



Author of "The Padre of Paradise Street," "The Mending," etc.

BUT does my lord really love me?"

Sesson, striving for eloquence, became feverishly inarticulate, after the manner of men more accustomed to the silences of vast spaces than the babble of crowds.

The girl, who was fifteen in age but ancient in wisdom and with a subtle understanding of life which few Western women can hope to attain, laid a bangled arm about the man's neck and drew his face down gently. The greatest of sculptors, banished again to earth, might have carved her out of old ivory, giving form and existence to the memory of his spirit love, lest he forget and the wonder of her be lost forever.

"And the old one," she whispered, simulating an easy indifference to disguise a burning curiosity, "what does he say?"

"Er, well—" Sesson fought his limited bump of language. "You see, light of the world, men of my race do not talk to one another about their love affairs."

"So. But of course I know you forget all about me when you leave my house."

With the lack of originality of men of all races, Sesson tried to tell her that he could not forget, that she was never out of his mind. Listening, she suddenly realized that her smile was betraying her feelings and she began to laugh playfully.

"But is my lord—who is so big and strong—afraid to tell the old Sinclair sahib about his home with me?"

"No, not afraid—but what good would it do? Besides, I don't want—I mean I—that is—"

"It is, my lord, and I am proud you hold me so

sacred." Coming into the wind easily, she shot off on another tack, without Sesson, who had been a sailor, being at all aware of her evolution.

They sat in the cool of the evening on the top of the house Sesson had rented for the girl with all the care and secrecy at his command. He knew only too well how news travels among the natives of India, and he had no desire to have his love affair become a joke in the bazaars.

Rising and falling, the roar of Calcutta flowed beneath them like a river; and in the still air the smoke of cooking fires lazily waved. The early bats were beginning their evening's gambol. Hanging like the sign of the girl's faith, the faintest crescent of a moon seemed more like an ornament than a satellite, and there were no stars.

"Looks as if the monsoon were about to break," Sesson remarked irrelevantly.

"Thinkest thou of the weather when with me?" she chided.

"It was but my tongue speaking," he apologized. "My soul is dumb in thy presence—like a devout in the temple of a goddess."

"Very good, my Sesson," she applauded. "Give me more. I like it, for it is good talk."

He did his best and while she listened she wondered; coming to the conclusion that she loved him as well as she could allow herself to love any man—but, after all, what was love? Besides, when one is young and lovely love is an easy thing to get. When one grows old, money is very useful. When she was old she might be fat. She shuddered slightly and Sesson, thinking she was cold, drew a shawl about her.

"Yes," she thought, "and he will marry some *mem sahib*, anyway, so what matters it? Still, if I could only be sure. Bah, one is sure only of old age and death."

"My Sesson," she roused herself with sudden decision, "didst thou ever look into the ink pool?"

"Of course not."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because it's silly, I suppose."

"So is all play, if you will. But I like to stare into the ink. Sometimes I see all sorts of things. Besides, I always look to see if thou art true to me." And she laughed lightly.

"Why?" Sesson was lovingly indignant. "How can you doubt me?"

"Did I say I doubted thee?"

"No. But you said you looked into the ink to see if I were faithful."

"Does that not prove I love thee? If I didn't care, would I trouble to be jealous? How little dost thou understand a woman, my lord!" And there was just enough of plaintiveness in her voice to make Sesson ashamed of himself. "Let us play, then," she suggested.

Sesson hesitated. While not exactly a clever man, he had had certain experiences which had taught him much. Also, he had one of the best teachers in the world, for his employer, Sinclair, knew the native as few men had ever done, without consideration of race or creed. Therefore, he hesitated, although he cursed himself—knowing his hesitation implied a doubt of the girl. Queer things have happened to those who have stared into the saucer of ink. But the girl loved him—she would rather die than do him an injury.

"All right—perhaps I will—some time," he parried weakly.

The women of India have a certain birdlike quality which is only faintly approximated by women of other lands. They can also rise gracefully from cushions laid on a flat roof. Doing this, the girl reminded Sesson for all the world of a small and very indignant canary.

"I go to look into the ink—perchance I may discover in what way I have caused my lord to doubt my faith."

"Did I say that I doubted?"

Sesson also rose from the cushions, but no one would have accused him of doing it gracefully.

"There is no need to say."

"But— But—" Sesson attempted to put his arms

round her.

"Let not my lord touch one so unworthy—he may contaminate himself." She avoided him disdainfully.

"Oh, well, I'll look into the—ink."

"There is no—ink. But such as it is thou shalt not look into it."

"Eh?"

She had gone too far—intentionally. Now she played her winning card—throwing herself into his arms, sobbing so violently that she scared him, as well as making him thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"It is always thus," she panted. "A woman gives herself to a man and worships him as a god, while he but regards her as a toy. This is bad, but when a woman loves a man with her whole soul and then finds he does not trust her—that is too bad to be borne. I will die!"

"Come, come." Sesson did his best to soothe her.

"Why—why didst thou fear the ink? Did my lord think that I, his slave, would play him some trick?" This was exactly the suspicion that had been in Sesson's mind, although it had not quite risen to the surface where words would have given it form. Thus, being an intangible thing, the girl's distress had blown it away, leaving in its place a feeling that he had treated her brutally. Besides, he knew that while he looked upon ink and crystal-gazing as merely aids to auto-hypnosis, methods of reflecting pictures in the subconscious and thus bringing them into conscious view, the girl considered everything so revealed as objective truths—believed them to be glimpses into the future, warnings, divine messages, and what not.

That is, the average girl of her sort did so believe, and he had no reason to think that Laulee was different from her species. All this being so, Sesson was in the unhappy situation of one who sneers at or doubts the religious belief of his sweetheart; while he had betrayed a doubt of her fidelity to himself.

"LIGHT of my life," he whispered fondly to the trembling bundle of white linen, bangles and emotion, "I did but jest with thee."

A long-forgotten story came to his aid.

"Thou knowest that whither thou goest I will go, and whatsoever thou takest pleasure in will surely be my delight. Let us together look for pictures in

the ink. I promise thee that thou wilt see nothing but thine own sweet face in my dreams."

She disengaged herself, clapping her hands like a delighted child.

"Oh, my Sesson, thou art a poet," she chirped. This he doubted, annoyingly conscious of being a fool. At the same time the shadow of a fear, a premonition of danger obtruded itself into his emotions. Manlike, however, he felt committed to his promise—in addition to disappointing Laulee, it would be dishonorable if he did not stare into the ink.

"But," he joked tenderly as they descended from the housetop, "what, if when we look into the ink, I should see all the men who have loved thee?"

"Ai, and if thou didst! Such a mob! You would think it an army—of fools. Would it not be more interesting to thee to see a picture of every man I have loved—which is very different?"

"Would that be an army, too?" he retorted with ready jealousy.

"Ay, my lord. Indeed, a host in himself. And that"—she lighted the lamp—"you may see without ink. Behold!" She laughed saucily and pointed to his photograph. "You may say the ink can lie, but I have heard that the camera cannot."

Sesson grinned, contented and comfortable. Here, in this house, he was as absolute as some feudal baron. The outer door was barred and no one could enter without fighting the old soldier, his gatekeeper. For privacy in India is sacred. What a crank he had been to make a fuss about the ink. As if any harm could come to him in such a sanctuary, even if the girl did not love him; and he felt sure she did. Why shouldn't she?

Lighting a pipe, he sank lazily into a soft couch and watched Laulee making ready for the experiment. To the dimming of the light he made no objection, nor yet to the preparations which told him he would be compelled to sit more upright; but he did complain when the girl decided it was necessary to stop the electric fan—a modern usurpation of the age-old *punkah* which made for greater privacy, and relished even by those who considered a *punkah* coolie as being merely furniture—because its spinning would irritate the placid surface of the ink saucer. But the girl soothed his objections with a pretty authority, finally surveying her arrangements with complacent satisfaction.

"Now, my lord, all things being in readiness,

wilt thou condescend to allow the gods to open the veil?"

"So the gods have charge of this business, eh?" asked Sesson as he took up the position assigned to him.

"Who knows, *sahib*?"

"Don't call me *sahib*," he protested.

"Don't make fun of what I do, then," she retorted.

"I am all obedience," he avoided the argument.

"You must not," she protested as he slipped an arm about her waist. "This matter must be approached without any idea of levity."

"Wherein is the levity?" He imitated a reprov'd schoolboy, and sat very straight.

"Nay," she begged, "please, my Sesson, do thou fall into my mood. Who knows what will happen?"

"If I don't fall asleep, I will keep on staring at a pool of ink until you grow tired of watching me do it—that's what will happen. Now!" And Sesson, to please Laulee, imitated her every move—or, rather, lack of movement.

For some minutes they stared, and Sesson was conscious of nothing more than an overwhelming desire to blink his eyes. Presently, this passed and he became sleepy. Then, suddenly, he stared intently—very wide awake! For, deep in the ink apparently—so deep that it seemed impossible that the saucer held less than an inch of the liquid, he saw!

What he saw at first were certain things he did not like to look at. Events in his life about which he could never think without a shudder of disgust, of shame—the skeletons which every man keeps hidden from the world and as far as is possible from himself. He rubbed his eyes, hoping that what he saw had no objective existence and would disappear. But it persisted. He saw himself, deep in the ink, doing again what he wished he had never done.

It was exactly as if some unseen moving-picture camera had recorded his every move—years before; and with a rare feeling of horror Sesson lifted his eyes from the damning record of his past to look at Laulee. Was she, too, witnessing the same scene?

She was not. In that small saucer of ink, she was seeing very different pictures, and the incidents of Sesson's life which he had seen were hidden from her. This he knew in a glance. For the girl's face was flushed with delight. She hardly breathed.

Whatever she saw, it was entrancing. Relieved and lured by a horrible fascination, Sesson stared again at the ink.

But the unpleasant picture of his past was no longer there to trouble him. There was nothing there, but the placid pool of ink; and warned by his previous experience Sesson felt that it would be the wiser part to stare no more with intentness. Laulee would be none the wiser if he pretended to look deep.

As a matter of fact, she was so absorbed in her visions that she had apparently forgotten he existed. If she asked him afterward what he had seen, he could invent something. To tell her the truth, as far as his experience had gone, would be impossible.

It was curious, very curious—this seeing the record of one's past. Of course he had heard of such experiences, but he had never experimented. In a vague way he understood why he could not see what the girl saw, and *vice versa*. He began to theorize on the how and why of the visions—his eyes still fixed on the saucer, so that if Laulee happened to look at him she would be deceived into believing he was seeing things.

CURIOUS stuff—ink! In some way it caught all the light in the room. Of course, the light was dim—Laulee had seen to that—just enough to see the ink properly. That, no doubt, was the reason the ink had changed both in color and appearance. That cloudy, steamy, vapory stuff, now rising like a fog over a marsh—that must be due to some chemical peculiarity of ink.

Sesson's knowledge of chemistry was trifling, but he gravely tried to explain to himself why he no longer saw a saucer of ink. As a matter of fact, he hadn't the remotest idea what he saw; but what he did see reminded him of the interior of a tunnel, just after a train has gone through it.

That was it. He remembered now. Funny why he had had any difficulty. Simple, when you knew how to figure it out! But, now he came to think of it, it was—strange his being able to stand in the way of an express train without getting hurt. He must have been standing in its way, because the train had just gone through the tunnel, and there was only one set of rails.

No, it wasn't so strange, after all. Very dimly, but nevertheless positively, he remembered that, for many, many years, nothing had been able to hurt him—that is, hurt him physically. He could, also,

fly. That, as a matter of fact, was his natural gait. He moved his legs something like walking, swinging his arms ever so little—much less than when swimming. And, by Jove, the air held him up much better than water did. How perfectly delightful this easy motion through space. He felt like a bird. No, not a bird, exactly. What did he feel like? Oh, well, it didn't matter. He could decide some other time.

It was lonely, though. And where was he? With a great effort, Sesson took hold of himself, as one can sometimes do in a dream, and realized that something exceedingly curious had happened to him.

He was not dreaming—in some way he was sure about that—but he certainly was not where he ought to be. But, where was that? Where should he be?

For what seemed like several centuries, Sesson struggled desperately to remember where he should be—where he had been before he found himself floating like a feather in a silent void. It was no use—he knew he was himself, but what that self was he did not know; and where he had come from was equally inexplicable.

The fear and horror peculiar to nightmare began to assail him and the only answer to all his questioning was that he was lost, utterly lost, in limitless space.

He struggled to awake, illogically because he still felt he was not dreaming, but it was the only course of action he could think of. He believed himself to be screaming, praying, begging. Then something deep in his consciousness told him to open his eyes. This he did, easily and naturally, finding, to his utter astonishment, that he was sitting where he had been before his awful experience, before the saucer of ink, while Laulee was still staring into the pool, with the same ecstatic smile. She, evidently, had had no such unpleasant experience.

"No more for me," he exclaimed involuntarily.

As if pulled by some invisible hand, the girl's head jerked back from its attitude of staring. She frowned at him.

"Why didst thou waken me? See, there is nothing—all is gone. Oh, why didst thou do it?"

"Don't blame me," he said contritely. "What I saw caused me to yell out loud. It was not my fault."

"Oh, yes it was," she answered with some

asperity. "For if there is no evil in our memories, no evil thing can happen to us in the ink. In all the universe there is nothing that can harm the good."

With one of her rapid changes of mood she began to pet and soothe him.

"Poor boy, did all the bad devils of thy past rise up to haunt thee? It had to be, but next time maybe the good spirits will take thy hand and lead thee to Paradise instead of Jehannum."

Whether the girl's explanation was correct or otherwise, Sesson was deeply moved by his experience. It was altogether different from anything he had ever known. Of course, one may dream of time and space, and feel that years are passing; but when one wakes one realizes that it was but a dream and probably lasted only a few seconds. The experience can then be dismissed, as not being real.

But, to his surprise, Sesson found that he could not so casually dismiss the effects of his ink-gazing. On one hand, he felt certain that he had never moved from the place where he had been sitting; on the other, to believe that he had not moved seemed absurd. The experience, the sense of motion—all this had been too real, too tangible. Indeed, compared with the events of everyday, Sesson was compelled to admit that one was as real as the other.

If what had happened to him while he apparently sat by Laulee's side had not been real, then he had not eaten his dinner that evening. Yet, logically, this conclusion was absurd. Thinking, the puzzled sailor remembered the words of an old fakir: "There is a realm where logic is transcended, where things are real."

Naturally, then, Sesson wanted advice. The experience had scared him. Could a man leave his body and go wandering, without regard to what we call time, and careless of what we call space? But who was there to advise him? Laulee? Hardly! And yet, why not? Was it the egoism of the male, hesitating to seek advice from the female?

No. Truthfully, Sesson could answer "no" to that. Then did he not feel confident; did he doubt her knowledge? That was better, but, still, not the whole truth. He felt that he might as well own up to it—that he wished thoroughly to understand the girl, but could not. Men in love feel this bafflement.

And the need of consulting someone was pressing. Calling himself a baby that could not keep its mouth shut failed to ease the urge. To talk,

to confess, if you will, to someone, he must. And who was there but Sinclair?

Yet, he balked. To tell Sinclair about his adventure in the ink meant at least hinting about Laulee; and while he knew that the elder man would not ask questions and would never even dream of trying to supervise his morals, he hated to mention that his extraordinary experience had taken place while apparently in the presence of a woman. Troubled this way he put off speaking to Sinclair; but the weight on his mind was so pressing that he went about his duties like a man in a dream and everyone he met knew he was bothered.

This of course he knew and because his confounded experience came between his work and himself, he worried the more. That he should worry at all was another problem and a weighty one. But how should Sesson know that he had dipped into the immeasurable sea?

In the end he developed a fixed idea—he wanted to tell Sinclair, but he would not. He would fight the wish. But "the suppressed wish" is the fulcrum of psychology and its effects are known to men of far less wisdom than Sinclair, the unofficial guardian of India. Being what he was, he disliked to question Sesson. Thus he compromised, one morning, with:

"You are not looking yourself—better take a few weeks' leave. Go up to Darjeeling, or some place where its cooler."

And Sesson, who was forty years the younger, blurted out the whole tale and felt better when he had blurted.

AS HE told it, he did not look at Sinclair and when he did look up he was startled by the expression of gravity on the face of the elder man, who said:

"It's too late to ask you why you stared, and I won't. You are living in a country where queer things happen, I mean, things which would be called queer in England, but which are everyday events in India."

He paused for a few minutes, then continued:

"In my many years here, to quote Newton, I have felt myself, as it were, walking by the shore of a boundless sea, picking up small pebbles. Each pebble means so much more knowledge—but what is a ton of such to all the knowledge hidden by the sea? It appears that you, unwittingly, have taken a plunge into the sea itself. Once, and only once, I

myself wet my hand in it. Well, whatever their reason, *they* did not allow it for mere amusement.” And Sinclair finished speaking almost as if he were talking to himself.

“Who,” Sesson stammered, “who do you mean by *they*?”

“I do not know,” said Sinclair very simply.

“Eh?” Sesson might well be surprised.

“No. I have discovered society after society. I found the gang which wishes to hypnotize the world, and may, because the silly world does not believe it possible! As if the western world knew anything about hypnotism! Yes, I have unearthed clique after clique—knowing all the time that behind all these manifestations lurked a power, a power which seemed as far beyond my reach as the fourth dimension, a power beyond me, which I was almost content to admit as my master. I believe that power is interested in you.”

Sesson was dumb. Not because he had heard about a mysterious power, which appeared to be interested in himself, but because Sinclair had admitted there was something in India which he was content to let alone, if not consider his superior. This was more than extraordinary; it was hardly believable.

“My explanation may be miles from being correct,” Sinclair continued, as if soliloquizing, “but it’s the best I have been able to build up in all these years. To make my idea easier of understanding, suppose we call this *they* who appear to be interested in you, ‘The People of the Fourth Dimension.’ Then, remember how almost everything pertaining to the so-called “Occult” has its origin in India.

“Sect after sect has arisen, book after book has been written, mahatma after mahatma—so-called—has said his little say and passed on. But all of these were perhaps but the echo of the *they* I speak of: the sects, the wise men, the books were maybe but gropings for the truth of this mysterious people, although, being human, these gropers pretended to have the truth, and lived by peddling it.

“Few of them knew more than you do today—everyone was trying to explain, and is trying to explain an experience similar to your own. That is why India is the home of occultism—because it seems to be the home of this unseen people of fourth dimensional space.

“I am a materialist, but not in the narrow sense in which the term is generally understood. I am so

because the material is constantly showing us new wonders and until we are certain that the marvels of the material are exhausted—which will never be—I see no reason to speak of the spiritual. For what we call spiritual is only matter refined. Therefore, this unseen people are as physical as you and me. They are invisible to us because they occupy four dimensions of space instead of three.

“Even if we admit a common evolutionary basis—I speak, of course, of some basis of which undifferentiated protoplasm is a product—why should not one branch of life have evolved in a space of four dimensions, while our branch evolved in three? If we admit the possibility of this—and I see no reason and no consistency in denying it—then the evolution of man in fourth-dimensional space must have resulted in a super-being, a being who grew beyond us for millions of years, in the ratio of as four is to three, with all the added possibilities of that added space.

“That we can not see them is to be expected, since we can not even imagine fourth space, verbally intelligible though it may be. But the theory is big. That these people exist you will, I think, soon have greater proof than I have. I suggest that you go on with your ink experiments, and if you tell the lady what I have told you, she will be apt to confirm it. If she doesn’t, you will have an inexhaustible source of argument. But perhaps you had better not tell her that you confided in me.

“Every native is suspicious of me, and will close up like an oyster if my name is mentioned.

“But, remember—for this is serious—that you are playing with something far too powerful for you to control. Nevertheless, I should like you to go through with the thing. We may learn something tangible—that is, if you are not afraid of the consequences to yourself?”

Naturally, this suggestion made Sesson all the more anxious to continue his ink experiments; if only to show Sinclair that he was not afraid of even the inhabitants of fourth-dimensional space. Yet no doubt he would have gone on without the dare—the lure of the thing being easily understood by anyone.

And so, that twilight, going to the house, he was conscious of two pulls. There was, of course, the charm of the girl; but Sesson paused in the narrow street, to wonder if, after all, the bugle call, crying “fight,” were not the more alluring. The something

to be done was beginning to thrill.

His devotion to Sinclair was stronger than that of son to father, more overpowering than the subject's loyalty to his queen or king. It was a subtle fealty, born of kindness and nurtured in friendship and understanding. And to risk himself, body and soul, to aid, in his weak way, Sinclair's researches, to assist the great man to solve what appeared to be his one unsolved problem! Why? "To crush the Moslem in his pride" could not have more greatly stirred a crusader to action.

But the task would need all of his not too-remarkable intelligence. For Sesson was under no delusions concerning his mental status. His was the average mind of the average ship's officer, and he had the bulldog courage of the breed. And that type is neither introspective nor fond of dallying with abstraction; neither is cold logic a hobby. To dare and do his best was a conviction more soul-binding than a religion. And to do this for Sinclair carried the additional force of an emotional stimulus.

The mind of the sailor set itself, as he stood between the high, old walls of the street. Just as years before it would have set itself to the task of squaring the yards had the wind drawn aft.

Automatically he again walked slowly. Haste is agitating and this thing must be approached calmly and with unwinded lungs—no hurting pantings when the clash came, be that clash weird beyond a mortal's imagining. It was a fight to be fought. He must be at his best. To think about the end would be folly, weakness. To fight, and do his best—this must be his one continual mental picture. The man in his fine determination was doing himself an injustice. He needed no such mental reminder.

LAULEE was fascinatingly melting. Her loving was of the custard-apple sort, which she knew to be Sesson's favorite fruit. So overwhelmingly subtle is mind of woman when it wishes to be. To have played the mango, with its wonderful taste but hard center, would have been a mistake. That girl could become things, and she instinctively knew the correct thing to imitate.

All the core, the jarring center of their last meeting, had been changed into lusciousness. In that sweetness he could feel that her love was real, was abandonment. And surely, if there were any doubt of her, wise old Sinclair would have warned him.

She was a mere child, playing, through the ink,

with the underlying occultism of India. And she did not know the danger of her toy. So, they were only lovers again and the world was a wealth of sweet-briar in late Spring.

They went up to the roof and, like two children, tried to count the flying foxes crossing the low moon. Like children, they pretended to quarrel about their counting. And both were very happy. So it was Sesson, feeling the call to self-abnegation, the urge to do what seemed his duty, who suggested, playfully, that they again seek pictures in the ink. Laulee was surprised, puzzled, but her answering laugh was light and lilting.

"Why, my Sesson, wouldst thou become a holy man and live in rags and with his beggar's bowl?"

He laughed back:

"No, my sweet one, I crave no fakir's austerity. To be strictly truthful, I hope, in the ink, to see thee—when thou dost not know me to be watching!"

He looked at her long and silently, put in doubt by her words and the hidden sparkle in her eyes.

Her answer was the answer of the woman of India. Men, reputed wise men, have wrangled over the possibility of telepathy; yet only an ignorant fool denies the power of suggestion. The two are one and the same, made slightly variant by the distance bridged. Whosoever does not believe this—from the lips of an agnostic—let him stain his face and body, learn language, and live as a native of India with the natives—if he has the wit not to be discovered—for twelve months. Chances are he will become as superstitious as a devotee of juju. Again the preparations, the lowering of the light—protracted tonight, however, almost as if the actors were late and the stage and curtain must be kept back for them, by loving interruptions, which Sesson found very soothing. He even asked for more, but the lady became suddenly firm, smiled, pointed to the ink, pouting delightfully.

"Seek me there as thou didst tell me."

And Sesson—feeling like a boy caught in a lie—stared, pretending his best, after a long kiss.

Hardly had he concentrated upon the saucer, when his eyes closed and he believed himself elsewhere, and he found it very pleasant. His sensations were those of lying upon a bank of flowers, by a small stream in that delightfully lazy condition only possible to healthy tiredness, perfect nerves. Besides, he was content to let the voice talk to him. It was a fascinating voice, which rose and

fell with the strangely soul-stirring sounds of an aeolian harp. As a chorus, there was the faint sob of the wind among the trees, with the whispered comments of the birds.

But, presently, Sesson knew that the voice was telling him something important—was not merely entertaining him with its beauty. So he listened carefully until, among the music of the many sounds, he came to distinguish what was meant for him. It thrilled him with memories and echoes of religion. And the theme was obedience.

But no man had ever preached or written upon obedience in the wonderfully alluring manner in which the subject was now imparted to Sesson. His soul seemed to become in tune with the voice and to answer back with emotional fervor that obedience was the whole duty of a man. In his ecstasy, it never occurred to Sesson to ask whom he should so utterly obey. It was enough for him, then, to absorb with intense enjoyment the lesson—obey, and all things thou delightest in and seekest shall be given unto thee.

Surely, he thought, the voice must be that of some old prophet of the Bible. He became imbued with religious enthusiasm to which he had ever before been a stranger. To obey! What a wonderful, soul-entrancing Creed! To obey, obey, obey, obey. He sat up on the flowers, anxious to begin the path of obedience. He tried to hear more, but the voice was failing. Into the scenery about him he stared, seeking the owner of the voice. He used his eyes as he would have done picking up a buoy on a dark night at sea, and—saw Laulee staring at him, her lips parted.

His experience he told to Sinclair in detail, not forgetting to mention his standing in the narrow street with the call to fight coming over him and his decision to go through with the thing, “like having trouble with the crowd forward.”

But at this Sinclair frowned and shook his head.

“That’s like you, of course, and I admire it. But you cannot approach this affair in that frame of mind. Think! How can you? Imagine wrestling with a being who occupied four-dimensional space. Try to picture your efforts to get a toehold on him! Won’t do! Impossible. No, there is only one way for you to go into this thing, and if that way dismays or annoys you, why, we will drop the whole affair.

“The way is—as in your last experience—absolute and entire obedience. You must subjugate

your will to *their* intentions, or nothing worthwhile will happen. You must become a mere automaton in *their* hands, or there will be no result. I know it sounds unattractive, if not worse; but I can promise you that you will suffer no injury. You may be somewhat inconvenienced, but only for a few days, or so. Permanent effect there will not be. You know me and can trust me. I am banking on a natural law. Will you go through with it on these terms?”

For the first time since he had known the man, Sesson was aware of what was nothing else but a pleading note in his voice. This was remarkable. Why was Sinclair so tremendously interested in this vague people? Sesson gave it up. It was beyond him. But Sinclair pleading! That was unnecessary. Of course he would go through with the thing. To oblige Sinclair he would go to hell.

He did not say this. That, also, was not necessary. The men parted in full understanding. But Sinclair spent most of the night making plans. The matter involved great consequences and not a single inch of the track must be allowed to be out of line.

NEXT evening, Laulee’s greeting savored of irony.

“My high priest of the ink must thou to thy duties at once—*ek dum*—or hast thou a tiny moment to waste on such utter uselessness as I?”

Veiling his eyes with a smile, Sesson studied her as keenly as he could; in reality, for the first time. From some hitherto nebulous intuitive faculty a truth came to him, cold and solid as a steel bar. Or, again, it may have been the sudden repulsing of an atavism. Leaving the argument, he knew with a stinging clarity that an ironical woman is worse than dangerous, passes understanding and is false. Love cannot stoop to irony—that is, and mean it. But, did she mean it?

“Lady of my life,” his voice had never been more lover-like, “if it pleases thee, thy slave will never again stare into ink but will spend every moment of his hours away from his work—and he needs must work, for thee—in proving to thee his utter and changeless devotion.”

This, of course, in Hindustani, which he spoke well, while Laulee caught her breath. Then, before she meant to answer—emotion-driven—

“But I would not ask thee to give up thy amusements, my lord.”

“Thou art more to me than any play, any

reward—more indeed, than my honor! What a small thing is it for me to cease to stare into ink which seems to displease thee.”

“Nay, my Sesson—”

He interrupted, with a careless gesture—

“Hush, sweet one, let us forget such little things, for what is a dish of black fluid?”

He was surprised at himself. Could that be Sesson, talking so incisively to Laulee? A doubt dragged him from the heights. He loved her, too greatly. Reaction came, and he felt almost as if he had struck her. With one of her lightning-like flashes—she was cobra-like in her rapidity and singleness of purpose—she struck back, one small, bare foot indicating indignation with a single stamp.

“So, that is it!” Her eyes met his, flashing venom. “In the first play thou didst doubt me, fearing I would do thee some small meanness. Then thou didst pretend to play. Now thou tirest of this pretense. It is all of a part. Thou hast all along believed me faithless. Maybe the old one told thee and like a calf thou didst bleat belief! And now, careless, thou hast as good as called me traitor!”

Her voice trailed off into heartrending plainness.

“When, my lord, all I wanted in my little game was thy strengthening presence by my side.”

She was in his arms, sobbing like a child wakening from nightmare.

A very cold-blooded, logical, perhaps inhuman, man might have resisted Laulee in that moment, provided he had not the slightest interest in her, did not love her. But, what chance had Sesson, pulsing passion, with five million reds, the normal blood-count of a healthy man—and the girl’s willing slave? He forgot everything; the doubt so recently roused vanished like a jet of steam. Besides, Sinclair had asked him to go through with this thing. Sesson became slightly bewildered. So the affair progressed.

But the molding was slow, and Sesson became irritated at the lack of tangibility in his ink-experiences. Nothing now but voices in a void reiterating lessons he felt he knew. This for a month. What was it all about? Why didn’t something happen? The man began to doubt, but kept it to himself, that there was anything behind these weak manifestations—that it was all self-induced hypnosis. Yet Sinclair, who could not make mistakes, had asked him to go through with

it? Laulee was a dear girl, who did not know what she was playing with.

The tangibility came with an overwhelming suddenness.

During the usual preparations, he found himself thinking that Laulee must have penetrated his reason for this nightly performance. Then he dismissed this thought—she, with the patient, eternal curiosity of her sex and India, was willing to continue seeking ink-truths all her life. And she did but ask his nearness as a sort of support. She had never asked him a question regarding his experiences. Remembering this last, he felt sure of her and comforted. Why comforted he did not seek to know.

OF COURSE by this time Sesson had merely to look at the ink with a momentary intentness to drift off into dreams or whatever his condition was. This night was no exception, but hardly had he reached his usual void, when the voice said loudly and with certainty—spoke in such a way that Sesson never even thought of doubting what it told him—

“Sinclair has been murdered!”

In that state, with every faculty and emotion suspended and waiting to be influenced, the words—to Sesson as truthful as if from the lips of God—swung every fiber of the man into frantic, clamoring, revengefulness. Sinclair murdered! Then there was only one thing in life for Sesson to do, and that was to get the murderer. Further, the law should throw no protecting mantle over him. Neither would he have the easy death of hanging.

But at this the voice protested. The murderer was too clever. He had even impersonated Sinclair, deceiving, for that day, even Sesson himself, the stout *babu*, Sinclair’s personal servant, the Sikh gatekeeper. If Sesson tried long-drawn-out killing, he would fail. Thinking he had gone mad, Sinclair’s men would grapple with him. Revenged he should be, but caution must be the mother of success.

His consuming anger was natural and admirable, as for a murdered father, but a clever villain must be beaten by cleverness. No other way could win. The voice was as greatly angered as Sesson, but knew better than to act rashly.

But Sesson was in the throes of a man bound, who sees all he loves violated. He struggled to free himself, to reach, in some way, that murderer.

But a month of suggestion—the work of a master—had made Sesson pliable, obedient. The murder must be at once avenged but there must be no chance of failure. A revolver, a shot at close quarters—the only sure way. Sesson was only vaguely conscious of his surroundings. He was steady enough on his legs, but his brain—swayed and guided by the voice, by the man he felt was his friend, who held his arm—groped, as if under the influence of some powerful drug.

He knew he was leaving the house with this friend, but it never occurred to him that no man but himself had any right in the privacy of that room. And this was not only due to the utter confidence he placed in the vague figure by his side—white or black, native or European, was something Sesson never considered—but to his having lost all interest in life, except to avenge Sinclair.

He neither saw nor thought of Laulee who, wrapped in a whirl of conflicting emotions, crouched in a corner, watching. Neither was he conscious of guiding his friend to that carefully hidden house. Yet here, he felt that, his friend knew the house, but needed Sesson's presence to gain admission. (The student of this subject will note conflicting theories, impossible of discussion here). If his volition, if his "free-thought" had been dammed and diverted, as is a stream, there was still the ever-living effort to burst through and again flow free. And Sesson felt his right hand on the automatic in the pocket of his coat. The Sikh gatekeeper admitted them, acting as if he neither saw nor sensed anything unusual, and as Sesson and his companion walked slowly across the small compound, the keeper of the gate closed his charge and turned to watch the two men, clearly visible in a streak of moonlight. Out of the forest of hair covering his face his teeth showed whitely for an instant, in what might have been a grin or a snarl. Then a scratching, a feeble knocking on the gate drew his attention.

He switched on the powerful light which showed what was outside and opened the lookout. What he saw brought again the show of teeth, but this time there was no mistaking the snarl.

"So, it is thee, hellcat!" And he turned aside, to spit loudly.

"Water-buffalo!" Laulee's intense emotion had lifted her above any sort of fear or thought of self. "No doubt thou thinkest thyself a brave and clever man, and at times that may be true. But I am all that

can save my *sahib* and thy *sahib* this night! Let me in, big man. Surely thou art not afraid of a woman, and such a little one?"

With her usual cleverness, the girl had made no appeal based on Sesson's love for her. But the Sikh knew of that fact, and he thought the world of Sesson. Also, he had his country's idea of women. Their place in the scheme of things was the place of toys. They belonged to the lower side of life. Yet a Sikh or a high-caste Hindu often adores his mother! They were neither to be trusted nor treated as responsible beings. But to hurt the woman a man loves is like taking cubs from a tigress. And Sesson *sahib* was a man.

"Come in, spawn of Satan," he announced blandly, opening the gate a trifle.

As the girl slipped through, he gripped her, hurtfully. Then he closed and barred the gate.

"About thee? Is it a knife, a gun, or maybe a trained sister of thine—another snake?" he asked. For a moment she twisted in his grip, then she gave up, and bore it.

"A knife!" She produced a curved, deadly blade.

"Hum! Keep it! Because of the honor I bear my Sesson *sahib*, neither will I search thee. Think not that this is due to any honor of thee! But, try to be the traitor thou art, and thy head falls—very swiftly!"

He drew his sword significantly.

"And while thou swellest thy chest, mouthing the brave things thou wilt do to a child, thou art preventing me from saving my *sahib*."

The Sikh laughed softly.

"Thinkest thou this is a hive of fools?"

Nevertheless, with his hand on her arm, he went with her towards the door of the house—sufficiently believing to leave his gate without authority.

They entered quietly. All seemed quiet. The small elevator was not running. A tiny light in a red globe showed the stairs. Against his wish, the urging of the girl caused the Sikh to hasten.

Making no more sound than two drifting feathers, they began swiftly to climb the wide staircase. They reached the first landing. Into the quiet—startling even the Sikh—the noise of a shot broke. Although he grabbed at her with the rapidity of a wrestler, and even cut at her flying legs with his sword, the girl squirmed out of his grip and fled like a streak of white up the last stairs soundless, for Laulee had left all her many bangles at home.

So swiftly had she moved that it seemed to the Sikh that the noise of breaking glass came to him after she had gone!

Flashes of half-light, shadows, trick of circumstance, the unexpected, the unguessable tide of human emotion, the touch of self-denial, the craving for the thing loved, the carefully planning mind of a great man—and chance.

WHAT Laulee glimpsed through her haze of feeling, at the open door of that curiously light-dark room, was, first, Sesson standing alone, staring vacantly at what seemed to be the shattered remainder of a large mirror, his empty hands hanging at his side—an attitude that was half terror, half not understanding. In the unbreakable grasp of the two ex-dacoits, whom Sinclair employed for rough work, stood the “voice,” the “friend.”

But Laulee, also, saw something else and to her distraught soul the hideous danger to Sesson was magnified a thousandfold. If she made any sound at all, it was a hiss. Then she sprang, as the panther springs, at the back of the “friend,” plunging the knife deeply into vital parts.

The unexpected shock of her spring loosened the dacoits’ grip. Clinging, even with her teeth, to the writhing body of the “voice,” her added weight dragged him from the astonished Burmans, and as she fell to the floor with her enemy she did her utmost to make the stab of the knife more deeply piercing and mortally wounding.

All this in moments. Then, as the astonished and maddened dacoits plunged again to hold the struggling but dying “friend,” that person managed to scratch lightly the girl’s throat with a large ring on his first finger. In a dialect understood by Sinclair alone he shrieked out some words. When the Burmans gripped him, there was no longer need of their gripping.

Sesson—feeling like a man emerging from a partial anesthetic, during which he has been helpless but always on the verge of complete consciousness—sank weakly on a couch. Laulee, gropingly but surely, crawled to his knees—upward, until he grasped her in his arms, and careless of onlookers held her head to his breast. She sighed like a tired child, content.

In the doorway stood the Sikh, observing all things with complete understanding.

Sinclair’s voice spoke from the gloom. The Burmans removed the dead “friend.” The Sikh and

others of Sinclair’s men left the room, shutting the door. Laulee and Sesson were alone with Sinclair. She was afraid of only one thing—that she might not be able to speak what she wished so wildly to say. And she was very tired, growing weak, and the humility of India’s women was upon her.

“My boy,” Sinclair’s voice was very gentle. “I was sorry to put you to all this, but I saw no other course. I spoke truly when I told you that this matter was my only problem and that I did not know with whom you were dealing. Now I do know—the words my enemy spoke as he died having told me—told me what I never guessed at, would not have credited.

“For some years I have felt an obstacle in my work and gradually it came to me, partly by intuition, that this unknown obstacle was a very clever man, or men, with but one object in life—my death. Far too cunning to chance a shot at me in the street or to employ any of the usual methods of the assassin, this obstacle was always near and I knew that some day he, or they, would find what appeared a sure way of killing me.

“It was not so much the danger of death that annoyed me—it was the eternal nuisance of having to take this obstacle into account whenever I planned anything at all. Before undertaking any task I had carefully to guard against the sudden cessation of all my work.

“If I could have obtained a tangible sign, the evidence of a single overt act, I felt capable of grappling with the man. But there was nothing I could come to grips with. The entire danger was as vague as the fourth dimension.

“I admit it began to get on my nerves, for I am not a young man. With all the power—no slight power, as you know—I command, I began to institute countermeasures against this unseen, unknown enemy, but as I said, it was like trying to put handcuffs on a mathematical X. Then, to my intense surprise—for, as you also know, I never allow any reports to be brought to me concerning the private affairs of my friends—you told me of your weird experience. Then, relieved, I knew that at last the battle was opening. I felt easily capable of winning.

“Much as I disliked doing so, I had to trick you with my ‘people of the fourth dimension.’ Since the enemy was keeping your mind from the truth I was compelled to take the same stand. You can see why.

"To use you against me was the best card he could have played. And it was all so subtly clever. He knew of my deafness to all reports of your acts when not actually on duty. When on duty it is necessary to know what you are doing, in the event of your needing sudden support. He banked on my knowing nothing of, er, the lady. I didn't know until you told me.

"Then he knew our racial horror of discussing such a private matter. He had reasons for feeling quite safe. It was hardly to be expected that you would say anything to me. But a certain distrust of—never mind the name—nullified the early suggestion given you. You have forgotten, but you were ordered, when 'in the ink,' not to mention either the ink or the lady to me. You broke through this inhibition—an unusual feat—and told me.

"You were no doubt asked seemingly light questions in the beginning. Had you spoken to Sinclair?

"Slowly he became sure of you and of his revenge. The thing had to be gone through with to the bitter end. An old arrangement of mirrors—don't you remember the living woman, showed in little theaters when you were a boy, whose existence apparently ended at her waist? All mirrors, cleverly arranged, made it appear that I lay facing you when he whom you believed to be your friend ordered you to shoot—to avenge me, likely as not?"

Sesson groaned an affirmative.

"Don't let it trouble you. It's all over and I am in your debt. You sacrificed yourself and your pride to help me. It was a big brave thing to do. And, oh yes, as he died he told me—Back to the Mutiny this thing goes. Years ago, as you know, I found where the British women and children had been incarcerated—underground Calcutta.

"We smashed that den, and as I believed caught every person affiliated with its rulers, in every city in India. But one man escaped us and I did not know it. He hated everything British with a hatred we can not understand. Eh, well—was he responsible? I doubt it. I think this tells you all. Boy, we touched history tonight, and the breed will trouble us no more.

"That dead man, as well as hating me for what I was and what I have done and am doing, had further cause for vindictiveness. He was the only living son of Nana Sahib!"

At this Sesson stiffened suddenly, and Laulee

gave a little cry.

"If there is something you wish to tell her," Sinclair spoke even more gently than before, "I will leave the room, while there is time."

"Eh?" Sesson voiced his lack of understanding.

THEN the girl spoke, her voice faltering:

"Do not go, *burra sahib*, for how can my lord mind kissing me goodbye in thy presence? Art thou not his father and his mother? And I want to tell you all. For in thy great wisdom it may seem well to thee, during the years that are yet to come, to tell my lord and my love that I was not all a traitor."

"Traitor?" Sesson held her more closely, not troubling to wonder why he knew so clearly that her one desire in life had always been for his love, for him.

"Little one, if it tasks thee, do not strain to tell. I think I know, and—I will tell."

"Nay, wise *sahib*, it were better for me to tell. Remember this lies heavy on my soul and it has such a little while to clean itself."

She sighed and nestled, still graceful.

"It began—my lord remembers—such a wonderful love. I was never bought! We saw, we loved—there was nothing else required. If sometimes I found myself fearing age, his tiring of me, his finding a woman of the white-log and making her his wife—all this I would forget in his arms!

"Like a girl I had played with the ink and the ink began to whisper to me—'He will grow tired; thou wilt grow old, maybe fat; he will leave thee, forget thee and marry one of his own kind.' This, I swear by Allah, I did not believe at first. But, as thou knowest, *burra sahib*, such fancies grow like weeds after rain. Money, much money, was offered to me—rupees for my age, when there would be no longer any love, no longer my Sesson. But I loved, and money was not enough.

"*Ai*, I was tempted, but I would not. I fell, but dared to deny my promise. But the ink—the—ink, *sahib*—it makes one worse than drunk! Then was offered me love—for all my life—love and my Sesson, for all mine own, forever! What woman, loving, would have refused a small deceit—coaxing to the ink—for such as that? For it was told me that there was a *sahib* whom all *sahibs* knew for an evil man, whom every *sahib* wished to see dead, but who was protected by the *sahibs'* law, which

protects evil and good alike.

"It was told that the *sahib* who killed this evil one would be a hero and benefiter of all *sahibs*. But because of the law he would have to hide. 'He will be brave, sacrificing himself for his own kind; but he will have to flee from his own and become one of us—a native. His face stained, he will live safely among us, with money secretly given by the *sahibs*. Never able to leave us. Never to speak to the *mem-log*! Dost thou not see, little sparrow, that he will be thine all thy life? Is such love, for all thy life, not worth so small a matter with great deeds in hand?'"

"That was why I—foolish, love-dazed, thoughtless—became what seems like a traitor, *burra sahib*—and oh, my lord, my love, my life!" She sobbed weakly.

"I would not call thee traitor"—Sinclair's voice was husky—"neither will thy Sesson. I would say that thou hadst loved too greatly for thy soul's peace."

"To love my lord too greatly were not possible!" An echo of the old, audacious lilt crept into her voice. "But, I must end. This night, being a woman who loved, I suspected treachery and, thank Allah, followed. Before the gate was reached I knew and felt the knife in my bosom speak to me. *Burra sahib*, didst thou not see that that dead spawn of Shitan was wearing boots?"

"I saw, and guessed the poison needle at his toes: But, loyal little lady, had he lifted a foot to

scratch he would not have reached thy *Sahib*. Nevertheless, in what thou didst do, thou didst show thyself a princess, a woman worthy of all love."

She tried to laugh.

"A little fool even in my dying," she gasped and choked slightly.

"Nay, but a great lady who gave her life to save her love. We honor such an one above all others!"

"Then"—she could scarcely whisper—"I die content."

There had been no suggestion of a doctor, of an antidote. Both Sinclair and Sesson knew the futility of such, knew that any attempt to save life would only make life's last moments more unhappy. Had there been pain, Sinclair had an anodyne at hand. But the poison was as painless as it was deadly—a poison unknown to Western toxicology.

There was silence in the room. Sesson could not speak; Sinclair did not wish to. The younger man could only hold Laulee as tightly yet as gently as he could as if feeling that all he loved were slipping away from him, he would try to prevent the going.

"My lord, I was and am unworthy. Forget me and find a woman of thine own race to be the mother of thy children. Yet," her voice trailed off until Sesson had to bend his ear to her lips, "yet—yet—my love—and my lord—for this last moment—love *me* and forget the *mem-log*—and kiss me—a long kiss—farewell."