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HER FACE WAS WHITER THAN HIS, THOUGH NOT A QUIVER OF MOUTH OR EYELASH BETRAYED HER EMOTION.

—Mr. Isaacs

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THE NOVELS OF
F. MARION CRAWFORD

MR. ISAACS

A Tale of Modern India

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD

WITH FRONTISPIECE

P. F. COLLIER & SON
NEW YORK

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MR. ISAACS.

CHAPTER I.

IN spite of Jean-Jacques and his school, men are not everywhere born free, any more than they are everywhere in chains, unless these be of their own individual making. Especially in countries where excessive liberty or excessive tyranny favours the growth of that class most usually designated as adventurers, it is true that man, by his own dominant will, or by a still more potent servility, may rise to any grade of elevation; as by the absence of these qualities he may fall to any depth in the social scale.

Wherever freedom degenerates into license, the ruthless predatory instinct of certain bold and unscrupulous persons may, and almost certainly will, place at their disposal the goods, the honours, and the preferment justly the due of others; and in those more numerous and certainly more unhappy countries, where the rule of the tyrant is substituted for

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the law of God, the unwearying flatterer, patient under blows and abstemious under high-feeding, will assuredly make his way to power.

Without doubt the Eastern portion of the world, where an hereditary, or at least traditional, despotism has never ceased since the earliest social records, and where a mode of thought infinitely more degrading than any feudalism has become ingrained in the blood and soul of the chief races, presents far more favourable conditions to the growth and development of the true adventurer than are offered in any free country. For in a free country the majority can rise and overthrow the favourite of fortune, whereas in a despotic country they cannot. Of Eastern countries in this condition, Russia is the nearest to us; though perhaps we understand the Chinese character better than the Russian. The Ottoman empire and Persia are, and always have been, swayed by a clever band of flatterers acting through their nominal master; while India, under the kindly British rule, is a perfect instance of a ruthless military despotism, where neither blood nor stratagem have been spared in exacting the uttermost farthing from the miserable serfs — they are nothing else — and in robbing and defrauding the rich of their just and lawful possessions. All these countries teem with stories of adventurers risen from the ranks to the command of armies, of itinerant merchants wedded to princesses, of hardy sailors promoted to admiralties, of half-educated younger sons of English peers dying in the undisputed possession

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of ill-gotten millions. With the strong personal despotism of the First Napoleon began a new era of adventurers in France; not of elegant and accomplished adventurers like M. de St. Germain, Cagliostro, or the Comtesse de la Motte, but regular rag-tag-and-bobtail cut-throat moss-troopers, who carved and slashed themselves into notice by sheer animal strength and brutality.

There is infinitely more grace and romance about the Eastern adventurer. There is very little slashing and hewing to be done there, and what there is, is managed as quietly as possible. When a Sultan must be rid of the last superfluous wife, she is quietly done up in a parcel with a few shot, and dropped into the Bosphorus without more ado. The good old-fashioned Rajah of Mudpoor did his killing without scandal, and when the kindly British wish to keep a secret, the man is hanged in a quiet place where there are no reporters. As in the Greek tragedies, the butchery is done behind the scenes, and there is no glory connected with the business, only gain. The ghosts of the slain sometimes appear in the columns of the recalcitrant Indian newspapers and gibber a feeble little "Ototoi!" after the manner of the shade of Dareios, but there is very little heed paid to such visitations by the kindly British. But though the "raw head and bloody bones" type of adventurer is little in demand in the East, there is plenty of scope for the intelligent and wary flatterer, and some room for the honest man of superior gifts,

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who is sufficiently free from Oriental prejudice to do energetically the thing which comes in his way, distancing all competitors for the favours of fortune by sheer industry and unerring foresight.

I once knew a man in the East who was neither a flatterer nor freebooter, but who by his own masterly perseverance worked his way to immense wealth, and to such power as wealth commands, though his high view of the social aims of mankind deterred him from mixing in political questions. *Bon chien chasse de race* is a proverb which applies to horses, cattle, and men, as well as to dogs; and in this man, who was a noble type of the Aryan race, the qualities which have made that race dominant were developed in the highest degree. The sequel, indeed, might lead the ethnographer into a labyrinth of conjecture, but the story is too tempting a one for me to forego telling it, although the said ethnographer should lose his wits in striving to solve the puzzle.

In September, 1879, I was at Simla in the lower Himalayas, — at the time of the murder of Sir Louis Cavagnari at Kabul, — being called there in the interests of an Anglo-Indian newspaper, of which I was then editor. In other countries, notably in Europe and in America, there are hundreds of spots by the sea-shore, or on the mountain-side, where specific ills may be cured by their corresponding antidotes of air or water, or both. Following the aristocratic and holy example of the Bishops of Salzburg for the last eight centuries, the sovereigns of the Continent are told

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that the air and waters of Hofgastein are the only nenuphar for the over-taxed brain in labour beneath a crown. The self-indulgent sybarite is recommended to Ems, or Wiesbaden, or Aix-la-Chapelle, and the quasi-incurable sensualist to Aix in Savoy, or to Karlsbad in Bohemia. In our own magnificent land Bethesdas abound, in every state, from the attractive waters of lotus-eating Saratoga to the magnetic springs of Lansing, Michigan; from Virginia, the carcanet of sources, the heaving, the warm, the hot sulphur springs, the white sulphur, the alum, to the hot springs of Arkansas, the Ultima Thule of our migratory and despairing humanity. But in India, whatever the ailing, low fever, high fever, "brandy pawnee" fever, malaria caught in the chase of tigers in the Terai, or dysentery imbibed on the banks of the Ganges, there is only one cure, the "hills;" and chief of "hill-stations" is Simla.

On the hip rather than on the shoulder of the aspiring Himalayas, Simla — or Shumla, as the natives call it — presents during the wet monsoon period a concourse of pilgrims more varied even than the Bagnères de Bigorre in the south of France, where the gay Frenchman asks permission of the lady with whom he is conversing to leave her abruptly, in order to part with his remaining lung, the loss of the first having brought him there. "Pardon, madame," said he, "je m'en vais cracher mon autre poumon."

To Simla the whole surpeme Government migrates for the summer — Viceroy, council, clerks, printers,

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and hangers-on. Thither the high official from the plains takes his wife, his daughters, and his liver. There the journalists congregate to pick up the news that oozes through the pent-house of Government secrecy, and failing such scant drops of information, to manufacture as much as is necessary to fill the columns of their dailies. On the slopes of "Jako" — the wooded eminence that rises above the town — the enterprising German establishes his concert-hall and his beer-garden; among the rhododendron trees Madame Blavatzky, Colonel Olcott and Mr. Sinnett move mysteriously in the performance of their wonders; and the wealthy tourist from America, the botanist from Berlin, and the casual peer from Great Britain, are not wanting to complete the motley crowd. There are no roads in Simla proper where it is possible to drive, excepting one narrow way, reserved when I was there, and probably still set apart, for the exclusive delectation of the Viceroy. Every one rides — man, woman, and child; and every variety of horseflesh may be seen in abundance, from Lord Steepleton Kildare's throughbreds to the broad-sterned equestrian vessel of Mr. Currie Ghyrkins, the Revenue Commissioner of Mudnugger in Bengal. But I need not now dwell long on the description of this highly-favoured spot, where Baron de Zach might have added force to his demonstration of the attraction of mountains for the pendulum. Having achieved my orientation and established my servants and luggage in one of the reputed hotels, I

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began to look about me, and, like an intelligent American observer, as I pride myself that I am, I found considerable pleasure in studying out the character of such of the changing crowd on the verandah and on the mall as caught my attention.

At last the dinner-hour came. With the rest I filed into the large dining-room and took my seat. The place allotted to me was the last at one side of the long table, and the chair opposite was vacant, though two remarkably well-dressed servants, in turbans of white and gold, stood with folded arms behind it, apparently awaiting their master. Nor was he long in coming. I never remember to have been so much struck by the personal appearance of any man in my life. He sat down opposite me, and immediately one of his two servants, or *khitmatgars*, as they are called, retired, and came back bearing a priceless goblet and flask of the purest old Venetian mould. Filling the former, he ceremoniously presented his master with a brimming beaker of cold water. A water-drinker in India is always a phenomenon, but a water-drinker who did the thing so artistically was such a manifestation as I had never seen. I was interested beyond the possibility of holding my peace, and as I watched the man's abstemious meal, — for he ate little, — I contrasted him with our neighbours at the board, who seemed to be vying, like the captives of Circe, to ascertain by trial who could swallow the most beef and mountain mutton, and who could absorb the most "pegs" — those vile

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concoctions of spirits, ice, and soda-water, which have destroyed so many splendid constitutions under the tropical sun. As I watched him an impression came over me that he must be an Italian. I scanned his appearance narrowly, and watched for a word that should betray his accent. He spoke to his servant in Hindustani, and I noticed at once the peculiar sound of the dental consonants, never to be acquired by a northern-born person.

Before I go farther, let me try and describe Mr. Isaacs; I certainly could not have done so satisfactorily after my first meeting, but subsequent acquaintance, and the events I am about to chronicle, threw me so often in his society, and gave me such ample opportunities of observation, that the minutest details of his form and feature, as well as the smallest peculiarities of his character and manner, are indelibly graven in my memory.

Isaacs was a man of more than medium stature, though he would never be spoken of as tall. An easy grace marked his movements at all times, whether deliberate or vehement, — and he often went to each extreme, — a grace which no one acquainted with the science of the human frame would be at a loss to explain for a moment. The perfect harmony of all the parts, the even symmetry of every muscle, the equal distribution of a strength, not colossal and overwhelming, but ever ready for action, the natural courtesy of gesture — all told of a body in which true proportion of every limb and sinew were at once

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the main feature and the pervading characteristic. This infinitely supple and swiftly-moving figure was but the pedestal, as it were, for the noble face and nobler brain to which it owed its life and majestic bearing. A long oval face of a wondrous transparent olive tint, and of a decidedly Oriental type. A prominent brow and arched but delicate eyebrows fitly surmouned a nose smoothly aquiline, but with the broad well-set nostrils that bespeak active courage. His mouth, often smiling, never laughed, and the lips, though closely meeting, were not thin and writhing and cunning, as one so often sees in eastern faces, but rather inclined to a generous Greek fulness, the curling lines ever ready to express a sympathy or a scorn which the commanding features above seemed to control and curb, as the stern, square-elbowed Arab checks his rebellious horse, or gives him the rein, at will.

But though Mr. Isaacs was endowed with exceptional gifts of beauty by a bountiful nature, those I have enumerated were by no means what first attracted the attention of the observer. I have spoken of his graceful figure and perfect Iranian features, but I hardly noticed either at our first meeting. I was enthralled and fascinated by his eyes. I once saw in France a jewel composed of six precious stones, each a gem of great value, so set that they appeared to form but one solid mass, yielding a strange radiance that changed its hue at every movement, and multiplied the sunlight a thousand-fold. Were I to seek

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a comparison for my friend's eyes, I might find an imperfect one in this masterpiece of the jeweller's art. They were dark and of remarkable size; when half closed they were long and almond-shaped; when suddenly opened in anger or surprise they had the roundness and bold keenness of the eagle's sight. There was a depth of life and vital light in them that told of the pent-up force of a hundred generations of Persian magii. They blazed with the splendour of a god-like nature, needing neither meat nor strong drink to feed its power.

My mind was made up. Between his eyes, his temperance, and his dental consonants, he certainly might be an Italian. Being myself a native of Italy, though an American by parentage, I addressed him in the language, feeling comparatively sure of his answer. To my surprise, and somewhat to my confusion, he answered in two words of modern Greek —"*δεν ἐνόησα*"—"I do not understand." He evidently supposed I was speaking a Greek dialect, and answered in the one phrase of that tongue which he knew, and not a good phrase at that.

"Pardon me," said I in English, "I believed you a countryman, and ventured to address you in my native tongue. May I inquire whether you speak English?"

I was not a little astonished when he answered me in pure English, and with an evident command of the language. We fell into conversation, and I found him pungent, ready, impressive, and most

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entertaining, thoroughly acquainted with Anglo-Indian and English topics, and apparently well read. An Indian dinner is a long affair, so that we had ample time to break the ice, an easy matter always for people who are not English, and when, after the fruit, he invited me to come down and smoke with him in his rooms, I gladly availed myself of the opportunity. We separated for a few moments, and I despatched my servant to the manager of the hotel to ascertain the name of the strange gentleman who looked like an Italian and spoke like a fellow of Balliol. Having discovered that he was a "Mr. Isaacs," I wended my way through verandahs and corridors, preceded by a *chuprassie* and followed by my pipe-bearer, till I came to his rooms.

The fashion of the hookah or narghyle in India has long disappeared from the English portion of society. Its place has been assumed and usurped by the cheroot from Burmah or Trichinopoli, by the cigarette from Egypt, or the more expensive Manilla and Havana cigars. I, however, in an early burst of Oriental enthusiasm, had ventured upon the obsolete fashion, and so charmed was I by the indolent aromatic enjoyment I got from the rather cumbrous machine, that I never gave it up while in the East. So when Mr. Isaacs invited me to come and smoke in his rooms, or rather before his rooms, for the September air was still warm in the hills, I ordered my "bearer" to bring down the apparatus and to prepare it for use. I myself passed through the glass

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door in accordance with my new acquaintance's invitation, curious to see the kind of abode in which a man who struck me as being so unlike his fellows spent his summer months. For some minutes after I entered I did not speak, and indeed I hardly breathed. It seemed to me that I was suddenly transported into the subterranean chambers whither the wicked magician sent Aladdin in quest of the lamp. A soft but strong light filled the room, though I did not immediately comprehend whence it came, nor did I think to look, so amazed was I by the extraordinary splendour of the objects that met my eyes. In the first glance it appeared as if the walls and the ceiling were lined with gold and precious stones; and in reality it was almost literally the truth. The apartment, I soon saw, was small, —for India at least, —and every available space, nook and cranny, were filled with gold and jewelled ornaments, shining weapons, or uncouth but resplendent idols. There were sabres in scabbards set from end to end with diamonds and sapphires, with cross hilts of rubies in massive gold mounting, the spoil of some worsted rajah or Nawab of the mutiny. There were narghyles four feet high, crusted with gems and curiously wrought work from Baghdad or Herat; water flasks of gold and drinking cups of jade; yataghans from Roum and idols from the far East. Gorgeous lamps of the octagonal Oriental shape hung from the ceiling, and, fed by aromatic oils, shed their soothing light on all around. The floor was cov-

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ered with a rich soft pile, and low divans were heaped with cushions of deep-tinted silk and gold. On the floor, in a corner which seemed the favourite resting-place of my host, lay open two or three superbly illuminated Arabic manuscripts, and from a chafing dish of silver near by a thin thread of snow-white smoke sent up its faint perfume through the still air. To find myself transported from the conventionalities of a stiff and starched Anglo-Indian hotel to such a scene was something novel and delicious in the extreme. No wonder I stood speechless and amazed. Mr. Isaacs remained near the door while I breathed in the strange sights to which he had introduced me. At last I turned, and from contemplating the magnificence of inanimate wealth I was riveted by the majestic face and expression of the beautiful living creature who, by a turn of his wand, or, to speak prosaically, by an invitation to smoke, had lifted me out of humdrum into a land peopled with all the effulgent phantasies and the priceless realities of the magic East. As I gazed, it seemed as if the illumination from the lamps above were caught up and flung back with the vitality of living fire by his dark eyes, in which more than ever I saw and realised the inexplicable blending of the precious stones with the burning spark of a divine soul breathing within. For some moments we stood thus; he evidently amused at my astonishment, and I fascinated and excited by the problem presented me for solution in his person and possessions.

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"Yes," said Isaacs, "you are naturally surprised at my little Eldorado, so snugly hidden away in the lower story of a commonplace hotel. Perhaps you are surprised at finding me here, too. But come out into the air, your hookah is blazing, and so are the stars."

I followed him into the verandah, where the long cane chairs of the country were placed, and taking the tube of the pipe from the solemn Mussulman whose duty it was to prepare it, I stretched myself out in that indolent lazy peace which is only to be enjoyed in tropical countries. Silent and for the nonce perfectly happy, I slowly inhaled the fragrant vapour of tobacco and aromatic herbs and honey with which the hookah is filled. No sound save the monotonous bubbling and chuckling of the smoke through the water, or the gentle rustle of the leaves on the huge rhododendron-tree which reared its dusky branches to the night in the middle of the lawn. There was no moon, though the stars were bright and clear, the foaming path of the milky way stretching overhead like the wake of some great heavenly ship; a soft mellow lustre from the lamps in Isaacs' room threw a golden stain half across the verandah, and the chafing dish within, as the light breeze fanned the coals, sent out a little cloud of perfume which mingled pleasantly with the odour of the *chillum* in the pipe. The turbaned servant squatted on the edge of the steps at a little distance, peering into the dusk, as Indians will do for hours together. Isaacs

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lay quite still in his chair, his hands above his head, the light through the open door just falling on the jewelled mouthpiece of his narghyle. He sighed — a sigh only half regretful, half contented, and seemed about to speak, but the spirit did not move him, and the profound silence continued. For my part, I was so much absorbed in my reflections on the things I had seen that I had nothing to say, and the strange personality of the man made me wish to let him begin upon his own subject, if perchance I might gain some insight into his mind and mode of thought. There are times when silence seems to be sacred, even unaccountably so. A feeling is in us that to speak would be almost a sacrilege, though we are unable to account in any way for the pause. At such moments every one seems instinctively to feel the same influence, and the first person who breaks the spell either experiences a sensation of awkwardness, and says something very foolish, or, conscious of the odds against him, delivers himself of a sentiment of ponderous severity and sententiousness. As I smoked, watching the great flaming bowl of the water pipe, a little coal, forced up by the expansion of the heat, toppled over the edge and fell tinkling on the metal foot below. The quick ear of the servant on the steps caught the sound, and he rose and came forward to trim the fire. Though he did not speak, his act was a diversion. The spell was broken.

"The Germans," said Isaacs, "say that an angel is passing over the house. I do not believe it."

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I was surprised at the remark. It did not seem quite natural for Mr. Isaacs to begin talking about the Germans, and from the tone of his voice I could almost have fancied he thought the proverb was held as an article of faith by the Teutonic races in general.

"I do not believe it," he repeated reflectively. "There is no such thing as an angel 'passing'; it is a misuse of terms. If there are such things as angels, their changes of place cannot be described as motion, seeing that from the very nature of things such changes must be instantaneous, not involving time as a necessary element. Have you ever thought much about angels? By-the-bye, pardon my abruptness, but as there is no one to introduce us, what is your name?"

"My name is Griggs — Paul Griggs. I am an American, but was born in Italy. I know your name is Isaacs; but, frankly, I do not comprehend how you came by the appellation, for I do not believe you are either English, American, or Jewish of origin."

"Quite right," he replied, "I am neither Yankee, Jew, nor beef-eater; in fact, I am not a European at all. And since you probably would not guess my nationality, I will tell you that I am a Persian, a pure Iranian, a degenerate descendant of Zoroaster, as you call him, though by religion I follow the prophet, whose name be blessed," he added, with an expression of face I did not then understand. "I call myself Isaacs for convenience in business. There is

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no concealment about it, as many know my story; but it has an attractive Semitic twang that suits my occupation, and is simpler and shorter for Englishmen to write than Abdul Hafizben-Isâk, which is my lawful name."

"Since you lay sufficient store by your business to have been willing to change your name, may I inquire what your business is? It seems to be a lucrative one, to judge by the accumulations of wealth you have allowed me a glimpse of."

"Yes. Wealth is my occupation. I am a dealer in precious stones and similar objects of value. Some day I will show you my diamonds; they are worth seeing."

It is no uncommon thing to meet in India men of all Asiatic nationalities buying and selling stones of worth, and enriching themselves in the business. I supposed he had come with a caravan by way of Baghdad, and had settled. But again, his perfect command of English, as pure as though he had been educated at Eton and Oxford, his extremely careful, though quiet, English dress, and especially his polished manners, argued a longer residence in the European civilisation of his adopted home than agreed with his young looks, supposing him to have come to India at sixteen or seventeen. A pardonable curiosity led me to remark this.

"You must have come here very young," I said.

"A thoroughbred Persian does not learn to speak English like a university man, and to quote German

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proverbs, in a residence of a few years; unless, indeed, he possess the secret by which the initiated absorb knowledge without effort, and assimilate it without the laborious process of intellectual digestion."

"I am older than I look — considerably. I have been in India twelve years, and with a natural talent for languages, stimulated by constant intercourse with Englishmen who know their own speech well, I have succeeded, as you say, in acquiring a certain fluency and mastery of accent. I have had an adventurous life enough. I see no reason why I should not tell you something of it, especially as you are not English, and can therefore hear me with an unprejudiced ear. But, really, do you care for a yarn?"

I begged him to proceed, and I beckoned the servant to arrange our pipes, that we might not be disturbed. When this was done, Isaacs began.

"I am going to try and make a long story short. We Persians like to listen to long stories, as we like to sit and look on at a wedding nautch. But we are radically averse to dancing or telling long tales ourselves, so I shall condense as much as possible. I was born in Persia, of Persian parents, as I told you, but I will not burden your memory with names you are not familiar with. My father was a merchant in prosperous circumstances, and a man of no mean learning in Arabic and Persian literature. I soon showed a strong taste for books, and every opportu-

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nity was given me for pursuing my inclinations in this respect. At the early age of twelve I was kidnapped by a party of slave-dealers, and carried off into Roum — Turkey you call it. I will not dwell upon my tears and indignation. We travelled rapidly, and my captors treated me well, as they invariably do their prizes, well knowing how much of the value of a slave depends on his plump and sleek condition when brought to market. In Istamboul I was soon disposed of, my fair skin and accomplishments as a writer and a singer of Persian songs fetching a high price.

"It is no uncommon thing for boys to be stolen and sold in this way. A rich pacha will pay almost anything. The fate of such slaves is not generally a happy one." Isaacs paused a moment, and drew in two or three long breaths of smoke. "Do you see that bright star in the south?" he said, pointing with his long jewel-set mouthpiece.

"Yes. It must be Sirius."

"That is my star. Do you believe in the agency of the stars in human affairs? Of course you do not; you are a European: how should you? But to proceed. The stars, or the fates or Kāli, or whatever you like to term your kismet, your portion of good and evil, allotted me a somewhat happier existence than generally falls to the share of young slaves in Roum. I was bought by an old man of great wealth and of still greater learning, who was so taken with my proficiency in Arabic and in writing that he

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resolved to make of me a pupil instead of a servant to carry his coffee and pipe, or a slave to bear the heavier burden of his vices. Nothing better could have happened to me. I was installed in his house and treated with exemplary kindness, though he kept me rigorously at work with my books. I need not tell you that with such a master I made fair progress, and that at the age of twenty-one I was, for a Turk, a young man of remarkably good education. Then my master died suddenly, and I was thrown into great distress. I was of course nothing but a slave, and liable to be sold at any time. I escaped. Active and enduring, though never possessing any vast muscular strength, I bore with ease the hardships of a long journey on foot with little food and scant lodging. Falling in with a band of pilgrims, I recognised the wisdom of joining them on their march to Mecca. I was, of course, a sound Mohammedan, as I am to this day, and my knowledge of the Koran soon gained me some reputation in the caravan. I was considered a creditable addition, and altogether an eligible pilgrim. My exceptional physique protected me from the disease and exhaustion of which not a few of our number died by the wayside, and the other pilgrims, in consideration of my youth and piety, gave me willingly the few handfuls of rice and dates that I needed to support life and strength.

"You have read about Mecca; and your *hadji* barber, who of course has been there, has doubtless

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related his experiences to you scores of times in the plains, as he does everywhere. As you may imagine, I had no intention of returning towards Roum with my companions. When I had fulfilled all the observances required, I made my way to Yeddah and shipped on board an Arabian craft, touching at Mocha, and bearing coffee to Bombay. I had to work my passage, and as I had no experience of the sea, save in the caïques of the Golden Horn, you will readily conceive that the captain of the vessel had plenty of fault to find. But my agility and quick comprehension stood me in good stead, and in a few days I had learned enough to haul on a rope or to reef the great latteen sails as well as any of them. The knowledge that I was just returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca obtained for me also a certain respect among the crew. It makes very little difference what the trade, business, or branch of learning; in mechanical labour, or intellectual effort, the educated man is always superior to the common labourer. One who is in the habit of applying his powers in the right way will carry his system into any occupation, and it will help him as much to handle a rope as to write a poem.

"At last we landed in Bombay. I was in a wretched condition. What little clothes I had had were in tatters; hard work and little food had made me even thinner than my youthful age and slight frame tolerated. I had in all about three pence money in small copper coins, carefully hoarded

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against a rainy day. I could not speak a word of the Indian dialects, still less of English, and I knew no one save the crew of the vessel I had come in, as poor as I, but saved from starvation by the slender pittance allowed them on land. I wandered about all day through the bazaars, occasionally speaking to some solemn looking old shopkeeper or long-bearded Mussulman, who, I hoped, might understand a little Arabic. But not one did I find. At evening I bathed in the tank of a temple full from the recent rains, and I lay down supperless to sleep on the steps of the great mosque. As I lay on the hard stones I looked up to my star, and took comfort, and slept. That night a dream came to me. I thought I was still awake and lying on the steps, watching the wondrous ruler of my fate. And as I looked he glided down from his starry throne with an easy swinging motion, like a soap-bubble settling to the earth. And the star came and poised among the branches of the palm-tree over the tank, opalescent, unearthly, heart shaking. His face was as the face of the prophet, whose name be blessed, and his limbs were as the limbs of the Hameshaspenthas of old. Garments he had none, being of heavenly birth, but he was clothed with light as with a garment, and the crest of his silver hair was to him a crown of glory. And he spoke with the tongues of a thousand lutes, sweet strong tones, that rose and fell on the night air as the song of a lover beneath the lattice of his mistress, the song of the mighty star wooing the

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beautiful sleeping earth. And then he looked on me and said: 'Abdul Hafiz, be of good cheer. I am with thee and will not forsake thee, even to the day when thou shalt pass over the burning bridge of death. Thou shalt touch the diamond of the rivers and the pearl of the sea, and they shall abide with thee, and great shall be thy wealth. And the sunlight which is in the diamond shall warm thee and comfort thy heart; and the moonlight which is in the pearl shall give thee peace in the night-time, and thy children shall be to thee a garland of roses in the land of the unbeliever.' And the star floated down from the palm-branches and touched me with his hand, and breathed upon my lips the cool breath of the outer firmament, and departed. Then I awoke and saw him again in his place far down the horizon, and he was alone, for the dawn was in the sky and the lesser lights were extinguished. And I rose from the stony stairway that seemed like a bed of flowers for the hopeful dream, and I turned westward, and praised Allah, and went my way.

"The sun being up, all was life, and the life in me spoke of a most capacious appetite. So I cast about for a shop where I might buy a little food with my few coppers, and seeing a confectioner spreading out his wares, I went near and took stock of the queer balls of flour and sugar, and strange oily-looking sweetmeats. Having selected what I thought would be within my modest means, I addressed the shopkeeper to call his attention, though I knew he

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would not understand me, and I touched with my hand the article I wanted, showing with the other some of the small coins I had. As soon as I touched the sweetmeats the man became very angry, and bounding from his seat called his neighbours together, and they all shouted and screamed at me, and called a man I thought to be a soldier, though he looked more like an ape in his long loose trousers of dirty black, and his untidy red turban, under which cumbrous garments his thin and stunted frame seemed even blacker and more contemptible than nature had made them. I afterwards discovered him to be one of the Bombay police. He seized me by the arm, and I, knowing I had done no wrong, and curious to discover, if possible, what the trouble was, accompanied him whither he led me. After waiting many hours in a kind of little shed where there were more policemen, I was brought before an Englishman. Of course all attempts at explanation were useless. I could speak not a word of anything but Arabic and Persian, and no one present understood either. At last, when I was in despair, trying to muster a few words of Greek I had learned in Istamboul, and failing signally therein, an old man with a long beard looked curiously in at the door of the crowded court. Some instinct told me to appeal to him, and I addressed him in Arabic. To my infinite relief he replied in that tongue, and volunteered to be interpreter. In a few moments I learned that my crime was that I had *touched* the sweetmeats on the counter.

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"In India, as you who have lived here doubtless know, it is a criminal offence, punishable by fine or imprisonment, for a non-Hindu person to defile the food of even the lowest caste man. To touch one sweetmeat in a trayful defiles the whole baking, rendering it all unfit for the use of any Hindu, no matter how mean. Knowing nothing of caste and its prejudices, it was with the greatest difficulty that the *moolah*, who was trying to help me out of my trouble, could make me comprehend wherein my wrong-doing lay, and that the English courts, being obliged in their own interest to uphold and protect the caste practices of the Hindus, at the risk of another mutiny, could not make any exception in favour of a stranger unacquainted with Indian customs. So the Englishman who presided said he would have to inflict a fine, but being a very young man, not yet hardened to the despotic ways of Eastern life, he generously paid the fine himself, and gave me a rupee as a present into the bargain. It was only two shillings, but as I had not had so much money for months I was as grateful as though it had been a hundred. If I ever meet him I will requite him, for I owe him all I now possess.

"My case being dismissed, I left the court with the old *moolah*, who took me to his house and inquired of my story, having first given me a good meal of rice and sweetmeats, and that greatest of luxuries, a little pot of fragrant Mocha coffee; he sat in silence while I ate, ministering to my wants, and evidently

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pleased with the good he was doing. Then he brought out a package of *birris*, those little cigarettes rolled in leaves that they smoke in Bombay, and I told him what had happened to me. I implored him to put me in the way of obtaining some work by which I could at least support life, and he promised to do so, begging me to stay with him until I should be independent. The day following I was engaged to pull a punkah in the house of an English lawyer connected with an immense lawsuit involving one of the Mohammedan principalities. For this irksome work I was to receive six rupees — twelve shillings — monthly, but before the month was up I was transferred, by the kindness of the English lawyer and the good offices of my co-religionist the *moolah*, to the retinue of the Nizam of Haiderabad, then in Bombay. Since that time I have never known want.

"I soon mastered enough of the dialects to suit my needs, and applied myself to the study of English, for which opportunities were not lacking. At the end of two years I could speak the language enough to be understood, and my accent from the first was a matter of surprise to all; I had also saved out of my gratuities about one hundred rupees. Having been conversant with the qualities of many kinds of precious stones from my youth up, I determined to invest my economies in a diamond or a pearl. Before long I struck a bargain with an old *marwarri* over a small stone, of which I thought he misjudged the value, owing to the rough cutting. The fellow was cun

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ning and hard in his dealings, but my superior knowledge of diamonds gave me the advantage. I paid him ninety-three rupees for the little gem, and sold it again in a month for two hundred to a young English 'collector and magistrate,' who wanted to make his wife a present. I bought a larger stone, and again made nearly a hundred per cent on the money. Then I bought two, and so on, until having accumulated sufficient capital, I bade farewell to the Court of the Nizam, where my salary never exceeded sixteen rupees a month as scribe and Arabic interpreter, and I went my way with about two thousand rupees in cash and precious stones. I came northwards, and finally settled in Delhi, where I set up as a dealer in gems and objects of intrinsic value. It is now twelve years since I landed in Bombay. I have never soiled my hands with usury, though I have twice advanced large sums at legal interest for purposes I am not at liberty to disclose; I have never cheated a customer or underrated a gem I bought of a poor man, and my wealth, as you may judge from what you have seen, is considerable. Moreover, though in constant intercourse with Hindus and English, I have not forfeited my title to be called a true believer and a follower of the prophet, whose name be blessed."

Isaacs ceased speaking, and presently the waning moon rose pathetically over the crest of the mountains with that curiously doleful look she wears after the full is past, as if weeping over the loss of her

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better half. The wind rose and soughed drearily through the rhododendrons and the pines; and Kiramat Ali, the pipe-bearer, shivered audibly as he drew his long cloth uniform around him. We rose and entered my friend's rooms, where the warmth of the lights, the soft rugs and downy cushions, invited us temptingly to sit down and continue our conversation. But it was late, for Isaacs, like a true Oriental, had not hurried himself over his narrative, and it had been nine o'clock when we sat down to smoke. So I bade him good-night, and, musing on all I had heard and seen, retired to my own apartments, glancing at Sirius and at the unhappy-looking moon before I turned in from the verandah.

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CHAPTER II.

In India—in the plains—people rise before dawn, and it is not till after some weeks' residence in the cooler atmosphere of the mountains that they return to the pernicious habit of allowing the sun to be before them. The hours of early morning, when one either mopes about in loose flannel clothes, or goes for a gallop on the green *maidán*, are without exception the most delicious of the day. I shall have occasion hereafter to describe the morning's proceedings in the plains. On the day after the events recorded in the last chapter I awoke as usual at five o'clock, and meandered out on to the verandah to have a look at the hills, so novel and delicious a sight after the endless flats of the northwest provinces. It was still nearly dark, but there was a faint light in the east, which rapidly grew as I watched it, till, turning the angle of the house, I distinguished a snow-peak over the tops of the dark rhododendrons, and, while I gazed, the first tinge of distant dawning caught the summit, and the beautiful hill blushed, as a fair woman, at the kiss of the awakening sun. The old story, the heaven wooing the earth with a wondrous shower of gold.

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"Prati 'shya sunarī janī"—the exquisite lines of the old Vedic hymn to the dawn maiden, rose to my lips. I had never appreciated or felt their truth down in the dusty plains, but here, on the free hills, the glad welcoming of the morning light seemed to run through every fibre, as thousands of years ago the same joyful thrill of returning life inspired the pilgrim fathers of the Aryan race. Almost unconsciously, I softly intoned the hymn, as I had heard my old Brahmin teacher in Allahabad when he came and sat under the porch at daybreak, until I was ready for him —

The lissome heavenly maiden here,
Forth flashing from her sister's arms,
High heaven's daughter, now is come.

In rosy garments, shining like
A swift bay mare; the twin knights' friend,
Mother of all our herds of kine.

Yea, thou art she, the horseman's friend;
Of grazing cattle mother thou,
All wealth is thine, thou blushing dawn.

Thou who hast driven the foeman back,
With praise we call on thee to wake
In tender reverence, beauteous one.

The spreading beams of morning light
Are countless as our hosts of kine,
They fill the atmosphere of space.

Filling the sky, thou openedst wide
The gates of night, thou glorious dawn—
Rejoicing run thy daily race!

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The heaven above thy rays have filled,
The broad belovèd room of air,
O splendid, brightest maid of morn!

I went indoors again to attend to my correspondence, and presently a gorgeously liveried white-bearded *chuprassie* appeared at the door, and bending low as he touched his hand to his forehead, intimated that "if the great lord of the earth, the protector of the poor, would turn his ear to the humblest of his servants, he would hear of something to his advantage."

So saying, he presented a letter from the official with whom I had to do, an answer to my note of the previous afternoon, requesting an interview. In due course, therefore, the day wore on, and I transacted my business, returned to "tiffin," and then went up to my rooms for a little quiet. I might have been there an hour, smoking and dreaming over a book, when the servant announced a sahib who wanted to see me, and Isaacs walked in, redolent of the sunshine without, his luminous eyes shining brightly in the darkened room. I was delighted, for I felt my wits stagnating in the unwonted idleness of the autumn afternoon, and the book I had taken up was not conducive to wakefulness or brilliancy. It was a pleasant surprise too. It is not often that an hotel acquaintance pushes an intimacy much, and besides I had feared my silence during the previous evening might have produced the impression of indifference, on which reflection I had resolved to make myself agreeable at our next meeting.

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Truly, had I asked myself the cause of a certain attraction I felt for Mr. Isaacs, it would have been hard to find an answer. I am generally extremely shy of persons who begin an acquaintance by making confidences, and, in spite of Isaacs' charm of manner, I had certainly speculated on his reasons for suddenly telling an entire stranger his whole story. My southern birth had not modified the northern character born in me, though it gave me the more urbane veneer of the Italian; and the early study of Larochefoucauld and his school had not predisposed me to an unlimited belief in the disinterestedness of mankind. Still there was something about the man which seemed to sweep away unbelief and cynicism and petty distrust, as the bright mountain freshet sweeps away the wretched little mud puddles and the dust and impurities from the bed of a half dry stream. It was a new sensation and a novel era in my experience of humanity, and the desire to get behind that noble forehead, and see its inmost workings, was strong beyond the strength of puny doubts and preconceived prejudice. Therefore, when Isaacs appeared, looking like the sun-god for all his quiet dress of gray and his unobtrusive manner, I felt the "little thrill of pleasure" so aptly compared by Swinburne to the soft touch of a hand stroking the outer hair.

"What a glorious day after all that detestable rain!" were his first words. "Three mortal months of water, mud, and Mackintoshes, not to mention the

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agreeable sensation of being glued to a wet saddle with your feet in water-buckets, and mountain torrents running up and down the inside of your sleeves, in defiance of the laws of gravitation; such is life in the monsoon. Pah!" And he threw himself down on a cane chair and stretched out his dainty feet, so that the sunlight through the crack of the half-closed door might fall comfortingly on his toes, and remind him that it was fine outside.

"What have you been doing all day?" I asked, for lack of a better question, not having yet recovered from the mental stagnation induced by the last number of the serial story I had been reading.

"Oh—I don't know. Are you married?" he asked irrelevantly.

"God forbid!" I answered reverently, and with some show of feeling.

"Amen," was the answer. "As for me—I am, and my wives have been quarrelling."

"Your wives! Did I understand you to use the plural number?"

"Why, yes. I have three; that is the worst of it. If there were only two, they might get on better. You know 'two are company and three are none,' as your proverb has it." He said this reflectively, as if meditating a reduction in the number.

The application of the proverb to such a case was quite new in my recollection. As for the plurality of my friend's conjugal relations, I remembered he was a Mohammedan, and my surprise vanished.

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Isaacs was lost in meditation. Suddenly he rose to his feet, and took a cigarette from the table.

"I wonder"—the match would not light, and he struggled a moment with another. Then he blew a great cloud of smoke, and sat down in a different chair—"I wonder whether a fourth would act as a fly-wheel," and he looked straight at me, as if asking my opinion.

I had never been in direct relations with a Mussulman of education and position. To be asked point-blank whether I thought four wives better than three on general principles, and quite independently of the contemplated spouse, was a little embarrassing. He seemed perfectly capable of marrying another before dinner for the sake of peace, and I do not believe he would have considered it by any means a bad move.

"Diamond cut diamond," I said. "You too have proverbs, and one of them is that a man is better sitting than standing; better lying than sitting; better dead than lying down. Now I should apply that same proverb to marriage. A man is, by a similar successive reasoning, better with no wife at all than with three."

His subtle mind caught the flaw instantly. "To be without a wife at all would be about as conducive to happiness as to be dead. Negative happiness, very negative."

"Negative happiness is better than positive discomfort."

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"Come, come," he answered, "we are bandying terms and words, as if empty breath amounted to anything but inanity. Do you really doubt the value of the institution of marriage?"

"No. Marriage is a very good thing when two people are so poor that they depend on each other, mutually, for daily bread, or if they are rich enough to live apart. For a man in my own position marriage would be the height of folly; an act of rashness only second to deliberate suicide. Now, you are rich, and if you had but one wife, she living in Delhi and you in Simla, you would doubtless be very happy."

"There is something in that," said Isaacs. "She might mope and beat the servants, but she could not quarrel if she were alone. Besides, it is so much easier to look after one camel than three. I think I must try it."

There was a pause, during which he seemed settling the destiny of the two who were to be shelved in favour of a monogamic experiment. Presently he asked if I had brought any horses, and hearing I had not, offered me a mount, and proposed we should ride round Jako, and perhaps, if there were time, take a look at Annandale in the valley, where there was polo, and a racing-ground. I gladly accepted, and Isaacs despatched one of my servants, the faithful Kiramat Ali, to order the horses. Meantime the conversation turned on the expedition to Kabul to avenge the death of Cavagnari. I found Isaacs held

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the same view that I did in regard to the whole business. He thought the sending of four Englishmen, with a handful of native soldiers of the guide regiment to protect them, a piece of unparalleled folly, on a par with the whole English policy in regard to Afghanistan.

"You English — pardon me, I forgot you did not belong to them — the English, then, have performed most of their great acts of valour as a direct consequence of having wantonly exposed themselves in situations where no sane man would have placed himself. Look at Balaclava; think of the things they did in the mutiny, and in the first Afghan war; look at the mutiny itself, the result of a hair-brained idea that a country like India could be held for ever with no better defences than the trustworthiness of native officers, and the gratitude of the people for the 'kindly British rule.' Poor Cavagnari! when he was here last summer, before leaving on his mission, he said several times he should never come back. And yet no better man could have been chosen, whether for politics or fighting; if only they had had the sense to protect him."

Having delivered himself of this eulogy, my friend dropped his exhausted cigarette, lit another, and appeared again absorbed in the triangulation of his matrimonial problem. I imagined him weighing the question whether he should part with Zobeida and Zuleika and keep Amina, or send Zuleika and Amina about their business, and keep Zobeida to be a light

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in his household. At last Kiramat Ali, on the watch in the verandah, announced the saices with the horses, and we descended.

I had expected that a man of Isaacs' tastes and habits would not be stingy about his horseflesh, and so was prepared for the character of the animals that awaited us. They were two superb Arab stallions, one of them being a rare specimen of the weight-carrying kind, occasionally seen in the far East. Small head, small feet, and feather-tailed, but broad in the quarters and deep in the chest, able to carry a twelve-stone man for hours at the stretching, even gallop, that never trembles and never tires; sure-footed as a mule, and tender-tempered as a baby.

So we mounted the gentle creatures and rode away. The mountain on which Simla is situated has a double summit, like a Swiss peak, the one higher than the other. On the lower height and the neck between the two is built the town, and the bungalows used as offices and residences for the Government officials cover a very considerable area. "Jako," the higher eminence, is thickly covered with a forest of primeval rhododendrons and pines, and though there are outlying bungalows and villas scattered about among the trees near the town, they are so far back from the main road, reserved as I have said for the use of the Viceroy, as far as driving is concerned, that they are not seen in riding along the shady way; and on the opposite side, where the trees are thin, the magnificent view looks far out over the spurs of the

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mountains, the only human habitation visible being a Catholic convent, which rears its little Italian *campanile* against the blue sky, and rather adds to the beauty of the scene than otherwise. As we rode along we continued our talk about the new Afghan war, though neither of us was very much in the humour for animated conversation. The sweet scent of the pines, the matchless motion of the Arab, and the joyous feeling that the worst part of the tropical year was passed, were enough for me, and I drank in the high, rarefied air, with the intense delight of a man who has been smothered with dust and heat, and then steamed to a jelly by a spring and summer in the plains of Hindustan.

The road abounds in sharp turns, and I, as the heavier mount, rode on the inside as we went round the mountain. On reaching the open part on the farther side, we drew rein for a moment to look down at the deep valleys, now dark with the early shade, at the higher peaks red with the westering sun, and at the black masses of foliage, through which some giant trunk here and there caught a lingering ray of the departing light. Then, as we felt the cool of the evening coming on, we wheeled and scampered along the level stretch, stirrup to stirrup and knee to knee. The sharp corner at the end pulled us up, but before we had quite reined in our horses, as delighted as we to have a couple of minutes' straight run, we swung past the angle and cannoned into a man ambling peaceably along with his reins on one finger and his

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large gray felt hat flapping at the back of his neck. There was a moment's confusion, profuse apologies on our part, and some ill-concealed annoyance on the part of the victim, who was, however, only a little jostled and taken by surprise.

"Really, sir," he began. "Oh! Mr. Isaacs. No harm done, I assure you, that is, not much. Bad thing riding fast round corners. No harm, no harm, not much. How are you?" all in a breath.

"How d'ye do! Mr. Ghyrkins; my friend Mr. Griggs."

"The real offender," I added in a conciliatory tone, for I had kept my place on the inside.

"Mr. Griggs?" said Mr. Currie Ghyrkins. "Mr. Griggs of Allahabad? *Daily Howler?* Yes, yes, corresponded; glad to see you in the flesh."

I did not think he looked particularly glad. He was a Revenue Commissioner residing in Mudnugger; a rank Conservative; a regular old "John Company" man, with whom I had had more than one tiff in the columns of the *Howler*, leading to considerable correspondence.

"I trust that our collision in the flesh has had no worse results than our tilts in print, Mr. Ghyrkins?"

"Not at all. Oh don't mention it. Bad enough, though, but no harm done, none whatever," pulling up and looking at me as he pronounced the last two words with a peculiarly English slowness after a very quick sentence.

While he was speaking, I was aware of a pair of

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riders walking their horses toward us, and apparently struggling to suppress their amusement at the mishap to the old gentleman, which they must have witnessed. In truth, Mr. Ghyrkins, who was stout and rode a broad-backed obese "tat," can have presented no very dignified appearance, for he was jerked half out of the saddle by the concussion, and his near leg, returning to its place, had driven his nether garment half way to his knee, while the large felt hat was settling back on to his head at a rakish angle, and his coat collar had gone well up the back of his neck.

"Dear uncle," said the lady as she rode up, "I hope you are not hurt?" She was very handsome as she sat there trying not to laugh. A lithe figure in a gray habit and a broad-brimmed hat, fair as a Swede, but with dark eyes and heavy lashes. Just then she was showing her brilliant teeth, ostensibly in delight at her dear uncle's escape, and her whole expression was animated and amused. Her companion was a soldierly looking young Englishman, with a heavy moustache and a large nose. A certain devil-may-care look about his face was attractive as he sat carelessly watching us. I noticed his long stirrups and the curb rein hanging loose, while he held the snaffle, and concluded he was a cavalry officer. Isaacs bowed low to the lady and wheeled his horse. She replied by a nod, indifferent enough; but as he turned, her eyes instantly went back to him, and a pleasant thoughtful look passed over her face, which betrayed at least a trifling interest in the stranger, if stranger he were.

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All this time Mr. Ghyrkins was talking and asking questions of me. When had I come? what brought me here? how long would I stay? and so on, showing that whether friendly or not he had an interest in my movements. In answering his questions I found an opportunity of calling the Queen the "Empress," of lauding Lord Beaconsfield's policy in India, and of congratulating Mr. Ghyrkins upon the state of his district, with which he had nothing to do, of course; but he swallowed the bait, all in a breath, as he seemed to do everything. Then he introduced us.

"Katharine, you know Mr. Isaacs; Mr. Griggs, Miss Westonhaugh, Lord Steepleton Kildare, Mr. Isaacs."

We bowed and rode back together over the straight piece we passed before the encounter. Isaacs and the Englishman walked their horses on each side of Miss Westonhaugh, and Ghyrkins and I brought up the rear. I tried to turn the conversation to Isaacs, but with little result.

"Yes, yes, good fellow Isaacs, for a fire-worshipper, or whatever he is. Good judge of a horse. Lots of rupees too. Queer fish. By-the-bye, Mr. Griggs, this new expedition is going to cost us something handsome, eh?"

"Why, yes. I doubt whether you will get off under ten millions sterling. And where is it to come from? You will have a nice time making your assessments in Bengal, Mr. Ghyrkins, and we shall have an income-tax and all sorts of agreeable things."

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"Income-tax? Well, I think not. You see, Mr. Griggs, it would hit the members of the council, so they won't do it, for their own sakes, and the Viceroy too. Ha, ha, how do you think Lord Lytton would like an income-tax, eh?" And the old fellow chuckled.

We reached the end of the straight, and Isaacs reined in and bid Miss Westonhaugh and her companion good evening. I bowed from where I was, and took Mr. Ghyrkins' outstretched hand. He was in a good humour again, and called out to us to come and see him, as we rode away. I thought to myself I certainly would; and we paced back, crossing the open stretch for the third time.

It was almost dark under the trees as we re-entered the woods; I pulled out a cheroot and lit it. Isaacs did the same, and we walked our horses along in silence. I was thinking of the little picture I had just seen. The splendid English girl on her thoroughbred beside the beautiful Arab steed and his graceful rider. What a couple, I thought: what noble specimens of great races. Why did not this fiery young Persian, with his wealth, his beauty, and his talents, wed some such wife as that, some high-bred Englishwoman, who should love him and give him home and children — and, I was forced to add, commonplace happiness? How often does it happen that some train of thought, unacknowledged almost to ourselves, runs abruptly into a blind alley; especially when we try to plan out the future life of some one

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else, or to sketch for him what we should call happiness. The accidental confronting of two individuals pleases the eye, we unite them in our imagination, carrying on the picture before us, and suddenly we find ourselves in a quagmire of absurd incongruities. Now what could be more laughable than to suppose the untamed, and probably untameable young man at my side, with his three wives, his notions about the stars and his Mussulman faith, bound for life to a girl like Miss Westonhaugh? A wise man of the East trying to live the life of an English country gentleman, hunting in pink and making speeches on the local hustings! I smiled to myself in the dark and puffed at my cigar.

Meanwhile Isaacs was palpably uneasy. First he kicked his feet free of the stirrups, and put them back again. Then he hummed a few words of a Persian song and let his cigar go out, after which he swore loudly in Arabic at the eternal matches that never would light. Finally he put his horse into a hand gallop, which could not last on such a road in the dark, and at last he broke down completely in his efforts to do impossible things, and began talking to me.

"You know Mr. Ghyrkins by correspondence, then?"

"Yes, and by controversy. And you, I see, know Miss Westonhaugh?"

"Yes; what do you think of her?"

"A charming creature of her type. Fair and

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English, she will be fat at thirty-five, and will probably paint at forty, but at present she is perfection —of her kind of course," I added, not wishing to engage my friend in the defence of his three wives on the score of beauty.

"I see very little of Englishwomen," said Isaacs. "My position is peculiar, and though the men, many of whom I know quite intimately, often ask me to their houses, I fancy when I meet their women I can detect a certain scorn of my nationality, a certain undefinable manner toward me, by which I suppose they mean to convey to my obtuse comprehension that I am but a step better than a 'native'—a 'nigger' in fact, to use the term they love so well. So I simply avoid them, as a rule, for my temper is hasty. Of course I understand it well enough; they are brought up or trained by their fathers and husbands to regard the native Indian as an inferior being, an opinion in which, on the whole, I heartily concur. But they go a step farther and include all Asiatics in the same category. I do not choose to be confounded with a race I consider worn out and effete. As for the men, it is different. They know I am rich and influential in many ways that are useful to them now, and they hope that the fortunes of war or revolution may give them a chance of robbing me hereafter, in which they are mistaken. Now there is our stout friend, whom we nearly brought to grief a few minutes ago; he is always extremely civil, and never meets me that he does not renew his invitation to visit him."

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"I should like to see something more of Mr. Currie Ghyrkins myself. I do not believe he is half as bad as I thought. Do you ever go there?"

"Sometimes. Yes, on second thoughts I believe I call on Mr. Currie Ghyrkins pretty often." Then after a pause he added, "I like her."

I pointed out the confusion of genders. Isaacs must have smiled to himself in the gloom, but he answered quietly —

"I mean Miss Westonhaugh. I like her — yes, I am quite sure I do. She is beautiful and sensible, though if she stays here much longer she will be like all the rest. We will go and see them to-morrow. Here we are; just in time for dinner. Come and smoke afterwards."

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CHAPTER III.

A LOOSE robe of light material from Kashmir thrown around him, Isaacs half sat, half lay, on the soft dark cushions in the corner of his outer room. His feet were slipperless, Eastern fashion, and his head covered with an embroidered cap of curious make. By the yellow light of the hanging lamps he was reading an Arabic book, and his face wore a puzzled look that sat strangely on the bold features. As I entered the book fell back on the cushion, sinking deep into the down by its weight, and one of the heavy gold clasps clanged sharply as it turned. He looked up, but did not rise, and greeted me, smiling, with the Arabic salutation —

"Peace be with you!"

"And with you, peace," I answered in the same tongue. He smiled again at my unfamiliar pronunciation. I established myself on the divan near him, and inquired whether he had arrived at any satisfactory solution of his domestic difficulties.

"My father," he said, "upon whom be peace, had but one wife, my mother. You know Mussulmans are allowed four lawful wives. Here is the passage in the beginning of the fourth chapter, 'If ye fear

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that ye shall not act with equity towards orphans of the female sex, take in marriage of such other women as please you, two, or three, or four, and not more. But, if ye fear that ye cannot act equitably towards so many, marry one only, or the slaves which ye shall have acquired.'

"The first part of this passage," continued Isaacs, "is disputed; I mean the words referring to orphans. But the latter portion is plain enough. When the apostle warns those who fear they 'cannot act equitably towards so many,' I am sure that in his wisdom he meant something more by 'equitable' treatment than the mere supplying of bodily wants. He meant us to so order our households that there should be no jealousies, no heart-burnings, no unnecessary troubling of the peace. Now woman is a thing of the devil, jealous; and to manage a number of such creatures so that they shall be even passably harmonious among themselves is a fearful task, soul-wearying, heart-hardening, never-ending, leading to no result."

"Just what I told you; a man is better with no wife at all than with three. But why do you talk about such matters with me, an unbeliever, a Christian, who, in the words of your prophet, 'shall swallow down nothing but fire into my belly, and shall broil in raging flames' when I die? Surely it is contrary to the custom of your co-religionists; and how can you expect an infidel Frank to give you advice?"

"I don't," laconically replied my host.

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"Besides, with your views of women in general, their vocation, their aims, and their future state, is it at all likely that we should ever arrive at even a fair discussion of marriage and marriage laws? With us, women have souls, and, what is a great deal more, seem likely to have votes. They certainly have the respectful and courteous service of a large proportion of the male sex. You call a woman a thing of the devil; we call her an angel from heaven; and though some eccentric persons like myself refuse to ally themselves for life with any woman, I confess, as far as I am concerned, that it is because I cannot contemplate the constant society of an angel with the degree of appreciation such a privilege justly deserves; and I suspect that most confirmed bachelors, knowingly or unconsciously, think as I do. The Buddhists are not singular in their theory that permanent happiness should be the object."

"They say," said Isaacs, quickly interrupting, "that the aim of the ignorant is pleasure; the pursuit of the wise, happiness. Pray, under which category would you class marriage? I suppose it comes under one or the other."

"I cannot say I see the force of that. Look at your own case, since you have introduced it."

"Never mind my own case. I mean with your ideas of one wife, and heavenly woman, and voting, and domestic joy, and all the rest of it. Take the ideal creature you rave about——"

"I never rave about anything."

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"Take the fascinating female you describe, and for the sake of argument imagine yourself very poor or very rich, since you would not enter wedlock in your present circumstances. Suppose you married your object of 'courteous service and respectful adoration;' which should you say you would attain thereby, pleasure or happiness?"

"Pleasure is but the refreshment that cheers us in the pursuit of true happiness," I answered, hoping to evade the direct question by a sententious phrase.

"I will not let you off so easily. You shall answer my question," he said. He looked full at me with a deep searching gaze that seemed hardly warranted by the lightness of the argument. I hesitated, and he impatiently leaned forward, uncrossing his legs and clasping his hands over one knee to bring himself nearer to me.

"Pleasure or happiness?" he repeated, "which is it to be?"

A sudden light flashed over my obscured intellect.

"Both," I answered. "Could you see the ideal woman as I would fain paint her to you, you would understand me better. The pleasure you enjoy in the society of a noble and beautiful woman should be but the refreshment by the wayside as you journey through life together. The day will come when she will be beautiful no longer, only noble and good, and true to you as to herself; and then, if pleasure has been to you what it should be, you will find that in the happiness attained it is no longer counted, or

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needed, or thought of. It will have served its end, as the crib holds the ship in her place while she is building; and when your white-winged vessel has smoothly glided off into the great ocean of happiness, the crib and the stocks and the artificial supports will fall to pieces and be forgotten for ever. Yet have they had a purpose, and have borne a very important part in the life of your ship."

Having heard me attentively till I had finished, Isaacs relaxed his hold on his knee and threw himself back on the cushions, as if to entrench himself for a better fight. I had made an impression on him, but he was not the man to own it easily. Presumably to gain time, he called for hookahs and sherbet, and though the servants moved noiselessly in preparing them, their presence was an interruption.

When we were settled again he had taken a nearly upright position on the couch, and as he pulled at the long tube his face assumed that stolid look of Oriental indifference which is the most discouraging shower-bath to the persuasive powers. I had really no interest in converting him to my own point of view about women. Honestly, was it my own point of view at all? Would anything under heaven induce me, Paul Griggs, rich, or poor, or comfortably off, to marry any one — Miss Westonhaugh, for instance? Probably not. But then my preference for single blessedness did not prevent me from believing that women have souls. That morning the question of the marriage of the whole universe had

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been a matter of the utmost indifference, and now I, a confirmed and hopelessly contented bachelor, was trying to convince a man with three wives that matrimony was a most excellent thing in its way, and that the pleasure of the honeymoon was but the faint introduction to the bliss of the silver wedding. It certainly must be Isaacs' own doing. He had launched on a voyage of discovery and had taken me in tow. I had a strong suspicion that he wanted to be convinced, and was playing indifference to soothe his conscience.

"Well," said I at last, "have you any fault to find with my reasoning or my simile?"

"With your simile — none. It is faultlessly perfect. You have not mixed up your metaphors in the least. Crib, stocks, ocean, ship — all correct, and very nautical. As for your reasoning, I do not believe there is anything in it. I do not believe that pleasure leads to happiness; I do not believe that a woman has a soul, and I deny the whole argument from beginning to end. There," he added with a smile that belied the brusqueness of his words, "that is my position. Talk me out of it if you can; the night is long, and my patience as that of the ass."

"I do not think this is a case for rigid application of logic. When the feelings are concerned — and where can they be more concerned than in our intercourse with women? — the only way to arrive at any conclusion is by a sort of trying-on process, imagining ourselves in the position indicated, and striving

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to fancy how it would suit us. Let us begin in that way. Suppose yourself unmarried, your three wives and their children removed ——"

"Allah in his mercy grant it!" ejaculated Isaacs with great fervour.

"—— removed from the question altogether. Then imagine yourself thrown into daily conversation with some beautiful woman who has read what you have read, thought what you have thought, and dreamed the dreams of a nobler destiny that have visited you in waking and sleeping hours. A woman who, as she learned your strange story, should weep for the pains you suffered and rejoice for the difficulties overcome, who should understand your half spoken thoughts and proudly sympathise in your unuttered aspirations; in whom you might see the twin nature to your own, and detect the strong spirit and the brave soul, half revealed through the feminine gentleness and modesty that clothe her as with a garment. Imagine all this, and then suppose it lay in your power, was a question of choice, for you to take her hand in yours and go through life and death together, till death seem life for the joy of being united for ever. Suppose you married her — not to lock her up in an indolent atmosphere of rosewater, narghyles, and sweetmeats, to die of inanition or to pester you to death with complaints and jealousies and inopportune caresses; but to be with you and help your life when you most need help, by word and thought and deed, to grow more and more a part of you, an essen-

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tial element of you in action or repose, to part from which would be to destroy at a blow the whole fabric of your existence. Would you not say that with such a woman the transitory pleasure of early conversation and intercourse had been the stepping-stone to the lasting happiness of such a friendship as you could never hope for in your old age among your sex? Would not her faithful love and abounding sympathy be dearer to you every day, though the roses in her cheek should fade and the bright hair whiten with the dust of life's journey? Would you not feel that when you died your dearest wish must be to join her where there should be no parting—her from whom there could be no parting here, short of death itself? Would you not believe she had a soul?"

"There is no end of your 'supposing,' but it is quite pretty. I am half inclined to 'suppose' too." He took a sip of sherbet from the tall crystal goblet the servant had placed on a little three-legged stool beside him, and as he drank the cool liquid slowly, looked over the glass into my eyes, with a curious, half earnest, half smiling glance. I could not tell whether my enthusiastic picture of conjugal bliss amused him or attracted him, so I waited for him to speak again.

"Now that you have had your cruise in your ship of happiness on the waters of your cerulean imagination, permit me, who am land-born and a lover of the chase, to put my steed at a few fences in the difficult country of unadorned facts over which I propose to

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hunt the wily fox, matrimony. I have never hunted a fox, but I can quite well imagine what it is like.

"In the first place, it is all very well to suppose that it had pleased Allah in his goodness to relieve me of my three incumbrances — meanwhile, there they are, and they are very real difficulties I assure you. Nevertheless are there means provided us by the foresight of the apostle, by which we may ease ourselves of domestic burdens when they are too heavy for us to bear. It would be quite within the bounds of possibility for me to divorce them all three, without making any special scandal. But if I did this thing, do you not think that my experience of married life has given me the most ineradicable prejudices against women as daily companions? Am I not persuaded that they all bicker and chatter and nibble sweetmeats alike — absolutely alike? Or if I looked abroad ——"

"Stop," I said, "I am not reasoner enough to persuade you that all women have souls. Very likely in Persia and India they have not. I only want you to believe that there may be women so fortunate as to possess a modicum of immortality. Well, pardon my interruption, 'if you looked abroad,' as you were saying? ——"

"If I looked abroad, I should probably discover little petty traits of the same class, if not exactly identical. I know little of Englishmen, and might be the more readily deceived. Supposing, if you will, that, after freeing myself from all my present

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ties, in order to start afresh, I were to find myself attracted by some English girl here"—there must have been something wrong with the mouthpiece of his pipe, for he examined it very attentively—"attracted," he continued, "by some one, for instance, by Miss Westonhaugh ——" he stopped short.

So my inspiration was right. My little picture, framed as we rode homeward, and indignantly scoffed at by my calmer reason, had visited his brain too. He had looked on the fair northern woman and fancied himself at her side, her lover, her husband. All this conversation and argument had been only a set plan to give himself the pleasure of contemplating and discussing such a union, without exciting surprise or comment. I had been suspecting it for some time, and now his sudden interest in his mouthpiece, to conceal a very real embarrassment, put the matter beyond all doubt.

He was probably in love, my acquaintance of two days. He saw in me a plain person, who could not possibly be a rival, having some knowledge of the world, and he was in need of a confidant, like a schoolgirl. I reflected that he was probably a victim for the first time. There is very little romance in India, and he had, of course, married for convenience and respectability rather than for any real affection. His first passion! This man who had been tossed about like a bit of driftwood, who had by his own determination and intelligence carved his way to wealth and power in the teeth of every difficulty. Just

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now, in his embarrassment, he looked very boyish. His troubles had left no wrinkles on his smooth forehead, his bright black hair was untinged by a single thread of gray, and as he looked up, after the pause that followed when he mentioned the name of the woman he loved, there was a very really youthful look of mingled passion and distress in his beautiful eyes.

"I think, Mr. Isaacs, that you have used a stronger argument against the opinions you profess to hold than I could have found in my whole armoury of logic."

As he looked at me, the whole field of possibilities seemed opened. I must have been mistaken in thinking this marriage impossible and incongruous. What incongruity could there be in Isaacs marrying Miss Westonhaugh? My conclusions were false. Why must he necessarily return with her to England, and wear a red coat, and make himself ridiculous at the borough elections? Why should not this ideal couple choose some happy spot, as far from the corrosive influence of Anglo-Saxon prejudice as from the wretched sensualism of prosperous life east of the Mediterranean? I was carried away by the idea, returning with redoubled strength as a sequel to what I had argued and to what I had guessed.

"Why not?" was the question I repeated to myself over and over again in the half minute's pause after Isaacs finished speaking.

"You are right," he said slowly, his half-closed

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eyes fixed on his feet. "Yes, you are right. Why not? Indeed, indeed, why not?"

It must have been pure guess-work, this reading of my thoughts. When he was last speaking his manner was all indifference, scorn of my ideas, and defiance of every western mode of reasoning. And now, apparently by pure intuition, he gave a direct answer to the direct question I had mentally asked, and, what is more, his answer came with a quiet, far-away tone of conviction that had not a shade of unbelief in it. It was delivered as monotonously and naturally as a Christian says "Credo in unum Deum," as if it were not worth disputing; or as the devout Mussulman says "La Illah illallah," not stooping to consider the existence of any one bold enough to deny the dogma. No argument, not hours of patient reasoning, or weeks of well directed persuasion, could have wrought the change in the man's tone that came over it at the mere mention of the woman he loved. I had no share in his conversion. My arguments had been the excuse by which he had converted himself. Was he converted? was it real?

"Yes — I think I am," he replied in the same mechanical monotonous accent.

I shook myself, drank some sherbet, and kicked off one shoe impatiently. Was I dreaming? or had I been speaking aloud, really putting the questions he answered so quickly and appositively? Pshaw! a coincidence. I called the servant and ordered my hookah to be refilled. Isaacs sat still, immovable,

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lost in thought, looking at his toes; an expression, almost stupid in its vacancy, was on his face, and the smoke curled slowly up in lazy wreaths from his neglected narghyle.

"You are converted then at last?" I said aloud. No answer followed my question; I watched him attentively.

"Mr. Isaacs!" still silence, was it possible that he had fallen asleep? his eyes were open, but I thought he was very pale. His upright position, however, belied any symptoms of unconsciousness.

"Isaacs! Abdul Hafiz! what is the matter!" He did not move. I rose to my feet and knelt beside him where he sat rigid, immovable, like a statue. Kiramat Ali, who had been watching, clapped his hands wildly and cried, "Wah! wah! Sahib margyâ!" —"The lord is dead." I motioned him away with a gesture and he held his peace, cowering in the corner, his eyes fixed on us. Then I bent low as I knelt and looked under my friend's brows, into his eyes. It was clear he did not see me, though he was looking straight at his feet. I felt for his pulse. It was very low, almost imperceptible, and certainly below forty beats to the minute. I took his right arm and tried to put it on my shoulder. It was perfectly rigid. There was no doubt about it — the man was in a cataleptic trance. I felt for the pulse again; it was lost.

I was no stranger to this curious phenomenon, where the mind is perfectly awake, but every bodily

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faculty is lulled to sleep beyond possible excitation, unless the right means be employed. I went out and breathed the cool night air, bidding the servants be quiet, as the sahib was asleep. When sufficiently refreshed I re-entered the room, cast off my slippers, and stood a moment by my friend, who was as rigid as ever.

Nature, in her bountiful wisdom, has compensated me for a singular absence of beauty by endowing me with great strength, and with one of those exceptional constitutions which seem constantly charged with electricity. Without being what is called a mesmerist, I am possessed of considerable magnetic power, which I have endeavoured to develop as far as possible. In many a long conversation with old Manu Lal, my Brahmin instructor in languages and philosophy while in the plains, we had discussed the trance state in all its bearings. This old pundit was himself a distinguished mesmerist, and though generally unwilling to talk about what is termed occultism, on finding in me a man naturally endowed with the physical characteristics necessary to those pursuits, he had given me several valuable hints as to the application of my powers. Here was a worthy opportunity.

I rubbed my feet on the soft carpet, and summoning all my strength, began to make the prescribed passes over my friend's head and body. Very gradually the look of life returned to his face, the generous blood welled up under the clear olive skin, the lips

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parted, and he sighed softly. Animation, as always happens in such cases, began at the precise point at which it had been suspended, and his first movement was to continue his examination of the mouthpiece in his hand. Then he looked up suddenly, and seeing me standing over him, gave a little shake, half turning his shoulders forward and back, and speaking once more in his natural voice, said—

"I must have been asleep! Have I? What has happened? Why are you standing there looking at me in that way?" Then, after a short interrogatory silence, his face changed and a look of annoyance shaded his features as he added in a low tone, "Oh! I see. It has happened to me once before. Sit down. I am all right now." He sipped a little sherbet and leaned back in his old position. I begged him to go to bed, and prepared to withdraw, but he would not let me, and he seemed so anxious that I should stay, that I resumed my place. The whole incident had passed in ten minutes.

"Stay with me a little longer," he repeated. "I need your company, perhaps your advice. I have had a vision, and you must hear about it."

"I thought as I sat here that my spirit left my body and passed out through the night air and hovered over Simla. I could see into every bungalow, and was conscious of what passed in each, but there was only one where my gaze rested, for I saw upon a couch in a spacious chamber the sleeping form of one I knew. The masses of fair hair were heaped as

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they fell upon the pillow, as if she had lain down weary of bearing the burden of such wealth of gold. The long dark lashes threw little shadows on her cheeks, and the parted lips seemed to smile at the sweetness of the gently heaving breath that fanned them as it came and went. And while I looked, the breath of her body became condensed, as it were, and took shape and form and colour, so that the image of herself floated up between her body and my watching spirit. Nearer and nearer to me came the exquisite vision of beauty, till we were face to face, my soul and hers, high up in the night. And there came from her eyes, as the long lids lifted, a look of perfect trust, and of love, and of infinite joy. Then she turned her face southward and pointed to my life star burning bright among his lesser fellows; and with a long sweet glance that bid me follow where she led, her maiden soul floated away, half lingering at first, as I watched her; then, with dizzy speed, vanishing in the firmament as a falling star, and leaving no trace behind, save an infinitely sad regret, and a longing to enter with her into that boundless empire of peace. But I could not, for my spirit was called back to this body. And I bless Allah that he has given me to see her once so, and to know that she has a soul, even as I have, for I have looked upon her spirit and I know it."

Isaacs rose slowly to his feet and moved towards the open door. I followed him, and for a few moments we stood looking out at the scene below us.

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It was near midnight, and the ever-decreasing moon was dragging herself up, as if ashamed of her waning beauty and tearful look.

"Griggs," said my friend, dropping the formal prefix for the first time, "all this is very strange. I believe I am in love!"

"I have not a doubt of it," I replied. "Peace be with you!"

"And with you peace."

So we parted.

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CHAPTER IV.

In Simla people make morning calls in the morning instead of after dark, as in more civilised countries. Soon after dawn I received a note from Isaacs, saying that he had business with the Maharajah of Baithopoor about some precious stones, but that he would be ready to go with me to call on Mr. Currie Ghyrkins at ten o'clock, or soon after. I had been thinking a great deal about the events of the previous evening, and I was looking forward to my next meeting with Isaacs with intense interest. After what had passed, nothing could be such a test of his true feelings as the visit to Miss Westonhaugh, which we proposed to make together, and I promised myself to lose no gesture, no word, no expression, which might throw light on the question that interested me — whether such a union were practical, possible, and wise.

At the appointed time, therefore, I was ready, and we mounted and sallied forth into the bright autumn day. All visits are made on horseback in Simla, as the distances are often considerable. You ride quietly along, and the saice follows you, walking or keeping pace with your gentle trot, as the case may

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be. We rode along the bustling mall, crowded with men and women on horseback, with numbers of gorgeously arrayed native servants and *chuprassies* of the Government offices hurrying on their respective errands, or dawdling for a chat with some shabby-looking acquaintance in private life; we passed by the crowded little shops on the hill below the church, and glanced at the conglomeration of grain-sellers, jewellers, confectioners, and dealers in metal or earthen vessels, every man sitting knee-deep in his wares, smoking the eternal "hubble-bubble;" we noted the keen eyes of the buyers and the hawk's glance of the sellers, the long snake-like fingers eagerly grasping the passing coin, and seemingly convulsed into serpentine contortion when they relinquished their clutch on a single "pi;" we marked this busy scene, set down, like a Punch and Judy show, in the midst of the trackless waste of the Himalayas, as if for the delectation and pastime of some merry *genius loci* weary of the solemn silence in his awful mountains, and we chatted carelessly of the sights animate and inanimate before us, laughing at the asseverations of the salesmen, and at the hardened scepticism of the customer, at the portentous dignity of the superb old messenger, white-bearded and clad in scarlet and gold, as he bombastically described to the knot of poor relations and admirers that elbowed him the splendours of the last entertainment at "Peterhof," where Lord Lytton still reigned. I smiled, and Isaacs frowned at the ancient and hairy

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ascetic believer, who suddenly rose from his lair in a corner, and bustled through the crowd of Hindoos, shouting at the top of his voice the confession of his faith — "Beside God there is no God, and Muhammad is his apostle!" The universality of the Oriental spirit is something amazing. Customs, dress, thought, and language, are wonderfully alike among all Asiatics west of Thibet and south of Turkistan. The greatest difference is in language, and yet no one unacquainted with the dialects could distinguish by the ear between Hindustani, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish.

So we moved along, and presently found ourselves on the road we had traversed the previous evening, leading round Jako. On the slope of the hill, hidden by a dense growth of rhododendrons, lay the bungalow of Mr. Currie Ghyrkins, and a board at the entrance of the ride — drive there was none — informed us that the estate bore the high-sounding title of "Carisbrooke Castle," in accordance with the Simla custom of calling little things by big names.

Having reached the lawn near the house, we left our horses in charge of the saice and strolled up the short walk to the verandah. A charming picture it was, prepared as if on purpose for our especial delectation. The bungalow was a large one for Simla, and the verandah was deep and shady; many chairs of all sorts and conditions stood about in natural positions, as if they had just been sat in, instead of

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being ranged in stiff rows against the wall, and across one angle hung a capacious hammock. Therein, swinging her feet to the ground, and holding on by the edge rope, sat the beautiful Miss Westonhaugh, clad in one of those close-fitting unadorned costumes of plain dark-blue serge, which only suit one woman in ten thousand, though, when they clothe a really beautiful young figure, I know of no garment better calculated to display grace of form and motion. She was kicking a ball of worsted with her dainty toes, for the amusement and instruction of a small tame jackal — the only one I ever saw thoroughly domesticated. A charming little beast it was, with long gray fur and bright twinkling eyes, mischievous and merry as a gnome's. From a broad blue ribbon round its neck was suspended a small silver bell that tinkled spasmodically, as the lively little thing sprang from side to side in pursuit of the ball, alighting with apparent indifference on its head or its heels.

So busy was the girl with her live plaything that she had not seen us dismount and approach her, and it was not till our feet sounded on the boards of the verandah that she looked up with a little start, and tried to rise to her feet. Now any one who has sat sideways in a netted hammock, with feet swinging to the ground, and all the weight in the middle of the thing, knows how difficult it is to get out with grace, or indeed in any way short of rolling out and running for luck. You may break all your bones in

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the feat, and you both look and feel as if you were going to. Though we both sprang forward to her assistance, Miss Westonhaugh had recognised the inexpediency of moving after the first essay, and, with a smile of greeting, and the faintest tinge of embarrassment on her fair cheek, abandoned the attempt; the quaint little jackal sat up, backing against the side of the house, and, eyeing us critically, growled a little.

"I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Isaacs. How do you do, Mr. ——"

"Griggs," murmured Isaacs, as he straightened a rope of the hammock by her side.

"Mr. Griggs?" she continued. "We met last night, briefly, but to the point, or at least you and my uncle did. I am alone; my uncle is gone down towards Kalka to meet my brother, who is coming up for a fortnight at the end of the season to get rid of the Bombay mould. Bring up some of those chairs and sit down. I cannot tell what has become of the 'bearer' and the 'boy,' and the rest of the servants, and I could not make them understand me if they were here. So you must wait on yourselves."

I was the first to lay hands on a chair, and as I turned to bring it I noticed she was following Isaacs with the same expression I had seen on her face the previous evening; but I could see it better now. A pleasant friendly look, not tender so much as kind, while the slightest possible contraction of the eyes showed a feeling of curiosity. She was evidently going to speak to him as soon as he turned his face.

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"You see I have been giving him lessons," she said, as he brought back the seat he had chosen.

Isaacs looked at the queer small beast sitting up against the boards under the window, his brush tail curled round him, and his head turned inquiringly on one side.

"He seems to be learning manners, at all events," said my friend.

"Yes; I think I may say now, with safety, that his bark is worse than his bite."

"I am sure you could not have said so the last time I came. Do you remember what fearful havoc he made among my nether garments? And yet he is my god-child, so to speak, for I gave him into your care, and named him into the bargain."

"Don't suppose I am ungrateful for the gift," answered Miss Westonhaugh. "Snap! Snap! here! come here, darling, to your mistress, and be petted!" In spite of this eloquent appeal Snap, the baby jackal, only growled pleasantly and whisked his brush right and left. "You see," she went on, "your sponsorship has had no very good results. He will not obey any more than you yourself." Her glance, turning towards Isaacs, did not reach him, and, in fact, she could not have seen anything beyond the side of his chair. Isaacs, on the contrary, seemed to be counting her eyelashes, and taking a mental photograph of her brows.

"Snap!" said he. The jackal instantly rose and trotted to him, fawning on his outstretched hand.

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"You malign me, Miss Westonhaugh. Snap is no less obedient than I."

"Then why did you insist on playing tennis left-handed the other day, though you know very well how it puzzles me?"

"My dear Miss Westonhaugh," he answered, "I am not a tennis-player at all, to begin with, and as I do not understand the *finesse* of the game, to use a word I do not understand either, you must pardon my clumsiness in employing the hand most convenient and ready."

"Some people," I began, "are what is called ambidexter, and can use either hand with equal ease. Now the ancient Persians, who invented the game of polo ——"

"I do not quarrel so much with you, Mr. Isaacs —" as she said this, she looked at me, though entirely disregarding and interrupting my instructive sentence — "I don't quarrel with you so much for using your left hand at tennis as for employing left-handed weapons when you speak of other things, or beings, for you are never so left-handed and so adroit as when you are indulging in some elaborate abuse of our sex."

"How can you say that?" protested Isaacs. "You know with what respectful and almost devotional reverence I look upon all women, and," his eyes brightening perceptibly, "upon you in particular."

English women, especially in their youth, are not used to pretty speeches. They are so much accus-

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tomed to the men of their own nationality that they regard the least approach to a compliment as the inevitable introduction to the worst kind of insult. Miss Westonhaugh was no exception to this rule, and she drew herself up proudly.

There was a moment's pause, during which Isaacs seemed penitent, and she appeared to be revolving the bearings of the affront conveyed in his last words. She looked along the floor, slowly, till she might have seen his toes; then her eyes opened a moment and met his, falling again instantly with a change of colour.

"And pray, Mr. Isaacs, would you mind giving us a list of the ladies you look upon with 'respectful and devotional reverence?'" One of the horses held by the saice at the corner of the lawn neighed lowly, and gave Isaacs an opportunity of looking away.

"Miss Westonhaugh," he said quietly, "you know I am a Mussulman, and that I am married. It may be that I have borrowed a phrase from your language which expresses more than I would convey, though it would ill become me to withdraw my last words, since they are true."

It was my turn to be curious now. I wondered where his boldness would carry him. Among his other accomplishments, this man was capable of speaking the truth even to a woman, not as a luxury and a *bonne bouche*, but as a matter of habit. As I looked, the hot blood mantled up to his brows.

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She was watching him, and womanlike, seeing he was in earnest and embarrassed, she regained her perfect natural composure.

"Oh, I had forgotten!" she said. "I forgot about your wife in Delhi." She half turned in the hammock, and after some searching, during which we were silent, succeeded in finding a truant piece of worsted work behind her. The wool was pulled out of the needle, and she held the steel instrument up against the light, as she doubled the worsted round the eye and pushed it back through the little slit. I observed that Isaacs was apparently in a line with the light, and that the threading took some time.

"Mr. Griggs," she said slowly, and by the very slowness of the address I knew she was going to talk to me, and at my friend, as women will; "Mr. Griggs, do you know anything about Mohammedans?"

"That is a very broad question," I answered; "almost as broad as the Mussulman creed." She began making stitches in the work she held, and with a little side shake settled herself to listen, anticipating a discourse. The little jackal sidled up and fawned on her feet. I had no intention, however, of delivering a lecture on the faith of the prophet. I saw my friend was embarrassed in the conversation, and I resolved, if possible, to interest her.

"Among primitive people and very young persons," I continued, "marriage is an article of faith, a moral precept, and a social law."

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"I suppose you are married, Mr. Griggs," she said, with an air of childlike simplicity.

"Pardon me, Miss Westonhaugh, I neither condescend to call myself primitive, nor aspire to call myself young."

She laughed. I had put a wedge into my end of the conversation.

"I thought," said she, "from the way in which you spoke of 'primitive and young persons' that you considered their opinion in regard to — to this question, as being the natural and proper opinion of the original and civilised young man."

"I repeat that I do not claim to be very civilised, or very young — certainly not to be very original, and my renunciation of all these qualifications is my excuse for the confirmed bachelorhood to which I adhere. Many Mohammedans are young and original; some of them are civilised, as you see, and all of them are married. 'There is no God but God, Muhammad is his prophet, and if you refuse to marry you are not respectable,' is their full creed."

Isaacs frowned at my profanity, but I continued — "I do not mean to say anything disrespectful to a creed so noble and social. I think you have small chance of converting Mr. Isaacs."

"I would not attempt it," she said, laying down her work in her lap, and looking at me for a moment. "But since you speak of creeds, to what confession do you yourself belong, if I may ask?"

"I am a Roman Catholic," I answered; adding

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