

"No wonder. I presume your views of immortality, the future state of the fair sex, and the application of transcendental analysis to matrimony, all changed about the same time?"

"Don't be unreasonable," he answered. "It all dates from that evening when I had that singular fit and the vision I related to you. I have never been the same man since; and I am glad of it. I now believe women to be much more adorable than you painted them, and not half enough adored." Suddenly he dropped the extremely English manner which he generally affected in the idiom and construction of his speech, and dropped back into something more like his own language. "The star that was over my life is over it no longer. I have no life-star any longer. The jewel of the southern sky withdraws his light, paling before the white gold from the northern land. The gold that shall be mine through all the cycles of the sun, the gold that neither man nor monarch shall take from me. What have I to do with stars in heaven? Is not my star come down to earth to abide with me through life? And when life is over and the scroll is full, shall not my star bear me hence, beyond the fiery foot-bridge, beyond the paradise of my people and its senseless sensuality of houris and strong wine? Beyond the very memory of limited and bounded life, to that life eternal where there is neither limit, nor bound, nor sorrow? Shall our two souls not unite and be one soul to roam through the countless circles of revol-

ing outer space? Not through years, or for times, or for ages—but for ever? The light of life is woman, the love of life is the love of woman; the light that pales not, the life that cannot die, the love that can know not any ending; *my* light, *my* life, and *my* love!" His whole soul was in his voice, and his whole heart; the twining white fingers, the half-closed eyes, and the passionate quivering tone, told all he had left unsaid. It was surely a high and a noble thing that he felt, worthy of the man in his beauty of mind and body. He loved an ideal, revealed to him, as he thought, in the shape of the fair English girl; he worshipped his ideal through her, without a thought that he could be mistaken. Happy man! Perhaps he had a better chance of going through life without any cruel revelation of his mistake than falls to the lot of most lovers, for she was surpassingly beautiful, and most good and true hearted. But are not people always mistaken who think to find the perfect comprehended in the imperfect, the infinite enchained and made tangible in the finite? Bah! The same old story, the same old vicious circle, the everlastingly recurring mathematical view of things that cannot be treated mathematically; the fruitless attempt to measure the harmonious circle of the soul by the angular square of the book. What poor things our minds are after all. We have but one way of thinking derived from what we know, and we incontinently apply it to things of which we can know nothing, and then we quarrel with the result,



which is a mere *reductio ad absurdum*, showing how utterly false and meagre are our hypotheses, premisses, and so-called axioms. Confucius, who began his system with the startling axiom that "man is good," arrived at much more really serviceable conclusions than Schopenhauer and all the pessimists put together. Meanwhile, Isaacs was in love, and, I supposed, expected me to say something appreciative.

"My dear friend," I began, "it is a rare pleasure to hear any one talk like that; it refreshes a man's belief in human nature, and enthusiasm, and all kinds of things. I talked like that some time ago because you would not. I think you are a most satisfactory convert."

"I am indeed a convert. I would not have believed it possible, and now I cannot believe that I ever thought differently. I suppose it is the way with all converts—in religion as well—and with all people who are taken up by a fair-winged genius from an arid desert and set down in a garden of roses." He could not long confine himself to ordinary language. "And yet the hot sand of the desert, and the cool of the night, and the occasional patch of miserable, languishing green, with the little kindly spring in the camel-trodden oasis, seemed all so delightful in the past life that one was quite content, never suspecting the existence of better things. But now—I could almost laugh to think of it. I stand in the midst of the garden that is filled with all

things fair, and the tree of life is beside me, blossoming straight and broad with the flowers that wither not, and the fruit that is good to the parched lips and the thirsty spirit. And the garden is for us to dwell in now, and the eternity of the heavenly spheres is ours hereafter." He was all on fire again. I kept silence for some time; and his hands unfolded, and he raised them and clasped them under his head, and drew a deep long breath, as if to taste the new life that was in him.

"Forgive my bringing you down to earth again," I said after a while, "but have you made all necessary arrangements? Is there anything I can do, after you are gone? Anything to be said to these good people, if they question me about your sudden departure?"

"Yes. I was forgetting. If you will be so kind, I wish you would see the expedition out, and take charge of the expenses. There are some bags of rupees somewhere among my traps. Narain knows. I shall not take him with me—or, no; on second thoughts I will hand you over the money, and take him to Simla. Then, about the other thing. Do not tell any one where I have gone, unless it be Miss Westonhaugh, and use your own discretion about her. We shall all be in Simla in ten days, and I do not want this thing known, as you may imagine. I do not think there is anything else, thanks." He paused, as if thinking. "Yes, there is one more consideration. If anything out of the way should occur in this transaction with Baithopoor, I should



want your assistance, if you will give it. Would you mind?"

"Of course not. Anything——"

"In that case, if Ram Lal thinks you are wanted, he will send a swift messenger to you with a letter signed by me, in the Persian *shikast*—which you read.—Will you come by the way he will direct you, if I send? He will answer for your safety."

"I will come," I said, though I thought it was rather rash of me, who am a cautious man, to trust my life in the hands of a shadowy person like Ram Lal, who seemed to come and go in strange ways, and was in communication with suspicious old Brahmin jugglers. But I trusted Isaacs better than his adept friend.

"I suppose," I said, vaguely hoping there might yet be a possibility of detaining him, "that there is no way of doing this business so that you could remain here."

"No, friend Griggs. If there were any other way, I would not go now. I would not go to-day, of all days in the year—of all days in my life. There is no other way, by the grave of my father, on whom be the peace of Allah." So we went to bed.

At four o'clock Narain waked us, and in twenty minutes Isaacs was on horseback. I had ordered a *tat* to be in readiness for me, thinking I would ride with him an hour or two in the cool of the morning. So we passed along by the quiet tents, Narain disappearing in the manner peculiar to Hindoo servants,

to be found at the end of the day's march, smiling as ever. The young moon had set some time before, but the stars were bright, though it was dark under the trees.

Twenty yards beyond the last tent, a dark figure swept suddenly out from the blackness and laid a hand on Isaacs' rein. He halted and bent over, and I heard some whispering. It only lasted a moment, and the figure shot away again. I was sure I heard something like a kiss, in the gloom, and there was a most undeniable smell of roses in the air. I held my peace, though I was astonished. I could not have believed her capable of it. Lying in wait in the dusk of the morning to give her lover a kiss and a rose and a parting word. She must have taken me for his servant in the dark.

"Griggs," said Isaacs as we parted some six or seven miles farther on,— "an odd thing happened this morning. I have left something more in your keeping than money."

"I know. Trust me. Good-bye," and he cantered off.

I confess I was very dejected and low-spirited when I came back into camp. My acquaintance with Isaacs, so suddenly grown into intimacy, had become a part of my life. I felt a sort of devotion to him that I had never felt for any man in my life before. I would rather have gone with him to Keitung, for a presentiment told me there was trouble in the wind. He had not talked to me about the



Baithopoor intrigue, for everything was as much settled beforehand as it was possible to settle anything. There was nothing to be said, for all that was to come was action; but I knew Isaacs distrusted the maharajah, and that without Ram Lal's assistance—of whatever nature that might prove to be—he would not have ventured to go alone to such a tryst.

When I returned the camp was all alive, for it was nearly seven o'clock. Kildare and the collector, my servant said, had gone off on *tats* to shoot some small game. Mr. Ghyrkens was occupied with the shikaries in the stretching and dressing of the skin he had won the previous day. Neither Miss Westonhaugh nor her brother had been seen. So I dressed and rested myself and had some tea, and sat wondering what the camp would be like without Isaacs, who, to me and to one other person, was emphatically, as Ghyrkens had said the night before, the life of the party. The weather was not so warm as on the previous day, and I was debating whether I should not try and induce the younger men to go and stick a pig—the shikarry said there were plenty in some place he knew of—or whether I should settle myself in the dining-tent for a long day with my books, when the arrival of a mounted messenger with some letters from the distant post-office decided me in favour of the more peaceful disposition of my time. So I glanced at the papers, and assured myself that the English were going deeper and deeper into the mire of difficulties and reckless expenditure that

characterised their campaign in Afghanistan in the autumn of 1879; and when I had assured myself, furthermore, by the perusal of a request for the remittance of twenty pounds, that my nephew, the only relation, male or female, that I have in the world, had not come to the untimely death he so richly deserved, I fell to considering what book I should read. And from one thing to another, I found myself established about ten o'clock at the table in the dining-tent, with Miss Westonhaugh at one side, worsted work, writing materials and all, just as she had been at the same table a week or so before. At her request I had continued my writing when she came in. I was finishing off a column of a bloodthirsty article for the *Howler*; it probably would come near enough to the mark, for in India you may print a leader anywhere within a month of its being written, and if it was hot enough to begin with, it will still answer the purpose. Journalism is not so rapid in its requirements as in New York, but, on the other hand, it is more lucrative.

“Mr. Griggs, are you *very* busy?”

“Oh dear, no—nothing to speak of,” I went on writing—the unprecedented—folly—the—blatant—charlatanism—

“Mr. Griggs, do you understand these things?”

—Lord Beaconsfield's—“I think so, Miss Westonhaugh”—Afghan policy— There, I thought, I think that would rouse Mr. Currie Ghyrkens, if he ever saw it, which I trust he never will. I had



done, and I folded the numbered sheets in an oblong bundle.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Westonhaugh; I was just finishing a sentence. I am quite at your service."

"Oh no! I see you are too busy."

"Not in the least, I assure you. Is it that tangled skein? Let me help you."

"Oh thank you. It is so tiresome, and I am not in the least inclined to be industrious."

I took the wool and set to work. It was very easy, after all; I pulled the loops through, and back again and through from the other side, and I found the ends, and began to wind it up on a piece of paper. It is singular, though, how the unaided wool can tie itself into every kind of a knot—reef, carrick bend, bowline, bowline in a bight, not to mention a variety of hitches and indescribable perversions of entanglement. I was getting on very well, though. I looked up at her face, pale and weary with a sleepless night, but beautiful—ah yes—beautiful beyond compare. She smiled faintly.

"You are very clever with your fingers. Where did you learn it? Have you a sister who makes you wind her wool for you at home?"

"No. I have no sister. I went to sea once upon a time."

"Were you ever in the navy, Mr. Griggs?"

"Oh no. I went before the mast."

"But you would not learn to unravel wool before the mast. I suppose your mother taught you when you were small—if you ever were small."

"I never had a mother that I can remember—I learned to do all those things at sea."

"Forgive me," she said, guessing she had struck some tender chord in my existence. "What an odd life you must have had."

"Perhaps. I never had any relations that I can remember, except a brother, much older than I. He died years ago, and his son is my only living relation. I was born in Italy."

"But when did you learn so many things? You seem to know every language under the sun."

"I had a good education when I got ashore. Some one was very kind to me, and I had learned Latin and Greek in the common school in Rome before I ran away to sea."

I answered her questions reluctantly. I did not want to talk about my history, especially to a girl like her. I suppose she saw my disinclination, for as I handed her the card with the wool neatly wound on it, she thanked me and presently changed the subject, or at least shifted the ground.

"There is something so free about the life of an adventurer—I mean a man who wanders about doing brave things. If I were a man I would be an adventurer like you."

"Not half so much of an adventurer, as you call it, as our friend who went off this morning."

It was the first mention of Isaacs since his departure. I had said the thing inadvertently, for I would not have done anything to increase her trouble for



the world. She leaned back, dropping her hands with her work in her lap and stared straight out through the doorway, as pale as death—pale as only fair-skinned people are when they are ill, or hurt. She sat quite still. I wondered if she were ill, or if it were only Isaacs' going that had wrought this change in her brilliant looks. "Would you like me to read something to you, Miss Westonhaugh? Here is a comparatively new book—*The Light of Asia*, by Mr. Edwin Arnold. It is a poem about India. Would it give you any pleasure?" She guessed the kind intention, and a little shadow of a smile passed over her lips.

"You are so kind, Mr. Griggs. Please, you are so very kind."

I began to read, and read on and on through the exquisite rise and fall of the stanzas, through the beautiful clear high thoughts which seem to come as a breath and a breeze from an unattainable heaven, from the Nirvana we all hope for in our inmost hearts, whatever our confession of faith. And the poor girl was soothed, and touched and lulled by the music of thought and the sigh of verse that is in the poem; and the morning passed. I suppose the quiet and the poetry wrought up in her the feeling of confidence she felt in me, as being her lover's friend, for after I had paused a minute or two, seeing some one coming toward the tent, she said quite simply—

"Where is he gone?"

"He is gone to do a very noble deed. He is gone

to save the life of a man he never saw." A bright light came into her face, and all the chilled heart's blood, driven from her cheeks by the weariness of her first parting, rushed joyously back, and for one moment there dwelt on her features the glory and bloom of the love and happiness that had been hers all day yesterday, that would be hers again—when? Poor Miss Westonhaugh, it seemed so long to wait.

The day passed somehow, but the dinner was dismal. Miss Westonhaugh was evidently far from well, and I could not conceive that the pain of a temporary parting should make so sudden a change in one so perfectly strong and healthy—even were her nature ever so sensitive. Kildare and the Pegnugger magistrate tried to keep up the spirits of the party, but John Westonhaugh was anxious about his sister, and even old Mr. Currie Ghyrkens was beginning to fancy there must be something wrong. We sat smoking outside, and the young girl refused to leave us, though John begged her to. As we sat, it may have been half an hour after dinner, a messenger came galloping up in hot haste, and leaping to the ground asked for "Gurregis Sahib," with the usual native pronunciation of my euphonious name. Being informed, he salaamed low and handed me a letter, which I took to the light. It was in *shikast* Persian, and signed "Abdul Hafiz-ben-Isâk." "Ram Lal," he said, "has met me unexpectedly, and sends you this by his own means, which are swift as the flight of the eagle. It is indispensable that you meet



us below Keitung, towards Sultanpoor, on the afternoon of the day when the moon is full. Travel by Julinder and Sultanpoor; you will easily overtake me, since I go by Simla. For friendship's sake, for love's sake, come. It is life and death. Give the money to the Irishman. Peace be with you."

I sighed a sigh of the most undetermined description. Was I glad to rejoin my friend? or was I pained to leave the woman he loved in her present condition? I hardly knew.

"I think we had all better go back to Simla," said John, when I explained that the most urgent business called me away at dawn.

"There will be none of us left soon," said Ghyrkins quite quietly and mournfully.

I found means to let Miss Westonhaugh understand where I was going. I gave Kildare the money in charge.

In the dark of the morning, as I cleared the tents, the same shadow I had seen before shot out and laid a hand on my rein. I halted on the same spot where Isaacs had drawn rein twenty-four hours before.

"Give him this from me. God be with you!" She was gone in a moment, leaving a small package in my right hand. I thrust it in my bosom and rode away.

"How she loves him," I thought, wondering greatly.

## CHAPTER XII.

It was not an agreeable journey I had undertaken. In order to reach the inaccessible spot, chosen by Isaacs for the scene of Shere Ali's liberation, in time to be of any use, it was necessary that I should travel by a more direct and arduous route than that taken by my friend. He had returned to Simla, and by his carefully made arrangements would be able to reach Keitung, or the spot near it, where the transaction was to take place, by constant changes of horses where riding was possible, and by a strong body of dooly-bearers, wherever the path should prove too steep for four-footed beasts of burden. I, on the other hand, must leave the road at Julinder, a place I had never visited, and must trust to my own unaided wits and a plentiful supply of rupees to carry me over at least two hundred miles of country I did not know — difficult certainly, and perhaps impracticable for riding. The prospect was not a pleasant one, but I was convinced that in a matter of this importance a man of Isaacs' wit and wealth would have made at least some preliminary arrangements for me, since he probably knew the country well enough