; "he did not frighten the pony – it was the rajah's spur, for my brother saw blood on the skin of the horse where the spur had cut."

"Why didn't he open the gate wide; had he orders not to do so?" Finnerty asked quickly.

"Sahib, if the rajah had passed orders such as that he would not have struck a Banjara like a dog, lest there be telling of the orders; but the gate had been injured so that it would not open as always, and the tender did not know it."

"But the rajah did not know we'd be coming along at that time," the major parried.

"As to time, one day matters no more than another. The rajah would have invited you through that gate some time. But he did know you were up in the jungle, and rode forth to meet you."

"It was but a happening," Finnerty asserted, with the intent of extracting from the Lumbani what further evidence he had.

"When one thing happens many times it is more a matter of arrangement than of chance," the Banjara asserted.

"I don't understand," Finnerty declared.

"There is a window in the palace, sahib, directly in front of

the gate, and it has been a matter of pastime for the rajah to sit at that window when somebody against whom he had ill will would be admitted and clawed by that black devil."

"Impossible!"

"It is not a new thing, sahib; my brother who was beaten knows of this."

Finnerty stepped into his room, and returning placed a couple of rupees in the ready palm of the Banjara, saying: "Your brother has been beaten because of us, so give him this."

The Lumbani rolled the silver in the fold of his loin cloth, and, indicating Swinton with his staff, said: "The sahib should not go at night to the hill, neither here nor there" – he swept an arm in the direction of the palace – "for sometimes that evil leopard is abroad at night."

Finnerty laughed.

The Banjara scowled: "As to that, the black leopard has had neither food nor water to-day, and if the sahibs sit up over the pool in Jadoo Nala they may see him drink."

"We'd see a jungle pig coming out of the fields, or a muntjac deer with his silly little bark, perhaps," Finnerty commented in quiet tolerance.

"Such do drink at the pool, but of these I am not speaking. The young man being not with you to disarrange matters, you might happen upon something of interest, sahib," the Banjara declared doggedly.

"We are not men to chase a phantom – to go and sit at Jadoo

Pool because a herdsman has fallen asleep on the back of a buffalo and had a dream."

Behind a faint smile the Lumbani digested this. "Very well, sahib," he exclaimed presently, with definite determination; "I will speak. When my brother was beaten the dust was shaken from his ears and he has heard. Beside the big gate Darna Singh and his sister, the princess, talked to-day, and the speech was of those who would meet in secret at the pool to-night."

"Who meet there?"

"The rajah's name was spoken, sahib."

"How knew Darna Singh this?"

"There be always teeth that can be opened with a silver coin. Now," and the Lumbani gathered up his black blanket, throwing it over his shoulder, "I go to my herd, for there is a she-buffalo heavy in calf and to-night might increase the number of my stock."

"Have patience, Lumbani," Finnerty commanded, and as the Banjara turned to stand in waiting he added to Swinton: "What do you think, captain – we might learn something? But there's Lord Victor; he'll expect you home."

"I'll drop him a note saying we're going to sit up over the Jadoo Pool and to not worry if I don't get home to-night."

Finnerty brought pencil and paper, and when the note was written handed it to the Banjara, saying: "For the young sahib at the bungalow, and if he receives it you will be paid eight annas to-morrow."

The herdsman put the note in his loin cloth and strode away. At the turn where Swinton had been thrown from his dogcart he dropped the note over the cliff, explaining to the sky his reasons: "A hunt is spoiled by too many hunters. It is not well that the young sahib reads that they go to Jadoo Pool – it was not so meant of the gods – and as to the service, I have eaten no salt of the sahib's, having not yet been paid."

The old chap was naturally sure that Swinton had written in the note that the young sahib was to join them at the pool.

As he plodded downhill he formulated his excuse for nondelivery of the note. It would be that the she-buffalo had demanded his immediate care, and in all the worry and work it had been forgotten and then lost. It was well to have a fair excuse to tender a sahib who put Punjabi wrestlers on their backs.

Chapter XIV

After the Banjara had gone, Finnerty said: "That's the gentle Hindu for you – mixes his mythology and data; he's found out something, I believe, and worked his fancy for the melodrama of the black leopard stalking abroad at night."

"I'm here to follow up any possible clue that may lead to the discovery of anything," Swinton observed.

"Besides," the major added, "I meant to take you for a sit up over that pool some night; many an interesting hour I've spent sitting in a machan over a pool watching jungle dwellers. There's a salt lick in Jadoo Nala, and even bison, shy as they are, have been known to come down out of the big sal forest to that pool. Nobody shoots over it, so that entices the animals; but Prince Ananda has a roomy machan there with an electric light in it. I suppose one of his German chaps put it in, for he has an electric lighting plant under the palace, also an ice-making machine. We'd better get a couple of guns fixed up in the way of defence, for it will be dark in an hour or so."

He went to his room and returned with a gun in each hand, saying: "Fine-sighted rifles will be little use; here's a double-barrelled 12-bore Paradox, with some ball cartridges. We won't be able to see anything beyond twenty yards, and she'll shoot true for that distance; I'll take this 10-bore. Now we'll go over into the jungle and get some night sights."

Wonderingly Swinton accompanied Finnerty, and just beyond the compound they came to a halt beneath a drooping palm, from a graceful branch of which a long, pear-shaped nest swung gently back and forth in the evening breeze. "This is the nest of the baya, the weaver bird; it's a beautiful bit of architecture," Finnerty said as he tapped with gentle fingers on the tailored nest.

A fluttering rustle within, followed by the swooping flight of a bird, explained his motive. "I didn't want the little cuss to beat her eggs to pieces in fright when I put my hand in," he added softly as he thrust two fingers up the tunnelloike entrance to the nest, drawing them forth with a little lump of soft clay between their tips in which was imbedded a glowworm. "That will make a most excellent night sight," the major explained; "there should be two or three more in there."

"What is the idea of this most extraordinarily clever thing?" Swinton asked.

"It may be food in cold storage, but the natives say it's a matter of lighting up the house. At any rate, I've always found these glowworms alive and ready to flash their little electric bulbs."

As he gathered two more nature incandescents Finnerty indicated the beauty of the nest. The insects were placed in the hall, or tunnel entrance, and above this, to one side, like a nursery, was the breeding nest, the whole structure being hung by a network of long grass and slender roots from the branch of the palm.

As they went back to the bungalow, Finnerty, as if switched

from the machinations of Prince Ananda by the touch of nature's sweet handicraft in the nest, fell into a mood so poetically gentle that Swinton could hardly subdue a sense of incongruity in its association with the huge-framed speaker. There was no doubt whatever about the pleasing thrill of sincerity in his Irish voice as he said, "One of my enjoyments is the study of bird nidification. They run true to breeding – which is more than we do. On that" – he pointed to a giant teakwood monarch that had fallen perhaps a century before and was draped with a beautiful shroud of lichen and emerald-green moss that peeped from between bracken and fern – "is the nest of a little yellow-bellied 'fly-catcher warbler' that is built of brilliant green moss lined with snowy cotton-silk from the Simul tree. See that fellow?" and Finnerty pointed to a little scarlet-and-black bird, its wings splashed with grey and gold, sitting on a limb. "That's a Minivet; she covers her nest with lichens so that on a lichen-covered limb it looks like a knot."

"Tremendously wise are Nature's children," Swinton contributed.

"Generally," Finnerty answered thoughtfully: "sometimes, though, her children do such foolish things. For instance, the Frog-mouth is just as cunning about hiding her nest, covering it with scraps of bark and moss to make it look like the limb of a tree, lining it inside with down from her own breast; but there's a screw loose somewhere, for she lays two eggs and the nest is never big enough to contain more than one bird, so the other one is crowded out to die."

They were at the bungalow now, and saying that he and Swinton must have a day some time among the birds Finnerty adjusted the night sights. With a slim rubber band he fastened a match across the double barrels at the front sight and beneath this placed a glowworm.

As Finnerty and Swinton went by a jungle path up the hill, the oncoming night was draping the forest with heavy gloom.

"We'll get within sight of the palace by this path," the major advised, "and then we'll skirt around the Lake of the Golden Coin to see if there are indications of things unusual."

When they came out on the plateau they were on the road that wound about the palace outside of the garden wall, and as they passed the teakwood gate it looked forbiddingly sombre outlined against the palace light. Swinton shuddered, and through his mind flashed a curious thought of how so much treacherous savagery could exist in the mind of a man capable of soft-cultured speech, and who was of a pleasing grace of physical beauty.

They circled the Lake of the Golden Coin till they faced the marble bridge; here they stood in the shadow of a mango thicket. The moon, now climbing to shoot its rays through the feathery tops of the sal trees, picked out the palace in blue-grey tones, the absence of lights, the pillared architecture, giving it the suggestion of a vast mausoleum.

Finnerty placed his hand on Swinton's arm, the clasp suggesting he was to listen. Straining his ear, he heard the

measured military tramp of men; then their forms loomed grotesquely in the struggling moonlight as they crossed the marble bridge coming from the palace; even in that uncertain light the military erectness of the figures, the heavy, measured tramp told Swinton they were Prussians. Finnerty and the captain hurried away, and as they passed around the lake end to the road a figure, or perhaps two, indefinite, floated across a patch of moonlight like a drift of smoke.

The major spread his nostrils. "Attar of rose! Did you get it, Swinton?"

"Think I did."

"There's only one woman on this hill whose clothes are so saturated with attar."

"Ananda's princess? What would she be doing out here at night?"

As they moved along, Finnerty chuckled: "What are we doing up here? What were the Prussians doing in the prince's palace? What is Marie doing here in Darpore? I tell you, captain, I wouldn't give much for that girl's chances if the princess thinks she's a rival. The princess comes from a Rajput family that never stopped at means to an end."

"It would suggest that there is really something on to-night. Doesn't Boelke's bungalow lie up in that direction?"

"Yes; and I think it was two women who passed; probably it was Marie's ayah whom the Banjara referred to when he said there were always teeth that could be opened with a silver coin.

Prince Ananda has not been seen much with the girl, but the princess may have discovered that he meets her at the pool. It would be a safe trysting place so far as chance discovery is concerned, for natives never travel that path at night; they believe that a phantom leopard lives in the cave from which the salt stream issues. This is the way," he added, turning to the left along a path that dipped down in gentle gradient to the beginning of Jadoo Nala, which in turn led on to a valley that reached the great plain.

Along this valley lay a trail, stretching from the forest-covered hills to the plains, that had been worn by the feet of great jungle creatures – bison, tiger, even elephants, in their migratory trips, Finnerty told Swinton, and sometimes they wandered up Jadoo Nala for a lick at the salt, knowing that they were never disturbed.

There was some bitterness in the major's low-pitched voice as he said: "Jadoo Pool would be an ideal spot for pothunters who come out here to kill big game and sit up in a machan over a drinking place to blaze away at bison or tiger, generally only wounding the animal in the bad night light; if it's a tiger he goes off into the jungle, and, crazed by the pain of a festering sore, will kill on sight, and finally, his strength and speed reduced by the weakening wound, will turn to killing the easiest kind of game – man; becomes a man-eater. I once shot a rogue elephant that had killed a dozen people, and found that the cause of his madness was a maggot-filled hole in his skull that had been made by a ball from an 8-bore in the hands of a juvenile civil servant, fired

at night."

Finnerty's monologue was cut short by the screeching bell of a deer. "A chital at the pool; something, perhaps a leopard hunting his supper, has startled him," he advised.

They moved forward softly, their feet scarce making a rustle on the smooth path, and as they came to the roots of a graceful pipal that stretched its lean arms out over the pool, from the opposite bank the startled cry of the deer again rent the brooding stillness as he bounded away, his little hoofs ringing on the stony hill.

A light bamboo ladder, strapped to the pipal, led to a machan that was hidden by a constructed wall of twigs and grass, through which were little openings that afforded a view of the pool.

As they reached the machan, Finnerty said: "As we are here to hear and see only, I suppose that even if Pundit Bagh comes we let him go free, eh?"

"Yes; I really don't want to kill anything while I'm in Darpore; that is, unless it's necessary to take a pot shot at a Hun, and I have a feeling that we're going to see something worth while – that Banjara is no fool."

Then the two men settled back on the springy, woven floor of the machan to wait in the mysterious night of a tropical jungle. Stilled, the noise of their own movements hushed, the silence of the mighty forest was oppressive; it suggested vastness, a huge void, as though they sat in a gigantic cave, themselves the only living thing within. A dried leaf rustling to earth sounded like the

falling of a large body; the drip of dew-drops on the leaf carpet was heard because of the dead stillness; a belated nightjar, one of those mysterious sailors of the night air, swept across the pool with his sad cry, "Chyeece – chyeece!" Then the stillness.

Swinton, his ear tuned to the outer distances of the void, caught a soft faint rub-a-dub, rub-a-dub! that drifted lazily up from a village in the plain, where some native thrummed idly on a tom-tom or his wife pounded grain in a clay mortar. Then something rustled the leaves just where the little streamlet flowed sluggishly from the cave to the pool, and something that was a hare or a mouse-deer slipped across the open space upon which the moon swept its soft light. To the left a startled "bhar-ha-ha!" from the bank above the pool was followed by a tattoo of tiny stamping hoofs as a muntjac, frightened by the mouse-deer, gave this first evidence of his own approach; then he bounded away, leaving stillness to take his place.

The boom of a gun sounded drowsily from down in the plains, some native, sitting up in a machan to guard his jowari or sugar cane, had fired his old muzzle-loader to frighten away greedy jungle pigs or bison.

Swinton found the drowsiness of the brooding jungle creeping into his frame; with difficulty he kept from sleep. He knew enough of jungle watching to know that he dare not smoke; the telltale odour of burning tobacco would leave them indeed in their solitude. And there was the thought that something was to happen, some mysterious thing to eventuate; the Banjara had not

sent them there to see deer drinking at the pool or even to feast their eyes on bigger game.

What was it? What was it? His head drooped toward his chest; dreamily he heard the soft rustle of something close; half consciously he raised his heavy lids to gaze into two big round orbs that blazed with ruby light. On the point of calling out, he saw a pair of white wings spread; there was an almost silent swoop, and that night hunter, the great horned owl, swept away. He felt the pressure of Finnerty's elbow; it was a silent laugh.

For five minutes the unruffled pool mirrored the moon in placid silence; it lay beneath them like some jewel, a moonstone on a deep green cloth. Where the stream trickled in and out of ruts and holes left in the muddy shore by drinking animals the water gleamed like scattered pearls.

Suddenly there was a crash of breaking bamboos, followed by the heavy breathing of large animals and the shuffling of many feet. Then a herd of bison – two bulls, a few cows, and two calves – less cautious in their enormous strength, swept over the hill brow of the farther bank; there they checked and examined the pool. A big cow, followed by two others and the calves, clambered down to the water, and the scraping of their rough tongues against the crusted salt lick could be heard. One bull, his high wither with its massive hump and enormous head denoting his sex even in the transient, vibrating shimmers of moonlight the swaying branches wove into the heavy gloom, stood on guard, his big ears flapping from side to side to catch every sound of

danger. The other bull, as if depending on the sentry, slid down the bank, took a hasty drink, and returned; then the cows, with their calves, went up from the water, and the herd melted like shadows into the gloomed sal forest.

Swinton was wide awake now; the majestic bison, the faithful bull on guard lest a tiger creep up on the calves, was a sight worth an hour or two of vigil.

Finnerty's head leaned toward Swinton as he whispered: "Gad! I wish I dared smoke." Then, with a smothered chuckle: "If I had turned on the electric it would have been a sight. I wonder if the current is on; we might need it if there's a shindy."

Like an echo of the major's whisper a sound floated up from the heavy pall of darkness that lay beneath the pipal; it might have been the sniff of a honey badger, the inquisitive, faint woof of a bear, or a muttered word. His hand resting on Swinton's arm in a tense grip, Finnerty strained his ears to define the curious sense he had that some one was stealthily moving beneath them. Once he put a hand on the top rung of the bamboo ladder; it vibrated as though some one leaned against it or had commenced to ascend. He slipped the butt of his 10-bore forward, ready for a handy, silent push of defence. But still, he thought, if it were Prince Ananda to meet somebody he would wait below. With a pang, Finnerty realised who the somebody that the prince must meet so secretly would be.

A little slipping sound as of a foot higher up on the path came to the listeners' ears; there was the tinkle-clink of a pebble rolling

to the stones below; the rustling push of a body passing from beneath the pipal and along the mud bank of the pool. Then Finnerty saw, for a second, an outlined figure where the moon fell upon the pearllike cups of water; and the straight, athletic Rajput swing betrayed that it was Darna Singh. Then he was swallowed up in the shadow that lay heavy toward the cave.

A cicada started his shrill piping in a neighbouring tree, awakening several of his kind, and the hissing hum, raspingly monotonous, filled their ears. Suddenly it was drowned by droning English words that came floating up from below, smothered to indistinctness.

"It is the prince," Finnerty thought.

Then there were odd catches of a woman's voice. Distinctly the major heard: "No, I cannot." The man's tones had a wavering drawl, as though he pleaded. More than once the word "love," with a little fierce intonation, came to the listener. The woman had uttered words that, patched together out of their fragmentary hearing, told that she, or some one, would go away the next day.

A low, purring note carried to the machan from the cave mouth.

Turning his head cautiously, lest the machan creak, Finnerty, holding his eyes on the trickling stream where it splashed into light, dread in his heart, saw a shadow creep toward the pool, its progress marked by the blotting out of the pearllike spots of moonlit water; then the shadow was lost, and next he heard the pushing pad of velvet paws upon the leaf-covered ground just

beyond the pipal. Finnerty knew. Only a tiger or a leopard stalked like that. Now the approaching animal had stopped. There was no moving shadow, no faint rustle of leaves; the thing was eyeing the pool – looking for something to kill by its brink. Below, the voices still droned, their owners unconscious of the yellow cat eyes that perhaps even then watched them in desire.

To Finnerty came with full horror a memory of the Banjara's words: "See the black leopard drink at the pool to-night."

Silently shifting his 10-bore till its muzzle ranged the side along which the thing crept, he uncovered the glowworm, and a little speck of luminous light showed that it was still alive.

Swinton, who sat facing the other way, feeling that there was something stirring, drew his gun across his knee.

A minute, two minutes – they seemed years to Finnerty – then he heard, deeper in the jungle, a bush swish as if it had been pushed, and in relief he muttered: "The brute must have seen my movement and has gone away."

For a full minute of dread suspense the silence held, save for the rasping cicada and a droning voice beneath; then, from beyond where those below stood, some noise came out of the gloom – it might have been a small branch falling or the scamper of a startled jungle rat. Holding his eyes on the spot, Finnerty saw two round balls of light gleam – yellow green, as if tiny mirrors reflected the moonlight. They disappeared, then glowed again; they rose and fell. With a chill at his heart he knew that the beast, with devilish cunning, had circled, and now approached from the

side farthest from the machan. Swinging his gun, with a prayer that the current was on, he turned the electric button; a splash of white light cut the jungle gloom, and where his eyes searched was outlined in strong relief, crouched for a spring, a black leopard. Turned up to the sudden glare, ghastly in the white light, was the face of Lord Victor; at his side, clutching his arm, with her eyes riveted on the leopard, stood Marie.

Values flashed through Finnerty's mind with lightning speed. He had expected the jungle dweller to flee when the electric glare lit up the scene, but the leopard was unafraid; he even crept a pace closer to those below. His forepaws gripped nervously at the ground in a churning movement; his tail stiffened; but before he could rise in a flying tackle a stream of red light belched from Swinton's gun; there was a coughing roar telling of a hit, and the leopard, turned by the shot, bounded into the jungle, his crashing progress growing fainter as he fled. Then darkness closed out the scene of almost tragedy, for Finnerty had turned the switch.

On the point of calling in assurance, Swinton was checked by the sudden death of the light; he understood the major's motive.

The two sat still, while Finnerty, his grasp on Swinton's shoulder, whispered into his ear: "The leopard is wounded; he won't turn now that he has started to run; let them get away without knowing who saw them, for they're in no danger."

There came the sound of feet going with stumbling speed up the path as Marie, dreading discovery more than the terrors of the jungle path, clutching Gilfain's hand, fled.

After a little, Finnerty said: "Fancy we may go back now. I wonder how much of this business the Banjara knew; how much of it is a twist of fate upsetting somebody's plans." And as they climbed the hill path from Jadoo Nala he continued: "Tomorrow morning we'll follow the pugs of that black devil; there'll be blood enough for the shikari to track him down, I think; he'll have stiffened up from his wound by then and we'll get him."

With irrelevance the captain blurted, in a voice filled with disgust: "That young ass!"

Finnerty laughed softly. "The dear old earl sent him to India to be out of the way of skirts. It can't be done!"

"But how did he get a meeting with that foolish virgin; he's only been here three days! And how did the Banjara know, and how did – oh, one's life here is a damn big query mark!"

"I should say that there's been a note written, either by the girl to his giddy lordship or vice versa; Darna Singh has made the mistake of supposing Prince Ananda was the man she was to meet; that's why the black leopard was turned loose."

"Do you think it really was the prince's beast?"

"Yes; that's why he didn't run when the light flashed. He's accustomed to it in the zoo grounds. But it was a fiendish caper, and Gilfain is fortunate."

"I think it proves the girl is a spy; she probably, at the prince's suggestion, led the young fool on. I'm glad he doesn't know anything about – " Swinton broke off suddenly, as the heavy gloom of the forest interior was brushed aside like a curtain,

disclosing to their eyes a fairy scene – the prince's palace.

The moon, which had leaped high above the barrier of the forest, poured a flood of yellow light across the open plateau, gilding with gold leaf the mosquelike dome roof of a turret and shimmering a white marble minaret till it sparkled like a fretwork thing of silver. The Lake of the Golden Coin was a maze of ribboned colours where the mahseer rose to its surface in play or in pursuit of night flies. A dreamy quiet lay over all the mass of gleaming white and purple shadow as they swung to the road that circled the gardens. Coming to the big teakwood gate, Finnerty clutched the captain's arm, bringing him to a halt as a sigh from its rusty hinges told it had just been closed by some one.

"I saw him," Finnerty whispered as they passed on. "It was Ananda, I swear."

Over the walls floated the perfume of rose and jasmine and tuberose; so sensuous, so drugged the heavy night air that it suggested unreality, mysticism, dreams, and beyond, rounding a curve, to their nostrils came the pungent, acrid smell of a hookah from the servants' quarters. Even deeper of the Orient, of the subtle duplicity of things, was this.

Swinton spat on the roadway, and Finnerty, knowing it as a token of disgust, muttered: "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves."

As they dipped down a hill toward the path that led to Finnerty's bungalow they came upon Lord Victor's horse leisurely dawdling along, stopping at times for a juicy snack from some succulent bush, and altogether loafing, a broken rein

dangling from the bit to occasionally bring him up with a jerk as he stepped on it. At their approach he scuttled off into the jungle.

"Gilfain's nag!" Finnerty commented. "Wishing to keep this meeting secret, he's left the syce at home and tied the pony to a tree up there somewhere; the shot probably frightened it."

"What's the horse doing on this road?" Swinton asked.

"It's a shorter cut down to the maharajah's stables in Darpore town than by the tonga road. Lord Victor will have to walk; we couldn't catch that harebrained weed even if we wanted to."

"Come on, major," Swinton cried, pushing forward; "I've got an idea. You give me a horse and I'll gallop back to my bungalow, getting there ahead of the young ass."

"I see," Finnerty grunted as they strode swiftly along. "You'll tell his lordship that you've been in bed for hours, and let him guess who was his audience at Jadoo Pool. The Banjara didn't deliver that note or his lordship wouldn't have been there."

As they hurried along, Swinton panted: "Devil of a hole for a flirtation; he must be an enthusiast!"

They swung into the bungalow, and Finnerty sent the watchman to have a syce bring "Phyu," adding that if there was delay a most proper beating would eventuate. As the watchman hurried away on his mission the major said: "Phyu is a Shan pony; he's only thirteen hands, but you can gallop him down that hill without fear of bucking his shins, and you couldn't do that with an Arab."

While they waited, Finnerty explained: "The girl made that

appointment for some reason. She would know that nobody would see them together there, as natives don't travel that path at night, and she would know that tiger and leopard do not ordinarily come to the pool."

"How did the Banjara know?"

"India, my dear boy – and servants; but he only half knew at that; he thought it would be the prince. I think even if Lord Victor did kill his dog, having been paid for it, had he known a sahib was the proposed victim he would have told us."

A grey, sturdy Shan pony, led by a running syce, dashed around the bungalow, and as Swinton mounted, Finnerty said: "I'll send for Mahadua right away and make ready for a peep-o'-day follow-up of that wounded leopard; we can't let him roam to kill natives. Meet me at the top of the tonga road at daybreak. In the meantime – well, you know how to handle his lordship."

Then the captain pounded down the mountain road at an unreasonable rate, though his speed was really unnecessary, for, clad in pajamas, he had half finished a long cheroot in an armchair on the verandah when he saw the form of Gilfain coming wearily up the gravelled road.

When Swinton knocked the ash from his cheroot, disclosing the lighted end, the pedestrian acquired an instantaneous limp; his rather lethargic mentality was quickened by an inspiration, and he hobbled up the steps and along the verandah at a pathetic pace.

"Been long home, anxious guardian?" he gasped, sinking into

a chair.

"About an hour," Swinton answered blithely.

"I got moony lonesome," Lord Victor explained as the smoker evinced no curiosity.

"And went for a walk, eh? Where did you go – down to the bazaar?"

Even to Gilfain's unperceptive mind the opening for a sweeping lie seemed a trifle too wide. Indeed, the fact that he had on riding boots was rather against this proposition. He didn't answer at once, a twinge in his newly injured ankle giving him an opportunity for a pause.

"You didn't see my syce about, did you?" he asked as a feeler.

"No; why – weren't you walking?"

"No; I went for a bit of a ride – down by the river – and just where the road forks over by that nala where we took the elephant after the tiger something sprang out of the jungle, let an awful roar out of him, and that fool country bred of mine bolted – he's a superb ass of a horse – jinked at a shadow, and went over a cut bank into a little stream kind of a place; I came a cropper, with my foot caught in a stirrup, and was dragged a bit. In fact, I went by-by for a few minutes. How the devil my foot came out of the stirrup I don't know. When I came to that three-toed creature they call a horse had vanished, and it's taken me rather well over an hour to limp back."

Then the cripple, holding his ankle in both hands across his knee, leaned back in his chair with eyes closed as if in agony,

inwardly muttering: "Gad! I wonder if that bally romance hangs together."

"Was it a tiger or a leopard?" Swinton asked in an even voice.

"I – I rather fancy it was a leopard. I didn't see overmuch of the silly brute, my mount being in such an ecstasy of fright."

"What about the syce; perhaps the leopard nailed him?" the captain asked solicitously.

"Hardly think it; I didn't see the bloomer after I left the bungalow. Oh!" It was the ankle.

This cry of pain galvanised Swinton into compassion; it also gave him an idea of how to mete out retribution to the awful liar beside him.

"We've got to fix up that ankle right away," he declared, rising.

"Oh, don't bother, old chap; I'll just bathe it."

"Worst thing you could do," Swinton declared professionally. "I've got a powerful white liniment; it stings like the juice of Hades. Probably peel the bark off, but it will prevent swelling."

With a sigh Lord Victor surrendered, and Swinton, bringing out his bottle, rubbed the romancer's ankle until he groaned – not from an imaginative pain. Then the limb was bound up in a bandage that all but checked the circulation.

"Feel better now; that give you relief?" And Swinton's voice was as solicitously tender as a mother's.

"Oh, yes – thanks!" And inwardly the exasperated patient swore.

Of course a whiskey and soda was part of the treatment,

doctor and patient both taking the medicine. As they sipped, the patient asked cautiously: "What did you and the major do in the evening?"

"Oh, we took a stroll up on the hill."

"Eh, what! Oh, heavens – my ankle!" The guilty conscience had all but betrayed its possessor. "Go up to see the prince?" he asked, his voice holding an assumed casualness.

"We didn't go quite that far." Gilfain breathed easier. "Finnerty is a great chap on birds' nests, and we saw some rather curious ones."

Lord Victor, in sudden inspiration, put his hand on Swinton's arm and gave it a knowing pinch. "You didn't happen to meet fräulein, old boy, did you?" And he laughed.

"Not bad, by Jove!" Swinton confided to himself; then aloud: "I'm not interested; also I'm going to bed. I believe I'll take a gun early in the morning and see if I can pick up the tracks of that leopard."

"What leopard?"

"The one that – that – charged your pony."

"Oh, yes, of course. But Lord bless me, man, he may be miles away by the morning."

"Come on, Gilfain; I'll give you an arm in to bed. You hadn't better get up in the morning. In fact, you'd better lie up all day to-morrow; in this hot climate a wrench like that may produce black inflammation."

"Black inflammation sounds good, anyway," Swinton thought

as the young man, leaning heavily on his arm, hobbled to his bedroom.

Swinton fell asleep pondering over the proverbial thought that no man can serve two masters, he being that no man in his now divided duty. In the earl's interests he should remove that nobleman's son from the vicinity of Fräulein Marie at once. A most dangerous woman she was, no doubt. In the interest of his real master, the government, he should stay on the spot and nip Ananda's intrigue.

Chapter XV

Swinton had left instructions to be wakened before the first raucous-voiced crow had opened his piratical beak, so, in the chill dawn half light, a grey mist from the river bed still hovering like a shroud over the plain, the voice of his bearer calling softly: "Sahe-e-b! Sahe-e-b!" brought him out of a deep slumber. Dressing, he chuckled over the apocryphal sprained ankle that had relieved him of Lord Victor's company or offer of it. Passing that young nobleman's room, lamp in hand, he saw, through the open door, a very red ankle, devoid of its bandage, hanging over the bed. Swinton chuckled, muttering: "Bad patient!"

His horse was waiting, and with a rifle across the saddle he went up the hill, meeting Finnerty, with whom was Mahadua, at the appointed place.

"We'll leave our gee-gees here with the syces," Finnerty said, "and Mahadua will take us by a shortcut path along the edge of the hill to Jadoo Pool."

At Jadoo Pool, they rested while Mahadua, as keen as a "black tracker," searched the ground for the leopard's trail.

Finnerty had imparted to the shikari nothing beyond the fact that a leopard had been seen in that immediate vicinity, and it was supposed he was wounded. The shikari had declared emphatically that it would prove to be the leopard with the man-eater's rosettes, and, no doubt, was the animal that came out of

the cave, giving rise to the belief that a ghost homed there.

First, Mahadua passed to the plastic clay banks of the little stream that trickled into the pool; there he picked up the pugs of a leopard, following them unerringly to where the cunning brute had backed away and circled when he saw Finnerty in the machan. On this circling trail a stick freshly turned, a nestlike hollow in the loose leaves where a soft paw had pushed, guided the tracker, so close to instinct in his faculties, till he came upon blood spots and torn-up earth where the leopard had been shot.

For twenty minutes Finnerty and Swinton waited, and then Mahadua came back, saying: "Chita has been shot in a hind leg, for his jumps in running are not big, and though he went to the deep jungle at first he is now back at the cave."

As they went up Jadoo Nala there were no blood spots on its stony bed, but Mahadua explained: "Chita remained hid in the jungle for a time, and the bleeding stopped."

Coming to the doorlike entrance of the cave, Finnerty peered cautiously in, and, seeing nothing, passed beyond, his eyes searching for tracks. A dozen paces and a sibilant whistle from behind whirled him about to see Mahadua facing the opening, his little axe poised for a blow of defence.

When Finnerty, cocking both barrels of his Paradox, raced back, the shikari said: "Chita stuck his head out to look at the sahib's back, but when I whistled he disappeared."

"Was it 'Spots' or a black leopard, Mahadua?"

"Black, sahib," he answered.

"A black leopard is the most vicious thing on earth," Finnerty said in English, his gun holding guard, "and one wounded and in a cave is a matter for consideration."

"He won't come out; that's sure," Swinton commented.

"Not before night – if we're here – and we can't afford the time to wait that long."

"Smoke him out," Swinton suggested.

"Difficult; smoke won't go where you want it to, but I'll ask Mahadua if it's possible."

"The cave is too big," the shikari replied to the query.

"How big?" Swinton asked with sudden interest.

"I don't know," and the native's eyes were evasive. "I have heard it said that the cave went far in, but I have no desire to go into the home of the spirits."

"My Rampore hounds would draw him," Finnerty said thoughtfully; "but I don't want to get them mauled – perhaps killed."

The name Rampore conveyed to Mahadua the sahib's meaning, though the English words were unintelligible. "The Banjara would send in dogs if the sahib would pay him well," he suggested.

"He would not risk his Banjara hounds," the major objected.

"True, huzoor, but he also has 'bobbery' dogs – half Banjara breed – and they being trained to the hunt will go in after the wounded chita."

"It's a good idea, Swinton," Finnerty declared. "We've done

the very thing I was bucking about last night; we've set adrift a wounded leopard who'll likely turn man-eater if he doesn't die and we'll be responsible for every native he kills."

"We've simply got to finish him off," Swinton concurred.

"We must. If you'll wait here with the shikari, keeping your eye on that hole so he doesn't sneak away, I'll pick up my horse and gallop down to get the Banjara and his 'bobbery pack.'"

Perhaps the going of Finnerty, with his large virility, had taken something of mental sustenance from the shikari, for he now lost somewhat his buoyant nonchalance.

"Sit you here, sahib, on this flat rock," he advised, "for here you face well the cave door, and if the evil brute makes a sudden rush you will have an advantage. As to the dogs, if it is a bhut they will not enter the cave, and if they do enter it will be because the spirit has gone."

"But, Mahadua, we saw him. How will he disappear through the rock walls of a cave?"

"As to the ways of a bhut not even the priest at my village of Gaum could say aught."

"Did you ever see a spirit, Mahadua?" Swinton queried, with the double purpose of whiling away the time as they waited and drawing from the man one of those eerie tales that originate with the half-wild forest dwellers.

"Sahib, I never saw my father, but there is no doubt that I had one; it was said that he died before I was born, and I believe it."

"Well, did you then know of one from people you believed

in?"

"Yes, sahib. The priest of Gaum, which is my village, knew well the tiger that was named the 'One Who Looks Up.' You know, sahib, a tiger when he walks through the jungle never looks up at the trees, there being nothing there in the way of his food nor that he fears; though if he be shot at from a machan, after that, if he catches in his nostrils the taint of a sahib, he will remember, and will see such a trap."

"Tell me of the One Who Looks Up," Swinton begged.

"He was a man-killer, Sahib, and one day he killed a woodsman, but was disturbed before he had eaten the poor fellow, and went away, the man's bhut going with him. A Dep'ty Sahib had a machan put in a tree above the body, and sitting there in the moonlight he saw bagh creeping toward his victim; but before the Dep'ty Sahib could shoot the dead man's arm lifted up, and a finger pointed at the machan. Bagh looked up, and seeing the Dep'ty Sahib fled."

The shikari's voice suddenly dropped to a whisper, and without the move of a muscle he said: "Look at the cave mouth and you will see chita watching you. Move very slow and you may get a shot."

Swinton's gun was lying across his knee, and gently pulling back the hammers he slowly carried the stock toward his shoulder. As their eyes met, the leopard's lip curled in a snarl that bared his hooked fangs, and his ears flattened back, giving the head a cobra-like look. Inch by inch the gun crept upward, the

unblinking eyes viewing this move with malevolent interest.

As the stock touched Swinton's shoulder he drooped his head to train his eye along the sights, for the shot must go true to the small brain beneath that sloping skull, or, stung by the wound, the leopard would charge and there would be no escape from a mauling; but his eye, travelling along the barrels, looked into the dark void of the cave. In a brief second the cunning beast had vanished.

"He will not return for some time, sahib; he knows what a gun is. Perhaps even it is a spirit," the shikari said.

Dropping the gun to his knee Swinton asked: "What was the end of the One Who Looks Up?"

"The Dep'ty Sahib was a man of resource, and coming down he pegged to the ground both arms of the one whose bhut had gone with the tiger; then, as he waited in the machan, the tiger came back, thinking the sahib would have gone, and, as the dead man gave him no sign, crept close up, when the Dep'ty Sahib killed him."

"And you believe that story is true, Mahadua?"

"The guru says it is; but whether it is true or not matters only to the one who is devoured."

For some time Mahadua sat facing the cave, turning over in his mind a little business venture; then raising his head, he looked into Swinton's dead-blue eyes, only to turn away in blinking haste before their disconcerting inertia. He coughed, adjusted his little brown cap, and said: "Sahib, as to this one in the cave we shall

know when the dogs come if it is a spirit; but if we had made an offering to the shrine, or even promised Safed Jan, who guards the mountain pass, a goat in sacrifice, all might have been well."

"It is too late now," Swinton suggested.

"If the sahib will bestow a silver rupee for the sacrifice of a goat to Safed Jan, Mahadua will make a ceremony over the gun and the bullet will not be turned by the spirit."

Swinton smiled at this wily touch while the man's master was away, but drawing forth a rupee he bestowed it upon the man who had capitalised a spirit. Very gravely Mahadua plucked a handful of grass, and, wrapping the coin in this, rubbed it along the barrels of Swinton's gun, tapped the locks with it, and then slipped the rupee into his jacket pocket, saying in a voice blithesome with relief – or cupidity: "If Safad Jan has observed, luck will follow."

Pariah-like yowls came up the pass, and Finnerty, with the herdsman and his brother holding in leash six dogs, appeared. The pack was a motley one, a canine kaleidoscope that, as it tumbled in the sunshine, showed all the various hues of ancestry from red Irish terrier to mizzled collie. One had a bulldog head and the lank, scraggy body of a village pariah; two had the powerfully boned frame of the Banjara hound; but all showed the uncertain, treacherous temper of their pariah cross.

Each dog was held by a rawhide leash fastened to a wide leather collar studded with iron spikes to prevent a leopard from taking his favourite jugular-severing jaw grip of the neck.

As he sat down for a minute's rest, the major said: "I fancy this may cost me a pretty penny for my friend, the herdsman, has made me agree to pay ten rupees for each dog killed, and five apiece for the mauled ones. He was deuced curious over the night's work, but I told him we saw no one. He admitted that he didn't deliver the note to Lord Victor, saying he had lost it."

"Do you think by any chance he had an inkling Lord Victor was going there, and didn't want him to know we'd be there?"

"No. He says we saw no one because we spoiled the hunt by going like a marriage procession; that we went by the road, and that his brother, the watchman, saw Prince Ananda watching us, both going and coming."

"The sahib will have rested now, and the sun is hot," the Banjara interposed.

Finnerty, rising, placed the men; Swinton behind the flat boulder he had sat on, and from the top of which his gun would range the cave mouth; two convenient trees were allotted to Mahadua, the herdsman, and his brother when the dogs had been slipped. Finnerty would stand on some ground a little higher where he could rake the nala, both up and down, should the leopard bolt.

The dogs had been given a noseful of the leopard's trail, and, when they were slipped, with a chorus of yelps they made for the cave, while their owner slipped nimbly to his allotted tree. It was a tense moment; the Banjara, perched on the lower limb of a mhowa, was avariciously hoping the leopard would kill the

whole pack, for at ten rupees a head they were better dead.

Mahadua's face grew grave as, instead of the tumult of a fierce battle, stillness held within the cavern; the eager yelps of the dogs as they had scrambled over loose stones to enter the cave had ceased. The leopard was, no doubt, a spirit, and had perhaps hushed the dogs. At any rate, a flesh-and-blood leopard would now be giving battle and voices of pain and passion would be filling the cavern with cries.

Finnerty was muttering: "Damn if I can make it out; it's a rummy go!"

At that instant the pack came stringing out, and the leader stood looking wonderingly at the sahibs.

"They are afraid," Mahadua jeered; "they went in thinking it was a hare. Oh, they are a true Banjara pack!"

The herdsman put a hand on a long knife in his belt, and with fury in his eyes said: "Will the Presence take a slipper to this monkey's mouth or shall I open its windpipe? The leopard is not within, for my dogs do not lie."

The pack was now running about in the silly, aimless manner of "gaze" dogs where there is no quarry to see, and only a scent that is cold to their very dull nose-sense.

The shikari pointed this out, saying: "Keeper of mud cows, if the leopard had but just passed out in the fear of your coming he would have left a fresh scent trail that even your dogs, who hunt but by the eye, would have found, and if the chita is not a spirit he is still within."

The Banjara drew his long, vicious knife, but as Finnerty grasped his arm he said, pointing in disdain at Mahadua: "This is a knife for game, not for cutting the throat of a chicken; I go into the cave to prove that of dog or shikari the shikari is the liar."

At this his brother also drew a knife, and, calling to the dogs, who sprang at his bidding to the cave, the two Banjaras followed at their heels.

"We might have a look; it's altogether mysterious," Finnerty said, turning to the captain.

The latter nodded. "I've got an idea; we'd better go in!"

They passed into a long, narrow chamber – so long that it reached into deep gloom, with no end wall showing. They could see the dogs pass into the mysterious black shadow beyond and again reappear; always, going and coming, they sniffed at one spot. Here Finnerty struck a match, and Mahadua, dropping to his knees, examined the rock, saying: "The leopard rested here – there is blood."

Led by Finnerty, they followed the dogs along the corridor, coming upon a blank wall. There was no leopard; he had vanished as mystically as a spirit might have done. Finnerty lighted matches, but there were only the sullen walls on three sides.

"It is as I have said," the Banjara growled; "Mahadua, who has grown too old for the hunt, gave forth so much monkey chatter that the sahib saw not the leopard pass."

Mahadua lifted his cap. "See, hunter of cow tics, I take off my head-cover to thee as a great shikari. Sahib," he pleaded, "turn

back this owner of mongrels, for I know where the chita will be found."

"Where?" Finnerty questioned.

"He will go up in the hills to the village of Kohima, where he was caught in a trap. It is said he killed many people near that village, for he was a man-eater."

"How far is Kohima?"

"It is six kos, or perhaps eight, and again it might be that it is ten by the road, but the chita will go through the jungle in a matter of half that distance."

The Banjara laughed, clapping a cupped palm over his mouth, giving vent to a note of derision. "The little monkey has a desire in his belly, sahib," he said, ceasing his popping mirth. "The women of Kohima are famed for the arak they distill, so Mahadua, with the sahib to pay for it, would get in a state to see leopards even in the village."

"I think we'd better get rid of this argument," Finnerty remarked, adding: "Come to the bungalow for your pay, Lumbani."

Calling their dogs, the Banjara and his brother departed.

"Now we're up against a mental dead wall, captain. What shall we do?" Finnerty asked.

"You'd like to go after Burra Moti, of course –"

"Yes; but I'd rather pot this black devil. I don't want any natives' blood on my head."

"But we haven't a trail to follow; I believe we'll find that

leopard back in his cage."

"Good heavens, man, he couldn't get through the solid wall!"

"But he did."

Finnerty blinked his eyes in unison with his rapid thoughts. A suspicion lingered in his mind that the animal had really slipped from the cave without Swinton seeing him – perhaps through his attention having been taken up by Mahadua. Indeed it was the only reasonable explanation of his astounding disappearance. With boyish diffidence he asked: "Did you and Mahadua do anything; that is, did he take up your attention with – well, he's a garrulous old cuss, especially on spirits."

Swinton in candour related what had occurred, and when he told of the rupee-gun ceremony the major, with a start, exclaimed: "Ah!"

"I know what you mean by that, major," Swinton said, with a little laugh, "but I never took my eyes off that hole in the wall."

But Finnerty shook his head. "Do you know what they call the leopard in every mess in India? – 'The Artful Dodger.'" Then he added hastily: "We'll settle your theory first, captain. On our way back to have some breakfast we'll look in at the zoo, and if there's a black leopard there with a wound it will be the one we're after; if there is one without a wound it will mean that we shot a jungle beast last night; if the cage is empty the brute either slipped your vigilance or is, as Mahadua says, a spirit."

The word leopard being familiar to the servant, he knew what the sahibs were discussing, and contributed: "Our eyes were

always on the door, sahib, and if a spirit took the leopard through the walls he would lead him to Kohima, for it is said that all his kills were made through the aid of one he acquired there."

"Come on!" Finnerty said. "We're in a fit condition of mystification to almost accept the little man's thesis."

A strange attendant was at the teakwood gate, but when the major explained that they simply wanted a look at the animals, being sahibs, he swung the gate for their entrance, closing it from the inside to stand near them. The heavily barred cage was empty, and there was no movement in the den behind to which a small door gave entrance.

"Where is the black leopard?" Finnerty asked quite casually.

A frown of reticence clouded the native's face as he answered: "I don't know, sahib."

With a covert movement, the major slipped into the man's fingers a rupee. The gateman coughed, adjusted his belt, and said: "The Burra Sahib, Nawab Darna Singh, sent away the man who was on the gate; that is why I am now here."

"Did the man sleep at his post?"

"It may be that he did, sahib, and that way the black leopard escaped; but he was beaten by the rajah – no doubt he deserved it – and Nawab Darna Singh thinks that in anger he may have freed the dangerous one, for a small door was left open."

"And the leopard has not been seen to-day?"

"No, sahib; but it is said he was shot, by whom or where I have not heard."

Then the two passed through the gate as mystified as when they entered.

"That destroys my solution of the mystery," Swinton declared.

With a laugh, Finnerty said: "Mahadua has the only unassailable belief – that it is a spirit. But now for some breakfast. Our horses are just around the turn. We'll slip over to my bungalow, and while we're eating send down for Lord Victor."

Chapter XVI

When Captain Swinton and Major Finnerty arrived at the bungalow a note was sent to Lord Victor asking him to come up on horseback, as they were going off into the jungle.

Knowing that servants' ears were animate dictaphones, the two sahibs ate breakfast in comparative silence, the strenuous morning after the black leopard having braced their appetites.

Later, at restful ease in big chairs, the major said: "In this accursed land of spies one must find a place where his eyes reach farther than his voice. That, by the way, was a trick of a clever tiger I killed, the Gharwalla man-eater, through discovering that when he had made a kill he would drag the body to a certain bare hilltop from which he could watch for danger. He'd been driven up to a gun so often that he was shy of secret places. There was something grewsome about that tiger's fiendish cunning. His favourite trick was to crouch in cover that overhung a roadway, and as a bullock cart came along pick off the driver with a flying leap and carry him to this hilltop for a leisurely meal. There was a pool close by, and, after eating, he would take a drink, roll in the sand, and then go quite a mile to thick cover for a sleep. I potted him when he was having one of his sand baths. You've seen a dog roll on a rug in the ecstasy of a full stomach, but with this chap there was something wondrously beautiful – if one could forget the horribleness of it – in the play of those terrible muscles and

the undulating curves of the striped body as he rolled in luxurious ease, paws fanning the air and his ivory-studded jaws showing in an after dinner yawn. I watched him for ten minutes, fascinated by the charm of subtle movement combined with strength, for I was well hidden in a thick growth of rose bramble, its mottled colouring of pink and grey and green deceiving his quick eye. I was lying flat, my 10-bore covering him. When I gave a low whistle the big head faced me, and the eyes, hardened to a yellow-green murder look, were straight on. But just below the jaw was a spot with no hard skull to deflect the heavy, soft-lead ball, and behind that feathered curl of white hair was the motor of that powerful machine – the heart. He never knew what struck him. The whole cavity was just pulp – heart and lungs – when we skinned him."

A native who had come in from the jungle now came to the verandah. "Huzoor," he began, "we knew that Burra Moti was near in the night, for Raj Bahadar was restless, cocking his ears and making soft speech through his trunk to the cunning old lady; but maybe on account of the camp fire, which we had lighted to show her that it was but a party of men who would eat and had sweet cakes for elephants who approached in a friendly spirit, she came not in. We could hear the bell tinkle, tinkle, tinkle – "

"You fool! Why do you mix lies in your report; the elephant had no bell."

Undismayed, the man answered: "The mahout maintained as much, sahib, but we all heard the bell, and Moti was in a sweet

temper, for she laughed, as elephants do when they are pleased."

"It was a bird you heard – the sweet-singing shama, or a chakwa calling to his mate across a stream. Did you see her?"

"It was still dark, but we could hear Moti sigh as though her heart was troubled because she could not come to partake of the cakes we burned so that they would be known in her nostrils."

"Couldn't come! She was free."

"As to a chain, it is true; but the sahib knows that evil attaches to things that are sacred of a temple when they have fallen into the hands of others."

"Speak!" Finnerty commanded, as the native hesitated.

"It is said – perhaps it is but a rumour of the bazaar – that Moti was of a temple up in the hills, and that in the bell was a sacred sapphire."

"But how came Moti to my place? Know you that, sage one?"

The native dismissed the sarcasm with a salaam, answering: "It is said that the temple was looted of jewels that were buried beneath a pillar."

With a start, Finnerty asked: "And the stone pillar – was it taken?" And he laughed as if in derision.

"I have heard that the pillar is in a new place, sahib."

"Is it in the prince's grounds?" And Finnerty swept an arm toward the palace hill.

"There is a stone standing there that did not grow with the roses," the native answered enigmatically.

"Just another move in our deranged friend's plot," Finnerty

commented. He turned to the native: "Was the lama of the temple killed?"

"Men who are dead do not come to the market place to complain, and as the priest has not spoken it may be that he is dead."

"Here comes our friend in perpetuity, the Banjara!" Finnerty exclaimed. He rose, and, going into the bungalow, returned to drop a rupee in the native's hand, saying: "Go back to Raj Bahadar and tell the mahout I will be along shortly." He turned to the captain.

"Swinton, all one's servants may know the thing a man is risking his life to discover and he be none the wiser till some one babbles it like a child."

"As in the mutiny," Swinton suggested. "Our officials saw cow dung plastered on the trees – some few heard what they called 'silly whispers,' but all native India knew, and all India remained hushed till the dead silence was shattered by the tornado."

"Exactly. And while we say Ananda is insane, and all these things are child's play, think of the trifling things that were used as factors to breed that holocaust of hate. The Mussulmans told that the British Raj had greased the cartridges they had to bite with pig's fat to defile their religion; that suttee had been abolished to break the Hindu faith by filling the land with widow prostitutes; that water the Hindu sepoys drank had come in contact with leather valves made from the skin of a cow. There were other trivial things lied into mountains of sins. Ananda

knows all that; he has the cunning of a serpent and the viciousness of a black leopard."

The Banjara had arrived, and Finnerty counted out five rupees; then, with a touch of Irish humour, he added another, saying, with a smile: "This for your disappointment in not having a dog killed."

"If the monkey man, Mahadua, had been true to his caste, which is to watch and not talk, there would have been profit for both sides – the sahib would have obtained a kill."

When he had tucked away his money, the Banjara said: "My brother is not now keeper at the tiger garden."

"Why? For whose sin does he suffer?"

"Darna Singh let the black leopard out to meet Rajah Ananda at Jadoo Pool."

"The rajah wasn't there," Finnerty declared in a drawling way.

"No; there was some talk that was either a lie or a mistake; it was another at the pool."

"Who?"

"The horse of the young sahib was found on the hill, and the mem-sahib was seen between the pool and her bungalow."

"A ghost story, Banjara, and it's all finished."

"A bullock that is dead is dead, but a herdsman watches that the other bullocks do not also die from the same thing."

"I trust you, Banjara," Finnerty said, seemingly at an irrelevant angle.

"The mem-sahib rides every day up into the hills, and the

roads are not good for pleasure. Packets of cotton that have stomachs come down over the road; cotton grows here."

"What has cotton to do with the one who rides?"

"Perhaps the mem-sahib rides to meet the one who comes behind the packets. My brother, who was the son of a Banjara priest, one who had visions that all the tribe believed, has also had a vision. Perhaps the beating caused a fever, for visions come thus."

"What saw he?" Finnerty asked, knowing that the herdsman had something of moment to tell in this way.

"There was a full moon in the sky, and by its light he saw a rajah, and the rajah had many guns and soldiers – even sahibs as soldiers – and he was driving out the English. And the guns were hidden behind bales of cotton."

"Is that all?" Finnerty asked, for the herdsman had stopped.

"My brother woke at that point, huzoor, and his eyes fell upon a mhowa tree in full bloom."

"Which means that the mhowa is in bloom now?"

"Of the interpreting of visions I know nothing, but it might be that way."

The Banjara now departed, and Swinton said: "Do you remember Prince Ananda saying that if a holy man stood by the Lake of the Golden Coin in the full of the moon, when the mhowa was in bloom, having the three sacred sapphires, he would see the dead king rise in his golden boat?"

"Yes, and this cowherd's chatter means an uprising soon. I

hear hoofs; that will be Lord Victor. Are we going to accuse him of being at the pool?"

"I think not. We know as much now as we shall if we question him. But we'll keep him with us; a young ass like that isn't safe without a keeper – he's no match for as clever a traitor as this girl."

Finnerty's chair groaned as though it had received a twist from his big frame, but his voice was devoid of protest: "I can't make the girl out. My mind is in a psychological state, and I suppose I'm influenced by the apparent candour in her eyes. They seem to express trouble, too, as if she were searching for a moral finger post, for a way out of darkness." Then the major expressed an apologetic phrase: "I'm afraid I'm a bit awkward at psychology; jungle dwellers are more in my line."

Swinton put his hand on the big man's shoulder. "My dear major, I wish I'd had a brother like you. My family was baked in the crucible of government service for generations; we're executive automatons."

"I understand; you're an Englishman – Damn it! I mean, in youth you never roamed the hills like shaggy-haired colts as we do in Ireland."

"If I had I wouldn't have made a good Raj policeman. But to hark back. The German machine, more soulless than our own, knows the value of Mona Lisa eyes, and Marie was probably picked for this delicate mission for the very quality that has won your sympathy – her appealing womanhood."

"And yet my perhaps sympathy for the girl was birthed by accident, not design on her part."

"What is an attractive girl doing here so close to Prince Ananda? Why is she here with a Prussian who is an enemy of the British Raj? Why is she averse to being approached? What is she searching for in the hills? It's the road to China, and guns have already arrived, according to our Banjara."

"I haven't an answer for any one of your queries, captain, but we must investigate those packets."

Lord Victor arrived now, and as he had not yet seen the skin of Pundit Bagh he was taken to where it was pegged out on the ground and being rubbed with ashes and alum. This kill of a tiger was probably the first incident in his life calculated to raise elation in the hearts of his friends.

"Something to tack to, eh?" he cried joyfully. "Fancy I hear the chaps in fluffy old London saying as I pass, 'That's the man that shot a big man-eater on foot.' No swank to that, major, for I did. You know that dicky little chapel dedicated to the tiger god?"

"Yes; the one down in the plain."

"It's simply buried under devotee bric-a-brac this morning. They should have a sign up 'Wet Paint,' for it's gory blood red. When I came along a fat black man, rolled in white muslin, cursed me – absolutely bowled at my wicket with a ball of brimstone. Now what do you make of that, major? It wasn't about the cow dog, for the bounder had one English word, 'tiger,' which he simply sprayed his lingo with."

Mahadua had come to accompany the party, and, somewhat perplexed, Finnerty turned to the shikari for an explanation.

"Yes, sahib," Mahadua said, "Pundit Bagh was a jungle god, and they are making prayer to the shrine so that the spirit may return again as a tiger to protect them from such as the black leopard."

Finnerty interpreted: "They feel that you have slain one who defended them against leopards and pig and deer that ate their crops."

"Oh, I say! Sort of a gentleman burglar who did not murder his victims."

The shikari explained that the man who had visited verbal wrath upon Lord Victor was a money lender who lent money at a high rate to the farmers to buy bullocks when the tiger had killed their plough beasts, so he was angry at this loss of revenue. He also said that some one was telling the natives that the sahibs were trying to destroy their religion by killing their jungle gods.

"Who tells them this?" Finnerty asked.

The shikari answered evasively: "This is not my country, so they do not tell me what is in the hidden room."

Chapter XVII

Major Finnerty had made arrangements for a full day after Burra Moti. Coolies had been sent on with provisions in round wicker baskets slung from a bamboo yoke, and soon the three sahibs started.

Perhaps it was the absence of immediate haste, a lack of pressing action, that allowed their minds to rest on their surroundings. Really, though, it was Lord Victor who drew them to a recognition of their arboreal surroundings with: "I say! Look at that bonfire – but it's glorious!" his riding whip indicating a gold mohur tree that, clothed in its gorgeous spring mantle of vivid red bloom, suggested its native name of "Forest on Fire."

"Yes," Finnerty said, "it seems to add to the heat of the sun, and, as if that weren't enough, listen to that damn cuckoo, the 'brain-fever bird,' vocal in his knowledge that we'll soon be frying in Hades."

The bird of fiendish iteration squeaked: "Fee-e-e-ver, fee-e-e-ver, fee-e-e-ver!" till he came to a startled hush, as, with noisy cackle, a woodpecker, all golden beak and red crest atop his black-and-white waistcoat, shot from the delicate green foliage.

"It's a land of gorgeous colouring," Finnerty commented; "trees and birds alike."

"Minus the scent and song," Swinton added as a hornbill opened his yellow coffin beak to screech in jarring discord.

But just when they had passed the sweet-scented neem, and then a kautchnor standing like some giant artificial wooden thing decorated with creamy white-and pink-petaled lilies, Finnerty drew rein, holding up his hand, and to their ears floated from a tangle of babool the sweet song of a shama. It was like the limpid carolling of a nightingale in a hedge at home; it bred a hunger of England in Lord Victor's boy heart. When the song hushed, as they passed the babool Finnerty pointed to a little long-tailed bird with dull red stomach, and the youth, lifting his helmet, exclaimed, "You topping old bird! I'd back you against a lark."

Perhaps India, populous with bird and animal life as well as human, was always as much on parade as it seemed this morning, and that they now but observed closer. At any rate, as they left the richer-garbed foothills for the heavier sombreness of the forest, their eyes were caught by the antics of a black-plumaged bird who had seized the rudder of a magpie and was being towed along by that squawking, frightened mischief-maker.

With a chuckle, Finnerty explained: "He's a king crow, known to all as the 'police wallah,' for he's eternally putting others to rights. That 'pie' has been looting some nest, and the king crow is driving him over into the next county."

Like a gateway between the land of the living and the land of beyond, its giant white limbs weird as the arms of a devil-fish, reaching through glossy leaves to almost touch a wall of sal, stood a pipal, its wide-spreading roots, daubed with red paint, nursing

a clay idol that sat amid pots of honey, and sweet cakes, and gaudy tinsel, and little streamers of coloured cloth – all tribute to the god of the sacred wild fig. Beyond this they were in a cool forest; above, high against a blue sky, the purple haze of the sal bloom, their advent sending a grey-backed fat little dweller scuttling away on his short legs.

"A badger!" Lord Victor cried eagerly.

"Kidio, the grave digger, as our natives call him," Finnerty added. "Even that chubby little cuss is enlarged mythologically." He turned to Mahadua, and in answer to a question the latter, drawing up to the Major's stirrup, said: "Yes, sahib, the *ghor kidio* comes up out of the Place of Terrors on dark nights and carries away women and children. Near my village, which is Gaum, one lived in the hills so close that he was called the 'Dweller at the Hearth.' A sahib who made a hunt of a month there broke the evil spell by some manner of means, for the great grave digger was never seen again."

"Shot him?" Finnerty asked seriously.

"No, sahib, else he would have had pride in showing the one." Then Mahadua dropped back well satisfied with the pleasure of converse with the sahibs.

Screened from the sun's glare, but warming to his generous heat, the forest held an indescribable perfume – the nutty, delicious air which, drawn into expanded lungs, fills one with holy calm, with the delight of being, of living, and so they rode in silent ecstasy, wrapped in the mystic charm of the Creator's

work.

An hour of travel and they met a party of Finnerty's men carrying one of their number slung from a bamboo pole. He had been mauled by the black leopard. The story was soon told. The whole party with Bahadar had moved forward on Moti's trail, stopping when they felt she was near, the men spreading out with the object of bringing her in. In one of these encircling movements they had surrounded, without knowing it, the black leopard, and, in breaking through, the vicious animal had mauled one so that he would probably die.

The shikari, after he had asked the locality of this encounter, said: "It is toward Kohima."

"This shows that he is not a spirit, Mahadua; that he hasn't dissolved into air."

"Still, sahib, a spirit, leopard or tiger, can always change back."

"It proves to me," Swinton declared, "that there's an exit to that cave which we did not discover."

They had forgotten Lord Victor's presence, but the young man said blithely: "I say, I heard you two Johnnies had gone out after a leopard this morning. What luck?"

"He got away; he's just mauled this man. And it means" – Finnerty turned and faced Swinton – "that we've got to follow him up."

Finnerty's voice had scarcely ceased when the trumpeting of an elephant, loud and shrill, sounded ahead. "That's Raj

Bahadar," Finnerty declared. "I expect Moti has come back with another walloping."

They urged their horses, and came to where the party had camped through the night, a fresh trail showing that the men had moved on. Following this, they came within hearing of human voices, high-pitched in a babel of commands and exhortations and calls, drowned at times by the trumpet of Bahadar. Emerging from a thick clump of trees, they could see the natives darting and hopping about something that looked like the top of a submarine emerging from the waters.

"Bahadar has fallen into a pit," Finnerty declared.

Before the three sahibs reached Bahadar there was an encouraging "phrut, phrut" from beyond, and Moti's gleaming tusks showed through the jungle; and then the old lady herself halted just beyond the pit for a brief survey, as if to make sure that it wasn't a game to trap her. Then she advanced gingerly, feeling the ground, and thrust out her trunk for Bahadar to grasp with his. The natives saw that Moti had come to help Bahadar and not to belabour him. With sticks and jungle axes some of them started to tear down to a slope the end wall of the pit, while the others gathered sticks and branches and threw them beneath the trapped elephant as a gradually rising stage.

Finnerty dismounted, and, calling a man, said: "While Moti is busy noose both her hind legs, leaving the ropes in the hands of men so that she will not find the strain, and when Bahadar is out fasten them quickly around trees."

Moti was for all the world like the "anchor man" on a tug-of-war team. Claspng the bull elephant's trunk in a close hitch, she leaned her great bulk back and pulled with little grunts of encouragement. Bahadar soon was able to catch his big toes in the partly broken bank, and helped the natives in its levelling.

At last he was out, and seeming to recognise what Moti had done, was rubbing his trunk over her forehead and blowing little whiffs of endearment into her ears, while she stood warily watching the puny creatures who kept beyond reach of a sudden throw of her trunk.

A native with a noose, watching his chance, darted in and slipped it over a forefoot, and Moti, in a second, was moored, fore and aft, to strong trees. Either in a cunning wait or from a feeling of resignation to fate, she put up no fight beyond a querulous "phrump, phrump!" as if she would say: "My reward, you traitors!"

Bahadar was cut about the legs, for the pit, being an elephant trap dug by Nagas who captured elephants for their meat and ivory, was studded with upright bamboo spears, and, unlike the local pits with their sloped sides, its walls were perpendicular to its full depth of ten feet.

"Tell me why you left the main trail, and how Bahadar stepped into this pit?" Finnerty demanded of Gothya, the mahout.

"We heard the bell, sahib – "

"Fool!" and Finnerty pointed to Moti's neck, on which was nothing.

"We all heard it, sahib, and some talk between a voice and Moti, who would answer back '*E-e-eu-eu – phrut! E-e-eu-eu – phrut!*' as though she were saying, 'Wait, brother!' No doubt, sahib, it was a jungle spirit that was drawing Moti along for our destruction, for, as we followed this old Naga trail, Bahadar suddenly went through the covering of leaves and dead limbs that was over the pit."

It was now past noon, and Finnerty said: "We'll have tiffin, a rest-up, and, with Mahadua, make a wide cast toward the hills to see if we can pick up tracks of the leopard; he's both ugly and hungry, so will do something to betray himself. We'll leave Moti here with the party – the tie-up will quiet her – until we return."

A leg chain was fastened from one of Moti's front feet to a hind foot, which would shorten her stride should it so happen that by any chance she broke away again.

PART FOUR

Chapter XVIII

Mahadua, the hunter guide, led the three sahibs always in the direction of Kohima, sometimes finding a few pugs in soft earth. About three o'clock two natives overtook them, their general blown condition suggesting that their mission was urgent.

"I am Nathu, the shikari," one said, "and the Debta of Kohima has sent for the sahib to come and destroy a black leopard who has made the kill of a woman, for my gun – that is but a muzzle-loader – is broken. It is the man-eater who was taken from Kohima by the rajah, and is now back; he has cunning, for a spirit goes with him, sahib. Three women were drying mhowa blooms in the sun, and they sat up in a machan to frighten away jungle pig and deer who eat these flowers; perhaps they slept, for there was no outcry till the leopard crawled up in the machan and took the fat one by the throat and carried her off."

"How far is Kohima?" Finnerty asked.

"It is but a few hours' ride. But if the sahib comes he will find the leopard at sunset, for he will come to where the body of the fat woman lies on a hill. Now in the daylight men with spears are keeping him away till I bring the sahib for the kill. The sahibs can ride to Kohima, for there is a path."

When they arrived at Kohima, the village sat under a pall of dread, and their advent was hailed with delight. An old woman bent her forehead to Finnerty's stirrup, wailing: "Sahib, it is the daughter of Sansya who has been taken, and an evil curse rests over my house, for before, by this same black devil, was taken a son."

"We'll get busy because night will soon be upon us," Finnerty said to his companions.

They were led on foot to an almost bare plateau, and Nathu, pointing to the spearsmen fifty yards ahead, said: "The body is there, sahib, and as the sun goes behind the hills the leopard will come back to eat. He is watching us from some place, for this is his way. Here he can see without being seen."

They beheld a grewsome sight – the body of the slain woman.

"This black devil has the same trick of devouring his kill in the open as the Gharwalla man-eater had," Finnerty declared; "but I see no cover for a shot." He gazed disconsolately over the stony plateau with neither rock nor tree breaking its surface. "There is no cover," he said to Mahadua, and when the shikari repeated this to Nathu, the latter answered: "*There* is cover for the sahib," pointing to a thick clump of aloe with swordlike leaves, twenty yards away. "My men will cut the heart out of that so that the sahib may rest within. Even if the beast is wounded he will not be foolish enough to thrust his body against those spears."

Nathu spoke, and two men came forward from a group that had lingered back on the path, and with sharp knives lashed to

bamboo handles cut an entrance and a small chamber in the aloe.

Finnerty laughed. "That is a new one on me, but it will probably deceive even that black devil; he would notice anything new here the size of a cricket bat."

"Huzoor," Nathu advised, "the leopard is watching us from some place, but, cunning as he is, he cannot count; so, while we are all here, the one who is to make the kill will slip into the machan and we will go away, leaving the woman who is now dead beyond doubt. And as to his scent, sahib, I have brought a medicine of strong smell that all of his kind like, and I have put some where the woman lies and within the aloe machan, so his nose will not give him knowledge of the sahib's presence."

"It is your game, Lord Victor," Finnerty said. "We'll go in a body to the aloe, and you, taking my 10-bore, slip quickly into your cubby-hole. Squat inside as comfortably as you can, with your gun trained absolutely on the body, and wait till the leopard is lined dead with your sights; don't move to get a bead on him or he'll twig you."

Nathu followed the sahibs, dropping on their trail from a bison horn a liquid that had been decocted from the glands of an otter for the obliteration of the sahib scent; the taint of natives would not alarm the leopard, experience having taught him that when he charged they fled.

As Gilfain sat behind the sabre-leafed wall of aloe he bent down a strong-fibred shoot to obtain a good rest for the heavy 10-bore, and an opening that gave him a view of the dead body of

the woman. Beyond the plateau the jungle, fading from emerald green, through purple, to sable gloom as the sun slid down behind a western hill, took on an enshrouding of mystery. A peacock, from high in a tamarisk that was fast folding its shutter leaves for the night, called discordantly. A high-shouldered hyena slouched in a prowling semicircle back and forth beyond the kill, his ugly snout picking from the faint breeze its story of many scents. Closer and closer the hyena drew in his shuffling trot, till suddenly, with head thrown up as if something had carried to his ear, he stood a carved image of disgusting contour against a gold-tinted sky shot with streamers of red. Then, with a shrunken cringe of fear, he slipped away and was gone.

From the jungle something like a patch of its own gloom came out upon the blurred plateau. As the thing turned to sweep along the jungle edge the fading sky light glinted on two moonstones that were set in its shadowy form.

The watcher now knew what it was. His heart raced like a motor. At the base of his skull the tightening scalp pricked as though an etcher were at work. His tongue moistened parchment-dry lips. His fingers beat a tattoo upon the triggers of the gun. It was not fear; it was just "It," the sensation that comes to all.

More wily even than the ghoulish hyena, the leopard worked his way toward the spot of his desire. Belly to earth, he glided for yards; then he would crouch, just a darkening patch on the surface; sometimes he sat up – a black boulder. Thirty yards across from the body, he passed beyond it to catch in his nostrils

the gently stirring wind that sifted through the aloe blades to where, once more flat to earth, he waited while his sixth sense tabulated the taints.

Lord Victor's eye, trained along the barrels, saw nothing definite; he felt a darkening of the ground where the woman lay, but no form grew in outlines. Suddenly there was a glint of light as if from a glowworm; that must be the leopard's eyes. Then – Gilfain must have moved his gun – there was the gleam of white teeth fair in line with the sights as the leopard snarled with lifted head.

Inspiration pulled the triggers – once, twice! The gun's roar was followed by the coughing growl of the writhing leopard. With a dulled, automatic movement the man jammed two cartridges into the gun, and with foolish neglect of sense scrambled from his cage, the razor edge of an aloe leaf slitting his cheek, and ran to where, beside the woman's body, lay dead the one who had slain her.

An instinct rather than reason flashed across Gilfain's still floating mind, a memory of Finnerty's precaution at the death of Pundit Bagh, and, holding both barrels cocked, he prodded the still twitching black body; but, now released from trivial things, the leopard lay oblivious of this.

Torches flickered in wavy lines where the village path topped the plateau, and a crunch of hurrying feet was heard. To reassure them Lord Victor cried a cheery, "Hello! Whoop-ah!"

When Finnerty and Swinton arrived at the head of a streaming

procession a soft glow of satisfied victory loosened Gilfain's tautened nerves, and he babbled of the joy of slaying man-eaters till cut short by the major's: "Well, this act is finished, so we'll get back."

Mahadua was already busy. The leopard was quickly triced to a pole, and they were back in Kohima. Then there was ritual, for the hillmen of the jungle have their ways, and the killing of a man-eater is not of daily habit, and Mahadua, knowing all these things, had to collect a levy.

The slain one was deposited in front of the debta's house, and Mahadua, with some fantastic gyrations supposed to be a dance, collected a rupee from the headman, also from the villagers flour and ghee and honey, for that was the custom when a man-eater was slain.

Six strong carriers, each armed with a torch, were supplied by the debta to bear the trophy, slung from a bamboo, down to the next village, which was Mayo Thana.

For the sahibs milk and rice cakes and honey were supplied, and their praises sounded as demigods. Lord Victor, as he sat on a block of wood that was a grain mortar, found his knees in the thin, bony arms of an old woman whose tears of gratitude splashed upon the hand with which he patted her arm. She was Sansya, the slain woman's mother.

As they left Kohima, the carriers waving their torches in rhythmic lines of light, the leader sent his powerful voice echoing down the slopes in a propitiatory song to the god of the hills,

which also conveyed an order to Mayo Thana to prepare a relay of bearers.

Weirdly mystic the torch-lighted scene, the leader's voice intoning the first line, and the others furnishing the chorus as they sang:

"God of our Hills!
Ho-ho, ho-ho!
The leopard is slain!
Ho-ho, ho-ho!
To thee our praise!
Ho-ho, ho-ho!"

To the flowing cadence of this refrain the six bearers of the leopard trotted down the mountain path in rhythmic swing.

At Mayo Thana, a mile down, and at Mandi, half a mile beyond, thrifty Mahadua collected his tithe as master of the hunt, and obtained torch-bearers, the lot from Mandi having the task of shouldering the burden till the elephant party was reached.

For an hour they travelled among heavy-bodied creepers and massive trees when, through the solemn stillness, echoed the far-off tinkle of a bell. Without command, Mahadua stood silently in the path, his head turned to listen. Five seconds, ten seconds – the sahibs sitting their saddles as silent as their guide, and again, now unmistakable, to their ears floated the soft note that Finnerty had likened to the clink of ice in a glass.

Mahadua, holding up his torch so that its light fell upon

Finnerty's face, turned his eyes questioningly.

"It is Moti's bell?" Finnerty said, query in his voice.

"Yes, sahib; but it is not on Moti's neck, because it would not just speak and then remain silent, and then speak and then remain silent, for in the jungle her pace would keep it at tongue all the time."

Then, listening, they waited. Again they heard it, and again there was silence.

"Easy, easy!" Finnerty commanded, and, moving with less speed than before, they followed Mahadua.

As they came to a break in the forest where some hills had burst through its gloomed shroud to lift their rocky crests into the silver moonlight, Finnerty heard, nearer now, the bell, and, startled by its unfamiliar note, a jackal, sitting on his haunches on the hilltop, his form outlined against the moonlit sky, threw up his head to send out a faint, tremulous cry. The plaintive wail was caught up as it died away by another jackal, and then another – they were like sentinels calling from posts in a vast semicircle; then with a crashing crescendo of screaming yelps all broke into a rippling clamour that suggested they fled in a pack.

"Charming!" Lord Victor commented. "Topping chorus!"

In the hush that followed this jackal din, Finnerty could hear the tinkling bell. "Does it come up this path?" he asked the shikari.

"Yes, sahib, and I thought I heard Moti laugh."

The major turned to Swinton. "I've got a presentiment that

somebody – probably the man that stuck a knife into Baboo Dass' thief – having the bell, has got Moti away from my fellows and is leading her up this path to the hills. I'm going to wing him." He slipped from the saddle, his 10-bore in hand. "Of course, if I can get my clutches on him – " He broke off to arrange action. "Put out the torch, Mahadua, and have your match box ready to light it in a second. You two chaps had better turn your horses over to the syces. With Mahadua I'll keep in advance."

Mahadua, putting his little hand up against Finnerty's chest, checked at a faint, rustling, grinding sound that was like the passing of sandpaper over wood. Finnerty, too, heard it. Perhaps a leopard had forestalled them in waylaying the one who had signalled his approach; or perhaps the one had stilled the telltale sapphire tongue, and was near. No, it tinkled, a score or more yards beyond. The shikari's hand clutched spasmodically in a steadying grip of Finnerty's coat; there was a half-stifled gasp from its owner as two lurid eyes weaved back and forth in the black depths in which the path was lost.

Finnerty's iron nerve went slack; his boy days of banshee stories flooded his mind in a superstitious wave as those devilish eyes hovered menacingly ten feet from the ground.

"A spirit!" Mahadua gasped as he crawled his way behind the major.

"Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" The sound came just below where the eyes had gleamed; then a smothering cry – the crunching, slipping sound of sandpaper on wood; a rapid clatter of the bell;

a noise like the hiss of escaping steam mingled with the crunch of breaking bones; and again the gleaming eyes cut the darkness in sinuous convolutions.

A gasp – a cry of: "Gad, what is it?" came from behind Finnerty, and beyond there was a heavy thud, the clatter of a bamboo pole, as, with cries of horror, the men of Mandi dropped their burden and fled, gasping to each other: "It is the goblin of the Place of Terrors, and if we look upon his eyes we shall become mad!"

In front of Finnerty the jungle was being rent asunder. With a wild trumpet note of battle, drawn by the bell clangor, an elephant crashed through impeding limbs and seized the evil-eyed goblin.

"A light!" Finnerty grabbed the torch, and as it flared to a match that trembled in Mahadua's fingers he thrust it back into the guide's hand, cocking the hammers of his 10-bore.

The resined-torch flare picked out against the grey of Moti's neck a white-and-black necklace, the end of which was wound about a swaying vine, and in the coils, drawn flat like an empty bag, was a man from whose neck dangled a clanging bell.

"A python!" Finnerty cried as he darted forward to get a shot at the wide-jawed head that, swaying back and forth, struck viciously with its hammer nose at Moti's eyes.

The jungle echoed with a turmoil that killed their voices; the shrill, trumpet notes of Burra Moti had roused the forest dwellers; a leopard, somewhere up in the hills, answered the

defiant roars; black-faced monkeys, awakened by the din, filled the branches of a giant sal and screamed in anger.

Great as was the elephant's strength, she could not break the python's deadly clasp; she was like a tarpon that fights a bending rod and running reel, for the creeper swayed, and the elastic coils slipped and held and gave and gathered back, until its choking strength brought her to her knees.

For a second the serpent's head was clear – a yard above, and the 10-bore spat its lead fair into the yawning mouth. The coils slipped to looseness; the big elephant neck drew in the cooling air, and Moti, wise as a human, knew that she was saved. A grunt of relief rippled weakly from her trunk, and Finnerty, slipping up as she lay still bound in the python's folds, patted her on the forehead and let her hear his voice.

"Put the bell on her, sahib," Mahadua advised, "for now that she is tired she will be at peace."

Mahadua's call to the carriers was answered far down the trail; but reassured by his cry of, "The big snake is dead!" they came back. More torches were lighted, their flickering glare completing a realistic inferno.

Down on her bended legs like a huge, elephant-faced god, a dead man, clad in the snuff-coloured robe of a priest, laced to her neck by the python coils and surrounded by black-skinned torch-bearers, Moti might well have been taken for some jungle fetish.

The men of Mandi carried little axes in their belts, and with these the serpent cable was cut and uncoiled. He was a gigantic

brute, thirty feet long and thicker than a man's thigh. The mottled skin, a marvellous pattern of silver and gold and black, looked as though nature had hung out an embellished sign of "Beware!" Or, perhaps, mothering each of its kind, had, with painstaking care, here limned a deceiving screen like the play of sunlight or moonlight through leaves on the dark limb of a tree.

As the priest's limp body flopped to earth a jade-handled knife fell from a leather girdle. Swinton picked it up, saying: "This is familiar, major."

"There are two of them," Finnerty answered, stooping to reach another that still rested in its sheath.

The strap that held the sapphire bell, wound twice around the priest's shoulders, was evidently intended for Moti's neck, and with a continuous stream of low-voiced endearments, Finnerty buckled it to place.

Touching the iron chain that still held in its stride-shortening grip Moti's legs, Finnerty said: "That's why they came along at such a slow pace, and it will help us shoo the old girl back; she'll know that she can't cut up any didos."

Mahadua, though he didn't understand the English, realising something of this, said: "Sahib, Moti will be like a woman that has had her cry of passion; she will now bear with her friends. I will go in the lead with a torch, and if the sahib will spare one of the bridle reins, holding an end and allowing Moti to take the other end in her fingers as she might the tail of an elephant, she will follow the horse."

It was soon arranged thus. At a word from Finnerty, Moti lumbered heavily to her feet, while he stood with uplifted whip, ready to cut a stinging blow to her trunk should she show signs of temper. Quite understanding this threat, Moti gently thrust her trunk toward the major's face and fumbled his chin with her thumb and finger as though she would say: "I know a friend when I find him."

As they neared the elephant encampment, Moti, catching the sound of Bahadar's ears fanning flies, rumbled a soft message of peace; but there was no expected noise of greeting from the natives, no bustle of sleepers rising to greet the sahibs. They came right into the camp before some of the men, who had slept with their heads rolled in the folds of turbans or loin cloths, sat up groggily or struggled to incapable feet. The mahout reeled up from somewhere near Bahadar and salaamed drunkenly, a foolish, deprecating leer on his lips.

The sight of Moti partly sobered him, and his mind caught up the blurred happenings of the night. "An evil spirit, sahib," he babbled, "caused us to fall heavy in sleep, and we were wakened by the breaking of the rawhide nooses that bound Moti; then she fled to the jungle."

"This fool is drunk!" Mahadua declared angrily. "If the sahib will beat him with a whip he will tell who brought the arak."

Gothya repudiated Mahadua's assertion, but a firm tap of the riding whip on his buttocks, with threats of more, gradually brought out the story of their debauch. A party of native liquor

runners, men who smuggled arak across the line from Nepal, had stumbled upon the party and had driven a thriving trade.

"That accounts largely for the stealing of Moti," Finnerty declared. He had in his hand the rawhide noose, showing that it had been cut close to the elephant's leg. Evidently the priest had been able to crawl right in to the camp, the drunkards having let their fire die.

The mahout, salaaming, said: "Sahib, the jungle is possessed of evil gods to-night. Just when it was growing dark we saw passing on a white horse the one who gallops at night to destroy."

"Was that before you became drunk, or since?" Finnerty asked sarcastically.

"At that time the wine had not arrived, sahib. We all saw passing yonder in the jungle where there is no path the white horse."

"Gad! It has been the girl coming down out of the hills," Finnerty said to Swinton. "There must be something about to materialise when she waited so late. We'll camp here," he added to Mahadua. "Send a couple of these fellows to the keddha to tell Immat to bring out his tusker, with a couple of ropes."

The men were sent off, a fire built, the tent pitched, and Finnerty's servant, who had been brought in charge of the commissariat, prepared a supper for the sahibs.

Bahadar, seeing that Burra Moti had overcome her waywardness, knelt down for a restful night, but Moti, true to her African elephant habit, remained on her stalwart legs, fondling

her recovered sapphire trinket.

Chapter XIX

Like the aftermath of a heavy storm, the night held nothing but the solemn forest stillness; the tired sahibs lay in its calm creatures of a transient Nirvana till brought from this void of restful bliss by the clarion of a jungle cock rousing his feathered harem.

A golden-beaked black "hill myna" tried his wondrous imitative vocal powers on the cock's call from the depths of a tree just above them, and when this palled upon his fancy he piped like a magpie or drooled like a cuckoo; then he voiced some gibberish that might have been simian or gathered from the chatter of village children.

The camp stirred; the natives, shame in their hearts and aches in their heads, crawled into action. Amir Alli, the cook, built a fire, and brewed tea and made toast.

Lord Victor was filled with curiosity over the cock crow, and when it was explained that there were wild fowl about he became possessed of a desire to shoot some.

After breakfast Finnerty loaded a gun and sent Mahadua with Lord Victor after the jungle fowl. They were gone an hour, for the beautiful black-red jungle cock had led them deep into the forest before falling to the gun.

Upon their return Finnerty fancied there was an unusual diffidence about Lord Victor; he seemed disinclined to dilate

upon his sporting trip; also Mahadua had a worried look, as if he held back something he should unfold.

A little later, as Finnerty went to the spot where Moti and Raj Bahadar were feeding upon limbs the men had brought, he heard Mahadua say to Gothya: "Does a spirit leave hoofprints in the earth as big as my cap, believer in ghosts? And does it ride back to the hills in daylight?" Then Gothya caught sight of Finnerty, and the wrangle ceased.

When the major had looked at the elephants for a minute he drew Mahadua into the jungle, and there said: "Now, shikari man, tell me what has entered through those little eyes of yours this morning?"

The face of Mahadua wrinkled in misery. "Sahib," he begged, "what am I to do? I eat master's salt, and yet – " He was fumbling in the pocket of his jacket; now he drew forth a rupee and tendered it to Finnerty, adding: "Take this, master, and give it back to the young lord sahib that I may now speak, not having eaten his salt to remain silent."

Finnerty threw the silver piece into the jungle, saying: "Bribery is for monkeys. And now that you serve but one master what have you of service for him?"

The man's eyes, which had been following with regret the rupee's spinning flight, now reverted to his master's face. "Going I saw in soft earth the print of hoofs, the front ones having been shod with iron; they were not small ones such as Bhutan ponies have, nor a little larger like the Arab horses, but wide and full,

such as grow on the *Turki* breed."

By the "Turki breed" Mahadua meant the Turcoman or Persian horse, Finnerty knew, and the grey stallion Marie rode was one such. He asked: "Was it the track of the white horse Gothya thought carried an evil spirit?"

"Yes, sahib; for as we went beyond after the jungle hens the mem-sahib who rides the grey stallion passed, going up into the hills, and a road bears its burden both coming and going."

Finnerty jumped mentally. Why had Lord Victor given Mahadua a rupee to say nothing of this incident? "But she did not see you nor the sahib?" he queried.

"She did not see your servant, but the young man spoke with her."

"And he gave you a rupee?"

"He put a finger on his lips and closed his eyes when he passed the rupee, and thinking the going abroad to eat the air by the mem-sahib of no importance to master I said nothing."

Neither did Finnerty say anything of this to either Lord Victor or Swinton. But he made up his mind that he would also go up into the hills that day. It was his duty.

Persistently his mind revolted at the thought of denouncing the girl. In some moments of self-analysis his heart warmed in confessional, but this feeling, traitorous to his duty, he put in the storehouse of locked-away impulses. He had never even whispered into words these troublous thoughts. It took some mastering, did the transient glint of pleasing womanhood into

his barren jungle life, for the big man was an Irish dreamer, a Celt whose emotions responded to the subtle tonic of beauty and charm. Ever since he had taken Marie in his arms to put her in the howdah he had felt her head against his shoulder; had seen the heavy sweep of black hair that was curiously shot with silver.

Finnerty could see an uneasy look in Lord Victor's eyes as that young man watched him coming back out of the jungle with Mahadua. Why had the youngster talked with the girl on the grey stallion – why had he not let her pass? Why had he given the shikari a rupee to say nothing of the meeting? There was some mystery behind the whole thing. She had come back late the previous evening, and now she was going up into the hills at this early hour.

The elephant Finnerty had sent for had not arrived; perhaps the half-drunken messengers had lain down in the jungle to sleep off the arak. But at last the tusker appeared. It was during this wait that Finnerty proposed to Swinton that they should go up into the hills. He saw Lord Victor start and look up, apprehension in his eyes, when he broached the matter, but though the latter advanced many reasons why they should not make the journey he did not accept the major's polite release of his company; he stuck. Indeed, Finnerty was hoping Gilfain would decide to return to Darpore, for the young man's presence would hamper their work of investigation.

He knew that the grey stallion's hoofprints would be picked up on the path that led to the hills when they came to the spot where

the girl, having finished her detour, would swing her mount back to the beaten way, so he rode with his eyes on the ground. He first discerned them faintly cupping some hard, stony ground, but he said nothing, riding in silence till, where the trail lay across a stretch of mellow, black soil, imprints of the wide hoofs were indented as though inverted saucers had cut a quaint design. Here he halted and cried in assumed surprise: "By Jove! Somebody rides abroad early this morning!"

But his assumption of surprise was not more consummate than Gilfain's, for the latter's face held a baby expression of inquiring wonderment as he said: "Floaty sort of idea, I'd call it, for any one to jog up into these primeval glades for pleasure."

Swinton, who knew the stallion's hoofprints from a former study of them, raised his eyes to Finnerty's, there reading that the major also knew who the rider was.

Now by this adventitious lead their task was simplified, and Finnerty clung tenaciously to the telltale tracks. This fact gradually dawned upon Lord Victor, and he became uneasy, dreading to come upon the girl while with his two companions.

They had ridden for an hour, always upward, the timber growing lighter, the ground rockier, and open spots of jungle more frequent, when, on a lean, gravelled ridge, Finnerty stopped, and, dismounting, searched the ground for traces of a horse that had passed.

"Have you dropped something, major?" Lord Victor asked querulously.

"Yes," Finnerty answered, remounting; "I think it's back on the trail."

Swinton followed, and Lord Victor, muttering, "What the devil are you fellows up to?" trailed the other two.

A quarter of a mile back, where a small path branched, Finnerty picked up their lead and they again went upward, now more toward the east. The presence of Lord Victor held unworded the dominating interest in Swinton's and Finnerty's minds, so they rode almost silently.

It was noon when they, now high up among hills that stretched away to the foot of Safed Jan, whose white-clothed forehead rested in the clouds, came out upon a long, stony plateau. Finnerty, pointing with his whip, said: "There lies the Safed Jan Pass, and beyond is the road to Tibet, and also the road that runs south through Nepal and Naga land to Chittagong. I've never been up this far before."

"If this trip is in my honour, you're too devilish hospitable," Lord Victor growled; "mountain climbing as a pastime is bally well a discredited sport."

Here and there on the plateau the damp-darkened side of a newly upturned stone told that the grey stallion had passed on the path they rode; but at the farther extremity of the plateau they came, with startling suddenness, upon a deep cleft – a gorge hundreds of feet deep, and yet so smooth to the surface that at fifty yards it was unobservable. There the path ended, and on the farther side, twenty feet away, perched like a bird's nest in a

niche of the cliff, was a temple, partly hollowed from the solid rock and partly built of brick. To one side, carved from the rock, was an image of Chamba.

With a rueful grin, Finnerty cast his eye up and down the gorge whose one end was lost between mountain cliffs, and whose other dipped down to cut the feet of two meeting hills. He dismounted and prowled up and down the chasm's brink. There were no hoofprints, no disturbing of sand or gravel; absolutely nothing but the quiescent weathered surface that had lain thus for centuries.

When Finnerty returned, Swinton, amused at the intense expression of discomfiture on his face, said: "Our early-morning friend must sit a horse called Pegasus."

Finnerty, raising his voice, called across the chasm. He was answered by an echo of his own rich Irish tone that leaped from gorge to gorge to die away up the mountainside. He seized a stone and threw it with angry force against the brick wall of the temple; the stone bounded back, and from the chasm's depths floated up the tinkle of its fall. But that was all; there was no response.

Somewhat to Finnerty's surprise, Swinton said: "Well, we've given our curiosity a good run for it; suppose we jog back? When we get in the cool of the jungle we'll eat our bit of lunch."

Finnerty did not voice the objection that was in his mind. Certainly the girl had passed that way – was still up above them; why should they give up pursuit because the trail was momentarily broken?

Back across the plateau Swinton had assumed the lead, and

fifty yards in the jungle he stopped, saying: "I'm peckish; we'll have a good, leisurely lunch, here."

When they had eaten, Lord Victor, saying he was going to have a look at the bald pate of Safed Jan, strolled back toward the plateau. When he had gone Swinton spoke: "If we stay here long enough, major, the girl, who of course rode that horse whose tracks we followed, will come around that sharp turn in the path, and, figuratively, plunk into our arms. We are at the neck of the bottle – the gateway. There's a mighty cleverly constructed drawbridge in the face of that temple; that brickwork hides it pretty well."

Finnerty whistled. "And the girl, you think, vanished over the let-down bridge?"

"Yes, and probably sat there eyeing us all the time."

"By Jove, they saw us coming on the plateau and drew up the bridge!"

"Yes."

"And what do we do now?"

"Wait here. We'll see her face to face, I'm certain; that will be something. Whether she will have with her what she searches for I don't know."

"Some companion she expects to meet here?"

"It must be, and I'm going to search him."

"Unless it's too big a party."

"When do we start?" Lord Victor queried, returning; but he received only an evasive answer. He grew petulant as an hour

went by.

And now Swinton had disappeared up the trail toward the plateau. After a time he came back, and with a motion of his eyebrows told Finnerty that some one was coming. They could hear an occasional clink of iron striking stone as a horse, moving at a slow walk, came across the plateau, and then a gentle, muffled, rhythmic series of thuds told that he was on the jungle path.

Finnerty had laid his heavy hand with a strong grip on Lord Victor's forearm, the pressure, almost painful, conveying to that young man's mind an inarticulate threat that if he voiced a warning something would happen him; he read its confirmation in a pair of blue Irish eyes that stared at him from below contracted brows.

A grey horse suddenly rounding the sharp turn came to a halt, for Swinton was sprawled fair across the path.

A heavy veil, fastened around the girl's helmet, failed to release at her trembling, spasmodic grasp, and her face went white as Swinton, leisurely rising, stood just to one side of the stallion's head, his implacable, unreadable eyes turned toward her. She knew, perhaps from the man's attitude within reach of her bridle rein, perhaps from the set of that face, perhaps from blind intuition, that the captain had recognised her.

Finnerty came forward, lifting his helmet in an interference of blessed relief, for he, too, sensed that there was something wrong – something even beyond the previous suspicion.

Lord Victor, who had sprung to his feet with a gasping cry at the girl's appearance, stood limp with apprehension, his mind so much of a boy's mind, casting about futilely for some plan to help her, for there was dread in her face, and, like a boy's mind, his found the solution of the difficulty in a trick, just such a trick as a schoolboy would pitch upon. The whole process of its evolution had taken but two seconds, so it really was an inspiration. He darted toward the horse, crying banteringly: "I say! Introduce me, old top." Then his foot caught in a visionary root, and he plunged, his small, bare head all but burying itself in Swinton's stomach.

The grey stallion leaped from the rake of a spur, his thundering gallop all but drowning the blasphemous reproach that issued from Swinton's lips, as, in a fury of sudden passion, he took a deliberate swing at the young nobleman's nose.

Finnerty unostentatiously crowded his bulk between the two, saying, with an inward laugh: "You're a dangerous man; you've winded the captain, and you've frightened that horse into a runaway. He may break the girl's neck."

They were a curious trio, each one holding a motive that the other two had not attained to, each one now dubious of the others' full intent, and yet no one wishing to clear the air by questions or recriminations – not just yet, anyway.

"What the devil did the girl bolt for?" Swinton asked angrily.

"The *horse* bolted," Finnerty answered, lying in an Irishman's good cause – a woman.

"You clumsy young ass!" Swinton hurled at Gilfain. "I wanted to – " Then the hot flush of temper, so rare with him, was checked by his mastering passion – secretiveness.

Lord Victor laughed. "My dear and austere mentor, I apologise. In my hurry to forestall you with the young lady whom you have ridden forth so many mornings to meet I bally well stumped your wicket, I'm afraid – and my own, too, for we're both bowled."

Finnerty philosophically drew his leather cheroot case and proffered it to Swinton, saying: "Take a weed!"

The captain complied, lighting it in an abstraction of remastery. He had made the astounding discovery that Marie was the young lady from whose evil influence Lord Victor presumably had been removed by sending him to Darpore, and, as an enlargement of this disturbing knowledge, was the now hammering conviction that she had brought the stolen papers to be delivered to traitorous Prince Ananda.

At that instant of his mental sequence the captain all but burned his nose, paralysed by a flashing thought. "Good Lord!" he groaned. "It is these papers that she seeks up this way; the somebody who is coming overland is bringing them for fear the authorities might have caught her on the steamer routes." Then in relief to this came the remembrance that so far she had not met the some one, for she travelled alone. But now that she – as he read in her eyes – had recognised him – her very wild plunge to escape proved it – his chance of discovering anything would

be practically nil; he would possibly receive the same hushing treatment that had been meted out to Perreira, the half-caste.

"Shall we go back now?" Lord Victor was asking. "It's rather tame to-day; I'm not half fed up on tiger fights and elephant combats."

"Presently," Swinton answered, sitting down to still more methodically correlate the points of this newer vision. He could not confide any part of his discovery to Finnerty with Lord Victor present; he would decide later on whether he should, indeed, mention it at all. At first flush he had thought of galloping after the girl, but even if he had succeeded in overtaking her what could he do? If he searched her and found nothing, he would have ruined everything; probably Finnerty would have ranged up with the girl against this proceeding.

Further vibration of this human triangle, the three men of divers intent, was switched to startled expectancy by the clang of something upon the plateau – an iron-shod staff striking a stone or the impact of a horse's hoof. This was followed by silence. Finnerty stepped gently across to his horse, unslung from the saddle his 10-bore, and slipped two cartridges into it as he returned to stand leisurely against a tree trunk, an uplifted finger commanding silence. They could now hear the shuffling, muffled noises which emanate from people who travel a jungle trail no matter how cautiously they move, and something in the multiplicity of sounds intimated that several units composed the approaching caravan.

Two Naga spearmen first appeared around the turn, their eager, searching eyes showing they were on the alert for something. The threatening maw of the 10-bore caused them to stand stock-still, their jungle cunning teaching them the value of implicit obedience. They made no outcry. In four seconds the shaggy head of a pony came into view, and then his body, bearing in the saddle a sahib, and behind could be seen native carriers. The man on horseback reined up; then he laughed – a cynical, unmusical sneer it was. He touched the spur to his pony's flank, brushed by the Naga spearmen, and, eyeing the 10-bore quizzically, asked: "Well, my dear boy, what's the idea?"

Finnerty lowered the gun, answering: "Nothing; preparedness, that's all. Thought it might be a war party of Naga head-hunters when I saw those two spearmen."

The horseman slipped from his saddle and stood holding the rein; a lithe, sinewy, lean-faced man of forty-five years, his sharp grey eyes, a little too close set, holding a vulpine wariness.

Swinton had noticed his easy pose in the saddle, suggesting polo command, and now the two or three quick, precise steps forward spoke, "Service."

To Finnerty the cynical, drawling voice rang familiar; it had a curious, metallic, high-pitched crispness that the drawl failed to smother, but the man's face, caked with the drifting hill dust that sweat had matrixed, was like a mask. Finnerty proffered a cheroot, which the stranger accepted eagerly, saying: "Fancy my beggars bagged mine. I've had only some native mixture to puff

from a crude clay pipe I made and baked in a fire."

"Come from Tibet way?" the major queried.

"No; been up country buying cotton for Chittagong people, and got raided by dacoits; had to work out this way."

This story, even fantastic and sudden-built as it sounded, might have passed ordinarily as just the rightful duplicity of a man not called upon to confide the reasons of his exploration trip to any one, had not the one word "Chittagong" burned like acid.

Swinton felt that the stranger's eyes were searching him, though his words were for Finnerty. Both knew the speaker was lying. His whole get-up was not the easy, indifferent, restful apparel of a man who had been some long time in the jungle. He wore brown leather riding boots instead of perhaps canvas shoes; his limbs were incased in cord breeches that spoke of a late Bond Street origin; a stock that had once been white held a horseshoe pin studded with moonstones, its lower ends passing beneath a gaudily checked vest. This very get-up dinned familiarity into the major's mind; he struggled with memory, mentally asking, "Where have I seen this chap?" The tawny moustache, bristling in pointed smoothness, had a rakish familiarity, and yet the echoes came from far back on the path of life, as elusively haunting as a dream recalled in the morning.

Abstractedly, as they talked, the stranger shifted his riding whip to his teeth, and, reaching down with the liberated hand, gave a slight tug at his boot strap, and that instant Finnerty knew his man. It was almost a gasping cry of recognition: "Captain

Foley – by all the powers!"

The stranger's face blanched, and Swinton sprang to his feet, galvanised by a tremendous revelation.

An amused cackle came from beneath the tawny moustache, followed by an even-worded drawl: "You Johnnies are certainly out for a fine draw this morning; my name happens to be Blake-Hume – Charles Blake-Hume."

Finnerty grinned. "The same old delightfully humorous Pat Foley that I knew in the Tenth Hussars at Umballa, when I was a griffin fresh out; even in the choice of a new name you're aristocratic – 'Blake-Hume!' My dear boy, you could no more shed yourself than you could that desire for a fancy vest and the moonstone pin that you wore in a deviltry of revolt against the idea that moonstones were unlucky."

Swinton was now convinced that Finnerty had made no mistake; he could see it in a sudden narrowing of the foxy eyes, and, taking a step closer to their visitor, he said: "Captain Foley, your daughter Marie has just passed down the trail."

This simple assertion had the comparative effect of a hand grenade dropped midway between Finnerty and the stranger; possibly the major was the more astounded one of the two.

"What, in the name of Heaven, are you saying, man?" he cried, though he still kept his steadfast blue eyes held on Captain Foley, for something in the latter's attitude suggested danger.

"Simply this," Swinton answered; "Captain Foley is the father of the girl known here as Marie Boelke, and it was she who stole

a state paper from the possession of Earl Craig."

"Candour seems to be a jewel above price in the jungles this morning, so my compliments to you, my dear Captain Herbert, government policeman," Foley snarled.

Stung by the gratuitous sneer, Finnerty said with feeling. "Perhaps 'Mad' Foley" – he dropped the captain, knowing that Foley had been cast from the service – "you also recognise me, but for certain pieces of silver you would deny it. Do you remember the time I saved you a jolly good hiding that was fair coming to you for one of your crazy tricks?"

"Perfectly, my dear Finnerty; you were known to the mess as the 'Ulster Babe'; it was just a humour of mine now to play you a little, and as for the 'bobby' here, one could never mistake those bits of blue china that have been dubbed the 'farthing eyes.' Indeed I know you both *quite well*."

Swinton, less edged than Finnerty, now tendered some cynical coin in payment: "Perhaps you know this young gentleman also; I think he has cause for remembering *you*."

"Good morning, Lord Victor! You are in pleasant company," and Captain Foley let his irritating cackle escape. He gathered the bridle rein in his left hand, grasping the mane at his pony's wither, and turned the stirrup outward to receive his foot as preparation for a leisurely lift to the saddle.

In answer to a hand signal, Finnerty lifted his 10-bore to cover Captain Foley as Swinton said: "Just a moment, Mister Foley; there are certain formalities imposed upon suspected persons

crossing the Nepal border, which include perhaps a search. We want the papers your daughter stole from Earl Craig under your influence, and for which you were paid German gold."

"The bobby is devilish considerate, Lord Gilly, in not naming you as the careless one, isn't he? Charmingly diffident sort of chap, to put the onus on the venerable early. The old gent would be tremendously shocked to know he was accused of flirting with a young girl, don't you think?"

"I *do* think something, which is that you're no end of a bounder to bring your daughter's name into your flooey talk," Lord Victor retorted angrily.

"Tell your coolies to open up everything," and Swinton's opaque eyes held Foley's shifty ones menacingly. "As to yourself, strip!"

"The coolies are at his majesty's service, Mister Bobby; as for myself I'll see you damned first. I am in independent territory; Maharajah Darpore is, like myself, not a vassal of Johnnie Bull. If you put a hand on me I'll blink those farthing eyes of yours, Mister Bloody Bobby."

Next instant the speaker sprawled on his back, both shoulders to the earthen mat, as Finnerty threw a quick wrestler's hold across his neck. The big Irishman's blood had been heated by the very words that had roused Lord Victor's anger. Besides, this was the easier way; they had no time for international equity. Swinton quickly searched the prostrate man. His boots were pulled off, the insoles ripped out – even a knife blade inserted between the

two laps of the outer soles, practically wrecking them. A Webley revolver that hung from a belt Foley wore was emptied of its shells; even its barrel was prodded for a hidden roll of thin paper. The search of the packs was most thorough, and fully devoid of results.

Foley laughed cynically when the two searchers stood empty-handed, discomfiture patent in their faces.

"You turned the paper over to your daughter," Swinton accused in an unusually verbal mood.

"According to your own statement, my dear government spy, you had the young lady in your hands here; did you find this apocryphal document?"

Swinton's eyes met Finnerty's, which were saying quite plainly: "The girl has beaten us out!" There also lingered in the Irishman's eyes, Swinton fancied, a pathetic look of regret that now there could be no doubt about her mission; he even heard a deep-drawn breath, such as a game better takes when he has lost heavily.

"A devilish nice mess you have made of your life and your daughter's, Captain Foley," Lord Victor suddenly ejaculated. "You were a 'king's bad bargain' in the army, and you're a man's bad bargain out of it."

Foley stared; then he sneered: "The young cock must be cutting his spurs. Rather tallish order from a waster, Lord Gilly." He turned to Captain Swinton. "Now that you have performed your police duties I have a bottle of Scotch, which no doubt

you observed among my traps, and if you gentlemen have no objection to joining me we'll drink a toast, 'Happy to meet, sorry to part, and happy to meet again.'"

"I don't drink with the king's enemies!" Swinton clipped the words with a sound as if coins dropped.

"Nor I – with thieves," added Lord Victor.

"I'm sorry for you, my boy," the major said solemnly. "I'm ashamed to refuse to drink with an Irishman, but I'm fed up on traitors."

Swinton drew the major to one side. When they had finished a discussion as to whether there was any benefit in detaining Foley or not, which was settled in the negative, Foley asked, a sneer curling the tawny moustache: "Well, you pair of bobbies, do I pass?"

"You may go – to hell!" Finnerty added the warm destination in bitterness of soul over his shattered dream.

The coolies had repacked their burdens; the two Naga spearmen at a command trotted down the path; Foley swung into the saddle, and with a mocking, "Au revoir, Lord Gilly, Mister Bobby, and my dear Ulster Babe," was gone.

"Dished!" Finnerty exclaimed bitterly.

"The girl – we are outwitted by a woman!" Swinton admitted despondently.

"You two Johnnies have thrown up your tails," Lord Victor objected. "If the girl has the document you're so cocksure of, it's something to know that it's in Darpore. That's what I call a

duced good clue."

"My dear boy," Finnerty said, under evident control, "you're as innocent as a babe. You don't happen to know that there's a mutiny near ripe in Darpore, and it just needed a torch, such as this document, to set the whole state in a blaze."

Swinton, galvanised out of his habitual control, added fiercely: "And, you young ass! You knew who the girl was; we saw you at Jadoo Pool – we saved your life. If I'd known that it was Marie Foley I'd have dogged every footstep she took – "

"But you knew when you had her here," Lord Victor objected, momentarily forgetting his part in that episode.

"Yes, by Heaven, I did, and I can thank your sprawling interference for her escape! Why didn't you tell us that it was the girl who had stolen these state papers?"

"I've got a floaty idea that this lack of mutual confidence originated with your honourable self, Captain – Captain Herbert, as I now learn your name is. Do you think the earl would have countenanced my accepting the hospitality of a prince accompanied by a government spy?"

"You've answered your own question, Lord Victor," Swinton said quietly. "Earl Craig belongs to the old school, the Exeter Hall crowd who believe the Oriental is an Occidental – India for the Indians is their motto – and that the Hun is a civilised gentleman, not as some of us know him, a rapacious brute who seeks to dominate the world. It is that cabal, the Haldane tribe, in psychic affinity with the soulless Hun, that makes it possible

for this cuckoo creature, Boelke, to plant his eggs of sedition in the Darpore nest. Earl Craig would not have been a party to my way of unmasking or clearing the Darpores, father and son; he'd call it un-English. But I may say I did not come out here to watch you; there was no suspicion that you would come in contact with the stolen paper. My mission was concerned with some arms that are headed for India. I hope you see why it was thought advisable to keep you in ignorance of my status."

Lord Victor did not assimilate this rapidly worded statement as quickly as it was offered. He pondered a little, and then said: "I did not know that Marie Foley was here, and she got no end of a surprise when I turned up. It was all a bally fluke her arranging to meet me; she funked it when that gold cigarette case was handed her by Prince Ananda with the information that I had found it. She thought I had recognised it, which I hadn't; at least it dangled in my memory, but I hadn't connected it with her. She rode down the hill, and when she saw me coming along dropped a note so that I saw it fall – devilish clever, I call it – making an appointment at Jadoo Pool, and there she made me promise not to denounce her."

"Somewhat easy, I fancy," Swinton said sarcastically; "threw the glamour of love over you."

"You dear old bachelor! You have very visionary ideas of that matter. She doesn't care two straws for me; it was purely a matter of 'on honour' business, because she gave me her solemn word that she hadn't stolen the document, and that she hadn't brought

it out to Darpore. As to the 'grand passion,' I have a floaty idea that the handsome major, with his trick of life-saving, has taken Marie's fancy."

Finnerty blushed, but Swinton said gloomily: "You see the result of believing her. She was just too fiendishly cunning; she hadn't the paper, but knew that her traitor father was bringing it and that she, comparatively immune from search, could safely carry it to the last lap of its journey. She knew that we were liable to intercept the father and very probably search him."

"Looks like it," Finnerty commented. "I didn't know that Foley had a daughter; I heard he'd been cashiered."

"He raced himself out of the army – gambled too heavily," Swinton explained; "then, it being the only thing he cared for, went at it professionally till he raced himself out of England. After that he drifted to Austria and married a Viennese, reported to be of noble family. Whether it was a chance to plant a spy in England or that the woman really fell in love with him I don't know. Marie, of course, is the daughter, and between them the Foleys stole that document through a chance that came because of Lord Victor's fancy for the girl."

Swinton had spoken without any feeling in his voice – automatically, like a witness giving evidence. Gilfain seemed to understand this, for he made no comment. But Finnerty said lugubriously: "Devilish nasty mess, and we've been dished." He picked up the 10-bore, and, going over to his horse, strapped it under his saddle flap, saying: "We'd better jog back."

Chapter XX

Two legs of the mental triangle somewhat folded together as it dribbled down the forest path, Finnerty and Swinton riding in the lead and Lord Victor, with the depressing conviction that he had muddled things, behind.

"It's pretty well cleared up," Swinton remarked in a tone that just reached Finnerty.

"And looks rather bad for us being able to handle the situation without telegraphing headquarters," the major answered despondently.

"Small chance for that," and Swinton laughed in bitterness. "Our new Nana Sahib, Ananda, will have the wires cut or the operator under control; we'll get no word out of here until the thing has happened."

Finnerty also realised how completely they had been blanked. "By heavens, we've got to spike the guns ourselves! We'd better be killed in the attempt than be censured by government," he declared.

"I think so. They've left it to us so far, and the blame is really on our shoulders, old man."

"We'll never get the paper," Finnerty said with conviction.

"I agree with you in that, but we've got to get the machine guns and their ammunition; without them they'd be an unarmed rabble, and no great harm could be done before a regiment from

Dumdum or Lucknow could be thrown in here. It's a crazy scheme of Ananda's, anyway, but the Mad Mullah in the Sudan cost many a British life because he was held too lightly at first and got guns."

Finnerty had been restlessly eyeing the trail they travelled. Now he worded the reason, which he had carried unplaced in words before: "Going and coming I've been looking for tracks left by that party of gun runners the Banjara told about, but I've seen none. This path that the girl followed is not the main trail leading up through Safed Jan Pass, and those accursed Huns, with their usual German thoroughness, built that drawbridge at the old temple so that Foley could slip in without a chance of being met. The whole thing is as clear as mud; he was to wait there till the girl came for the document. When we get lower down we'll cut across the jungle to the regular trail – it's an old elephant highway – and check up."

"We've got to get into that underground fort," Swinton said with solemn determination in his voice. "Jadoo Cave has got something to do with the entrance."

A disconcerting thought struck Finnerty. "The minute we show up we'll be surrounded by spies. They're in my bungalow all the time; we'll not get a chance."

There was a warning cough from behind, and then Lord Victor, urging his horse closer, said: "Don't bar me, you fellows, from anything that's on; I don't want to be 'sent to Coventry.' If it's a question of fight, for God's sake give me a gun. I'd rather

have you damn me like a bargee than be left out. I can't bally well plan anything – I'm not up to it – but I'm an Englishman."

"My dear boy," Finnerty answered, "we know that. If we'd taken you in at the start we'd have given you a better chance, but we all make blunders."

It was about four o'clock when Finnerty, halting, said: "I know where I'm at now; the other trail lies due west, and if we keep our faces full on Old Sol we'll make it."

Through the jungle without a path their progress was slow. At times they were turned into big detours by interlaced walls of running elephant creeper and vast hedges of the *sahbar kirao*, the "have-patience plant" that, with its hooked spikes, was like a fence of barbed wire. Their minds, tortured by the impending calamity, were oblivious to the clamour of the jungle. A bear that had climbed a dead tree inhabited by bees scuttled down to the ground, an animated beehive, his face glued with honey, his paws dripping with it, and his thick fur palpitating with the beat of a million tiny wings. He humped away in a shuffling lope, unmolested; not even a laugh followed his grotesque form.

It was five o'clock when they struck the Safed Jan Trail and swung southward, Finnerty's eyes taking up the reading of its page. "Ah!" he cried suddenly, and, pulling his horse to a standstill, he dropped to the ground.

In the new partnership he turned rather to Lord Victor, saying: "We've been told that machine guns and ammunition have been run into Darpore over the same Chittagong route we think Mad

Foley used, only they've come along this trail from the pass." He dipped his thumb into one of the numerous deep heel prints, adding: "See! The carriers were heavy loaded and there were many."

From the varied weathering of the tracks it was apparent that carriers had passed at different intervals of time.

The major remounted, and they had ridden half an hour when his horse pricked his ears and the muscles of his neck quivered in an action of discovery. Finnerty slipped his 10-bore from its holding straps, passed his bridle rein to Swinton, and, dropping to the ground, went stealthily around a bend in the path. He saw nothing – no entrapping armed natives – but a voice came to him from its unseen owner, saying softly: "Salaam! I am the herdsman, and am here for speech with the sahib."

"All right. Come forth!" the major answered.

From a thick screen of brush the Banjara stepped out, saying: "My brother is beyond on the trail, and from his perch in a tree he has given the call of a bird that I might know it was the keddah sahib that passed; he will soon be here."

Finnerty called, and Swinton and Lord Victor came forward. Presently the fellow arrived, and, at a word from the herdsman, said: "Nawab Darna Singh sends salaams to the keddah sahib."

Finnerty stared in amazement. "Why should he have sent you, knowing that a Banjara does not kiss the hand that has beaten him like a dog?"

"Because of that, huzoor. Darna Singh is also treated like a

dog, for he is put in a cage, and those who are beaten join together against the whip."

"Why is Darna Singh caged?"

The man cast an uneasy glance toward Lord Victor and hesitated. Sensing the reason for this, Finnerty said: "Speak the truth and fear not."

"We of this country know that the sahibs are quick to anger if the mem-sahibs are spoken of, but it is because of the young mem-sahib that Darna Singh suffers. There is to be war, and Darna Singh came to know – though it may be a lie – that the mem-sahib would be made maharani – perhaps not a *gudi maharani* – and his sister would be taken with a fever and die. And it may be that in a passion over this he sought to end the matter with a thrust of a knife, but I have heard that Rajah Ananda received but a slight cut."

"I'm damned sorry for that, for the nawab has a strong arm."

"Darna Singh was indeed unlucky, sahib, for Rajah Ananda had been taught in Belati to strike with the hand and that saved him."

"Where is the Nawab caged?"

"Below; where the guns are."

Finnerty caught a quick flash of the eye from Swinton.

"And if that is the truth, that you come from him must be a lie, for a jailer does not give entrance to friends of the prisoner."

"True, sahib; but the rani is not caged, and she fears for the life of her brother, and knowing I had been beaten by the rajah and

knowing that a Banjara does not forgive, for our tribe is many in her father's state, she sent by a handmaid, who is also of our tribe, a ring of keys that were Darna Singh's, and the woman was taught to say, 'Give these to the keddah sahib and tell him that war comes to the sircar; that these keys open the way where are many guns and where now is Darna Singh.'

The man took from the folds of his turban a ring upon which were three keys. Finnerty received them in astonishment; then he asked: "Where are the doors?"

"The black leopard came out from his cage through Jadoo Cave, and it may be that Darna Singh opened a door of the cave with one of these keys."

"Damn it!" Swinton ejaculated. "That's the whole thing." But Finnerty objected: "We searched that cave, and there was no door."

"True, there is no door, but there is a passage high up in the gloom, and beyond that is a cave that was made by the foreigners, and in that is the door. And also it opens to the trail that we are now on." The native messenger was explicit.

"By Jove!" Finnerty exclaimed. "That's how the leopard slipped away."

The herdsman said: "I did not know of this, and perhaps wrongly accused that monkey-faced shikari of sleeping over his task."

The messenger now said deprecatingly: "A watchman knows the many manners of acquiring to the inside of a bungalow

without being seen, and one way is to wait for darkness. Also they will watch the sahib's bungalow for his return."

"Very well," Finnerty said; "if I am able to see to it, my faithful fellow, when this is over the sircar will give to you and your brother a village that you may collect the tithes from and have a home."

"Sahib, I have received my pay in advance from the rajah; I am but serving in the manner of the pay."

"Sit you then," Finnerty commanded, "while we talk in plans."

"We've a chance, major, now that we can get in," Swinton declared. "I have my cordite rifle, you have your 10-bore, and if we can but get command of their ammunition we'll blow the damn thing up, even if we go with it."

Finnerty felt that there was no question about the captain's sincerity; the flat blue eyes transmitted nothing but fixed purpose.

"Oh, I say, am I in the discard?" Lord Victor asked plaintively, for the messenger's information had been translated in a condensed form, Finnerty rather emphasising the important part Marie played as the future maharani.

"I thought of that," Swinton answered; "you will be a 'reserve battalion.' I don't mind being pipped in the way of duty – rather expect it some day – but I should rather like my family to know that I pegged out playing the game, and I shouldn't wonder if we're bagged in that cubby-hole, that it would never be known just how we had disappeared."

"Besides, youngster," Finnerty added, "if you can work yourself into communication with the government we want you to let them know what is trump." The major spoke to the Banjara; then he returned to Lord Victor: "This chap will smuggle you out, he says, and I think he can do it. His brother will bring you word if we get out, and even if he knows we've been captured he will come to tell you; at any rate, if we're not reported safe before morning you had better take the horses and get away – the Banjara can stick on one, he says."

"Don't worry over us, Gilfain," Swinton added; "just get word out as soon as you can."

Then the watchman said: "The sahib sent back out of the jungle the elephant with the bell, and it is a sacred elephant for such as worship the god that sits in sleep."

"It is a sacred elephant to those who worship Buddha," Finnerty answered.

"The woman who came from the maharani said that Rajah Ananda has taken the sacred elephant in his hand, for to-night is a night of omen at the Lake of the Golden Coin."

"By gad!" Finnerty cried. "That swine has got the three sapphires together now. Nothing will stop him; he'll be fanatically insane."

A sibilant whistle from Swinton was his only comment. The thought was paralysing.

"Well" – Finnerty sighed the words – "we'll just sit here till it's dark, and then play our last card." He pulled his belt, in which

was a hunting knife, a hole tighter, as if girding his loins for the fray.

The Banjara now said: "Rajah Ananda will send out men to look for you on the trail, sahib, but if you will go east through the jungle to where there is a small path – one the sahib no doubt knows – my brother and I will lead the horses back up over this broad trail to a nala with a stony bed, and then through the jungle and back to where you wait, so that those who come forth will say: "The keddah sahib and his friends came down and then went back again to the hills, perhaps to follow a bison.""

"Splendid!" Finnerty commented, and added in commendation: "To a strong man a wrong done is more power."

Then Finnerty and his companion cut across through the jungle. It was a good ruse, for the rajah's men, thinking the sahibs were up in the jungle, would not guard every approach.

The sun was now sinking on the horizon, and with its usual bird clamour of eventide the day was passing. Once, as they waited, Lord Victor said: "I don't believe that girl would join herself to a native."

"That's because you're in the full moon of faith, my young friend. At your age I believed in fairies, too," Finnerty said.

"Just the sort of faith," Swinton contributed, "that gives such women their power for mischief; a Prussian spy must do as she is told, and if she were allotted to Ananda, to Ananda she goes."

A shrill note that might have been from a boatswain's silver whistle or a red-breasted teal came floating up from where they

had left the Safed Jan Trail. It was answered from on toward the palace hill.

"Ananda's men have found where the horses have turned to go back up into the hills," Finnerty chuckled.

"Deucedly clever work of that Banjara," Lord Victor declared, "sorry I shot the old infidel's dog."

A little later the whistling note, repeated three times, came from higher up, where the Safed Jan Trail lay.

The forest was dark from the drop of night's curtain when the Banjara and his brother came so softly along the scarce discernible trail that they were almost upon the sahibs before they were heard.

"The moon will appear in two hours, sahib, and its light would betray you," the herdsman advised, "so it is well that we take the horses down this path which no one travels at night, and when we have come close to Jadoo Nala I will remain with the horses and you will go with my brother into the cave."

When they had come to a proper place to leave their horses in the jungle, Lord Victor said: "The strategy of you two Johnnies isn't what I'd call first chop. I'll be a dub at this sortie game, for I don't know the language."

"The Banjara does," Finnerty said shortly.

"There's another thing," the youth resumed; "either of you chaps are sort of serviceable to the king, probably cost him a thousand pounds up to date for your training, and I'm – as our delightful friend Foley phrased it – a waster. Sabe, my dear

major?"

"My dear boy, you're in training for the future earlship. A thoroughbred colt isn't much benefit to the realm, but he generally develops into something worth while – sabe?"

"Thanks, old top! Rather think I'll stow that away as a good tip. But to return: I'd feel rather thankful to take a chance inside to – well, come back."

"You mean about the girl? We just forgot all that, and are now trying to do the best we can for what's to come, and your place is just where you've been stationed; that is, unless you're in command."

Lord Victor sprang to his feet, clicked his heels together, very erect and soldierly, for he had been at Sandhurst, and saluted. With a laugh Finnerty said: "Fall out!" The discussion ceased.

From where they were they could hear, at times, curious, muffled noises disturbing the evening quiet, coming from the palace hill. Finnerty now gave some final advice:

"It is now eight o'clock. If we do not come back for the horses or get you word before morning, make for the outside. Have you any money?"

"Not much," Lord Victor answered.

Finnerty and Swinton gave him the money they had, the former saying: "If we get caught in that cave we won't need these rupees to pay board for long, I fancy." He held out his hand, and the youth took it, saying: "I'll remember about the thoroughbred colt."

Swinton shook hands with him, saying: "Duty is the best tutor, Lord Victor; it's a steadier, eh?"

"Sorry about – well, the – that silly break of mine about secret service, you know."

The Banjara, noting this completion of detail, said: "And the matter of a village, huzoor – does the young Lord Sahib understand that he is to tell the sircar that me and my brother have been true to their salt?"

"I will tell him to not forget, my friend, for you will well deserve it," the major answered.

When he had impressed this matter upon Gilfain, Finnerty held out his hand to the Banjara: "Brother, you are a man."

"We Banjaras are taught by our mothers that we are to become men," the herdsman answered with simple dignity.

Like the sealing of a solemn compact between the members of a brotherhood was this exchange of handclasps, Swinton also taking the Banjara's hand in a grasp of admiration.

As Finnerty and Swinton melted down the gloomed path with the Banjara's brother, the herdsman stood watching their going, repeating a tribal saying: "In the kingdom of men there are no boundaries."

When the two sahibs came out to where the Safed Jan Trail wound along the bed of a nala approaching the palace plateau, their guide said: "Just beyond is the new cave. I will go forward to see that no one keeps the door, for they will not think it strange that I should be about. If the sahibs hear the small cry of a tree

cricket they may come forward."

In five minutes the hissing pipe of a cicada came back to their ears, and, slipping from the jungle to the nala trail, they noiselessly crept to the dark portal that yawned to the right of their way. From the contour of the hill, outlined against an afterglow sky, Finnerty knew that they were on the reverse side of the jutting point that held Jadoo Cave. As they entered a gloom so intense they saw nothing, a whisper reassured them, and the native's hand grasped Finnerty's fingers. The major, understanding, reached back the stock of his 10-bore to Swinton, and they went forward into the blackness. Soon the watchman stopped and whispered: "Put out your hand, sahib, and feel the spot that is here."

By a grasp on his wrist Finnerty's hand was placed upon a stone wall, and his fingers, moving up and down and across, detected a thin crack so truly perpendicular that it suggested mechanics.

The native whispered: "One of the keys on the ring will unlock this that is a door." Then he fumbled the wall with his fingers, and presently found a square block of stone, saying: "The keyhole is within."

A long-stemmed key on the ring fitted the keyhole, but before Finnerty could shoot the bolt the native whispered: "Not yet, sahib." He produced two candles and a box of matches. "Remember, sahib, that no man owns the light of a fire; here is an eye that makes no betraying light." And he placed in Finnerty's

fingers a slim male-bamboo rod.

At a twist from Finnerty's hand a heavy bolt in the lock glided back with noiseless ease; a pull caused the stone-faced door to swing forward in the same frictionless quiet, and beyond was a gloom as deep as that of the cave.

"I will watch, sahib," the guide whispered, "and if it is known that evil has fallen upon you I will warn the Lord Sahib; if it please the gods that you come forth I will also carry to him that good tale."

Closing the door behind them, the two adventurers stood in a void so opaque, so devoid of sound, that it produced a feeling of floating in blackened space with the earth obliterated. Finnerty's big hand groped till it found the captain's shoulder, where it rested for a second in heavy assurance; then he gave Swinton a candle, saying: "If we get separated – "

They moved forward, Finnerty feeling the path with the bamboo rod. He hugged the wall on his right, knowing that the passage, skirting the hill edge, must lead to beneath the palace. Suddenly, shoulder high, the gloom was broken by a square opening, and through it Finnerty saw the handle of the Dipper in its sweep toward the horizon. Beneath this port was a ledge to support a machine gun, as the major surmised. Every twenty feet were openings of different shapes; some narrow, vertical slits for rifle fire. Once Finnerty's rod touched a pillar in the centre of the passage. His fingers read grotesque figures carved upon its sides, and he knew they were in one of the old Hindu rajah's

semisacred excavated chambers. Twice, on his right, his hand slipped into space as he felt his way – open doorways from which dipped stone steps to lower exits.

Suddenly his bamboo rod came dead against an obstructing wall in front. Set in this was a flat steel door, with a keyhole which admitted one of the other keys. Finnerty closed the door, not locking it, but when he had taken two steps he caught a clicking sound behind. Turning in apprehension, he pushed upon the door, but it refused to give. He inserted the key; the bolt was where he had left it, shot back, but the door was immovable. A shiver twitched his scalp. Had he himself touched something that automatically locked the door, or had its swing carried a warning to some one who had electrically shot the bolts? The door itself was massive enough to hold any sort of mechanism; it was like the bulkhead of a battleship.

Twice Finnerty found a closed door in the wall on his right; no doubt within the chamber beyond were cannon that commanded some road of approach to the hill. Next his hand swept across a four-foot space, and against the farther wall of this stood open a heavy teakwood door; from the passage beyond drifted a nauseating, carrion smell, such as hovers over a tiger's cage.

Twenty yards beyond, Swinton touched the major's shoulders and whispered: "I heard something behind; I feel that we are being followed."

The major shivered; not through personal fear, but if they were trapped, if they failed, what bloodshed and foolish revolt would

follow. To turn back and search was useless; they must keep on. They must be close to the many chambers beneath the palace where the ammunition and guns, no doubt, were kept. It was ominous, this utter absence of everything but darkness.

With a gasping breath, Finnerty stood still. A slipping noise in front had caught his ear, but now, in their own silence, they both heard the slip of velvet feet on the stone floor behind, and in their nostrils struck full the carrion smell.

"Tiger!" Finnerty whispered, and the pulled-back hammers of his gun clicked alarmingly loud on the death air.

In ten paces Finnerty's gun barrel clicked against iron; it was a door. They were trapped. Behind, the thing crept closer.

"Light a candle and hold it above my head; I must settle that brute," he said, in his mind also a thought that perhaps the light would frighten away the animal that trailed them.

As Swinton struck a match it broke, its flickering fall glinting green two devilish eyes in the head of a tiger that was setting himself for a spring, ten feet away. The roar of Finnerty's 10-bore, the two shocks almost in one, nearly burst their eardrums, and Swinton stood keyed to rigidity by the call for steady nerve. There was no rushing charge. A smothered cough from the tiger told that blood choked his lungs.

A man's voice came from the darkness almost at their elbow, saying: "Sahib, I am Darna Singh – a friend!"

"Come here!" Finnerty answered. "But no treachery!" For he feared it might be an imposter.

Darna Singh drew close, whispering: "The tiger is dead, so do not make a light. How did the sahib get here – has he keys for the door?"

Finnerty told how the princess had sent him Darna's ring of keys.

Darna Singh explained: "I was cast in here by Ananda to be killed by the tiger who has been let down from his cage. Perhaps they do not know that you are here."

"Have they heard the gun?" the major asked.

"The doors are very heavy, and through the rock they would not have heard. If they have, the key will not open the door if they wish."

Then Darna Singh told what lay beyond the door. The magazine was all prepared for blowing up should Ananda's plan fail and there be danger of discovery of his imported guns. Wires ran from the magazine to a room in the palace, where a switch could bury everything in a second. The passages were lighted by electricity, and the dynamo might have gone wrong, causing the darkness, or it might be an entrapping scheme. There would not be more than one or two German guards at the magazine, where the guns were, and if the sahibs could fall upon these in the dark, Darna Singh could win over the native guards, for they did not love Ananda.

The door opened to a key, showing beyond no glint of light. They passed through; this time Finnerty, finding a fragment of rock, fixed it so that the door could not be closed behind them.

Hope suggested that the shot had not been heard, for no storm of attack broke upon them.

After a time Darna Singh checked, and, putting his lips close to Finnerty's ear, whispered: "We are close to the gun and ammunition room. I will go a little in advance and speak in Hindustani to the sentry; he will think it one of their natives, and as we talk you must overpower him."

Keeping within striking distance, Finnerty and Swinton followed. As they crept forward, with blinding suddenness an electric glare smote their eyes, and from beneath the reflected light a machine gun stuck forth its ugly nose. Behind a steel shield a German-flavoured voice commanded: "Drop your guns!"

Both men hesitated. To surrender was almost worse than death.

"Obey, or get shot!" the ugly voice called.

"We'll put them down, major," Swinton said; "dead men are no help to the government."

As they laid down their guns two Prussians slipped into the light and picked them up. From behind the steel shield two others appeared, and following them loomed the gorilla form of Doctor Boelke, his face wreathed in a leer of triumph.

At a command in German, one of the men swung open an iron-barred door, disclosing, as he touched a button, a cell ten feet square. Boelke turned to Finnerty: "Major, you haf intruded without der ceremony of an invitation; I now invite you to make yourself at home in der guest chamber."

"Your humour, like yourself, is coarse," Finnerty retorted.

"You vill enter der door, or – " Boelke waved a hand, and the bayonets were advanced to within striking distance, while the machine gun clicked ominously.

Finnerty realised that to resist was suicide; no doubt Boelke would prefer to have an excuse for killing them – there was absolute murder in the bleary animal eyes.

Swinton said in an even, hard voice: "The British government will have you shot as a German spy."

"Perhaps *Captain Herbert* vill be shot as an English spy tomorrow; und now" – Boelke raised his arm – "ven I drop my hand you vill be shot for resisting arrest."

"We won't give the hound an excuse for murder," Finnerty said, leading the way through the door. A German followed them in, and ran his hands over their bodies for revolvers; finding Finnerty's hunting knife, he took it away. The door was locked, and a guard placed in front of it.

It was only now that the two noticed that Darna Singh had disappeared; nobody seemed to have seen him; he had simply vanished. Probably the guard, even if they saw him, took him to be one of their own natives – not associated with the sahibs who had dropped into their hands.

Chapter XXI

Captain Foley sat in Doctor Boelke's big chair in the doctor's bungalow, seeing a lovely vision in the smoke which curled upward from his cheroot; he saw himself the possessor of two race horses he would buy when he went back to Europe – perhaps it would have to be in Germany – with the money Boelke had gone to the palace for. The crafty captain had demanded "money down" – the two thousand pounds he was to have for delivering the stolen paper, and that, too, before he showed the paper. To guard against force, he had allowed Marie to keep the document, but Marie should have been in the bungalow; however, she could not be far – she would be in shortly.

From where he sat at Boelke's flat desk, Foley looked upon a wall of the room that was panelled in richly carved teakwood, and from a brass rod hung heavy silk curtains. On the panel that immediately fronted his eyes was Ganesha, a pot-bellied, elephant-headed god; a droll figure that caught the captain's fancy, especially when it reeled groggily to one side to uncover an opening through which a dark, brilliant eye peered at him. The captain's face held placid under this mystic scrutiny, but his right hand gently pulled a drawer of the desk open, disclosing a Mauser pistol.

When the whole panel commenced to slide silently, he lifted the pistol so that its muzzle rested on the desk. Through the

opening created in the wall a handsome native stepped into the room, salaamed, and, turning, closed the aperture; then he said: "I am Nawab Darna Singh, the brother of Rajah Ananda's princess. May I close the door, sahib?"

Foley lifted the Mauser into view, drawling: "If you wish; I have a key here to open it, if necessary."

Darna Singh closed a door that led from the front hall to the room, and, coming back to stand just across the desk from Foley, said: "The major sahib and the captain sahib are prisoners of Doctor Boelke; they are below in a cell – they will be killed."

In answer to a question, Darna Singh related how the two men had been captured and how he, not observed, had slipped away, and, knowing all the passages, had made his way to the stone steps that led from the tunnels to Doctor Boelke's bungalow.

Foley in his cold, unimpassioned voice asked: "What do you want me to do?"

"Save them."

The captain's eyes narrowed. "They are not friends of mine; they searched me to-day, and if I play this silly game I chuck in the sea two thousand quid. It's a damn tall order."

Darna Singh's voice throbbed with passionate feeling: "I am a rajput, sahib, and we look upon the sahibs as white rajputs. We may hate our conquerors, but we do not despise them as cowards. I never knew a sahib to leave a sahib to die; I never knew a rajput to leave a brother rajput to die."

Foley puffed at his cigar, and behind his set face went on the

conflict the rajput's appeal to his manhood had stirred.

Darna Singh spoke again: "The sahib will not live to be branded a coward, for his eyes show he has courage. And we must hurry or it will be too late, for these two sahibs have risked their lives to save the British raj against Prince Ananda's, who is a traitor to the sahib's king; he is a traitor to his wife, the princess, for to-morrow he will force into the palace the white mem-sahib who is here with Doctor Boelke."

"By gad!" At last the cold gambler blood had warmed. His daughter Marie, eh? That was different! And to funk it – let two Englishmen die! One an Irishman, even! No doubt it was true, he reasoned, for that was why Darna Singh was in revolt against the prince.

"What chance have we got?" Foley asked.

"There will be a guard at the cage."

"A German?"

"Yes, sahib."

"They have seen me with Doctor Boelke; perhaps we can turn the trick. But," and his hard grey eyes rested on Darna Singh's face, "if, when we go down there is no chance, I won't play the giddy goat; I'll come back." He handed Boelke's Mauser to the rajput, saying: "I have a pistol in my belt."

Darna Singh slid the panel, and they passed from the room to a landing and down a dozen stone steps to a dim-lighted passage. Here the rajput whispered: "I can take the sahib by a dark way to where he can see the cage in which the two sahibs will be."

"Hurry!" Foley answered, for he was thinking ruefully of his money.

The underground place was a cross-hatch of many tunnels, and Darna Singh led the way through a circuitous maze till they came to a bright-lighted cross passage, and, peeping around a corner, Foley saw, fifty feet away, a solitary German leaning against the wall, a rifle resting at his side. Raising his voice in the utterance of Hindustani words, Foley rounded the corner at a steady pace, followed by Darna Singh. The sentry grasped his rifle, and, standing erect, challenged. In German Foley answered: "We come from the Herr Doctor."

The sentry, having seen Foley with Doctor Boelke, was unsuspecting, and, grounding his rifle tight against his hip, he clicked his heels together at attention.

"The two prisoners are wanted above for examination," Foley said. "You are to bind their arms behind their backs and accompany us."

"The one sahib is a giant," the other answered, when this order, percolating slowly through his heavy brain, had found no objection.

"Give me the gun; I will cover him while you bind his arms."

The sentry unlocked the door, took a rope in his hand, and, saying to Foley, "Keep close, *mein Herr*," entered the cell.

Finnerty and Swinton watched this performance, in the major's mind bitter anger at the thought that an Irishman could be such a damnable traitor.

"Will the *Herr Kapitän* give orders in English to these *schweinehunds* that if they do not obey they will be killed?"

Foley complied. What he said was: "Major, put your hands behind your back; then when this chap comes close throttle him so quick he can't squeak."

A hot wave of blood surged in a revulsion of feeling through Finnerty's heart, and he crossed his hands behind his back, half turning as if to invite the bondage. When the German stepped close a hand shot up, and, closing on his windpipe, pinned him flat against the wall, lifted to his toes, his tongue hanging out from between parted lips.

"Bind and gag him, Swinton," Foley suggested.

In a minute the sentry was trussed, a handkerchief wedged in his mouth, and he was deposited in a corner. Outside, Foley turned off the cell light, locked the door, and, handing the guard's gun to Swinton, led the way back to the dark passage.

On the landing above the stone steps, Darna Singh silently moved the carved Ganesha and peered through the hole. Then whispering, "The room is empty," unlocked and slid open the panel, locking it behind them as they entered Boelke's room.

The bungalow was silent. There was no sound of servants moving about; no doubt they were over at the palace, waiting for the thing that was in the air.

Out of the fullness of his heart, Foley spoke in low tones: "Gentlemen, the doctor will be here shortly with money for me, and your presence might irritate him."

"I'll never forget what you've done for us, Foley," Finnerty said.

"Neither will I if you do me out of two thousand quid by blathering here," Foley drawled.

Swinton put his hand on Foley's arm. "Forgive me for what I said on the trail, and I give you my word that what you've done for us will be brought to the sircar's notice; but we've got to capture Boelke. We've got to nip this revolt; you know there's one on."

"Look here, Herbert," Foley drawled, "I don't mind risking my life to help out a couple of sahibs – a fellow's got to do that – but I'm damned if I'm going to chuck away a kit bag full of rupee notes."

"I've got nothing to do with the money; that's a matter you must settle with Boelke," Swinton said in dry diplomacy; "but if you and the major will hide behind that heavy curtain and capture this enemy to the British raj, I can promise you an unmolested return to England. There's another thing" – his words were hesitatingly apologetic – "we are now your heavy debtors and can't make demands on you for that paper, but if it gets into Prince Ananda's hands it will make his revolt possible. He will show it to the chiefs who meet him to-night."

"And with that I have nothing to do. I'll deliver the paper to Boelke and take my money; what you do to the Herr Doctor after that is no concern of mine."

With a smile, Swinton held out his hand, saying: "Darna Singh and I are going to blow up the magazine, but I'll just say, thank

you, for fear I get pipped."

Chapter XXII

Foley and Major Finnerty took up their positions in a corner behind a heavy curtain, Foley making two slits in it with a pocketknife. They were clear of the door leading below, and even if Boelke came that way he would not detect their presence.

In five minutes Marie entered the room, and stood looking about as if she had expected to see some one. She wore a riding habit, and through the curtain slit Finnerty could see that her face was drawn and white, her eyes heavy in utter weariness.

Almost immediately a heavy tread sounded in the hall, followed by the thrust of Boelke's ugly form through the door. He glared about the room, and, crashing into his chair, asked gruffly: "Where is your fadder?"

"I don't know," the girl answered wearily.

"You don't know! Vell, where is der paper?"

"You must get it from my father."

"I don't like dot; some one is a liar!"

The girl's silence at this brutality but increased Boelke's ugliness. "Your fadder don't trust me. Being a thief himself, und a traitor, he pays me der same compliment – he refuse to deliver der paper till der money is paid. Here is der rupees, und I vant der paper." His heavy knuckles beat upon the table.

"You must wait, then, till he comes."

"He toldt me you had der paper still – for fear he might be

robbed, I suppose. Where is it?"

"It is hidden."

"Get it; der rajah waits."

The girl sat with no movement of response. Finnerty could see her face draw into a cast of resolve. Both he and Foley felt that it would be better to wait for the girl to leave the room before they rushed upon Boelke; there might be shooting.

The doctor's rage increased. "If your fadder is traitor to me – if der paper is not produced in five minutes, I vill send out word that he be shot on sight, und between you two ve vill find der paper." Boelke sat back in his chair with a snorting growl.

"Listen to me, Herr Boelke," the girl said in a voice clean cutting as a steel tool that rips iron. "My father is acting loyal to you, though he is a traitor to his own government. He stole that paper because he faced what he called dishonour over gambling debts, and I was blamed for taking it. I was the one who faced dishonour, and, through me, Lord Gilfain. I escaped and made my way to India under false names, not to help, as you thought, but to recover that paper and give it back to the government or destroy it."

"Haf you destroyed it?"

"You will never get it, Herr Boelke. I have to tell you this – that you may know my father did not act the traitor to you."

"Ha, ha! You are as mad as your fadder. If der paper is not here in five minutes do you know vat vill happen you?"

"I am not afraid; I took all these risks when I came here to

clear my name."

"Here is der money – my time is short."

Twice Foley had laid a hand on Finnerty's arm in restraint.

"Never! I swear it. I am not afraid."

"No; like your fadder you haf not fear or sense. But wait. You do not fear for your own life – I know dot – but vill you trade dot paper for der life of der man you love – Major Finnerty?" The listeners heard a gasp. "I mean dot. He und der udder fool, Svinton, is below in a cell – caught dere as spies – und to-morrow dey vill be shot as spies. Dey took care dot nobody see dem go in, und I vill take care dot nobody see dem come out."

A ghastly silence followed, only broken by the sound of the girl's breathing.

Boelke waited to let this filter through her brain to her heart.

Then she said in a voice that carried no convincing force: "You are lying to frighten me."

"I vill prove it to yourself. You haf on der riding habit, und now I know you haf been riding to deliver dot paper to der major; but you did not meet him because he is a prisoner below."

Again there was the hush of a debate in the girl's mind; then she said: "If you will bring Major Finnerty and Captain Swinton from below, through that door, and let them go as free men, and will swear to not pursue them, I will give – get the paper, and –"

"*Ach, Gott!* You haf der paper! You put your hand to your breast!"

The girl cried out, startled, frightened, as Boelke's gorilla form

flung his chair back. He saw the rush of Finnerty and threw back the drawer of his desk; it was empty – Foley had taken the Mauser.

"If you open your mouth, you're a dead man!" Finnerty declared; then adding, for relief: "You hound!"

The girl, who had backed to the wall, dropped to a chair, burying her face in an arm on the desk, swept by a flood of confusion and relief.

Foley transferred the packages of rupee notes to his pockets, saying: "I've delivered the paper in Darpore, and am taking my fee," while Boelke sat blinking into a pistol that stared at him four feet away.

Finnerty said: "We're going to gag and bind you, so make no outcry."

When this little matter was attended to, the doctor was dumped into a big closet and the door locked.

"I'll have a look at the outside, major," Foley said. "Fancy I heard some one prowling."

When the curtain slipped back to place, blotting out Foley, Finnerty gave an inward gasp; he was left alone with the girl whom he had heard offer to barter her more than life – her reputation – for his life. A dew of perspiration stood out on his forehead; he trembled; the shyness that had been a curse to him from his boyhood made him a veritable coward. He was alone with the girl in an atmosphere of love – the most dreaded word in the whole English lexicon.

Marie held the paper in her hand, looking upon it as though she were crystal gazing, using it as a magnet to focus her own multitudinous emotions. Before her stood a man that was like a Greek god – the man who had twice saved her life; though the saving of her life, while it would have wakened feelings of deep gratitude, could not have filled her soul with the passionate yearning that was there – the surging soul warmth that submerges everything.

The man was like a child. Words utterly failed to shape themselves into a fitting coherence for utterance. He stepped to the wall and swung the little Ganesha panel, peering vacantly into the dark passage. He came back and gazed out into the hall.

"I want to tell you something – " The girl's voice startled him as though he had been struck; his nerves were frightful. "I want to tell you," she said again, a wan smile striving to master her trembling lips, "why I didn't give up this paper on the trail today."

"I understand," he interrupted; "it would not have cleared you."

"No; Captain Swinton would have thought that I had given it up under compulsion. But if I had lost it, all I have gone through would have been for nothing. That's what frightened me so when Doctor Boelke discovered I had it. I did wrong in keeping it; I was selfish."

The girl's tensed nerves were being slacked by her words; expression was easing the tightened coils as the striking of a clock

unwinds the spring; the relief was loosening tears; they flooded the great dark eyes, and one had fallen on the paper, for an instant like a pearl before it was absorbed.

This trivial thing was a power that swept away the bondage of shyness that held the giant. He put his hand on the girl's shoulder; his voice was trembling. "Marie," he said, "I must speak – something. Don't mind, colleen, if you can't understand what I say, for I feel just like a boy at home in Ireland. I'm just mad with love for you; I can't live without you. All my life I've been alone. I love beautiful things – birds and trees and flowers and animals – and I've starved here, where all is treachery and work – nothing but just work."

It was a torrent, words trembling from the lips of a man whose soul was on fire, and the blue eyes had turned deep like rich sapphires.

The girl rose from her chair and stood against the wall, holding up her hand as if she would repel him, crying: "You mustn't say that; you must not! Oh, my God! Why didn't you let me die – why did you save my life, that I might now know the bitterness of living!"

Finnerty recoiled. His hand caught the corner of the desk; his voice was husky, full of despair: "You don't – don't – I'm too late? Is it Lord Victor that – "

"There is no one!" The girl's voice was almost fierce.

"What is it, then? Am I not worthy – "

"It is I who am not worthy. *You* not worthy? And you heard,

standing behind the curtain, that I bargained my all for your life."

"Yes, I heard that. Then how are you not worthy of the love of a man if he were a hundred times better than I am?"

"You could not marry me. My father was a traitor, a gambler – we are the same blood."

Finnerty took a step forward and grasped the girl's wrist. The touch steadied him. "Hush, colleen; don't say that. Your father was just a brave, generous Irishman when I knew him before the gambling got into his blood. Fear he did not know. He didn't know how to do a mean act; he'd give away his last penny – the gambling got into his blood. Wasn't that what got him into this? It was India that scorched and seared his soul – the life here. The others had money, and here they lavish it, throw it about, gamble. He tried to keep his end up, for he was game. He was unlucky – it was a second name for him in the service – 'Unlucky' Foley. I tell you it got into his blood, the wild Irish blood that boils so easily – that is not cold and sluggish from dilution from the essence of self."

It was curious the metamorphosis of love, the glamour of it that roused the imaginative sympathy of Finnerty, till, for the girl's sake, all her geese were swans. And yet there was truth in what he said; only a Celt could have understood Foley as Finnerty did.

Finnerty's hand had taken the other wrist. He drew the girl's hands up and placed them either side of his neck, and looked into her eyes. "Colleen, I love you. Nothing in the world is going to

take you from me – nothing. I'm going to seal that with a kiss, and neither man nor devil is going to part us after that."

As his arms went around the girl a tremour shook the earth, the bungalow rocked drunkenly, they heard the crashing of rocks and trees somewhere on the plateau.

Chapter XXIII

It had been easy for Darna Singh to smuggle Swinton through the tiger garden gate, for the guard were tribesmen of his own – rajputs who really hated Ananda.

And now the two sat in a room of the palace, at Swinton's elbow a switch that, at a shift, would send a current of eruptive force into the magazine. Through a closed lattice they looked out upon the terrace thronged with natives – Mussulmans, Hindus, Buddhists; and, gazing, Swinton thought that it was like bringing together different explosives – a spark would perhaps fan a sudden mental conflagration among these fanatics. Silence reigned – a hush hung over the many-coloured throng as if something of this held them on guard.

Darna Singh was explaining in a whisper:

"Ananda has called these chiefs to sign a blood pact against the sircar. The two men of the big beards are from Khyber way – Pathans whose trade is war; one is Ghazi Khan and the other is Dhera Ishmael. They will not sign the blood pact unless Ananda shows them the paper wherein the sircar is to force their young men to war. The maharajah will not be here, but whether he is true to the sircar no man knows, and sometimes, sahib, he does not know himself, because of the brandy."

They could see Burra Moti upon her bended legs on the marble-slabbed terrace, a rich cloth, sparkling with jewels,

draping her head and neck and body. Huge gold rings had been driven upon her ivory tusks.

Darna Singh whispered:

"Look, sahib, at the two men that stand beside the elephant's neck; they are my blood brothers, and when we entered at the teakwood gate I told them of the sapphire bell. They have their mission."

Beyond, the Lake of the Golden Coin, rich in its gorgeous drape of shadow and moon gold, lay serene, placid, undisturbed by the puny man passion that throbbled like a ticking watch above its rim.

The droning hum of voices, like the buzz of bees, died to silence, and foreheads were bowed to the marble floor as Prince Ananda, clothed in a coarse yellow robe, came forth and strode like a Roman senator to table at which sat with the two Pathans a dozen petty rajahs, nawabs, and Mussulman chiefs.

"They are waiting to have the paper translated to them by a *moonshi* and to see the sircar's seal upon it, for they all know that mark," Darna Singh said.

"What will happen if the paper does not come?" Swinton asked.

"They will not sign the blood bond; they will think that Rajah Ananda has told them lies. Also the two men who are my brothers will place another lie in the mouth of Ananda, if it is Kismet, and at that time the sahib will blow up the mine."

From below the voice of Ananda came floating up to their ears

as he talked to the chiefs in impassioned words of hatred to the British raj. He told them of the machine guns and ammunition he had below; that the great German nation would send an army, for even now they had sent men to train the soldiers of the revolt.

To Swinton it was simply the mad exhortation of a mind crazed by ambition, but he knew that scores of revolts against the British had originated in just this way; the untutored natives, taught hatred of the British from their birth, would believe every word.

The voice of Ghazi Khan, rough as the bellow of a bull as it came through an opening in his heavy, matted beard, was heard asking:

"Where is the paper, rajah, wherein is written that the sircar commands our sons to cross the black water to fight against the caliph and to destroy Mecca – even to destroy the faith of Mohammed, as thou hast said?"

"We also, Rajah Darpore," the Nawab of Attabad said, "would see first the sealed order of the sircar, that we, too, are forced to cross the black water to the destruction of our caste – to fight battles that are not the battle of India. Thou hast said, rajah, that it is so commanded in a state paper that was to have been put in the Lord Sahib's hands as he sat in council in Calcutta, and though no doubt it is true we would see it, for war is not to be taken in words that are spoken."

Ananda explained that the paper would be brought soon by his German officer, and he would show it to them before they

signed the pact.

Then Ananda, lowering his voice to tragic intensity, said: "It is written that if the three sacred sapphires come into the hand of a man it is because the gods have bestowed upon him wisdom and goodness and power; that he is to lead. It is also written that if, having the three sapphires, he stand beside the Lake of the Golden Coin at midnight in the full bloom of the mhowa tree King Jogendra will appear in his golden boat if he be selected to lead. I will take the ordeal to-night, for the mhowa is in bloom and the three sapphires have been sent."

Swinton saw Ananda throw open his yellow robe, disclosing two sapphires, and heard him say: "The third is here on the neck of the sacred elephant in a bell."

At that instant the booming note of a gong striking the midnight hour came from somewhere in the palace.

A dead silence settled over the people on the terrace, and they turned their eyes to the waters of the Lake of the Golden Coin.

Twelve times the gong throbbed as it quivered from a blow, and as the last whimpering note died away in a forest echo a circling ripple spread from the shadow of a pipal, and now the rippling waves came fast, darting here and there like serpents of gold or silver in the moonlight.

Men gasped in awe; some touched their foreheads prone to the marble floor as a boat of gold, its prow a serpent's head with gleaming ruby eyes, came up out of the water and floated upon the surface.

King Jogendra clothed in a rich garment, his turban gleaming red and blue and white and gold where the moon flashed upon jewels, rose from a bier and lifted a hand as if to invoke the favour of the gods upon the prince who had called him from his long sleep.

Even Swinton, knowing that it was but a trick of the German engineers, shivered as if he caught a fragment of the spell that almost stilled the beating of hearts below.

And then from the sal forest came floating to this stillness of death the soft, sweet "Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" of the sapphire bell.

Burra Moti threw up her trunk, uttering a cry that was like the sob of a frightened child, and cocked her huge ears. As the bell called again, "Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" she thrust her trunk beneath her neck cloth; but her fingers found no bell; it had been stolen.

With a scream of rage she surged to her feet, and, trampling men, throwing them to one side like bags of chaff with her ivory spears, she crashed through the table and fled.

"Now, sahib!" Darna Singh cried.

In answer to Swinton's pull of the lever the plateau rose up, the palace quivered, the waters of the Lake of the Golden Coin swept across the terrace over a flattened, yellow-robed figure that had been Prince Ananda, and then was sucked back to disappear through a yawning crevice.

"Come, sahib; there will be no revolt, for Ananda is dead," Darna Singh said softly.

Sometimes when the mhowa tree is in full bloom the soft tinkle of the sapphire bell is heard up in the sal-covered hills; then the natives whisper:

"The spirit of Rajah Ananda rides forth on the Brown Elephant."

THE END