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The Thunder Dragon Gate

by

Talbot Mundy

CHAPTER 1.

"Country of origin—Tibet; home town Lhasa."

IT was one of those days when not even Cockneys like London. Spring had made a false start. Fog, wind, rain, sleet, and a prevalent stench of damp wool. Even the street noises sounded flat and discouraged. Big Ben was invisible through the fog from Trafalgar Square, and the lions around Nelson's monument with rain streaming from their granite flanks resembled mythical ocean monsters. Lights in the windows of Cockspur Street suggested warmth, and there was a good smell of hot bread and pastry exuding through the doors of tea shops, but that only made the streets feel more unpleasant.

Tom Grayne turned up his overcoat collar, stuck his hands in his pockets, and without particular malice cursed the umbrellas of passers-by.

No one noticed him much. He was fairly big, tolerably well dressed. He was obviously in the pink of condition; he walked with the gait of a man who knows where he is going, and why, and what he will do when he gets there—the unhurried, slow-looking but devouring stride of a man who has walked great distances.

A policeman with the water streaming from his black cape nodded to him.

"Oh, hello Smithers. Nice day for your job!"

"H-awful! But we 'as to get used to it."

"When do they close the Aliens Registration Office at Bow Street?"

"Five o'clock I *think*, but you've plenty of time. I didn't know you were a foreigner."

"American, born in London, Smithers. Dual citizenship. Two sets of very suspicious officials to convince I'm not a traitor to the human race."

Tom Grayne grinned, but as a matter of fact he savagely resented the indignity of having to report in person and register his address every month. He had a right to British citizenship if he should choose to claim it. He chose not. As he saw it, he had a right to be and to do what he pleased, and

to go where he pleased, provided he didn't make a nuisance of himself. He detested bureaucracy, hated to ask favors, loathed having to explain himself, and liked people who didn't put on artificial lugs.

He wasn't unreasonable about anything else, so far as he knew, but by the time he turned out of the Strand toward Bow Street police station he was feeling hostile, and he was glad of it. He wanted to punch somebody. But there was nobody to punch except a few poor devils trudging through the rain, and a policeman leading along a prisoner. One does not punch policemen profitably, and besides, a police man especially in London is what he pretends to be, so he doesn't stir antagonism, or shouldn't. But the smug stride of that particular one, and the melancholy resignation of his prisoner, who trudged beside him un-handcuffed, goaded Tom's already pugnacious disposition and aroused his sympathy at the same time. He felt an almost irresistible impulse to horn in and be a nuisance.

Even so, he might have gone about his own business, down in the basement, but there was something familiar about the prisoner's appearance that held his attention. He hesitated. He didn't recognize the prisoner. He had never seen him before; he was positive about that. But he felt the same sort of wordless and unreasoned impulse that makes a man choose something unusual for dinner. He followed through the main door to the desk, where an alert-looking sergeant stood ready to book the new arrival. Tom was just in time to overhear the charge. Then he knew instantly that his hunch had been right. Memory overflowed.

"Thö-pa-ga—of the Josays Sept of the Kyungpo—whatever that means—country of origin Tibet—home town Lhasa."

"How d'you spell it? Here, give me that warrant. Go on."

"Last known address—"

"Yes, all right, that's written here."

"Charged with noncompliance with the Aliens Registration Act, under section—"

"Yes, that's on the warrant."

"Arrested at eighty-eight Oxted Street."

"Say anything?"

"Said nothing."

"All right. Cell eighteen."

"Bail!" said Tom Grayne, suddenly, as if he were making the high bid at an auction.

"Who are you, sir?"

Before Tom could answer a man entered who looked much more Mongolian than the prisoner. The prisoner might have passed for a New Orleans quarter-breed at first glance. He was a good-looking fellow, with a sad face and an air of patient resignation. But this other man looked like a devil. His head was framed in the hood of a long, black, glistening waterproof. He had brilliant, sunken eyes, high cheek-bones and a skin like dirty parchment. He was several inches more than six feet tall,

and fairly broad in proportion. More like a figure of death than a human being. He spoke rapidly to the prisoner, who stared sullenly but didn't answer. The desk-sergeant caught one word, thrice repeated:

"Shang-shang? Sounds like Chinese."

Tom unbuttoned his overcoat in an unconscious gesture. This was something he could lend a hand at. He interpreted:

"Tibetan. Something like a cross between a harpy and a nightmare, with eight legs."

"Is there one in the Zoo?" the sergeant asked.

"No, nor in Nuttall's Dictionary. A shang-shang is employed by magicians in Tibet to terrify people to death and then to hound them into hell after death."

"Never heard of that one," said the sergeant, "although we've some strange superstitions in London—more than you might suppose. We had some witches in here a week ago, arrested for alleged practises that 'ud make your hair stand on end if you weren't used to horrors—and bunkum."

Slowly, in Tibetan, through thin peculiarly mobile lips that seemed to enjoy the flavor of the words, and with his face thrust close to Tom Grayne's, the man who looked like death spoke:

"You-who-know-the-meaning-of-a-shang-shang—if-you- do-not-wish-to-add-experience-to-hearsay—let-alone-that- one-who-is-a-stranger-to-you!"

"Go to hell," Tom answered, in plain English. He added the equivalent in the Tibetan language.

"What's your name, you?" said the sergeant.

The tall Tibetan produced a soiled card from an inner pocket. The sergeant laid it on the desk and speared it with a pencil-point.

"*Doctor* Noropa, eh? What kind of doctor? Medicine? Law? Music? Philosophy? We'd a man in here the other day who called himself a doctor of blackmail. What do you want here? You a friend of the prisoner?"

Instead of answering, the tall man turned and walked out. The sergeant wrote on a slip of paper the name and address that were on the card and handed the paper to a man in uniform at a desk behind him.

"Check that. Have him followed. Step lively.—And now you, sir"—he stared penetratingly at Tom Grayne—"I think you mentioned bail. Are you a householder?"

"No. Is there any charge against the prisoner besides not having registered as an alien?"

"No, not at present. But that one's serious. He's liable to imprisonment and subsequent deportation. If you're not a householder—"

"Phone," said Tom Grayne. He went to the coin-in-the-slot machine, in the booth in the corner. The prisoner laid the contents of his pockets on the desk; he had been marched off to a cell before Tom was out of the booth.

"Sergeant, I have phoned to Professor Mayor at an address in Bloomsbury. He will be here with a solicitor's clerk as fast as a taxi can bring him."

"Professor Mayor, eh?" The sergeant's manner changed perceptibly. "Of Bloomsbury? Not Clarence Mayor? The Home Office Expert?"

"British Museum—specialist on Tibetan manuscripts and works of art."

"That's the man. The Home Office calls him in on special cases. Does he know the prisoner?"

"I think not. But he is as interested as I am."

"What makes you so interested, if I may ask?"

"Tibet is my subject."

"Ever been there?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

Tom Grayne went outside, and below to the basement. He reported no change of address. There was no one else in the office. The uniformed clerk behind the long counter was civil and inclined to make conversation:

"With all the hotels and boarding-houses there are in London, I can't help wondering why you stay at that address, sir. Not that it's any concern of mine. I'm merely curious."

"I don't mind telling you," said Tom Grayne. "It's inexpensive and I can live there as I please. I live hard, so as to keep fit. There are no luxuries in the country I hope to revisit before long, and the climate might easily kill a man who'd lived soft. I even practise not eating for days at a time."

"Some folk," said the clerk, "starve 'emselves just to annoy the police. We'd one man in the cells who wouldn't eat because, he said, he was a high-caste Hindu, but he turned out to be a Scotch bigamist."

Tom returned to the upstairs office and waited for Mayor, who came in presently wiping rain from gold-rimmed spectacles and followed by a stoop-shouldered lawyer's clerk in a bowler hat, who went straight to the desk.

"Silly fellow!" said Mayor, wiping his pinkish, boyish-looking old cheeks with a big silk handkerchief. "Befriending shang-shang victims? What next? Thö-pa-ga, you say his name is? Wasn't he at Oxford?"

"Yes. I thought you'd be interested."

"If I weren't, I shouldn't have left a comfortable fireside, tea, buttered toast and a book."

"Come and have supper at my place and we'll find out why this fellow was in hiding."

"Good heavens! Your place? You live in a fish-shed, don't you?"

"Not quite. I can make you comfortable. Good grub. I have a notion it might be dangerous to take him to your house."

"Dampness—fog—rats! Tom Grayne, I haven't your fortitude. However, perhaps it's wiser. Very well. I'll risk my health and my opinion of you."

The formalities of bailing out the prisoner took time. Mayor was at the desk for several minutes. After that, he went into the phone booth, talked for a long time and emerged chuckling as if he had played a good joke.

"Can you accommodate four, Tom? I've invited O'Mally."

"Who is O'Mally?"

"Horace Farquarson O'Mally of Harley Street, you ignoramus. Consulting physician to half the crowned heads and multimillionaires in the world."

"Okay. What's he good at?"

"He likes Chateau Yquem. You'll have to stop and get some at a place I'll show you. He can smell a vintage from a mile off."

Thö-pa-ga was under bail by the time O'Mally arrived, very fashionably dressed. Top hat, spats, a monocle. He looked as tough as a prize-fighter, with Chesterfieldian manners.

"Came away in the middle of an operation, I suppose?" said Mayor. "Or did you leave another death-bed?"

"Who told you my patients ever die?" O'Mally answered, in a voice like a disciplined thunderstorm. "Is this the man?" He refixed his monocle, stared at Thö-pa-ga for about two electric seconds, and then faced Tom Grayne.

"Our host," said Mayor.

"I have heard of you," said O'Mally. "How do you do?" He shook hands.

"Don't you tell him how you are," said Mayor. "Let him find out. He will cut you open if you let him."

No one spoke to Thö-pa-ga; he stood looking orientally calm, incurious, melancholy. The solicitor's clerk snapped his little handbag shut and vanished into the rain.

"My car is waiting," said O'Mally.

Mayor laughed: "I once rode in a royal wheelbarrow. I knew a gardener at Windsor Castle when I was a small boy. I know how to behave. My feet are wet; will they ruin the carpet?"

O'Mally and Mayor raised their hats to the Law, or the desk, or the King or somebody—perhaps to the sergeant; he looked pleased. Tom Grayne thrust his arm through Thö-pa-ga's and followed, into a Rolls Royce limousine that bore an almost microscopical coat of arms on the door panel.

CHAPTER 2.

"Thö-Pa-Ga is Time-Is-Come."

ALL London was streaming homeward for the night. The limousine with its oddly assorted passengers sped along streets that were rivers of liquid fire, with the traffic incredibly borne on the surface. They stopped for several minutes at a wine shop favorably known to Mayor, whence Tom Grayne emerged with a brown paper parcel. Thence they headed for Kew and the River, where Tom gave intricate directions to the chauffeur, and at last they had to leave the limousine to thread their way on foot, in almost darkness, through pools of slush, beneath dripping eaves. O'Mally didn't seem to mind that his top hat was being ruined, but Mayor was plaintive; he had to be lent a hand along the slippery and rather rotten planking of a wharf. But at the end of the wharf was shelter.

Tom unlocked the door of what looked in the dark like a fish- or net-shed. But when he lighted a couple of oil lamps the place was cosy enough. There was a big stove; he had that going in a minute. There was everything a man of Tom Grayne's disposition needed, and nothing he didn't need. Bunks, cooking-pots, shelves of books, a sink, two tables, a few chairs, two big lockers.

"Umn! No woman, eh," O'Mally remarked.

"Good job, too," said Mayor. "Can you imagine the kind of woman Grayne would select?"

"He would choose an actress," said O'Mally. "Each of them would try to make the other famous and there'd be the usual divorce. Or am I in poor form this evening?"

"Some one died on you?" Mayor asked.

"This place," said Tom, "was rented by a retired sea captain, who fixed it up to suit himself. But some one thought he had money and murdered him. He died on that bunk with his throat cut, and I read about it in the paper—front-page illustration with an X to mark the spot, and so on—three-day mystery. I came to look and found the landlord sure he'd never get another tenant because people are afraid of ghosts. So I rented it cheap."

"And the ghosts?" asked Mayor.

Thö-pa-ga shuddered. Tom was already cooking supper. Coffee was on. A pot of stew was simmering and beginning to smell delicious. Tom laid the table. Mayor opened the paper package.

"I told you Chateau Yquem!"

"I liked the shape of those bottles better. It's Berncasteler Doktor '21. Help yourself."

O'Mally took the corkscrew from its nail on the wall and pulled a cork expertly. He shook down his clinical thermometer and inserted it in the neck of the bottle.

"Good enough," he remarked after a minute. "I am now in no hurry."

"No more patients?" Mayor asked. "Have they all found you out?"

"I am on vacation—first in nearly four years. I catch the eight o'clock boat train for Harwich tomorrow evening. Going to Moscow. A man of whom I'm jealous has cut off a dog's head and kept it alive for three days, during which it eats and reacts to sight and sound. That interests me. Where's a wine glass? These they?" He produced cut glasses from an old sea captain's wine chest. "Are they clean?"

"Boiled."

"What's that delicious smell?" asked Mayor.

"Lobster mulligan. Or do you mean the toasted barley? I eat barley. So, I think, will our friend."

Mayor was pulling off his boots and socks. Thö-pa-ga was doing nothing, saying nothing, seated on one of the bunks with the palms of his hands on the edge, as if he expected to have to jump up at a second's notice.

"May I have that dish-pan nearly full of hot water, and then some mustard," said Mayor. "Unlike O'Mally, I'm important. Serious things might happen if I were to catch a bad cold."

O'Mally filled a wine glass. "Yes," he said, "if you should die, and this mysterious gentleman from Tibet should take it into his head to disappear, they would confiscate the house you have pledged as security." He walked over to the Tibetan. "Drink this."

Thö-pa-ga shook his head.

"Abstainer? Never mind. It's medicine. Drink it"

"What do you suppose is wrong with him?" Tom Grayne asked, stirring the mulligan.

"I know," O'Mally answered. "It requires no thought whatever. Come along, young fellow—you understand English, don't you? Drink this."

The Tibetan hesitated, smiled wistfully and then suddenly obeyed. He swallowed the wine at a gulp. The wind howled under the eaves and he shuddered either at that or at the feel of the wine as it went down. O'Mally nodded.

"My professional advice would be: return as soon as possible to Tibet." He was watching Thö-pa-ga's eyes. "He will talk presently. He has been wanting to talk all the way from Bow Street. He has been thoroughly frightened, and he is suffering from—"

"Words of one syllable, please!" said Mayor. "I can use twenty-one-syllable Sanskrit words, but mine mean something." Mayor was sloshing his feet in the dish-pan and the steam from the hot mustard-and-water had dimmed his spectacles. He wiped them, to watch Thö-pa-ga.

"He is suffering from being too near sea level," said O'Mally. "If he really is from Tibet, he is used to a minimum altitude of twelve or fourteen thousand feet. It is as if he had taken to deep-sea diving without the proper physique and training. Barometric pressure for prolonged periods, plus a constitutional lack of resistance to micro-organisms that don't exist at high altitudes, produce a mental and physical change. But those are a vicious circle; one produces the other. He will die if he doesn't return to Tibet."

"I would rather die," Thö-pa-ga said suddenly, in good English. The wind howled. They all shuddered.

"Damn our English climate!" Mayor exclaimed. "They say it's worse in Tibet, but I don't believe it!" It wasn't the wind that had made him shudder. He knew that.

Tom Grayne struck the stew-pot with an iron spoon:

"Yesterday's mulligan, warmed up—canned soup added—homemade barley bread baked by a Stornoway fisherman's widow, New Zealand butter, American cheese, celery and white wine. Come and get it."

They drew up chairs to the table. Thö-pa-ga elected to eat mulligan. Tom Grayne munched barley alone.

"Wise enough, if you vary your diet now and then. But it's hell to be wise," said O'Mally. "Are you in training?"

"Yes, for Tibet. The important thing is not to eat too often. Discipline your belly."

"Don't forget the sugar. When do you go to Tibet?"

There was no time to answer. There came a peremptory knock at the door. It sounded authoritative, like a police man's, only there was a suggestion of deliberate rhythm, as if it might be a prearranged signal. A weird howl of wind drove squalling rain against the side of the hut. Beneath, the river sucked and splashed amid wharf-piles. Thö-pa-ga froze motionless.

"Now I understand why I came," O'Mally remarked. He poured wine for Thö-pa-ga. "This is very interesting."

Tom Grayne went to the door and opened a peephole. He could see nothing; it was all dark outside.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

No answer. No sound outside except wind and splash.

"Perhaps your chauffeur?"

"No," said O'Mally, "I sent him home. Can you open the door without cooling the stew?"

Mayor pulled a blanket from the bunk behind him and wrapped it around his knees. Tom Grayne tried to open the door only a few inches, against the wind. A hand seized it—wrenched it suddenly. A man crashed into him, thrusting him backward on his heels. The door slammed. It was Dr. Noropa, in his dripping black waterproof. He turned calmly and bolted the door.

"Give me some more of that excellent stew before he murders us," said Mayor.

O'Mally snorted: "Don't talk nonsense. Grayne can lick him. I can help, if necessary."

Thö-pa-ga neither moved nor seemed to breathe; he stared straight in front of him. He looked guilty of something and ready for death. There was silence for probably sixty seconds. Then, from the midst of a circle of rain from his dripping waterproof, the gaunt Noropa spoke:

"I come to tell you Thö-pa-ga is time-is-come. If you know what is shang-shang, you will let him alone. Thö-pa-ga must go home."

"Well, he should," said O'Mally. "But who are you?"

"I know who you are," Noropa answered. He looked at Mayor. "And I know who you are." Then, at last he met Tom Grayne's eyes. "You, who should know better, having been in Tibet, do you wish a shang-shang sending?"

"Yes. I never saw one. Send the thing by parcel post. Get out of here."

Noropa's death-like face betrayed no emotion. Tom Grayne slid the bolt and Noropa walked out, forcing the door open against the wind with such prodigious strength that he seemed hardly to have to exert himself.

The door slammed. Then suddenly Thö-pa-ga gulped wine and shook off silence. He seemed unconscious of O'Mally's professional critical gaze. His left hand rested on the table, but he seemed not even aware that O'Mally's fingers touched his wrist. He spoke, if to any one at all, to Mayor:

"You, who are kind to a stranger, you don't know. Me they will not kill. Because me they need for purposes. But you they will make away with by magical means. That is to say, if you befriend me. It is therefore not seemly for me to have friends, because I get them into trouble."

"Oh, come now, come," said Mayor. "The police at Bow Street showed me your record. You're an Oxford graduate. You surely don't believe in magic."

"You mean, *you* don't," said O'Mally. "Early environment, early associations, ill health, worry, nostalgia, *and* persecution—don't overlook that—readily produce receptivity to hypnotic suggestion. Those are words of one syllable, more or less. They're all in the dictionary. Have you caught cold?"

"No," said Mayor.

"That was magic. Before you were put into knickerbockers, your mother or your maiden aunt or your nurse told you a hot mustard foot-bath would prevent colds in the head. It won't, of course. But it did, didn't it? Don't interrupt him—go on talking, Thö-pa-ga. Who are you? Why are you in London?"

"I am of a sub-sept of the Josays Sept of the Kyungpo. It is a secret sub-sept, and my father, who was a nobleman, was Keeper of the Thunder Dragon Gate, of which you have never heard."

"Oh, yes, indeed we've heard of it," said Mayor. "Tom Grayne knows as well as you or I do, it's a figure of speech. It means a state of consciousness, through which the Arhants* have to pass on the Road to Enlightenment. It is referred to in the New Testament as the Eye of a Needle."

[**Arhant*, *arhat* (Sanskrit: enlightened one) —a Bhuddist who has realized certain high stages of attainment. The implications of the term vary based on the respective schools and traditions.]

"That," said Thö-pa-ga, "is what you may have read in books, or what you have deduced. But what I know is other wise, and so I warn you. When my father had died and my mother was made to go into a nunnery, I wished never to become the Keeper of the Thunder Dragon Gate, although they said I had inherited my father's spirit and his duty also. There was an Englishman who came to Lhasa, a very kind man who represented the Indian Government. I ran away and asked that Englishman to give me work to do. He begged my freedom from the Dalai Lama. There was money. It was simple. I was sent to Oxford for an education, and I have it. But before I reached Oxford, he who had done me that great kindness was already dead—they said, of poison. And at Oxford there began to be a very soon beginning of a shang-shang sending not at all a mystery to me."

The blinded window-pane above the back of Mayor's head smashed suddenly—three distinct crashes of splintering glass. The wine bottle broke into a dozen pieces. The mulligan stew-pot fell off the stove to the floor. O'Mally stared at his top hat, on a nail on the wall. There was a hole through it.

"This is London, England," O'Mally remarked. "Or am I dreaming?"

Tom Grayne took a flash-light from the locker, leaned his weight against the wind-blown door and walked out.

"They will not kill me," said Thö-pa-ga, "because they need me for a purpose. But they will kill you—each of you and every one."

"Who are 'they'?" asked Mayor.

O'Mally reached for his top hat. "Exactly! Who are they? Does a shang-shang spit a soft-nose Webley bullet? Go on—don't interrupt him, Mayor—tell us. I wish now I weren't going to Russia."

CHAPTER 3.

"Say it, then, behind his back, to Ambleby!"

A POLICE whistle—three shrill blasts. In rain and darkness there is no other sound like that. O'Mally straightened his tie. The whistle shrilled again. Tom Grayne wrenched the door open and came in, dripping.

"Cops!" he said abruptly.

He had hardly said it when the door thundered to a man's fist. He uncovered the peephole—peered through.

"Yes, it's the Law. Shall I let 'em in?"

In response to O'Mally's nod he leaned his weight against the door. A policeman's flash-light—foot—knee—shoulder—face beneath an oilcloth-covered helmet—an official voice:

"What's going on in here? There's a broken window—"

"Come in—for God's sake, come in and let's shut the door!"

Two policemen entered, oilskinned, bulky, suspicious, cautious because they had no warrant.

"Anybody hurt? A fight? Any firearms in here?"

O'Mally answered: "No."

"May I have your names, please—and addresses."

O'Mally produced his card. He showed the flap of his wallet, then his new passport.

"Thank you, Sir 'Grace. And these others?"

"Dr. Mayor of the British Museum and the Home Office. Mr. Tom Grayne, American. Mr. Thöpa-ga, from Tibet."

"Ah! How long has *he* been in here?"

O'Mally gave a telegraphically terse synopsis of what had happened. He described Noropa.

The policeman produced his note-book. "I was asked in—"

Tom interrupted him: "Yes, I invited you in. Take a seat at the table; you'll write easier."

He poured them coffee. One policeman stood, sipping noisily. He didn't like American coffee, but he was polite about it. The other sat, reading aloud what he wrote:

"Nine-eighteen P.M. A man was seen and heard to fire three shots with a revolver in the direction of this shed—occupied by—broken window—broken wine bottle, upset cook-pot—"

"*And* a top hat ruined," said O'Mally.

"—hole in a top hat. Does any of you gentlemen know how it happened, or why? Bearing in mind, please, that any thing you say may be taken down and used in evidence against you."

Tom Grayne told the whole story. The policeman wrote down the details of Tom's passport.

"And now what next?" O'Mally asked. "You were tipped off by Bow Street to follow Noropa, and he followed my car. Am I right, constable?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. I'm what is known as acting on information received. I've no warrant, but I could get one. I heard three shots, saw one of them, and flashed my light on a tall man in a hooded black waterproof. I saw him throw his revolver into the river. There were other witnesses

besides me. I believe it would be best for all concerned if his here Mister Thö-pa-ga (two dots, you said, over the 0) would come with me to the police station—I mean, if he'd come willing—and be locked up for the night, where he'd be safe and warm and comfortable, and we could make enquiries in the morning."

Thö-pa-ga reached for his overcoat.

"Damn!" remarked O'Mally. "We were just getting his story. Professor Mayor went bail for him. Ask the Professor."

Mayor glanced at Thö-pa-ga. The Tibetan nodded; he had already buttoned his overcoat up to his ears.

"I don't understand my legal position," said Mayor. "You must do as you see fit, constable."

"He seems willing to come with me, sir."

"I'll go with the policeman and Thö-pa-ga," said Tom Grayne. "There's plenty more wine. You two make yourselves at home until I come back."

Mayor nodded.

"Very well," said O'Mally. "Are they pursuing Noropa?"

"Begging your pardon, sir," the constable answered, "the man wasn't identified. He slipped away into the shadows, but I daresay he won't go far before they catch him. If it should happen his name's Noropa he'd have more than a bit to explain. There's a watch being kept on this place; you'll be safe here until daylight. Or I could phone for your car, Sir 'Orace."

"No thanks."

"As you say, sir."

It was a long way to the police station. Tom Grayne trudged through the storm in silence beside Thö-pa-ga, who kept stride with the policeman. There was no sense in trying to talk to Thö-pa-ga, who seemed more gloomy than ever—an unusual state of mind for a Tibetan; Tibetans usually laugh at anything. Tom felt baffled. He had already begun to count on this accidental meeting as just the very stroke of luck he had been hoping for for months. Thö-pa-ga might—anything is possible—might help him to reenter Tibet. If not, he might have connections in Tibet who would honor an introduction. No plan yet, of course, but a strong hunch. Busted hunches are more disappointing than broken promises: one expects results from a hunch. This was the wrong kind of result.

At the police station, what with sending out a messenger to find a cigarette slot-machine, and then telling the long tale all over again for the benefit of the sergeant on night duty, nearly two hours went by. There was no sense in making a mystery for the police; the obvious thing to do was to keep them friendly.

So it was after midnight before Tom Grayne returned to the storm-swept hut where he had left his guests. He found O'Mally stoking the stove and arguing with Mayor.

"That is why," Mayor was saying, "I need your influence."

"At the Foreign Office? I have none—none whatever," O'Mally answered. "I'm consulted now and then by the Home Office, just as you are, in special cases. At the Foreign Office I'm an absolute nonentity."

"How about the India Office?"

"Worse and worse! An Indian Rajah, who got himself into political trouble, was one of my patients. I'm supposed to have advised him how to prove he didn't poison his aunt."

"Give him wine, Grayne! Make him drink it. O'Mally, I am not your patient, so you needn't lie to me. I happen to *know* you're on the Foreign Office list. That's why I invited you here. I repeat: if I should go to the Foreign Office, with a Home Office introduction, and tell that graciously insolent Sphinx Ambleby that Tom Grayne ought to go to Tibet, I should be courteously informed that no one is allowed to enter Tibet. Even as it is, Grayne is on the black book for having entered Tibet and remained there without permission. If you were asked what you think of him, what would you say?"

"I wouldn't tell him or you that," O'Mally answered.

"Say it, then, behind his back, to Ambleby." Mayor sipped wine. O'Mally clipped the end of a big cigar, with a platinum clipper—a personal gift from a crowned head. Mayor continued: "You are Ambleby's physician. He's a credit to you. Hundreds of people have wished him dead a thousand times over, but you've kept him alive. Oh, yes, I heard all about his being poisoned by a spy, and how you invented an antidote."

"I didn't."

"It was kept out of the papers, if that's what you mean. And I know, without being able to prove it, that you're off to Russia on a medical errand of your own, but with a secret errand, too, for Mr. Foreign-Office-Secret-Service Ambleby, who has a high opinion of your gift for bluff innocence and discreet observation."

"You are guessing," said O'Mally. "You are talking non sense."

"If," said Mayor, "*you* should go to Ambleby, and tell him what I have just now told you; and tell him your real opinion of Tom Grayne, Ambleby would regard that as a very proper introduction. I tell you, he hasn't another man to send to Tibet; there simply isn't one available who has Tom Grayne's knowledge of the country, Tom's physique and Tom's ability to take care of himself. And I repeat: this case isn't simple. It isn't merely a Tibetan feud; nor is it just another psychopathic case for you to pause and analyze on your way to a peerage. It's—"

He hesitated. O'Mally grinned.

"Go on, man! Are you weakening? Say it!"

"I have said it already three times."

"Grayne know what you think it is?"

"Yes. He and I together deciphered a Japanese document that baffled me until Tom broke the code. If it were known Tom had seen it, I should never be trusted again. It was one of those documents

that governments always denounce as forgeries when secret service agents find them in a dead man's wallet."

O'Mally looked sharply at Grayne: "What do *you* think it is?"

"I agree with Mayor."

"You agree with him because you wish to go to Tibet?"

"No, Sir Horace. I intend to return to Tibet with or without a Foreign Office permit. You may say so, if you want to."

O'Mally liked that. He uncorked another bottle of wine. He filled a glass for Grayne, who had hitherto not tasted it.

"Here's luck to you! So you agree with Mayor? Splendid! You believe, then, that this is a cog in the wheels of a Japanese scheme to get control of China?"

"Sure as you're alive," said Tom Grayne.

"I'm alive, my boy. I'm alive and interested."

"Then do your plain duty!" said Mayor. He was getting short-tempered. He laughed at himself. Then he yawned. "Strong wine—not used to it." Suddenly he clutched the table.

The wind was howling, but it wasn't wind that shook the door. O'Mally dropped his monocle—caught it in mid-air—pretended he did it on purpose. Grayne picked up a heavy broomstick.

"Sh-h-h!" said Mayor.

They all listened. One lamp flickered out, short of oil. The river sucked the wharf-piles. The wind howled. The shed creaked. The door thudded again, three times, as if some one kicked it.

"You're an en-n-t-ertaining host!" said Mayor. His teeth chattered.

Grayne went to the peephole, saw nothing and suddenly opened the door. The other lamp blew out. It was pitch dark, and a gale in the room.

"Duck!" yelled O'Mally. He up-ended the table, crashing everything to the floor. He and Mayor crouched behind the table. The door slammed. The stove belched smoke. Grayne had hold of some one. They were struggling, crashing among upset chairs and broken dishes.

"Hold him!" O'Mally shouted. "I'm coming!"

But he tripped over a table-leg and before he was up the door opened and slammed. A sudden blinding electric torch—darkness again.

"All right, sir, all right, I have him! Has he hurt you?"

"Police?" asked Mayor's voice. "Sure you've got him?"

"Yes, sir, he's out o' mischief for the present. Get up, you! Stand over there!"

The policeman held his flash-light steady until O'Mally relighted the lamp.

"Lucky I saw him! Sure you're not hurt, sir?"

Noropa, handcuffed, with his hands behind him, stood glaring with his back to the wall. One of Noropa's eyes was closing up; he was bending a bit forward, as if hit in the wind. Tom Grayne's coat was torn and there was blood on his lip. O'Mally took a stride toward Tom:

"Hurt?"

"No."

O'Mally examined the prisoner. The policeman stared at the mess on the floor.

"Did he do all this?"

"No, he didn't," said O'Mally.

"Thought he couldn't have. I was close on his heels. How did all this 'appen?"

O'Mally laughed testily. "It was a part of my arrangements for going to Russia! I didn't wish to be shot. You say you followed him here?"

"Yes, sir. The constable on watch at the end of the alley saw him first, but I was on my way here with a message, so I killed two birds with one stone, as you might say. All I saw him do was kick the door. Maybe when they search him at the station—"

"What's the message?"

"Oh, yes. I took the liberty a while ago of phoning for your auto. Sir 'Grace. It's 'ere already, at the street corner, two 'undred yards away. We had to phone Scotland Yard about all this. They phoned back ten minutes later to say there's a gentleman from the Foreign Office—"

"Didn't I say so?" Mayor interrupted.

"He said, sir, you'd know his name without his giving it, and he'd be very much obliged if, on your way home, you'd drop in and see him."

"At his office?"

"No, at his rooms."

"Told you so," Mayor repeated.

Tom was staring at Noropa. "You're no Tibetan! You're not Chinese, either! Are you?"

Noropa said nothing. He glared with one eye; the other was already swollen shut.

"They may need my hat for evidence," remarked O'Mally. "Lend me one of yours, Grayne—yes, that cap will do nicely, thanks. Are you coming, Mayor? I can drop you at your house on my way to—"

"Victoria Street, Westminster!" said Mayor. "Yes, I know where you're going."

The policeman led his prisoner outside. O'Mally waited until the door had slammed shut behind them.

"Just one moment. You, Mayor. And you, Grayne. If either of you should mention my name, in connection with this night's work, or for any other reason, at the Foreign Office, it would be breach of confidence, an unfriendly gesture and a damned serious indiscretion. Have I made myself clear? Very well. Thank you, Grayne, for supper and entertainment. Both were excellent. Good night. See you again some day, I hope."

"Good night, Tom," said Mayor. "How early can you be at my house in the morning?"

"Much too early for you. I'll be waiting for you down stairs."

Mayor winked twice behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. He jerked his respectable gray head toward O'Mally's back. Grayne let them out.

He had cleaned the place and was asleep on a bunk within ten minutes.

CHAPTER 4.

"If you can do it!"

IT was like any other door in the long, dim, draughty corridor, except that a man in blue uniform stood outside and asked Tom Grayne's business. The Foreign Office is like all the rest of Whitehall; comfort hadn't been invented when they built it. On the other hand, tradition was already ancient; it grows older, but it never dies, in that kind of building. The muscular, military-looking man in blue tapped on the door as if a lady were asleep within, opened the door cautiously, tiptoed in, murmured, and came out smiling. A neatly dressed Japanese gentleman walked along the corridor from behind Tom Grayne and turned the corner at the far end.

"Go right in, sir. Mr. Ambleby expects you."

Tom Grayne circumnavigated a beautiful old Spanish leather screen, so arranged that whoever stepped into the room presented his face to the desk in profile in the light from a high window. There was a coal fire, in a hideously dignified Georgian fireplace. Over the fireplace was a three-quarter length mirror—new glass in an antique frame; it very clearly reflected whoever entered the room, but it did not reveal the desk to him who entered.

Against a background of books, in the dimness behind a big, antique desk, sat Arthur Tremaine Ambleby. An astonishing man, because he was so different from what one expected. He stood up as Tom Grayne entered and without a word, but with a very gracious gesture, offered him the chair beside the desk. That placed Tom in the light from the window.

Amblesby looked like a poet, or perhaps an editor of a very learned review. He looked capable of having written Locksley Hall, or he might have translated Homer into English elegiacs. Gray hair. Wise eyes. A clean-shaven, courteous, civilized face. A dark leather bow tie. A leather waistcoat. An immaculately tailored jacket of a color that couldn't be guessed exactly against the background of books in the dimness. A man of perhaps sixty, who looked fifty and conveyed, without the slightest trace of self-importance, the impression of knowing all the secrets in the world and thoroughly enjoying them.

"Professor Mayor told me to come and see you," said Tom.

Amblesby nodded. There was nothing on his desk. No notes. No papers. Nothing that suggested that the room might be the exact center of an invisible spider-web of secrets that reached all over the world, into men's minds, hopes, ambitions, histories, forgetting nothing, overlooking not much. There were no files in the room. There was not even a door leading into another room where files perhaps might be.

"Yes," said Amblesby. "I spoke with Professor Mayor at three o'clock this morning and we discussed you. You have helped him, I believe, to decipher some curious documents in Tibetan and—er—and other languages."

Tom Grayne kept silence. He liked this man, right off the bat. He was just the kind of man he did like. Knew his stuff. Nobody's fool. But Tom was thoroughly on guard against him; he anticipated one of those simple, utterly innocent traps that are much harder not to fall into than the complicated sort. It appeared:

"You have an acquaintance in Harley Street?"

"No."

"Wasn't he with you last night?"

"Man who wears a monocle and spats? Oh, yes, I've met him. That's all. He doesn't know me. I don't know him."

"You have visited Tibet?"

"Yes. I intend to return."

"And you use an American passport?"

"Yes."

"How do you propose to do it? You understand that the terms of a treaty between the Tibetan and Indian Governments preclude our supplying you with anything in the nature of a permit?"

"Yes."

"We couldn't even give you unofficial recognition. Quite the contrary."

"Yes, I understand that."

"How then do you propose to enter Tibet?"

"That, sir, is my secret. Short of locking me up or shooting me, I'm fairly confident that nobody can prevent my getting in."

"I know how you got in, as you call it, last time."

"Yes, but I'm not an animal. I don't try the same trick twice running."

"What do you propose to do in Tibet?"

"Study the country. It's my subject."

"Some very interesting books have been written about Tibet," said Ambleby. "Which particular field will your book cover?"

Tom avoided that trap also. "I don't write books. The British Museum is crowded with information about Tibet that needs checking. Anything I learn for a fact I'll report to Mayor. He can do as he likes with it."

"Does he supply you with funds?"

"No, I have enough money of my own. I don't need much, the way I travel."

"You know a Tibetan named Thö-pa-ga?"

"Slightly. I know where he is. Professor Mayor withdrew bail at the request of the police, so Thö-pa-ga is either on his way from Kew or else already in a cell at Bow Street."

"Do you know a Tibetan named Noropa?"

"Yes. He isn't a Tibetan."

"You surprise me. What do you think he is?"

"I know. He's half-Jap, half-Chinese—I'd say a Chinese father, and that's unusual."

"He bears a bad reputation," said Ambleby. "Who is the person named John Sinclair, who was in the place where you live when the reporters called early this morning?"

"Oh—that's me. I invented that name. Old friend, phoned for by Tom Grayne to come and occupy the place in his absence.—Hadn't seen me recently—hadn't had time to talk over the phone—just hurried over—didn't know where I was, or when I'd be back."

"Well, Mr. Grayne, I am not in a position to do anything for you officially. You are well recommended. As far as I am concerned, there is no objection to your entering Tibet, *if you can do it*. But, of course, that has nothing to do with my office. I have been in communication with the Home Office, and with Scotland Yard. I know what took place yesterday. Would you object to telling me, in confidence, what you think it all means?"

"Thö-pa-ga," said Tom, "is wanted back in Tibet. Noropa has been sent to hound him back there. That's as clear as daylight. Probably Noropa pestered him with shang-shang magic, until he went

into hiding. Then Noropa tipped him off to the police for not registering a change of address, and got him locked up, so he'd be deported."

"Yes, that seems clear. But why should Noropa fire three bullets through your window?"

"Simple. It costs money to return to Tibet, but if you're deported you travel free. Maybe, too, he wants to return on the same ship with Thö-pa-ga. He was careful to throw his pistol into the river. It would be pretty difficult, I imagine, to convict him of anything serious. And—"

"Yes? And?"

"If Noropa were deported by the British Government, that wouldn't compromise any foreign legation that other wise might have to get him visas and supply the necessary funds, and all that."

Ambleby listened as if he were being told something that he didn't know. He looked vaguely, politely, not exactly incredulous but non-committal. Tom Grayne knew he was being studied, parsed, analyzed, doped out, criticized, considered—all behind a mask of courteously guarded interest.

One thing was already quite clear in Tom's mind: if he wanted Ambleby's help in any way, for any purpose, he had first to demonstrate his own value, and even so the help would not be openly done or acknowledged. Ambleby would tell him nothing more than he already knew.

"Hell!" Tom said suddenly. "Mayor gave me a hint who you are, so I'll talk horse. The Japs will have to starve and even cease to be a nation if they can't grab China. There's nothing else for them to do. Therefore, China it is. And China used to own Tibet. The new ruler of Tibet will be a young child in the hands of regents. That's to say when they've found the right child, and they haven't yet, though they pretended they had. But the Tashi Lama* is another story. He's the religious head of things. His influence, under a semi-political mask, still reaches all through China, along Buddhist channels. The Japs thoroughly understand the Buddhist psychology."

[**Tashi Lama*—any of a succession of Tibetan monks and spiritual leaders, second in importance to the Dalai Lama. Also called Bainquen Lama, Panchen Lama, Panchen Rimpoche.]

"Do you think they do?" asked Ambleby.

"Sure. Lots of Japs are Buddhists. They understand it, any how, a damned sight better than the Germans understood the rest of us in 1914. There's a secret sept in Lhasa called the Wishful-ones-who-stand-in-awe-before-the-Thunder-Dragon-Gate. It's one word. They are reputed to be black magicians. They're said to be (and I think it's true) the only Tibetan really secret sept who will admit Chinamen into their ranks. Thö-pa-ga's father was the figurehead lama known as the Worshipfully-born-Keeper-of-the-Thunder-Dragon-Gate. That is also one word. Most lamas are forbidden to marry, but that particular lama is obliged to marry. He has to marry a woman selected for him by the men in the dark, who have the real power. They are known as the Worshipful-nameless-ones-in-the-dark-who-see-the-light-that-is-coming. That again is one word. The Keeper of the Thunder Dragon Gate is merely their mouthpiece, but he issues oracular messages, prophecies and commands, that filter through, in writing and by word of mouth to wherever Buddhism has any influence open or secret. The office of Keeper of the Thunder Dragon Gate descends from father to son, which is another thing unusual in Tibet. Every thirteenth one in succession is always named Thö-pa-ga. The name means 'Wonderful-to-hear.' And there's a tradition, thoroughly believed, that the ones named Thö-pa-ga are more important than the others: that their coming always coincides with great changes."

"Yes, I know all that," said Ambleby. It was a rather surprising admission from him.

Tom continued:

"Well then, what is there to stop the Japs from getting control of the Keeper of the Thunder Dragon Gate? If he's a shang-shang victim—that's to say if he has been thoroughly well voodooed—they can make him send out propaganda, by word of mouth and secret writing, that should favorably influence quite a lot of Chinese in the matter of Japanese designs on China."

"Do you think the Chinese might be influenced in that way?"

"Just as readily as we Americans were coaxed into the World War. Why not? Artfully managed propaganda can accomplish anything. But it has to be artful. The Japs understand that perfectly. That's why they prepared a throne in Manchukuo for the ex-Emperor of China. That's again why about thirty million Chinese have already emigrated into Manchukuo. The Emperor isn't a Chinaman, he's a Manchu. They know it. He has no power. They know that. But he means something to the Chinese mind that can't be substituted. All the Japs have to do after that, is to provide a tolerable government, for which the Chinese give the puppet Emperor the credit."

"So you think Thö-pa-ga is being hounded back to Tibet to become the mouthpiece of Japan?"

"Yes, to about a hundred million people—some of 'em in India, some in Ceylon and Burma—some in French Indo-China—many of 'em in Malaysia and the Dutch East Indies—but the great majority in China."

"But why, Mr. Grayne, should they go to all that trouble? For instance, supposing young Thö-pa-ga should have been shot dead in your dwelling last night, why couldn't they put a substitute in his place?"

"That's exactly what they will do—and they'll pick an obedient nitwit, some one they have thoroughly psychologized to do the job, if they can't get hold of the real man. But if you know the first thing about Tibet, you'll realize they'd prefer the right man. Those people believe their own medicine. A substituted Thö-pa-ga would undo their own belief in themselves and their magic. This man probably has well-known birth-marks. And besides, they'd have to murder him before they could put in a substitute. They'd have a job on their hands to bring the substitute in from abroad, because it's common knowledge in Lhasa that Thö-pa-ga was sent to England for an education. The Dalai Lama's regents, who hate the Tashi Lama like the devil, would be pretty sure to try to expose and denounce a substitute. The Japs wouldn't have any faith in a substitute, either."

Ambleby betrayed no other emotion than courteous interest.

"It does sometimes happen," he said, "that certain governments employ a strictly unofficial means toward an undeclared objective. I have, of course, no knowledge of Japanese methods. However, there is a medical report to the effect that Thö-pa-ga might die soon, if he were permitted to remain in England. In the circumstances, since there is a balance to the credit of the fund that was sent from Tibetan sources for his Oxford education, it might be quite the proper thing to send him home in charge of some one. Are you willing to undertake that? Could you leave, say, day after tomorrow, from Hendon?"

"Oh, yes."

Ambleby's next remark withdrew the corner of a veil from undercover statecraft:

"Dr. Noropa will be deported, I am told. In England there are legal difficulties, but in India he can be detained for enquiries, under an Order in Council that provides for such contingencies. You are unlikely to be troubled by Noropa.—Do you happen to know any one in Delhi?" The question sounded quite casual.

"Oh, yes."

"For instance?"

"Oh, lots of people."

Amblesby smiled. "It wouldn't help you in the least," he said, "if you should mention me. But when you reach Delhi, if you should call on Mr. Norman Johnson, of the Bureau of Ethnology, and mention Professor Mayor, you might find Mr. Norman Johnson helpful. He would be interested to meet Thö-pa-ga. With his help, I imagine Thö-pa-ga will be able to reach Tibet."

"Okay."

"Could you leave your passport with me? I will have it visaed. I am informed that the police have saved your effects from being put out into the rain by your landlord."

"Oh?"

"Yes. It appears the wharf is unsafe. Where would you like your things sent?"

Tom smiled. All his private papers were locked in a bank vault.

"Robbin's Hotel," he said, "Golden Square."

"Very well, Mr. Grayne. Thö-pa-ga will meet you at the plane, at Hendon, day after to-morrow. Your ticket as far as Delhi and your passport shall be handed to you at the same time. Keep away, please, from Professor Mayor. No harm, I think, in phoning to him, provided you use discretion, but don't be seen at his house or in his company. I think that is all for the present. Should you ever return alive from—er—Delhi, drop in and see me."

"Thank you. Yes, I'll do that."

It was raining like the devil. Tom took a taxi. It was followed by another taxi to Robbin's Hotel, an old-fashioned place, recently redecorated, of the type that Americans dread but the English permit to survive. Tom went straight to the desk and signed the register. A very well-dressed Japanese followed him into the hotel, asked for mail, received it and stood reading it near the desk.

"Can I have my usual room? Any mail for me?" Tom asked.

"Yes, the same room. No, Mr. Grayne, no letters."

"Is Miss Burbage in? I will speak on the phone."

"Booth One, sir."

"Hello Elsa."

"Hello Tom. Did you read the morning paper?"

"No. Why should I?"

"You're on the front page."

"That's no reason. Get your facts from him as knows 'em! Listen: you'll need your cheque-book."

"Tom, are you in trouble?"

"Hell, no. Have you your passport? Indian tourist visa?"

"I have had it in my purse for six weeks."

"Cut along down to Cooks and buy yourself a reservation on the plane for Karachi, day after tomorrow. Better go to the bank first.—Yes, about that much—draw out plenty—fifty pounds more would be better. After you've made your reservation, meet me in the downstairs room at Doby's."

"All right, Tom."

He returned to the desk. The Jap was still there, writing something. "I'm expecting a couple of suitcases and a load of junk from Kew. Put the junk in the cellar—everything else into my room."

"Yes, sir. Did you see your name on the front page?"

"Sure. I spelt it for them."

They had spelt his name wrong, which was all to the good. He turned up his overcoat collar, thrust his fists into his pockets and walked out, striding like a man who meant to walk around the world. As he turned the corner he saw the Jap standing in the hotel doorway—saw him nod to a taxi-driver. The taxi drove away, slowly, and turned the same corner. It might mean nothing. But he was the same smart, well-dressed Japanese who had walked along the corridor in the Foreign Office.

CHAPTER 5.

"They should rate you AAA One Hundred Plus."

"Ton, I don't look excited. I swear I don't! Yes, I got the last seat there was. They had just sold the last-but-one. I have twelve hundred pounds in the bank. I have kept a small trunk packed ever since you warned me to be ready. And I'm so sick of Robbin's Hotel—no I'm not, I love it!—I will kick it good-bye, and come back a couple of years from now and love it all over again!"

"Kick your trunk good-bye," he answered. "Stick some doodads in a handbag. Buy all the rest of the stuff in India."

"Tom, this isn't true! It simply isn't."

"It won't be, if you don't listen carefully. The least slip, and it's all off. They'd cancel everything."

"I am all ears."

She wasn't. She had remarkably well-shaped ears, half hidden in a wind-blown bob of curly dark hair, under a Cossack kaftan. She was so small, and full of naturally ready laughter, that she looked almost Tom Grayne's opposite, except for a similar, equally hard to define but quite evident vigor of being. She might be twenty-two or twenty-three, but looked younger. She had small, strong, sun-browned hands. Her feet were tucked under her, in the big red leather arm-chair. Doby's downstairs fireplace was living up to its reputation; it was about the most comfortable fireside in London in rainy weather. There were a lot of luncheon tables, but no one ever came there much before twelve-thirty. The waiter had brought tea, taken his cue from the size of the tip, and left them alone. The tea was untouched.

"You take the airplane bus to Hendon," said Tom, "day after to-morrow. I take a taxi. There'll be a messenger with flowers for you and some fruit and chocolates, in the name of oh, any old name I think of when I order 'em. We're just nodding acquaintances, you and I. We get to know each other a bit on the journey, and after that, you use your wiles on Thö-pa-ga. Worm your way into his confidence."

"I've never been in a plane. I want to make enormous noises on a B-flat saxophone."

"You understand now, don't you, how all this happened? Or shall I repeat it?"

"No, no. I have understood you. I understand that Thö-pa-ga is being hounded back to Tibet, and that he doesn't guess what we're after, or know you except for last night's happenings, or trust you or trust any one else."

"Thö-pa-ga," said Tom, "needs friends. He needs them badly. He needs some one to whom he can talk. He has a persecution complex, and I don't blame him, poor devil. He's a particularly sensitive type of oriental. He would instantly detect an unsympathetic motive. He suspects Mayor. He suspects me. He mustn't suspect you, and there's only one possible way to fix that. You must make up your mind to be his friend, no matter what he does or what happens to him. You must be absolutely on the level with him. Never tell me his secrets without his full permission. Gradually get him to trust me."

"And then what?"

"I told you: he needs friends, not enemies. We can't get what we're after on a basis of something for nothing. Thö-pa-ga comes first, or we'll be fooled badly. All of us will be."

"How about Uncle Clarence?"

"Not one word to him! Not a hint! Not a word to a soul except Emily Foster, and nothing to her except to repeat instructions, from a public phone booth, if you think it necessary—but don't go near her. She is simply to put any thing you send to her into another envelope and mail it to Professor Clarence Mayor. Your Uncle Clarence doesn't know our private code. It would be a mistake if he did. The idea is this: you know the code by heart—you're sure? Word perfect?"

"I can say it backwards. I can signal it faster than you can read it."

"Okay. If I should write from India to Professor Mayor in London, my letters would be read in transit, even if they should never reach him, which they very likely wouldn't. But if I send something to you, by mail or messenger, in code, and you decode it and mail it to Emily Foster—an innocent, middle-aged lady who lives at Dorking—and she re-mails it to your Uncle Clarence, he will safely receive an unsigned communication that can't easily be traced back."

"Then you and I won't be together in India?"

"Not noticeably, to begin with. Certainly not in the same hotel. You're a tourist, remember. You'll have to play that part carefully; tourists, as a rule, don't visit India in the hot season. Don't let on that you can read Tibetan, or that you know anything about Tibet. Don't even let Thö-pa-ga know that, if you can help it. But if you get caught knowing more than girls of your age usually know, you can admit that you've studied a bit at the British Museum and that you picked up odds and ends from Thö-pa-ga on the journey."

"I'll be careful."

"Better be. If you make even one bad break, the Indian Government, of course, would simply ask us to leave India. But the Tibetan gang would give us the works. Very likely poison."

"I don't see why I can't tell Uncle Clarence. Isn't he in on it?"

"No, you chucklehead! He doesn't even guess that the deaf-and-dumb loony, who files away the notes I send him, copies them and passes them along."

"Tom, *that* poor old thing?"

"He's a Polak, whose father was an interpreter at the U.S. consulate in Warsaw for twenty-five years. Draw your own conclusions, but keep them under your hat. The system is run on a basis of never letting one agent know another agent, or what the other agent is doing if it can be helped, and never letting any one agent know more than necessary. Your Uncle Clarence is a useful man, in his particular line. They'd can him in a second if they guessed his deaf-and-dumb clerk is my go-between. If they thought Mayor guessed what you're up to, they'd never trust him again. It's an unforgivable offense to have a private iron in the fire, and an almost unthinkable thing for a girl like you to try to enter Tibet. If you should tell Mayor, he'd be furious. He'd warn Ambleby. That would be the end of me. They're only using me because there's no one else who fits the problem at the moment. If they guessed you are in my confidence, they'd have no use for me whatever. I'm only using them because it's the best chance in sight. They haven't okayed me yet. The man in Delhi may not like my guts. They're touchy, the Indian Government crew; they like the Foreign Office outfit about as much as I like being told what to believe. The India Office people, here in London, love me like a Bolshevik."

Elsa looked puzzled. Curled in the chair, she suggested a terrier, aching to be taken hunting, absolutely confident that any hunting, under Tom's direction, would be first rate. Some women, even to-day, have that excellent faith in a man. But it was not as simple as all that evidently.

"Then, if we get into Tibet—"

"*When* we get there," he corrected.

"All right, when! You will—you say we're merely making use of them—you will ditch all this and—"

"Don't believe that for a second," he answered. "Nothing for nothing in this world. Make your bargain, settle clearly in your own mind what the bargain is, then deliver the goods or bust. It isn't only the British Empire that is vitally interested in knowing who is planning what in China. I'm as interested in the Thunder Dragon Gate as they are. If I weren't, I'd find some other way of getting into Tibet. Pay as you go. Then you get what you're after. Speaking of which, you'd better go and buy yourself a letter of credit. Have it drawn on a bank in Delhi. If you've anything to say to me at the hotel, talk deaf-and-dumb and use the code. Don't phone my room if you can avoid it. Store your trunk. Twenty-eight pounds of luggage. Burn your boats. Hernando Cortez had nothing on you and me."

"I know it. Tom, do you guess how thoroughly I've burned my boats? They're ashes. If I don't make good, I'm done for."

"Scared?"

"No, Tom, are you? Please don't be. I won't let you down. I'm little to look at, but—d'you think I'm—"

He interrupted: "Don't talk piffle. You're game, all right. You're on the level. But some jobs are too tough for some people. Even now it's not too late to call it off. I'd trust you to hold your tongue."

"I have burned my boats!" she answered. "Tibet!"

Tom scowled. He hated to have to explain himself.

"You're full of enthusiasm," he said, "so you believe what you wish to believe. I'm reminding you for the last time—"

"Don't, Tom, you don't need to."

She might as well have tried to stop a steam-roller.

"You've no rating. None. I've no authority from any one to tell you my secrets—let alone to try to get you into Tibet."

"Tom, I know all that. You're being generous beyond the dreams of—"

"Generous nothing. If you'll keep your head you can be useful. There isn't another girl on earth who has your special ability. But remember, I turned you down flat in the first instance, and I told you why."

"Yes, Tom."

"Certain people trust me because they know I don't get tangled up with any woman who might soften me or blurt out what I'm doing. I have trained you as well as I could in the little time we've had. But we're taking a whale of a long chance. Both of us. If it were known I married you to give you a certain amount of possible legal protection in case I'm bumped off, they'd rate me from then on as a sentimentalist. In my profession that's the zero rating."

Elsa nodded. "They should rate you AAA One hundred plus."

"That's the point. They rate a fellow by results. You can't look to me for the slightest recognition of anything but your personal value to me as an assistant, strictly on your merits—and a secret assistant at that."

"I expect nothing else."

"Not now, you don't. But you don't know what's ahead. No matter how tight the jam you're in, you've got to stick to the agreement. Your only value to me is your intelligence, obedience and pluck. I want nothing else from you. Your marriage certificate simply entitles you to the key to my strongbox if I'm bumped off. Your marriage is so secret, and so otherwise meaningless, that you mayn't even get a divorce without my permission—and I won't give permission until secrecy no longer matters."

"Yes," she said. "I agree. I understand perfectly."

"I'm trying to get you into Tibet simply and solely because I think you'll be useful."

"I will deserve it," she answered.

"Damn!" he said suddenly, *sotto voce*.

The Jap had come in. The same Jap. Because of the high chair-back Tom hadn't noticed him until he slipped into a chair in the corner by the row of pegs, on which they had hung their overcoats. The Jap ordered tea. When the waiter had brought it he sat sipping and studying something that he took from an envelope. He didn't stare noticeably.

"Get your coat," Tom signaled with the fingers of one hand. "What is he reading?"

Elsa went and powdered her nose before she lifted her coat from the peg. She used a rather large square mirror. She was less than six feet away from the Jap. There was not a lot of light in that corner of the room; the manipulation of the mirror was quite plausible.

"Airplane ticket," she announced, when she returned to the fireside.

"Where to?"

"Couldn't read it, but it looks like Karachi."

CHAPTER 6.

"Have your meals with me while you're in Delhi."

EIJI SARAŌ, the Japanese merchant, made himself altogether too agreeable. He was very widely traveled. He could talk the colloquial peasant speech that passes muster along the Chino-Tibetan border, and he missed no opportunity, on the long flight from London to Karachi, to get in conversation with Tom, Elsa and Thö-pa-ga.

However, Thö-pa-ga was ill—not plane-sick but becoming feeble from some obscure ailment that was aggravated, if not produced by his mental depression. It had been very difficult indeed to talk

to Thö-pa-ga. He was an aristocrat; he resented that peasant dialect, and besides, he had partly for gotten it, or said he had. Mr. Eiji Sarao had not learned much from Thö-pa-ga.

But he made it almost impossible for Tom and Elsa to exchange confidences. His bright little eyes watched them continually. He detected their use of finger signals. He tacitly assumed that they were traveling together. At every pause in the long journey, he tried to get them into a three-cornered conversation.

At Karachi he had no trouble at all with the immigration authorities. Tom, on the other hand, had to enter an office near the hangar and answer searching questions. His passport, visaed in red ink by the India Office, merely stated that he was accompanying Mr. Thö-pa-ga as far as Delhi. The immigration officer, a gray-mustached ex-soldier, referred to a little indexed memorandum-book.

"You have visited India before, Mr. Grayne. Weren't you invited to leave?"

"Yes. But do you recognize that visa?"

"That isn't the point. For what reason, two years ago, were you told to get out?"

"I wasn't. As you put it the first time, I was invited to leave. You can get the facts from your files, can't you? If you choose to disregard that visa, take the consequences. I have no idea what they'll be. For all I know, you may have authority to override the India Office. If so, do it and let's see what happens."

The officer smiled. He had very intelligent brown eyes. "What is the nature of your relationship with Mr. Eiji Sarao?" he asked after a moment.

"You mean that Jap who traveled on the same plane? None whatever. I don't know him. Never spoke to him or heard his name before he boarded the plane at Hendon."

"I am informed that you and he made frequent use of the deaf-and-dumb alphabet during the journey."

Tom laughed. "That airplane steward probably has one glass eye. Did he say he saw the Jap doing it?"

"Very well, to whom were you signaling?"

"To myself, for practise."

"Mm! Have you designs on Tibet this time?"

"Delhi."

"Nothing beyond Delhi? Are you willing to agree to do your business in Delhi, and to leave India within a reasonable time—say, three weeks?"

"No."

"Understand me, Mr. Grayne: I have no information that suggests you should be classed with what are commonly called undesirable aliens. But it might put the Indian Government to a very great deal of trouble and expense if you should attempt to repeat your former indiscretion. Tibet is a

closed frontier. To bring you back from the border of Tibet would be a thoroughly unnecessary episode, that might have awkward diplomatic consequences, and is well to guard against."

"Okay. Guard against it."

"Will you give your promise, in writing?"

"You mean not to enter Tibet?"

"Not to try to enter Tibet. You could never do it again, I can assure you. But not to try to do it."

"If a promise is all you want," said Tom, "I'll make one. How's this: I promise faithfully, on my word of honor, to do everything humanly possible to get into Tibet as soon as I can."

The officer grinned.

"Well, you're frank about it! Any friends in Delhi?"

"Dozens."

"To whom do you intend to deliver Mr. Thö-pa-ga?"

"To the first good doctor I can find. The man's sick."

The officer scribbled a name and address on a slip of paper.

"Dr. Lewis has had a lot of experience with Tibetan cases. He was stationed for a long time at Darjeeling. Try him. Very well, Mr. Grayne, I shall have to report you as dangerous."

"Deadly!" Tom answered. "Obviously in league with a Japanese cotton-goods salesman to bring about a communist revolution led by shamans from Tibet!"

The officer stood up to shake hands. "I enjoyed your article on Tibetan magic in the *Asian Review*," he remarked.

"I didn't write it," said Tom.

"Isn't your *nom de plume* Bloomsbury?"

"No."

"Will you give my regards to Dr. Lewis?"

"Yes."

It had been almost on the tip of Tom Grayne's tongue to say that P.K. Bloomsbury was Dr. Clarence Mayor's *nom de plume*. Not that that mattered. Dozens of people knew it. But if Tom had confessed that *he* knew it, that might have had disastrous consequences. As he had drummed into Elsa's consciousness on every possible occasion, there is no knowing who has been told to discover, by means of apparently innocent questions, whether or not you can be trusted not to mention names or claim acquaintance with men on the inside.

And now, the Jap even invaded the same compartment on the train. He was very courteous. He offered aspirin to Thö-pa-ga, who seemed to suffer tortures from the heat and lolled back limply in a corner. Eiji Sarao knew all about Delhi hotels; he recommended one to Elsa—told her, too, of shops where she could buy whatever clothes she might need. Elsa, observing Tom's signal, accepted the Jap's advice about where to stay. Tom remarked he would probably stay with a friend; leading questions only led to more and more evasive answers.

When they reached Delhi at last, and the heat under the station roof almost made Thö-pa-ga collapse, the extremely friendly Mr. Eiji Sarao was rather evidently puzzled by the farewell between Tom and Elsa.

"Good-by. Thanks for all your kindness."

"Kindness nothing. I enjoyed your company. Hope you'll enjoy India. Perhaps we'll meet again some day, somewhere. Who knows? Good-by."

Tom took a taxi with Thö-pa-ga to Dr. Lewis's office. That address had not been given him for nothing. No one—absolutely no one was going to take responsibility for his entering Tibet. They wanted him to do it, off his own bat, at his own risk. No one was going to tell him anything, of any importance, in so many plain words. If he hadn't enough intelligence to understand hints, then he was the wrong man for the job and the usual governmental agencies would easily stop him in the course of the usual day's work. If he hadn't wits enough, he would be stymied without being able to say that any one had even as much as suggested to him that it might be possible to cross the Tibetan border.

That immigration officer wasn't the regular man; he hadn't even known where to look for the switch to regulate the force of the electric-fan in the office. But he had done his job pretty well. He had served warning to Tom to look out for the departmental mechanism that prevents the unwise, wishful wanderer from breaking bounds. He had warned him, too, against Eiji Sarao—as if that were necessary!

In the taxi, whirling through the crowded Delhi semi-modern streets that reeked of hot humanity and sprinkled pavement, he didn't have to bother about Thö-pa-ga. The man was almost comatose, although Tom was pretty sure he wasn't as ill as he looked; he was suffering from a sort of psychic blue funk. It was probably true, as he had declared suddenly in the shed that night, that he would rather die than return to Tibet. Perhaps Dr. Lewis could fix that. If not, a high elevation would do it. Meanwhile, Eiji Sarao? Noropa? The mysterious Noropa had had time to phone to half the Japanese in London in the interval between the Bow Street incident and his arrest that night at Kew.

Embassies and consulates don't openly employ a shang-shang expert. It would be an absolutely safe bet that no one, not even the secret service, or Scotland Yard, or Ambleby could prove any connection between "Doctor" Noropa and the Japanese Government. No doubt Eiji Sarao was an eminent man of affairs who represented a Tokyo cotton combine, as he said. But some third person, who knew Noropa, also might know Eiji Sarao. Or possibly Eiji Sarao knew Noropa. Eiji Sarao's visit to the Foreign Office might have been a mere coincidence; there was no reason why a distinguished foreign visitor to London shouldn't call there. But it hardly looked like a coincidence that Eiji Sarao booked a seat on that plane to Karachi. It was certainly not a coincidence that he had followed from Robbin's Hotel to Doby's downstairs lunch room. He had probably had a spy in the street—perhaps a taxi-driver.

It would be a fairly safe bet that a warning was already en route, in the innocent guise of a commercial telegram, to some confederate in Northern India to keep an eye on Tom Grayne *and* Elsa Burbage. Not so good.

Some one in Eiji Sarao's pay certainly would go through Elsa's belongings at the hotel. Japs excel at that game; in Japan they even open all the letters that the tourist school-marms send home to their sisters and their cousins and their aunts. They wouldn't learn much from Elsa's luggage.

Dr. Lewis's office turned out to be on the ground floor of a hospital courtyard. There was the usual crowd of patients and patients' relatives squatting on the shady side of the yard; the usual half-obsequious, half-insolent *chuprassi** at the office door; the usual Chi-chi clerk, inclined to give him self airs; the usual delay, on bent-wood chairs beneath a whirling fan. A vague smell of iodoform. A portrait of King George on an otherwise blank wall. A "no smoking" sign. A painted glass window in a door marked "Private. No admittance." A spot of glass, from which the paint had been removed, about the size of a half-rupee, at about the height of a man's eye from the floor.

[**Chuprassi* (Hindi)—a uniformed doorkeeper; also a messenger or servant wearing an official badge.]

Tom was aware he was being stared at through the peep-hole for two or three minutes before the door opened and Dr. Lewis came out to greet him. He was in a white suit, white aproned, pulling off rubber gloves. A jolly-looking fellow. Sharp nose. One eyebrow higher than the other. Two or three scars on his face. Straight, unruly, almost carrot-colored hair. Very likely fifty, perhaps older. Half his right-hand middle finger missing.

"Mr. Tom Grayne? How do you do? Come in. This the patient? Some one phoned me from Karachi to expect you. Bring him in and let's see what's wrong."

He motioned Tom to a chair beside a desk and led Thö-pa-ga to another chair beside a window. He got busy at once with a stethoscope.

There was a long counter at one end of the room, burdened with all sorts of bottles, phials, scales and retorts. On the desk was a microscope and a lot of implements. Something that smelt pretty rank was boiling in a covered container over an alcohol burner on a white-enameled table on wheels. There was nothing in the room worth particular attention except Lewis himself, the fact that he had indicated that particular chair beside the desk instead of either of two other chairs—and the radio message that lay on the desk, exactly where whoever should use that particular chair couldn't possibly help seeing it. Tom's eyes devoured it:

DR. MORGAN LEWIS
EDITH CAVELL MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
DELHI, INDIA
AWAIT BY AIR MAIL GRAIN CONSIDERED SUITABLE FOR SHANG-SHANG EXPERIMENT AND ALSO
NECESSARY MONGOLIAN EXTRACT RECOMMEND BOTH TO YOUR DISCREET ATTENTION BEST
WISHES AND KIND REGARDS HORACE O'MALLY

The date tallied. Sir Horace O'Mally had despatched that from London before leaving for Russia—after his midnight interview with somebody in Westminster.

Thö-pa-ga had his shirt off. He was being systematically thumped. The doctor strode to the desk presently, touched a button and returned to the patient. He appeared to doubt one of the lungs. He resumed business with the stethoscope, until an orderly appeared—another Chi-chi, twice as dark as the Tibetan.

"Bath—bed—light diet—observation. Private room. And tell the head nurse I will be up there to study the case in half an hour."

"Card, sir?"

"I will sign that later."

"It's against the rule, sir, to—"

"Do as I tell you."

Thö-pa-ga, with his shirt unbuttoned, followed the orderly out of the room. Dr. Lewis came and smiled in front of Tom Grayne. He lit a cigarette and offered his case.

"The rules," he remarked, "are blessed in the breach, like etiquette. But breach 'em at the right time! That thing boiling in there is a gentleman's liver. He hadn't sense enough to break a rule. He was too polite. He ate what was put in front of him. We shall know soon what it was he died of, and perhaps who did it—although that's less likely. Your man will be dead pretty soon if you can't get him up to the Hills. I can probably put him in shape for the journey. I advise Darjeeling."

He picked up the radio message, as if he hadn't known it was there. He put it into a drawer.

"Do you happen to know my friend Horace O'Mally of Harley Street?"

"No," said Tom Grayne. "I have met him, once, casually, that's all."

"Didn't he leave on a visit to Moscow?"

"I don't know."

"Take that other chair, it's easier, and tell me something that you do know."

"Well," said Tom, "I know the road to Tibet."

"Good. Then you don't need my advice to be careful what you eat and drink. I'm going to give you some iron rations of my own invention, for emergency use, when you happen to doubt what's set in front of you."

"Damned kind of you."

"No. Merely thoughtful. Have your meals with me while you're in Delhi."

CHAPTER 7.

"Memo. buy some american chewing-gum."

"I SPENT eleven years near the Tibetan border," said Lewis. He wasn't looking at Tom Grayne; he stuck his hands deep in his pants pockets, leaned against the desk, and talked familiarly, as if to an

old acquaintance, as if there was no need to do any thawing whatever. Tom, however, knew that any overt attempt on his part to win Lewis's confidence would have the opposite effect. He maintained his reserve and let the doctor do the leading.

"Sikkim?" he suggested.

"Yes, and Bhutan."

"Good country. I bet you liked it."

"Yes. I made a lot of friends among the lamas. Knew a lot of sorcerers, too—shamans—all sorts of people. Tried to swap facts with 'em. Couldn't. I spent two-thirds of my pay on medicines and so on, to give to the shamans: cascara, quinine and stuff like that, that they passed along as elementary magic. In exchange they'd tell me pretty nearly any thing I knew already, but nothing more than that. Poisons? Couldn't get a word from them. Magic? They'd laugh and swear there was no such thing. If you added it up, I daresay I spent a third of my time trying to get what I supposed you'd call the low-down on a shang-shang. I used to write to O'Mally in London. He's well read. He's a very intelligent student of the vagaries of the human mind, is Sir Horace O'Mally. But his suggestions of lines of investigation led no where. Our letters on the shang-shang subject alone would make a fat volume. In the end we both came to the same conclusion."

"That a shang-shang exists in the realm of illusion," Tom suggested.

"No. It lives and moves and has its being, but the legends about it are lies. That's why a shang-shang is so damned deadly. And I'm convinced that the Thugs, who used to terrorize India, were rather mild and inoffensive gentry compared to the shang-shang magicians. They're a very highly organized, intelligent and mysterious gang of terrorists, with no discoverable motive for their practises other than sheer malice and self-importance."

"Did you happen to hear of the Thunder Dragon Gate?" Tom asked him.

Lewis glanced at him sharply and looked away again. "Yes. I did. That's where shang-shang sendings are supposed to come from. I'm convinced it's an actual temple or shrine of some sort. But I don't know where it is."

"Thö-pa-ga is the hereditary Keeper of the Thunder Dragon Gate," said Tom Grayne.

Again Lewis looked straight at him. "Has he told you anything about it?"

"Nothing that I didn't know already."

Lewis nodded. "I might be able to make him talk. Care to come upstairs and see me try?"

"No," Tom answered. "He's suspicious of me as it is. I want his confidence. If you can help me indirectly to get that, I'll reciprocate, if, as and when possible."

Lewis nodded again. "Where are you staying in Delhi?"

"Don't know yet. Came straight here."

"Try Ingleby's Hotel. It's a new place."

"Okay, thanks, I'll do that. Any suggestions about Darjeeling?"

"Are you acquainted there? Do you happen to know the Ringding Gelong Monastery? The Abbot's name is—damn, I'll forget my own name next—well, no matter, it's in my note-book."

"Mu-ni Gam-po," said Tom.

"Oh, you know him, do you? Well, you couldn't do better than take your man to that monastery. The high elevation, the familiar monastic atmosphere and old Mu-ni Gam-po's amused arbitrariness should do more to restore him to health than anything else I can think of. How did he react to air plane altitudes?"

"Splendid. At high altitudes he grew almost talkative."

"To you?"

"No. I didn't crowd him. I let him talk to any one he pleased. I haven't asked him a question beyond is he feeling better, or how about a clean shirt or a stick of chewing-gum. I'm not trouble, I'm the lad who pulls him out of it and doesn't give a damn why."

"All right. Well, I'll go upstairs and see him. If you'll dine with me, I'll meet you at the Service Club at nine; I'll be there waiting for you."

"I haven't a dress suit."

"Very well, meet me at Logan's—know where that is?"

"Sure. I'll like the grub at Logan's better. Club grub dulls my intuition. It's all right when you've nothing important to do. Could I have a slip of paper?"

Tom wrote a short note, sealed it in a plain envelope and addressed it to himself at Ingleby's Hotel.

Memo. Dine to-night at Logan's 9 P.M. Cancel other engagement by phone.

Memo. Buy some American chewing-gum.

He almost never made written memoranda. He didn't have to; he had trained his memory. But he gave the envelope and a coin to a filthy-looking Punjabi, who was loafing in front of the hospital. The man offered his services with rather noticeable persistence. He was possibly a spy. Anyhow, Tom hoped so. He told him to deliver the message at Ingleby's Hotel, and watched him for half a block, until he was quite sure he was being followed by a much better-dressed Punjabi Moslem. That settled it. Tom took a taxi in the opposite direction, made sure that he wasn't being followed by another taxi, and then drove to one of the new administration buildings, where he had some difficulty in finding the Ethnographic Office. When he found it at last, at the end of an upstairs passage, he was rather guardedly welcomed by Norman Johnson, a man in spectacles, bulky, morose and used to being treated with more deference than Tom betrayed.

"Professor Clarence Mayor of the British Museum suggested I should call on you."

"Oh, yes?" He didn't even invite Tom to be seated. The room was lined with evidently much-consulted books. The desk was piled with papers. There was an atmosphere, an emphatic suggestion of too much work to be done and too little time in which to do it. "What does Mayor

want? I have a whole file of his letters. He always wants something that he could dig up for himself in the Museum if he had the patience. What is it this time?"

"Nothing that he told me."

"Aren't you the man who entered Tibet?"

"I have been in Tibet."

"Well, I must say it surprises me that Mayor should send you to me. He knows perfectly well it's forbidden to do what you did. Does he think I'm going to help you to repeat the offense?"

"I don't know what he thinks, and I'm damned if I care," Tom answered.

"Haven't you any other introduction?"

"No."

"Know any one at the Foreign Office?"

"No."

"Remaining long in Delhi?"

"No."

"Where are you going from here?"

"Darjeeling."

"I may perhaps meet you there. I should be there now, but there was too much work to be done here first."

"Mail or messages will reach me at the Hindu Kush Hotel in Darjeeling," said Tom.

"And in Delhi?"

"Ingleby's. I see you're busy. I'll be off."

"Good of you. Yes, I am busy. I will look forward to a conversation with you in Darjeeling."

So much for him. Tom chuckled as he walked out. He didn't expect to be kissed on both cheeks and told what to do. One very famous explorer, officially forbidden to enter Tibet, cooled his heels for months, continually applying for permission and continually rebuffed, until at last he waked up and discovered that a road had been made all clear for him. All he had to do was to pretend he had slipped across the Tibetan border without the Indian Government's knowledge. No competent secret service has any sympathy for stupidity; and no successful government does openly what is better done left-handed in the dark.

Tom drove to Ingleby's Hotel, registered and ordered his bag brought from the station. There was no self-addressed message. Good. Pretty stupid of some one. A really smart man would have

opened it, read it, sealed it up again and sent it on its way. He took a shower in his room and went down to the broad veranda that faced the street and a row of good green trees. It was already late afternoon. About a dozen people were using the long chairs, drinking. They all stared and immediately lost interest. Tom took a chair at the far end. He ordered ginger-ale—hated the stuff, but you have to order something; it was too hot for tea. He sat still, frowning, doing nothing, mentally reviewing the day's conversations and wondering about Elsa. He was a bit worried about her. But his frown relaxed when a box-wallah spotted him and patiently worked his way along the veranda, offering cheap jewelry and similar rubbish for sale. Because he expected just that, Tom spotted the legerdermain with which the fellow added a small box of spearmint chewing-gum. As he drew near he placed it in full view on the top tray.

"Melikani tschooin-gum, sahib? *Bohut atcha*—new-fresh-jus' arrive by steamer—same as sell in New York, Paris, London—original package—good—cheap—guaranteed."

Tom bought his entire stock of the stuff. It didn't seem to have been tampered with. There was no evidence of the wrappers having been disturbed. A moment later he silently cursed himself and laid the box on the floor at his left hand. A very pleasant-looking missionary woman in the next chair on his right leaned toward him and spoke:

"If I had seen the chewing-gum, I would have bought some. Do you want it all? May I buy some from you?"

Well, he couldn't tell her he suspected it was poisoned. He couldn't let her go ahead and take a chance and chew the stuff.

"Sorry," he answered. "It's for a sick friend. Promised him." Pretty lame excuse, that. Better touch it up a bit. "I'm going for a stroll," he added. "If you like, I'll get some for you. Would you like a whole box?"

"No, no, please don't trouble. It was just a passing fancy. I haven't dared to eat any Indian sweets since I was poisoned in Darjeeling."

She met Tom's gaze steadily. Gray-eyed, gray-haired. Jolly-looking woman, with a good grim trouble-eating lip line. Good ears. Scarred knuckles. Carried her head right. Licked a whale of a lot of bad grief in her day. Damn her, why didn't she break ice? Suddenly she did it, quite naturally:

"Are you Mr. Tom Grayne? Some one we both know phoned a few minutes ago to say you're going to Darjeeling. So am I—to-morrow morning. Do you know Darjeeling? Perhaps I can be of some use to you there. I keep a school for Hill children."

She didn't mention Ethnological growling Johnson's name, so he'd be damned if he would. How could he check up?

"Do you know Mu-ni Gam-po?" he asked.

"We're great friends."

"Give him my kind regards."

"Would you care to meet him at my house?" she suggested.

Tom hesitated, although he didn't appear to. The unlikeliest people are on the inside. Equally unlikely people are among the mischief-makers and merely curious who imagine themselves on the inside.

"I'd enjoy meeting Mu-ni Gam-po anywhere," he answered.

"I am Nancy Strong," she said. "Does that mean anything?"

"Yes."

He wondered why he hadn't guessed it. But a man can't remember everything. He should, but he doesn't; a brain doesn't work that way. He had heard of her scores of times, from scores of people. Even her Christian enemies spoke of her with respectful appreciation. Tom remembered a district judge remarking that the more he hated her the more he liked her. Funny—he had imagined her as a totally different type of woman; he had avoided meeting her for that reason. Had forgotten her for the same reason.

"You will call on me?" she asked.

"Sorry I didn't long ago."

"I will look forward to it."

She got up, so of course Tom did, and she walked away with an air that made her look as likable as one of those rather impoverished county gentlefolk, who, all the world over, keep the good traditions going while the bad ones die. Tom went into the lobby and wrote a letter to Elsa, in code lest Eiji Sarao should see it:

Not for Mayor. Go as soon as you like to Darjeeling. Any good hotel will do. Soon after you get there call on Miss Nancy Strong, School for Hill Children. Tell her all you care to about Thö-pa-ga but show no interest in me. Everything progressing favorably. Better destroy this.
TOM

He mailed it, stuffed his hands into his hip-pockets, and went for a stroll.

CHAPTER 8.

"Said it was a shang-shang.

Then he said it was his own soul looking at him."

LOGAN'S is a queer place. Its proprietor is Greek and the cooking Chinese. It stands at a corner where a busy street becomes a tributary of the Chandni Chowk and never less than thirteen nations mix into a stream that readily becomes a turbulent vortex. Any wind of politics can whip that swarm into a tantrum. In time of riot it is one of the first points that the armored lorries and machine-guns visit. European and American ladies have frequently been spat on at that corner by oriental gentlemen of prejudice and peculiar views.

Tom Grayne, at three minutes to nine, with his hands in his pockets, was more alert than he looked, but he was almost not alert enough. As he crossed the street toward Logan's a Ford roadster whipped around the corner, driven by a nondescript in a dirty turban. It missed him by less than an inch. As he turned his head to try to recognize the driver or take the car's number, a second Ford, coming the same way, actually touched him as it whirled by. He stepped backward against a burly Sikh, who cursed him savagely, inviting a blow, that would have led to a fight, that would have brought the police. Tom knew better than to get himself into police toils.

He grinned at the Sikh: "Run and tell them what you would have done if you'd dared!"

He walked into Logan's, where Dr. Lewis was already seated at a table. He sat down facing him and laid the box of chewing-gum on the table.

"Doped out yet what ailed that liver you were boiling?"

"Yes. A very rare poison, distilled from the roots of a small plant that grows in Sikkim. It takes twenty or thirty roots to yield a few drops of the stuff. It's sure death in a couple of days—attacks the liver—and seems to break it down in a way that I don't understand. I'm sending some of it to O'Mally. He won't make much of it steeped in alcohol—or I think not. But he'll enjoy the poison—three drops that would kill I don't know how many people."

Eiji Sarao entered. He nodded and smiled to Tom and took a table whence he could watch without turning his head. Tom spoke to Lewis:

"The two sticks of gum that are lying loose on top are new ones that I bought half an hour ago at Catesby and Simonds. Take one."

"Why? I hate the stuff."

Tom insisted. He took the other loose stick, broke off the paper and chewed it. Lewis followed suit. Both chewed. They ordered dinner.

"After dinner, take the box," said Tom, "and have it analyzed." He explained why, and how he had come by the box. "Eiji Sarao," he added, "is having a whale of a good time watching us chew. Don't look at him. He's grinning to himself like a Chinese idol—cocksure funeral-to-morrow kind of grin. Any news at your end?"

"Yes. Quite a bit. A man who said he had come recently from Giang-tze, showing what may have been forged credentials from the Tashi Lama of all improbable people, came to the hospital and demanded to see Thö-pa-ga."

"How did he know he was in there?"

"That's the point. I asked him. He was nonplussed for a second, but they're quick to cover up, are those Northerners; they're not like Indians. An Indian only thinks he's inscrutable; whereas a trained Tibetan, is. He told me Thö-pa-ga has been expected for a long time, so he was on the lookout for him. He said that a patient who was discharged this afternoon had run and told him. Lie, of course."

"Sure. Eiji Sarao told him, that's a safe bet. Did your visitor interview Thö-pa-ga?"

"No. Thought of letting him. Thought better of it. I said he's too ill. He isn't. Lungs are right enough. He'll get well at a high altitude, but he has been eating the wrong kind of food—such slush as this, for instance. Altitude and monastery grub will soon put him to rights. I didn't even tell Thö-pa-ga he'd had a visitor."

"Good."

"But he knew it."

"Uh-huh?"

"I was sent for in a hurry. He was sitting up in bed raving. Said he'd seen a shang-shang, so there must be some one come from Tibet."

"Any one else see it?"

"Yes. The head nurse. Thö-pa-ga is in a small room with his bed by the open window. There's no fire-escape there, but the wall is easily negotiable by any active person. I could climb it myself. In fact, we all suspect that window has been used to deliver forbidden drugs to patients. There's a locked fly-proof screen, but the wire gauze was recently damaged by a violent patient who tried to commit suicide. It was repaired, but the repair was badly done—probably on purpose—and the fact wasn't brought to my attention. It is quite easy, from outside, to detach and pull outward a whole corner of the wire gauze. Thö-pa-ga had asked for shaving tackle and a mirror. The head nurse let him have them. It's usual, unless forbidden in special cases. She had let him have one of those nickel-framed magnifying mirrors that was left behind by a patient and never claimed. Safety razor. She had left him with the mirror against his knees, leaning back against a heap of pillows, with his back to the window, shaving him self. He started raving before she had reached the next room. She was back in the nick of time to see through the window what *she* said (and she may have been right) was a Tibetan devil-mask. But she said it was green, which hardly fits. She's a good, strong, level-headed woman, but she may have been too badly frightened to observe it accurately. Thö-pa-ga had seen it in the shaving mirror, magnified and probably distorted. First he said it was a shang-shang. Then he said it was his own soul looking at him! The nurse had to keep him from cutting his throat. He had the blade out of the safety razor. So she couldn't look out of the window; and, of course, by the time they'd sent for me the thing was gone. I raised particular hell, but no one who had any business in the yard below would admit having seen anything."

Tom watched Eiji Sarao get up and go. They nodded to each other.

"If I were the Indian Government," he said to Lewis, "I would run Mr. Eiji Sarao out of the country so fast that he'd burn the tracks."

"And the evidence, too!" Lewis answered. "Understand me, I'm entirely ignorant of what it's all about or what the Government intends. I know nothing about you. Nothing. You called on me, mentioned the name of a mutual friend, and I'm living up to the Welsh reputation for hospitality."

"Quite so."

"So I'm going to introduce you, simply as an act of hospitable kindness, to a rajah. Have you eaten enough of this ullage? Like some dessert? More coffee? Let's go then. He's the Rajah of Naini Kol, which is a little bit of a principality tucked away in the Hills a couple of hundred miles from here."

"I think I've heard of him. Isn't he the scientist?"

"M-m-yes. He dabbles. He can afford it. His name is Dowlah, which it shouldn't be. He's a descendant on the female side of the famous Suraja-ud-Dowlah of Clive's day. Adopted or something. Anyhow, he hasn't inherited political ambition. He neglects his subjects, which is very fortunate for them; they're backward, but they're pretty decently ruled by a fat prime minister, who's too afraid of them to try any tyranny and too honest to steal; a damned rogue but a good bloke, if you understand me. He has his points. Dowlah has traveled a good deal, but he lives most of the time nowadays in Delhi. He is one of my private patients; I had to treat him for a nervous condition induced by too much effort to become a scientist without the necessary mental training."

"Strange hour to call on him, isn't it?"

"I'll tell you another peculiar thing. We're going to call on him without any one knowing but you, he and I. I'm going to leave you alone with him. Come and see me in the morning at the hospital and I'll let you know what reaction I get from this chewing-gum."

They took a taxi to Lewis's club, where Lewis squandered nearly two hours talking to acquaintances while Tom, on a veranda chair, sat staring at the night. But at last Lewis borrowed a friend's auto, driven by an ex-sepoy. They were whirled after that through so many streets that Tom was hard put to it to keep his sense of direction. Obeying orders, the ex-sepoy, a Mahratta, doubled and redoubled on the course until there was no longer the slightest question of their being followed. The car stopped at last in almost total darkness, beneath neem trees, on the western outskirts of the city.

Lewis dismissed the car. He and Tom walked to a high teak gate that opened in response to knocks and admitted them into a heavily scented garden. A fountain splashed. A path led to a front door, in a house that looked centuries old but recently modernized. An ancient, white-bearded attendant in a white smock emerged like a ghost from the shadows, greeted Lewis profoundly, and rang the bell.

CHAPTER 9.

"Tee-Hee! Isn't she a lulu!"

RAJAH DOWLAH of Naini Kol, to put it mildly, did not stand on ceremony. Some one had opened the front door by mechanical means; there wasn't a servant in sight as he came like a dancing master down the hall to greet his guests. The hall was severely furnished in the latest modern fashion—metal chairs—one astonishing oil painting—indirect light—imported travertine—a long strip of gloxinia-hued hand-woven carpet. There were two full-length mirrors, framed in chromium; the one at the end that faced the front door made the hall seem twice as long as it actually was, and you seemed to walk toward yourself.

The Rajah was in a European dinner-jacket and canary-colored silk turban. He didn't walk, he pranced. He didn't smile, he giggled. He didn't hold out his hand, he flourished it. He didn't shake hands, he shook himself, offering a hand to either guest and using theirs for leverage.

"Lewis, old thing, how are you? Who is your friend? Not a patient, I hope?"

He had very intelligent eyes. Beneath an air of triviality and gush he seemed to have the coldly concentrated, alert attention of a gambler, in a game where the stakes are big and the opponents not notorious for fair play.

"Don't talk nonsense, Lewis! No, no, I won't listen to you! You must have a drink and a smoke. You must stay at least until after I've shown you my latest!"

"Perpetual motion?" asked Lewis.

Dowlah giggled at Tom. "He's jealous! He's afraid they will make me an F.R.S.!—Lewis, you incredulous old Taffy, I have a shang-shang! Alive! In captivity! Come along and I'll show you."

"You're a damned liar," said Lewis. "I'll look."

The Rajah led the way. The library, as he called it, was as full of scientific instruments as books. It was a big room, lined with travertine. There was another full-length chromium-framed mirror, its effect spoiled by a cabinet that stood against it, draped with a huge embroidered silk shawl. There were microscopes, cameras, retorts, but none of the dirt and disorder that usually accompany amateur nights into physics. There were also three big easy chairs, a table, decanters, syphons. The Rajah offered whisky and cigars. Lewis accepted both, Tom neither; Tom had a way of declining, without excuse or apology, that left nothing to argue about. Then, suddenly:

"I can't wait, Lewis! I simply must show you!"

"Go ahead, Dowlah, you idiot. Show us!"

Dowlah led, on excited tiptoes, toward the glass cabinet that stood in front of the mirror. He jerked off the silk shawl and revealed a glass case, six feet long, four wide, standing on a heavy teak table.

"Hold your breath! Sssh-sh! Take a look! Take a look!"

On the floor of the glass case was a brute like a huge green spider with a body as big as a quart pot, spiked like a horned toad's. Its legs were two or three times as long as a spider-crab's and had projecting bristles. It was emerald green. It had a face like a shrunk devil-mask—a blind malignant face. Its real eyes were on top. They were opal colored. Its mandibles moved continually, as if it were feeding itself on something that it couldn't see. There was a big, dead rat near one corner of the cage, caught in a network of web as thick as sewing silk, and sucked dry.

"Weighs seven pounds, six ounces and a half," said Dowlah. "Angry! Mad angry! She's from the Hills. The heat here maddens her. But isn't she a beauty! Lewis, my boy, that's a genuine shang-shang. She's a young one. They say they grow to be twice her size. That's the beast you said doesn't exist! That's the killer-spider of the Himalayas that can thrive up near the snow line. That's the origin of half the Tibetan legends, and of nearly all the superstition, about murder by magic! Death? Hah! There's death for you, Lewis my boy! How'd you like that on a dark night! Devilish death! Painful! Worse than a hamadryad! If the tales are true, that creature's bite sets every nerve in its victim's body aflame with agony. But you can't scream. You can't move. You die speechless. Would you like to see her kill another rat now?"

"No," said Lewis. "How d'you know it's a shang-shang and how did you get it?"

Dowlah didn't answer the questions. "How would you like her loose in your bedroom?" he retorted. "That's her job! That's what the shamans catch 'em for! They're a thousand times as dangerous and difficult to catch as cobras or panthers. I'll show you. This brute can jump clear across the room, so keep out of its way! Out of *her* way! She's the female of the species. The male is small, dark red, non-poisonous. She invariably kills and eats him. However, I'll let her loose and show you what she's good for."

"No, you won't," said Lewis.

"Oh, yes. It's quite simple. If you don't get between her and where she's going, you'll be quite safe until after she gets there. I'll trap her all right. You watch. I'll show you how it's done. She has a one-track mind, like any other spider—always does the same thing in the same way. She's almost human in that respect. Stand over there by the wall."

It was a very long room. On another table, against the wall at the far end, there was a glass case similar to the one that contained the shang-shang, similarly covered with a silk drape. Its hinged top was raised and held open by a string suspended from a pulley on the wall; it could be opened and shut from half a room away. Dowlah took a small stick like a conductor's baton, tied a wad of cloth to the end, dipped the wad in something in a saucer—

"Warm meat extract. Blood is better. But when she's very angry warm meat extract does the trick."

He opened a small slide at one end of the glass case and proceeded to irritate the shang-shang with the rag on the end of the stick. The thing's ferocity was horrible. It flew at the stick. It bit the rag. Its leg movements were so swift and powerful that it seemed to fly. The interior of the six-foot-long case became a whirl of something vividly green that moved too swiftly for the eye to follow. Dowlah removed the stick and closed the slide. The monstrous insect crouched itself over the slide and appeared to be trying to force it open.

"Now!" said Dowlah. "Watch this! *Arichnida ferox shang-shang Dowlah!* They will hardly be so jealous as to deny it the use of my name, will they? I'm its discoverer. I'm the first to have a captive shang-shang under observation."

He began to touch the floor, tables, furniture, even the books on the shelves, with the rag on the end of the stick. He laid a zigzag scent that led all over one half of the room, until he finally came to the open glass case, untied the rag and dropped it in. Then he removed the saucer of meat extract into the hall, closed the door again, locked it to prevent a servant from entering unannounced, switched off the two electric ceiling-fans, attached the end of a cord to a ring on the lid of the case, stood back ten feet away—pulled the cord—opened the lid.

Out came the shang-shang, swiftly, with a sidewise spider movement. It crouched on the glass on the top of the cabinet. Seen against the mirror, in three dimensions, it was nauseating—an emerald horror.

"God!" exclaimed Lewis.

Tom Grayne noticed a bottle of cyanide on a shelf in a case behind him. It might be better than no weapon in a pinch.

The Rajah giggled: "Tee-hee! Isn't she a lulu! Find her an adjective, Mr. Grayne—lulu is already antique—isn't she entitled to a new word? You're an American. You invent it!"

"Shut up! For God's sake, watch the brute!" Lewis said irritably. "Here, give me that window-pole. I warn you, I'm going to swat your shang-shang if it heads my way."

"Don't you worry. She won't. But I bet you couldn't hit her—not with that," said Dowlah.

Lewis reached down the brass-hooked pole from the ring on the ventilator window up high on the wall.

The shang-shang began to move again, crabwise, with its legs spread wide. It looked like three different things, all horrible: crab, spider, octopus. It moved like none of them—like all three of them—raising its body up and down. Suddenly it leaped to the floor, soundless—crouched there, swaying as if ready for a spring—then dashed in a sudden, absolutely silent zigzag course from point to point that had been touched by the rag on the end of the stick. Almost lightning speed, effortless.

From the time it started it seemed less than a second before Dowlah let go the cord that shut the lid of the cage at the end of the room.

"Phew!" Lewis leaned on the window-pole and wiped his forehead. "The damned thing scared me. I admit it."

"Now you know," said Dowlah, "how the shamans kill a victim. First find a shang-shang. Where to find them is a secret that's been well kept. Next, catch a female. If you can do that without being killed, you're a magician! After that, contrive to touch your victim with something smelly that excites a shang-shang's anger. Blood! Human blood, if you have it. Make a trail back to your shang-shang. Let her go. And you've one more mysterious murder!"

"Can they catch 'em again?" asked Lewis.

"I don't know, but I doubt it. Mrs. Shang-shang, I imagine, makes tracks for the Hills. She likes high altitudes. Her natural food is mice, snakes, birds—and her unfortunate husband."

"Are you sure she's in that case?" asked Tom Grayne. He glanced again at the cyanide bottle.

"Yes, she's in there. I keep the sides of the case covered because she gets so angry if she can't hide behind some thing."

"You damned fool!" exclaimed Lewis. "She isn't in there! Look! That's her leg! She's between the case and the wall! By God, she's coming for us!"

Tom reached down the cyanide. Lewis held the window-pole like a spear.

"Pretty pussy!" remarked Dowlah. "Now we have to use our guessing apparatus—eh, what?"

Lewis exploded: "God damn! Where's your shotgun?"

"Don't kill her! Man alive, don't kill her! Let's be scientific!" Dowlah seized the silk shawl that had covered the nearer of the two glass cabinets.

The shang-shang moved. Another leg appeared above the cabinet. Tom set the cyanide bottle on a table and pulled down two drapes from the wall. He offered one to Lewis.

"Bull-ring tactics. If she bites that she'll waste her venom."

The shang-shang emerged. Its opal-colored eyes looked rotten with cancered malice. They shone in the electric light like iridescent evil. Suddenly the creature darted up the wall, zigzagged across the ceiling like a silent green shadow, and vanished through the ventilator window. It was hinged along the bottom. It had opened downward when Lewis jerked away the window-pole.

"Sinners and drunkards in care of the Lord!" said Lewis. "Well, we have her!" He used the pole to slam the ventilator shut. "She can't get out of there."

"Oh, can't she? I could cry," said Dowlah. He let go fathoms of profanity in an unknown tongue. "I hadn't even photographed her! All I have now is a dead rat, from which to extract poison that the analysts will say is something else! Oh, why am I irreligious? Why haven't I a God to blame? Oh, damn! You jinxes! You brace of alien intruders! There's a shaft there that leads to another, larger one that sticks up through the roof."

"No screen on it?"

"No, double-damn my magnanimity! There was one of those cowlers at the top, that spin and suck the air up. It needed repairs. I permitted a delay of three days because the man who had taken the thing to his workshop had a sick son. That was why I kept the ventilator shut. Lewis, you calamity! I know now why the Welsh worship goats and are weaned on onions!"

"Better send out an alarm," said Lewis. "If she gets out, she'll be killing some one."

"Oh, yes? Are you going to say you saw a shang-shang? Even now, you're known as Crazy Taffy. You'd be sent home and locked up."

"Remember your manners," said Lewis.

Dowlah threw himself into a chair and sat with his head between his hands. "Lewis, old thing, I would pay you, or any one else, half a lakh of rupees to bring that shang-shang back again alive! I'd pay a whole lakh if I had it."

"You haven't half a lakh," said Lewis.

"Can't we climb the roof?" asked Tom Grayne. "If we had a good thick bag that it couldn't bit through—"

Dowlah interrupted. "Did you see my roof? It's as steep as a candle-extinguisher. It was built by a Swiss, to keep our lousy Hindu gods from sitting on it. No. I don't mind being silly, if there's any sense in it. But I don't chase a runaway shang-shang. She's gone, she's gone. Dammit, she's gone. She can hide—kill—scoot—she will make for the open country—then the Hills. Whoever sees her will believe his sins have found him out. Snakes will get the credit for any murdering she does. Lewis, you unlucky omen, have another drink, and go away, and leave me alone with my sorrow."

"I will leave you alone with Tom Grayne," Lewis answered. "Yes, I need a drink, please."

Dowlah studied Tom Grayne. He kept glancing at him so intently that he poured Lewis's tumbler nearly half-full of whisky. Then the soda ran over the top. He handed the drink to Lewis without looking at him.

"Yes," he said to Tom at last, "I'd like to talk with you. You're the only man in the room who wasn't frightened."

"Hell," Tom answered, "I was scared stiff."

CHAPTER 10.

"You and I are equally in danger."

THE Rajah seemed to have collapsed for the time being. He sprawled in an arm-chair, absent-mindedly jerking at the trigger of an empty soda-water syphon. But he was studying Tom, and Tom knew it. There were going to be no preliminaries. There was a tacit assumption already that each man understood the other's importance. Each wanted the upper hand. There would be a battle of wits, and, like a dog fight, it would begin in the middle.

"I've a thought," said Tom Grayne.

"Drown it then in whisky. I can think of nothing but the loss of my pet. That isn't thought, it's emotion. All is lost save honor, which is not an asset."

"If we should open that ventilator," Tom continued, "the brute might return. She might try to kill you. We could catch her." He went and opened the ventilator. "Have you, for instance, a big butterfly-net on a fairly long pole?"

"She won't come back. She could bite through a muslin net. She's too quick to be caught. You couldn't hit her with a shotgun. Don't talk like a cuckoo."

Dowlah took a long drink. Then he got up and locked the decanter away.

"Out of sight, out of mind," he remarked. "Who is that girl who came with you to Delhi? I will save you the trouble of lying. Her name is Elsa Burbage. Who—what—why? You'd better tell me."

"Why should I talk to you about a girl who happened to be on the plane?" Tom answered. He hadn't expected that twist. He wasn't ready for it, but he betrayed no embarrassment.

"You and I," said Dowlah, "have to understand each other. As a doctor, Lewis is a regular, orthodox run-of-the-mill mediocrity. But are you such an ass as to suppose he brought you here to save a wench's reputation by being sentimentally evasive?"

"Lewis didn't tell you about Elsa Burbage. Who did?"

"What's she good at?" Dowlah asked him.

"Can you see the whites of my eyes?" Tom retorted. "You fire first. If we put that saucer full of meat extract up there near the ventilator, possibly the shang-shang might come down to get it. If she's hungry—"

"If she's hungry she will hunt for something she likes better than warm Bovril. What I hope," said Dowlah, "is that she will go and kill the shaman from whom my servant stole her. That would save me some emotions. My servant should have killed the shaman, but he didn't."

"So the shaman's gunning for you?"

"Yes, but not with a gun. I don't know why he brought the creature to Delhi. I do know that if he learns who stole her, my number is up. That is why I didn't send out an alarm. I don't want a Tibetan shang-shang tamer heaping blessings on me."

"There may be more than one shang-shang in Delhi," said Tom. "A man named Thö-pa-ga is rather credibly reported to have seen one through a bedroom window."

"Oh, that? Don't be silly. That would be a dummy on a pole. They want to scare Thö-pa-ga back to Tibet in a proper state of dismal-mindedness. Tibetans, even educated ones, believe a shang-shang not only can kill them but hound them in hell after death. There's a man in Delhi who has come for Thö-pa-ga. He owns the shaman who owned the shang-shang. He's an anonymous Number One, in hiding. He won't want you in the way and he doesn't love me—not if he's sane, he doesn't. You and I are equally in danger. But before I play with you I want to know more about you. Who is Elsa Burbage?"

"You tell me," Tom answered.

There was no longer the slightest trace of nonsense about Dowlah. His yellow turban suggested mustard-gas. His nose was an interrogation mark, his eyes insolent.

"Very well, I will tell you. Elsa Burbage is a girl who holds her tongue too damned well to be innocent. Why won't she talk about you?"

"Have you tried to make her do it?" Tom asked. He sounded, looked, was casual. There was no anger in his eyes, no particular interest. The battle was on.

Dowlah chuckled. "You seem as close as she is! Elsa Burbage can't be persuaded to talk even with her big toe in a nut cracker. She wouldn't even yell."

"If her feelings were any of my concern, you wouldn't dare to tell me that," said Tom. "Talk horse. Why am I here?"

No embarrassment. Not a trace of it. Tom's hands were at ease, unclenched. His voice was level, his eyes cold. Dowlah tried another angle:

"I propose to help you into Tibet, Mr. Tom Grayne. If I do that, what will you do for me in return?"

"Nothing. Why should you help me, if you could get along somehow else? I'm necessary, or I shouldn't be here."

Dowlah nodded. "Well, I'll tell you. I'm afraid of this Elsa Burbage. You appear trustworthy. You have been well recommended to me. But a girl—well, Eiji Sarao has warned me. He says he saw you two together in London. He says Thö-pa-ga has come more or less under her influence."

Tom betrayed no surprise whatever. He understood the system. He was not being tested to find out how much or how little he knew, but whether or not he would tell what he knew.

"Am I wasting time? Why am I here?" he repeated.

"Eiji Sarao told me you intend to find the Thunder Dragon Gate and to go in."

"Not he. Some one else told you that."

"Is it true?"

"Ask your informant. I don't tell my business without good reason."

"Eiji Sarao says you know Noropa."

"If you believe Eiji Sarao, why ask me about it?"

Dowlah grinned. "Why, do you suppose, do I enjoy the confidences of a Japanese cotton-mill representative?"

"Easy. You're the con man. Probably the Jap secret service people imagine you're their number one bet on the Indian board. Probably Eiji Sarao trusts you, to the extent that a Jap spy trusts any one. He probably believes you're a secret enemy of the Indian Government."

"Not so bad," said Dowlah. "Now it's your turn. Who is Elsa Burbage?"

"If I knew, I wouldn't tell you."

"Very well then, answer this one. Thö-pa-ga needs very artful handling, if you hope to find the Thunder Dragon Gate. You will have to use Thö-pa-ga. There is no other possible way. Elsa Burbage is reported, by Eiji Sarao, who is a rather keen observer, to have Thö-pa-ga's confidence, more or less. Thö-pa-ga, he says, shows a tendency—nothing more than a tendency yet—to open up—almost to be in love with her. If so, she might be useful. It 'ud be devilish risky to use an inexperienced girl, but we could kill her if she made a *faux pas*. Do you think she'd tune in?"

"How should I know?" Tom answered. "Why not ask her?"

"Very well, I will," said Dowlah.

He got up, and went out into the hall, leaving the door open. Tom caught a glimpse of him in the mirror behind the case that had contained the shang-shang. Saw him enter a door in the hall. Saw him govern his face as he came back.

"She appears unconscious at the moment," he said as he closed the door behind him. "I suppose we rather overdid the third degree."

"You're overdoing tommyrot!" Tom answered. "Bring her in."

Dowlah laughed. He returned to the hall. Tom waited calmly. If Elsa had made any bad breaks, she had made them. If she hadn't, she hadn't. Nothing to be gained by getting worked up. He would know, in a minute, how she came to be there.

But it was nearly five minutes before Dowlah returned.

Elsa had hold of his arm. Tom watched them in the mirror. She walked beside him as if they were old friends. She was laughing at some joke he had made. A bit pale—a trifle wild-eyed—just a trace excited—but well in control of herself. She looked very small beside the tall, lean Dowlah.

She walked at Dowlah's right. The fingers of her right hand moved like lightning—shorthand—almost too fast for Tom to read it. He was afraid Dowlah might notice it in the mirror; not that it mattered much, because Dowlah couldn't understand it, but he glanced at the mirror to make sure. He almost betrayed that he was startled. His blood ran cold. It wasn't so much that he saw Eiji Sarao's face peering through the partly open door, disturbing though that was; it might mean anything. But, peering over Eiji Sarao's shoulder from behind him, was Noropa—unmistakably Noropa—the six-foot eight-inch figure of death, who should be in an English prison. How the devil had Noropa reached Delhi?

Only one glimpse. The Rajah turned to close the door, and Elsa's fingers kept on furnishing vital information. He had to watch them. She could see Tom in the mirror, but she pretended not to—made no sign of recognition. She was be having splendidly.

Dowlah pretended to be trying the lock. He turned suddenly, to try to catch them making signals, but he couldn't see Elsa's right hand. She finished signaling. Tom stood up:

"Well, Elsa Burbage! It hasn't taken you long to find your feet in Delhi! Pleased to meet you again."

"Good evening, Tom. I'm less surprised than you are. You're the kind of man, aren't you, who turns up in all sorts of unexpected places."

Dowlah looked amused. "Nothing unexpected about me," he remarked. "I'm the most conventional, correct and predictable man in the world. And I'm as easy to fool as the income-tax man."

CHAPTER 11.

"But on whose side is Dowlah?"

RAJAH DOWLAH resumed his mask of inconsequential inanity. He giggled as he pulled up an arm-chair for Elsa beneath the ceiling fan and arranged a huge cushion. But he was watching for signals. Tom was quite sure of that. Three times in less than sixty seconds he saw him glance at the mirror behind the empty shang-shang cage. Evidently Dowlah wanted to know too much and to tell too little before committing himself. It was time to unmask Dowlah's batteries. The weather in the passes leading toward Tibet wouldn't wait on Dowlah's moods.

Tom went and unlocked the door without a word. He strode into the hall. He heard Dowlah's voice behind him:

"Silly ass, he's jealous!"

Then Elsa's: "Kindly take your hands off!"

But almost any man can make a girl say "take your hands off!" It's particularly easy for an oriental to make a white woman say it. Tom didn't even glance backward.

He tried the door on the left. It was locked, although he could hear some one on the far side. The second door opened readily. He walked into a beautiful room—apricot-hued carpet, travertine walls, indirect lighting—three or four exquisite Chinese vases—modern chairs and chaise longue. Three men: Eiji Sarao, Noropa and another.

A bit of a puzzle, that third man. Tall—obese—a little round embroidered skullcap on a bald head—a full, shovel-shaped beard, dyed with henna—a fine white linen smock beneath a severely cut black frock-coat—long white pantaloons—Persian slippers. Vaguely he resembled a friar, only he lacked the fringe of hair and looked less insolent. He put on pince-nez to stare at Tom, but his gaze was mild, inoffensive, rather bovine.

Eiji Sarao's eyes glittered amid leathery wrinkles. If he was startled, he didn't show it. He smiled, stuck his hands in his dinner-jacket pockets and waited for Tom to speak first. Tom didn't speak—not yet. He went straight up to Noropa, swiftly, as if he meant to hit him. The tall Mongolian, looking more than ever like a figure of death, took a short step back wards. He threw his left hand forward, palm outward, as if to ward off an expected blow. Tom seized his wrist. There was a second's spasm of jiu-jitsu, but Tom had expected that. Noropa's arm curled in an agonied knot behind his back; he could obey, or, if it pleased him, lose the use of that arm for ever. He surrendered, speechless.

"So you know that?" said Eiji Sarao. He was still smiling; his hands were still in his side-pockets, with his thumbs outside. "Please tell me why you violate this person." He spoke as if he were asking the way or something.

"I will tell you in the library," Tom answered. "Last door on the right at the end of the hall. Now, please. I don't want to have to knock this man cold, but if I have to tackle you, I'll do it. Turn to the right, then last door on the right—go straight in."

The obese man in the pince-nez with the henna-tinted beard had got out of his chair. He looked now rather like a father-abbot about to bless some penitents.

"Who are you?" Tom asked him.

"I am the prime minister of Naini Kol."

"Oh. Pardon the disturbance. Come along if you care to. Suit yourself."

"I always do," he answered. Then he wiped his pince-nez on a white silk handkerchief and stood aside to signify that he preferred to walk last. That was all right with Tom; a fat prime minister wasn't likely to use a blackjack. Poison, yes, perhaps, but not an automatic. Besides, Dr. Lewis had been at pains to describe him; he was very likely all right.

Noropa said never a word. He was nearly a head taller than Tom, and Tom was six feet in his socks. He had the vaguely buttery-smoky smell of a Tibetan, but Tom was more than ever sure he wasn't one. He had on a more or less European black silk suit, brand new. There was a knife under his shirt, held in place by his belt; he had to hold his stomach tight against the belt to keep the knife from slipping. No Tibetan would have done that; a Tibetan by nature pouches a thing in his shirt as a kangaroo carries her young. He permitted him self to be marched along the hall toward the library. Eiji Sarao opened the library door. They all entered the room in a group, Eiji Sarao

leading, in order to signal to the Rajah, as Tom noticed in the mirror. The prime minister came last, closed the door, locked it, but made no signal.

All eyes were on Tom Grayne, so it was easy for Elsa to use the fingers of her left hand; they moved as rapidly as a concert pianist's and not even Eiji Sarao saw it. By the time his glittering brown eyes had moved to see what Tom was looking at, Tom already had Elsa's information. Tom pushed Noropa into a chair, removed his long knife, tossed it on the table and then let go his wrist. Noropa's lips moved, but he said nothing audible; he sat chafing his arm. Rajah Dowlah giggled. Eiji Sarao scowled at him; he looked suddenly bossy, like a Japanese official ordering a tourist not to photograph a barrack gate.

"Congratulations!" said Tom. "Good staff work! You must need Noropa pretty badly, though, to spirit him so quickly from a jail in London. Looks like a miracle."

Eiji Sarao smiled. He raised his shoulders in a deprecating gesture.

"I am sorrow for you," he said gently. "You are found out. You are American Government spy. It is better you go home."

Tom's voice was equally restrained, but less silky:

"Mr. Eiji Sarao, I want both your hands over your head— now—quickly! Up with them!"

"You'd better do it, Eiji!" said the Rajah. "I don't want him killed in my house. Better humor him."

The Japanese didn't obey, but he took his hands out of his pockets, probably to protect himself. He was obviously puzzled. Tom's hands were into his pockets before he could turn to glare at Dowlah. One hip-pocket and the inside jacket-pocket. Quick work. Eiji Sarao sprang away and struck very smartly at Tom's forearm, but he just missed paralyzing the muscle he aimed at. The crack of his heel on Tom's instep didn't hurt much because Tom was ready for that—all Japanese know that dodge, and it's quite a trick to counter it.

Eiji Sarao's inside pocket tore. Tom had what he wanted. Eiji Sarao glared, straightening his jacket, ruffled, indignant, dignified, bewildered, savage, but still in command of his manners.

"I am no longer sorrow for you. It is your fault that you shall be liquidated."

That was a strange word for a Japanese to select. But what was more significant was Eiji Sarao's glare at Dowlah. He expected support, protection. He didn't get it. He was baffled. Tom, on the other hand, noticed that Dowlah was looking well pleased with the turn of events.

Tom examined his find. Three documents that Eiji Sarao had not had time or opportunity to stow safely away. One was his own memorandum about the dinner engagement with Lewis, and the chewing-gum. The second was the coded message he had mailed to Elsa. Stolen from the mail. Not so easy to do. It meant a thoroughly well-organized spy-system. Tom's fingers told Elsa its contents. The third was a cablegram in French, from Paris, signed "Jeanne Marcel," enclosed in an envelope with a Pondicherry postmark and addressed to Eiji Sarao in Delhi. That one he translated aloud into English: "Harley has wired from Moscow warning some one to tell Barley you are in charge of negotiations."

"Some one" might be Ambleby. "Harley" was undoubtedly Sir Horace O'Mally, who lived and performed his miracles of doctoring in Harley Street. "Barley," equally undoubtedly, was Tom Grayne. It was just the kind of message that gets by the censors without arousing suspicion.

"Swell network," said Tom. "Moscow to London—by way of Finland?—phoned to Paris—cabled to Pondicherry—innocent-looking envelope from Pondicherry to your hotel—and you a perfectly innocent piece-goods salesman! Clever. You Japs are up against it, aren't you, what with Russia watching you as well as Great Britain and the British Indian Government. To use your own phrase, I am sorrow for you. Care to come with me to Tibet?"

Eiji Sarao's expression changed. He looked maliciously amused.

"You," he answered, "you are going nowhere."

Tom retorted: "Well, it's pretty obvious that Dowlah is liaison man between Japan and certain Indian seditionists. Your dilemma is that Dowlah fears you'll double-cross him. Almost any one could guess that in the dark. He feels he has gone a bit too far. He can't afford to be caught with the goods."

"Can any one afford that?" the prime minister asked. He was sitting like a bishop in an arm-chair, next to Elsa; it appeared he liked them young, small, with a wind-blown bob. She did look good. Her frock was obviously bought that afternoon in Delhi, but it suited her. The old chap's taste in women evidently wasn't as eccentric as his figure.

"Take a seat, Mr. Sarao. You'll get tired standing," said Tom. He was watching Elsa's fingers. It didn't matter that the prime minister was also watching them; even if he could read that rapid shorthand code, it didn't matter. And if Eiji Sarao, as seemed possible, could read at any rate some of it, that didn't matter either, because his back was toward her. He sat down, dignified but as comfortless as a suspicious cat, on a chair near Noropa. Tom could look straight at him and, at the same time, watch Dowlah in the mirror. At the moment he didn't need any more information from Elsa, she had told him enough.

Dowlah's face was dramatic—amused, amazed, alert—a mask of semi-imbecility, a bit too transparent; beneath it was almost savage excitement. Tom resumed the offensive. Spur-of-the-moment guesswork. Hammer-blows of downright statement. He was like a man in the ring, slugging his opponent to compel him to reveal his weakness.

"Mr. Eiji Sarao, the Russian, British and Indian Governments all know what your game is. You're no mystery. The British Home Office allowed Noropa to leave England at his own expense. That's obvious. He took the plane to Paris, flew from there to Damascus, and made connections with a fast special plane that happened to be leaving for Karachi. That's equally obvious. Surely, even you must realize you're being watched. Do you, or does the Japanese Foreign Office want it known that Rajah Dowlah has been their secret agent for Lord knows how long?"

"As for me, rather than face that, I would bump myself off," said the prime minister. "They would send me to the Andamans. Have you ever seen the Andamans? Have you heard of them? Ugh!"

Tom hadn't expected support from him; he looked too bovine to be a conspirator. Eiji Sarao said nothing. Tom continued:

"You have made some bad breaks, Mr. Eiji Sarao. In the first place you behaved suspiciously in London. On the journey you were too damned inquisitive. Here, you walked straight into a couple

of my traps. You tried to have me poisoned with chewing-gum. You tried to have me killed in the street. You robbed the mail. Why are you here to-night?"

No answer.

"All right. Hold your tongue and listen. Your grip on Rajah Dowlah is the old one, that all secret services use: if he doesn't obey orders, he'll be tipped off to his own government. That would be the end of Dowlah. Or so you think. But how about the end of your own rope? Your Foreign Office won't ask questions if you're not heard from for a while. Not official questions. Nothing through diplomatic channels. You're not going to be heard from. Would you care to come with me to Tibet?"

"Say more," said Eiji Sarao. His face was a mask.

"Some one has come to Delhi to take charge of Thö-pa-ga? Who is he?"

Eiji Sarao's expression changed. It became vacant. He shook his head. He didn't know. But he overplayed it; it was clear enough that he did know.

"Well, you've a minute or two to refresh your memory," said Tom. "This afternoon you very kindly showed Miss Burbage where to do her shopping. Why did you introduce her, in the back room of a clothing shop, to an alleged Chinese, allegedly from Turkestan, to whom, however, you spoke Japanese? And why did you explain to him what sympathy she feels for Thö-pa-ga, and how gratefully he reacts to it?"

"I didn't. You are guessing," said Eiji Sarao. "No one can have told you such a—"

He shut up suddenly. It possibly had occurred to him that Elsa might have signaled the information.

Tom glanced at Dowlah. With the corner of his eye he had detected signs that Dowlah wasn't as amused or confident as he wished to appear.

"Tell him what you think, Dowlah."

Dowlah rose nobly to the occasion. No man possibly could have looked more embarrassed, more silly, more incompetent to carry his end of a dilemma. He even pulled off his turban, ran his fingers through his black hair and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief.

"I am frightened!" he said, after several seconds. "Double-dammit and to hell with all this, do I pay a minister to sit still and fold hands on his belly? Curse you, Abdul Mirza, all this comes of listening to you! You talked me into it. Get me out of it! Hurry up now! Wake up! Tell him what I think—or what I ought to think—or, if you're worth your salary, what I will think!"

The prime minister rose out of his chair. He was a tall man. Standing, he carried his big belly with dignity. He stroked his hennaed beard with both hands, parting it in the middle. His mildly intelligent dark eyes, behind ridiculous pince-nez, looked at each face in turn but dwelt longest on Elsa's. His little gold-embroidered skullcap, slightly awry, suggested a caricature of the pill-box caps that British cavalymen used to wear for the delight of French cartoonists.

"To discuss the modesty of my emolument, and to compare it with the nature of my services, seems inappropriate at this time," he began. "I think it also inappropriate to enter into details of an

alleged—ah—foreign entanglement that, if it did in fact exist, would be—ah—deadlier to handle than a—ah—cobra. I am for simple solutions, though they may appear—ah—complicated."

"Cut all that!" said Dowlah. "Tell us."

"Fortunately Mr. Grayne wants something, which only we are willing to supply. I am informed that he wishes to go to Tibet for a secret purpose. Only we can help him. Then it follows that a basis exists, whereupon—"

"You may cut that, too," said Dowlah. "This isn't my birthday. You're not honeying the tax-payers. Talk sense."

"Sense is this," said the prime minister. "Neither Tibet nor Japan would welcome Mr. Grayne: Tibet simply from a habit of excluding visitors—Japan in order not to let the light of curiosity expose a beautiful intrigue."

"You blimp, you talk like an unpaid radio performer," Dowlah interrupted.

The prime minister wiped his pince-nez.

"It appears to me," he said, "that we should first assure ourselves of secrecy, and next decide who shall accompany Mr. Grayne. If Mr. Eiji Sarao, or Mr. Grayne, or this extremely beautiful young lady, should betray by the merest accident our motives, our intentions or our—ah—secret affiliations—that would be a catastrophe comparable to the fate of the Czar of Russia."

"Cut that, too!" said Dowlah. "You make me shudder. Do you understand him, Eiji? The fat fool means we're in a fix. I'm through. No more of this sort of game for me. I know the ropes; you'd ruin me by tipping me off to the British, if I gave you half a chance. But I won't. You and that fellow Noropa go with Tom Grayne to Tibet, where I hope you all get bitten by a shang-shang!"

Abdul Mirza sat down, drooped his eyelids and appeared to lapse into a dream. Tom resumed the offensive, for Eiji Sarao's benefit:

"Miss Burbage came here to dinner on Eiji Sarao's invitation, but at your suggestion, Dowlah. Why?"

Dowlah didn't hesitate a second. He exploded like a petulant weakling, found out and blurting the truth:

"Why? Damn you, because Eiji said she's with you. So she is! She and you are prisoners! You don't believe it? Show them, Abdul Mirza! Get up, you fat loafer! Go and show them!"

The prime minister hove himself out of the arm-chair with a sigh. He wiped his pince-nez, put his feet into his slippers, walked to the door, listened, unlocked it, opened it wide and stepped backward. Armed men!

There was no longer a light in the hall. But the light from the room shone on the faces of at least a dozen men—dark-skinned, turbaned, cummerbunded, bearded—six in the front row. There were faces behind them, and more heads in the shadow beyond.

"Prisoners!" said Dowlah. He strode to the door, pushing Abdul Mirza back toward the middle of the room. Without a word of explanation or warning he switched out the lights.

In pitch-black darkness Tom took one step sideways and five forward, reached Elsa's chair and groped for her hand. She could touch-read; there was no need for her to see his fingers.

"Well done. Just what I wanted to know."

"But on whose side is Dowlah?"

"His own, you cuckoo!"

There was a sudden cat-fight exclamation in the darkness from about the spot where Tom was standing when the lights went out.

"Keep your hair on!" Tom signaled. Those were ten tough seconds for a girl who was new to the game. He could feel Elsa as taut as a violin-string. Something fell to the floor. Dowlah turned the lights on.

Blood ran from Eiji Sarao's neck. Not much blood; the blow had missed his jugular. Noropa's knife lay on the floor. Noropa stood near Eiji and gaped like a ghost that saw a super-ghost and couldn't understand. Not even a Mongolian terrorist can see in total darkness. Noropa had stabbed the wrong man.

Dowlah laughed. The armed men hadn't moved in the doorway. There was an altogether new, dynamic note in Dowlah's voice:

"I thought you'd try that, Eiji! You fool, how dare you try to kill a man in my house?"

"I didn't!" said Eiji.

"Liar!" Dowlah answered. "*You* meant to use jiu-jitsu!"

Dowlah went to a nest of drawers on a shelf and pulled out medicated cotton—gauze—bandages—tossed them to Eiji Sarao. Then he turned fiercely on Abdul Mirza. It was clear enough now that Dowlah was covering almost hysterical nervousness under a cloak of insolence.

"You should be at Geneva, you should! When you've finished thinking up some resolutions, go and phone for Dr. Lewis! Care to lie down, Eiji? Very well then, they'll show you a bed."

He gestured like a conductor coaxing woodwind through a waning tumult of the brass. Four men armed with sabres marched in. Two of them hustled Noropa pretty roughly. The other two politely led out Eiji Sarao, supporting him between them.

Dowlah came near and stood grinning at Tom and Elsa. He had to grin for thirty seconds before he could speak with an air of being rather scornfully amused. He was only calm on the surface. There was an expression in his eyes that suggested almost terror. It was certainly not less than anxiety.

"Don't you wish," he said, "you had a private army! I'm allowed two hundred and twenty-four men, but I'm supposed to keep 'em all at Naini Kol. I'd get hell if it were known I have a few of 'em in Delhi. However, you don't do badly, you two. I'll have to work up such a system of signals as you use—it's a dandy. Damned if I can read it."

"Miss Burbage would like a drink. Can she have one?" Tom asked.

Dowlah turned away to unlock the liquor cabinet. Tom's fingers signaled:

"Admit nothing. Tell him nothing until he tells us."

CHAPTER 12.

"Your chewing-gum kills rats."

DOWLAH pressed a button on the wall and spoke into a telephone that looked like a small brass ventilator:

*"Barraff!"**

[**Barraff* (Hindi): ice.]

Ice arrived on a dumb-waiter, along with syphons. He poured two drinks and glanced at Tom.

"You?"

"No thanks."

Dowlah drank deep, watching Elsa sip hers. "Got me to look away, didn't you! Well, you're a smart pair. I admit it. Both of you shall go to Tibet. I don't envy you. I wouldn't go there for a fortune. Frost-bite at eighteen thousand feet. Holy murder stalking you at every turn of the road. Tibetans are jolly people. I've seen 'em flog a girl as pretty as you, Elsa Burbage, and then leave her naked to die of cold in the night."

For about fifteen minutes he described the tortures that Tibetans and their neighboring semi-Chinese cousins use on foreigners.

"Mr. Grayne has told me all about it," Elsa interrupted at last.

"Dowlah, you're wasting time," said Tom. "If you've a card up your sleeve, either play it or call the game. Make up your mind to do one or the other."

Dowlah giggled again. "I am not your nurse," he answered. "Think you're very clever, don't you! If you are, you'll have to prove it. Show your own hand."

"Very well," Tom answered. "If it's my lead, lock up Eiji Sarao and loose Noropa."

"Do you want him with you in Tibet?" Dowlah could ask a silly question with the earnest innocence of a really artful attorney.

"No, you ass. But I'm going to have your confidence, or else your enmity, right now."

Dowlah chuckled. He sat down on the arm of a chair and crossed his legs. The giggle had gone, like the moisture from the outside of a glass.

"Which do you prefer?" he asked.

"Frankly, I don't give a damn. I'd rather buck you than count on you and be let down. My guess is that you're in a corner. You don't act like a man who can please himself what he'll do next. What use are you to me?"

"What do you want?" asked Dowlah.

There was a knock at the door. Dowlah went and unlocked it. Abdul Mirza entered, a bit too meek looking and benevolent to be innocent of mischief. He wiped his pince-nez, to get a better look at Elsa.

"Dr. Lewis is here," he remarked. "He is stitching up Eiji Sarao. I have not told Dr. Lewis how it happened."

Dowlah seemed relieved to have some one to brow-beat.

"Sit down, you bag of platitudes! Listen to what this man wants."

Abdul Mirza looked over the top of his pince-nez at Tom.

"I think he will demand too much," he answered. "Such men usually do. What is it?"

"I want Eiji Sarao under lock and key. Turn Noropa loose to make his own mistakes. Eiji Sarao won't talk, and I don't think you'll find any information in his wallet—"

"Not a thing, not a thing," said Abdul Mirza. "Nothing but a correctly visaed passport and some money."

"—but to hold him incommunicado may throw the whole Japanese system out of gear between here and Tibet, for the time being."

Dowlah nodded. Abdul Mirza readjusted his pince-nez, belched, and addressed a remark to the ceiling:

"Naini Kol is not a resort for tourists. We had the runaway wife of a twenty-one gun maharajah there for two years, and no one knew it."

"No one would know it now, if you weren't such a clapper-tongued ass," said Dowlah. "Go on, Tom Grayne. What else?"

"Any one could play it," said Tom. "It's one, two, three. Noropa is a fanatic, with a certain narrow intelligence, who obeys orders from high up. He's a Number One man's factotum. Turned loose, he'll behave like a dog that you can count on absolutely to betray his owner by his effort to protect him. He has a one-track mind, and it's a bad track. That's why some one sent him to London to scare Thö-pa-ga back to Tibet. That's why the British Foreign Office let him fly to India; they turned him loose just to see what he'd do. I want him locked up, talked to, and helped to escape."

"Who's to talk to him?" asked Dowlah.

Tom glanced at Elsa. Dowlah's eyes studied her thought fully. He nodded.

"Noropa must be given to understand," said Tom, "that Eiji Sarao has a secret and tremendously important message that he absolutely must deliver to the personage who came from Tibet to take charge of Thö-pa-ga. Noropa wounded Eiji. How should he know the wound isn't serious?"

"The personage from Tibet isn't, so to speak, notorious for simple-minded incompetence or, let us call it complacency," Abdul Mirza remarked.

"Take it or leave it," Tom answered. "I have said what I want."

Some one knocked on the door.

Abdul Mirza seemed suddenly to wake up. He stared over the top of his pince-nez.

"Answer the door," commanded Dowlah. "If it's Dr. Lewis, let him in."

Lewis breezed in. He had the half-comical air of a physician who has competently dealt with a disaster that he foresaw—a sort of "well, boys, what next?" expression.

"Grayne, your chewing-gum kills rats," he said cheerfully. Then he looked hard at Dowlah. "I have just taken five stitches in the neck of that Gurkha."

"Quarrelsome people, Gurkhas," said Abdul Mirza.

"Yes, and reticent," said Lewis. "He didn't tell me his name, or how it happened. Pour me a drink, Dowlah. Nothing serious. The Gurkha will be all right in a day or two. What a striking resemblance they bear to the Japs. Oh, by the way, your shang-shang has been celebrating her escape. There are two snake-bite cases, one man, one woman, miles apart, both of 'em bitten in bed on a roof, both paralyzed and speechless—dying, of course—probably dead already. Thirty or forty people swear they have seen the devil and at least one mosque is full of Moslems praying to be saved from it. A police officer saw the thing. He tried to shoot it. He described it as three times the size of a goat, and he's at the club now, getting drunk and rather tired of being laughed at."

"Dr. Lewis, Miss Burbage," said Dowlah.

Lewis ceased looking at her sideways. He stared.

"How d'you do. Are you the lady who befriended a Tibetan named Thö-pa-ga, on the plane from London? He keeps asking for you."

"How is he?"

"Oh, I think he's coming along all right. He should be fit to travel in a few days. If you've time, I wish you'd call and see him. New to India?"

"Yes. My first visit."

"Take care what you eat." Lewis glanced at Tom Grayne.

"Miss Burbage tells me she'll be going to Darjeeling," said Tom.

"Oh. That so? Uh-huh. Well, I'll tell you. Perhaps it would be better, after all, not to call on Thö-pa-ga. Drop me a line instead—to Dr. Morgan Lewis, Edith Cavell Hospital, and let me know when you're off. I'll try to get him off by the same train. I'm sure that any kindness you can show him will be a godsend to him. He's lonely. Not homesick. Quite the reverse. The poor devil doesn't want to go home."

"Glad to do whatever I can," said Elsa.

"Careful what you eat, remember!"

"Thank you for the warning."

"Heart all right? Can you stand high altitudes? Darjeeling, you know, is a great many thousand feet higher than Delhi. How's the blood-pressure? Care to have me test that?"

Tom's fingers moved.

"How awfully kind of you," said Elsa.

"Come into the other room," said Lewis. "It'll only take a minute or two."

Elsa uncurled her legs from the arm-chair and followed Lewis out into the hall.

"Damn his eyes," said Dowlah. "Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief, Taffy came to my house and stole a girl from under both our noses! He's a rotten doctor, but he's good at learning more than anybody tells him."

"Rot!" Tom answered. "Pretty decent of him."

"Oh, yes?" Dowlah stared in assumed amazement. "Are you such a cuckoo as all that? Do you think any one but she and you will give a damn if either of you dies in Tibet?"

Tom didn't answer. He was as curious as Dowlah, at least as curious, to know what Lewis and Elsa were talking about. However, Elsa would tell him soon enough, whereas she wouldn't tell Dowlah. He had the edge on Dowlah.

Dowlah knew it; he finished his drink and poured himself another.

CHAPTER 13.

"Young man, you remind me of a bomb with the fuse ignited."

ABDUL MIRZA'S pudgy, but somehow competent-looking fingers were interlocked on his belly. He leaned back in the arm-chair, looked over the top of his pince-nez, coughed to call attention to himself and spoke:

"It is my duty to advise Your Highness. You are what is called a semi-independent ruler. You are now, however, semi- so-to-speak menaced by three antagonistic elements—Tibetan, Japanese, British—to say nothing of the Indian police, who are not students of extenuating circumstances. As Your Highness well knows, the police and the secret intelligence are mutually exclusive, and to each other incomprehensible necessities of state. To be foul of the police is not a signal for help from certain quarters that I need not name. Call that semi-independence, or if it suits you better, call it a dilemma—a predicament—a—"

"You are a sententious mule," Dowlah interrupted. "Cut the prologue."

But Abdul Mirza was not to be hurried. He was conceivably talking for Tom's benefit; else why lecture the Rajah in Tom's presence? He continued:

"It is true that Your Highness possesses a certain gift for sub-diplomatic, I might say almost subterranean intrigue. But unless the Japanese have changed their character within the last hour or two, they will presently learn that you have double-crossed them. And unless they have changed their religion, they will know what to do about that. Will the British Government protect you? Or will it moralistically make a gesture to the Japanese by strafing you for having done what it knew you were doing and what it secretly but non-committally approved? Answer me that one. As for the Tibetans, there is no need to remind you that the Thunder Dragon Gate is not a source of abstract homiletics. Nobody knows much about it except that it is certainly a source of fanatical ferocity controlled by Bön*-tutored Tibetan shamans, who will presently discover it was you who stole their shang-shang."

[* *Bön* (Tibetan). Generally, the oldest extant spiritual tradition of Tibet (see *Wikipedia*.) Here, a syncretic religion that arose in Tibet during the 10th and 11th centuries, with strong shamanistic and animistic traditions.]

"I will tell them you did that," said Dowlah.

"Then I fervently hope that the indescribable felicity of being Your Highness's prime minister may descend upon more competent shoulders. As for me, I shall learn what eternity is—if it is."

Tom listened, but he was watching the open ventilator. One of the shang-shang's green legs kept appearing. Just the tip of it. A spidery web-spinning motion. No sign of a web. Dowlah seemed unaware of it. The prime minister's back was toward it. Perhaps Dowlah had lied about the cowl on the roof being missing. Maybe he knew the monster couldn't possibly escape. Perhaps he knew how to recapture it uninjured. There were some phials of chloroform and cans of ether on the shelf where the cyanide stood; he might intend to try those. The possession of a living shang-shang would be worth almost any risk, to a man of Dowlah's temperament.

But didn't it mean that there must be more than one shang-shang in Delhi? Otherwise, what about the people who, according to Lewis's account, had been bitten to death? What about the police officer who had seen a shang-shang and had tried to shoot it?

Abdul Mirza went on talking like a rather sleepy lecturer to a class of theological students:

"There are reasons beyond Reason's comprehension. It is sometimes wise to act unreasonably, simply because all the reasonable actions will be used or foreseen by one's opponent. There isn't any reasonable reason for employing Miss Elsa Burbage. Therefore—"

"*You* didn't think of that," said Dowlah.

Abdul Mirza bowed. "I thank Your Highness for the compliment. You and Mr. Grayne thought of that. I have only called attention to the fact that the thought is irrational and therefore at the moment—ah—"

He perked up suddenly, glanced at Tom and then looked straight at Dowlah. In a surprisingly sharp voice he added:

"Can't you recognize Nemesis? Cover your tracks!"

Dowlah walked out of the room. Tom took the pole and closed the ventilator. Abdul Mirza nodded approval:

"As it happens, quite unnecessary, Mr. Tom Grayne. No one could overhear us through that ventilator."

He polished his pince-nez furiously. Tom waited. He noticed he hadn't slammed the ventilator tight enough. The brass latch hadn't caught in the socket.

"Young man, you remind me of a bomb with the fuse ignited. I have seen one. It looked as patiently potent as you. It was dealt with by removing the fuse."

Tom said nothing.

"You are an American citizen?"

"Yes."

"It is known that the United States State Department is very interested in the efforts being made by Japan to get control of China."

"Yes," said Tom. "I've read a lot about that in the daily papers."

"If I thought you were an agent of the United States' secret service, I would trust you more than I could otherwise," said Abdul Mirza. His manner more than vaguely suggested a father-confessor explaining the essential difference between cardinal and venial sin. He placed his finger-tips together and continued:

"Not that American secret agents are so specially competent or reliable, but because I should then understand your—ah—real motive. It is men's motives that—ah—govern probable behaviour in—ah—circumstances that demand discretion. There are no witnesses. Tell me."

Tom laughed. "Hell. I know nothing about that. But do you suppose a secret agent would admit he was one? My goal is the Thunder Dragon Gate. I couldn't find it last time. If my efforts this time have any particular value to your intelligence department, hitch your trailer to my tow-bar. Okay with me. I've no secrets."

"But you have a mistress?"

"Me? No. Can't afford it. I have nothing to offer the kind of woman who could interest me. Besides, women have a way of becoming too important. A man can't have his cake and eat it. Liquor, tobacco and women are off the menu."

"Why, then, did Miss Elsa Burbage, tactfully and with charming discretion, but nevertheless plainly admit, this evening at dinner, that her relationship with you is of a special nature?"

"She didn't," Tom answered. "You guessed it—*after* dinner."

"You are very clever with your signals to each other."

Silence from Tom. The ventilator fell forward on its chain, wide open. Four of the shang-shang's legs, and then part of its hideous, blind face appeared. It couldn't possibly see, because its eyes were on top of its back. It might be listening, smelling, or using some extra sense that humans can't imagine.

"An intelligent, competent, daring young lady is your Miss Elsa Burbage!" Abdul Mirza was watching Tom's face, but Tom's expression didn't make him glance up at the ventilator. He continued speaking, quite unconscious of the green monster that moved its mandibles beneath a snout like a Tibetan devil's.

"A personage from Tibet, who has been reported to me to be eager to talk with Eiji Sarao, is here in Delhi. It is probable that the personage was concealed, and listened, perhaps even saw Miss Burbage in the back room of a shop to which she was escorted by Eiji Sarao this afternoon."

"He can't have learned much," Tom answered. "He is probably the Number One man from whom Noropa gets his orders."

"Correct. And let us hope that he did not learn too much. He expects Eiji Sarao to tell him more."

The shang-shang retreated until only the tip of one leg was visible. Abdul Mirza continued:

"For the moment we have Eiji Sarao—ah—fortunately in disposed. Dr. Lewis gave him a—ah—sedative. Noropa, in another room, has been permitted to believe that Eiji Sarao is dying. Noropa is not afraid of us. He cares nothing for Eiji Sarao. He understands our predicament. He knows it would be inconvenient for us to hand him over to the police. Because such people as Noropa have been trained from early infancy to more than Jesuitical obedience, they dread, beyond anything that you and I can imagine, the anger of their master—the anger of him whom they obey. Do you follow me?"

"Sure. Tell me something I don't know."

"Very well then, Mr. Tom Grayne, your success or failure now depends on our convincing the Number One personage that Miss Elsa Burbage means nothing to you, but that she is indispensable to Thö-pa-ga, who otherwise will rather die than go to Tibet and become the so-called Keeper of the Thunder Dragon Gate." Abdul Mirza looked over the top of his pince-nez. "She is not your mistress? Not your wife? Sweetheart?"

"I already told you," Tom answered. "No, she isn't."

"That," Abdul Mirza remarked, "is what I mean by removing the fuse from the bomb."

Tom kept the corner of one eye on the shang-shang.

Abdul Mirza insisted: "You assure me she is not your property in any way? Is she free to behave as she pleases?"

"Hell, yes."

"Thö-pa-ga, when he returns to Tibet, will find a woman waiting for him," said Abdul Mirza. "She has been well trained, by Bön magicians, who are very expert. She is of a tribe whose women have been accustomed for many centuries to discipline a number of husbands. Polyandry. The reverse of polygamy. Dual moral code reversed and votes for men unthinkable. The inferiority of the male so well established that the women beat their husbands. The women are the sorcerers and priestesses. This one is to control Thö-pa-ga. The magicians control her. Japan proposes to control them."

"Yes? Well?"

"Eiji Sarao, when the effect of the—ah—sedative wears off, may suspect that the Japanese secret service has—ah—overestimated the—ah—affection of Rajah Dowlah. But—Dr. Lewis has ordered Eiji Sarao kept quiet. We can provide for him, I assure you, a more than monastic retreat. It will—ah—as we will explain to him—preserve him from the—ah—undiplomatic attentions of the police who will wish to know more about some poisoned chewing-gum. Having made an unprovoked attack upon a guest in Rajah Dowlah's house, he is, moreover, in no position to make any protest that would cause police investigation."

Tom nodded. "Sure thing. He'd be canned by his own people, right off the bat."

"Very well then, Mr. Tom Grayne, some one has made the bright suggestion that if Miss Burbage should—from—ah—sheer young feminine excitement—compromise herself a bit with Thö-pa-ga, something might come of it."

"For instance?"

"She might be believed, if she should carry a secret message from Eiji Sarao."

"To whom?"

"To the Number One man."

"Better fetch her in and ask her."

"She has gone already."

"Alone?"

"No. Noropa took her."

Tom didn't have to restrain his voice or control his eyes. The shang-shang gave him all the excuse he needed for using words like punches:

"Don't move suddenly! You hear me? Get out of your chair quietly and pussy-foot for the door! The shang-shang's coming down the wall!"

"Oh, Allah!"

"I said, move slowly!"

The prime minister's slippers were off. He held his breath and tiptoed barefoot, with his hands high, like a man balancing himself along a wall. Tom picked up one of the slippers. He hurled it and hit the shang-shang at the same moment that Abdul Mirza jumped out of the room and slammed the door behind him. The slipper fell to the floor.

The shang-shang spread out like a huge green crab, shot down the wall—pounced on the slipper—bit it—worried it—carried it—dropped it and fled to the end of the room. It made no sound. Midway up the end wall it spread itself again and crouched, dancing a little, like a livid green octopus, staring with huge opal eyes. Its mandibles moved continually. It was head downward, if that sickening blind mask was its head.

Tom reached for the window-pole. He put the hook into the slipper and drew it toward him. It had been torn by the shang-shang's jaws. There was slimy liquid on it. There was just one chance that the brute had spilled all her poison—might want to creep away like a teased snake, and hide, and brew more. Pretty slim chance, that. But he had to do something. The monster was watching him. It wouldn't stay long where it was. No use trying to hit it with a bottle or with Noropa's knife; its eyes were on top; it could see a missile coming. Safer to try to catch the damned thing.

He went and opened the glass cage, the one by the mirror. Keeping an eye on the shang-shang, he covered the cage with the shawl to make it look like a nice dark hiding-place. The cord that passed through a pulley to hold the lid open was a long one. Taking care to keep the poison off his fingers he tied the free end of the cord to the slipper. It was a fool's chance, but it might work. Probably the shang-shang hadn't any brains to speak of. Probably, as Dowlah had said, it always did the same thing in the same way. Question was, what would it do? Which same thing? Perhaps its habit was to spring at people. It could jump like a flash of green light, without apparent effort. No use waiting for it to do that.

Tom threw the slipper on the end of the cord as far as it would reach. It fell about five feet away from the wall, directly underneath the shang-shang. The brute didn't move. Probably hadn't seen the slipper coming. Eyes on top, like a spider's that can't see a marauding wasp until it's close enough for a fight to the death. The worst part of the brute was its silence—that and its moving mandibles that seemed to be stuffing invisible food into its blind face. It pulsed on the tips of its long legs as if pruning itself for a spring off the wall.

Tom drew the slipper along the floor, slowly, in short jerks. Still the shang-shang didn't move. He put the slipper into the cage and untied it, taking care to leave a scent up the side of the cage. Then he picked up the other slipper. Some one tried the doorknob. Dowlah's voice:

"Grayne, are you in there? Are you all right?"

"Yes. Dammit, keep out!"

Tom turned the key in the door and hurled the slipper. It hit the wall hard, about two feet higher up than the shang-shang. The monster saw that one—saw it coming—wasn't there when it hit—dodged, as quick as light, toward the corner. Even so, it reached the floor before the slipper did. It climbed the table, crawled along it. Suddenly it seemed to go mad. It danced on the table-top. It knocked over an electric lamp. Then it got under the table and hung head-downward.

That was a chance. Heavy drapes, then chloroform. Tom reached for a drape. As if the shang-shang knew what he intended, it crept out on the far side of the table, four legs on top, four underneath, mandible-end upward—angry. Tom picked up a book and threw that. The brute saw it coming and leaped to the floor, exactly on the trail of the slipper. It had followed the trail and was

into the cage in less than the time between two heartbeats. It savaged the slipper instantly. The lid thudded shut. Tom went and shot the brass bolts home. Then he arranged the covering shawl neatly, shoved one hand in his pocket and went and opened the door.

Dowlah stared at him: "The shang-shang?"

"In the cage. Where's Elsa?"

"Elsa Burbage? What do you care?" Dowlah answered. "For the shang-shang, I congratulate you in the name of Science, my immortal mistress." He went and peeped into the cage. "You pretty, precious pussy! Tweet-tweet!"

CHAPTER 14.

"Tum-Glain! Tum-Glain!"

DOWLAH went and picked up the lamp that the shang-shang had knocked over. He rearranged a number of other objects, lit a cigarette and smiled reflectively.

"You are a wonderful fellow," he remarked. "I believe I'd trust you if I held a pledge from you of some sort."

"No witnesses," said Tom. "It's getting late. Talk turkey."

Dowlah took a mock-poetic pose.

"Science!" he remarked. "My immortal mistress Science! My only love! My muse! She takes nothing for granted—searches all things; questions all things. Each of us is a potential danger to all the others. One little blunder, and whoopsy-daisy!—all sorts of plain and fancy combustibles—two or three million volts of malice—a short circuit—whoopee! Whoever caused the short circuit would burn, and bad luck to him! But then what? When the moralists discover what their governments are doing, governments have to go to war to prove how virtuous they are. Tell me now: what have you discovered so far?"

"That you're afraid," Tom answered.

Dowlah giggled, like a woman being tempted to betray her something less than irreproachable virtue.

"Do be seated, Grayne. Standing, you give me an inferiority complex. That's better. Have you ever considered the appalling fact, that of a thousand volunteers for secret sub-diplomacy, very rarely one is found fit for the work?"

"No," Tom answered. "Sub-diplomats don't come applying to me for a job."

"Of any thousand," said Dowlah, "twenty-five may be fit for policemen; fit for regular routine duty subject to the rules. One or two if competently handled may be fit for rather ticklish situations; such men as Eiji Sarao, for in stance—not really clever. Seldom one, and never more than one, in

any thousand who begin by being spies, is fit to be trusted to understand what he's doing. How long have you been in the secret service?"

"Never was," said Tom. "My subject's Tibet."

"Would you care to come with me to Tibet?"

"If I thought you were really going there," said Tom, "I'd think that over."

"Well, if I were really going, I might make you an offer. You speak Tibetan?"

"Fat chance I should have in Tibet, if I couldn't."

"What strange things men study!" Dowlah remarked. "Except for my scientific researches, which I am frequently assured are puerile and undisciplined, I have studied very little. I was sent to the usual school for princes' sons. We were taught the three princely virtues: mediocrity, hypocrisy and cricket. I was good at the first two. Common sense was an extra, but nobody took that. Tibetan was not in the curriculum."

He glanced at the shang-shang cage, got up and crossed the room to change the angle of an electric-fan, so that it would blow on the cage and cool the monster inside it. When he sat down again he glanced at the shelves of books, as if wondering what to say next.

"Well, good night," said Tom. "I see we're getting no where. I'll go to the hotel and turn in."

Dowlah betrayed an almost imperceptible flutter of annoyance.

"No, don't go yet. I expect an interesting visitor."

"At this hour?"

"Time means nothing to him. Did you ever hear of the Most Reverend and Holy Lobsang Pun?"

Tom almost betrayed excitement. "No," he answered.

"He is the Tashi Lama's confidential representative."

Dowlah was watching Tom's face, but apparently he detected nothing to suggest that Tom was more than politely interested.

"Lobsang Pun," he continued, "is probably in Delhi to persuade our Government to help the Tashi Lama to return to Tibet. Since the Dalai Lama died in Lhasa there's been a slowly developing chance for the Tashi Lama to return and seize control."

Dowlah appeared to be talking to kill time. He looked as if he were thinking of something else while he made conversation.

"Strange system of government, isn't it," he continued. "But it couldn't be worse than ours, so perhaps it's better. Dalai Lama in Lhasa, in charge of civil affairs. Tashi Lama, at Tashi-lunpo, in charge of spiritual law and order. Theoretically equals. Both of 'em moralists. Actually as chummy as a couple of bobcats in a cage with one bird between 'em."

"That's the fault of their subordinates," said Tom. "As a general rule, it isn't the men at the top who make trouble. It's the men who want to be on top."

Dowlah nodded. "Yes," he said, "the man who wants to see his master cock of all the dunghills is a menace. And what a way to choose a successor when one of 'em dies! I daresay it's as good as our way, if you don't mind poison as a political argument. It's logical enough to have the Tashi Lama superintend the selection of a dead Dalai Lama's successor—and the Dalai Lama, in turn, do the same thing when a Tashi Lama dies. But what actually happens? A committee gets itself appointed to go hunting, at public expense, all over Tibet, for a child who was born at the hour of the late lamented ruler's death. Eventually they find one with certain birth-marks. Those and his horoscope are supposed to prove he's a reincarnation of the deceased. That's as good as any plebiscite. Perhaps it's better. But again, what happens? A Council of Regents gets itself appointed to educate the child, and to govern in the child's name, until his eighteenth year. So, if they poison him before he's eighteen, that gives 'em another eighteen years of power. And, of course, the followers of the surviving Lama scheme like devils to control the Board of Regents. Lobsang Pun would like that job. You know, they haven't chosen the child yet. They said they had. The political gang in Lhasa tried to rush proceedings before the Tashi Lama could return from exile. But he started from Peking the moment he heard the news. He made a prodigious forced march to the Tibetan border. Some say he used a Chinese airplane. Some say camels. Anyhow, there he is, on the eastern border of Tibet. They won't let him enter Tibet, but without him they can't legally select a new Dalai Lama. Stalemate, unless Lobsang Pun can move a hidden piece or two."

"Do you know him well?" Tom asked.

Dowlah avoided the question. "Lobsang Pun," he said, "is a picturesque prelate with a string of astonishing titles half a yard long. He has a reputation for severity. No vices. He imposes floggings on sinners who use tobacco, and on ladies who are scandalously indiscreet. He has traveled—widely. And he has been through the Tibetan self-denial mill—frightful austerities—said to have lived somewhere near Mt. Everest, at an altitude of seventeen thousand feet or so, immured in a cave, naked in all weathers and fed on five grains of parched barley a day—for two years—until he was sent for by the Tashi Lama. Some say he did it to convince the Tashi Lama of his iron will. Those fellows believe in more than theory. They like their secret diplomatic agents to be practically tested first, before they trust them. Even so, they sometimes pick a wrong 'un. Lobsang Pun is as right as a shang-shang, if you get my meaning. When he comes, don't talk Tibetan."

Tom's eyes smiled. Dowlah noticed it.

"Lobsang Pun knows English none too perfectly. Stick to English and perhaps he'll slip up."

"All right."

"Have a drink on that," said Dowlah.

"No thanks."

They were silent for several minutes before a knock at the door announced the visitor. Abdul Mirza bowed him alone into the room, said nothing, retired and closed the door. Dowlah got up and stood with his back to the shang-shang cage. Tom stood, smiling. All three bowed simultaneously. The Most Reverend and Holy Lama Lobsang Pun murmured his blessing.

He was even more astonishing than when Tom last saw him. He had been fat then, but he had grown fatter. If he was recently from Tibet, it was amazing that he shouldn't have lost weight on

the exhausting journey. A big drum belly bulged above his girdle. An unruly thatch of black hair. A black toga. Black robe. A jade rosary, each bead carved to resemble a human skull. A nose like an owl's beak, protruding between cheeks that looked as if he were puffing them out on purpose. High cheek-bones. Twinkling, deep-sunk, humorous, malicious black eyes. Pretty nearly six feet of him.

He didn't appear to suffer from the heat. If it was true that he had once lived immured in a cave near Mt. Everest (and it might be true), then perhaps, too, he had partly learned the hermits' mysterious art of enduring extremes of temperature. He had certainly recovered from the effects of the alleged diet of five grains of barley a day.

He had a grand voice. He and Dowlah, going through the ritual of polite question and answer about each other's health, sounded like priest and acolyte intoning a litany. Not a phrase was omitted, to the last, almost physically embracing:

"Your Highness's happiness?"

And Dowlah's: "That is crowned and rendered deathless by Your Eminence's visit."

During the entire ritual Lobsang Pun was watching Tom's face in the mirror behind Dowlah. He chose a chair from which he could continue that espionage. But he pretended not to recognize Tom until the Rajah formally introduced him. Tom winked.

Instantly, the Lama's features broke into an ivory-leathery torment of grinning wrinkles. He opened a mouth from which half the teeth were missing and roared with laughter that shook his big belly. He seized Tom's hands and shook them as if they were prayer pumps.

"Tum-Glain! Tum-Glain! Oo-ha-ha-hah!—Player efficacious! 'Leven hunderd monks all playing that the snow not overtaking you! I ordering it. Oo-ha-ha-hah!"

Tom returned the laugh. It was a thoroughly Tibetan joke.

"Your Eminence's confidence in prayer almost persuades me to become a Tantric Buddhist! You expelled me, as I don't doubt you remember, just a few days ahead of the winter blizzards. At the time I thought you cruel—even homicidal, but I see I was mistaken."

"Oo-ha-ha-ha-hah!"

The Most Reverend and Holy Lobsang Pun hadn't had such a laugh since the news of the late lamented Dalai Lama's death. Even so, there was a hint of gales of laughter in reserve. He might be saving those for the day when the Tashi Lama should return across the border and become the ruler of Tibet without any rival at all.

He let go Tom's hands at last and leaned back in the chair, studying him intently, lowering his eyebrows, pouting judicious lips.

Dowlah watched both of them, visibly puzzled. He appeared slightly nervous. He interrupted the tense silence:

"Somebody has told His Eminence that you, Tom Grayne, were Thö-pa-ga's protector in London. That your influence in certain quarters preserved Thö-pa-ga from prison. That at great self-

sacrifice you brought him to India, neglecting your own interests. And that here in Delhi you lodged him in a safe place where his enemies couldn't get at him. Is that an exaggeration?"

"It is," Tom answered. "His Eminence is a man of vast experience. He'll believe we're lying to him if we yes each other."

"Oo-ha-ha-ha-hah! Thö-pa-ga having many enemies," said Lobsang Pun. "You his friend, you Tum-Glain?"

"I don't think he trusts me."

Suddenly again the Lama burst into roars of laughter.

"Player efficacious. Oh, yes! Ah-ha-ha!"

He nodded to Dowlah. Enough. The interview was at an end. He was used to terminating interviews. He scrooged himself up from the arm-chair, became solemn, flicked like lightning about twenty or thirty beads of his rosary, bestowed his blessing and began to stride toward the door—long strides, taken slowly, to permit the proper courteous expressions of regret that he should take away the splendor of his presence.

Dowlah followed him into the hall, shutting the library door with a slam that flatly told Tom to remain in the room. There was quite a bit of noise in the hall, but through the thick door it was impossible to guess what caused it. It might be the commotion of departing guests. All was quiet when Dowlah returned after fifteen or twenty minutes. He looked excited.

"That's the Number One man," he remarked. "That's the fellow who showed the Japanese what they can do in Tibet. Money couldn't buy him. But a chance to make his nominal master, the Tashi Lama, sole ruler of Tibet would justify him, in his own opinion, for setting all the nations of the world at one another's throats. He would know how to go about it, too, the old devil. I like him, and I wish he liked me. Grayne, you surprised me. You lied with artistic calm. I didn't guess you knew him. You behaved a lot better than I'd have done. By God, if he had ever kicked me out to perish in the snow, and had the impudence to pray for me on top of that, I'd have shown some resentment. However, it's too late to discuss that. I won't detain you any longer."

He paused. He gave Tom a chance to question him. He went and poured himself another drink. He needed one, to judge by the way he swallowed it. Tom stood waiting, silent.

"Damn you," Dowlah said at last, "you're tough. Why don't you ask about Elsa Burbage?"

Tom laughed: "You're responsible. She's your guest."

"I perceive you're a sensible man," said Dowlah. "Nowadays it's no one's business what a young woman is doing at 4 A.M."

"As late as that, is it?"

"Yes. Lewis doesn't usually turn up at the hospital much before nine in the morning. But the doctor who should be on duty was taken ill, so Lewis is on the job. You'll find a taxi at the front gate."

"Okay. Good night."

"Don't tell Lewis anything. Let him tell you."

Dowlah poured himself another drink.

A dark-skinned, bearded servant, whom Tom hadn't seen before, accompanied him to the front gate. There was a decrepit taxi waiting there. Its driver was a Sikh, three good sheets to the wind and sleepy. He didn't know how to find the hospital. So it was nearly 5 A.M. when Tom walked into Lewis's office and found him irritably adjusting an electric light for the microscope on his desk. Lewis looked tired out and bad tempered. On the desk was Elsa's small white hand kerchief embroidered with a blue goose on the wing—one of a dozen that Tom had bought for her in London from a man who had no legs and did that kind of thing for a living. There was no possibility of it not being her handkerchief. Lewis slipped it into a drawer, after he was sure Tom had seen it.

"Is she here in the hospital?" Tom asked.

"No, she isn't."

"Let me see that."

Lewis took it out of the drawer and laid it on the desk, blue goose upward. Tom took it, sniffed it, eyed it, stuffed it into his pocket.

"Meaning?" Lewis asked him.

"Nothing. How is Thö-pa-ga?"

"Gone," said Lewis. "Damn your chewing-gum. It kills rats. But it isn't a metallic poison, and it doesn't show color. It may take me two or three days to analyze it."

"Uh-huh? Gone since when?"

"Half an hour ago."

"With your permission?"

"Didn't need it," said Lewis. "No law against his going. I was operating—emergency accident case. Elsa Burbage came in a closed carriage and took him away. I was told about it through the slide in the door of the operating room. I couldn't leave what I was doing—bad case of haemorrhage."

"Gone where?"

"God knows. Haven't you any notion where she'd head for?"

The phone rang. Lewis answered it with a smile of contemptuous reserve.

"No," he said over the phone. "No. There isn't a snake in the world that makes an incision an inch long or an inch deep. No. Snake venom doesn't ever do that to the victim's liver."

He hung up. He caught Tom studying the handkerchief again. In the corner below the blue goose was a small square marked with lip-stick. It meant that Elsa was all right and that she knew what to do next.

But beneath that, done in eyebrow pencil was a broad-arrow mark, so small that it only covered about ten threads. That meant:

"Beware of—"

In the opposite corner, also done with eyebrow pencil, was a row of short upright lines in groups, with lip-stick dots between to separate them.

||||.|||||||.|.|||||||.|.|||||||.|.|||||||.|.|||||||.

He counted them, using the light from Lewis's microscope:

4.15.23.12.1.8.
D. O. W. L. A. H.

He nodded to Lewis. "Thanks," he said. "I get you."

CHAPTER 15.

"What are you looking peaked about, Mr. Grayne?"

THERE was a railway time-table on Lewis's desk. Lewis drew attention to it by picking it up and tossing it down again. That looked like a pretty straight hint.

"That blasted shang-shang," he remarked, "has left a trail all over Delhi. Some of my *confrères* are deducing, from the shape of its bite, that a new sort of human Jack the Ripper is at large."

"Maybe there's a pack of 'em loose and lighting for home," Tom suggested.

Lewis seemed to wish to know nothing about it. He shook his head.

"If it weren't for an efficient censorship," he said, "there'd be a thousand of them in the morning paper, plus a score of Tibetans escaped from the observation ward! I shall have to report this poisoned chewing-gum to the police. If you're in Delhi, they'll interrogate you."

Tom smiled. Lewis didn't. He looked worried.

"Good-by," said Tom.

"Good-by. Take care of yourself."

"Thanks for your hospitality."

Lewis merely stared. Tom held out his hand. Lewis shook it. Tom walked out.

He refused the first and second taxi that offered themselves, got into the third one, drove around a bit to make sure he wasn't being followed and then went to the hotel. The door porter was asleep. So was the clerk behind the desk. He was only seen by a nondescript sweeper, who was at no pains to pretend not to notice him and therefore probably wasn't a spy.

He bathed and packed the little zipper suit-case that contained all his belongings. It had been searched in his absence; even his socks had been unfolded and refolded differently. The stitching of the case had been unpicked at one corner and something—probably a sliver of split bamboo—had been inserted between the lining and the leather. However, that might not mean much. It might have been done to find out whether he was the sort of idiot who carries codes or any other important information in a zipper suit-case. Or one of Eiji Sarao's agents might have done it. If so, he hadn't learned much.

Tom awoke the desk clerk, paid his bill and left no forwarding address. He carried his own bag to a taxi, pitched it in and told the man to drive around the corner and wait for him there. Then he walked in the opposite direction around the block. All sorts of people up at daybreak on all sorts of business. A strong smell of streets being cleaned and watered. Nobody seemed interested in his movements. He drove to the station, fairly sure he hadn't been observed or followed.

Typical Indian railway-station crowd. Usual din. Usual smelly droves of natives who had slept on the platform all night for fear of losing the morning train, or perhaps to save money. Notice board. No need to ask questions. Express train at 8 A.M. making connections for Darjeeling. Ticket. Reservation—lucky he was early—good seat and no trouble at all—didn't even have to bribe the reservation clerk. Corner table in the restaurant, with a full view of door and windows. Strong tea and boiled eggs—the best pick-me-up in the world after a sleepless night. Into a corner seat, in a front-end compartment, with a good view of the entire length of the platform, half an hour before starting time. A bit heavy-eyed now, but alert. No Elsa. No one who looked even remotely like her.

She should be headed for Darjeeling. This was the first train she could have caught. True, Eiji Sarao had stolen the letter that instructed her to do that. But Tom had signaled the message to her in Dowlah's library when he recovered the letter from Eiji Sarao's pockets. Eiji Sarao might already have had it copied, but it wasn't likely that any one could break that code, without almost incredible luck, short of a couple of weeks of hard work. The code was based on an almost unknown Tibetan poem. Names of people and places would be particularly baffling for a code-breaker, however expert, because each syllable referred to a different syllable in a different Tibetan word.

So it was at least a million to one that no one had understood the message in time to prevent Elsa from taking Thö-pa-ga to Darjeeling. According to Lewis, Elsa had taken Thö-pa-ga away in a carriage. Whose carriage? Five minutes to go. No sign of Elsa.

Four minutes before starting time came Nancy Strong, in a plain print frock, walking down the platform like a teacher on her way to school, making no fuss, followed by a string of porters who also made no fuss because they knew they would get exactly what was coming to them, neither more nor less. Nancy Strong got into a compartment midway down the train.

Two minutes to go. The train already crowded, and no one yet but Nancy Strong whom Tom even knew by sight. Then suddenly, in a hurry, Abdul Mirza, in a turban and gray alpaca frock-coat. Six servants, all running and making a fuss. Ten or twelve porters. Two long strings of jasmine buds looped over Abdul Mirza's shoulders. One servant with a whole basket full of books and magazines. The end of Abdul Mirza's turban unavailingly employed to hide part of his face. No platform farewells—into the train like a shot, midway between Nancy Strong's and Tom's

compartment, and more than sixty seconds to spare. Why the hurry? About two compartments-full of turbaned secretaries—people of that type anyhow—scrambled into the train after him in such a hysterical hurry that Tom couldn't even count them. They were either six or seven, all in one another's way.

Three last-minute passengers—running—porters ahead and following. Conductor's whistle. Engine whistle. And away—out into fierce white sunshine. No Thö-pa-ga. No Elsa.

Swell train. All the fancy novelties—cool air—ice water—glare-proof glass—a better dining-car than any pre-war king ever had—lots too many men to ask if you needed anything. White man's burden hell, it was a white man's shocking waste of other people's money, grudgingly, not too politely shared with the duskier gentry who were taxed to pay for the extravagance.

That wouldn't do. Thinking that kind of tripe is what keeps a fellow from minding his own business. No risk of being murdered on the train in daylight. Tom leaned back and was fast asleep in less than two minutes.

It was several hours before he awoke and strolled along the corridor. The door of Abdul Mirza's compartment was closed and the curtains down. Further down the train Nancy Strong sat by the open door of a compartment that contained three other people. One was an Indian lady who couldn't endure life very well with her feet on the floor. Nancy Strong had made room for her to get her feet up and looked as if she wished she hadn't. She nodded to Tom, got up and followed him into the corridor.

"What are you looking peaked about, Mr. Grayne?"

"Am I?"

"How is your sick friend?"

"Which one?"

"The other. Not the one who wanted chewing-gum."

"I don't know."

A train corridor is a perfectly safe place for confidences. Two in conversation can look both ways. They can't be overheard above the noise of the train, unless they have screech-owl tourists' voices. Nancy Strong—graying, forty-five or fifty years old, humorous, was inviting confidence. Her experienced, sensible eyes conveyed that information without a word said. But Tom's eyes were as intelligible as hers. She understood—laughed:

"What a job your mother must have had! Excuse me, won't you. My business in life is getting suspicious youngsters to tell me their troubles."

"Do I look suspicious?"

"No, of course not. And you're not exactly a youngster. But you wouldn't tell me anything I don't know, would you?"

"Probably I don't know anything you don't know," Tom answered.

"Now, now. I didn't mean to insult you. Our mutual acquaintance spoke of you, over the phone, with such terse approval that I'm more than curious."

"So am I," said Tom. "I listen like a hole in the ground."

"My informant said something about a girl."

Tom froze.

Matter-of-factly, Nancy Strong applied the necessary heat to thaw him.

"India is a wonderful country for a girl who isn't cursed with too good looks, or too much money, or too many brains. She can find a satisfactory husband in almost any place she visits, if she is properly introduced. But without the proper introduction, India is almost the worst country to come to. And for a girl who hasn't introductions, but who has more than normal intelligence, it's the most dangerous country on earth."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I know it. A really bright girl's curiosity will lead her into danger that she hasn't the experience to deal with. At the same time, it will keep her away from the good, kind, stupid people who don't ever know that such dangers exist, because their lives are too humdrum."

"Your life humdrum?" Tom asked.

"I am neither good, kind nor stupid," she answered. "If I were good, those little devils of Hill children wouldn't like me. If I were kind, the Almighty would give me a villa at Nice, with nothing more cruel to do than cut the flowers in the garden. And if I were stupid, I shouldn't be talking to you."

"I'm all alone, up forward," said Tom.

"Very well."

They went and sat facing each other in Tom's compartment, silent for about five minutes, just as if they were old friends, with the wheels beneath them thumping a monotonous refrain that suggested, as train wheels always do suggest, that life rolls onward as a river, torn by the rocks that it leaves behind, and healed by distance. Tom spoke first:

"So they've passed the ball to you, have they?"

"No," she said. "I think it's your ball. But I can tell you what no one else will. I am unofficial. Nothing whatever that I say has the slightest authority. I'm a gossip. If you should quote me, you would be quoting a garrulous, middle-aged spinster who was a victim of her own romantic imagination."

"Shoot," said Tom. "I get you."

"Don't shoot me, if I say a few things that you won't like."

"Say what you please," he answered. "I'll listen. I won't quote you. I won't ask questions. But I won't answer 'em either, unless I see fit."

She nodded. "Yes, I think we understand each other. Well, by way of gossip, I learned of your bringing Thö-pa-ga to India. Curiously enough, my advice was asked about it. I suggested Mu-ni Gam-po in Darjeeling. My advice was asked because it happens that Thö-pa-ga was lodged in my house in Darjeeling for several weeks, some years ago, when he was on his way to Oxford for an English education. Would you believe I have lived in Tibet?"

Tom stared. "Tell what you care to," he said. "I won't ask."

"And you won't quote me?"

"All right. No. I promise."

He was studying her skin. Any woman nowadays can buy almost any complexion except the kind you have to go and fight for on frozen and dust-laden plateaux, sixteen thousand feet or so above sea level. He had noticed it when he first met her. Funny he hadn't recognized it. Reasonable, though. In all history there haven't been half a dozen white women in Tibet.

"Thö-pa-ga," she said, "was a rather precocious boy suffering from a severe case of persecution complex. Has he recovered from it?"

"Not to speak of. He's as superstitious as a Kokonor yak-herd. But they gave him a B.A. degree at Oxford."

"He was very suspicious of me," said Nancy Strong. "To ease his homesickness I had made the mistake of talking only Tibetan to him. The poor young persecuted runaway—for that is what he actually was—associated me, because I was a woman speaking Tibetan, with a woman they were going to make him marry if they could ever force him to return. At the end of four weeks, when at last I understood that, I began to disillusion him about me. But by the time I had found the one femininely friendly angle from which he could be reached, the money had come and he had to resume his journey toward Europe."

She paused, but Tom made no comment. So she shot a question at him:

"Have you brought Miss Burbage with you to exploit that femininely friendly angle?"

Tom wasn't to be caught off-guard as easily as that. He answered matter of factly:

"So far as I know, they met for the first time on the plane from London to Karachi. Thö-pa-ga appears to like her."

"Does she like him?"

"Honest to God, I don't know," he answered.

"But she loves you?"

"What makes you ask that?"

"Never mind why I ask. Tell me."

"How should I know? Why should she? Elsa Burbage is a girl with unusual gifts, who has had a very unusual education and opportunities. So far as I know, she is not in love with any one."

"But you love her?"

"Never been in love in my life," Tom answered. "Don't know what it feels like."

"Well, of course, you realize, don't you, that such a person as you are, can't bring an unusual girl to India without arousing comment."

"I had hoped to escape that," said Tom.

Nancy Strong smiled. "Mr. Grayne, one of the funniest things in life is the occasional disingenuousness of otherwise hard-headed, intelligent men! Did you really think she wouldn't be checked back to the day of her birth? How much money do you suppose the Indian Government spends in a month on cables, just for a *leetle* more information than is written on the face of a passport? Even I, a mere gossip, know this much: Elsa Burbage is a niece of Dr. Clarence Mayor of the British Museum, where she has had the run of the oriental department. Her father, Colonel of a Fusilier regiment, was killed in action in 1917. Her mother, an ex-actress of considerable reputation in her day, died in 1929, of heart-failure following an attempt to climb the Matterhorn. Elsa Burbage has an inherited income of eight hundred pounds a year; an honor degree from London University; a junior teacher's certificate for oriental languages and oriental art; a good seat in a saddle; a little house in Dorking rented to a friend; dark hair; very beautiful eyes; a slightly pert nose; a ready laugh; a quiet conversational voice; and she sings high soprano. I have never seen her, and never heard of her until yesterday. Now what?"

"You tell me," Tom answered.

"I intend to tell you."

"Let me order tea first. Fruit—crackers—jam? I'll have some with you."

He rang the service bell. He needed an interruption. So far as he knew, he hadn't betrayed what he felt. But he was feeling rather as if some one had suddenly punched him in the wind.

He gave the order to the waiter.

"So they know all that, do they?" he asked when the waiter had gone.

"They know a lot more than that," said Nancy Strong.

CHAPTER 16.

"I had no right to exact that promise."

"I AM going to Dutch aunt you," Nancy Strong resumed when the waiter had removed the tea things.

"Very well. I'll play Dutch nephew."

"You're a man in a million, Mr. Grayne, or you wouldn't be secretly approved by certain people who can't afford to make mistakes."

Tom smiled. "That's the formula. Praise 'em and then swat 'em! I can take it."

"But there isn't a known exception, is there, to the rule that geniuses all have blind arcs, which cause them to behave like lunatics, or savages, or children? A genius is never stupid in his own field. But there is always a zone where his genius, with its natural self-confidence, invades what is to him a no-man's land. For instance, a poet will try farming. That is an extreme instance. Virgil and Horace did it. Horace's farm was stocked chiefly with wine and women. Virgil tells us, in beautiful language, how the bees get honey from carrion. They were both good poets. Bad farmers. Aren't you trying to make a steel tool out of honey?"

Tom rested his jaw on a fist whose sinews resembled moulded bronze. He didn't answer. He wasn't going to until he knew the answer.

Nancy Strong continued: "No one but a genius would ever have thought of employing a twenty-three-year-old girl as a secret accomplice on such an expedition as yours. It bears the genius-stamp of unexpectedness. Elsa Burbage must be a very competent girl, or you would never have considered her. She may be old enough. I was twenty-four when I went to Tibet. If I could stand the conditions, probably she can. I lived there, secretly—and it's still a rather close secret—as the mistress of a Tibetan nobleman. His wealth has supported my school in Darjeeling for the past twenty-one years."

That was a staggerer. And yet, come to think of it, it wasn't. Nancy Strong had obviously said yes to experience. Her eyes said it. She had made the yes good. She had side-stepped nothing that could be tackled, and licked, and turned to account.

"Is he still living?" Tom asked, searching memory of people he had known in Tibet. She might be giving him an important clue.

She ignored the question.

"So I know what I'm talking about, Mr. Grayne, when I say that Elsa Burbage isn't in safe hands."

"How d'you mean—safe?"

"I mean you."

"She's in no kind of danger from me," Tom answered.

"That, Mr. Grayne, is what I daresay you believe. Iron-man though you probably are, if you were secretly in love with her, you couldn't possibly keep your secret in the face of what she will almost certainly experience. That is why I asked whether you are in love with each other. Would you care to know why I left Tibet?"

"If you choose to tell. I won't quote you."

"Because my nobleman, who was in love with me, couldn't endure the indignities from which even he couldn't protect me. There were Chinese Ambans in Tibet in my day. Their malice was almost incredibly ingenious."

Tom wanted to ask her whether she loved her nobleman. She knew he wanted to. She paused long enough to let him ask. But he could see in her eyes the iron answer ready. No sense in inviting a snub.

She continued: "It is quite agreeable to you to be made use of by men who treat you as they would a weapon. They try you out, then use you, and you ask nothing better. You don't expect to be rescued if you get into trouble. Your value is that you're competent and silent. Their value to you is that they can let you do what you couldn't without their leave and, at least to some extent, without their secret help. They wouldn't turn you loose if they thought you might get into trouble for sentimental reasons. They wouldn't risk using that kind of weapon. But is she a weapon such as you are?"

"Intelligence branch becoming sentimental?" Tom asked.

"No. Don't be silly. And don't try to make me think you're not feeling a twinge of guilt. I am watching your eyes. Are you her friend?"

"I like her first rate."

"Somebody told me that a hospital nurse has reported that Thö-pa-ga talks, even in his sleep, of Elsa Burbage. That may be a slight exaggeration. But it seems to be a fact that she has his confidence. I gathered there must be a very good reason for wanting Thö-pa-ga to confide in some one.

I have been asked to find out whether Elsa Burbage has in her the necessary steel to make it possible for her to go through with what perhaps may happen."

"Then you know where she is?"

"No, I don't."

Tom scowled. But he detected the ghost of an observant smile, so he straightened out the frown. Nancy Strong continued:

"The men with whom you are dealing wouldn't send one of their own daughters on such an errand as you're letting Elsa Burbage undertake. In a way they resemble surgeons. Their sentiment ends where the operation begins. They trust nobody—not even one another. They can't. They mustn't. They must find out, but they must never be found out. They send a man or a woman into danger or worse as ruthlessly, and with as little compunction as a general who sends a platoon by night to a position from which he knows they can't return alive. There are all sorts of problems. They can use all kinds of women, from a Mata Hari to an Edith Cavell, each in her own field."

Tom smiled reproachfully. "I said I'd listen. But—well, never mind, we've lots of time. Go ahead."

"Yes," she said, "I know you know all that. But you haven't thought what it probably means for Elsa Burbage. A woman, Mr. Grayne, who doesn't adventure off the beaten path is entitled to and usually gets conventionally humane and sometimes chivalrous treatment, even nowadays. But the minute she consciously oversteps the line, she has forfeited her feminine rights and privileges. She is no more entitled then to chivalrous consideration than, for instance, you are. No part of her is any longer sacred. She becomes a weapon. And a weapon that breaks, misfires, becomes rusty, or useless for any other reason, is simply thrown away."

"What do you propose to do about it?" Tom asked.

"Nothing. I was asked to study and report, not to interfere or advise. But I was also asked to get in touch with you."

"And to report on me, too?"

"Are you angry?"

"If I were, I wouldn't let you know it."

"Will you play fair?"

"Now what?"

"I have told you an intimate personal secret. Don't you think it would be fair play to do me a very personal favor in return?"

"Say what you mean."

"Send Elsa Burbage home to England!"

"Uh-huh. So, if you okay her, she may go to Tibet, but you don't want the responsibility? Is that the idea?"

"You said you wouldn't ask questions. Send her home, Mr. Grayne."

"What makes you think she'd obey me? Do you think I would have any use for a girl who would scam because some one had told me that some one else said she was soft?"

"Very well. Will you try to persuade her to go home?"

"Because you told me your secret? Are the cases parallel?"

"If you know India, and the Hills, and Tibet, then you know I'm right. If you don't know what I mean, then you had no right to bring a young girl to India."

Tom conceded a point. "Well, you did lay your bet on the board, I admit. Okay, I will put it up to her. But I don't guarantee the result."

"Thank you. I believe you will keep your promise." Suddenly she laughed. "But it's a good example of why the individuals of whom we were speaking mustn't trust each other. I had absolutely no right to exact that promise. It's entirely personal between you and me."

"I know better than that," Tom answered. "You're obeying orders and shielding the man who told you what to do. That's proper. Tell you what. Move your things into my compartment and have it all to yourself. You'll be more comfortable without some one's feet in your lap. I'll find a shake-down somewhere else on the train."

She nodded—understood him to mean he wasn't angry.

"Isn't there plenty of room for us both in here?"

"Yes, I suppose there is."

Tom went in search of a porter to bring her belongings from the other compartment. He took his time about it. He put his own bag on the corner seat that Miss Strong had vacated, with a belligerent abruptness that amounted to an ultimatum. The seat was henceforth his. He wasn't at all sure he wanted much more of Nancy Strong's conversation. She wasn't likely to tell him anything important, and it might prove too easy to tell her too much.

CHAPTER 17.

"Guilty. I shouldn't have done it."

TOM tried to peer into Abdul Mirza's compartment, but the blinds were drawn. So were the blinds of the other compartment, in which the staff of secretaries, or whatever they were, were as silent as dead men. He loafed about for a while in the corridor, but the compartment doors didn't open, so after half an hour or so he returned and sat down again opposite Nancy Strong.

"Done Dutch aunting?" he hinted.

"No. I am just getting into my stride. It's very good of you to listen. Do you know a little church in Bristol named St. John's? A stone church, where the Clifton Road crosses the street that leads to the Suspension Bridge?"

Tom stared hard. Her eyes were laughing at him. It was a palpable hit, and he couldn't hide it.

"Why didn't you pull this out of the bag to begin with?" he retorted.

"It was at the bottom of the bag. And besides, I'm a woman. Please believe it is a sheer coincidence that I happen to know that church. I went there to attend my sister's wedding, during the last year of the World War."

"Well? What of it?"

"It's your turn," she answered. "Tell me."

"So they know that, do they?"

"Oh, yes. But they would like to know more. Why did you marry Elsa Burbage?"

"Dammit, why shouldn't I marry her?"

"You seem to think you shouldn't have. Isn't she—"

Tom interrupted. He spoke quietly, without emphasis, and yet every other word was like a hammer-blow. It was as if he were laying his thoughts on an anvil and cracking them up for his own analysis.

"I will tell you this much, Elsa Burbage is a little bit of a Cossacky-looking, well-bred smiler. She has as much pluck as intelligence. As much intelligence as good looks. Too good looking, as a matter of fact, but too intelligent to be spoiled by fools who'd like to paw her over. She's on the level. Knows her stuff. I taught her most of it, but she learned a lot in the British Museum. She can

read Tibetan as well as I can, and I'm rated an expert. I have a big strong-box in a bank vault chock-a-block with real stuff that I've not had time to study, let alone to translate. Elsa is to have all that, if I get bumped off. And there's other stuff in there, that shouldn't be seen for a generation. Elsa would know what to destroy and what to keep and what to publish. As I said, she's on the level. She'd do the right thing. She couldn't be tempted to do the wrong thing."

"But she married you. Was that the wrong thing?"

"The worst break I ever made. A sentimental mistake. They're the worst kind. I could have consulted a lawyer and made a will leaving the contents of the strong-box to her."

"But perhaps you were afraid she might marry some one else?" said Nancy Strong. "You know the proverb: a mistress keeps a secret for a week, a wife as long as she loves you, a friend forever, but other men's wives never leave off telling it."

"No," Tom answered. "I don't own her. We agreed she can have a divorce, at my expense, on demand, at any time, provided she doesn't swap horses in mid-stream. If she should fall in love, she'd have to wait until she could get a divorce, in Mexico or somewhere, without getting my name into public print. It was to be a strictly secret marriage, for strictly business purposes."

"Now that the secret is out, she may have a divorce?"

"Yes. Why not? She'd better do it. D'you know why I've been trusted, quite a bit, by certain people?"

"I believe I can guess," Nancy Strong answered. She was just plump enough to be unable to suppress a slight ripple of mirth. "You are probably known as a man who can't be taken in or hoodwinked by any woman. Were you hood winked by Elsa Burbage?"

"No, I wasn't. I've told you what she is. I'll back my judgment against yours or any one's. In fact, that's what I did do. She was wild to come to India, and to help me to enter Tibet. She had worked so hard, and schooled herself, and saved her money, and kept physically fit, and so set her teeth into the job of making herself useful to me, that I yessed her. I shouldn't have. But I did. I even said I'd try to get her into Tibet. She deserves it. She's ace-high to any deuce of an adventuress I ever met."

"But that isn't why you married her?"

"Yes, that's one reason. If I should get bumped off, she might stand a better chance as my legal widow than if people should find out she'd merely tagged me along. I've seen several women get a hell of a cold deal because they couldn't show a marriage certificate. And they were damned good women; I'm not talking about kept women or Shanghai passage-beggars."

"You admit you made a bad break."

"Only time in my life I was sentimental."

Nancy Strong a bit too visibly suppressed an Old Faithful geyser of amusement. She used her handkerchief. It did sound a bit like a sneeze. But she controlled her voice perfectly:

"Hadn't you better ask her to go away and divorce you? Didn't you say, in Mexico?"

"I'll have to think that over."

Tom went out and paced the corridor. He had something else to think about. Dowlah. Abdul Mirza. Noropa. For fifteen or twenty minutes he kept an eye on the doors of two closed compartments. However, no luck yet. So he returned and sat down again.

"Verdict?" Nancy Strong asked.

"Guilty. I shouldn't have done it. It was probably vanity. I guess a psychoanalyst would say I craved a she-disciple, to make me feel like a guru. Elsa will stick to her guns, mind you. Why shouldn't she? But the marriage has ruined the team. If I order her home, she can claim privilege. If I should offer any mushy reasons for avoiding danger, she can quote our bargain. We agreed, she's entitled to take all chances, at her own risk, same as I am."

Nancy Strong opened her bag and snapped it shut, but she made no other sign of having reached a climax. Her voice was normal:

"Would you like me to suggest in the proper quarter that she should be sent home? That would not involve you. She would never know who advised, or who ordered it. She need never know that you and I discussed her."

"Go to hell," Tom answered. "Before I'd do her any dirt like that, I'd brain you with a monkey-wrench and throw the wrench into the works. If you or they want her run out of India, say it to me. I'll pull my freight and hers, too. I know how to get to Tibet without double-crossing a good kid."

Nancy Strong rippled all over with laughter.

"Very creditable, Mr. Grayne! One of these days, when you do fall in love with a girl, I wonder what lengths you won't go to for her sake. She will be able to count on you when her back is turned, won't she! Very well, I promise I won't suggest any official move of that sort."

"Care for some dinner?"

She laughed again. "You have a grand way of denying anger. Yes, I would like dinner. Do you trust me to keep my promise?"

"If they order her deported, I will know at whose door to deliver the bouquet," he answered.

"And if they don't—no flowers, Mr. Grayne, by request."

"Understood and agreed. Let's go eat."

No sign of Abdul Mirza, nor of any of his companions, except that a waiter was removing soiled dishes from the prime minister's compartment, but he had closed the door behind him before Tom could get a glimpse. However, it wasn't that compartment that interested him as much as the other. Prime ministers, as a rule, don't do their own dirty work; they look the other way while some one does it who can be repudiated after the event. The other compartment door was shut, blinds drawn, and not a sound within.

However, he had better luck after dinner. A silk-clad secretary sort of person came out of Abdul Mirza's compartment and entered the other one just as Tom entered the corridor on his way from

the dining-car. Nancy Strong, behind him, was left imagining what she pleased. Tom passed the door in time to get one swift glimpse before it slammed shut. He had seen what he wanted.

"Do you sleep well on a train?" he asked when he and Nancy Strong had sat down again facing each other.

"Yes. I usually turn in early and sleep till daylight."

"Okay. I won't disturb you. I may find some one to talk to. Might talk all night."

"Talk to me, if that's your trouble."

But the spell was broken. Conversation lagged. It was barely ten o'clock when Tom strolled down the corridor and claimed the lower berth on which he had left his bag. He sprawled with the bag under his elbows, so that he could see under the blind into the corridor. It was midnight, or later, before he moved from that position. Then he opened the door, making hardly a sound, and tiptoed out.

He was almost too late. By the time he reached the car ahead there was some one standing by the door of the compartment in which Nancy Strong lay asleep. A very tall, bare-headed man in a dark suit. He had opened the door and was trying to peer into the dark interior. His back was toward Tom. The corridor lights were turned low. There were deep shadows.

Train thief? Hardly likely on a modern express train.

There is a whole caste of professional thieves whose only means of livelihood is robbing Indian trains and their passengers. So almost anything was possible. But the man looked familiar.

Tom crowded himself against the curve at the end of the corridor. The man appeared to be listening. He opened the door a trifle wider. Apparently the slight squeak of the hinges awoke Nancy Strong or perhaps she hadn't been asleep. She switched on the light. The man scooted away, along the corridor toward the car ahead. Tom didn't follow; a train corridor is a mean place for a fight, especially with some one who probably carries a knife, or worse. Instead, he went and told Nancy Strong to lock the door on the inside.

"I've found a man to talk to. Good night. See you in the morning."

He went and turned in—slept like a top. He didn't wake until the train neared Siliguri.

CHAPTER 18.

"I've no right to look in his pockets."

"SILIGURI! Change for Darjeeling!"

Pulses begin to beat faster at Siliguri. There the two-foot gauge Himalayan Mountain Railway awaits the transcontinental mails. Six hundred feet above sea level, six thousand feet below Darjeeling, and piping hot from the snipe and rice swamps of Bengal, Siliguri is the threshold of another world. The plains cease. The mountains begin. The early morning excites imagination—

sends it leaping from forest to forest, across the intervening tea gardens, toward the grandest view on earth, where the Himalayan ranges rise against the northern sky.

Tom pitched his bag to a Lepcha porter on the platform and followed it. He was the first passenger to leave the train. There were all sorts of people on the platform, all in motion—Lepchas, Gurkhas, Tibetans, Bengalis—tea-planters in Terai hats—British and Indian soldiers—police—gazelle-eyed women—beggars and thieves and princes' sons. Tom told his porter to go and wait for him "perhaps a long time" in the shade near the auto-parking place.

He knew the station well. A score of strides and he was hidden in the almost dark room where the emergency oil-lanterns stand in a row on a shelf. There was only one small dirty window, rather high up; he had to stand on a box and clear a peephole through the dust. He saw Abdul Mirza and his companions, and presently Nancy Strong go hurrying after their baggage toward the narrow gauge train. But no Noropa—not yet. He was almost beginning to lose hope that Noropa had seen him enter the lamp room, when he caught sight of a man coming along the platform from the rear end of the train.

Sure thing! Unmistakably Noropa, in an ill-fitting, hurriedly-made bazaar suit and a Lepcha turban, looking like a school-teacher. He was wearing spectacles, probably plain glass. He was stooping a little to make his great height less noticeable. No bag, no porter. He threaded his way through the dwindling crowd as if he had business at the far end of the platform.

There was a momentary tumult of excitement, just in front of the window, where some Indian passengers were being met by noisy friends and relatives. Some one's caged monkey got loose and a dog gave chase. Shrieks, shouts, roars of laughter. Noropa was very clever, the way he snatched the opportunity to step sideways and make for the lamp-room door. He didn't dash in. He stopped and stooped to tie his shoe-lace, so as to look back and make sure he was unobserved. Then he entered quite quietly.

But he didn't shut the door swiftly enough. He drew his weapon just a fraction of a second too soon; the light shone on it before the door shut and Tom recognized the kind of weapon he had to deal with. That was half the battle, but the other half wasn't so simple. He didn't want a corpse on his hands, nor even a badly injured man. He didn't want a police investigation. He would never be forgiven if he set police investigators on the *qui vive*.

There wasn't a word spoken. Hardly a sound. Noropa's weapon broke against the stone wall. Tom's fist thudded on the point of Noropa's chin—dropped him like a steer in a shambles. He lay still. It was a pippin of a punch on the jaw; he was likely to lie there for several minutes.

Tom examined the weapon—eighteen inches of bright tool steel as thin as a bodkin, set into a heavy brass-bound wooden hilt. Hilt and blade both hollow. A strong spring and about an ounce of poison in the hilt that would have gone squirting through the blade into any wound it made. No smell that Tom recognized. Probably a quite rare poison. It was oozing out through the broken blade—thick, sticky stuff like molasses. He stuck the blade into a crack in the wall to let it bleed, so to speak, without leaving a menace for some lamp-trimmer's naked foot.

Noropa stirred, opened his eyes and blinked. Tom stooped over him, lifted him by the shoulders—the man was as heavy as lead—and set him sitting against the wall. The door opened suddenly. Sunlight fell full on Noropa's death-mask face. The station-master—Anglo-Indian, natty, alert, helmeted, smartly uniformed in white—stood staring. All three men had presence of mind. The station-master took a step backward to glance left and right for the railway police. Noropa sat still, pretending to be much less conscious than he was. Tom spoke to the station-master:

"Could you get me some ice water? I think he was looking for the lavatory. I saw him go in here and fall down, so I followed to see what was the matter."

"Why did you shut the door?" asked the station-master. He was suspicious, but Tom's easy assurance impressed him, and there was no obvious sign of a struggle. Noropa's chin on his chest concealed the mark of the blow.

"Was it shut? I didn't notice. I guess I kicked it when I tried to lift him."

"Who is he?"

"How should I know?"

"By his turban he's a Lepcha," said the station-master.

"Yes. He's on his way to Darjeeling. He told me that on the train," Tom answered.

"Well, he has missed the Mountain train. It's pulling out now. Has he a ticket?"

"How should I know? I've no right to look in his pockets. Tell you what," said Tom, "I'm going up by road, so I'll give him a lift. If he isn't better by the time we reach the hotel I'll take him to a doctor. Will you help me get him out of here?"

"I'll call a couple of porters. Have you engaged a car? I'll see if I can get one for you."

When the station-master turned his back Tom shook his fist under Noropa's nose for silence. It was hardly necessary. Noropa had heard, understood. He even smiled assent to Tom's lie about what had happened. Tom took the knife from the crack in the wall, wrapped it in a rag that he snatched from the lamp-shelf and thrust it into Noropa's jacket-pocket, forcing it down between the jacket and the cheap Italian half-lining. He picked up the broken half of the blade and put that into Noropa's side-pocket. Noropa understood that also: if the police should show up and become curious, they would find that deadly weapon on the person of its owner.

The station-master returned with two porters.

"There's only one auto left," he said. "It's a ramshackle old thing, but you'll have to take it if you don't want to wait for a couple of hours. He looks better already, doesn't he. Some of them, if they're not used to it, get train-sick. But I'd take him to a hospital, if I were you, and let 'em find out what's wrong. Come on, you, these porters will help you out o'here."

CHAPTER 19.

"You're a mongrel. but I'll give you a chance."

IT was an ancient Sunbeam. Its spare tire was down to the canvas; the four tires in use were only slightly better. The springs of the worn cushions were concealed by a folded stable blanket. The Bengali Moslem driver knew no English.

The engine sounded like a machine-gun getting hot and about ready to jam; it was a question which would give out first, engine or tires. But Tom couldn't afford to let it go at that. With a grin at the driver he raised the hood, pretending to give a half-turn to the screws on a couple of oil cups. What he actually did was to open the newly fitted brass water plug just enough to establish a steady drip, good for ten or twelve miles at a guess, supposing the radiator was full to start with. It probably was full; there was a water faucet near by and the water cost nothing.

Then away, on the rear seat beside Noropa, with a rattle like a tinker's cart and the canvas top nodding like a processional canopy. Rubber tooter, blowing like the devil to make the Siliguri bullock-carts get out of the way. Dead slow, choking dusty, until they turned toward the mountain and began the long, comparatively easy, beautifully engineered ascent.

Tom recovered the weapon then. His left fist, knotted like a club, commanded the situation; his right hand searched Noropa's pockets competently, considering that picking pockets wasn't his normal occupation. All he found was the poisoned dagger in two parts, several hundred rupees in paper money, a few small coins and a white gold wrist-watch with a broken strap. It was all right, it wasn't Elsa's watch, though it did look like it for a moment. No return ticket. One Tibetan coin among the small change wasn't anything to arouse comment. But the ten-rupee notes were brand new.

"All a traveler needs nowadays is money, isn't it," said Tom. "Here you are—take it. When a man like you goes to a bank with a cheque they give him all the dirty money in the till. Who gave you nice clean bank notes?"

No answer, but Noropa seemed surprised to get his money back. He stowed it away carefully, eyeing Tom sideways, Tom pretending to watch the road.

"Ah! Thought so! Drop it, or I'll break your wrist!"

No punch necessary that time. A small knife hidden in a pocket in Noropa's shirt had fallen crosswise and hadn't come out handily. It fell to the floor of the car as his big-boned forearm creaked in Tom's doubled grip. Tom put his foot on the knife.

"Any more weapons? Kick your shoes off."

He felt Noropa all over, tapping lightly, because it is easy to overlook quite bulky objects if the searcher uses too much pressure. It was all right, the man was completely disarmed now. For at least an hour or two he wouldn't feel exactly tempted to use that right forearm. He was rubbing it with the other hand. There was pain in his eyes. They weren't pleasant eyes to look at. Framed in the blue-rimmed plain glass spectacles they looked like the eyes of a man on the rack, so full of hate that no pain could conquer him.

"I've conquered tougher guys than you," Tom remarked in a matter-of-fact voice. "None of you terrorists can ever stomach your own stuff. Somewhere between here and Darjeeling you're going to break. Do you know what that means?"

No answer.

"You can have it as rough as you choose. I'm not squeamish."

No answer.

"Where is Miss Elsa Burbage?"

"Not knowing."

"Where is Thö-pa-ga?"

"Not knowing."

"Where is the Holy Lama Lobsang Pun?"

Silence.

"So you're afraid of Lobsang Pun. What could he do to you?"

"You-who-know-what-shang-shang-is—you-bloody-fool- you-break-my-arm—you-get-a-shang-shang-sending."

"Trot out your shang-shang. Who killed Eiji Sarao?"

Got him! The meaning of his sudden stare was unmistakable. Some one—very likely Abdul Mirza, but perhaps Dowlah, had told Noropa that Eiji Sarao was dead of that wound in the neck. Tom felt fairly confident that Eiji Sarao was really being secretly conveyed to Naini Kol. But Noropa believed him dead. That was clear. A lucky shot, that. Now for another, a thousand to one shot, that wouldn't do any harm if it didn't come off:

"Lobsang Pun was angry that you killed Eiji Sarao. You come after me, to kill me, to make Lobsang Pun forgive you for having killed Eiji."

Silence. Had the shot missed? Then suddenly:

"You-bloody-fool-you— shang-shang-sending-killing-you-like-Eiji!"

That was a stumper.

"Are you so crazy that you kid yourself you're a shang-shang?"

No answer. Tom, his imagination leaping from guess to guess, plugged home another disturbing question without a query mark:

"Rajah Dowlah told you Lobsang Pun demanded that you kill me, because the Japanese demanded it, because I'm bad for the plan to make use of Thö-pa-ga."

Got him again! Noropa shook his head in dissent too vehemently. His eyes glazed with the smoky oriental sullenness that guards the truth that has been touched but still perhaps only guessed at, not discovered.

"You're an awful boob," said Tom, "if you believed that yarn. You haven't a Chinaman's chance to curry favor with Lobsang Pun. He's through with you. If you had killed me, he'd have had you hanged by the British. Or, if they wouldn't do it, he'd have had you fed to shang-shangs."

Noropa shuddered. The mention of Lobsang Pun's name seemed to make him as nervous as a chela who hears his guru being blasphemed.

"As for Dowlah," said Tom, "if you trust him, you're a worse fool even than I thought you. Dowlah believes in neither god nor devil. He'd betray any one, if he thought he couldn't be found out, just for the sake of feeling clever. What did Dowlah tell you about me?"

No answer.

"Dowlah told you they've decided they don't need me but they can use Miss Elsa Burbage."

Noropa's intelligence laired in a cavernous mystery of superstition. To him, every breath a man breathed—every word a man said, had a dark metaphysical cause; it served some devil's purpose, or it could not be. Sulky, sullen, he was frightened by the accuracy of Tom's guesswork. It seemed to him supernatural. It had far more effect on him than the punch on the jaw and the agonied arm. Tom continued:

"So Dowlah gave you a weapon and money, but he didn't tell Abdul Mirza. You traveled with Abdul Mirza's staff, but they can swear they knew nothing about it."

No answer.

They had crossed the wandering narrow-gauge railway track a dozen times, when the rotten old rattletrap car at last did even better than Tom hoped. Half-way through a mile-wide belt of deodars, between two tea estates, the radiator boiled and a rear tire blew like a gun going off. The Bengali driver, in a rising off-key yell of misery, named three men, probably mechanics. He invited Allah (blessed be His Prophet) to impregnate them and all their progeny forever with deathless worms and inward-growing boils that should destroy their rest and make sleep a torment. Having attended to that, he got down to attend to the tire. Tom eyed Noropa:

"Put your shoes on and get out."

The set-up was perfect. A dark wilderness of trees. A convenient hollow out of earshot from the road. Probably at least an hour's work for the Bengali, patching that rotten tire and then finding out what was wrong with the engine. Even if he should think of tightening the water plug, he had nothing in which to fetch water; he would have to go in search of a vessel of some sort. There was plenty of time, and no risk whatever of interruption.

Noropa tried to escape. Tom's toe hooked his instep as he ducked around a big tree. He fell headlong and got up because he was kicked up. There isn't any fun in kicking even murderers who use poisoned daggers, but there was no sense in half-doing the job. Noropa walked backward after that. He didn't dare to shout for help, nor did he dare take his eyes off Tom; a fellow whose team had depended on him, not so many years ago, for an occasional drop-goal from the seventy-five yard line, has a remarkably accurate aim and a toe that can hurt. Noropa fell, naturally, several times. He was kicked up again. He picked up a rock. It was kicked out of his hand before he could raise his hand to throw it. By the time they reached the bottom of the hollow he was possessed by an inferiority complex that even his malice hadn't heat enough to burn off. Tom did nothing to reduce it:

"You miserable mongrel. Why d'you call yourself Tibetan? You couldn't fool a Tibetan. You're Chinese-Jap. Chinks and Japs are not allowed in Inner Tibet."

Silence. It amounted to sulky assent. No Tibetan would have swallowed that insult without protest. Tom's guesses were beginning to have the feel of accuracy. It was like working out a mathematical equation with a number of unknowns. Get one right and the others logically follow.

"I'd give a dollar to know your early history, you useless pye-dog."

Not a word at random. The word "useless" specially chosen. "Pye-dog"* was pretty scurrilous, but it was better than its American equivalent, at the moment.

[**Pye-dog* (Anglo-Indian from Hindi *pahi* - outsider)—ownerless half-wild mongrel dog common around Asian villages, especially in India.]

"You've had an education of sorts. You're a Christian convert. You were kicked out of your church."

A hit! Mystery men hate to be stripped of their veils. They prefer physical torture; vanity helps them to endure that. Noropa stood still enough, but his mind almost visibly shrank. It found no shelter.

"You're a killer. You probably murdered a Christian priest somewhere in China. Not for money. You'd be too superstitious. The first thing they teach you black magicians is you mustn't kill for money. Did you want to take holy orders? Did a father-confessor say no? Told you you weren't fit for the priesthood? That it?"

Silence.

"Tell me when I'm mistaken, won't you! Turned down. Revenge. Was it you?—or wasn't it?—who tipped off the Chinese to scough a mission? But a taste of religion had shown you a way to become important. Couldn't get by as a Christian. Tried another line, eh? Fell in with a shaman? You've the symptoms. One of those wandering wizards who sell poisons and love-potions? Taught you that your ugly mug was fine for scaring women, kids, sick folk, and superstitious peasants. Hell, you even tried to scare me with it, in London."

The eyes, now, of a cornered animal that daren't fight and can't run. The eyes of a gangster, not only cut off from, but deserted by his gang. Defiance dead. Nothing left but a lonely, self-pitying gloom that a man, however tough he may be, can't keep out of his. eyes when he knows the gang has disowned him. There is the same look in the eyes of an animal that has been driven from the herd.

"Who taught you Tantric Buddhism?" Tom demanded. "Did you learn it in Peking, hanging around the legations, doing odds and ends of spy work, while you looked for a religion that you could get your teeth into? Lots of exiled Tibetans in Peking."

He was taking long chances. You can't expect a bull's-eye every guess, not even when the guessing is comparatively easy. But he was watching Noropa's eyes; there wasn't a hint of a gleam of triumph to suggest that he was guessing badly. There wasn't even a look of momentary relief.

"And then the Tashi Lama—Panchen Lama, you'd call him—fled from Shigatse in Tibet to escape from the political gang in Lhasa. Wanted to go to Urga in Mongolia. But the Chinese Government was afraid the Russians might get control of him, so they forced him to go to Peking, where they gave him an apartment in the imperial palace. The Jap legation had sense enough to see his value in a second. You haven't brains enough to have thought of that. But by that time you'd made

yourself pretty useful to the undercover agents of the Japanese legation. Hadn't you? And of course, they threatened you. That's routine. Obey, or be betrayed to the Chinese and repudiated—then left to your fate. The prospect of the tortures in a Chinese dungeon didn't tempt you, but a chance to get your teeth into a good mysterious religion did. One way or another you wormed your way into the Tashi—that's to say the Panchen Lama's establishment in Peking, as a spy for the Japanese. Guard? Or were you posing as a humble supplicant for religious teaching? Or both? Answer: is that how you came to meet Lobsang Pun?"

No answer. A glare of sullen obstinacy, instantly met by a resounding crack on the jaw from Tom's fist.

"You heard me. Answer."

"Yes."

"Thought so. Who told you about the Thunder Dragon Gate and Thö-pa-ga?"

Silence. Noropa was rubbing his jaw. His lips were trembling. His fingers twitched. Insolence had begun to yield to self-pity. To keep him from rebuilding his mental resistance, Tom went at him swiftly from another angle:

"All sorts of undercover dirty work goes on, doesn't it, that the Tashi—I mean Panchen Lama doesn't know about. His Holiness is a gentle, benevolent man of peace. Some of his followers aren't. They're more ambitious for him than he is for himself. They don't tell him all that goes on, do they?"

Noropa looked puzzled. Suddenly Tom shot a statement at him, and a question:

"The Most Reverend and Holy Lobsang Pun was with the Panchen Lama for a while in Peking. Was it he who told you about Thö-pa-ga. Did Lobsang Pun tell you about the Thunder Dragon Gate?"

Silence.

"Bound you to secrecy, did he? Shall I repeat the oath for you?"

"No!" It was almost a shout.

Tom laughed. He did repeat the oath, in Tibetan:

"This supplicant, in deep humility applying for a revelation from the earthly custodian of wisdom and continual blessings—standing in awe before the blessed sacraments and in the holy presence of innumerable saints, solemnly avowing secrecy, willingly accepts the penalty of being shang-shang-hunted through hell forever, without rest or other mercy, if violating this secret at any time for any reason."

"May you die of it!" said Noropa.

Tom laughed again. He continued:

"Lobsang Pun was intriguing for Japanese help to enable the Panchen Lama to return to Tibet and kick out the political gang in Lhasa. He wasn't expecting anything for nothing, either. Didn't the

Japanese recommend you to Lobsang Pun as a suitable man to be sent to England to make Thö-pa-ga return to Tibet? Answer!"

Noropa mumbled. The combination of being kicked and hit and stripped of mystery had left him almost without a will of his own.

"You you-knowing-so-well-all-that-why-you-asking-me?" he stuttered.

"Who sent you to the Thunder Dragon Gate for training before sending you to London? Lobsang Pun?"

No answer.

"Lobsang Pun would never send you into Inner Tibet. You know as well as I do, it's sure death for a lama to do that without definite orders from Lhasa. If he did it, they'd drown him. And Lobsang Pun couldn't get orders from Lhasa. How could he? He's the Tashi—Panchen Lama's man. But you crave to go to Inner Tibet. You would like to link up with Bön magicians. I know your yearning. There are plenty like you with that complaint, but you have it badly. Therefore you attached yourself to Lobsang Pun. And him you fear and obey. There never was a terrorist who didn't have to have a secret him-who-is-to-be-obeyed. That's all that keeps you from dying of fear. Lobsang Pun is your"—he used a Tibetan word—"undeniable-one-whose-unspoken-wish-is-sooner-to-be-obeyed-than-the-spoken-commands-of-any-other-person. Lobsang Pun is my friend."

That was a staggerer. Noropa took off his spectacles, wiped his face with his sleeve and muttered. He was cursing Tom and summoning dark forces. Failed by the powers of darkness, there would be nothing left on which to base resistance. Tom went at him again:

"You half-magicians all believe your own stuff, until you find it won't work. You can't even keep a secret." He took a dangerous chance now. "The Thunder Dragon Gate is near the border between Tibet and Nepal, near Mount Everest, where the Most Reverend and Holy Lama Lobsang Pun is supposed to have spent two years immured in a cave."

Pure deduction, based on a retentive memory of hints and chance remarks. If it missed it would restore Noropa's self-confidence. But there wasn't a glimmering hint of superior knowledge in Noropa's eyes. On the contrary, a look of utter desperation had crept into them. Tom followed up:

"You weren't accepted as a disciple by Lobsang Pun. You're not his *chela*. You're a stool-pigeon. Such a man as Lobsang Pun could see through you in half a second. But he helped you to become a novice in the Thunder Dragon Gate, because he could do that without betraying his own oath. Later, he sent you to England, because you can speak English. Your job was to compel Thö-pa-ga to return. You weren't ordered to return from England. Who the hell wants a stinker like you when you've done your business? When you followed Thö-pa-ga to India, you found that Lobsang Pun was very angry with you for having dared to get in touch with the Japanese secret agents in London and Paris. Who were you that you should dare to step out?"

Noropa's face was a picture. The last layer of all of his skin of mystery was being torn off. Tom went on flaying mercilessly:

"Eiji Sarao paid your fare to India. Lobsang Pun was particularly angry with you for knowing Eiji Sarao. Now you're afraid that Lobsang Pun will slam the door on you forever. Why shouldn't he?"

Pause—a rather long one. Then:

"I am the only man in the world who can influence Lobsang Pun to overlook your misbehavior."

Not a flutter, but a kind of false dawn in Noropa's eyes. It vanished. No hurry. Two or three more mental wallops, and almost any spark of hope would look attractive.

"Lobsang Pun believes you killed Eiji Sarao because you had been rebuked for knowing Eiji Sarao and for accepting his money."

First miss! But it accomplished more than a hit. Noropa leaped with relief at a chance to prove that Tom didn't know everything.

"Damn-fool-Eiji-waking-up-and-going-library-looking-for- Dowlah-not-there-opening-cage-and-shang-shang-bit-him."

"Where's the shang-shang?"

"Library-door-open-escaping-into-hall-and-out-through-open-window-good- by."

Tom didn't dare to laugh. Noropa had no sense of humor. He couldn't be moved by imagination of Dowlah's mourning for his lost pet and the efforts of skeptics to explain away the shang-shang's killings.

"What d'you think Lobsang Pun will do to you when he learns you took money from Rajah Dowlah to kill me? I am Lobsang Pun's friend."

Silence.

"What will Dowlah do when he learns you failed?"

More silence.

"What will Lobsang Pun do when he learns you told me where the Thunder Dragon Gate is?"

"Ah-h-h! Not me! Not telling! Never!"

"No? Try to make Lobsang Pun believe you didn't tell me! Try to make the guardians of the Thunder Dragon Gate believe you didn't tell me!"

" You-who-so-well-knowing-Lobsang-Pun-you-say-you- talking-him-for-me-yes-why-you-say-that?"

Quietly: "Where is Miss Elsa Burbage?"

"Not knowing."

Tom's foot moved. Noropa flinched—spoke suddenly:

"Girl-and-Thö-pa-ga-in-auto-to-Darjeeling."

"Where is the Holy Lama Lobsang Pun?"

"In-auto-to-Darjeeling."

"Same auto?"

"Maybe 'nother auto. Not knowing."

"Coming to Darjeeling, is he? Do you want me to protect you?"

"You-you-saying-you-his-friend-you-doing-that?"

"If you obey me. You're a coward. You're a mongrel. But I'll give you a chance."

Noropa's answering gesture was one of almost weird humility. Like a de-fanged cobra, he would need time to grow new fangs and brew new venom.

"But if you miss your chance, don't look to me for pity. Walk ahead. To the car. And get in."

Noropa didn't like walking ahead. He couldn't walk fast, he had been kicked too painfully. To reach the road was about all he could manage. The Bengali had decided to take a chance with the spare tire; the blown one was beyond his skill to repair. He had carried water in a borrowed kerosene tin, but he hadn't thought of tightening the water plug. Tom attended to that.

CHAPTER 20.

"Did you have trouble with this man?"

DARJEELING enjoys a climate. It endures the weather. All the way up the magnificent drive from Siliguri Tom leaned back on the comfortless cushions and let his lungs fill with pine scent borne on the snow-sweetened breezes from the Roof of the World. He sat cornerwise, to keep an eye on Noropa, but he only spoke to him once in a while, with long pauses, always speaking suddenly, to give the man no time to invent lies.

"Can you catch a shang-shang?"

"No, no!"

"You useless duffer!"

"Not-yet-learning-how-to-do-it. That-is-secret-only-known-to-some-few-persons-specially-chosen."

"Uh-huh. Do they ever get bitten?"

"No, no. Same-as-serpent-charmers-never-bitten-knowing-proper-magic."

"Is a shang-shang solitary?"

"Oh, yes." Noropa shuddered. "She-shang-shang-slaying-any-other-coming-near-it."

"Who said so?"

"I seeing."

"When?"

"Two-three time."

Sudden rain put an end to the conversation. Not the climate, weather. Black clouds, shot with lightning, rolled above the mountain. Purple gloom. Chill air. A stupendous deluge that in two or three seconds made an overflowing bathtub of the canvas top. Noropa, speaking vehemently, named the devils who had done it. Being rotten, the canvas burst and let fall about a hundred pounds of water into Tom's and Noropa's laps. The spare tire chose that moment for a blow-out. The driver announced he was out of petrol. With the air of resignation of a captain who has done his utmost and now proposes to sink with the ship, he bowed his head over the wheel and nasally praised Allah.

Tom paid him and left him. A walk in the rain would do Noropa good; it would supple him up where the kicks had left him stiff and painful. It was only three or four miles to their destination. Noropa could carry the bag. That, too, would do him good. It would serve to increase his consciousness of defeat. Noropa made a fuss about it. He pretended the elevation made him breathless, that the rain chilled him and that the sheer weight of the downpour broke his strength. But he didn't like being laughed at, and he liked still less the prospect of being kicked. So he shouldered the bag and walked ahead, as commanded.

To reach the Ringding Gelong Monastery, you avoid the township. You follow the wonderful road that skirts the cliff, where landslides once fell in the rain upon snoozing villages and buried them and all the intervening forest beneath hundreds of acres of wet earth. Four miles along that road, above an aromatic ocean of deodars, and you round a corner and see the monastery rather suddenly, a bit below you. It faces the Himalayas, with Darjeeling above, at its back. From its roof you can see Tibet. In fine weather the horizon-long Himalayas seem only a few miles distant.

The rain over Darjeeling, being due to the weather, not the climate, cleared as suddenly as it had come. The sun light burst forth and shone upon gleaming rocks and roaring torrents. It was almost impossible to hear anything above the raging of rain-fed waterfalls. Tom paused to stare at the northern sky line. He loved that view. He watched a dark patch, about the size of a postage stamp, moving across the surface of the distant snow—a storm in the Hills—a killer. His ears were full of the cascade music. He didn't hear a car overtake him—wasn't, in fact, aware of it until it passed and stopped beside Noropa, who was waiting patiently. An Indian policeman got out of the car and ordered Noropa to the front seat beside the driver. Noropa obeyed without saying a word, as if he believed Tom had done this by superior magic. What else could it be? Tom hadn't phoned—wired—sent a message ahead.

A police officer on the rear seat called to Tom:

"Is that your bag he's carrying?"

Tom went up and took the bag in silence. The officer stood up to remove his waterproof.

"You're wet through," he remarked. "How far are you going?"

"I'll be all right. Not far. Is he under arrest?"

"Detention. Suspected of being an unregistered alien—held for investigation." The officer looked straight into Tom's eyes. He wasn't smiling, but his eyes looked merry. "Incomunicado," he added. "The station-master phoned from Siliguri. You're expected, so we kept a dekho lifting. Followed you along to a quiet place. Is his name Noropa?"

"That's what he says his name is. Who expects me?"

"Some one at the Ringding Gelong Monastery."

"Okay."

The officer studied the beaten-dog glare in Noropa's eyes:

"Did you have any trouble with this man?"

"None whatever. Take care of him, please. I guess I'll need him."

Hugging Noropa's poisoned dagger beneath his jacket, and carrying his own bag, Tom trudged away toward the monastery, humming to himself.

CHAPTER 21.

"Quite a scholar, the old abbot."

THE Ringding Gelong Monastery is a rather large one, built in the Tibetan style, with a great main building like a keep and a number of courtyards. It dates from the days when Darjeeling was within the political boundary ruled by the Maharajah of Sikkim. There were no railways in those days. So there are stables, in the first courtyard, for a great number of transport animals. Almost the first thing Tom noticed, as he did his greetings under the arch over the main entrance, was that the stables in the first courtyard were crowded with Tibetan ponies. There were more than forty obvious camp-followers squatting in groups in the yard, smelly fellows with their sheepskin jackets rolled up beside them. Loads by the dozen, roped and ready.

"Tum-Glain! Tum-Glain!" The sloe-eyed monk on duty at the gate was all smiles. He took Tom's bag and passed it to another monk.

Tom was expected; they made that evident. They asked all the proper questions about his health and well-being, and they blessed him with countless blessings. But beyond that, they said nothing at all.

He was led across two courtyards, in one of which some devil-dancers were practising. Their steps looked very comical without masks and costumes. They were being narrowly watched by twenty Tibetans who were seated with their backs against the wall, beneath a long wooden gallery that served as corridor for the cells and dormitories on the upper story. One was an obvious shaman of the type who wander all over Tibet, Turkestan and Mongolia, working fake magical cures, selling poison and telling fortunes. The men who sat near him looked like herdsman.

But one man sat apart. A Bön priest, six paces away from a sturdy-looking novice. They two were hooded mystery men—magicians—real practitioners of the black arts that survived the conversion

of Tibet to Buddhism. There was no mistaking them. They were what Noropa craved to be. Insolent eyes. Lips that wouldn't care to tell the truth if they were offered for it all the plunder in the world.

Until they noticed Tom's arrival all the others were as rapt as children at a picture-show, dividing their attention between the devil-dancers and the monks on the opposite roof who were extracting one another's beards with tweezers. But they two sat in meditation in the attitude that only Bön magicians can assume. It is acquired by years of self-torture, and it looks like a caricature of the posture of Buddhist saints.

They had strange-looking luggage. It was certainly not Tibetan—or, at any rate, the baskets weren't. Those might have come from the Salween country in Upper Burma, where there is cane of which to make such things and a more or less Chinese idea of what cane can be fashioned to do. Shaped like flat loaves, to be slung on poles and borne by women, or to be mounted one on each side of a horse. The two biggest were round, like snake-charmers' baskets, only much bigger—cart-wheel diameter—with slightly domed lids, and neatly covered with waterproofed cloth. Nothing Tibetan about that.

All the same, all those men were recently from Tibet. They bore all the signs of having come a long way, by forced marches. Except for the Bön magician and his novice, who sat motionless, they were all munching the last of their Tibetan cheese. On top of one basket was a hunk of yak-meat that stank like the devil; they had partly covered it with a scrap of cloth and the cloth was black with flies. All except the Bön magicians stared at Tom with the silent curiosity of nomads.

Tom turned aside to speak to them. The Bön priest ignored him as if he didn't exist. So did the novice. He asked the others, in Tibetan, whose servants they were. They got up and stood between him and the big baskets.

The monk came running and almost dragged Tom away. He led him up the well-remembered stone steps to the gallery. The Bön priest moved. Followed by his novice he went to the middle of the courtyard and got in the way of the dancers, in order to watch Tom as he walked the entire length of the gallery and turned down a passage toward where Abbot Mu-ni Gam-po's chamber faced the winds from the Roof of the World.

Through a heavy teak door into the antechamber. That was nothing more than a wide, dim, masonry passage with a very small window and stone benches against the walls for the attendant monks. There were four monks. The most solemn of the four—he had ears that resembled the lugs on a cast-iron cooking-pot—entered the inner room and came out bowing. He dismissed Tom's guide with scant ceremony. The guide was evidently not a suitable person to enter that sanctum on a Thursday forenoon. Tom entered alone. The thick door thudded at his back.

A weird light, from two arched windows wide apart in masonry walls many feet thick. Heavy roof beams in the gloom above the shafts of sunshine. An image of Chenrezi* against one wall, flanked by beautiful paintings of the Buddha. Two prayer wheels on a heavy table that was almost invisible in mid-room because of the difficult light. A prayer drum, in an iron frame on the floor, rigged up with a treadle and the free-wheel mechanism from a bicycle. Old Mu-ni Gam-po was notorious as an innovator, and a humorist to boot. The prayer drum had been given a good treadling, perhaps by the monk who had announced Tom; it went on spinning for two or three minutes; two or three hundred repetitions of the thousands of prayers written on little scraps of paper in the drum.

[**Chenrezi*—the Tibetan name of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the patron deity of Tibet; the god of mercy and universal compassion. The Dalai Lama is considered to be an incarnation of Chenrezi.]

There were two men in the room, but the light was so baffling that he could only recognize one of them. Old Abbot Mu-ni Gam-po hadn't changed in the least. He stepped down from his dais between the windows, black-robed and benevolent, all smiles and blessings.

"Tum-Glain! Tum-Glain!"

He was very stoop-shouldered from reading and writing all day long in a light that would have destroyed most men's eyesight. As thin as a wraith, all wrinkles. Big ears with long lobes. Big, good-humored eyes and a firm mouth. Skin the color of old parchment. Full of chuckles that shook his frail body. A deep voice:

"Tum-Glain! Tum-Glain!" Then in sonorous Tibetan: "O Nobly Born, a hundred thousand times a hundred thousand welcomes!"

Two or three minutes (and Tom out of practise) of galloping Tibetan syllables, chained together into words a yard long that spilled themselves into sentences like sunlit water burbling over gravel. Then old Mu-ni Gam-po took Tom's hand and led him toward the farther window. In the shadow to one side of it the other man sat on a throne like the Abbot's, only smaller, of raised masonry spread with a woolen rug woven in Lhasa and blessed in Tashi-lunpo. Mu-ni Gam-po patted Tom between the shoulders as he introduced him to the son of sunlight, incarnation of Kun-fu-tse and blessed with millions of blessings—Norman Johnson!

"How d'you do," he said gruffly, staring as if Tom hadn't any business to be there.

Tom laughed. He went and treadled the prayer drum until it spun like an electric fan.

"That's how," he answered. "I'm raring to go."

"Oh, yes?" said Johnson.

His manner and appearance were the same as they had been in Delhi. There was the same sullen glower in his eyes, the same hectoring note in his voice, the same heft to his shoulders, even in repose, as if he were thrusting his way through a crowd.

"Don't you ever sit down?" he demanded.

Tom went and sat on the deep window embrasure between him and Mu-ni Gam-po. There was nowhere else to sit, except the table or the floor. Mu-ni Gam-po struck a gong, commanded, and presently a monk brought in a chair. He set it facing the light. Tom moved it out of the wedge-shaped zone of sunlight and sat down where he could watch both men's faces as conveniently as they could watch his.

Johnson glared at Tom as if he were some sort of strange animal under scrutiny. However, Tom didn't mind being stared at.

"You interrupted a conversation," said Johnson, after at least a minute's silence. "The Reverend Abbot was giving me his views of the situation in Tibet. His Reverence, as I dare say you know, is a Yellow-hat Lama. His religious convictions impose upon him a consistently pacifistic attitude.

The present state of anarchy in Tibet deeply grieves him. His constant prayers have inspired him, so he tells me, to keep this monastery open to all-comers, of whatever faction. Thus he keeps himself well informed of what is happening beyond the border. He would like to return to Tibet, to die in peace at Tashi-lunpo."

He talked like a lecturer to a class of students of anatomy—as if there were a corpse in front of him and the students must listen whether they liked or not.

"However," he continued, "should His Reverence return to Tibet, he might be murdered without having accomplished anything."

He paused. He appeared to expect comment. Tom glanced at the Abbot:

"What would happen to this monastery, if His Reverence should go away? No fat brethren as long as he's here! No unchaste ones who aren't whipped and given 'solitary.' None who dares to miss a midnight service! I've attended those services—cold—draughty—full ceremonial—no cuts. But he makes 'em like it."

Mu-ni Gam-po beamed. Johnson shot a sudden question at Tom.

"Do you know what happened to the Dalai Lama?"

"Sure. They poisoned him."

"Who did?"

"Some of his own political gang in Lhasa."

"Why?"

"He was too pro-British, for one thing. Too sincere. Wouldn't stand for sending Bön monks to try to poison the exiled Tashi Lama. He was for letting the Tashi Lama return to Tibet."

"How long were you in Tibet?"

"Two years."

"You knew the Dalai Lama, of course? I mean, you met him?"

"Well," said Tom, "they poisoned him. You can't ask him that, can you."

"I am trying to discover where your prejudices lie, Mr. Grayne."

"They don't lie," said Tom. "It's the truth, I haven't any. I'm here to listen."

"I have been told you propose to return to Tibet."

No answer.

"It is no business of mine," said Johnson. "My department is a purely decorative one. I assemble dry facts and write reports that no one reads. I understand you carry an American passport."

"Yes. I have it with me."

"Do you know that there are laws and treaties specifically forbidding foreigners of almost every nationality from entering Tibet?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I understand that."

"The Indian Government has solemnly pledged itself not to permit British subjects to cross the Tibetan border."

Tom sat silent. Mu-ni Gam-po appeared to have gone into meditation. Johnson resumed:

"An Englishwoman, who marries an American, becomes an American citizen, doesn't she, Mr. Grayne?"

Tom laughed. "Damned if I know. The laws are funny. She'd be eligible, under certain conditions. Go on. You're telling me."

"No American," said Johnson, "can be classified as British. That might not hold in Tibet, where I imagine they don't know the difference. But we are under no treaty obligations to guard the Tibetan frontier against American citizens. We are equally under no obligation to protect Americans in Tibet."

"Hell. D'you mean you wouldn't send the British fleet to Lhasa, over them thar hills?"

Johnson rose abruptly. "I must go. I have an appointment. Will you see me to the stairhead?"

"Come back, Tum-Glain. Come quick back," said Mu-ni Gam-po.

Johnson shook hands with the Abbot and then lingered in the anteroom to talk with one of the attendant monks. Tom went ahead and waited midway along the gallery, where he watched the devil-dancers until Johnson overtook him.

"Are you hurt?" asked Johnson. "You carry your left arm pretty close to your side."

"No," said Tom. "I'm all right."

Johnson shed his brusqueness: "Quite a scholar, the old Abbot. He is worried about some books in the British Museum. He wants them sent to him, to be returned to Tibet, on the ground that they're sacred and were stolen in the first instance. The request seems reasonable. I have put him in touch with Dr. Mayor. You know Mayor, I believe."

"Yes," said Tom, "I know him." He wasn't going to get garrulous just because a brusque ethnologist had suddenly turned civil.

"Funny," said Johnson. "Old Mu-ni Gam-po wouldn't write to Mayor for fear his correspondence might be opened by the censor. We've a pretty drastic censorship in force, on account of the Indian Nationalist troubles and one thing and another. But that needn't have bothered him. I suppose he's touchy. I had to apply for authority to give him my personal word of honor that his letters won't be opened in transit." He stared at Tom. "Of course," he added, "we never censor anything that comes from Tibet addressed to Mu-ni Gam-po himself. If we did, he'd soon know it. He might retaliate by ceasing to keep us informed, and that'd be awkward. Those rogues down below us, for instance,

have undoubtedly brought him secret news. If it's important he'll drop us a hint. Do you know any one in Dorking?"

"I did," Tom answered. He looked as suddenly casual as a hunter who sees his quarry with the side of his eye.

Johnson smiled. "Dangerous place, Dorking. Lots of traffic accidents. Police there are very officious."

Tom reciprocated promptly. He could hardly have asked for a plainer hint.

"Thank you. Speaking of police," he said, "some of your men might recognize this." He produced Noropa's dagger from under his left arm. "Careful! It's poisoned."

"Found that, did you? May I have it?"

"Yes," said Tom. "If you can't find its original owner, label it a souvenir from—" he began to spell it, pausing on the second letter—"D—o—"

"Dorking! Yes, yes. I must show this to Abdul Mirza. He arrived this morning to discuss the mysterious death of a Japanese merchant. Abdul Mirza knows some one who is rather an authority on unusual weapons and rare poisons. You know Abdul Mirza?"

"Good guy."

"Very. To all intents and purposes he governs Naini Kol. I must get him to ask his scientific friend about this thing—dagger would you call it?—before the—ah—scientific friend goes into retirement. Abdul Mirza tells me you know Lobsang Pun."

"Know him? The old hellion booted me out of Tibet. Damn his eyes, he waited until it was almost a cinch I'd be caught by winter in the passes."

"So you're enemies, eh?"

"I like him first rate," Tom answered. "The man's a gentleman. He wouldn't stoop to dirty murder. But he'd laugh like hell if you or I should run into something we couldn't buck. Then he'd pray for our souls, to a bunch of saints who know what humor is. He's a high altitude, high church humorist."

"He's a dangerous man," said Johnson. "If old Lobsang Pun could have persuaded the Japanese to do the fighting for him, the Tashi Lama would be spiritual ruler of Asia, with all the temporal power that Lobsang Pun could filch for him. But the Japanese, as I understand it, turned him down. Both sides wanted too much, I imagine. Such men as Lobsang Pun make bitter enemies. If he should happen to be murdered while he's under our protection, there'd be hell to pay. But who knows which his enemies are?" He changed the subject abruptly:

"I hope the police didn't give you a scare this morning, Mr. Grayne. The station-master phoned them from Siliguri, so something had to be done in the way of eyewash."

"Scaring me wouldn't matter," said Tom. "I'm used to it. But third degree would—"

"Tut-tut, man, we never use it. In special cases, to prevent anything of that sort, it's the rule for an officer to keep a prisoner under continuous observation. That Noropa person is a mean customer. It was just as well to lock him up until we could discuss him with you. We don't want an American citizen murdered in India. Your State Department could be very unpleasant about it."

"Oh, they wouldn't bother about me," said Tom. "I may need Noropa."

"You may have him—delivered, if you like, in cellophane. Simply press the button."

"If they should tell him he was being let go as a personal favor to me, he'd come and find me. He's feeling friendly at the moment."

"Very well. But he'd better be shadowed, or he might double back. We don't want him in Delhi."

"Thank you for the tip about how to get my mail through."

"Not at all. You may count on that. You'll reciprocate, of course?"

"You bet."

"Anything addressed to me in Delhi, in any kind of envelope marked Secret, reaches me unopened. Thunder Dragon Gate! Where is it? What is it? Why is it? Facts, if you please, Mr. Grayne. And don't get bumped off. It isn't you I'm thinking of."

"Sure. I get you."

"Well then, good luck."

"Thanks, and same to you."

Johnson turned away abruptly and strode along the gallery toward the stone stairs. Tom turned the other way, toward the Abbot's chamber. Neither man glanced back ward. Tom was humming to himself. His stride was vigorous —springy—the stride of a man who smells the wind and sees the long trail open.

CHAPTER 22.

"Fine."

TOM lost no time about eliminating Dorking from his line of communication. Abbot Mu-ni Gam-po was delighted to have him draft a letter in English to Professor Mayor. The Abbot copied the letter, in beautiful handwriting, taking nearly an hour to do it. He enclosed with it, in the same sealed envelop, one in Tom's handwriting that Mayor's deaf-and-dumb filing clerk would know what to do with.

Carefully written with one of Mu-ni Gam-po's fine pens, it covered two sheets of closely written paper. The fine pen-point went through the paper here and there. Mayor would read the letter and toss it to the deaf-and-dumb Pole to be filed away. The Pole would transcribe the pen-pricked letters only. They would then read:

Eiji Sarao dead. Jap system may be out of gear for time being. Indian Government Number One using me and in return guarantees my mail by this route secret. Leaving for Tibet. Pronto.

The Polish filing clerk would add to that message the words "No. 88 to No. 1" and would mail it, in a plain envelope, to an address in the west of London. It would reach Washington sooner or later.

The next thing was to get Mu-ni Gam-po to act as secret postmaster and to protect all letters with his big Tibetan seal. That had to be done tactfully. Very Reverend Abbots, even more than other people, mustn't let the right hand know the good or evil that the left is doing. It says so, definitely, in nearly all the sacred scriptures, of all nations.

So there was patiently copious conversation, cordial, evasive of the issue, guarded. The Abbot continually questioned Tom about European politics. Tom knew not much more about those than he had read in the papers. In fact, the Abbot knew more than he did. Tom kept returning to the subject of the Tibetan books in the British Museum, little by little increasing the stress on the fact that he was intimately friendly with Professor Mayor. The Abbot wished to be told about President Roosevelt.

They had drunk not less than twenty cups of tea apiece, and it was growing dark; they had discussed the probable action of the League of Nations in regard to Italy and Ethiopia, the behavior of Japan in Manchukuo, and the state of religion in Russia; Tom had had to struggle to explain the New Deal in the United States (it was the first time he had ever seriously tried to understand it!) before Mu-ni Gam-po gently and persuasively suggested that, if Tom should write now and then to Professor Mayor, and if he, the humble Abbot Mu-ni Gam-po should forward the letters, perhaps Professor Mayor might be thereby reminded to employ a little of his illustrious influence to procure the return of the stolen sacred books. That settled that. They understood each other without having swapped any naive confidences. Not even Tom would be able to swear that the Abbot knew what was going on.

Then solemn ceremony in the monastery chapel, Tom looking down from the gloom of the heavily beamed gallery. A lamp-lit altar, spread with the Eight Happy Symbols and large incense pots. A great stone image of Chenrezi, twenty-five feet high, between smaller images of Padma Sambhava and Atisa. The entire dimness hung with painted banners. Rows on rows of half-seen monks all bowed in the flickering shadows cast by scores of tiny oil lamps. At intervals they laid their foreheads on the floor in adoration. Gongs. Horns. A tinkling silver bell. A murmur, a drone that swelled into a chant and died away, to be awakened again by Mu-ni Gam-po's golden voice. In his robes, in the lamp-lit dimness, the old Abbot looked like a wooden carving come to life; his acolytes and ministering monks, patient though they were, in comparison resembled lively worldlings in a hurry to be through with ceremony and receive their blessing. There was no sign of the Bön magician's party, though they might have been beneath the gallery, where Tom couldn't have seen them.

After that, the evening meal in the dim refectory. The old Abbot ate supper alone; not even for Tum-Glain would he set aside that rule. Tom filed into the refectory behind the hooded monks, all two by two, and took his seat near the door. Prayer. Blessing. Silence, save for the sound of munching and the noise of spoons and platters. Tea, cheese, barley bread. Good grub. Tom was used to it. He had long ago learned how to chew the lightly cooked grain so that, like the monks, he needed not enough of it to bloat him, though he ate enough to leave the table feeling fit for a forced march.

Again, not a sign of the Bön magician's party. Perhaps, as rank heretics and blasphemers, they were being fed in the outer courtyard along with the stablemen and horsemen.

Prayer, quite a lot of that. Blessing, a bit quick and perfunctory. Then up the stone stair to the guest cell, along a passage leading from the gallery between two long dormitories, fifty yards from the Abbot's chamber at the other corner of the building. Good clean quarters, though a trifle draughty from the small, square, unglazed windows that faced the Himalayas. Plain stone walls and floor. A truckle bed. A chair. A little table. A lamp in a niche in the wall. A strip of matting. A teak door two inches thick, without a lock but with a peephole for the dutiful-observant-brother- going-rounds-approving-silent-meditation-and-no-visiting- each-other-in-the-night.

The sound of a bell about every fifteen minutes. Dutiful-observant-brother's eye, and then his big mouth at the peephole and his knuckles on the teak:

"Blessed-night-of-celebration-of-wonder-working- incarnation-of-the-precious-Lord- Avalokitesvara-whose-mission- is-to-liberate-humanity-from-the-Eight-Great-Perils-humbly- make-your-meditation-before-midnight-service."

Thud-thud again on the teak and the slap on stone of dutiful-observant-brother's retreating sandals. Thud-thud on another door, and another, and another. A monk might sleep if he could.

Then the weather again, not the climate. Darjeeling actually boasts of a hundred inches of rain in June. But it wasn't June. It was merely getting ready for June, six weeks ahead. The rain came down in swishing torrents that cascaded to the courtyard flags until night was all one tumult of crashing and gurgling water.

Damp walls, as cold as the devil. Meditation indicated. Tom, in two shirts and his sleeved leather waistcoat, was meditating where to buy the necessary garments for the venture into Tibet, when he heard a clatter in the inner courtyard that sounded more like stones being thrown from the roof than falling rain. A twenty-foot radong* blared like a fog horn. Shouts. Hoof-beats—couldn't be anything else: the walls re-echoed them until they sounded like a regiment of horse arriving.

[*Radong (Tibetan)—a long, trumpet-like ritual instrument with a bell-shaped end. Often telescopic.]

Tom made his way to the gallery by torchlight reflected off the wet walls of the courtyard. A fabulous scene. Some of the light was electric—one of Mu-ni Gam-po's innovations, very good for discovering monks up to mischief in holes and corners. Economical, too: penalty-of-work-in-meditation- time-on-monastery-woodpile-paying-cost-of-batteries-for-torches.

Seen through the rain from above, the electric torches and the spluttering pine-knots weirdly suggested a wet night in Trafalgar Square. There were things that suggested Landseer's lions, dripping wet. In place of Nelson's Column in the midst, there was a man on horseback.

Couldn't possibly mistake that man—even from above, in pouring rain, near midnight—even under that pointed black hood, on a steaming horse, beneath a small black canopy on long poles held by four men, that kept him liberally splashed with water from its tasseled fringe whenever the horse moved or the bearers fell out of step. He was riding forward across the courtyard toward the gallery, dead slow.

The things that looked at first like Landseer's lions revealed themselves after a moment or two as enormous, shapeless loads covered by black tarpaulins. Six or eight men—a confusion of legs—staggered beneath each.

There were monks on the run, all hooded, with their robes up and the torchlight gleaming on wet bare thighs and calves. Greetings. A great howdydo of obeisance. A big yellow umbrella that wouldn't come open was being made ready by monks who struggled against gusty squalls at the foot of the gallery stairs. Even the Lord Abbot of a Ringding Gelong Monastery must be summoned from his bed, or meditation as the case may be, to do the honors for such a prelate as the Most Reverend and Holy Lobsang Pun.

It was he all right. He bulked on the back of the horse like a black balloon, but he sat the saddle like an experienced horseman. The thrice-blessed horse was a little bit gone in the knees and looked inclined to kneel and pray beneath the staggering weight. But the total effect was magnificent.

Tom stared. Lobsang Pun on the march meant climax. It meant that one of Asia's dynamic geniuses had decided to forge an event or two, instead of waiting for Time and Destiny to do it.

Mu-ni Gam-po passed, followed by his four attendants, hurrying along the gallery. They took no notice of Tom. They had passed him a minute ago; he was leaning, head and shoulders in the rain, with his elbows on the rail, when he felt a touch on his shoulder. He didn't turn. Probably one of the monks had been sent to tell him to keep out of sight. He stole the last second to stare at the scene.

"So you're Tum-Glain, are you! I asked for Mr. Tom Grayne and they corrected my pronunciation!"

"Elsa! Well, thank the Lord! Where's Thö-pa-ga?"

"At Nancy Strong's."

"How is he?"

"Moony. But he's better. He began to get better as soon as we started to climb from Siliguri."

"Moony? About you?"

"Yes. And he's afraid to go to Tibet. He's like a man awaiting execution. Nancy Strong offered to keep him as a teacher in her school, but he says—you know his funny phrases—spiritual things might happen. What he means is, he's afraid of shang-shang sendings. He's afraid they would wish them on Nancy Strong."

"She lend you the waterproof? It's nearly big enough for Lobsang Pun! Who brought you here?"

"I came. I didn't need to be brought. I held Lobsang Pun's horse's tail. He didn't mind. Nancy Strong says you will send me back to England. Tom—please!"

"How did you come from Delhi?"

"Some one's carriage to the Edith Cavell Hospital, I don't know whose. Then—"

"Why did you go to the hospital?"

"Dr. Lewis asked me to, at Dowlah's house, when he was testing my blood-pressure. He didn't test it seriously. What he wanted to do was to talk. I didn't see him at the hospital. He was operating, or so the head night-nurse said. They brought Thö-pa-ga down—he was hysterical, he was so glad to see me—and the carriage took us about twenty minutes' drive through dark streets to a place where a big closed Daimler car was waiting. Some one had brought my bag from the hotel and paid the bill, the receipt was on top of the bag, tucked under the strap. We were off in a minute. It was a perfectly wonderful drive, and—"

"Before that happened, did Dowlah send you with a message to Lobsang Pun?"

"No. Abdul Mirza's servant did. He begged me not to mention Dowlah, so I didn't. He asked me to go with Noropa, in a closed carriage, and say that Eiji Sarao was dying and must speak to Lobsang Pun before it was too late. The house we went to seemed to be heavily guarded. We drove through so many streets in the dark that I haven't the slightest idea where it was. The walls were hung with Tibetan pictures. Lobsang Pun turned out to be the man to whom Eiji Sarao had introduced me through a panel in the wall of a shop in the Chandni Chowk that afternoon. Tom, it was fun. I loved it. All intrigue. Lobsang Pun—enormous—like a great gorilla in a black robe—in a rather dark room, all lined with carved wood. Of course I knew Eiji Sarao wasn't really dying. I lied to a most reverend and holy prelate! Wasn't that awful? He could speak pretty good English, and he asked me lots of questions about Thö-pa-ga."

"Did he speak to Noropa?"

"Yes. He cursed him. He called some one and ordered Noropa driven from the house. They treated Noropa pretty roughly. I felt sorry for him, though on the way in the carriage he had done his best to scare me. He kept looking into my eyes. He kept repeating one sentence: 'Telling Lob sang Pun Noropa brought you! Telling Lobsang Pun Noropa brought you!' I think he tried to hypnotize me, but perhaps he's mad. Anyhow, I didn't say Noropa had brought me. The last I saw of Noropa was when he was thrown out of that house into a dark street. Lobsang Pun came with me in the carriage, back to Dowlah's house, and another carriage followed us, full of, I think, Tibetans. They all had weapons, and excepting Lobsang Pun they all acted scared. Lobsang Pun seemed just the opposite of scared. He treated me like a favorite niece or something. He held my hand all the way in the carriage and kept patting it and laughing."

"So you were in Dowlah's house when Lobsang Pun was in there?"

"No, I wasn't. Abdul Mirza met me at the front door and took me back to the carriage. He leaned through the window and said 'Be clever, sweet maid, and let who will be good. Open your eyes and shut your mouth, be kind to Thö-pa-ga, and you shall see where King George will send you!' He told the coachman where to drive, and the next thing I was at the hospital, where I knew what to do."

"You did well," said Tom. "Did Dowlah proposition you at any time?"

"Oh, yes. All through dinner. He was rather good at it. He has an original line. I couldn't consult you of course, so I pretended to be awfully thrilled but rather scared."

"Why didn't you come here first?" Tom asked. "Why did you go to Nancy Strong's house?"

"Shouldn't I have? Thö-pa-ga wanted to go there. Dr. Lewis had advised it, though he said I should probably find you here. It was awfully late, but Nancy Strong seemed to expect us. She had food ready, and two bedrooms prepared. She expected me to stay the night. But Tom, her account of her conversation with you in the train—I couldn't stay still until I had asked you about it. She said—"

"How did you meet Lobsang Pun again?"

"He came to Nancy Strong's house on horseback. I've no idea where he came from. He may have overtaken us in another auto during the night. Or he may have come by plane. I simply don't know. He demanded to see Thö-pa-ga, who was already in bed, so Nancy Strong took him to Thö-pa-ga's bedroom, and I don't know what happened. I should say he was alone with Thö-pa-ga for at least half an hour. Nancy Strong told me Lobsang Pun was coming here to see Mu-ni Gam-po. She said she was glad he was leaving her house, because his enemies are after him and there might be serious trouble. So I borrowed her waterproof, and I didn't ask Lobsang Pun's leave or anything. I just held on to his horse's tail, because it was dark and I could hardly force my way against the rain. I'm wet, but here I am. And now, Tom, tell me."

He met her eyes and spoke bluntly:

"I have promised to do my best to persuade you to return to England."

Elsa waited several seconds before she answered. Her face, in the reflected torchlight, was a picture of alarm—wide-eyed. She didn't flinch, but her voice changed:

"Tom, do you think that's honorable?"

Tom's voice had changed, too: "I can't go back on a promise."

A pause—bleak, grim, gusty—eyes to eyes in semi-darkness.

"How about your promise to me?"

Thunder and lightning cannonaded for sixty seconds before he could answer:

"That was conditional."

He writhed. He knew he couldn't keep her from detecting it. He knew the keenness of her enthusiasm, the sharpness of her disappointment. He could guess how she felt by how he himself felt. That was why he had set his jaw and raised his voice to make it harshly penetrate the noise of splashing and of voices echoed off the courtyard walls. Even in his own ears it sounded cruel.

Lobsang Pun and Mu-ni Gam-po, followed by a dozen monks, were coming up the stone stairway. He took Elsa's arm and almost hustled her into the dark passage that led toward his cell. There he faced her again. It wasn't easier, even so, where he could hardly see her eyes.

"Conditional on the marriage being secret," he said. "It isn't. They know it."

"Yes," she answered. "Nancy Strong didn't say so, but I knew she knew it, from the way she spoke about your conversation on the train." She laid her hands on his forearms. "Tom—do you believe I told?"

"No. I know you didn't."

"Did you tell?"

"No. But I've admitted it. They've checked back. Simply routine, that. Punch a button nowadays, and you can find out anything, about anybody. The gaff's blown, Elsa."

"Tom, are you being fair? Have I failed you? Is there any reason, that we didn't discuss before we left England, why you should order me home now?"

"No, by God," he answered. "Damn the woman. I told her flat I wouldn't order you home."

"Then I won't go."

"Fine," said Tom. "That settles that. Tell her I kept my promise."

She laughed, suddenly, gaily. "Tom, you're—Please forgive me. I was scared. I was afraid I hadn't made good. I should have known you wouldn't use a trick to get rid of me. She didn't say so, but she made me think you had asked her to have me sent home."

"Hold on to yourself," he answered. "Scares have hardly begun. Eiji Sarao is dead—of a shang-shang bite. They've canned Dowlah—caught him double-crossing every one, I don't doubt. They have okayed you, unless Nancy Strong should report unfavorably and I don't think she will. They've given me my head and all the privilege I could ask. I have Noropa by the short hair. I've a line on where the Thunder Dragon Gate is. Now we go to the mat with Lobsang Pun. The old bird's a top-notch, so there won't be any easy show-down. He's the Tashi Lama's political chief of staff. He's the Tibetan Number One. When Number One steps out, there's trouble. If his enemies are out to get him, that's my answer to all the prayers I've prayed since I was your size. You'd better stay and see the midnight ceremony. Are you too wet? Are you tired? Wait, I'll get a blanket for you. If we're in the gallery before the show begins there'll be no questions asked."

CHAPTER 23.

"They're taking Thö-Pa-Ga away!"

THE dark gallery ran the entire length of one side of the chapel. It was so high up under the roof that Tom could touch the rafters. No lamps up there, but there was plenty to look at if one could only see it. Wood carving. Pictures. His little pocket flash-light hardly served to show the details of a Tantric Hell depicted on a panel on the rear wall. A sound, while he and Elsa were looking at that, drew his attention to the fact that they were not alone in the gallery. He left her in the dark and went to investigate.

The Bön magician, his novice, the shaman and four more of the party he had seen in the courtyard, were grouped together at the far end, in the darkest corner. They had had to move the benches to make room for their two big baskets covered with black waterproofing. They stirred like evil birds disturbed by the pin-ray light. The shaman spoke, in Tibetan. He said nothing polite. Tom didn't answer. There was nothing to be gained by trying to make conversation. He groped his way back to Elsa and they went to the opposite end of the gallery overlooking the high altar. The benches were too low for any one seated to see over the rail to the floor below, so they leaned on the breast-high rail.

There were little lights on the altar, and two big lamps at the opposite end, but all the middle of the chapel was in darkness until two monks entered, one with an electric torch to show the other where to use his taper on a long pole. They lighted all the little oil-lamps in the niches in the walls, and in the iron lanterns hanging from the beams, until the chapel was aswim with smoky light that spread rich shadows flickering amid colored banners and upon the calm features of Chenrezi above the high altar. But it was almost as dark as before, up there in the gallery.

After a while the gallery door squeaked open and thudded shut. Footsteps. Stealthy. No slap of sandals. Tom used his flash-light. It wasn't bigger than a cigarette-case; it made a circle of light about two feet in diameter.

In the midst of that appeared Noropa's death-mask face—Noropa's eyes, like a cat's. He was smiling—the first smile Tom had seen on that humorless face—wan, hideous, a bit pitiful, unpleasant. He came forward, making very little noise for such a tall, strong, awkward specimen. He thrust his face close to Tom's, stuttered and then spoke with more than his usual breathless speed, as if a thousand syllables could form only one word:

"My-not-knowing-you-such-very-Number-One-man-they-letting- me-go-saying-you-demanding. Now-my-understanding-you-plotecting-my- obeying."

The man was trembling with excitement, or relief, or anxiety—or perhaps with all three. He could speak English better than that when he was in a normal condition.

"What did the police do to you?" Tom asked.

"Nothing-only-telling-me-your-being-Number-One-Amelikan. My-being-glad-plotection-and-obeying-Number-One."

"Go and find out what's in those baskets. Come back and tell me."

Tom drew Elsa close to him. She snuggled and he felt for given for suggesting she should go home. He laid his hand on her neck to feel if she was shivering with cold. She wasn't. He found her hand and used their private code:

"Giving Noropa his chance. That man in the far corner is a black magician—Bön—perhaps a hot wire."

"Do you trust Noropa?"

"Too friendly all of a sudden."

Monks began filing in, two by two, until the floor below resembled a dark carpet of bowed heads. At the far end, facing the altar, a raised stone platform was left clear. The wall behind it was hung with pictures of Tibetan saints. Old Mu-ni Gam-po, followed by acolytes and ministrants, entered to the sound of a gong and weird wind-music that accompanied a chant. He took his seat on the high-backed throne-chair beside the altar. Motionless, in heavy vestments, he looked like a carving in old wood and ivory. One monk, seated beside a flat drum, which he tapped with a strangely irregular beat, intoned a hymn. Most of the words went lost amid the rafters. But it wasn't a regular Buddhist hymn. It sounded more like a ballad describing miraculous feats by the followers of the holy saint Avalokitesvara, against the sinful minions of the Eight Great Perils. Decidedly not pacifistic poetry. Mu-ni Gam-po looked ill at ease. The monks kept glancing at each other.

Silence, as if something had gone wrong. It lasted two or three minutes. The noise of rain and wind from the courtyard suggested a storm at sea. There was a sudden booming blare of radongs—twenty-foot long trumpets. All the monks' faces turned toward a door beneath the gallery. There was thudding and commotion, but Tom and Elsa couldn't lean over far enough to see what caused it. The devil-dancers appeared—sixteen of them, two abreast, in grotesque devil-masks and full costume.

Tom signaled to Elsa: "Something fishy. Devil-dancing is done outdoors. Looks to me like trouble brewing. Tibetan monks are scrappers when they're roused."

"Would they fight in here?" she answered.

"Fight anywhere, like hornets. Rouse 'em, that's all."

The monks had to make way for the devil-dancers, who forced quite a wide passage down the midst of the chapel, dancing a curious, stealthy step, in a formation that opened and closed like scissor-blades. The same step constantly repeated. Behind them came a heavy palanquin, borne on poles by eight monks. It was a closed, old-fashioned thing, held together by big wooden pegs inserted into tongues protruding through slots in the woodwork. Its shape looked almost Chinese. But the dragon, on the panel that could be seen from the gallery, wasn't Chinese. It was a crudely painted monster with a devil's face and eight legs, belching a crimson fury of flame through a long snout that was almost like a trumpet.

Elsa signaled Tom: "The monks look scared."

"Hold on to yourself," he answered. "Don't talk. Watch. Keep close to me."

She crowded herself against him, so that he shouldn't have to look for her. He put his arm around her.

Behind the palanquin—at a noticeable distance behind it—walked Lobsang Pun. He was preceded by one attendant bearing a bronze dorje on a cushion—a thing shaped like a thunder-bolt. It meant that he represented the Tashi Lama. He was dressed in the full robes of a Yellow-hat lamaistic hierarch, including cone-shaped hood. He looked enormous. He took long strides, slowly, that made his robes sway, so he looked arrogant.

He paused, exactly in the middle of the chapel and faced the high altar, until his eight attendant monks had formed into a group behind him. Then, with convincing reverence, he bowed before the image of Chenrezi. Nothing could have been more decorous, meek, dignified. He appeared unconscious of the disturbance behind him. One of his attendants slapped a monk belonging to the monastery who hadn't backed out of the way fast enough. There was quite a scuffle. Lobsang Pun marched forward toward the high altar, followed by only seven attendants; the eighth was being carried out, apparently stunned by a blow on the head. He bowed to Mu-ni Gam-po and then seated himself on a throne like the Abbot's, on the other side of the altar, with his attendants grouped on his left hand.

Elsa whispered: "Do you notice the Abbot's face?"

Tom signaled: "Shut up! Watch!"

The palanquin was carried to the dais at the far end of the chapel. The bearers' clothing was slightly different from that of Mu-ni Gam-po's congregation. They might perhaps be Lobsang

Pun's men. As they raised the palanquin to the dais one of them slipped on the stone. He fell and was soundly kicked in the ribs by one of Mu-ni Gam-po's monks. He seized the monk's leg in both hands and bit it. He was kicked in the face. The palanquin almost toppled over, but a monk with a sharp stick came and restored order, prodding as if he were driving animals to market. He was a very efficient person, competent to prod the right man at the proper moment. The palanquin was lifted to the dais and planted there facing the altar with its poles removed. The devil-dancers, on the floor to right and left of it, swayed and gestured. They appeared not to be illustrating any midnight adoration theme.

Abbot Mu-ni Gam-po looked like a man in the seat of torture. His face was a picture of impotent indignation. He raised his right hand. One of his acolytes struck a gong. There was a subdued blare of horns. There began the regular midnight ritual, more than vaguely resembling High Mass droned by long-used, rather listless voices. But Lobsang Pun's voice was as clear as a bell. He led the chanting. By the vigor of his reverence he re-created a sensation of mystical midnight devotion. The ritual grew real.

"Arbitrary old devil," Tom signaled to Elsa. "Champion churchman. Hellion. Humorist. I bet his plan is to commit Mu-ni Gam-po to something the old chap disapproves. But I think there's trouble brewing."

Noropa groped his way back stealthily. He appeared excited. He came to Tom's left side and whispered.

"Their-saying-baskets-containing-relics-for-blessing-by- Holy-Lobsang-Pun-when-this-service-finishes."

Tom signaled to Elsa: "Beats me how that Bön magician got in here unchallenged. He wears a Japanese dagger. I saw the hilt. Think he must have told Mu-ni Gam-po he is Lobsang Pun's protégé. Perhaps has a forged document. I bet he's laying for Lobsang Pun. You're going to see some magic. Fold that blanket so that you can spread it wide in a second, then wrap it back on your shoulders."

Noropa whispered again. He thought Tom hadn't heard; he seemed more excited than ever. The second hymn ceased. It was time for the homily. Mu-ni Gam-po should have delivered that, but Lobsang Pun seemed to be stealing the show. One of his attendants brought him a sacred book and laid it opened on his lap.

There fell a silence so intense that there seemed to be no wall to deaden the splashing of rain. Lobsang Pun leaned forward in the teacher's attitude, one elbow on his knee, and read a long text from very ancient scripture. Mu-ni Gam-po perceptibly shuddered. The very last word of the text, pronounced slowly, distinctly, with an even stress on each syllable, was like three distinct words of command:

"The name of him whose spoken word in Thunder Dragon Gate shall move men's minds and stir their hearts, so that these things shall come to pass, shall be like unto the Holy Spirit that directs his sayings: THÖ-PA-GA! (wonderful-to-hear.)"

He paused. At the far end of the chapel some one opened the palanquin. The leaves of the double door banged sharply against the sides. Every head in the chapel faced suddenly in that direction. Within the palanquin, motionless, looking like a dead man except that his eyelids moved, sat Thö-pa-ga. The devil-dancers had not ceased swaying. Their monotonous motion emphasized Thö-pa-ga's stillness. Two monks directed flash-lights at Thö-pa-ga's face. His eyes shone like dark jewels.

Mu-ni Gam-po stood up. Tom gripped Elsa's hand to signal to her. There was all the electric suspense that precedes sudden bloodshed. A sensation of resented sacrilege, increased and heated by Lobsang Pun's air of triumph.

Lobsang Pun hove himself up from his throne-chair. Before Mu-ni Gam-po could forestall him by dismissing the monks to their cells as he seemed to intend, Lobsang Pun stole the thunder. His magnificent voice rang through the chapel. In the name of His Holiness the Tashi Lama he proclaimed Thö-pa-ga the Keeper of the Thunder Dragon Gate, the Mouthpiece and the Voice of Prophecy, the Sender-forth—

Even he had to cease. Even his beaked, belligerent, triumphant face froze. Not a doubt of it: he wasn't pretending. He was struck dumb. Horror. Amazement. All eyes followed his.

A gasp of fear struck like a gust of wind and died away into ghastly silence. Three hundred prayer wheels were snatched from girdles and set whirling. Three hundred monks backed away in a wave toward the wall that faced the gallery. The rear ranks kicked and struck at those in front to save themselves from being crushed.

A shang-shang was on the chapel wall, midway between Thö-pa-ga and the far end of the gallery. It was motionless, except that its mandibles moved. Elsa's hand clutched Tom's.

He signaled: "Opportunity!"

The brute was hugely bigger than the one that had escaped from Dowlah's house. Its livid green body was about three feet long. The spread of its hairy legs was not less than ten feet, perhaps twelve. In the basket it must have curled them in under itself. Crab, spider, octopus, all three, and devil features added. Its eyes were horrors of the size of tea-plates, motionless, without irises. They looked like opalescent sores. Its snout was a foot long; the moving mandibles beneath it seemed to be wiping one another in preparation for a meal.

About a hundred monks threw themselves prostrate on the chapel floor. Old Abbot Mu-ni Gam-po was the first to break silence. He began to chant a mantram. His voice broke, but two hundred monks took up the mantram. In a moment the roof was booming to the chant. It appeared to annoy the shang-shang. It moved like a spider up and down the wall, then suddenly, almost too swiftly for eye to follow, it shot sideways, and became still again directly over Thö-pa-ga's head. Thö-pa-ga didn't move; he was like a man in a trance. Some fool blew a radong. Two monks turned their flash-lights on the monster.

The flash-lights seemed to drive the brute crazy. It began to scamper all over the walls, making no sound whatever. It passed along the wooden front of the gallery with the tips of its upper legs over the rail. Tom jerked Elsa away, but the brute had passed before they could step backward. Noropa fled into the gloom, upsetting benches. The shang-shang leaped to the floor of the chapel. It made two or three short starts in different directions and then scooted toward the high altar, climbed that and continued upward over the great image of Chenrezi to the gloom of the wall above. There it became motionless again, visible only by its eyes that reflected the chapel lights like pale danger signals, one above the other.

Lobsang Pun stood his ground. So did Mu-ni Gam-po, but he changed the mantram; Lobsang Pun stuck to the first one, and about half the monks did the same, so that for at least a minute there was a babel of voices, and two tunes. Noropa came sneaking back and Tom seized his wrist. Lobsang Pun was looking up at the gallery. Tom began to drag Noropa toward the far end of the gallery.

"Stay where you are!" he commanded. But Elsa followed. Tom didn't know it, because Noropa began to resist and to try to break away. Tom hit him hard enough to slow him up:

"You fool, here's your chance!"

But Noropa became panicky. He struggled. He wouldn't be dragged, he was useless. Tom knocked him out of the way and hurried forward. Elsa overtook him.

"Damn you," he said. "Obey orders!"

But she wouldn't obey. There wasn't time to argue. He couldn't treat her like Noropa.

The Bön magician was coming toward him, followed by his novice and the shaman. They seemed in a hurry, but they hesitated. Behind them, the other four men were carrying the big black baskets, one basket empty with the lid half-open. The Bön magician had his hands inside his black robe, getting something ready in the line of sharp-edged, very likely poisoned magic. Tom hesitated, too. He glanced back at Elsa:

"Damn you, run! There's a shang-shang in that other basket! I'm going to turn it loose. Get the hell out of here!"

"No," she answered. "Go ahead. I've a blanket in case you need it."

Tom had learned combative magic on football fields. The magician cannoned backward into his novice. The novice crashed into the shaman. They both fell. Tom leaped them and bucked the basket-bearers. The empty basket and the man who carried it went reeling away over upset benches. The three who held the other basket dropped it, to put up a fight. There were ends of benches in the way that tripped them. One of them stopped a hay-maker that cracked on his jaw like the blow of a meat-ax. There was an awful din below the gallery, but no time to guess what caused it. Tom heard Elsa's voice:

"They're taking Thö-pa-ga away !"

No time to look. He hove up the big black basket and balanced it on the gallery rail. It stank foul. He tore off the waterproof cover and it stank worse. There was an iron hasp and a big iron padlock—no key. He wrenched the hasp until it tore loose from the cane into which it was threaded and wired. Then he opened the lid and hove the basket over, to the floor below. It spilled a shang-shang. The awful brute crept out and spread itself on top of the basket. It was even larger than the other, but it looked sick—or perhaps it was stiff from close confinement.

"Tom! Help!"

Elsa's stifled scream, from down in the dark on the gallery floor. Flash-light. The shaman and the Bön magician's novice were trying to gag her with her own blanket. Two of the basket-porters stood in Tom's way. They were as easy as ninepins. But he stumbled over the legs of an upset bench and didn't kick the shaman hard enough. The shaman, Bön magician, novice and all the rest of them fled from the gallery, slamming the door. Noropa nowhere to be seen, perhaps hiding among upset benches.

"Hurt?"

"No, not much."

"Good girl. They'd have pulled that off, if you'd obeyed me."

They returned to the rail. Sudden silence had fallen again. A monk's foot rutching on the chapel floor was an explosion of noise. Four monks, running into the gallery with flash lights, made a prodigious din as they stumbled over upset benches. Elsa's fingers signaled on the back of Tom's hand:

"The devil-dancers were trying to drag Thö-pa-ga away."

No sign of them now. Thö-pa-ga sat quite still. All the monks were crowded back against the far wall, but the devil-dancers weren't there any longer. They might have fled under the gallery, out of sight. One shang-shang was still on the wall above the high altar. The other was on the floor in mid-chapel. It pulsed up and down on the tips of its wide-spread legs as if flexing them. The monks in the gallery turned their flash lights on the monsters. Tom signaled Elsa:

"Unless Noropa lied, they'll fight. They're cannibals. That's why they're rare."

The brute on the wall dropped to the altar and poised it self, hanging over so that its eyes, on top of its body, looked straight at the other brute. The one on the floor began to pulse up and down more violently. Stuff that looked like froth bubbled on the end of its snout. Suddenly it launched itself toward the high altar. The other fled up the wall. The big one gave chase. Lobsang Pun's voice broke upon the breath less silence, booming scripture:

"Blessings create blessings in an endless cycle. Evil creates evil until evil-doers perish. For the devils shall destroy them selves and one another, and their dupes shall perish with them."

The shang-shangs vanished, up amid the shadows of the roof beams. The flash-lights discovered them. One dropped to the floor—a fifty-foot drop on to stone that made hardly a sound. The other followed, flourishing its legs in mid-air. It missed its pounce by a yard. The first one fled to the altar, leaped it and crouched with its body resting on Chenrezi's head. The other followed, not so fast now, stalking, crab-wise, with a kind of see-saw movement. It stood still on the altar platform between the Abbot and Lobsang Pun. Slowly it approached the altar, climbing it crab-wise, in short, almost imperceptible movements. When it reached Chenrezi's feet the other pounced on it. The chapel seethed with its congregation's gasp of horror.

The brutes fought in Chenrezi's lap and all over the altar, knocking altar vessels to the floor with a crash that broke the spell that had held the monks motionless. Some of them ran and hustled Mu-ni Gam-po away from the altar platform. The competent fellow with the sharp stick ran and tried to belabor the brutes. He was joined by taper-on-a-pole. They prodded, whacked, and hit nothing except the altar and Chenrezi's statue, for several minutes. But they were gallant fellows. They stuck to it. The shang-shangs fought like wolverines, dragon-flies, octopuses, tearing, leaping, gnawing off each other's legs. They were as quick as lightning. The only sound they made was of rending flesh. They were tearing each other to pieces in a lather of vile froth. One had torn the other's eyes out before the brave man with the stick hit one of them at last. He skewered the blind one. Then he beat the other. It had only three legs left. It dragged itself toward him. Lobsang Pun picked up a heavy charcoal brazier and crushed the brute. Then he laughed—his big laugh from the depths of his huge belly:

"Oo-ha-ha-ha-ha-hah!"

The monks swarmed around the altar. Tom seized Elsa's wrist. He didn't signal, he spoke:

"Come and talk to Thö-pa-ga. It's trespass, but I guess he needs us."

No sign of Noropa. They hurried out of the gallery and down the stone stairs. That brought them into the courtyard. They had to run in the rain around a stone building and its long buttresses to the chapel entrance. Double door. Dark vestibule. Another double door—it swung open against them.

Tom caught a glimpse, against the light within the chapel, of grinning devil-masks and of Thö-pa-ga between the Bön magician and the shaman, coming on the run toward him. Something struck him on the head. He lost consciousness.

CHAPTER 24.

"Sign your name as representative plenipotentiary!"

TOM didn't remain long unconscious. He was alone in the vestibule, in almost total darkness. There was a lot of noise in the chapel. He could feel his scalp was bleeding, but not too badly. He had evidently been hit on the top of the head with a cudgel. He felt dazed. When he stood up it took him a minute or two before he could steady himself. Then he went out into the rain and doused his head under a gush of water from a dram-pipe off the gallery roof. After a minute of that he was wet to the skin, and sore-headed, but in full possession of his senses.

As fast as he could run he crossed two courtyards to the monastery gate. The monk on gatehouse duty came out of meditation rather resentfully, spinning his prayer wheel.

Yes. A number of people, including the Bön magician and some devil-dancers and others, had passed out through the gate about fifteen minutes ago, and good riddance to them. The Bön magician had produced a document that bore Lobsang Pun's signature. Forgery? Nonsense! Who would dare to forge Lobsang Pun's blessed name? In all there were probably thirty people, but he wasn't sure, he hadn't counted. There had been others waiting for them outside, he didn't know how many. To the Powers of Darkness with such rogues. He had locked the gate behind them and returned to his prayers.

No, he hadn't noticed Elsa, nor any one who looked like a European woman. No, he hadn't seen Thö-pa-ga; didn't know what he looked like; didn't wish to know. Yes, they had all seemed to be in a great hurry, but in no greater hurry than he had been to see the last of them. He didn't know what had come over Mu-ni Gam-po of late, that he should admit such people to the monastery. Those devil-dancers, for instance: not like good Darjeeling devil-dancers. Dissolute, bold, ill-mannered fellows, recently from Tibet, where they must have been corrupted by political and religious quarrels.

The rain ceased. No, the monk wouldn't open the gate for Tom—not unless he had an order from the Abbot. It would have to be in writing. Yes Lobsang Pun's written order would be all right, because Lobsang Pun was a high dignitary, even higher than the Abbot. No, if Tom should try to climb the wall, he would summon the watch, who were armed with cudgels. The gate would be opened again at sunrise, and no sooner. Then respectable people could walk out with the holy Abbot's blessing, and might the blessing go with them wherever they should set foot.

Tom returned to the inner courtyard. All the monks had poured out of the chapel. Mu-ni Gam-po looked deathly sick; he was being supported by his four attendants. Tom wasn't allowed to

approach him. A monk thrust a spluttering torch so close to Tom's face that it singed his eyebrows. He said the holy Abbot might be dying. If so, he mustn't be interrupted; otherwise his spirit might be hounded away by shang-shangs and prevented from reincarnating at an early moment. None but holy men who knew how to deal with shang-shangs should come anywhere near him; but if he didn't die Tom might speak with him to-morrow. Several other monks were of the same mind. It was no use trying to approach the Abbot.

Faggots. At least a hundred monks were bringing them. They were building a big pyre in the center of the court yard, spreading it evenly, waist high. Others were carrying a big black sheet out of the chapel, holding it by the four corners. They were surrounded by monks with twirling prayer wheels, all chanting a mantram. Other monks were blowing horns. On the sheet lay the bright green remains of the two shang-shangs, looking smaller than when they were alive, because most of their long legs had been bitten off while they fought and they had been swept into a heap.

Behind the black sheet marched Lobsang Pun, exorcising. He was closely followed by his personal attendants, all singing at the top of their lungs and whirling prayer wheels. With his dorje in his right hand Lobsang Pun described magical signs in the air. He had a great reputation as an exorcist. He looked the part. The torchlight crimsoned his big, beaked face. His swaying gait lent something even more than dignity. He looked victorious, triumphant. He, not Mu-ni Gam-po, had quoted the scriptural text that set the shang-shangs to slaying each other—evil destroying evil! He believed that. There wasn't a scrap of insincerity about him. His was faith militant, triumphant.

They laid the shang-shangs, desecrated black curtain and all, on the pyre. The wood was dry. A dozen torches plunged into the faggots. The flames leaped, crimsoning the surrounding walls. The wet courtyard paving resembled a lake of liquid fire, on which shadowy, two-dimensional monks stood twirling prayer wheels, throwing shadows in their turn that made flickering waves of wet light. The monks pitched their chant against the roar and crackle of the flames.

Tom watched Lobsang Pun until he turned away from the scene, but that wasn't until Mu-ni Gam-po's four attendants had half-carried the old man up the gallery stairs. It appeared that Lobsang Pun didn't exactly crave the Abbot's company or conversation just then. He showed no sympathy for the Abbot—none whatever—no concern about him. He walked down a narrow passage off the courtyard. Tom followed. A door was slammed in his face. He thrust and kicked it open before there was time to shoot the bolt. He was inside before any one could prevent him.

A four-square stone-walled room. Lobsang Pun. Seven monks. One sturdy wooden bed. A heavy table. Benches. An imported oil lantern. Six or eight candles and a little oil lamp in a niche in the wall. Some heaps of corded luggage. All seven monks had Mauser pistols; each man's loaded pistol lay in its holster on the table, with belt attached. When Tom entered they buckled on their pistols in a hurry, beneath their robes.

Not a word. Tom and Lobsang Pun stared at each other. With his right thumb, like a London policeman directing traffic, Tom indicated the seven monks, one by one, then the door. Lobsang Pun nodded. He, too, gestured. The monks filed out. Tom shot the bolt in the door behind the last one.

"Tum-Glain! Tum-Glain!"

"Your Eminence?"

Silence again. Lobsang Pun spoke in a challenging tone in Tibetan:

"Your wanting what?"

Tom answered in Tibetan. He didn't dare to be misunderstood. He knew more Tibetan than Lobsang Pun knew English. But he hadn't time nor mood to adorn his language with the phrases, of humility and reverence, that ought to have preceded and loaded every sentence. The structure of his phrases was as nearly English as the Tibetan speech would permit. It was crude, but it didn't make Lobsang Pun laugh.

"Write your permit for me to travel where I please in Tibet."

Lobsang Pun looked startled, as if by an idea. Oriental diplomat, he temporized, to gain time to think:

"Tum-Glain, who am I that I should write that?"

Tom retorted bluntly: "I didn't ask who you are. I know. I am saying: write that permit or take the consequences. I will use it and take the consequences."

"Tum-Glain—"

"Do you want to be arrested by the British authorities on the charge that your agent, bearing your instructions, over your signature, threw shang-shangs into a monastery chapel and then carried off Thö-pa-ga and Miss Elsa Burbage?"

The arbitrary absolutist Lobsang Pun made no attempt to appear indifferent. He was visibly shocked:

"Tum-Glain, that is untrue!"

"Prove it! That Bön magician showed the monk at the gate a document with your signature. Probably that same document passed him across the border into British territory with his baggage unexamined. He used it to get admission to this monastery. Forgery perhaps, but prove it!"

"Tum-Glain, I am on my way to Tibet. I will swiftly overtake and punish."

"Overtake? You?" Tom's fist thumped the table. "I want five or six of your best men. Ten horses. Provisions. That permit. After that, if you can overtake me you're a wizard! Here's the table. Pen. Ink. Paper. Sand. A chair. Sit down and write!"

"But Tum-Glain, they can not have gone far—not yet. My seven monks—"

Tom snorted: "Oh, yes, Mauser pistols. Pursuit. A fight on British territory! Dacoity! Sikkim military police! Your Eminence, if the police, here in Darjeeling, get a hint of what has happened, every road will be blocked by telephone within half an hour. Then what? Do you wish to stay here and face an enquiry?"

"You shall not go to the police!" said Lobsang Pun. His eyes blazed indignation.

Tom laughed. "Very well then, write that permit, and the order for horses, provisions and five men."

"Tell your thinking, Tum-Glain."

"I will tell you your own thoughts!" Tom answered. "That Bön magician, who carries a forged authority from you—or isn't it forged?—was wearing a Japanese dagger in his girdle. You came to India to get the British to support the Tashi Lama. Don't say you didn't. I know you did. You'd been intriguing with the Japanese, but they wanted too much in return for their help, so you turned pro-British without warning the Japs. But the British weren't any too enthusiastic. They didn't want you in Delhi—you and your Tibetan intrigues, so you were diplomatically hung up. You only heard of Thö-pa-ga's return from England after he reached Delhi. Eiji Sarao told you about it. You hadn't expected Thö-pa-ga so soon. You weren't quite ready. But the opposition was."

"Your not understanding what you're talking, Tum-Glain."

"Oh, no? Listen to this, then. The Japanese saw through your turn-about-face, so they lined up promptly with the Lhasa gang who murdered the Dalai Lama. That Bön magician belongs to the Lhasa outfit. They, you, Russia and Japan all want control of the Thunder Dragon Gate. You want it for His Holiness the Tashi Lama's benefit, and for him only, in order to make him the ruler of Tibet. They want it in order to keep the Tashi Lama out of Tibet. Russia wants it to use against Japan. The Japanese want it for propaganda purposes, to further their aims in China and Inner Mongolia. Now then: if the Lhasa politicians get the Thunder Dragon Gate, and if the Japanese control them, what chance has the Tashi Lama?"

Silence. Lobsang Pun's expression was a mixture of out raged dignity, suspicion, embarrassment, alertness and lurking humor. The humor was in ambush, behind cunning eyes. But he liked Tom. He couldn't disguise that he liked him. A brow-beater himself, he respected a man who stood up to him and dared to bully him with questions that carried no question-mark. Tom kept hard at him:

"You know well you'd be discredited forever if there's a police investigation."

"No police, Tum-Glain."

"Very well then, listen. Suppose they kill Thö-pa-ga. Suppose he dies on the journey. How would that suit you? Would they admit he's dead? Not likely! He'd be out of the way. They'd bury him, or throw his body to the dogs, and put another in his place—they'd pick a devil—and they'd say he was the real man just returned from abroad. The very first thing that their devil would do would be to denounce the Tashi Lama from the Thunder Dragon Gate. After that, he'd begin prophesying that the long-awaited, all-redeeming Maitreya, who is to unite Asia under one benign government, is the Emperor of Japan! Am I right?"

No answer.

"What will they do to Elsa Burbage, if Thö-pa-ga dies on the journey? Do you want the credit for that—you and your Bön magician, who, you *say* forged your name to a document!"

A plea at last. Not guilty! Accomplished diplomatic liar Lobsang Pun might be, but his eyes told the truth. Black, oriental, malicious, reserved, fierce, intelligent eyes, they were. But they weren't lying now. Whatever his intentions might have been, concerning Elsa, he hadn't been a party of her abduction. He perceived its implications.

"Tum-Glain, they didn't—"

"They did. They have carried her off to keep Thö-pa-ga from dying of terror and depression. That dog Noropa suggested it to them. If Thö-pa-ga dies, they'll kill her. Then what?"

Lobsang Pun displayed a philosophic doubt on that score.

"Tum-Glain, now your talking foolishness. Why their killing a young woman? Nancy Strong, true, not stolen, but having lived long in Tibet, not dead yet."

"Uh-huh? Write that permit!"

"She being your woman?"

"You've sixty seconds to take that pen in your hand."

The diplomat's canniness came to the surface:

"Tum-Glain, your not wanting police, eh? Why not?"

"Very well, I'll tell you. More than two years ago, when you turned me out of Tibet, I was hunting for the Thunder Dragon Gate. I am hunting for it now, and so is Elsa Burbage. Stop either of us—stop us if you dare! Time's up. Write. Here you are." He dragged the heavy chair to the table. "Sit down. Write."

Lobsang Pun sat and took the pen in hand, but he still hesitated:

"Tum-Glain, no good. My representing Blessed Holiness Panchen Rinpoche, Tashi Lama. His being exiled beyond border of Tibet—"

"Don't I know that? Do you think I'll show your permit to the soldiers or officials from Lhasa? Sign your name as representative plenipotentiary, and set your seal to it. There isn't a tax-ridden layman in all Tibet, nor a decent monk, who doesn't love His Holiness the Tashi Lama and want him home again at Tashi-lunpo. Write it. I'll take the consequences."

Lobsang Pun demurred. "Tum-Glain, my writing evidence, my aiding your entering Tibet, contrary to law? Signing my sentence of death!"

"I'm American. There is no law against my entering Tibet. Against all other foreigners, yes. An American, no."

"They not understanding that."

"Does Your Eminence understand that every minute is of consequence? I'll take care your enemies don't get hold of the permit to use against you. Rather than that, I'll eat it."

Lobsang Pun wrote. But he paused again before he signed.

"Tum-Glain, your never returning alive!"

"No? You went in, didn't you? Here you are. Are you dead?"

"Tum-Glain, my not going in there. Never. More than two years, many years ago, not daring, staying outside."

"You sent Noropa in."

"No. His not going in, also."

"Too bad. Well, Your Eminence, signature please. Now the seal. Thank you."

Tom sanded the document and stowed it away in an inner pocket. Then he opened the door.

By word of mouth, to one of his seven attendant monks, Lobsang Pun gave the order for horses, provisions and five men.

CHAPTER 25.

"I'm ready. Let's go."

"HIS HOLY EMINENCE commands you to give me that pistol," said Tom.

All seven monks looked stonily indignant. Lobsang Pun had commanded nothing of the sort. But he didn't deny it. Tom unbuckled a Mauser, belt and all, from the waist of the monk who had been told to see about horses, provisions and men. He strapped it on under his own shirt. Lobsang Pun roared:

"Oo-ha-ha-ha-hah! Tum-Glain!"

Then he did an astonishing thing. He ordered all the other monks to unload their pistols and to give Tom the ammunition.

"Your going quick, you, Tum-Glain, better not letting my catching you! Oo-ha-ha-hah!"

Unexpectedly he offered to shake hands. He wouldn't let go. He belly-roared his blessings until Tom almost tore himself loose. The monks couldn't get out of his way fast enough.

He ran up the gallery steps, fetched his bag from the guest cell and demanded to see Mu-ni Gam-po. If the Abbot really was dying of shock, it might be possible to invent a new line of communication even on the spur of that moment. But the monks told him to wait. They were not in the least impressed by his impatience. Fuming at delay, he watched the monks in the courtyard shoveling the fire, burying the shang-shangs' ashes beneath a huge cone of glowing crimson embers. They were taking no chances on the brutes returning to life!

But there was something else going on. Twice, two messengers ran past him along the gallery, going and coming. They crossed the fire-lit courtyard and vanished in the direction of the main gate. A monk came and said the Abbot would see Tom presently, but he must wait a little longer.

Ten more minutes passed, and then came Abdul Mirza up the stairs, all alone, wrapped head and shoulders in a shawl. Tom didn't recognize him until they were face to face.

"You?"

"You?"

"Do you know what has happened here?" Tom asked.

"I know nothing. I am looking for Noropa."

"You won't find him. How did you get by the main gate?"

"Oh, I made a noise like a prayer wheel. What are you doing here with your bag in your hand?"

"Waiting for word with the Abbot. What had you to do with Dowlah sending Noropa to stab me with a poisoned dagger? Noropa traveled with your party."

"Yes, Noropa begged to be allowed to travel under my protection. He said he was coming here to beg facilities to return to Tibet."

"What is Dowlah doing?"

Abdul Mirza made a wry face. "He has vanished. Are you on your way to Tibet? Can I help you with equipment?"

"Thanks, I guess that's all attended to."

"Have you money?"

"Yes. Indian rupees."

"Then why wait? It is my private opinion, Mr. Grayne, that Rajah Dowlah also is on his way to Tibet. I have no proof, but I believe he knows where the Thunder Dragon Gate is. I am not in his confidence. I never have been. It has always been a game between him and me, as to which could outwit the other. It was my duty to prevent him from making serious mistakes, but he has made at least one too many. Your arrival on the scene, I think, precipitated crowning indiscretion. He was always ambitious, always jealous. Even as a boy he was possessed by irrepressible curiosity. Contempt for other people's intelligence is his worst fault. I believe his plans have been secretly laid for a long time. He believes the Thunder Dragon Gate will give him fame and power. He, and twenty men, have vanished."

Tom saw what looked like light on the situation.

"Listen," he said, "a Bön magician, devil-dancers and some others, less than an hour ago, raised hell here with a couple of shang-shangs at the midnight service. They have carried off Thö-pa-ga and Elsa Burbage. D'you think Dowlah had a hand in that?"

Abdul Mirza stared into Tom's eyes. His own were far-sighted from advancing age, and he couldn't get out his pince-nez quickly from under the shawl.

"You say they carried them off? And you wait here? No, I don't think Dowlah had a hand in that. He can't have, or I think not. How could he? He will take advantage of it, if he learns it has happened. He is very partial to European women. Intelligent ones. Young ones. Good looking. Unconventional. Have you warned the police?"

"Of course I haven't."

"There are very efficient police in Sikkim," said Abdul Mirza.

"Yes, a damned sight too efficient. At a word they'd be under way in less than fifteen minutes."

"Are you afraid the abductors would murder Miss Burbage, if pursued by the police? I think that unlikely."

"That isn't the point," Tom answered. "You should know that."

"My young friend, then what is the point?"

"If a Bön magician and his party can cross the passes at this time of year, and reach the Thunder Dragon Gate, I can follow. If they can get in, I can."

"And Miss Elsa Burbage? Mr. Grayne, the police—I am afraid. If it should be said I knew, but that I did nothing, did not tell the police—"

"All right, you don't know. You haven't spoken to me. You haven't seen me. Can't wait any longer on the Abbot. Good-by."

Tom went hurrying to the stables. The monk stood swinging a lantern. There were several men in line—some packed loads—two tents—a string of ten shaggy Tibetan ponies. He could see at a glance that one pony was lame; the other nine were probably not much better, and the men worse—malingerers, thieves, weaklings. The monk, no doubt, was out for vengeance for the requisitioned Mauser pistol.

Tom examined the loads first, rejected one tent as unnecessary and demanded another load of tea, sugar and canned milk. Then an extra load of cheese, and another of ground barley. He rejected a bale of rotten dried apricots. They stank. He found another bale of them that didn't stink. He demanded more blankets. By a high-handed display of impatience and money he bought, at an outrageous price from a sleepy Tibetan, a sheepskin coat and hat. They reeked of ghee* and yak-dung smoke, but they were in good condition. Then he went into the stable and requisitioned the ten ponies that were haltered in a line in the dark at the farther end.

[**Ghee* (Hindi)—a clarified semifluid butter.]

That started a fine rebellion. The monk went nearly frantic. Those were the special personal ponies reserved for the use of the Holy and Reverend Lobsang Pun!

"Yes," said Tom. "I guessed that."

He didn't actually have to fight, but he did have to go in and lead out the ponies. Such a row was raised about them that he found out who the best men were, because the monk appealed to them and ignored the others. So Tom picked five of those. He promised each of them a bonus of fifty rupees, over and above regular pay.

"*Bhod!** Tibet! Now!"

[**Bhod!*—Tibetan name for Tibet.]

So be the trail lay northward, men and beasts were willing. Saddling up took next to no time. Such delay as there was, saved valuable minutes. Abdul Mirza caused it. He came, wrapped in his shawl, like a prowling Haroun al Raschid of Baghdad. He had an order to open the main gate, which Tom did not have. True, he might have managed with Lobsang Pun's seal and signature, but Abdul Mirza's signed pass from the Abbot was better.

"Tom Grayne, I have salved my conscience, such as it is. You appear to have none, so may peace ride with you. We have been too stupid, some of us statesmen. Others have been too clever for their own good. Between those extremes, the middle, and perhaps the only wise course, is madness. Go ahead and be mad, and may Allah guide you."

"How's the Abbot?"

"Shocked. Recovering. But almost overwhelmed with spiritual dread. He feels a consciousness of sin that held open the door to the shang-shang sending. The poor old fellow thoroughly believes that burning shang-shangs' corpses is merely a gesture that soothes ignorant monks but can't allay the spiritual menace. You saw those monsters fight?"

"Yes."

"What Dowlah missed! How that sight would have thrilled him!"

"Did you speak of me to the Abbot?"

"Yes. He sends his blessing. He will pray to a thousand saints to protect you, wherever you go. I don't know what he meant, but he mentioned some sacred books. He begs you kindly not to forget to write about them."

"Did you speak of Elsa Burbage?"

"Why inflict on him more anxiety? No. Nor of Noropa. I prevaricated, Mr. Grayne, about Noropa. I didn't come here to enquire about him. Mu-ni Gam-po is occasionally very well informed. I hoped that perhaps he had heard something of Dowlah's plans—some rumor—or perhaps some detail about provisions and porters waiting for him between here and Tibet."

"Well?"

"He knows nothing."

"What's your particular worry about Dowlah?"

"Twenty-one years my prince! Tom Grayne, it needs more than twenty-one hours to destroy an aging man's love for the boy he tried to build into a man. I always knew he was a rogue. May Allah, blessed be His Prophet, show me mercy—I have never been able to love sincerely persons who were so righteous that butter wouldn't melt in their mouths!"

Abdul Mirza glanced into the stable and took a horse-blanket down from a hook on the wall. He removed his own beautiful Kashmir shawl and wrapped the smelly blanket over his head and shoulders.

"It will be cold in the passes. Should you overtake her, she may need this."

"I will say it's a present from you."

"And will you do me a favor?"

"If it's possible. What?"

"Dowlah's bankers in Delhi were served, this midnight, by phone and special messenger, with an order forbidding them to cash Dowlah's drafts or to forward money to him through their agents or by any other means. They will not dare to disobey that order. If you should find Dowlah, will you give him this package?"

"What is it?"

"Ten thousand rupees. All I have."

"I knew you were a good egg," Tom answered. "Yes, I'll do that. If he kills me, he'll take it anyhow. Go ahead, will you, and get 'em to open the gate. I'm ready. Let's go."

CHAPTER 26.

"Who would speak of such a valley?"

THE Tibetans hadn't seen the shang-shang battle, but they had heard about it. Storm or no storm, they were in a momentary mood to go as far away as possible, at top speed. Abdul Mirza had his carriage waiting outside the monastery gate. He was staying at the Hindu Kush Hotel. He promised to wake the clerk, get Tom's mail, should there be any, and send it by messenger to Nancy Strong's house.

Rain, thunder, lightning. Deserted, dark streets. Even the police were under cover. A light in Nancy Strong's living-room. All the rest of her house dark. No one at the gate. A fork of lightning revealed a rather bare compound with a lean-to children's play-shed that served to shelter the men and ponies.

Tom had a deuce of a time to get the front door opened. Rain and thunder out-dinned his thumping on the panel, and there was no bell. However, a servant opened at last, dried him off a bit and showed him into the living-room. Nancy Strong, in a quilted dressing-gown, was hugging the fire, reading and making notes. She looked middle-aged and untidy with her gray hair down over her shoulders, but she didn't seem embarrassed. She looked over the top of horn-rimmed reading-glasses and shot a question at Tom before he had time to speak:

"Did you persuade her?"

"No."

"Did you try?"

"Yes. Nothing doing. I want her bag, please."

"Your Elsa Burbage is exactly the kind of girl I feared she might be. You are using a thoroughbred, Tom Grayne, to do a mule's job."

"Too late to discuss that," he answered.

"Thö-pa-ga? Lobsang Pun?"

"Ask Johnson. He probably knows by now. Perhaps he'll tell you. Tell him I said nothing. Or you might ask Abdul Mirza. He's more talkative."

Nancy Strong went for Elsa's bag. Apparently it had to be repacked; she was a long time bringing it. Tom paced the room, staring at framed Tibetan photographs. There was one of Lobsang Pun, many years younger, in a silver frame on the piano. A portrait of the late Dalai Lama. Several Tibetan landscapes in water-color, a bit school-marmy in conception and execution, but not too bad—probably Nancy Strong's work. Several photos of Nancy Strong, young and rather good looking, in Tibetan costume, two on horseback and one on camelback.

Tom's ears were alert. He heard a pounding on the front door and opened it to Abdul Mirza's messenger. A telegram. Nothing else.

HARLEY BELIEVES TEIVOS SALESMAN EITHER ON THE WAY OR PERHAPS ALREADY MAKING BID FOR CONTRACT. CAVELL

Marching orders! Gate into Tibet open and its custodians not looking! Sir Horace O'Mally of Harley Street, physician extraordinary to kings and millionaires, had evidently learned a lot more in Moscow than how to cut off a dog's head and keep it alive. The word "Teivos" couldn't be anything else than "Soviet" reversed. "Soviet salesman" must mean "Russian secret agent," on his way to the Thunder Dragon Gate or there already. "Cavell" was certainly Dr. Morgan Lewis of the Edith Cavell Hospital.

If the telegram meant anything whatever, it meant: "Ride like the devil and get there ahead of them all!"

The United States, Great Britain, Russia, Japan, the Tibetan Council of Regents in Lhasa, and the agents of the Tashi Lama, were all in the running! Dowlah, Lobsang Pun, the Bön magician, and how many others?

Nancy Strong brought two bags, Elsa's and another filled with such luxuries as raisins, chocolate, soap, face cream and a small first-aid kit.

"I have nothing small enough for her, so I have put in needles, thread, scissors. She will have to make her own warm clothing, of any material she can get. Oh, you iron men! Is she out in this storm? Have you plenty of money? Have you a Mauser pistol? Tibetans believe a Mauser has some sort of magical superiority over all other weapons. They won't face Mausers. Have you ammunition? You won't be able to get any in Tibet. Have you wind-proof clothing?"

Tom almost tore himself away. He didn't even wave his hand as she stood in the open doorway with the yellow light behind her. He was afraid she might summon him back for some last-minute argument.

He had no difficulty in getting the Tibetans and ponies to face the storm again. The Tibetans laughed. They said it would cease before daylight, and it did. There were washed-out roads and some dangerous bridges, but nothing to delay a small, self-sufficient, experienced party. The going might have held up dude explorers, or a heavily laden caravan. But the ponies' loads were reasonably light. There was nothing to be bought but corn, in small quantities, to enable the ponies to keep up the grueling pace; so they didn't have to linger anywhere and answer questions. The principal problem for three days was to remove leeches from the ponies' legs and bellies every time they crossed one of the almost countless streams in the tropical valley bottoms.

Up from the steaming jungle, up above the tree line, above the clouds. Down again into the tropical heat. Up again, over the freezing sky line, sleeping, all huddled together for warmth, in one tent. No privacy, but no chance for conspiracy. The seeds of mutiny are laid in whispers in the night, but the Tibetans couldn't whisper in the night without Tom's overhearing.

His hardiness puzzled them. He did more than his share of the work. He could load two ponies while any one of them was loading one. He ate the same coarse food, consumed the same greasy salted tea and seemed to have an even greater craving than their own to reach the Roof of the World and its windy desolation.

He asked no questions along the road. There were fifty trails through Sikkim that the Bön magician's party might have taken, but they all had to converge to one point. There the Bön magician might be held up by the police or border officials, but more likely he would get by with Lobsang Pun's forged signature. The Sikkim military police might spot Elsa, but more probably not, if she were swaddled up in blankets. The road into Tibet was open to let Thö-pa-ga go home and unlock a secret.

Once over the seventeen thousand-foot Sepo La, there were two roads. One of them toward Lhasa. A main road, absolutely certain to be guarded by Tibetan troops. If the Bön magician intended to take that road, then it was of the utmost importance to head him off. But if his objective was the Thunder Dragon Gate, and if the Thunder Dragon Gate was somewhere near the northern slope of Everest, he would take that other road, westward, skirting Nepal. Somewhere along that rarely traveled western road was a Yellow-hat monastery. It would be Lobsang Pun's only possible base for supplies. As the Tashi Lama's representative the old prelate was to all intents and purposes an outlaw in Tibet. If his objective, also, was the Thunder Dragon Gate, that monastery, whose monks were very likely faithful to the exiled Tashi Lama, would be his first goal. There was nowhere else where he could have left provisions safe from bandits and Tibetan troops.

Tom talked it over with the headman, who wasn't much impressed by the need for haste. The more he thought about the Bön magician, the less he liked the prospect of over taking him.

"Tum-Glain, I saw it happen. I saw those devil-dancers pull their costumes off, in darkness, in the stable courtyard, pack them hurriedly and, shouldering their own loads, follow the Bön's party out through the gate, on foot.

"That," he insisted, "means they had animals waiting for them, hidden somewhere, ready. They behaved like men who have a plan well laid. That they dared to offend the Holy Lobsang Pun is proof enough that they are bad rogues. Such men are cunning. They use magic. They can make themselves invisible. They wouldn't take a straight road through Sikkim. That black devil knows where he can get supplies from people in out-of-the-way places who won't betray which way he went for fear he might send them a sending. I say, they are far behind us."

Tom watched for signs of Elsa. There were countless chortens, cairns, trees beside the road to which pious travelers had tied strips of rags to flutter ceaseless prayers in the wind. But there was no rag that might have been torn from Elsa's dress. In the lead, on the sturdiest pony, mile after mile, day after day, Tom searched with tireless eyes for anything whatever that she might have put to use as an intelligible signal.

The Tibetans laughed, not at him, but at the notion that a prayer streamer might be a message to any one in this world.

"Those are to bring blessings upon us. *Om mane padme hum!** They repeat it again and again."

[**Om mane padme hum* is the most important mantra in Buddhism. It is the six syllable mantra of the Bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteshvara. The basic English translation is "Om Jewel in the Lotus Hum" or "Praise to the Jewel in the Lotus."]

"Watch, I tell you! Unless they tied her hand and foot, she will leave her mark somewhere. It isn't likely they would ill treat her. That would have a bad effect on Thö-pa-ga, and it is him they think of."

"For Thö-pa-ga, so I have heard, they have another woman waiting," said the headman. "Is this one your woman? If so, she should give them the slip."

"She will stand by Thö-pa-ga," Tom answered.

"Oh, is she his woman?"

"Keep your eyes open for some sign of her."

But they saw no sign until the ten wearying ponies had toiled up the long gradual ascent of the Sepo La. Near the cairn at the summit, that marks the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet, was the first snow—a mere acre or two in the lee of a ledge, out of reach of the bitter westerly wind. The Tibetans made haste to off-load. The ponies rolled in the snow on the edge of a fifty-foot precipice, while Tom hunted for signs of the Bön's party having bivouacked thereabouts. There were plenty of traces of traders' caravans. There were skeletons of yaks and ponies, scattered apart and cracked up by wolves. But nothing recent. There was nothing attached to the boundary cairn, or hidden near it.

But in a hollow a considerable distance off the road he found embers and a lot of horse-dung that was not many hours old. A party that had carried wood up to that elevation, and that could afford to waste embers and not to burn the horse-dung, must have plenty of ponies and be traveling in great haste. He examined the ground carefully, kicked over a stone and picked up one of Elsa's blue goose handkerchiefs.

It was very likely her last one. The headman laughed like a child at the embroidered blue goose.

"Such a prayer flag should bring happiness! Better leave it where you found it, Tum-Glain."

No lip-stick marks. Probably she hadn't any lip-stick. But, wrapped in the handkerchief, there was a small strip of bark off a piece of firewood. On the inside it showed thumb-nail marks. First, a broad-arrow mark. Danger. Then a series of groups of nail marks, as easy to read as a telegram if one knew the code:

"Thöpe well. Böns fear pursuit. Look out for ambush. Turning westward."

Nothing about herself. No complaint. Nothing to indicate whether she was being well or ill treated.

"Leave it where you found it, Tum-Glain. Interfering with happy prayers brings miserable curses. We have trouble enough."

It was high noon. Men and ponies wished to bivouac in the shelter of that hollow, and the ponies had earned it. But Tom fed the ponies and refused to pitch camp. There would be a full moon. Night, with the moon on the snow would be nearly as bright as day, and for many miles there would be an easy, gradual descent to a level of about fifteen thousand feet.

"Forward!"

"Tum-Glain, we are too few. The Bön magician is a devil with plenty of servants, who will kill us if we overtake them. They might see us from a long way off and use magic against us. Better keep far behind them until we are overtaken by the Holy Blessed Lobsang Pun Rinpoche."

"Did he order you to obey me?"

"Yes."

"Then obey."

By nightfall they had reached the fork where the rough but clearly marked track toward Lhasa winds around to the right of an unclimbable peak. The other road, westward toward the maze of mountains that hide Nepal, is little used and usually difficult to find. But it was easy now. There was a maze of hoof-prints in the snow. Even before moonrise it was easy to tell that the track had been ploughed up too recently for the blown snow to hide it again.

There was no avoiding a halt to rest men and animals. The Tibetans boiled tea in the lee of a rock, and while he waited for moonrise Tom checked up on his previous guess work. It was dangerous to ask questions, because if the headman should start lying to him there would be no end to it. He had to pretend he knew the main facts and needed only to know minor details.

"Soon we shall run out of food for the ponies. How far is it to the monastery where the Holy Lobsang Pun has stored his supplies?"

"Three days. Four days."

"At my speed?"

"Perhaps two days, if the ponies can endure it. This is a bad road. It leads upward and upward. Once it was a main road toward Nepal, but the pass into Nepal is so steep and high that it has been abandoned these many years, and now only a few monks use this road—they and bandits—and some pilgrims."

"What pilgrims?"

"I have never heard what pilgrims, nor whither they go, nor why."

The beginning of lies and evasions. Tom pretended to lose interest. It was enough for the moment that he knew he was right about that monastery. Moonlight touched the far-off peaks and made them serenely beautiful. The loveliest view in the world. It filled the Tibetans with mystic fears. They spoke of spirits, and of snow-men, and of devils. Not even they knew which of those peaks was Everest, although they claimed to know what monstrous phantoms lived on which mountain. There were a score of moonlit summits, perhaps a hundred miles away, or less, all indescribably white against moonlit sky. On some of them no human being had ever set foot. Somewhere in among them was a valley, unmapped; unphotographed even from the air; unvisited even by Sven Hedin* or by the Mt. Everest expeditions; sacred; dreaded; secret.

[**Sven Anders Hedin* (1865-1952)—a Swedish explorer, geographer and geopolitician. Hedin led several expeditions to Central Asia and mapped large parts of the Tibetan highlands but he never reached his ultimate goal: the then forbidden city of Lhasa. See *Wikipedia* for more information.

Tom questioned the headman: "Year after year, pilgrims by the hundred visit a secret valley down yonder. How is it that the secret is so well kept?"

"Tum-Glain, who would speak of such a valley?"

"How, then, do they find the valley?"

"How should I know?"

"Some of them," said Tom, "come hundreds of miles, measuring the way by lying prone on the earth after each step."

"Why shouldn't they?" said the headman. "But what should I know about it?"

The headman turned questioner: "Tum-Glain, are you thinking of daring to fight that Bön magician? All that darkness between here and there is full of devils that will aid him but oppose us."

"Where he leads," Tom answered, "we can follow."

"Not so, Tum-Glain. I know the way to the first monastery, which is easy enough to find. But he knows caverns, hermitages, secret valleys, where he may have hidden what he needs for the journey. He can go faster than we. And he will kill that woman, just to spite you, if you press him hard. Those Böns are devils."

"Keep your eyes open for signs of her. If she possibly can do it, she will leave a mark to show us where to follow."

"But the snow, Tum-Glain, is continually driven by the gales that never cease hereabouts. It will cover any marks she might make, even if she makes any. I think she will be suffering from the cold. Unless you follow fast, you may find her dead or dying. But if you follow too fast, you will have to fight the Bön magician. He might kill her, rather than let you have her before she has served his purpose, whatever that may be. I say, wait here, feeding the ponies as little as possible, until the Blessed Lobsang Pun Rinpoche overtakes us. He will use some magic on the Bön that will bring him bad luck, so that perhaps he will let the girl go."

"You're warm and well fed, among friends, in your own land. You talk like a lucky fool," Tom answered.

He redistributed the ponies' loads, doing most of the work himself, pressed forward, until midnight, camped, and was away again at daybreak, wearing out men and ponies without getting as much as a sight of the Bön magician's party.

Most of the following day the wind blew with hurricane force, ice-cold from the peaks around Everest. But he disregarded the Tibetans' protests and bucked the wind, with as few halts as possible. The blown snow had covered all tracks, but the magician's ponies could be no better than his; the magician's strength no greater than his own. No sign, all day, of Elsa, who was probably too numbed by cold and altitude to think of anything but how to keep life in her body.

But late that afternoon the wind died down to a normal gale. Soon after that, where the track emerged from a grim defile on to a bit of a plateau where the snow lay sheltered from the wind,

there were signs of two considerable parties having met and milled around on the snow before they all went westward. There was horse-dung, still unfrozen.

"Bandits!" pronounced the headman. "See, they came this way, captured them with no trouble at all, and carried them off along the way they came, no doubt to some secret cavern. All Tibet is full of bandits since the Blessed Holiness Tashi Lama Rinpoche was driven into exile. His Blessed Holiness took religion with him, and evil people are no longer afraid to do wrong."

Tom decided to rest men and animals, but he only waited until moonlight silvered the distant summits. Then he was off in the lead, on foot, leaving men and ponies to follow. The track wound amid dismal piles of raw rock sketched by star light against faintly luminous snow, along a ledge around a precipice. It was almost too dark to see the edge, and the altitude was telling on him. It made his head swim. His heart pounded like a trip-hammer. He felt his way with one hand on the face of the cliff, his fingers numb with cold in spite of a big sheepskin glove. But the men obeyed. He could hear them coming. They made a lot of noise, stumbling over loose rock. If they could stand it, he could.

Then the moon rose. The rough track opened out on to a few square miles of hummocky plateau, patched with snow and wind-blown rock. It was hedged in by a wilderness of snow-clad peaks. In the distance, perched like a swallow's nest on an almost unclimbable crag, perhaps seventeen thousand feet above sea level, the monastery walls were etched gray by the light of the moon. The winding track was a series of dark shadows and pale white snow. To the right of the track, two hundred yards ahead, or less, sat a man with his back to a rock.

The man didn't move, although he appeared to at first. It was his unfastened yak-skin coat that fluttered in the wind. He was dead. He couldn't possibly be alive, and sit still, facing the wind, with his coat open, in that temperature. Fifty yards or so beyond him, against another rock, also with his coat unfastened, sat another man. Between the two there was a shadowy track in the snow, as if the man farther away had dragged himself to the place where he sat, and had died there. It looked as if they had killed each other.

Tom went up and examined the first man. He was the Bön magician. He sat bareheaded, with his head tilted back against the rock, so that he was staring at the sky with his mouth wide open and a bullet hole in his forehead, about an inch above the right eye. He was stone-cold, but his watch was still going. He hadn't been touched by birds or animals. Apparently he hadn't been looted, not even of his Japanese dagger.

Tom examined him more closely. There was nothing in the pockets of his long sleeves, nor in the looseness of the bokkus above his belt, where a Tibetan normally carries his odds and ends and even his provisions. The Japanese dagger was tight in its sheath. He had no firearms, pistol holster, ammunition belt. No money. And no document bearing Lobsang Pun's signature. Nothing in writing whatever. He had been thoroughly looted by some one to whom a silver watch and an expensive dagger were of no interest.

The other man was the Bön magician's novice, with a bullet hole beneath his left eye. He hadn't dragged himself along the snow. He had been shot, standing, where he now sat propped carefully against a rock. The tracks in the snow had been made by some one walking from one dead body to the other and back again. He had a Japanese, or it might be Korean knife in a sheath at his waist, a heavy jade charm at his neck, and a Japanese silk shirt underneath a heavy woolen sweater made in Massachusetts. There was nothing in his pockets.

Barring bullet holes and the blood on their faces, there was no evidence of a fight. They appeared to have left the road at points more than fifty paces apart, to have walked about fifty yards along parallel courses almost due northward, to have turned when they reached those rocks, and to have been shot at rather close range. Then some one had walked back and forth, more than once, from one to the other.

"Bandits!" remarked the headman, when he came up with the leg-weary ponies. "I said so."

"Would a bandit leave behind a silver watch, jade charm, daggers, good clothing, boots?"

"Tum-Glain, some one may have warned the bandits of Your Excellency's coming, so that they fled in haste."

Tom went and examined the ponies. They were dog-tired. But by dividing up the loads it might be possible to reach the monastery. He did the work with numbed hands, and then led the way, leaving the five Tibetans to follow on foot, arguing about the proper distribution of the Böns' belongings.

Moonlight gleamed on the two bodies, sitting, naked now, staring at the sky. The Tibetans had been careful to leave them in the proper attitude of death. There would be wolves soon, and then, in the morning, vultures.

CHAPTER 27.

"I am Su-Li Wing."

MIDNIGHT amid the frozen filth at the foot of the cliff on which the monastery perched. Utterly foundered ponies. A path led steeply upward, in and out of moonlight, like a monstrous, fantastic stairway in a dream. The loaded ponies couldn't possibly negotiate that. Notched against the moon two or three hundred feet in the air, there was a dark projection with something hanging to it. That was the monastery elevator, operated by a hand winch—a big basket made fast to a hide rope that passed over a roller at the end of a beam. It was sure to descend presently. The monks had seen Tom's party crossing the snow in moonlight and had sounded several long blasts on their radongs.

Tom was feeding the ponies with scraps of stale barley bread, with his back toward the steep stone ramp at the foot of the ascending path, when some one touched his elbow. He turned suddenly and stared into the face of a woman.

It was a clean face, which is rare in Tibet. Her features were Chinese. Astonishingly good looking in that weird light. Age difficult to guess—perhaps twenty-seven, or even thirty. The moonlight filled her eyes with sparks of pale green swimming in golden brown. She was wearing, over the customary woolen clothing of a Tibetan lady, an American man's coonskin overcoat of very fine quality. She was breathing hard.

She had evidently come down that monstrous stairway. An active, healthy, daring, intolerant-looking woman, with an odor of expensive perfume.

"I am Su-li Wing," she remarked, as if the name explained everything. "Who are you?"

She spoke in a rather Chinesey voice, with a synthetic accent.

"Staying in the monastery?" Tom asked.

She laughed: "Men only! They won't admit me. If you are seen talking to me, they won't admit you."

"Anything particular to talk about?"

She laughed again. "Very well, Mr. Mind-your-own-business- with-ten-tired-ponies, do you know a man named Rajah Dowlah?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Shortly before sunset he shot two monks. Perhaps you saw their bodies. He seized and carried off an English girl, and a Tibetan named Thö-pa-ga. Do you happen to know who they are?"

"How do you know he did it?"

"I saw him do it. If you're Tom Grayne I am glad to meet you. I will tell you."

"Yes, I'm Tom Grayne."

"I was Dowlah's friend. I was waiting for him in Nepal. He met me at Khatmandu and we crossed the forbidden Khambu-shar-kang Pass. It was a dreadful journey. The idea was to get into Tibet ahead of Lobsang Pun—and ahead of you, too, if you should still be alive. Dowlah seemed to think you were probably dead. We turned in this direction to requisition some of Lobsang Pun's supplies, that Dowlah guessed were in this monastery. Scouts went ahead of us. They brought back word so we all rode forward, past this monastery, and held up a party who turned out to be Thö-pa-ga in charge of a Bön magician, with an English girl whose name is Elsa Something-or-other, a mongrel named Noropa, a lot of devil-dancers and some others. There were about thirty of them; about forty of us. There wasn't a fight. They were exhausted after a hard march. Noropa shouted to them to surrender and the devil-dancers all obeyed him. Dowlah's men are nearly all from Naini Kol, and well armed. The Bön magician had a pistol, but they took it away from him."

Tom began off-loading the ponies. They were too tired to roll. The five Tibetans piled the loads against the wind and took shelter behind them. The ponies herded themselves in a melancholy group behind a flying buttress of gray rock.

"Are you listening?" asked Su-li Wing. "If you know Dowlah as well as he says he knows you, perhaps you can guess what it meant to him to capture Thö-pa-ga. He had expected to have to set an ambush, further westward, and to fight Lobsang Pun's party."

"I suppose it meant nothing to you?" Tom suggested.

"Oh, no. Nothing! I am the woman, who was to replace the woman, who has been waiting for several years for Thö-pa-ga. Dowlah said Elsa Something-or-other is worth a dozen of me. He left me flat, here, in the night, without luggage or servants."

Tom stepped more into the moonlight. She followed him. That way he could see her face better.

"How is Elsa Burbage?" he demanded. "Did she seem all right? Did you speak to her? What did she say?"

"Very little to me. She was all wrapped up in smelly sheep skin, so I can hardly say I saw her. She was very angry with Dowlah because he and Noropa shot the Bön magician and his novice. Dowlah ordered them to go and stand where he could speak to them separately, each out of the other's hearing. Then he and Noropa walked up and blew their brains out. Dowlah flew into a rage with me after that because I told him he was a fool to start murdering people. He would have shot me, if he had dared, but Thö-pa-ga and Elsa Burbage defied him. That was the only reason why he didn't shoot me. I was surprised at Thö-pa-ga. Dowlah had said he was a spiritless booby. He isn't. He took that girl's part and he swore like an English lord."

"You seem to think you know who I am."

"Oh, yes. Who else could you be? Dowlah told me. All the way over that awful pass from Khatmandu, whenever we had any conversation, he kept laughing about Tom Grayne, the American spy. He said you were dead, but I think he doubted it. He seemed surprised when one of the Bön magician's men claimed to have killed you with a club when they carried off Thö-pa-ga in Darjeeling. Dowlah told that to Elsa Burbage."

"Did she believe it?"

"I don't know. She didn't say."

"So Dowlah found his way through Nepal, did he? That took some doing. You say you're his friend?"

"I said, I *was* his friend."

"What are you now ? "

"Well, I came all the way from Peking to Lhasa, lived more than a year in Tibet and traveled from Lhasa to Khatmandu, at my own expense, on the strength of Dowlah's promises. I kept him very well informed of what is happening in Tibet. I organized most of his secret line of communication. And I know he took to himself the credit for all the work that I did. He left me without money or food or servants, as he expressed it, to entertain the monks. I suppose I think of Dowlah what Elsa Burbage thinks of you, if she has any sense. Is it true she was your girl friend? Dowlah said you sold her to Thö-pa-ga. He laughed about it. She'll belong to Dowlah soon, unless you do in Dowlah. Or do you count on her to seduce Dowlah and betray him to you?"

"Before Peking, where were you?" Tom asked.

"Do you think I'm a can of sardines?" she retorted. "You ask questions like a—"

"Moscow?"

"Since you've guessed it, yes."

"Lenin Institute, for special training? Former member of the Kuomintang? Now Revolutionary Instrument Number So-and-so?"

"Supposing that's true, then what?"

"Did you play with Dowlah with the notion of getting to India under his protection and stirring up sedition among the Indian women?"

"You're smart, aren't you! Get me close enough to Dowlah to kill him, and I'll tell you anything you want to know."

Tom laughed. "Tell me why you and he quarreled. If I believe that, perhaps I'll believe the rest of it. Look out! Stand clear. Here comes the hotel elevator! You say the monks won't give you shelter?"

"No. No women. And I made a mistake. I shouldn't have mentioned the Thunder Dragon Gate. I did it to impress them. But it worked the wrong way. Now they say I'm shang-shang-ridden. They know more than you'd think. They have mysterious ways of sending and receiving messages. They don't know who Dowlah is, but they knew his name—knew he was coming. They expect Lobsang Pun, and they had sent a messenger along the road eastward to warn all travelers against Dowlah. The Bön captured the messenger, but he escaped when Dowlah shot the two magicians. Have you anything to eat?"

CHAPTER 28.

"You shot Tara-eke! You blamed Pavlov."

IT could hardly be called a basket. It was a crate built of tamarisk boughs, lashed with raw-hide. It swung in the wind at the end of its rope and made a sort of parachute landing, about a hundred feet to one side of its beam. Two monks let themselves out, no worse for the adventure—smiling, gentle-looking fellows, spinning prayer wheels at sight of Su-li Wing, courteous to Tom, and even reverential when he showed them Lobsang Pun's seal in the moonlight. One by one they pressed the seal against their foreheads.

After that, they invited Tom to enter the basket and be hauled up. But he wanted food for the ponies, nothing else. He had his own tent. He reproached them for refusing shelter to Su-li Wing. They whirled their prayer wheels in self-defense, and appealed to Tom's own Tibetan followers for corroboration that it wasn't customary, or even lawful to admit women. Above all, not that woman. There and then mutiny started.

The headman announced he was going no further. He and his men would wait for the Holy Lobsang Pun, whose servants they were. He demanded to be paid off, and to receive the promised bonus. Taking his cue from the monks, he declared Su-li Wing was a witch who would bring to pass terrible disaster. When the Holy Lobsang Pun Rinpoche should come and exorcise the evil that otherwise would certainly result from the Bön magician's death, then it might be sensible to dare new dangers. He climbed into the basket. Tom hauled him out.

"One of the others may go up, along with the monks, and bring down plenty of feed for the ponies. After that, you may all go to the devil. Ask Lobsang Pun for your bonus and see what you get!"

So one man went up, he and the monks singing together in the cage that swung in the biting wind and bumped the cliff. The ascent took fifteen minutes. At the summit they had to catch a mooring rope and be hauled in to a dock that was out of sight from below. Meanwhile, the headman tried to

change Tom's mind. He couldn't. So he changed his own. He would go anywhere with Tum-Glain, now, at once, or at any other time. But it would be better to have nothing to do with that woman.

"If these holy monks, who are good people, won't give her shelter, she must be very evil."

"Pitch the tent. Prepare tea," Tom ordered.

He spread his own blankets, on a doubled yak-hide on the snow, for Su-li Wing. She turned in, well fed by the Tibetans, and fell asleep almost at once. When the basket came down with several loads of grain, and he had fed the ponies, Tom turned in, between her and the headman. The Tibetans put a prayer streamer and a turquoise charm between her and him. They chanted several mantrams before falling asleep.

When the first daylight stole into the tent, Tom lay still watching Su-li Wing searching his bag. She found Abdul Mirza's package, weighed—felt—considered it. Presently her hand came feeling inside Tom's jacket for his Mauser pistol. She stifled a scream when he gripped her wrist and held on until she let go of the Mauser and he was sure she hadn't a knife in her other hand.

"Dowlah took mine," she remarked matter of factly. "You are not such an oaf as Dowlah said you are. You sleep like a weasel, with one eye open."

The Tibetans boiled tea again, over horse-dung fuel. The monks sent down a meal of hot barley porridge, with the Abbot's compliments. Tom went to examine the ponies. He fed them before he returned to the tent.

"Su-li Wing, how tired were Dowlah's ponies?" he demanded.

"Nearly as tired as yours. He left food for them, and his tents, in charge of two men at this end of the high pass that leads to Nepal. That's where he's camped with your girl friend. But what do you think you can do to Dowlah? You and five men with one pistol between you! If you want my help, buy it."

"Su-li Wing you are going to talk."

"Oh, am I? Suppose I wait for Lobsang Pun. These monks expect him. What if I wait and talk to him?"

Tom reached inside her coonskin coat. She had cached some dry bread, cheese and two cans of condensed milk. He placed them out of reach.

"Wait for Lobsang Pun if you like. You'll be hungry."

"You'd let me starve?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Buy me. Tom Grayne, I need money. Dowlah took mine. I know more about Tibet than you'd ever dream. And I need five thousand rupees."

"What for?"

"It costs money to return to Peking."

"Not five thousand rupees, it doesn't."

"Well, can I live in Peking on nothing? Tom Grayne, what I know is worth a high price. You could sell it two or three times over, if you're clever."

"Perhaps you've been too clever," Tom answered. "Moscow wouldn't leave you short of funds if you'd played straight. Dowlah took your money? He'd do it. But I bet you hadn't any. You hadn't paid your servants, or they'd have stood by you, not Dowlah. Talk, Su-li Wing, or I'll leave you flat."

"Will you give me a break, if I tell?"

"Depends on what you tell. You'd better come clean."

"Tom Grayne, there's a Russian named Pavlov, who is so jealous of me that he can't see straight. He ditched me and reported me to Moscow."

"Bela Pavlov? The half-Hungarian who shot the Chinese magistrate in Urga three years ago? Was it he who polished up your English? I was at school with that bird. He and I learned Tibetan from a Chinese herbalist in Cleveland. Where is he?"

"That is part of the information that I will sell, for a fair price."

"Try to sell it to Lobsang Pun. I've heard he has 'em whipped if they won't answer questions. Compared to that old humorist, I'm easy. I will stake you to some journey money, on conditions. Lobsang Pun would stake you to the fresh air and a flogging, with his blessing to follow. Why did you quarrel with Dowlah? Tell it like a telegram. I don't want any dope on communism, or why girls leave home."

"Are you so wise you know truth when you hear it?" she retorted. "Well, I'll try you. Did you know that Dowlah is unmarried—that he has no ranee?"

"I never gave a damn about it, one way or the other."

"I told Dowlah in a message that I sent to him by way of Nepal, that he could make me Ranee of Naini Kol or I would betray to the Indian Government his link-up with Moscow. In that way, I could have restored my standing with the Comintern. I could do a lot with the Indian women. Dowlah answered he would do it. That was why I went to Khatmandu to meet him."

"Why didn't Dowlah kill you somewhere in the passes?" Tom asked. "Who'd have blamed him?"

"He thought he needed me," she said, "until he captured Elsa Burbage. After that, he'd have liked to kill me, but she made such a fuss about his killing the Bön magicians that he thought twice. He's sweet on her. He doesn't want to quarrel with her. He supposed I would die of hunger, anyhow, or perhaps be eaten by wolves. He knew the monks wouldn't shelter me. Like a fool, I told him that every monk between here and Lhasa believes it was I who killed Tara-eke. I didn't. Pavlov did that. But they blame me, because Pavlov said I did it. The monks don't mind her being killed. Her very name makes them shudder. But whoever kills a devil is supposed to be entered into by that devil's spirit. That makes you safe from assault. They're afraid to do anything to you—that includes giving you food and shelter."

"Who was Tara-eke?"

"The woman they were keeping for Thö-pa-ga, to make him mentally complacent. Pavlov shot her. Then the Böns of Djaring-dzong—some of them have been to Moscow—tried to put me in her place. The Abbot wouldn't let them. So they tried to kill him."

"Who tried?"

"The Thunder Dragon Gate people. Pavlov said that was my fault, because I wouldn't go in and face it."

"Face what?"

"It. In the Thunder Dragon Gate. You wouldn't believe if I told. Let's say, I don't know. Perhaps Dowlah will make your Elsa Burbage face it."

"How did you keep in touch with Dowlah, while he was in Delhi, and you in Tibet?"

"Oh, I went to see him in Delhi. I was ordered to do that. I traveled as a pilgrim across Nepal. On the return journey I arranged the line of communication. They teach you in Moscow how to do that, and it's always easier to do in a forbidden country than an open one, because the people of a closed country feel mysterious and like to have dangerous secrets. After that Dowlah came and met me once in Khatmandu, and then again this time."

"How many Japanese at Djaring-dzong?"

"Oh, fourteen or fifteen, under a man named Chou Wang, whose real name is Naosuki. They pretend they're Chinese Buddhists and very pious, but the monks know better. It was Chou Wang, as he calls himself, who persuaded the Thunder Dragon Gate people to send a shang-shang party into India, to scare Lobsang Pun and to get hold of Thö-pa-ga, because it was known that Lobsang Pun had sent Noropa to London to compel Thö-pa-ga to return home. They couldn't do much without Thö-pa-ga. They couldn't put a substitute in his place as long as he was alive, because he might show up some day. And they didn't dare to murder him in England or in India, because the story might reach Tibet—and besides, the Japanese connection with it might have leaked out. The English are very fussy about murder, unless they do it themselves with machine-guns. But they can kill anybody in the Thunder Dragon Gate, and no one the wiser. The Japanese have a substitute ready for Thö-pa-ga if he should prove intractable."

Tom was keeping an eye on the ponies. He was giving them all the time they needed to munch barley and recover their spirit. They were hardy little bad-tempered brutes. One of them was already kicking at the others. It was already warm in the direct rays of the sun, although it was zero cold in the shade of the tent. It was nearly time to saddle up. Tom glanced at the five Tibetans, talking together in low tones.

"And Dowlah?" he asked. "Are he and Pavlov buddies? I mean, are they riding the same horse?"

"No," she answered. "Dowlah was afraid of Pavlov. He had never met him, but he knew his reputation. Dowlah wouldn't move until I sent him word that Pavlov had fled to Sinkiang. The monks drove Pavlov away not long after he shot Tara-eke."

Tom stared at her a moment.

"You shot Tara-eke," he said suddenly. "You blamed Pavlov for it and he bolted. Is that his coat you're wearing?"

"No."

"Uh-huh? Pavlov," said Tom, "is no easy mark. You must be pretty hot stuff if you put one over on him. Pavlov got him self booted out of the United States for sedition, racketeering and living off the earnings of prostitutes. He went to Russia and became an agent of the Comintern. Trusted agents of the Comintern aren't sentimentalists. But they don't leave women subordinates without funds, in such a country as Tibet, merely because they're jealous. Jealous of you? I know Pavlov. He's a hard, mean, cynical killer, without a compunction in his kit. He's too sure of himself to know what jealousy feels like. You could lie about that for a year, and I wouldn't believe you. Did he try to kill you before he bolted? Quick now! Come clean!"

"Yes," she answered. "What made Dowlah think you're stupid?"

"If he thinks I'm dead, that's even better."

Tom caught the headman's eye and signed to him to begin loading the ponies. The Tibetans began pulling down and rolling up the tent and roping loads. Since daybreak they had been sitting on the upturned saddles, to warm them a bit for the ponies' backs. If a Tibetan thinks of a pony's back, with out being ordered to do it, he has something else than mere benevolence in mind. Tom quietly cocked the Mauser underneath his jacket, but he continued talking:

"Dowlah counted on capturing Thö-pa-ga?"

"Yes. But he expected to have to waylay Lobsang Pun. That is why he brought so many men. He expected Lobsang Pun would get possession of Thö-pa-ga in Darjeeling. It was very difficult to bring so many men across Nepal. Forbidden country, even to Dowlah. Terrible roads. The Gurkhas as suspicious as snakes. If it hadn't been for my preparations, he could never have done it. They all had to wrap their weapons inside their loads and pose as pilgrims. Even so, we were pursued, pretty nearly to the top of the Kambu-shar-kang. Dowlah's men almost mutinied. They can't stand the cold and the high altitudes. Dowlah planned to lay an ambush for Lobsang Pun, somewhere near this monastery, but I think he doubted his men. That was why he was so delighted when things turned out as they did."

Tom whipped out his pistol. He didn't say anything. He didn't need to. The five Tibetans reined in. They had mounted the five best ponies and were trying to steal away. Warm saddles had been only one precaution; they were leading a pony loaded with nearly all the remaining food. They dismounted and stuck out their tongues, each man thrusting his right ear forward with his hand, in sign of humiliation. Tom gestured with the all-commanding Mauser and they returned to work, loading the other ponies. Then he beckoned the headman.

"What is the usual punishment for that offense?"

"A flogging. But Your Excellency doesn't do usual things. And of what use would flogged men be?"

"You are the headman."

"Yes, Your Honor."

"Therefore, it was your fault. Shall I send you with a letter to the Holy Lobsang Pun, inviting him to administer justice?"

"Better anything than His Blessed Holiness's anger!" said the headman. "Let me beat these others, and then next time they won't listen to me if I tell them to desert Your Excellency."

"It is you who shall be punished. Since you are too wise to take back a letter to His Holiness Lobsang Pun, you shall have a chance to restore yourself in my favor, and earn merit, by other means."

"What is it?"

"I will tell you at the right time."

Tom examined the loads and the ponies' girths. He hoisted Su-li Wing onto a pony with scant ceremony, and gave her a double blanket for her legs. He commanded the Tibetans to walk beside their mounts. He led the way on foot, striding too fast for the loaded ponies, westward, toward Mt. Everest, that gleamed in the sun in the midst of the frozen tumult of peaks that rear themselves against the sky between Nepal and Tibet.

CHAPTER 29.

"It would be wasted on me."

"TUM-GLAIN," said the headman, "who shall protect us from all the devils of these parts? This is evil country. There are snow-men, who come like the wind from the mountain-tops."

"Have you ever seen one?"

"No. But I have heard of them. They bite off the tip of a man's nose and toes and fingers. They leave the rest of his body undestroyed, and frozen. A man can't get another body until this one is utterly decomposed. And the gods won't defend us against them unless we have some blessed person with us who knows how to pray, and whose prayers are acceptable because of merit earned in former lives. You and I lack merit. Otherwise, you wouldn't be a foreigner and I wouldn't be compelled to obey you."

"Acquire merit by obedience," Tom answered; and that gave the headman enough to think about to keep him quiet for a couple of hours.

It was easier to think than to talk, with the bitter wind blowing a gale from the eternal ice and snow of the tremendous peaks that blocked the horizon. With the monastery out of sight behind them, they were now completely surrounded by mountains, whose devils, said the headman, created the wind, so that there was no protection from it. Westerly, it seemed to come from every direction. It followed ravines and glaciers, dividing into howling blasts that fought with one another as they struck the open spaces at different angles and whirlwinded the snow in great clouds from wherever it clung.

It wasn't easy even to think. Cold and altitude combined to produce the deadly lethargy that had to be fought against minute by minute, stride by stride. Frequent halts were necessary.

"Let us ride, Tum-Glain!" advised the headman. "The beasts are stronger than we are."

But it was better to preserve the riding ponies' strength against emergency. Dowlah might have a number of comparatively fresh mounts. The main thing was to get in touch with Elsa: let her know she was closely followed.

During one halt, Su-li Wing, with her back to the wind, made another attempt to persuade Tom. She was as sentimental as the blizzard; as persuasive as the butt-end of a Marxian realist's club.

"Why don't you pitch the tent and be sensible? Are you so crazy about your girl friend that you forget Dowlah has weapons? She is all right. She has all my luggage. There is even perfume in one of the bags. Dowlah's tents are luxurious, and the cots have air mattresses. She is clean and comfortable, and being made love to by Dowlah. No woman is in trouble while she is being made love to—not as long as it lasts. If Dowlah should shoot you, you won't have a chance even to be second fiddle."

At the next halt she was even more contentious. Wind, snow-glare and the ultra-violet rays were irritating her beyond endurance.

"Are those her bags among the loads? Give them to me. then, in exchange for mine that Dowlah stole from me to give to her. I need face cream. I need snow spectacles. Dowlah took mine. Are you such a brute that you don't care how badly I suffer? God! I wouldn't choose to be your girl!"

Tom gave her the stump of a stearine candle from the tent lantern.

"Warm that under your arm-pit. Smear it on under your eyes. Keep your face covered. You don't have to look charming. It would be wasted on me."

It was about a mile after that when Tom caught sight of two men crouching in the shelter of a frozen snowdrift that formed a bridge between two rocks. They were alive, those two. They appeared to be armed.

"Bandits!" announced the headman.

"Dowlah's scouts!" said Su-li Wing. "Just beyond that spur of raw rock is the ravine where the track begins that leads upward to the pass into Nepal. That's where he pitched camp. Oh, you damned fool! Turn back before it's too late! Listen. Is it the Thunder Dragon Gate you're after? Turn back, and I will show you the other way in! It's longer, and more difficult. But we will have the wind behind us at least part of the way, and if we travel fast we may get there ahead of him. Do that, and I'll show you how to defeat him and let other people kill him."

"Shut up!" Tom commanded. He turned to the headman.

"Go forward alone. Tell those two men to come here to me."

"They may kill me."

"To earn merit, after behaving treacherously, a man, should be willing to run some risk."

"Well, that is true. But if they kill me, it will be your karma. I will try it. Tum-Glain, if they shoot me, you must ask the Holy Lobsang Pun Rinpoche to pray for me—many prayers. After all, I am his servant. I don't want to go to hell. It takes a long time to get out of hell, and then one has to be gin at the bottom with all sorts of miserable incarnations—worms and rats and such-like."

He mounted and rode forward slowly. Both men came toward him. They were not Tibetans. As they came nearer they appeared to be turbaned Indians, in good wind-proof clothing. One had a rifle wrapped in greased cloth; the other a repeating pistol in a holster. They walked awkwardly over the snow, stumbling, as if their feet were frozen.

They evidently had no speech in common with Tom's headman. After two or three minutes of futile gesturing they took hold of his saddle, one on either side, and submitted to be half-towed to where Tom waited for them. Bearded. Brown-eyed. Military looking. They saluted respectfully. After the man with the repeating pistol had beaten the frozen snow out of his beard and had smoothed it a bit, he handed Tom a scrap of folded tin-foil from a cigarette tin.

Tom turned his back to the wind, removed his gloves and unfolded the tin foil within the shelter of his opened over coat. Inside it was a piece of thin white paper, also from a cigarette tin. It was almost covered with pin-pricks. He smeared the back of the paper with soot from the top of the candle-lantern. It was easy to read then:

Thöpe is being splendid. Dowlah says you dead. I don't believe but fear you may be too late. Tom, I think Dowlah is desperate. His men are mutinous. I will carry on to give you every possible chance. Man who takes this offered help me escape but Thundergate not far now and you may be near. So will stick it out. Good luck. ELSA.

Tom turned to the man with the rifle and spoke in Hindustanee:

"What has happened?"

"Sahib, Rajah Dowlah brought us sepoy of Naini Kol, by way of Khatmandu in Nepal, across the Roof of the World. We came by forced marches, not knowing why, but because we were his men and he ordered it." He stared at Su-li Wing. "In Khatmandu, this woman waited for us. And as long as she was with us all went well, although the Gurkhas of Nepal made trouble. But she showed us how to escape from the Gurkhas. In the high pass we nearly perished. After we had pitched camp at the foot of the pass, Rajah Dowlah led us along this way, past a monastery. He commanded us to attack a party of Tibetans, who rode toward us. But there was no fighting. They surrendered. He, and a man named Noropa whom we had seen in Delhi, slew two leaders of the party, and from one of the dead leaders he took a writing—I know not what, but it pleased him greatly. There were many Tibetans, and among them an English lady, who gave me that message when I crawled to the tent before daybreak, whispering to her that we sepoy of Naini Kol are honorable men, who perceive that we are being forced to become brigands, to which we now refuse consent before it shall be too late."

"How is she?" Tom demanded.

"Sahib, she is a very brave young woman, full of mockery of Rajah Dowlah. When he entered her tent she threw hot tea at him. There is a Tibetan named Thö-pa-ga among the prisoners. They protect each other, they two, and they share the same tent. He was in there when I crept to the tent for speech with her. I said: we sepoy of Naini Kol would protect her. I told her the truth, that we had agreed among us to go no farther with Rajah Dowlah, but to see what could be done about reaching India by some other route. She spoke to me of Tum-Glain, and I remembered having seen Your Honor through the door of His Highness's library, one night in Delhi. She begged me, if by any means I could, to deliver a message to Your Honor. So I promised, and she pricked it with a pin by candlelight. When morning came we refused to march. There was a bad scene. His Highness rode away westward, with the lady and with all the Tibetans we had captured."

"Had you all your weapons?"

"No. Nor much food, sahib. Rajah Dowlah had sent that man Noropa in the night to steal as many rifles from us as he could. He stole nine, one by one I suppose, while their owners slept. We were very weary. Rajah Dowlah had said we need not post a sentry. Knowing we were disaffected, before daylight he had armed those Tibetans with the rifles that Noropa stole from us."

"Did you try to protect Miss Burbage?"

"Yes. We called to her. We bade her turn back, and we slapped our rifles. She saw, sahib. She heard. She understood. She waved her hand and said nothing, smiling. But at me she looked with meaning, as much as to say I should not for get my promise. Had she appealed to us, we would have acted otherwise. But it seemed to us all that she knew what she was doing."

"Did Dowlah take all the ponies?"

"No, he left the lame ones."

"How many are you?"

"Twenty men, sahib, with one pistol and eleven rifles."

"Weren't you forty, all told?"

"We from Naini Kol are twenty men. There were also twenty porters—Sherpas from Nepal. They all deserted by way of the pass, at daybreak. We feared to follow, not being mountaineers. Sherpas are like monkeys on a mountain, and they love snow."

"Who is in command of you?"

"I am, sahib."

"Have you any money?"

"No."

"Enough provisions to reach India?"

"Perhaps. How far is it? By which road? Sahib, did we do wrong to permit the English lady to ride away? We are true men, we sepoys. We deserted our prince because our *izzat** was offended by the murders we saw him do. We are afraid, but we are not cowards. If the sahib will take command of us, we will obey."

[**Izzat* (Persian and Urdu)—honor: the honor or reputation of a person, organization, or institution.]

"I find no fault," Tom answered. "That is, if you are telling the truth."

"If I have lied by as much as a word, may Allah do so to me, and worse!"

Tom went to his bag and broke open Abdul Mirza's package. He counted out fifteen hundred rupees. He gave a thousand rupees to the man from Naini Kol.

"I can't accept your offer. You and your men must march to India by way of the Sepo La. Start immediately. Wire from the first telegraph-station in Sikkim to Abdul Mirza, in care of Miss Nancy Strong of Darjeeling. I will write her address for you. She will know where he is. You will report to Abdul Mirza, at whatever place he directs, and you will tell him that I gave you money for your journey, so that you needn't beg or pillage. If, on your way you should encounter a Tibetan priest-nobleman named Lobsang Pun, with a large following, you may tell him your story and say that Tum-Glain urges him to come with all possible speed. Thereafter, until you meet His Excellency Abdul Mirza face to face, you hold your tongue, lest trouble come of it. Silence. Do you understand that?"

"*Atcha*,* sahib. But how shall we find this what is it? this Sepo La?"

[**Atcha*, *acha* (Hindi)—good! all right!]

"This lady—Su-li Wing—will show you. Ask her no questions, and you will not need to lie when you say, like an honest soldier, that you know nothing against her. When you reach India, but no sooner, give her this, for herself."

Tom handed him five hundred rupees. Then he turned to Su-li Wing:

"There you are. I said I'd stake you to some journey money. You've an escort thrown in."

"Do you mean you're running me out of Tibet?" she demanded.

"Yes. Without prejudice. Tell your own story. About the worst they can do is to deport you from India and pay your fare."

"Do you call that giving me a break? Marching orders and five hundred miserable rupees? My luggage, that your girl friend has stolen, is worth at least five thousand rupees! I hope Dowlah rapes her, and then kills her! Give me her luggage. It's worth at least *something*."

Tom turned again to the man from Naini Kol.

"Did Rajah Dowlah carry off this lady's luggage?"

"No, sahib. There are several loads of it. His Highness offered it to the English lady, but she refused. She wouldn't even permit the porters to carry it into the tent we pitched for her."

"Snooty little bitch!" said Su-li Wing.

CHAPTER 30.

"Bandits! Let us turn back!"

DOWLAH'S camp site, at the foot of the almost unnegotiable pass into Nepal, looked stricken, dismal, hopeless. The men from Naini Kol lined up and faced the wind. They were ashamed of

being mutineers. They said so. They were equally ashamed of feeling beaten by the cold, the unaccustomed food and the altitude. They were angry with their subadar* for having agreed to return to India. They said that vehemently. They felt guilty of having let Elsa Burbage ride away with Dowlah. Muffled to their ears, and with their loads already packed on half-starved and exhausted ponies, they demanded, with chattering teeth, to be given a chance to restore their *izzat*—their soldierly honor.

[**Subadar*—an Indian Army mid-rank officer equal to a Captain.]

"That's a brave offer," said Tom. "I respect you for it. But I can't accept. I'm not a British official, I'm American. You men are in foreign territory without permission or authority from any one. As I see it, you obeyed your Rajah's orders until you had reason to believe he was acting criminally. After that, you refused to obey. Well and good. But if the Tibetan soldiers from Kalimpong should catch you, you'd be massacred. That might cause bad international trouble. I am here as a foreigner at my own risk. I have no authority. But I have given your subadar a letter to Abdul Mirza, and I don't think you will be in disgrace when you get back, if you hold your tongues."

Su-li Wing tried harder than the men from Naini Kol to change Tom's mind.

"Look here," she said, "Tom Grayne, I'm for sale. You buy—yes?"

"No, I've told you."

"Don't you be a damned fool," she insisted. "If you follow Dowlah, he will kill your girl friend, sooner than let you get her. I know him. Once a man of Dowlah's type becomes a killer, he goes on killing. I have seen scores of men, in China and in Russia, who burned their bridges after intriguing themselves into a desperate situation because they thought themselves more clever than any one else. They all took to murder. First they killed one person, then another, and then several. After that, they were like wolves that kill sheep, because to kill sheep is so easy."

"You're a killer yourself," Tom answered.

"You can't prove it! But you can buy me. I will stay bought. Give me the breaks, and I will show you how to get what you want in Tibet. I will show you how to get ahead of Dowlah. I haven't told you all I know. We professional spies should be as members of one brotherhood."

"Good-by," said Tom. "Good luck to you. Short rations as far as Sikkim, Su-li Wing. After that you'll be able to eat your fill. If you take my advice, you'll talk small when you get to India."

He offered to shake hands. She refused. He returned with a genial grin the salute of the men from Naini Kol, then rode away at the head of his Tibetans. He was uncertain why they followed without protest. But after a mile or two the headman explained:

"Tum-Glain, in some other incarnation you must have done something to entitle you to wisdom in this one. In another life you ought to be entitled to some mercy, for your mercy to us now. We feared that for a punishment you might dismiss us and take some of those Indians instead. Then the soldiers from Kalimpong would have killed us, should they catch them, as is likely, because that woman is a bad-luck bringer."

"You think, then, that the Tibetan authorities may send out a patrol from Kalimpong?"

"Why not?"

"Along this road?"

"No. The soldiers are afraid of the evil spirits hereabouts, so their officers wouldn't be able to lead them along this road. But they will block the road. Why shouldn't they?"

"Do you think the Tibetan troops will oppose the Holy Lobsang Pun Rinpoche?"

"A million blessings on His Sacredness, they might! There is no knowing how wicked or how stupid soldiers can be. But His Blessed Holiness would make a magic, I think, and get by them unseen. If he wishes to come this way, he will do it."

Tom made the most of the Tibetans' changed mood. He accomplished marvels of marching, changing the loads frequently from one pony to another. But Dowlah's speed was next thing to a miracle. Two days and two nights at his heels, but not a sight of him. Tom's mood was merciless to man and beast, himself included, but instead of causing mutiny it stirred the Tibetans' superstition in his favor. Whenever he called a halt, to let them boil their slimy salted tea, in some cave or lee of a rock, or beside black and white water that welled amid treeless wastes of moraine and snow, their remarks revealed less curiosity than guarded approval. It was the same when they huddled together at night, in the tent.

"Tum-Glain, tell us how is it that you, a foreigner, who hadn't the advantage of being born in this blessed beautiful land, nevertheless are so good to be with? You speak our speech so that it sounds comical, although we understand you, and you understand us. Which is it? Were you one of us in a former life? Were you reborn into some miserable foreign country for your former sins? Or are you a foreigner, too good for your own wretched country, being made ready, be cause of merit, to be reborn, at the proper time, in this blessed land? If so, better die soon, sooner to be reborn!"

One more day, speed dwindling, and then food for the famished ponies! A load of barley on the snow, beside a dead horse. Ravens had arrived, but no vultures. The horse's carcass was hardly cold. The Tibetans apologized for cutting off meat for themselves. They admitted they were robbing birds and wolves. It wasn't decent food. Nevertheless, it wasn't so indecent as if they themselves had killed the animal. Hungry men mayn't be choosers. They were pious about it. They said their prayers for the soul of the sinner that had been incarnated in the horse because of sins in former lives. They wished him a better incarnation next time. They ate the meat raw, ravenously, throwing stones at the ravens because they are birds of very bad omen for the liberated soul whose dead carcass they insult with their beaks. They shouted aloud for the vultures to come and drive the ravens away.

Tom studied the trail, protecting his eyes from the wind with his gloved hand. It would be dark in less than two hours. The dead horse lay exactly at the summit of a narrow pass between high mountains that were part of the jumble of summits that hide Everest from almost every direction. From where he stood, a crag-flanked, bouldered gorge led downward, so nearly straight between the flanks of mountains that he could see the black-purple shadow of a valley, perhaps twenty miles away, five thousand feet below him. Darker seams in that shadow might even be tamarisk scrub. It looked like comfortable country, as one reckons comfort in Tibet. Fuel. Less wind. Altitude where breathing would be no effort, where three or four hours' deep sleep would really rest man and beast.

But the ponies couldn't possibly do twenty more miles. It might take them another day to reach that valley. They needed eight hours' rest, and another meal, before attempting the boulder-strewn descent. It would be a sheer impossibility in darkness. It would be many hours before the moon would rise over the peaks, and then not long before it would pass behind other peaks, so there

would be no night march in any event. He looked for a good place to bivouac, wishing he had field-glasses.

Presently, on the right-hand side of the descending trail, about four or five miles away, and two hundred feet above it, he saw what looked, in the sunset shadow, like the mouth of a cave. If he could have only afforded the time, it would be a good place to await the morning sun. A good place any how. It seemed accessible. There would be room in there for the ponies, and no need to pitch the tent. He pointed it out to the Tibetans and led the way.

For a while he lost sight of it, because the track led down ward, a thousand feet in half a mile, between broken cliffs where the loaded ponies had to be manhandled over the slippery rock. Then he saw it again, through a saw-tooth gap—halted—beckoned the headman:

"Can you see any one in that cave?"

"Bandits! Let us turn back!"

"How many can you see?"

"One."

"I also. Man or woman?"

"I can't tell. It is some one sitting by a fire of sticks, not a dung-fire. That means horses, or else porters, and that means danger for us. There are no prayer flags hereabouts. This is a country where the holy lamas haven't driven away the devils. So whoever is here is a dugpa,* who obeys devils, or else they obey him, which would be even worse. Let us turn back quickly, while there is time."

*

[**Dugpa*—devil-priest; strictly speaking, an adherent of the Buddhist religion of Tibet who, previous to the reform by Tsong-kha-pa in the 14th century, followed sorcery and other more or less Tantric practices, which are entirely foreign to the pure teachings of Buddhism.]

Tom led forward, doing two men's share of the exhausting work of holding up ponies over rock worn smooth by ice and wind. Here and there a hoof-mark was discernible. In one place, on a pocket of frozen snow, there were at least twenty hoof-marks. But no sign of Elsa.

At last the ponies stood heaving, with trembling legs, while he studied the mouth of an ascending, winding track that led through a break in the rock wall on the right hand, toward the cave on the mountain-side. From where he stood he couldn't see the cave, but it was a well-worn causeway that led to it. Some of it was artificial, laid with flat stones set edgewise. There were traces of yak-dung in the crevices, left by the men who had gathered the stuff for fuel. There was quite a lot of yak-dung farther down the trail toward the dark valley, and some of that was recent.

The Tibetans refused to go a step farther. They declared they would wait for the moon and then turn back, unless some one should come from that cave, meanwhile, and kill them all. They were panic-stubborn.

"Tum-Glain, if we die at dugpas' hands, without a holy lama to protect us, devils will pursue our souls through outer darkness. No, not another footstep forward! Go on alone, if you are as brave as all that."

Tom glanced at the pony that carried the load that held the money-bag. That pony—it was his own, the strongest—might perhaps have had enough strength to retreat uphill. Tom laughed at the headman.

"What would you do with money in the next world?"

Then he filled his lungs and shouted:

"Hullo-hullo-hullo! *Koi hai! Koi hai!*"*

[**Koi hai* (Hindi)—Is anyone there?]

The shout went clamoring from crag to crag. It seemed endless. It was like a thousand hollow voices of the devils of the night, that came hurrying out of the valley. The Tibetans laid their foreheads on the rock between flattened hands. The headman moaned the sacred "*Om mane padme hum!*" The others, a word behind him, moaned it louder, until they caught up with him, all chanting faster and faster. It sounded like "Three Blind Mice."

Tom cocked the Mauser and waited, gripping the butt with his ungloved hand inside his overcoat. He was dog-tired. He leaned in the icy shadow of a huge boulder in the middle of the track, flexing his muscles to keep them from growing numb.

It seemed ten minutes, but the shadow wasn't ten minutes deeper, before footsteps clamored on the causeway. Echoes magnified them into a prodigious noise that resembled the clatter of small stones falling from the higher ledges. Who ever was coming made no secret of it. But Tom stayed in the dark where he was, making sure of his footing. He made sure of his grip on the Mauser. The Tibetans ceased chanting and lay as still as dead men.

It seemed ten more minutes before a man came and stood in the gap, in the last of the reflected sunset, staring. He was wearing snow-spectacles, with his head in a hood, above wind-proof, fur-lined clothing. He stared at the Tibetans—at the ponies—pulled off his spectacles to peer into the deepening shadows—

Tom spoke, quite quietly:

"Dowlah, put your hands up! Put them high over your head!"

"Oh, it's you, is it? I thought—I mean, I hoped they had buried you in Darjeeling."

"I won't repeat the warning."

Dowlah put his hands up. "Curse you, are you an immortal? Where's that Chinese woman? You must have passed her."

"Keep your hands up!"

Tom told the headman to go and search him. Comforted by the Mauser, the headman obeyed.

Dowlah had no weapon.

CHAPTER 31.

"I was in trouble some years ago."

"You see, I had to sleep," said Dowlah. "Hee-hee! I've had a good sleep. You haven't had. What are you going to do about that Mauser? Shoot me, or strike a bargain?"

They sat facing each other, across a wood-fire near the mouth of the cave, their faces glowing but their backs protected with heavy sheepskin from the icy wind. No moon yet. Pitch dark. The Tibetans had refused to enter the cave. They said it belonged to dugpas; it was occupied by homeless souls, too wicked to have bodies. They were afraid, too, of Dowlah. But Tom had prevailed on them to lead the foundered ponies, and to climb with the loads, to a wide ledge below and beyond the cave. There they had pitched the tent and had a fire of their own, amid leaping shadows.

The cave contained plenty of fuel, tied in yak-load bundles. Tom had cooked tea and a meal for himself and Dowlah. No lantern. Firelight was sufficient.

Tom was sleepy. Dowlah knew it. Tom had shaved recently and his tired face looked at least civilized, but Dowlah's tangle of black whiskers was a scandalous mess, through which his eyes gleamed with fire-lit malice. The dilettante, amateur scientist's pose had vanished, but he hadn't lost his giggle. If he was feeling beaten or afraid, he didn't show it.

Tom forced the issue. "My Tibetans," he said, "are out of gas. Four flats to a man. They won't go another yard for ward. In the morning I'm going to take the two best ponies and go on alone."

"To your death," said Dowlah.

"You may go with my Tibetans," Tom answered. "Over take your own men. They're a bit ashamed of having let you make a monkey of yourself. They'll take you safe back to India. The British will probably let you go and live in Monte Carlo on a pension, like the other rotten rajahs, who aren't worth hanging. They're not bad sorts, the British. True, you're a bloody murderer, and they'll soon know it. You're a double-triple-crosser, and they already know that. But they've plenty of sense. They're not likely to make a public scandal, if you accept banishment and hold your tongue."

"My dear man, what an imbecile you are," said Dowlah. "You're a poor spy and a worse psychologist. Do you mistake me for a man who will accept humiliation? Are you going to use that Mauser?"

"I don't have to," Tom answered. "I need sleep. I'm going to fix you first. What has happened?"

"Produce a drink and I'll tell you."

"I don't use liquor. There's plenty of tea. Help yourself. I won't ask any question twice. How did Elsa put one over on you?"

Dowlah grinned. "You strong, silent, tough, abstemious, big blundering brutes never fail to fall for little women, do you! You may as well be disillusioned now as later. I will tell you the truth about

your sweet-innocent Elsa Burbage. Smart little devil! I told her you're dead, as I supposed you were. A man said he had killed you. She didn't care a damn. Not a damn, Mr. Lowly Lothario Grayne. Mr. Mute Mephistopheles Grayne and your miniature Marguerite! She began to play her own hand from that minute."

He paused, watching Tom's eyes in the firelight. His own eyes were contemptuous, but cunningly alert. He continued:

"I confess she put one over on me, as you call it. She saw me get rid of Su-li Wing, and I don't doubt that gave her this idea. Clever little hypocrite! Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. Pretended to be sorry for Su-li Wing. Needed clothing like the devil, but wouldn't even look at the other woman's luggage. Su-li Wing fooled Pavlov, but she hadn't guts enough to kill him, and she hadn't brains enough to fool me. All Su-li Wing ever wanted was Thö-pa-ga. He is all that anybody needs, to get control of the Thunder Dragon Gate. Elsa Burbage has him by the heartstrings."

He paused again, but Tom's eyes told him nothing. He continued:

"It was one of those crises, Grayne, that occur in the midst of all well-laid intrigues. The unpredictable. My men had become a liability—a dangerous nuisance. Carefully-chosen men, nevertheless mutinous. So I armed some of the Böns with their weapons and told them to go home. They're sure to fall foul of Tibetan troops from Kalimpong or some where, and be wiped out. Serve them right, the ingrates!"

Tom put some wood on the fire.

"Of course," said Dowlah, "I realized at once, in Delhi, that Elsa Burbage was merely using you for her own ends. She hadn't been in my house twenty minutes before she was measuring me with her eyes for a—"

Tom interrupted: "Cut that, Dowlah, if you need your front teeth."

Dowlah chuckled. "Grayne, accept your natural role of victim of a pretty little woman's cunning! She is quite capable of taking care of herself. The Bön magician's men—more than half of them devil-dancers—regard Thö-pa-ga as the incarnation of a god. She is the god's handmaiden. His daffadowndilly. His joy. Thanks to her companionship—and whatever else—Thö-pa-ga has recovered his spirits. They share the same tent."

"To protect her from you?" Tom suggested.

"Oh, I hadn't a chance. Not a chance. Don't be jealous. The Böns gave her credit for preserving Thö-pa-ga's life, so she very soon had the Böns eating out of her hand. Even that treacherous dog Noropa grovels to her. It was he who gave her one of my men's pistols. She had the impudence to threaten me with it. Tee-hee! Imagine being held up, at my age, by a ninety-pound girl with a Mauser! I don't believe she knows how to pull the trigger."

"She can hit an egg with a service repeater at thirty feet five times out of six," said Tom.

"Oh, can she? Well, the Böns were a bit difficult. You see, I had shot their leaders. I had to do that. It wouldn't have been safe to get rid of my own men while those two rascals were alive. Without leaders, and with Thö-pa-ga and Elsa Burbage on my side, the Böns should have been easy to manage, but I underestimated her spunk and cunning. I expected she would regard me as a rescuer. Instead, she jockeyed me into the position of having to look to her for protection. She can talk

Tibetan, confound her! I can't. I had to depend on her influence with Thö-pa-ga to keep the Böns from killing me. I had to pipe down, as they say in the Navy. The only tactical error that she made was preserving my life. I can't imagine why she did it."

"How did you travel so fast?" Tom asked him.

"Oh, the Böns had caches of provisions and fresh remounts. Good ponies. We rode like the devil. One brute burst his heart at the top of a hill."

"That's how I found you."

"Lucky blunderer! Grayne, you were riding to certain death."

"Talk sense," said Tom. "Your number's up, Dowlah. You know it."

"Grayne, if you had half the intuition of a dog, you would know without being told, that I have burned my bridges. No retreat possible. And I'm not the man to be beaten by a situation like this. There's Noropa, a half-boiled mystic who believes the gods will love him if he swaps horses often enough. By flattering him and telling him a few facts more or less embellished, I contrived to undermine egregious Elsa's position. She will find she has no secrets, but lots of opposition when she gets to Djaring-dzong. Because of promises that I made to Noropa, he is quite sure to bring or send a rescue-party. According to my calculation, they should be here by noon to-morrow."

"Does Noropa trust you? Or you him?"

"No. But he has seen my credentials."

"The forged letter that you stole from the man you murdered?"

"Who says it's forged? Who's to prove it, you infatuated ass? It's from the Tashi Lama himself."

"Bunk."

"Hah! I haven't it on me. It's well hidden. If you should shoot me, you couldn't find it. If I had known of its existence a year ago I would have got hold of it in time to avoid all this mess. I have known for more than a year that I would have to bolt sooner or later. Abdul Mirza, damn him, betrayed me a day too soon. But no matter. I got away, through Nepal. That route fooled them."

"You rewarded Su-li Wing for it, didn't you!"

"Blackmailing bitch!" Dowlah spat into the fire. "When we reached this place, I did lose a trick, I admit. There was another gang of Bön monks waiting for us, down below there on the trail, with a herd of yaks. Murderous-looking swine. They put most of our loads on the yaks and sent the ponies along unloaded, downhill. Some of them wanted to kill me. Elsa prompted Thö-pa-ga, and he objected. Some one challenged his identity, so they stripped him naked behind a screen of blankets, to look for his birth-marks. He has 'em. They bowed down and worshipped. He'll be a wonder, under proper control. He had to do a lot of talking to protect me, but he did it. Elsa Burbage asked me to go up to this cave, where I'd be safe while Thö-pa-ga orated. I had no suspicion of what the little sorceress intended. I got some of the Tibetans to carry up a few of my personal loads and light a fire. I made tea, and I opened a bottle of prunes. I declare she had doped them. I remember noticing that the cap wasn't screwed on the bottle tightly. When I awoke, it was morning. I had been disarmed. There was no one in sight."

Tom eyed him with curiosity. "You skeptics," he said, "are always credulous. Where would Elsa get dope?"

"Damned if I know. Perhaps you gave it to her for Thö-pa-ga. Would a Tibetan have written in the ashes, with a stick or his fingers, in English: 'Now it's your turn to be left flat. How do you like it?' Waspy little devil! She'll be singing to another tune though, before those Tibetans have finished, unless you accept my offer."

"You haven't made any offer," said Tom. "You weren't doped. You were drunk. On the way up here I saw the broken whisky bottle where you threw it. Frazzled nerves, and your last bottle of Scotch. One slug might make you pye-eyed at this altitude. You drank a whole bottle and fell asleep. Are the fumes still in your head? Or are you going to listen to sense?"

"The point is: have you any sense?" Dowlah retorted. "Are you vain enough to think I have been talking for your entertainment? Do you flatter yourself that I enjoy your company? Or that I have the slightest intention of accepting favors from you? I wish you in hell."

Tom grinned. "Same to you. I'll bet on my wish. You'll starve here, betting on Noropa, until Lobsang Pun turns up, and he'll send you to hell with bells on. You haven't food, tent, money, horse or weapon. What's your offer?"

"I know where the Thunder Dragon Gate is."

"So do I! Down in the valley. Less than a day's march. I've had that doped out since day before yesterday. This must be the valley that explains the fifty-mile discrepancies on all the maps."

"But I know how to get in!"

"Says you, Dowlah."

"And I know what to do when I get there."

"I know what to do with you, unless you come clean, Dowlah. I'm not going to let a crook like you keep me awake much longer. Speak up."

"Very well. I will tell you enough to satisfy you that I know a great deal more."

Dowlah stared at the night. There was a wistful melancholy in his eyes, as if he were bidding silent farewell to a treasured secret. He leaned forward as if he couldn't force himself to say it aloud; he must whisper it. Suddenly he scraped up embers with his naked hands and pitched them at Tom's face. As quick as a snake he made a grab for the Mauser—and took the consequences.

"Cry out when you've had enough," said Tom.

Ready for anything, he had dodged most of the embers, a bit singed, nothing serious. He took Dowlah by the neck and rubbed his face in the hot ashes.

"If you want to be killed, try one more trick!"

He kicked the fire together, holding Dowlah by the neck to examine his face by the light.

"Help yourself to cooking grease from that can. Smear on plenty."

Dowlah spat ashes. He snarled: "I won't forgive that."

Tom gave him tea to wash the ashes from his mouth.

"Dowlah, you're a busted flush and a rotter. But I'll give you a break if you act sensibly. You've taken crazy chances. It's a cinch you've a card up your sleeve, or think you have. You count on some one in the Thunder Dragon Gate. Who is he?"

Dowlah tied a handkerchief over a scorched eyelid. It made him look like a colored-supplement pirate. Tom fetched a bundle of wood and began feeding the fire.

"Sixty seconds," he remarked. "I'll count 'em. One—two—"

Dowlah interrupted: "You do show an occasional spark of intelligence. Yes. You have guessed it."

"Do I count? My limit's sixty."

"I have the goods on Naosuki. Do you know who he is?"

Tom laughed outright. "Must be good goods! Naosuki is the man who faked the Soviet Army mobilization plans that were sold to Germany. He sent the genuine ones to Japan. All the insiders were laughing about it. Goods on Naosuki, have you? Just now he goes by the name of Chou Wang. I've never met him, but that's the ninth or tenth name that I've heard of him using. He's the toughest and trickiest secret mischief-maker that Japan ever turned loose. He's the man who played the fiddle for the recent dance in Sinkiang that cost China a province. Before that, in China, he was too smart even for Borodin. Dowlah, are you still so full of whisky that you really believe you can blackmail Chou Wang? What's to stop him from having you bumped off? He'd no more hesitate to do that than to kill a bed-bug."

Dowlah snorted disgust. "What is the use of talking to a fool like you!"

"It's your only chance," Tom answered. "Tell me the truth and make me believe it. I promised old Abdul Mirza to give you a break if you'd give me half an excuse."

"Oh. What did Abdul Mirza tell you?"

"Plenty. Do I start counting? All right. One—two—"

"I was in trouble some years ago," said Dowlah. "Never mind what. Abdul Mirza suggested to me that the best way to regain prestige with the Indian Government would be to distinguish myself as a secret agent. Damn his eyes, they had already made him ruler of my state, to all intents and purposes. I was deeply in debt. Even my house in Delhi belongs to a swine of a money-lender. He even holds a bill of sale on the furniture. Instead of increasing my income, Abdul Mirza cut it to the bone, to relieve taxation. He is one of those humbugging democrats who wants to be loved by multitudes. However, I have a natural gift for this game. I did pretty well. But no better than rather well, until I got in touch with Naosuki. Yes, he is Chou Wang at the moment. I did him lots of favors. You know how it is. You've sold your country's secrets scores of times, I don't doubt."

"I never knew 'em," said Tom. "Our State Department keeps the secrets, along with the gold, in a locked tin box."

"Don't be a sententious hypocrite!" Dowlah retorted. "There isn't an international spy in the world who doesn't make a business of selling anything he knows to whoever will pay. How much! That's the only question. I could never get enough money, but what I craved was intellectual excitement. Chou Wang was the man to provide that. I excited him, and he me. All of us have our Elsa Burbagas on the job. Few of them are quite as smart as yours; but very few of us are such blundering boobies as you. Through a woman in Singapore, who found a fool of your type in a responsible position, I obtained for Naosuki photostatic copies of some plans of the new British naval base. They're in Japan now. He has very likely sold copies of them to several nations. In exchange, he supplied me with details of some of the Japanese defenses of Formosa. Very opportune. I turned those over to the British Secret Intelligence in the nick of time to allay their suspicions of me."

"What's the idea of bragging to me that you're a worse crook than I thought you?" Tom asked.

He stirred the fire. Dowlah's uncovered eye glittered with contemptuous malice. He lighted a cigarette before he answered:

"Tom Grayne, unless you can develop enough sense to agree with me, you will be dead, or worse, by to-morrow night. Have you ever been tortured? If you kill me now, I shall have ceased to care who knows my secrets. When they kill you, you will cease to remember them. Is that clear? You ass, you said you wish to be convinced. I am convincing you. In simple phrases. Adapted to your mulish intellect. For my own purpose. To persuade you that I mean what I say in all seriousness, and that I know what I'm talking about."

"Go ahead," said Tom. "I'll listen."

"What I did not turn over to the British Secret Intelligence was Naosuki's private code and some plans of the fortifications of Kobe that reveal his finger-prints under the microscope. He sent those to me in exchange for certain details of the new American anti-aircraft guns."

Tom grinned. "How did you get those?"

Dowlah grinned back. "If you want that information, buy it! I will sell it to you. Naosuki is afraid of nothing on earth except myself and the Japanese Secret Intelligence. The Japanese are a strange people, as I daresay you know. Naosuki is an unmitigated blackguard, who would rather die, of any kind of torture, than be shown up as a traitor to his own country. Traitor he is. So you see, I have him. Have you enough intelligence to understand that?"

"If he should kill you, how could you betray him?" Tom retorted. "Left the evidence in India, I suppose, to be sent to Japan in case you and he quarrel? Dowlah, you're not so bright. How can you communicate with India? Seems to me, Dowlah, that you've lost your senses along with your number. Too much liquor? All you nervous numbers seem to go by that route."

Dowlah leaned forward and tapped Tom's knee.

"Naosuki knows that unless my secret agent in India should hear from me, at frequent intervals, my agent will convey that evidence to Tokyo and give it to the Japanese Government."

"Hell! Hasn't Naosuki any agents? Do you kid yourself that his man can't shadow your man, and kill him?"

"No, Mr. Tom Grayne, I never kid myself, as you poetically phrase it. I have stolen a march on Naosuki. My messenger is already on the way to Tokyo. He may be there already. Naosuki's number is up, but he doesn't suspect it. By wireless, and secret lines of communication by way of India, it will take the Japanese two or three weeks to reach Chou Wang and kill him, or make him kill himself, or make his subordinates kill him. But they'll do it. They never fail to kill their traitors. By that time, thanks to Naosuki, you and I will have possession of the Thunder Dragon Gate and Thö-pa-ga. I hate to do it, but I'm going to have to okay you with Naosuki, in exchange for the protection of your Mauser until we connect with him. That is my offer."

Tom stirred the fire and added fuel. "What do you propose to do with the Thunder Dragon Gate?" he asked.

"Even you may appreciate that when you get there. Ditch Elsa. Have her, if she's alive. I don't care what you do with her. But if you've any sense at all you will give her to Thö-pa-ga and let her make a fool of him. Thö-pa-ga is the whole problem. There is nothing more to it than Thö-pa-ga. I will put one thought into your thick head and let it try to find lodgment. Suppose you should return to America and offer your opulent government a continuous, day after day, week after week, authoritative, psychologically skilful anti-Japanese propaganda to reach the whole of Asia, but especially China, how much would they pay?"

"Oh. I'm the salesman, am I?"

"And no sales resistance!" said Dowlah. "You know there's a world war coming. If Mussolini doesn't start it, some one else will. All Europe, India, Africa. Japan's opportunity to gobble China! Bang goes America's trade, along with all the capital invested in China. America's alternatives are guns or propaganda. The Thunder Dragon Gate is worth at least a billion to any government. And think of the chance for us to make a splash in the world—ten times the splash that Lenin made!"

"Yes, I'm thinking of that," said Tom. "I draw a modest salary, for taking chances now and then to stop that kind of splash before it happens."

"You? You think you can stop it?"

"I don't know yet. I'm going to keep a promise I made to Abdul Mirza. He gave me money for you, but I gave some of it to your destitute men and to Su-li Wing. I'm giving you what's left."

"How much?"

"Eight thousand five hundred rupees."

"Keep it! I daresay that's as much as you earn in a couple of years. In exchange for it, lend me a pony and escort me either as far as the Djaring-dzong Monastery, or until Noropa's messengers meet us on the way. After that, you may go to the devil."

"Here's your money," said Tom. "I'm going to the tent now, to sleep with the Tibetans. Don't try to hire 'em to murder me. I might get rough. Offer them a fair price in the morning and perhaps they'll take you with them."

"Where to?"

"Damned if I care, Dowlah. Good night."

CHAPTER 32.

"This is a dreadful place."

DOWLAH, a mere fire-lit shadow at daybreak, called from the mouth of the cave.

"To your death, you idiot!"

The Tibetan headman remonstrated:

"Tum-Glain, turn back with us. We dare not go with you down into that valley. Nobly Born, it is from down yonder that come the shang-shangs. It is bad luck even to speak of the place. But we like you. We wish to save you from terrible things. Perhaps Your Honor hasn't heard that shang-shangs kill a man in this world, and then hound him in the next, so that he can't reincarnate. Down yonder they give dead men's bodies to the shang-shangs instead of feeding them to the dogs and vultures as is decent. Give that man Dowlah a pony. You wait here. Let it happen to him. Perhaps then—"

Tom interrupted. "Do as I said in the night. Delay him. Later, if he wants a pony, let him have one and follow me, if he wishes. As for you, I have praised you in that letter that I have given you for Lobsang Pun. The sooner you deliver it, the sooner you will receive his commendation and his blessing."

"But if His Holiness Lobsang Pun Rinpoche should not be coming this way, then what?"

"His Holiness is too shrewd not to come," Tom answered. "The point is that he should come quickly."

Dowlah shouted again from the mouth of the cave.

"Grayne, I want to talk to you. Come up here for a few minutes."

Tom continued talking to the headman:

"Don't rob him. Money or valuables taken from a killer, such as he is, are very evil and produce nothing but bad luck. Hold him here until the sun warms the morning a bit. Then let him have a pony and go his own way. You go yours. Is there another road than this that the Holy Lobsang Pun might follow?"

"Oh, yes, there is a shorter way than this one. It turns off this side of that monastery where they let down the basket. It saves a great distance, and it rejoins this road not far from where the dead horse lay. But it is a sacred road, and only holy people dare to use it. That is why the Böns didn't use it. Even those rogues wouldn't have dared to bring foreigners by that route."

"But you are the Holy Lobsang Pun's servants, so you may go and meet him along that road? Do that. If you meet him, bid him make haste."

"Nobly Born, Dowlah may follow and kill you! Better let us take him with us."

Tom laughed. He answered with a Tibetan proverb: "The dog that follows in order to steal, by his bark betrays the men who come to slay."

He shook hands with all the Tibetans and started on his way with the two best ponies, lightly loaded. No tent. The loads were principally food, Elsa's bags and his own.

In the distance, from above, the sharp descent had looked almost straight. It actually wound like the narrow track of a snake between fifty-foot cliffs that had once contained a glacier. It was choked with smooth boulders, and in many places so steep and difficult that he had to lend the ponies his strength to save them from crashing headlong.

At the end of ten miles he had descended something like four thousand feet. There he rested on a sloping acre of moraine that provided the first clear view of the valley into which the trail led. Down below there, spring had already greened scant herbage on the banks of aquamarine-colored streams.

The serene splendor produced an almost hypnotic sensation of unreality. Much warmer, and the air much easier to breathe. Ponies sweating. No sign of the Monastery of Djarang-dzong. It probably faced southward, around a corner to the right, where there was a vague haze. Not smoke. It looked more like steam from hot springs, hardly moving on a breath of wind. The westerly gale, that blows all day long on Everest, seemed not to touch that valley.

Tom hadn't long to rest. He had twice caught sight of Dowlah, miles behind, once riding, and once scrambling beside his miserable pony down a fifty-foot glissade. The Tibetans must have been impatient to get started up the steep grade and got rid of him sooner than Tom anticipated.

Uphill from the valley were coming three men, who might be the rescue-party that Dowlah had said he expected. Because of turns and intervening crags and boulders, they had been invisible until they were quite near. They were riding yaks, brutes that can climb like goats. One man had a bow and arrows; the others had heavy, old-fashioned, long-barreled guns with two-legged metal supports on which to rest the weapon when in use.

The man with the bow and arrows seemed to be the leader. He vaulted off his yak, stuck out his tongue at Tom respectfully, placed his hand behind his ear and walked straight forward with a letter in his hand.

"Nobly Born, are you Rajah Dowlah?"

Rajah Dowlah's name was on the outside of the sealed parchment envelope. It had been written with a brush dipped in Chinese ink. The handwriting was unmistakably Elsa's. Tom almost snatched the letter from the Tibetan's hand, broke the wax seal and tugged it from the parchment envelope. It was in code, difficult to read because of the brush strokes. He lay on a rock in the sun to work it out with the aid of a pencil. The Tibetans began transferring his loads to the yaks.

DEAR TOM,

I know you're not dead, although Noropa and the others all say you are. There is a man here who says he killed you in Darjeeling, but I saw the blow, so I don't believe him. I know you're coming. I know it. I will stick this out to the very end, to give you all the possible chances. I couldn't think of any other way than this to get a message to you, but if Dowlah gets it he can't read it, so no matter. Dowlah is expected by a man named Chou Wang, who is a devil. This is a dreadful place. There have been murders and a kind of civil war is going on. The Abbot, who is a Yellow-hat and a friend of Mu-ni Gam-po, is Chou Wang's prisoner. Chou Wang has some people here who look

to me like Japanese. They are well armed. But they are in fear of their lives from a faction of Red-hats and Böns who occupy the other half of the monastery and are supposed to obey a man named Pavlov. There seems to be no Pavlov, but I think he is a man who was murdered or else escaped after either he or Su-li Wing shot the woman who was being kept here for Thö-pa-ga. So says Noropa, who, however, seldom tells the same tale twice running and is obsequious one minute, insolent the next. Chou Wang hates my influence over Thö-pa-ga, who is being a brick and is respected by all except Chou Wang, who bullies him. He bullies everybody. He scoffs at the idea of substituting me for the Tibetan woman who was shot, but Thöpe and I are playing that hand for lack of a better. Chou Wang had Noropa flogged severely for not having killed Dowlah, whom Chou Wang fears, I don't know why. Now Noropa is spying on Thöpe and me, toadying to Chou Wang, but I think he would like to kill Chou Wang, whom he certainly hates. But he would kill me if Chou Wang ordered it, as Thö-pa-ga believes he intends. Chou Wang interrogated me so menacingly about Dowlah that I had to pretend to weaken to avoid violence. He even threatened torture. Thinking me weak, he became care less, so I caught on that he would like to trap Dowlah, who he fears is too cunning to come within reach. I doped out that they both pretend friendship for each other but are actually enemies and from something that Chou Wang said about Su-li Wing, it appears that she obeyed Chou Wang's orders to betray Dowlah to the Indian Government. Chou Wang accused me of being Dowlah's accomplice. Then I thought of pretending to write to Dowlah asking him to come and take me away. Chou Wang jumped at that. He thinks I am very simple and scared out of my wits. But I insisted Thöpe must see the letter before it goes. Thöpe shall show it to Chou Wang. I am writing two letters, and when Chou Wang has read the one to Dowlah Thöpe will destroy it and substitute this. Perhaps Chou Wang will kill me, when he thinks I have done what he wants. But we may be able to defeat Chou Wang by my pretending to be Thöpe's wife or mistress. It appears these monks won't stand for murdering Thöpe's woman. But it's awkward. Thöpe takes it seriously. He insists you are dead and that you came to him in a dream and said so. He wants me to be another Nancy Strong and live with him in Tibet, and I daren't be too stand-offish or he might blow up. Thöpe has my pistol safely hidden and not even Chou Wang dares to touch Thöpe or search him. Some of these monks seem decent although madly superstitious, and I think I could persuade them to send me safely away. But that wouldn't be right, because I think Thöpe can get me inside the Thunder Dragon Gate, and that may make it possible for me to smuggle you in, though I don't yet know how. Tom, I can't imagine you dead. I know you're not dead. I know it. I can't imagine you doing any thing but win through. I know you will. I'm counting on it. I'm positive you're not far away. You shall not fail through any cowardice of mine. I have described you, not Dowlah, to the messengers, though Dowlah's name is on the envelop. So, if you get this, you will know I am almost at the end of my tether but counting on you. Tom, if you should come too late, this is good-by and God bless you. ELSA

Tom shoved the letter into his pocket. The Tibetan messenger led one of the yaks toward him, blindfolded, because if a yak should see the act of mounting he would presently use his horns to get rid of his rider.

"Nobly Born, a good beast, who will carry you in comfort."

Suddenly he saw Tom's eyes. He stepped backward.

"Have I done wrong? Have I spoken offense?"

Tom vaulted on to the yak from behind.

"How far to the monastery?"

"Nobly Born, being downhill, it should take two-thirds of the time from daybreak until now. Your Honor's eyes are angry. How have I given offense?"

"You haven't. Walk beside me and let us talk as we go."

CHAPTER 33.

"Got to get into the monastery."

DOWLAH was either an expert or immensely reckless horse man. He wasn't more than two miles behind when Tom saw him crossing the sloping moraine where he had read Elsa's letter. As he vanished again in the bed of the winding track, the snub-nosed, gently mannered Tibetan asked:

"Does Your Honor know who that is who follows?"

"Have you heard of Tum-Glain?" Tom answered.

"No."

"Are you a monk?"

"Yes, of the Josays Sept, that used to keep the Thunder Dragon Gate, until these changes came to pass. Some of us began to wear lay clothing as a protest. Later, they forced us all to do that, and made us labor at the mean tasks. We, who used to receive the pilgrims and instruct them, are now rhagbyas, reckoned of no account. They even make us handle dead men's bodies. They have taken away even our prayer wheels."

Tom quoted the Tibetan proverb:

"Night follows the day, but day follows the night."

"Nobly Born, this is a long night! Ever since the Holy Panchen Lama Rinpoche was driven away into exile from Tashi-lunpo by the blasphemers in Lhasa who control the army, there has been nothing like the old order. Foreigners came here—two factions—both claiming—we say falsely—high authority from Lhasa. But who has true authority in all Tibet since the Holy Dalai Lama Rinpoche died? Who knows? They have found none yet to replace him. No Tashi Lama! No Dalai Lama! No Thö-pa-ga! In all sacred Tibet, no voice of true authority that all may trust! No longer are the pilgrims sent away from here to the ends of the earth with blessed messages of peace and wisdom from the lips of the Thö-pa-ga."

"Hasn't Thö-pa-ga returned? I heard he had."

"Nobly Born, yes—with a woman, of whom we know nothing except that Thö-pa-ga loves her. Why should he love a foreign woman? Is it the sign of the end of all things?"

"Where is the woman?"

"I don't know. She was in the monastery. But I think now she is with Thö-pa-ga within the Thunder Dragon Gate. They say it. In the old days, none would have dared to take her in there. But

our Abbot admitted those black devils of Böns to the monastery, because the Holy Panchen Lama Rinpoche said that there is no such thing as evil men, but only evil that corrupts men by illusion. Prayer and meditation might have conquered their evil. But there was too much evil, and they too fond of it. It was they and their cursed magicians who brought the shang-shangs hither, and put them within the Thunder Dragon Gate, so that no one else dared to enter. The shang-shang doesn't harm them, because their souls are black."

"Shang-shang? One or many?"

"One now. At first there were many. The dreadful monsters destroy one another unless prevented. Who is to prevent? The females kill the males, and it is said that the shamans can't find any more males on the mountain-ledges. There were five left, and one little male that was harmless and very afraid. Four of them the shamans took to India, in baskets, I don't know why. Some said it was to terrify His Holy Eminence Lobsang Pun. Others, that it was to greet Thö-pa-ga, who was known to be coming. Perhaps it was for both those reasons. But they left the great one within the Thunder Dragon Gate, with the one male—the very little one. She slew it. Nobly Born, she is enormous and old. She is the mother of all those others."

"Whom do the Böns obey?" Tom asked. His eyes were as alert as his ears. He could still not see the monastery. Half a mile ahead, a thousand feet lower, the track divided left and right. The left-hand fork led upward, past a number of caves; but it seemed to lead downward again in the distance and to curve to the right to rejoin the other. Half-way along the right-hand track, he caught sight of a number of men on foot. It was only a quick glimpse, through a gap. He wasn't sure how many.

The monk answered: "They obey Chou Wang, as I do also, since I must. Chou Wang ordered me to bring that letter to Your Honor."

"Who are the men coming uphill toward us?"

"Nobly Born, I don't know."

"Which of the roads below should we take?"

"The one to the right is easier."

"Let us take the left one swiftly. They behave like men who wish not to be seen."

The monk made no objection. That, in a Tibetan, was remarkable. All three monks went to great pains to keep out of sight, from above or below, until the loaded yaks and unloaded ponies began to scramble up the steep left-hand fork behind a fanged screen of enormous boulders.

"You are afraid of those fellows?"

"Nobly Born, we Josays never know nowadays what to expect. They shoot us one at a time, for no reason at all except that we are faithful and say our prayers. If we are seen speaking together they shoot us."

"Who do?"

"Chou Wang and his followers, who declare they are Chinese, although we doubt it. They seem to us like foreigners from some other country. Perhaps devils. They throw our shot bodies, while they

are still warm, to the shang-shang. Does Your Honor know that shang-shangs are the images in this world of the monsters that pursue the dead through all eternity? Who shall be saved from shang-shangs in the other world, whose body has been mauled by them in this present life?"

"Why haven't you run away?"

"We are the faithful. We await the coming of the Holy Panchen Lama Rinpoche, or of his delegate the Holy Lobsang Pun, to restore the old order. Lobsang Pun sent word. He promised it shall not be long now. Should he come here and find no faithful?"

"How many are you?"

"Nine-and-forty. We were eighty."

"Why do you trust me with these confidences?"

"Why not? We faithful await a messenger from Lobsang Pun Rinpoche, who isn't likely to send any one we know, lest the messenger should be recognized by the Böns and slain. I have never before heard the name Rajah Dowlah. How should I know Your Honor's business? You speak and you look like one who has authority. You might be the messenger, to say His Holiness is coming. If not, no matter. What harm could you do?"

Tom pulled out his permit with Lobsang Pun's seal and signature. He unfolded it and held it in front of the monk's eyes.

The monk stared. He almost went mad. He jumped, danced, slapped his thighs, thrust forward his forehead for Tom to touch it with the seal. He held it pressed against his forehead as long as Tom would let him. The other two came scrambling over rocks to see what the excitement was about, saw the seal and signature, and began chanting. All three laid their foreheads on the ground until Tom ordered them to get up.

"My name isn't Dowlah. I am Tum-Glain. Here, you see it written. That man who rides the road below us is Dowlah. They who are coming toward him on foot are probably some of the Böns who brought Thö-pa-ga. They have been sent secretly by a man named Noropa, who may be with them. Have you faithful any weapons?"

"Only such as these things, and no powder! We are men of peace, not killers, such as Böns are."

"Would you fight, if I would lead you?"

"No, Nobly Born. We aspire to merit, on the Middle Way."

"Would you kill a shang-shang?"

"We are not killers of anything."

"What if I should do it?"

"We would bless you!"

"You three, with the yaks and ponies, go as fast as you can to the monastery. Get your forty-nine together, if you can, and tell them I'm the man who saved the Holy Lobsang Pun from two of the

shang-shangs that the Böns took to India! Tell them I'm coming to kill the big one! Wait now—wait a minute! Secretly if possible, get word to that woman who came with Thö-pa-ga. Say to her you have spoken with Tum-Glain. In proof of it, give her this."

He opened Elsa's bag, groped at random and found a little red vanity-case. The monk hid it in the voluminous bikkus above his belt.

"There is magic in that bag. Good white magic, blessed by His Holiness Lobsang Pun. Take care that she gets it, and no one else sees it. Tell her Tum-Glain is close at hand and very pleased with her. Repeat that."

"Tum-Glain is close at hand and very pleased with her."

"Right. If you faithful want to acquire great merit, and to receive the thousand-fold-fruitful-blessing of the Holy-Panchen-Lama-Rinpoche-Representative Lobsang Pun—in person, mind you, he shall bless you in person, touching you with his right hand—then obey that woman! Do whatever she tells you! For every act of obedience with which you obey her, I will demand, for each of you faithful, one thousand blessings from Lobsang Pun Rinpoche! Now hurry!"

Tom set the example. He was out of the monks' sight in thirty seconds, keeping his head and shoulders low as he clambered diagonally, zigzag, downward, toward the point where he estimated Dowlah would meet the men coming uphill. He scrambled, slid, fell, clambered and arrived in time to look down from a ledge and see Dowlah talking to Noropa. There were seven others. They turned and led the way down hill, Noropa leading, Dowlah bringing up the rear. Tom scrambled along the ledge. He shouted:

"Dowlah!"

Almost too late. A machine-gun from behind some rocks on Tom's left ripped out half a belt that mowed down all the Tibetans and Dowlah's pony. Noropa was the first to be hit. Dowlah crawled out from under his pony, took cover, and climbed until Tom could take him by both hands and haul him to the ledge.

"Got your Mauser?" he asked, panting. There was blood on his knees from the climb.

"Lie still."

Six men climbed down from the machine-gun nest into the narrow road-bed to examine their victims. They were dressed in padded khaki uniforms without insignia, and woolen puttees—short, stocky-looking fellows, as active as cats. Tom crawled along the ledge, making too much noise over loose rock. There was a tumbled heap of boulders between him and the spot he had marked down as the machine-gun nest. Holding his breath, and with the Mauser ready, he peered over—eyes to eyes, breath to breath with a Japanese who was looking to see what made the noise. The Mauser's muzzle touched the Jap's nose.

"Shoot, you idiot!"

But it was Tom's left fist that sent the Jap sprawling head-over-heels into the hollow, where a Japanese machine-gun lay in place on its tripod in a gap between boulders. Tom jumped on to him. He wasn't hurt much. He had a knife, but no pistol. He shouted, once, but a kick in the ribs stopped him and the shout didn't seem to be heard by the men below. Dowlah scrambled down into the hollow and went straight for the machine-gun. Tom objected—with the Mauser.

"Come here, Dowlah. Stand there. Keep still."

Instead of admitting that he knew Japanese, Tom tried the Japanese with Tibetan, getting no more response than an ambiguous grin. He tried English. The grin changed to a defensive, tight-lipped alertness. So he continued in English, speaking slowly:

"You are one of Naosuki's men. Don't lie about it. I know. He calls himself Chou Wang. This man is Rajah Dowlah, to whom Naosuki sold the plans of the fortifications of Kobe. The evidence against Naosuki is already in the hands of the Japanese Foreign Office. Naosuki is a traitor to his Emperor."

"Who are you?"

"A traveler. Perhaps you have heard of Eiji Sarao? Knowing I was on my way to join an expedition, Eiji Sarao asked me to find you people, and to say that as many of you as are found in Naosuki's outfit will be handed over to your own government. Unless you, too, are traitors to your Emperor, you will separate yourselves from Naosuki."

"Why he—Eiji Sarao not make that in writing?"

"Eiji Sarao is dead," Tom answered. "That was his dying message. Get down there and tell those others!"

"Why should they believe?"

"Dowlah," said Tom, "go down there with him, establish your identity, and tell them."

"What do you take me for?" asked Dowlah.

"I won't tell you again, I'll kick you down there."

"Why didn't you let them shoot me in the first instance? Is this your bucolic idea of a joke?"

"One—two—"

Dowlah obeyed. Because his knees hurt him he let the Japanese help him down the face of the steep ledge. Tom covered him with the machine-gun. It was in good order and perfectly placed; it could sweep the road below in either direction. There was a small box of ammunition. Two loaded Japanese military rifles lay on a blanket behind a boulder. Below, Noropa's body lay, more hideous in death than when alive. Dowlah talked like a machine-gun, too fast, very nervous and too emphatic.

Tom couldn't hear what he said. He lowered his voice—lowered it again. He appeared to be bargaining like a huckster, and the Japs, clustered around him, seemed in doubt what to do. At last he climbed back, swearing savagely at the pain in his knees.

"They want us to come and confront Naosuki."

"Do you dare?" Tom asked him.

"No. He'd shoot me on sight. Those men admit they were acting on Naosuki's orders to blow me to hell."

"Will you go if I go with you?"

"No, you madman! I might have convinced Naosuki he's mistaken in mistrusting me if you hadn't told that fellow what I've done. You blew my last chance, and your own, too, when you did that, damn you!"

"Okay, I'll go alone," Tom answered.

"You are absolutely mad," said Dowlah. "*Pogal!** You have *la rage*—hydrophobia!"

[**Pogal*, *poggul*, *poogle*, *puggly* (Hindi)—a fool; an idiot; a madman; often used colloquially by Anglo-Indians.]

Tom unloaded both the Japanese rifles. He smashed one rifle against a rock. He used the other as a club to break the lock of the machine-gun. Then he smashed that rifle, too.

"Play your own game, Dowlah."

"Curse you. You might at least have let me have one of those weapons."

"Taking no chances on you, Dowlah."

"Chances? But you go with those men?"

"Sure thing. Got to get into the monastery."

CHAPTER 34.

"Any dog can kill!"

THERE were outcrops of onyx. A two-mile march into a valley that roared with the hurrying water of scores of streams. Stone bridges, well built. The monastery came suddenly into view around the thousand-foot high corner of a cliff that curved like the handle and blade of a sickle. There were splits in the face of the cliff; rough trails marked by chortens, vanished into them.

The monastery was almost snow-white; the diagonal shadow across its face, bright blue. It was backed by snow-clad mountains that looked like huge waves breaking in dazzling foam. On the roof were the usual chortens, bells and Buddhistic symbols. There was almost no wind, so the bells were silent. From behind the main building there arose a cloud of dense white steam to a great height before it mushroomed and spread, shutting off part of the view of the mountains. A high wall enclosed the monastery—main building, two long wings, and what looked like a small town of jumbled roofs. Heads peered over the wall; until they moved they looked like big black birds.

Tom walked behind the Japanese. There had been an argument about that. They all had repeaters, but he had his Mauser, so they yielded the point, grinning, as much as to say they could manage him comfortably when they should be out of Dowlah's range. They had no idea Tom had broken the machine-gun.

Striding along behind them, he was careful to look as little as possible like a prisoner. They didn't know he understood Japanese, so they talked. They seemed to be puzzled, anxious, discontented.

He noticed a prodigiously long radio aerial strung high above the monastery roof. That was the only modern touch; it looked new; the copper wire hadn't turned green.

The very military-looking man in command of the escort seemed rather afraid of his men. He was almost diffident toward them. They kept whispering to one another without turning their heads, the way prisoners and monks do where there is a rule of silence. Twice he told them they had not acted nobly in refusing to try to recapture the machine-gun and rifles. They laughed, and one of them retorted that he hadn't led with any noticeable valor. Discipline seemed to have become undermined by resentment or disillusion.

The trails debouching on the monastery from the fissures in the face of the cliff looked well worn. Tales of pilgrims from the ends of Asia, secretly wending their way to the Thunder Dragon Gate for words from the lips of "Wonderful-to-hear," seemed credible. There were caves, too, in plenty that might be, or might formerly have been occupied by solitary hermits. It might be true that His Holy Magnificence Lobsang Pun had once occupied one of those. There isn't any limit to religious eccentricity in Tibet. Humility earned in a cave at thirty below zero is exchangeable for arbitrary vigor.

Outside the monastery main gate there was a huge heap of refuse and stable manure. It was being carried away in baskets by men in the rags of religious clothing. They appeared to be starving. One of them, bent under his stenching load, didn't get out of the way soon enough. He was knocked down, and kicked as he lay, by the man in command of the escort, who seemed relieved by encountering some one on whom he dared to vent malice.

Tom helped the monk to his feet. The Japanese had marched a dozen paces before they realized what he was doing. They didn't hear what he said in Tibetan:

"The Holy Lobsang Pun Rinpoche is coming! Run swiftly and tell your brothers!"

The Japanese, cockier now they were close to the wall, surrounded Tom. They tried to make him march in their midst. Their leader, having kicked a man and feeling consequently overbearing, laid a hand on him with the usual Japanese assurance that no foreigner knows anything about jiu-jitsu. He began to use pressure and his other hand reached for Tom's Mauser. So he landed on the manure heap, heels-over-head, on his face, with a mouth full of filth. Tom drew the Mauser.

"Shoot it out if you like! There are others coming. Kill me, and see what you get!"

The man who knew English interpreted. Two or three of them got in the way to prevent shooting and one of them went to his officer's rescue, brushing him off and talking to him. Tom caught the name Naosuki.

The great gate opened. They marched in, Tom last. There were forty or fifty monks within the wall, in groups that seemed unfriendly to one another. At least two groups. Perhaps three. They had a sort of jail-yard atmosphere. Instead of laughing at the sight of a foreigner, as would be normal in Tibet, they scowled; instead of whirling prayer wheels, they talked in surly undertones, group by group. Some had cudgels.

At irregular intervals there was an unplaceable sound like muted thunder. It seemed to come from every direction. It was like an earthquake noise, without any perceptible earth tremor. Weird.

Tom's escort turned sharp to the right, marched along the face of the right wing of the monastery and turned left into a long courtyard that separated the wing from a maze of stores and stables. There were several big chortens, and a building that looked like a mausoleum, with a flight of stone steps leading to a door near the top of the wall.

At the far end of the yard was an enormous prayer wheel, built of heavy lumber. It was at least fifty feet high, about twelve feet broad, big enough to contain millions of prayers written on scraps of paper. It had been recently mended with iron straps. It was kept in motion by a waterfall that plunged out of the cliff above it, turned the wheel and spilled into a sluice, along which it vanished into a hole in the ground. The officer went and washed his face at the sluice, rinsing his mouth and grimacing savagely.

Near the wheel a couple of obvious Japanese, dressed as Tibetans, stood guard with rifles over a small, newly built stone shed, into which a raw-hide belt disappeared. The great wheel had been hitched to a dynamo; its hum was quite distinct above the thump-thump-thump of the wheel and the splash of water.

The man who knew English grinned at Tom. He seemed tolerably unresentful of the punch he had had in the jaw. He touched his own chest. His eyes nearly disappeared amid wrinkles as he grinned with the pride of showmanship:

"Dynamo—come in pieces—long way—killing many horses—camels! Me, mechanic!"

"*Banzai!*" Tom answered, purposely mispronouncing the word, and the Japanese laughed.

Through a thick door in the wall on the left hand they entered a long, dark, draughty passage. Near the door there were some monks on mats, engaged in silent meditation. One of them stood up and bowed to the Japanese with surprising humility, although he didn't stick his tongue out. They took no notice of him. Behind their backs he pressed a scrap of paper into Tom's hand. Then he squatted again on his mat and appeared to resume his meditation where it left off.

Tom unfolded the scrap of paper. Where a shaft of sun light filtered through a narrow slot high in the wall he stopped and pretended to blow his nose. Every man of the escort faced about suspiciously, but he managed to read the note without their seeing it.

Your message received. Oh, Tom! Thundergate entrance is through chapel. Beware of shang-shang. Sudden rumor that Lobsang Pun is coming has created new situation. They believe he must be bringing a foreign army. Thöpe and Abbot busy propaganding you are special sending to prepare way for Lobsang. Chou Wang, deadly desperate, has locked me in room behind his office, but this monk is pro-Abbot. He will deliver this to you and get me out of here. He promises. ELSA

Tom crunched the paper in his left fist and followed the Japs. There were two stands of piled rifles with fixed bayonets, near a door at the end of the long passage. Opposite the door was another, open, through which came cigarette smoke and the talk and laughter of the guard. One sentry lounged near the rifles. He knocked on the closed door. A bell rang. He opened the door. The escort stood aside for Tom. Two of them, the commander and the man who knew English, followed him into the room, where they stood at attention to right and left of the door.

Stone walls. Pictures of heaven and hell. Against one wall a large radio-receiving set, not yet quite fully assembled, with all its parts exposed to view. One window, glazed with oiled paper. A charcoal brazier. A tea urn. An immense table. Some Chinese cigarettes. A rather small man seated at the table, facing the door, in a heavy wooden chair heaped with cushions. An automatic pistol on

the table within reach of his right hand. In front of him, near the ink-pot, a big bronze dorje, emblem of authority. Beside him, at his right, a kneeling monk was rummaging in one of Elsa's bags and laying her belongings one by one on the table. Tom's bag was also on the floor, as yet unopened. A high, carved screen behind the man in the chair suggested that there might be a door there leading into another room.

Tom walked straight up to the table and spoke first, standing with his back to the window within reach of the kneeling monk.

"Are you Chou Wang-Naosuki?"

The man at the table touched the automatic. After one sharp glance at Tom he nodded to the officer, who at once began speaking very rapidly in Japanese, reporting what had happened. He spoke so fast that Tom could hardly follow what he said, but that gave him plenty of time to study the man in front of him.

Small, but mentally and physically powerful. His eyes and mustache were cat-like. Not a trace of humor. Prodigious shoulders for his size, lumpy with muscle and rather stooped. He was wearing a magnificent embroidered Tibetan lama's cloak over a red Russian blouse. He looked incapable of any emotion other than sulky delight in enforcing his will. Brown, absolutely merciless eyes of the color of English ale, which revealed nothing except that mercy wasn't in them.

"Why was this man not disarmed?" he demanded angrily.

Before the officer could answer he met Tom's eyes and said sharply, in English:

"Lay your weapon on the desk."

Tom went one step nearer to the kneeling monk.

"You damned rat, Naosuki!"

Naosuki pushed his chair back, stood up suddenly and snatched his automatic off the desk. Tom kicked the kneeling monk and sent him sprawling against Naosuki's legs, upsetting his balance and spoiling his aim. His bullet pierced the paper window, followed by another. Tom's fist hit him hard on the nose. With his other hand he snatched Naosuki's automatic, hurled it through the window, splitting the oiled paper from top to bottom, letting in a flood of cold, bright day light.

It all happened too quickly for the other two men in the room to do anything about it. By the time they had drawn their weapons, Naosuki was writhing in Tom's arms, barking his own shins against the table edge in his efforts to kick Tom's, and crying out to his men not to shoot. They might have shot Tom, but they would much more probably have killed Naosuki.

The noise brought the guard on the run. They nearly broke the door down in their hurry. The Bön monk, on the floor under the table, tried to get his teeth into Tom's leg, but all he bit was the top of a boot. Tom had Naosuki helpless in an agonizing hold. He shook him the way a terrier shakes a rat, hefted him and pitched him across the table into the midst of the guard. Their rifles broke his fall. He slid to the floor unharmed, off sloping butts and bayonets and got up fuming like a madman, making horrible faces. He seemed on the verge of an epileptic fit. Tom's feat of strength so astonished the guard that they stood still gaping at him.

He kicked the monk in the face to make him let go. Then he sat down in Naosuki's chair, a split second ahead of a bullet that splintered the screen. He produced his Mauser, but didn't answer the shot. And at last he spoke Japanese, using the jargon that passes muster along harbor-fronts, pungent, plain. He hadn't time to remember grammar and flowers of speech:

"I have been sent to tell you fools to clear out before you're caught in that man Naosuki's company. Have the others told you that he betrayed your Emperor's secrets to Rajah Dowlah?"

Plainly, the guard had been talking it over. Plainly, they had long suspected Naosuki. Plainly, if they could only feel justified, they were ready to turn on him.

"Naosuki is a thief, a murderer, a forger, a liar and a traitor to his Emperor," said Tom. "What are you honest men going to do about it?"

Naosuki tried to snatch an automatic from a man's belt, but its owner wouldn't let him have it.

"The game is up," said Tom. "Your expedition has failed. Naosuki betrayed you by betraying his Emperor. Save your Emperor's face and what is left of your own honor by going away swiftly, leaving no disgraceful tracks. You may take a pack-train from the monastery stables and get out of Tibet by the way you came. You may do what you please with Naosuki."

"Who says it?" asked one of the guard.

"I say it, and who I am is none of your business. Naosuki has been counting on the support of Tibetan troops from Lhasa and Kalimpong. It isn't coming. There isn't a soldier, officer or man, in Tibet who would dare to invade this sacred valley to support foreigners, or for any other reason than to rid the place of foreigners. There's a force on the march, how ever, that doesn't consist of Tibetan soldiers. You will be cornered here like rats, unless you pull out quickly. If you're caught, you'll be sent to Japan by way of India, with a letter to say you are Naosuki's accomplices. The proof of Naosuki's treason to his Emperor is in Japan now."

They all stared at Naosuki. Tom continued:

"Naosuki sent you out to shoot the man who knows the truth about him—Dowlah. By saving Dowlah, I have saved you all from being parties to Naosuki's guilt. Now I will save you from something else."

He stood up, pulled aside the screen and let it fall to the floor with a crash. There was a locked door, with a key in the lock. He went on talking:

"Living or dead, do you wish to be known or remembered as savages? Have you been parties to the rape or torture of a defenseless woman? You see her bags. Naosuki was dishonorably pilfering from them. You see her clothing on the table. Where is she?"

He turned the huge key in the ancient lock and flung the door wide open. It revealed a bare room—empty. The key fell to the floor. He picked it up and stuck it in the lock on the inside of the door, carelessly, as if he wasn't thinking what he was doing.

"Where is she? What has Naosuki done to her?"

Naosuki was speechless, making grimaces as inhuman as a tragic actor's on a Japanese print.

"You were told you were heroes," said Tom. "You were told you were being sent to do an honorable duty for Japan, to make it easy for Japan to conquer Asia. You have been lied to and misled by a traitor who sold his Emperor's secrets. Where is that woman?"

Without the slightest suggestion of hurry, he entered the inner room and shut the door behind him. The ancient lock, as he turned the key, made hardly any noise. It was a very thick door; through it he could barely hear the murmur of angry argument.

There was another door, unlocked, with the key on the outside. On the stone floor near it was the broken lip-stick with which Elsa had scrawled on the panel:

Chapel. Hurry. ELSA

He hurried, with methodical decision, making better speed than if he had run wildly. There was a maze of doors and corridors, stone stairways leading to the upper floor and downward to the kitchens and into echoing cellars. There were passages within walls that were twelve feet thick. At almost every corner there was a dark hole where a monk might sit and meditate or lurk in ambush.

But there was no one in sight, only sounds of men running—the boom of a great bell—a roar of voices from a long way off, like a sea-roar—and the weird, intermittent, irregular muffled thunder-sound that shook nothing but seemed to come from all directions. Then, suddenly, the unmistakable staccato rattle of rifle-fire—no guessing whence it came, along echoing passages.

Out into a courtyard, and the sound of rifle firing louder. A long cloister to a courtyard behind the monastery. Steam—lots of it. On the far side of the courtyard a big chapel, door wide open and a riot roar coming through it. Tom entered quietly.

No sign of Elsa or of Thö-pa-ga, but a monk with bull lungs, standing on a platform, was holding up Elsa's frock. It was the frock she bought in Delhi. He was tearing it into strips, like prayer streamers, and distributing them at random to whoever could get near enough. At the end of the chapel, on the altar platform, an old man in a yellow robe, who couldn't be any one else than the Abbot, surrounded by a dozen monks who were protecting him, held a carved box above his head. It probably contained sacred relics. The monks surrounding him were all shouting at once, and one of them was pounding an enormous gong as if his life depended on it.

There were not less than a dozen dead or dying or severely wounded monks underfoot, amid pools of blood. In mid-chapel about thirty monks were fighting thirty or forty half-starved wretches in rags, who were led by the bow-and-arrow yak-man who had told Tom he wouldn't fight in any circumstances. He wasn't using bow and arrows. He and his two comrades, for some reason better fed than the scarecrows they led, were hard at it with cudgels. Religious frenzy had burst the restraint of doctrine. The meek had inherited righteous indignation. The skulls of the proud were cracking.

It was easy to distinguish the proud. They were Böns, with their backs to the wall—the long wall, with a dais in the middle and a gallery above that. They were the well-fed ones.

Beneath the gallery, behind the dais, was a studded door, deeply carved and painted red. On either side of it were hideous tantric images of devils devouring men who yearned upward in agony toward the carved head and shoulders of Gautama Buddha, smiling from an arched recess, illuminated by colored glass lamps in the dimness above the door and below the gallery.

Apparently no one had any firearms, but there were missiles flying in all directions, chiefly prayer wheels and brass lamps. Nearly all the paper windows were broken. The Böns seemed to outnumber all the others, but to have used up all the missiles within their reach. They were chanting, to invoke their magic and to fortify their courage. The man who was tearing Elsa's dress into strips appeared not to be a Bön. It was hard to guess what he was. He seemed to be preaching a war of his own. It was he who first caught sight of Tom. He went into a frenzy, pointing at him, bellowing, slobbering. Impossible to tell what he was shouting about—demanding summary execution or offering welcome.

Tom went for him. As he crossed the floor, scrumming his way through the brawl, a bow-and-arrow man let drive at him from the gloom under the gallery. The arrow buried itself in a monk's back. Some one slew the bowman with a bronze candlestick. Another bowman, from the doorway by which Tom had entered, took a shot at the Abbot. He hit him. The Abbot fell. There was a roar of rage. Some one struck down that bowman from behind. A man entered, cowed like a monk, but black-whiskered like no monk in all Tibet. He had a rusty sword, but when he tried to use it some one snatched it from him, and in a second there were ten monks fighting for it, all in a scrimmage, rolling over one another on the floor.

The new arrival followed Tom. He reached him just as Tom reached the man who was tearing into little pieces the last shreds of Elsa's dress.

"Where's your Mauser, you fool?"

Dowlah! He and Tom became the center of a maelstrom of yelling monks. Dowlah shouted in Tom's ear:

"Japs shot the stable-men—took all the best horses—they're on the run with all the loot they could pack!"

"Who's coming?"

"Damned if I know! Some one. They'd an outpost in a cave up on the mountain. I saw the flash of his helio. Look out! Who's that? Where's your Mauser?"

Chou Wang-Naosuki! Dressed in his yellow lamaistic robe. Silent in the doorway. Stoop-shouldered. Head forward. Scowling. In his right hand an automatic.

Tom couldn't draw the Mauser. The monks were pressing him too closely. Dowlah tried to snatch the weapon. Failing, he ducked. Chou Wang-Naosuki drew down his eyebrows, raised his right hand, took deliberate aim at Tom, fired, missed him and killed the bull-lunged fellow who had torn up Elsa's dress.

Panic. Imprecations—yells of terror—anger. Every one except the Böns who had their backs to the door scattered in search of cover. They struggled to hide behind one another. Naosuki calmly entered the chapel. Dowlah almost screamed at Tom:

"Shoot him, you damned idiot!"

"Any dog can kill," Tom answered.

He did draw the Mauser. He whipped it out, thrusting Dowlah aside. The shove forced Dowlah backward, off-balance. A monk tripped him. He fell. Naosuki laughed suddenly—once. It was like

a big dog's sullen bark. He tossed his weapon to the floor at Tom's feet. Dowlah pounced on it—leaped to his feet—aimed—drew the trigger. Empty! Naosuki had used his last shell. He sneered and walked toward the door under the gallery. The Böns made way for him. One of them opened the big red door. He entered, not looking back ward.

Tom went through the midst of the Böns with such explosive ferocity that he reached the door before the brass bar fell in place. He charged through, Dowlah behind him, into darkness.

"Elsa!"

No answer.

"Elsa!"

CHAPTER 35.

"Banzai!"

Nothing but an echo in the darkness. Silence. Then muffled thunder. That sound, and the accompanying warmth, explained itself and the steam that could be seen from far off. Masses of boiling water down below somewhere—one of earth's cauldrons, obedient to some incalculable rhythm. Tom groped for his pocket flash-light. He and Dowlah were in a tunnel whose walls were coated with a black shiny film of glassy basalt. There were niches in the wall on both sides; there were pottery lamps on some of them, but no lamp burning. Tom shouted again:

"Elsa!"

Echo. Underground thunder. Silence. Then some one's footsteps. Naosuki's? Somewhere ahead, at an unguessable distance, there appeared a patch of dim light about the size of a man's hand. Tom strode forward, Dowlah lagging. It turned out to be reflected light, at a turn of the tunnel—dim daylight. It increased. The tunnel made several turns, grew narrower, then wider and opened suddenly into a daylit space so full of steam that it was all whirling whiteness and noise.

"Grand place for a miracle!" said Dowlah. "Look out for shang-shangs. Can you use a Mauser?"

Tom answered irritably: "Shut up!"

Dowlah shoved his elbow. "There's Naosuki! Go on—shoot! You can't miss!"

"Damn you, pipe down, or I'll kill you!"

Dowlah giggled: "Write him a courteous letter! Why not? Your name should be Woodrow!"

Naosuki, silhouetted against whirling white steam, stood framed in the mouth of the tunnel, staring down into the place where the steam came from. Tom hurried toward him. Naosuki glanced backward along the tunnel, turned left and vanished.

Dowlah clutched Tom's arm. "Look out!" he said. "I warn you! He'll be waiting for us around the corner. Give me the pistol. You go forward, and when he jumps out at you, I'll shoot him!"

Tom shook him off. He hurried to the spot where Naosuki had stood. It was the lip of a crater, slippery with some kind of glassy lava. Left and right a wet path vanished into steam. The sudden, muted thunder of water boiling underground was almost deafening. There was a surge of invisible water that fell back on itself. Steam belched upward. And then silence.

"Elsa!" Tom shouted. "Elsa!"

No answer. He took the left-hand path and followed Naosuki, blinded by the white steam, keeping his hand on the sheer face of the encircling rock wall. The smooth, wet path sloped outward toward the crater. Dowlah slipped and grabbed him, almost dragging him over the edge, but the wall was covered with carvings of monsters; Tom's fingers caught a devil by the open mouth and hung on. After that he made Dowlah keep five or six paces behind.

It was all noise—muffled, deadened, ominous. There was a vague smell of sulphurous gas. Scraps of sky appeared, brilliant blue, and here and there, through gaps in the whirling steam, there were glimpses of wet cliffs hundreds of feet high.

The path widened. It became fifty feet wide. There were stone altars, of onyx, very ancient, in a curved row near the edge of the crater. Grooves on the tops of the altars led to holes through which blood could run off.

"Human sacrifice!" said Dowlah. "Tee-hee! Kill 'em beautifully! Chuck 'em in and boil 'em, for a meal for devils in the next world! Holy! Holy! Holy! That's the door to the B6n-po hell, that crater! They've boiled your Elsa, I bet you!" He giggled, stepping backward out of range of Tom's fist. But he needn't have troubled. He had lost, if he ever had it, any power over Tom's impulses.

The carved cliff closed in again toward the crater's edge, but it sloped backward, letting in more light than on the far side.

"There he is!" said Dowlah. "Shoot him! Damn you, shoot him! I say, shoot him!"

A hundred feet up, a half-arch of glistening wet rock, shaped like a pheasant's spur, curved outward from the cliff and was almost lost to sight in steam above the crater. Hewn steps in the rock face zigzagged upward toward it. On the farthest tip, looking like a ghost in the steam, stood Naosuki, motionless. In his lama's robe he looked like a high priest. Tom called to him:

"Naosuki! Do you know where Elsa Burbage is? Your life for hers!"

No answer. Naosuki took no notice whatever. Suddenly he cried aloud in Japanese and leaped, feet foremost and together, with his robe wrapped tight around him and his right hand raised. He vanished into steam. The muted thunder rose and greeted him. The invisible boiling surge up-hove and laved a smooth wall, falling back upon itself.

"*Banzai!*" said Tom, and that time he pronounced it properly. He turned on Dowlah. "That's more than you've the guts to do!"

Dowlah sat down on an onyx altar, with his head between his hands.

"All I need is a drink," he remarked. Then, suddenly recovering his self-control, savagely: "You blockhead! Do you realize there's nothing now between you and me and what we're after?"

There came a cry through the craterous thunder. It sounded far off. Tom shouted:

"Elsa! Elsa!"

He began running. He followed the path until it curved under the projecting half-arch. Beyond that it turned left again along a wider ledge. Around that corner there was a door, once painted red, but nearly all the paint had scaled off. It was heavily reinforced with iron. Four feet from the bottom was an iron grille, about ten inches square. It had a huge iron padlock, not very ancient, not very rusty, slick with recent greasing.

"Elsa !" he shouted.

"Tom? Oh, thank God!"

"Coming!"

He resumed his unhurried mood. He examined the lock, rubbing his thumb along the surface. It bore the legend: *Honorable East India Company. 1845.*

"Tom, we're in here with a shang-shang! Thöpe has fainted. It's dark."

"Half a minute!"

He put a shot into the padlock. Then another. He found a rock then and hammered. The padlock broke. The door swung open and Elsa nearly fell into his arms. She was wearing Tibetan clothes, too big for her, with turquoise jewels.

"Get Thöpe, Tom."

"Okay. Watch Dowlah."

He groped in darkness, found a leg and dragged out the Tibetan, left him lying, stepped inside again and shut the door. Then he spoke through the grille:

"Elsa—come on—tell me."

She answered quietly, with her face as close as his to the grille: "Tom, please come out of there."

"Good girl now. Hang on to yourself. Tell me."

"Tom, there's a passage for thirty feet. Beyond that there's a cavern with a great pit at the far end. If you look for a long time by the light of the grille, you can see the shang-shang's eyes on the rear wall."

"Okay. I can see them. It's the last of the brutes. No hurry. If it comes toward me I couldn't miss it. How did you get in here?"

"There was a fight in the chapel. About Thöpe—and me. The Böns said, if Thöpe is genuine he can manage the shang-shang. They tore my clothes off and gave me these, and brought us here and left us."

"Where's your revolver?"

"Noropa stole it."

"Okay. Noropa's dead. Dowlah's unarmed, but watch him."

"Where is he?"

"Damned if I know. Stay where you are, and yell like hell if he starts anything."

Tom switched on his little pencil of light and went slowly forward into stenching darkness. To right and left were about a dozen cells hewn in the rock, with doors made of poles set two inches apart. Most of the doors stood ajar. Away ahead in the darkness the shang-shang's eyes glowed pale opal, as big as soup plates, almost exactly one above the other. All the rest of the brute was invisible. The eyes didn't move, didn't blink. They looked unreal, almost like holes in the rock through which a wan light entered.

At the end of thirty or forty feet the passage widened into a broad cavern and the pin-light picked up the edge of a gap in the floor at the farther end. It extended the full width of the floor and as far as the rear wall. Mutterings came out of it, but no steam. Near the edge of the gap was a naked human corpse, dried up, like a mummy.

With the Mauser in his right hand and the light in his left, Tom leaned against the corner where the passage opened into the cavern. He tried to trace the outlines of the monster, but it was so huge that the pin-light couldn't follow its spidery legs into the darkness. Its body was as big as a barrel, vivid green, and foul with what looked like crimson fungus. Its mandibles moved. It was beginning to blubber with foam at the snout. The light annoyed it. It moved.

Tom fired—two shots, one at each eye. The second shot was probably a miss. The shang-shang curled up like a swatted spider and vanished, writhing, down into the chasm.

Tom went and looked, but the pin-light couldn't fathom the utter darkness. He could hear water, but couldn't see it. He pushed the human corpse into the chasm and turned away, striding resolutely, not too fast, lest horror should make him lose his self-control.

Dowlah was nowhere in sight when he opened the door. Thö-pa-ga was standing beside Elsa, looking mournful, but twice the man he was when Tom last saw him. In spite of having fainted, there were signs of iron in him, and of self-control. He had more actual control than Tom had at the moment. He was dressed in gorgeous yellow silk, with an embroidered crimson toga. He held out his hand. In his peculiar, stately English he said:

"Mr. Grayne, I thanking you so much for all this."

"Thöpe has been a perfect brick," said Elsa.

They were all embarrassed. Tom was watching Elsa sideways. She said nothing.

"I, who ran away from destiny, am disciplined," said Thö-pa-ga.

Tom didn't know what to say.

"Where's Dowlah?" he demanded.

Suddenly he turned to Elsa and took hold of her and kissed her. He kissed her a long time. She was quite still in his arms, but he could feel her heart thumping as fast as his own.

"Tom," she said at last, "you don't owe me anything. It's dear of you, and generous, but—"

He interrupted: "I lied to you like hell. I half knew I was lying. You're a damned good gallant little woman and I loved you from the day we first met. But neither do you owe me anything. Go and get your divorce."

She chuckled, with her arms on his shoulders.

"Tom, I lied much worse than you did! I believe you meant it, or at least you believed you meant it. I didn't! Not once, for a single minute. I've been all yours, any time you'd have me, from then until now! But have I played fair?"

He almost crushed her.

"Thöpe, old fellow—"

Thö-pa-ga smiled wanly. "Oh," he said, "I take the Middle Way, I think, from now on. I am no good in the world."

"Rot!" Tom answered. "Buck up! But for you, this place would be a shang-shang-ridden nest of lousy propaganda! Thanks to you there are no more shang-shangs. Take the credit for it! Take hold! Clean up! Run the show and root hard for the Tashi Lama. He's a good man. Work to get him back to Tashi-lunpo. Do a man's job. Help to keep all foreign devils out of Tibet!"

Elsa interrupted: "Tom, is it as over as all that? Is it true about Lobsang Pun? Is he here yet?"

"Let's go see. Where's Dowlah?"

No sign of Dowlah. They returned around the crater amid steam and muted thunder and then groped their way along the tunnel to the great red door. It was locked. There was a roar of voices in the chapel, frantic gong-beats, and a new noise—the triumphant blare of conches and long radongs.

Thö-pa-ga protested: "Wait here! That man Dowlah—"

"Ride yourself!" Tom interrupted. "Now's your big chance. If they opened for Dowlah, they'll open for us. If Dowlah hasn't found some liquor he has shot his last bolt. Stand back."

He fired three shots at the door and reloaded his Mauser. A monk opened the door. Thö-pa-ga stepped through, then he, then Elsa. The sunlight through the smashed windows was dazzling. The place was a wreck. Monks' dead bodies lay in pools of blood, in a litter of fallen banners, pictures and broken lamps. No sign of Dowlah. The monks were marching around and around the chapel to a blare of trumpets and thunder of drums. They swarmed around Thö-pa-ga.

"Your chance!" Tom shouted at him.

The monks bore Thö-pa-ga away toward the altar. He stood there smiling. There fell a hush, breathless. No other sound than the groan of a wounded monk and the flutter of torn window paper. Then Thö-pa-ga's voice, ringing clear:

"*Om mane padme hum!* Blessed be the Word that goes forth! There are no more shang-shangs! The Thunder Dragon Gate no longer speaks for Evil. Clean up! Clean up!"

Tom hurried Elsa out of the chapel. In the yard, between the chapel and the monastery wall, stood twenty bearded skeletons in sheepskins, beside scarecrow ponies. Dowlah's men! On the monastery steps stood Dowlah, staring at them, and they stared at him. They didn't see Tom and Elsa; even Dowlah didn't. They weren't speaking. They were simply staring at Dowlah in resentful silence, and he at them. Dowlah turned his back and walked into the monastery. Tom went up and spoke in Hindustanee to the subadar.

"What are you doing here?"

"Sahib, that Holiness Lobsang Pun is a bahadur of the old school! Aye, a burra wallah general bahadur! There is the spirit in him. On our way we met him, near that monastery. Lo, he swept us up and rolled us westward! We have marched like men in a dream. He had a hundred monks behind him, and more than two hundred ponies and yaks. That monastery belched provisions for him—aye, and more monks. And he knew where those devils of Böns had cached their ghee and barley meal. Nay, nay, we haven't starved, nor have our ponies. He marched us thin! He is a magic-maker! That Lobsang Pun Bahadur could conquer the world! If he sleeps, then he sleeps on horseback, and it needs relays of horses in half-hour spells to stagger at such speed beneath His Honor's weight!"

"And the woman—Su-li Wing?"

"She came, too. She has no more heart for India than we have, with our shame upon us. But we saw no shame in being led by Lobsang Pun Bahadur. Bold he is, and arrogant, and godly. He could make a dead man march to the world's end! Lo, behold us, sahib, we are all here, not a man is missing."

"And now what?"

"God knows, sahib."

Tom and Elsa went into the monastery. They had to step over the legs of monks who sprawled, dead weary, in the corridors. They had loads, but no weapons. More than half of them were asleep on any kind of mat or blanket they had been able to find. Some of them lay like dead men, snoring on the flagstones.

At the end of a passage there was a crowd of monks outside an open door, through which came Lobsang Pun's voice, reprimanding, roaring orders. Unmistakably his voice, ringing with energy. In the midst of the monks lay Dowlah, stone dead, in a pool of blood. There was a knife in his back.

Not a monk had laid a hand on Su-li Wing. She was standing near the door, still wearing her coonskin overcoat. She seemed to have shriveled inside it. She looked utterly worn out, and years older. But when she saw Tom and Elsa she laughed—metallic—nasal—high pitched—cruel.

"You wouldn't give me a break," she said, "but there's your Dowlah! He saw me. He knew I did it."

She stood aside to let Tom and Elsa enter the room. The Abbot's dead body lay in state on a table with lighted candles, surrounded by kneeling monks. Lobsang Pun was in a great chair by a table

loaded with the monastery records. Monks were on the run with more records. He had some Böns up in front of him, with their hands tied. He was pronouncing sentences, pursing his lips to taste the flavor of godliness and then opening them wide to roar:

"Mercy to man and beast. It isn't merciful to let men die in sin. That foul stuff leaves, the way it entered, through the body. Two hours' flogging!"

The minute he saw Tom and Elsa he roared with laughter. They went up and bowed.

"Shang-shang?" he demanded.

"Your Eminence, the last one is dead," Tom answered.

"Chou Wang-Naosuki?"

"Dead, too. Thö-pa-ga is safe in the chapel."

"Yes, I knowing it."

"I have the honor to present my wife, Your Eminence."

"Oo-ha-ha-ha-hah! Tum-Glain, what your doing in Tibet? Get out! Go home!"

Tom laughed. He liked Lobsang Pun. He struck his right hand on his pocket.

"Your Reverend and Holy Eminence," he said, "has surely not forgotten that permit to travel wherever I please in Tibet."

"What your wanting?"

"Ponies. Provisions. An outfit. Men—I might take Dowlah's, if Your Eminence can't spare a few. I will follow the trail of the Japs. I want a messenger to-morrow morning, to carry my mail to Mu-ni Gam-po in Darjeeling."

Lobsang Pun stared at Elsa. His big beak of a nose twitched and his eyes almost disappeared into a maze of wrinkles. He smiled at her. He chuckled.

"You?" he demanded.

"Tom says I have won my spurs, Your Eminence. I am his wife. I will go where he goes."

"Tum-Glain! Oo-ha-ha-ha-hah! What about that Chinese woman?"

"Send her packing," Tom answered. "Send her to India."

Lobsang Pun objected. "Better mercifully two hours' flogging. Beat the sin out. Save her a million years in hell."

Tom grinned: "Your Eminence's magnanimity is famous. But I beg you, as a personal favor to me, not to waste it on that woman. Please let her go."

Lobsang Pun looked scandalized. His eyes glared autocratic indignation.

"What your wanting, Tum-Glain? Two women? One not enough for you? Your being too sinful. My letting Su-li Wing go, unadmonished by two hours' whipping, if Thö-pa-ga requesting. Otherwise, my blessing her with suitable rebuke."

"Very well," Tom answered, "I will plead with Thö-pa-ga. By the way, Your Eminence, the money in Rajah Dowlah's pocket belongs to Abdul Mirza, who's a good old honest fellow with a lean purse. May he have it?"

"Yes, my sending to him."

"And I think you'll find a letter, bearing your signature—"

"Forged!"

"That he took from the Bön magician—"

"Oo-ha-ha! I have it! See? I have it.—Now you, Tum-Glain, now your knowing Thunder Dragon Gate, your going to the moon next? Tum-Glain! Elsa! Oo-hah-ha-ha-ha-hah!"

THE END

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