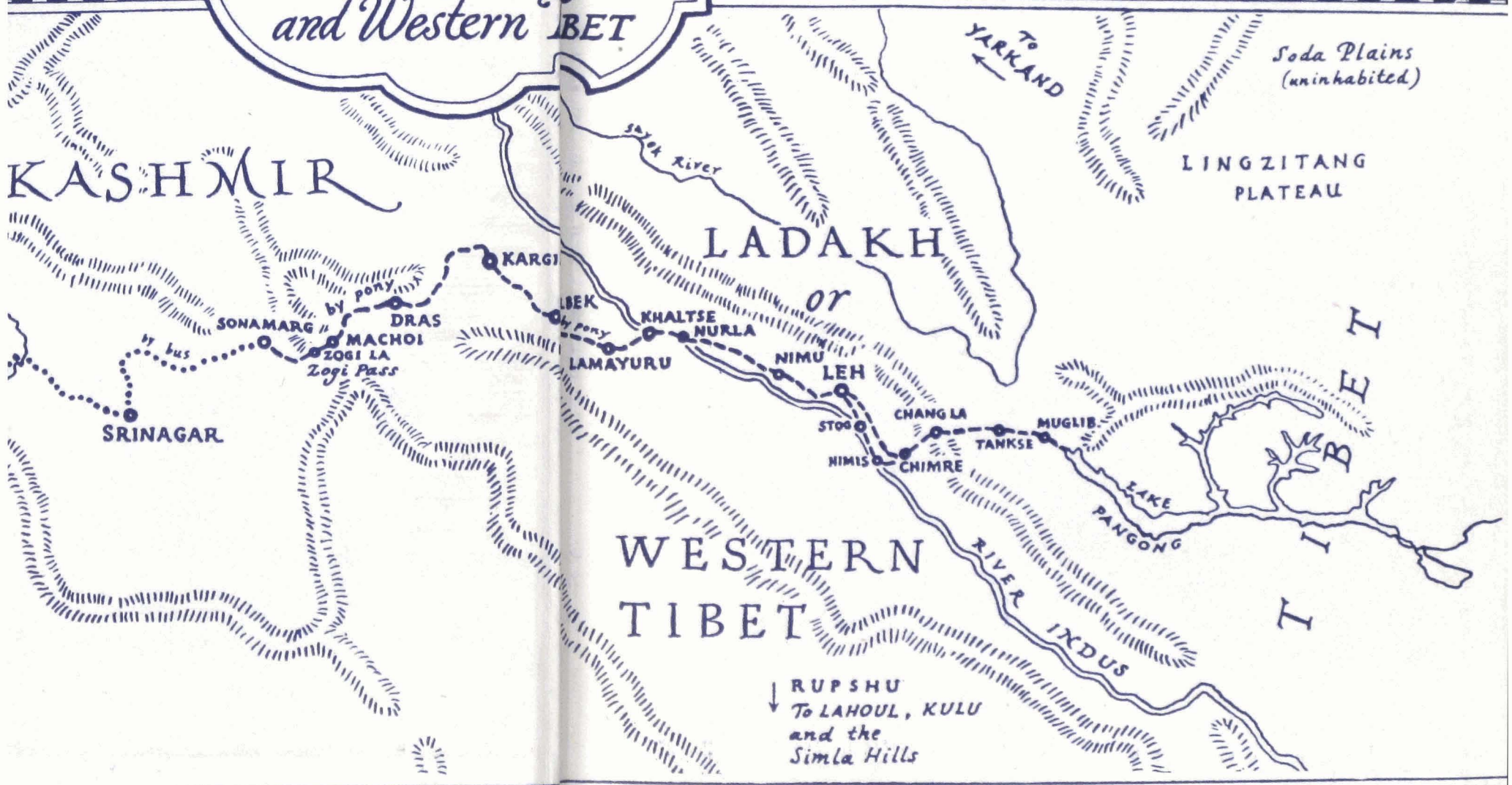




Map of INDIA
and Adjacent Regions
with an Enlarged Section
showing KASHMIR
and Western TIBET



CHINA
BURMA
of Bengal
Ceylon



"RAJAH"

Sidika Badhyari, of Kashmir—Guide, Counselor, Unfailing Friend.

Golden Doorway **to TIBET**

by
Nicol Smith



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LOREN TUTELL

Philip B Stewart
10/20/32

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY, INC.

INDIANAPOLIS

Publishers

NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1949, BY THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY, INC.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

First Edition

To ANNE ARCHBOLD

One of the great travelers of our time, who has forgotten more about the far corners of the world than I will ever know.

—NICOL SMITH

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE CURTAINED DOORWAY	13
II THE PILLOW SLIP OF YELLOW SILK	28
III THE LAST ENGLISHMAN	49
IV EVEN IN PARADISE—	65
V THROUGH THE DOOR IN THE CLOUDS	88
VI THE LAND THAT IS STILL TIBET	114
VII I DON'T LIKE LAMAS	136
VIII IN THE HOUSE OF THE EVIL DRUG	156
IX WE MEET ROYALTY	180
X THE SKOOSHOK OF HIMIS	200
XI THE EYES OF THE MASK	212
XII THE TALISMAN	231
XIII THE FIVE GREAT DOGS OF CHIMRE	247
XIV THROUGH HELL AND HIGH WATER	259
XV THE LAST BUS	273

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
"Rajah"—guide, counselor, unfailing friend	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Ambassador Grady and the Khwaja Sahib	14
The Khwaja Sahib and his guests at tea	14
The bullets intended for the Khwaja Sahib	15
Surely this isn't Alfred—it's a gypsy dancing girl!	32
Sikh princes—the Baba Sahib (left) and his son	33
Walt Mason, of the Associated Press (left), and the author	33
The houseboat <i>Ritz</i> at Srinagar, Kashmir	48
Our living room on board the <i>Ritz</i> , with Nabha the butler	48
Setting up camp after the cook-guide's fall from his pony	49
The accident that nearly ended the expedition	49
The stampeded pack ponies were rounded up at last	64
Tibetan mothers and fathers don't buy baby carriages	65
Harvesters—the girl's cape is worn skinside out	65
Chunrezig, "the thousand-handed," at Lamayura Gompa	80
Fortress of King Naglug and suspension bridge spanning the River Indus	81
Colonel John Peart sits his ancient silver saddle	81
The empty castle of the Kings of Ladakh in Leh, the capital	96
Lydia entertains in her spotless kitchen at the Christian Inn	97
Walter Asboe pulls a tooth—fee, two cents	97
These jovial Yarkandi traders may be Russian agents	112
The ladies of Ladakh spend many hours at their knitting	112
Buddhist lamasery of Triksé near Leh	113
The author tells the Queen of Ladakh that he admires her hat	128
Their Majesties, the King and Queen of Ladakh	129
The royal summer palace at Stog, near Leh	129

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS—*Continued*

	FACING PAGE
Lhasa terriers fill the author's fur-lined boots	144
The <i>onpo</i> , or court astrologer, carefully makes predictions to the Queen's taste	144
The great lamaseries of Western Tibet are always built on pinnacles of rock	145
The Skooshok of Himis	160
The <i>Chagdzod</i> (regent) of Himis at his devotions before the Golden Buddha	161
Masked devil dancer of Himis lamasery	176
When devils take off their masks they're quite human	176
Boys only thirteen years old served as pony wallahs	177
Carvings made by Nestorian Christians, near Tankse	177
A red-robed lama of Tankse lamasery looks across cultivated valley fields	192
Mask of the founder of Tankse Lamasery	193
Ragged beggar beating his drums	193
Town father, Sidik Bat	193
Our camera squad at Lake Pangong	208
Our cook, "Thunderbolt," and his helper, "Lightning"	208
Our caravan approaches Lake Pangong	209
Lake Pangong hidden in the Himalayas of Tibet	224
Majestic mountain ranges form the "Golden Doorway to Tibet" at Lake Pangong	225
At right of Chimre Lamasery stands a chorten, a Buddhist lama's burial urn	240
Lamasery of Tankse is fabled to have had among its treasures the world's most precious ruby	240
At Tankse Lamasery prayer flags flutter out the Buddhist invocation, <i>om mani padme hum</i>	241
Four Moslems of Kashmir who were my friends	241

GOLDEN DOORWAY TO TIBET

I


The Curtained Doorway

BISMILLAH 'rahmani 'rrahheem! "In the name of GOD, the Compassionate, the Merciful!"

The sun was rising over India. It was the hour for the third of the five prayers which the devout Moslem makes daily—the *soobh*, the prayer at daybreak.

Over the myriad rooftops of the ancient city of Delhi, gilded by the first rays of the sun that would soon be merciless in its heat, the call floated from the towers of the mosques.

El-hamdoo lillahi rabi 'lalameen! "Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!"

I turned over drowsily on my pillow, in my room in the Imperial Hotel, in New Delhi, the new-built city which adjoins the ancient one. I had no intention of getting up at any such hour.

Ihdina 'ssirat almostakeem! "Guide Thou us on the straight Path!"

Perhaps, if I had understood at that time the meaning of the words, I would have roused myself to listen. Certainly I would need "guidance" on my path, although it was an earthly road, and not the holy Path of Faith to which the words of the Arabic prayer referred. The road to which I was going lay hundreds of miles to the north of Delhi, on the farther side of the mighty wall of the Himalayas, whose snow-clad summits support the sky itself.

That path would lead me as far as Tibet, the land of mysteries. . . .

But on this particular morning—the seventh of July—the only mystery that confronted me was how to keep cool. I had arrived

in Delhi five or six days before this, had completed most of my business there, and would be ready to start in another day or two for Srinagar, in Kashmir, from which point I would go with a pony caravan into Western Tibet. Everything was going smoothly, including the steady trickle of perspiration down the back of my neck.

Why was I heading toward Tibet? Well, it wasn't a pleasure trip. I was undertaking it because my business is to go to the out-of-the-way corners of the earth, to gather material for my lecture tours. I was taking with me a photographer who had accompanied me on previous expeditions, a superb photographer—Loren Tutell.

I had scarcely finished breakfast when a chit—a note delivered by messenger, a time-honored mode of communication in the Orient—was handed to me. It contained an invitation from the Shanti brothers to lunch with them that day.

The Shanti brothers conducted one of the most renowned jewelry stores in India. Two or three years before, during the war, a group of Siamese “underground” agents under my charge had wished to show their gratitude to General William J. Donovan, chief of the Office of Strategic Services, for his help to Siam. They had asked me to select a gift for him, at the Shantis' shop. I had chosen a seventy-carat sapphire, carved in the form of the Hindu elephant-god, Ganesha, the Remover of Obstacles, the god of good luck.

Their store is only a block or two from the Imperial Hotel, on the opposite side of the street, and nearer the center of town, and I sauntered up there shortly before noon. The sun was blazing down from a cloudless blue sky, and it was a relief to find the darkened interior of the shop.

I found the two senior brothers of the firm waiting for me. They were barefooted, dressed only in what seemed to be a voluminous white sheet (it's called a *dhoti*), and were reclining com-

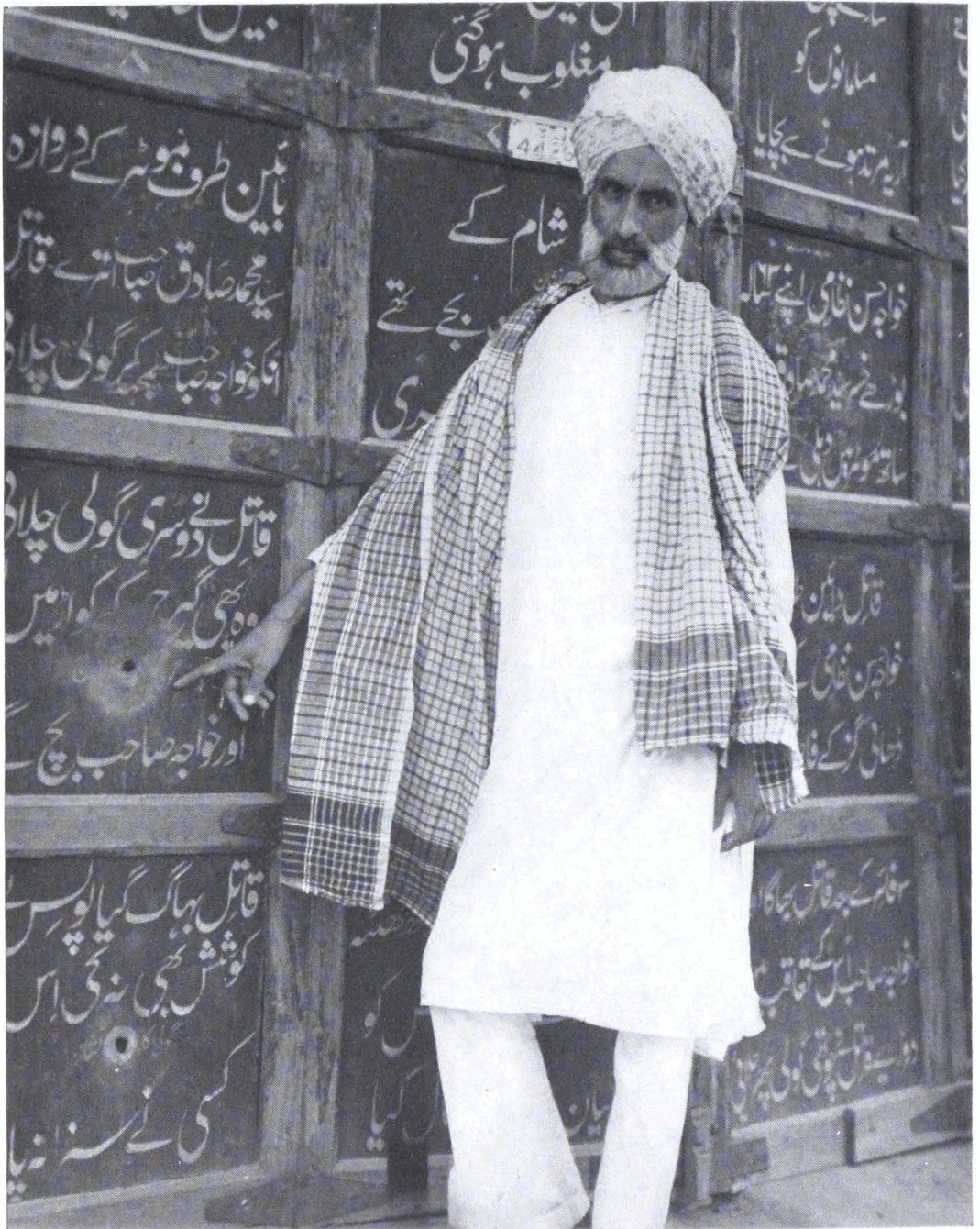


AMBASSADOR GRADY AND THE KHWAJA SAHIB



THE KHWAJA SAHIB AND HIS GUESTS AT TEA

At table, left to right: Colonel Peter Green, Nicol Smith, the Khwaja Sahib, a friend, Robert Trumbull (*New York Times*), Percy Wood (*Chicago Tribune*).



THE BULLETS INTENDED FOR THE KHWAJA SAHIB

The Imam points to the holes made in the garage door by two of them.

fortably on the cool bare floor. I wouldn't expect to enter Cartier's or Tiffany's on an August day, however hot, and find the senior partners appareled in this fashion, but it seemed sensible here. They welcomed me in perfect English and motioned me to sit down beside them.

"We'll have lunch in a few minutes," said the elder of the two. "Careful, don't sit down on that ant!"

"Why, is its bite poisonous?" I asked, watching the tiny insect scurry away.

"Oh, no. But it has its right to live, as has every created thing."

I remembered then. The Shanti brothers are Jains, members of a Hindu religious sect which numbers about a million believers. One of their cardinal vows makes it a sin to kill even the tiniest of creatures. I'm afraid I wouldn't make a very good Jain where mosquitoes are concerned.

I lowered myself cautiously to the floor and noticed for the first time that one of the brothers held cupped in the palm of his hand a brightly glittering object no larger than a golf ball. "What on earth have you got there?" I exclaimed.

Mr. Shanti smiled and held it out to me. "A child's plaything," he said.

It was a tiny elephant, decorated with enamels and encrusted with jewels of microscopic size. I have never seen such exquisite workmanship.

"A toy?" I gasped. "What child would be given a toy like this? Why, it must be priceless!"

Mr. Shanti beamed. "Perhaps you would like to examine these, also," he said, pushing toward me a tray which was lying on the floor beside him.

On the tray were four other little figures, none of them more than an inch or two in height—a miniature tiger, a tiny horse, a parrot and some other bird, of a species unknown to me. Each one was adorned with enamels and glittering with gems. Most ex-

quisite of all, I thought, was the tiny parrot, with its feathers of green enamel. I gazed and gazed in sheer wonderment at the artistry of all four.

“You are right, there is no living craftsman who could equal these little masterpieces,” said Mr. Shanti, interpreting my thought. “The tiger and the two birds were made by master craftsmen in the days of the Mughal emperors, whose rule, as you know, was dwindling to an end two hundred years ago. The other two are somewhat later.”

“Have you set a price on them?” I asked.

“Oh, they are worth from one to three thousand rupees each,” said Mr. Shanti. “Say from three hundred to a thousand dollars in your money.”

“Pretty expensive toys, I should say!”

“Well, they are not ordinary toys,” Mr. Shanti agreed, “but the children to whom they were given were not ordinary children. They were the children or grandchildren of the Mughal emperor then ruling. The nobles who governed, under him, such states or cities as Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Jaipur and Alwar, found that one sure way of keeping in the emperor’s good graces was to order their finest craftsmen to fashion these wonderful little figures and then to present them to the emperor’s grandchildren.”

I reluctantly returned the tiny green parrot to the tray. “And have you added any other treasures to your collection since I was here last?” I asked.

“A few,” Mr. Shanti admitted. “Would you care to have a look?”

I would. The two dark-skinned brothers arose, gathered their sheets about them and ushered me into a small adjoining room, the inner sanctum of their establishment. It was bare of furniture except for a large steel safe that stood in one corner. Again we took our seats on the floor.

The elder brother summoned one of his clerks, a venerable

Hindu similarly gowned in white, and requested him to open the safe and bring him various boxes it contained. The clerk brought eight or ten small boxes, each lined with velvet, and placed them on the floor beside his master.

From the first box that Mr. Shanti opened, he took out a diamond necklace priced at one million rupees, or slightly more than 300,000 American dollars. It was a circlet of small diamonds, from which hung eight huge diamonds, each as large as a walnut. The next box yielded a necklace of sapphires, valued at a half a million rupees—a mere \$175,000. The outstanding piece in the collection was a necklace of diamonds and rubies valued at two and a half million rupees—roughly \$800,000. Altogether, the bracelets, pendants and other articles in the ten boxes formed a collection which was, to coin a phrase, fit for a queen. The valuation placed on the lot was four million dollars. . . .

The two barefooted Jains seemed no more impressed by their treasures than if they were handling containers of homogenized milk.

“And to think,” I exclaimed, “that I asked you if you had anything new! Why, I don’t imagine there’s a finer collection in any establishment the world over!”

The elder of the Shantis smiled. “How long do you expect to remain in Delhi?” he asked.

“Only a day or two more,” I replied. “I’m on my way to Kashmir and Ladakh, on the border of Tibet. Why do you ask?”

“Well, perhaps, then, when you come back, later in the year——” He hesitated. “You will be coming back this way, won’t you?”

“I think so.”

“Well, perhaps by then we will be able to show you something which will make all of these——” he waved at the jewel boxes which were being returned to the safe——“look like trinkets.”

“You’re serious?” I asked.

“Perfectly. We are negotiating at the moment, my brothers and I, for the world’s greatest ruby. It is the most perfect pigeon’s-blood ruby that exists. It is more than thirty carats in size. For the past two hundred years it has remained in the possession of the same Indian family, but it is coming on the market now, for the first time since the early eighteenth century.”

“What would you ask for a ruby such as that?” I asked.

“The exact figure has not yet been decided,” replied Mr. Shanti, “but we think it will be somewhere in the neighborhood of four million rupees.”

“A million and a quarter dollars!” I gasped. “For a single stone! What maharajah is the most likely purchaser?”

“Perhaps the purchaser will not be a maharajah at all,” Mr. Shanti replied smilingly.

“But the maharajahs are the world’s greatest buyers of jewels, aren’t they?”

“In the past, yes. But in recent months, no. Remember, only a handful of days are left—only six weeks—until the fifteenth of August, Partition Day, arrives, the old India which England fashioned will vanish and in its place will rise the two new nations, the dominions of India and of Pakistan. England will no longer have her viceroy here to preserve order. No one knows what may happen then. Riotings and the looting of shops have already occurred throughout the country. And after Partition Day, who knows? Even the jewels that you see here will soon be taken out of Delhi for safekeeping. No, my young friend, I think the Heart of India, as we like to call this matchless ruby, will not be offered to any maharajah here, but will go with us to America, to be sold there.”

I shook my head. “I’m sorry,” I said, “but with our present tax problems I don’t believe there’s a single American who could put that much money into a stone, even if it’s worth more than you ask. I think you’re twenty or thirty years too late with your Heart of India. A jewel like that might have been snapped up by Pier-

pont Morgan the elder, or one of our comparable millionaires at the turn of the century, but there just ain't any such buyers now. I don't think you will easily find a purchaser for it today."

"Well, we will count on you to help us, when we have flown to New York," Mr. Shanti observed hopefully. "Perhaps you will give a small affair and invite some of your friends so that we may show them the ruby."

I chuckled inwardly as I pictured the invitations I would send out—"to meet the Shanti brothers. Don't come without a certified check for a couple of million dollars." Somehow, I didn't think it would work.

"And so you think that the political changes in India are causing the maharajahs to tighten up on their jewel buying?" I said.

"Undoubtedly," declared one of the brothers, while the other nodded in agreement. "Ever since the bloodshed in Calcutta on Direct-Action Day, more than a year ago, and outbreaks of violence between Moslems and Hindus that have continued, many of the wealthy princes have foreseen only trouble ahead. They are buying American dollars and British pounds with their rupees, and are transferring securities to the Western world. Strange things truly are in the air. Better economic conditions for all are promised more and more by those in power, and yet Communism is making its appearance here, as it has already appeared in many other Asiatic states."

"And Communism is not a form of government that approves of individuals walking around with million-dollar rubies in their pockets, is it?" I asked jokingly.

The Shanti brothers just smiled. "Shall we go to lunch?" asked the elder, getting to his feet.

Just then a third brother—much younger than the first two—who had been modestly hovering in the background while we examined the jewels, shyly came forward and begged his brothers' permission to show me something which was in his special

department—curios which, although not jewels, were of great value.

Eagerly he reopened the safe and brought out—a shawl! It was, as I saw at once, a true Kashmir shawl, woven in superb colors, but with a most brilliant red predominating. Spreading it out before me, he dramatically challenged me to take a guess as to its value.

“Ten thousand rupees?” I hazarded at a venture.

“Guess again!” he cried proudly.

“Fifty thousand?”

He smiled, shook his head, pursed his lips together and said solemnly, “One million rupees!”

I could scarcely believe this price possible, until he pointed out to me the immense amount of detail in the shawl’s design. It was, he said, the very finest shawl in all the world. It had been woven in Kashmir, he told me, at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It had been made by a single family, all of the household taking part in the work, and had required many years to complete. Although nearly two hundred and fifty years old, it had been beautifully preserved, and the colors were surely as brilliant as on the day when the thread was dyed.

The scenes depicted on the shawl included some which showed the richly caparisoned elephants ridden by the Mughal emperors over the high mountain passes into the lovely Vale of Kashmir, four hundred years ago. All in all, on this shawl, which was of ordinary size, there were at least two thousand figures of people and animals, although no one could possibly have counted them without losing track of the number. The youngest Shanti brother reverently replaced the shawl in the safe. His brothers were waiting for me.

Luncheon was served in the modest apartment which the brothers had rented in a small building adjoining their jewelry establishment. They explained that their actual residence was situated

at some distance from their shop, and that they had rented this flat and maintained a cook and houseboy here merely because they disliked lunching in restaurants and crossing the city in the heat of the day.

The apartment was well supplied with divans and comfortable chairs—no floor-sitting here—and three chairs had been placed at the enormous dining-room table. The Shanti brothers seated me between them.

“What is this?” I asked, as I picked up a small object beside my plate.

“It is for you,” the brothers said in unison. “A little gift, a souvenir, to remind you of your old friends in Delhi.”

It was the figure of the elephant-god, Ganesha, carved from a single emerald. The emerald itself was of no great value, being pale in color, but the design was fascinating and the carving was of India’s top craftsmanship. It was certainly the most unusual place card I had ever encountered on my travels anywhere.

“This is much too magnificent a gift!” I exclaimed. “I don’t see how I can accept it!”

“Oh, it is nothing, a mere bagatelle,” they insisted, beaming at my pleasure. “Take it, keep it, enjoy the protection of Ganesha. He will bring you good luck on your journey! And perhaps you will remember us when we come to America.”

The luncheon consisted of twenty-seven courses, not one of which included meat. The truly devout Hindu, and the Jain in particular, eats no meat. But there were dishes of delicious vegetables, fruit, ginger, rice, cakes, sweets and condiments, following one another endlessly. I enjoyed myself thoroughly.

As I was about to take my departure, my delightful hosts again asked me if they could be of service to me in any way.

I hesitated. “Well, there is one small article that I’d like to buy while I am in Delhi,” I said. “It’s a lady’s handbag, one of those small velvet ones, decorated in gold or silver thread, for evening

wear. When I was in Delhi two years ago I bought one or two of them as souvenirs, but I can't find a shop that has them, now. I don't suppose you carry such a thing, do you?"

The eldest Shanti shook his head, smiling. "I know what you mean," he said, "but we do not keep them in stock. They are charming, but hardly to be classed as jewelry, you will admit. Have you tried any of the shops along the Chandni Chauk? They are more likely to have articles of that sort."

I thanked him for the suggestion and, renewing my thanks for their hospitality, took my leave. It was about three o'clock when I left the Shanti brothers' establishment, the small elephant-god, carved from a single emerald, safely tucked away in my waistband pocket. Having no other engagements for the afternoon, I decided to pursue my search for the velvet handbag in Old Delhi, hot as it was. Perhaps the elephant-god would bring me luck.

I walked along slowly, keeping my eyes open for a tonga, the two-wheeled horsedrawn vehicle that takes the place of a taxicab in India. I hailed one, climbed in and told the driver to take me to the Chandni Chauk. The tonga plodded northward through the heat for a mile or two, at one point skirting an area several hundred yards in length, where caravan camels drowsed in the shade of sheds roofed with corrugated iron, and entered the old city by one of the gates in the wall which had anciently encircled it. We came in sight of the grim walls of the Black Mosque, which were standing a hundred years before Columbus discovered America when seeking a new passage to India; and a little farther on, at the western end of the Chandni Chauk, I dismissed the tonga and proceeded on foot.

It was slow going. The Chandni Chauk, more than a mile in length, is the world's busiest shopping street. It is not a broad thoroughfare, at best; the thousands of pedestrians filled the middle of the road as well as both sides of the street; they moved aside, reluctantly, only to make way for one of the sacred cows of India,

or at the frenzied honking of an occasional antiquated motor vehicle, driven by some incurable optimist; the swirl of colors and the clamor of the street were continuous and bewildering. Hindu women in saris and Moslem women with their faces veiled so that only their eyes were visible, squeezed through the press. Naked children at play darted everywhere, and horribly filthy beggars held up skinny brown claws, begging for baksheesh, or with their backs propped against a wall, slept in the sun while passers-by stepped over their legs. Fruit vendors, half of their produce already devoured by clouds of ravenous flies, squatted by their baskets and trays. Petty merchants, refugees from other sections from which they had been driven by rioting, had set up shops in tiny booths along the gutters, stocked with everything from pink combs and brushes to imitation Swiss watches and dust-covered sweetmeats. In the background, almost hidden behind piles of jimcracks and tarnished goods, could occasionally be seen the doorways of larger shops, or windows at which goldsmiths and silversmiths could be seen at work on bangles and earrings. Slowly and endlessly the thick stream of humanity moved back and forth. I could move only as it carried me.

An eddy of this swirling tide tossed me into the doorway of a shop and left me gasping there. Sheer chance. . . . I looked around to get my breath. It was a small shop, but not so small as many I had already seen. I saw at a glance that its stock consisted of small curios, of every description, and I felt a stirring of hope. It seemed just the sort of place at which to find almost anything.

From behind a tall showcase at the rear of the place, the shopkeeper emerged and came toward me. He was a plump, olive-skinned individual, wearing a long loose jacket of white muslin, its skirts fluttering around the knees of baggy white muslin trousers. His shirt, I noticed, was fastened with three gold studs, instead of buttons. His bare feet made no sound on the dusty floor.

Bowing obsequiously, he asked in perfectly good English if there was anything in particular that I desired.

I described the sort of handbag I was looking for. He shook his head regretfully. "No, honored sar," he replied, "I have none. But perhaps you would care to look around the shop? I have some unusually good pieces done in matrix of lapis that might interest you."

"Well, let me just look around," I said.

Just then another customer came in, and the shopkeeper promptly abandoned me. "You will find the lapis work on that table, sar," he said, waving toward the back of the store. "If you will excuse me, I will see what this man wants. I will be back in a moment."

Left to myself, I wandered back to the indicated table and examined the lapis figures. They were quite good and were reasonably priced, so I made a mental note to buy one or two of them before I left the store. I then wandered on along the narrow aisles between the crowded show tables, to see what else might be worth picking up. On the next table, a long and narrow silver box, studded with semiprecious stones, caught my eye. I opened its lid. Inside, there was a human thighbone. I recognized it as one of the items which are used by an *onpo*, or Tibetan astrologer, as the tools of his trade, in the foretelling of events. I put it quickly back in its box and moved on.

I am not the sort of person who believes that the future can be told with the help of a thighbone.

I moved on from one table to the next. On one I noticed several jade carvings, some of them being "mutton-fat" jade, plainly very old. On another were bronzes, also of great age. Mingled with the good pieces were many of no value, of cheap and tawdry modern manufacture; but everywhere I looked I found something of interest and so, step by step, I was drawn closer and closer to the rear of the shop.

At that end of the shop there was a curtained archway, leading, as I supposed, into an alcove storeroom of some sort. As I was idly examining the objects displayed on the table nearest it I became aware of curious sounds proceeding from behind the curtain—the sound of shuffling feet, low exclamations, sudden grunts, as if a desperate struggle were going on. The heavy green curtain was half drawn, and with a natural curiosity I stepped over and peered around the edge of the curtain to see what was going on inside.

There was no inner room there. There was merely a hallway leading to an outer door, a heavy oaken door, which was standing ajar. The sounds came from the other side of this door, and I took two steps and looked out.

The door opened on a small courtyard, enclosed by high walls plastered over with crumbling stucco. The enclosed space was no more than twenty feet square. In its center was a space, ten or twelve feet square, where the pavement of the court had been covered over with smooth yellow sand. Around this, squatting on their haunches with their backs to the courtyard walls, were several spectators, Hindus, and at each end of the sandy arena stood a nearly naked dark-skinned attendant, holding a paddle-shaped board in his hands. No one noticed me. All eyes were fixed on the two men who stood facing each other in the center of the sanded ring.

They were two enormous fellows, naked as the day they were born, except for loincloths of coarse silk of a light purple shade, almost fuchsia-colored, tightly stretched around their hips. Huge of stature though they were, the play of muscles rippling under their smooth brown skins indicated that they had the lightness and swiftness of movement of giant cats. They too were Hindus, I judged, the marks on their broad sullen foreheads distinguishing them as worshipers of the god Siva, whose wife Kali is the goddess of Death. They were moving around each other warily, when suddenly one struck with the swiftness of a cobra. The blow, de-

livered with the edge of the open hand, fell at the base of the victim's neck. The man grunted, tottered and collapsed to his knees. The victor instantly bent over him, massaged the back of his neck with rapid strokes; and almost instantly the man who had fallen like a bludgeoned ox leaped again to his feet.

There was a moment's breathing space, during which the two attendants hurriedly smoothed out the sand of the arena with their wooden paddles. This evidently was done in order to provide the contestants with a surface on which they could plant their feet firmly, to insure perfect balance. The two naked giants again circled around each other. Suddenly they grappled in a bearlike hug, until, wrenching one arm free, the man who had lost the first bout fastened his fingers upon his opponent's throat. Horror-stricken, I expected to see the man strangled before my eyes, when, as if at a signal, the killer released his grip and the two wrestlers sprang apart. It dawned on me that this was evil sport, whose practitioners were merely perfecting themselves in the art of committing murder with no weapon but the hands.

But as I watched the sand being smoothed out for a third bout, the shopkeeper suddenly pushed back the curtains behind me, elbowed past me and pulled the door closed in my very face. He seemed highly excited.

"I left you to look at the objects in my shop," he spluttered, "and not to stare, uninvited, at my neighbors' private recreations. It might be very awkward for me, if they thought I permitted such a liberty."

"I'm sorry, I assure you," I said. "I heard some noise out there and just wondered what was going on. What kind of wrestling is that, by the way? I've never seen anything like it!"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said the man shortly. But as we walked back into his shop, he seemed to realize that he had spoken too rudely, and turned to me with a conciliatory smile.

"I hope you understand, sar," he said suavely. "It's only that we

should not like our customers to intrude on those people any more than we would like having such people disturb our customers. Just forget it, sar. Did you find anything to interest you here in our little establishment?"


I was a little miffed by his behavior in general, but I replied that I would buy two of the little figures in matrix of lapis, paid him the thirty rupees he asked for the two, and went out again into the crowds and hubbub of the Chandni Chauk.

It was like emerging into the heat of a furnace. I instantly gave up all thought of looking further for the handbag I had thought of purchasing, and, to my relief, found an empty tonga almost immediately.

Half an hour later I was back at my hotel. In another hour I had emerged from a cooling bath and had got into fresh garments. The telephone rang, and the voice of the clerk at the desk downstairs announced:

"Colonel Peter Green is here, sir."

II

*The Pillow Slip of
Yellow Silk*

LIEUTENANT COLONEL PETER GREEN, of the Indian Army, was a young Englishman whom I had come to know very well since the war. I liked him immensely.

Peter Green had entered the British Army when hardly more than a boy, had served for years with troops in the Middle East and for the last ten years had been stationed in India. There was scarcely a corner of the country he hadn't visited, and his fund of information about India and its people was amazing.

"I thought you were up in Simla with Nan and the kids," I said, as we shook hands. "Grand to see you!"

"That's just where I have been. Got back only this morning and found your note. How soon can you move?"

"Move?"

"Yes, of course. The family will stay on in Simla throughout the hot weather, and I'll be alone. No reason for you to stay on here."

"But I've got Loren Tutell with me. He's going to do the photography on the expedition."

"Splendid! Plenty of room for both of you. Stay as long as you like. And I can promise you, I've got the best cook in Delhi."

Loren and I checked out of the hotel and moved over to Peter's apartment that very evening.

As Peter had assured me, the apartment was a spacious one. Loren and I were each given a suite of several rooms. It was in a large cream-colored house, only one story in height but occupying about the space of a New York city block, at No. 12 Aurangzeb Road, across the street from the residence of Mr. Jinnah, chief

founder of the new state of Pakistan, which would come into being on August fifteenth, with Mr. Jinnah as its first governor-general.

Our fourteen small trunks—army foot lockers—full of photographic equipment were taken over to the apartment by lorry. They weighed nearly a ton.

Peter's staff of house servants, consisting of four men and a boy, was drawn up at the front door to salute us on our arrival. There was no servant problem in Delhi. With the approaching end of British administration of India, many English families had already departed, and servants far outnumbered the available jobs remaining. Of the four, the highest paid was, of course, the cook. We had insisted on sharing the household expenses, and our half of the cook's wages came to two and a half dollars a week.

Peter had also engaged an extra man to serve as our personal valet. He was an old gentleman, a Moslem, of venerable appearance, with a huge white beard and excellent chits. Naturally we called him Grandpaw from the first. Loren wanted to know what a chit was. We explained that the word meant a note delivered by messenger, but also was applied to the letters of recommendation given to house servants by former employers, which they carry with them at all times and consider of the greatest importance. Whether they have been in the service of a foreigner for ten years or only one day, they insist on getting a chit when they leave. And since they never keep a chit unless it is complimentary, every servant, everywhere, is always described in a chit as being "incomparable," "remarkable," "fantastic" or "super," and, in the case of several chits written by former GI's, "super-duper." Grandpaw had one of these latter in his collection. We paid this venerable paragon—and he really was a paragon—two dollars a week.

"Just remember," Peter warned us in a whisper, "not to wander around your bedrooms in the nude when he's present. That would shock a Moslem's sense of propriety beyond endurance."

We also hired a *dhobie*, or laundryman, for a dollar and a half

for the week. "Change your shirts as many times a day as you wish," said Peter, "because if you don't put on at least three shirts every day he will be annoyed. If you don't, he won't have enough to do, and the other servants will look down on him."

We did our best.

We turned in early that night, and I woke up at about eight the next morning from a dream in which the Shanti brothers had set up a buzz saw just outside my window and were sawing little elephants out of cedar logs at the rate of one every minute. But the rhythmic sound of the saw kept on, even after I was awake; and I finally got up, wrapped a sheet around me and stepped out onto the wide front porch to see what was going on.

There, squatting against the farthest wall, sat an Indian in an incredibly filthy costume of patched-together rags. And by his side, with his legs stretched out over the tiles of the porch, his paws folded over his stomach, and his head propped against the wall behind him, was a huge black Himalayan bear.

Mr. Bear was sound asleep and snoring as loudly and rhythmically as any buzz saw. His mouth had dropped open, and he didn't have a tooth in his head.

I burst out laughing. Peter came out, followed by Loren.

"Where did this ridiculous creature come from?" I asked.

Peter chuckled. "Well, Loren said he wanted to photograph anything unusual that might turn up, and I passed the word along to the servants. This fellow and his bear came walking along the road about half an hour ago, so they collared him and brought him in here. Think he'll make a good picture, Loren?"

"I sure do," exclaimed Loren. "Can he dance?"

"From the way he snores, I wouldn't be surprised if he sang as well," said Peter. "But let's breakfast first, and then have the concert."

Breakfast over, we went out on the porch again. The bear was still asleep and snoring, but his ragged master prodded him to his

feet. Upright, he stood nearly as tall as a man. He shuffled forward a step or two and held out his forepaw pleadingly, as if wanting to shake hands.

“Don’t trust him,” said Peter. “He may be toothless, but he could crush a man’s ribs with those forearms of his.”

I backed away. “Makes you think of that poem of Kipling’s, doesn’t it?” Peter added, smiling. “The one warning the world never to trust the bear that walks like a man—meaning Russia, of course. Kipling was continually prophesying that Russia would someday invade India by way of the mountain passes of the north, you know. And he was firmly convinced that Russia would break her word whenever it suited her to do so. Well, England will be out of India soon, worse luck. After that, it will be India’s and Pakistan’s headache.”

“But it’s been fifty years or more since Kipling began predicting a Russian invasion of India,” I objected, “and there hasn’t been any invasion yet.”

Peter smiled. “What’s fifty years in the life of a country that’s ten thousand years old?” he retorted. “Yesterday and Today and Tomorrow are all mixed up in the same box, so that you can’t tell one from another.”

Loren finished taking his pictures of the poor old bear. Peter Green then took us in his car for a tour of the extensive area several miles south of the city in which stands the tall tower of the Kutab Minar, surrounded by the tombs of emperors and kings who had been dust for six hundred years—an area now chiefly occupied by the hovels of the poor. The morning was insufferably hot and humid, and a haze composed of fine particles of dust overhung the city. The most refreshing incident of the tour occurred when we stopped for a moment to look at the ancient stone swimming pool known as the Bath of the Daughter of the Emperor Shamsud-din Altamsh. It stood near the foot of a slender cylindrical tower which seemed to me fully sixty feet high. As soon as our

car drew up, a half-dozen almost naked Indians who had been dozing in the shade of a ruined wall rushed up to us and clamorously offered to dive down from the top of the tower into the shallow pool, in return for money. We told them that if all of them would jump we would give them one rupee each.

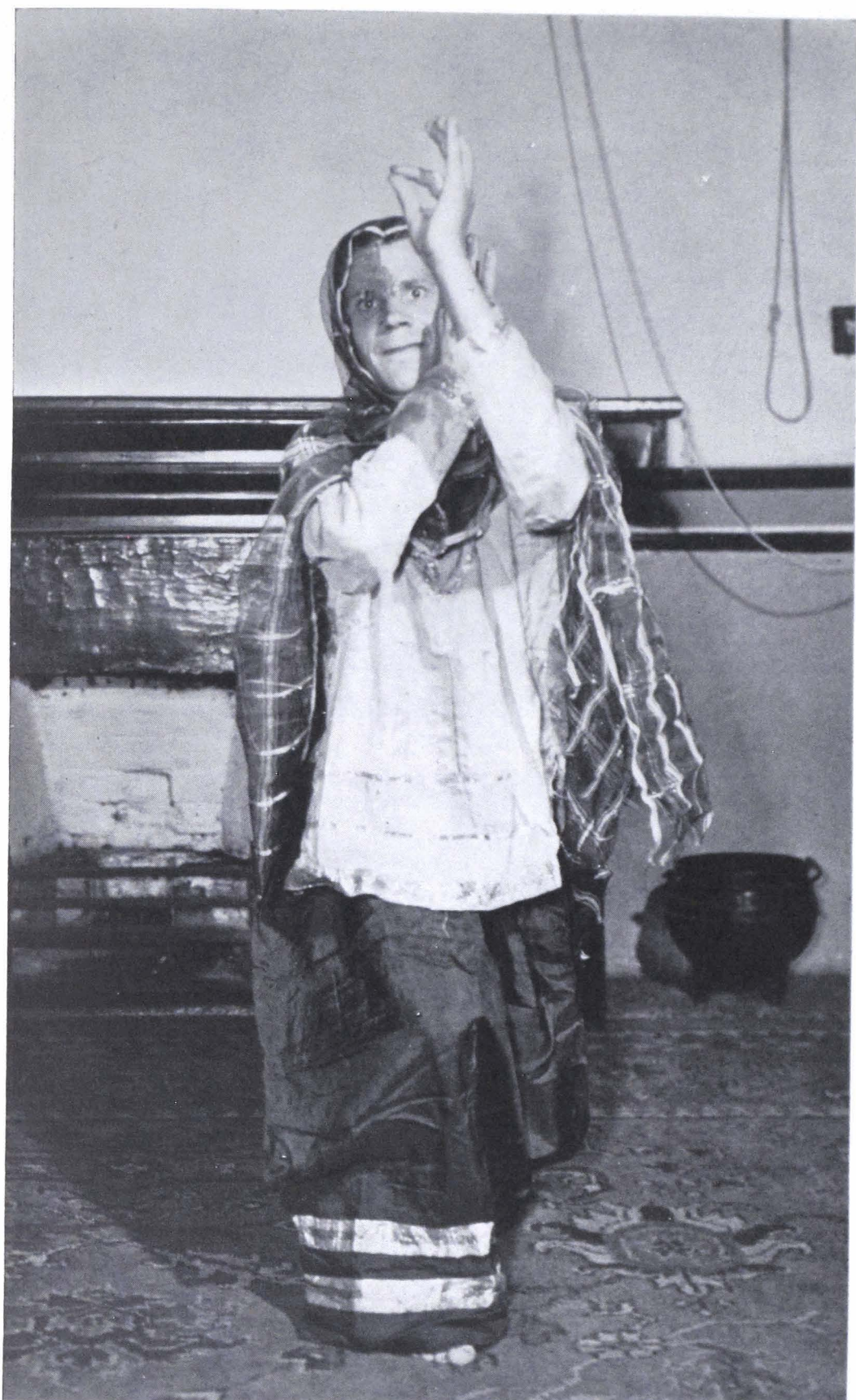
The athletes howled that this wasn't enough, and began arguing for more—all of them except one, an eager beaver who decided that he would jump first and argue later. It was a really spectacular dive and when he came back to the car, dripping, we handed him five rupees. At this, the other five rushed off and plummeted down into the pool, landing practically on top of one another. We hadn't bargained for this, and we got back into the car and drove off as they were swimming out. The rugged individualist who had got his five rupees looked down at them, grinning, and then, suddenly realizing that his position would not be enviable when they got back, took off down the dusty road like a frightened rabbit. When we last saw him, he was still in the lead, with all five streaming after him in hot pursuit.

Loren alone seemed moody. "For my money," he muttered, "I'd rather see the princess herself do that dive."

"Impossible." Peter chuckled. "She's been dead for seven hundred years."

This seemed to settle that point.

Ever since we had moved our mountain of luggage from our hotel, I had been wondering if I ought not to hire a number-one boy to attend to it on the long trip to Kashmir and into Tibet, and I now asked Peter if he could recommend one. He knew of no one, but when we got home he telephoned to the offices of the Security Police. "They'll send a man over," he assured me, after he had told the police what was wanted. "He's a Punjabi Mussulman named Medhi. They say he's an excellent packer of equipment, an extremely rugged chap, and he'll know how to handle your caravan servants."



SURELY THIS ISN'T ALFRED—IT'S A GYPSY DANCING GIRL!

In this disguise the indomitable Cockney soldier proposes to convey his master's fortune in jewels to a safe hiding place.



SIKH PRINCES—THE BABA SAHIB (left) AND HIS SON



WALT MASON, OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS (left), AND THE AUTHOR

Medhi duly appeared. We took an instant dislike to him. He was thin but tough, with arms like bands of iron, and carried himself like a soldier. But he looked exactly like a hawk, with a thin beak of a nose and a pair of the most cruelly glittering black eyes I have ever seen in any human being, the eyes of a bird of prey. But he claimed that he had handled caravans in Kashmir, and to Gilgit, and had crossed the great passes of the Karakoram into Turkestan.

“I don’t like this fellow’s looks,” Peter whispered to me. “There’s something about him that makes me think he can’t be trusted. I can’t put my finger on it—it’s just a hunch. But if I were you, I wouldn’t promise to keep him all the way through. When you get to Srinagar you can look around for someone to suit you better.”

In spite of Peter’s warning I hired him, for I simply couldn’t face the rail and bus trip from Delhi to Srinagar without someone to look after those fourteen heavy boxes. I agreed to pay him a hundred rupees a month, out of which he was to pay for his own food, an amount which Peter said was more than generous. I gave him ten rupees in advance, to buy some articles which he said he would need, together with four shirts. Loren contributed two pairs of white duck pants, which seemed to fit him perfectly, a bed was found for him in the servants’ quarters, and we hoped that our fears were unjustified. But Peter’s house servants hated him from the moment he appeared, and I have no doubt he made himself thoroughly obnoxious to them.

Another visitor that afternoon was a gentleman named Ahsan Allah. I had met him at the home of Pandit Nehru, who was to be premier of the new Dominion of India. Mr. Ahsan Allah hailed from Kashmir, home of Mr. Nehru’s forebears, and claimed to be a great friend of the Premier’s. He had formerly been secretary of the Chamber of Commerce of Srinagar and was now the director of the Army Agency, a private organization, reputed to have made a fortune by selling camping equipment and acting as agent

for many of the eight hundred houseboats which, in Srinagar, are rented by tourists in place of hotel rooms. He was a Moslem, as are the great majority of Kashmir's inhabitants, and opposed to the rule of the Maharajah of Kashmir, Sir Hari Singh, who is a high-caste Hindu and who had filled most of the offices of the state with Brahmins and other high-caste Hindus. Mr. Ahsan Allah had been frequently in prison for his political views, but this seemed to have had no effect upon his jauntiness. He was attired in European clothes, but with an orange turban, and he oozed salesmanship.

"I hear that you are thinking of renting a houseboat through the Thomas Cook agency for your stay in Srinagar," he began. "At eighteen rupees a day! That's ridiculous! There are very few tourists in Kashmir this year, and you can get a houseboat complete with servants and food for much less."

"How much less?" I asked.

"At least three rupees a day," he declared. "I can get you one of the best boats in all Srinagar for fifteen a day. It is called the *Ritz*. It is luxurious!

"And we can do everything to facilitate the making of your pictures," he went on. "In fact, I think you should be paid by the government of Kashmir for making them. They will provide most wonderful publicity for our country."

Mr. Ahsan Allah put on such a superb job of salesmanship that we were greatly impressed and decided then and there to sign on the dotted line.

He went away at last, and I hurried to my room to take a cooling bath, the third that day, and to dispense with all clothing—Grandpaw was not around—until dinnertime.

The dinner served that evening was excellent, as all of the meals had been; Peter's praise of his cook had been more than justified. There was a cold soup, a superb omelet and a delicious cold fish, chilled vegetables, a salad and an orange ice. With the electric fans

playing on us, we forgot the excessive heat of the day—the hottest summer heat, the paper said, that Delhi had known in sixty years.

Loren elected to go to his room for a nap after dinner, and Peter and I relaxed on wicker chairs with a cooling drink beside us.

I remarked to Peter that I had called, the previous morning, on Mr. Trevelyan, Secretary to the Department of External Affairs in the Government of India, to discuss my trip to Kashmir and my expedition across Western Tibet to the borders of Tibet proper. My friend Ronald Sinclair, an Englishman in New York, who had formerly been the British political agent in Peshawar, had written to him in my behalf. Mr. Trevelyan assured me that he had already written to the British Resident Officer in Srinagar and that the Department would also give me letters to the Kashmiri customs officer at the frontier and to the Prime Minister of the Maharajah of Kashmir.

“He told me that he was sure everything would be in order, Peter,” I said jubilantly. “But I must say that he seemed pretty gloomy about what’s going to happen to India after the fifteenth of August, when British rule ends.”

“And why shouldn’t he be?” Peter demanded. “His people have been prominent in Indian governmental affairs for generations, and now comes this abrupt change which affects his life, and the lives of thousands of other Englishmen in the civil and military service of India. But the really alarming question is what will happen to the people of India after the British have withdrawn? The Moslems and the Hindus are already at each others’ throats, and the least spark might make the country run red with blood from one end to the other. You’ll pass through sections on your way up to Kashmir where there have already been riotings. You’ll pass through them again on your way back. The best luck I can wish for you is that you don’t get caught up in any trouble, either going or coming.”

“Well, aren’t you the cheerful little cup of tea!” I exclaimed.

“But at any rate I’ll be in Ladakh, on my way to the Tibetan border, during a good part of the time. It’s not likely that there’ll be any trouble up there, do you think?”

“No, there are precious few Moslems or Hindus in Ladakh,” said Peter. “That’s Buddhist country. Hold on, I’ll ask my cook if he knows anything about it.”

He explained, while we were waiting for the cook to arrive from the kitchen, that the cook was a Buddhist—a Bengali Buddhist, hailing from the Arakan, a section of Burma bordering India on the southeast, which is largely Buddhist in religion. This man, although only twenty-one, had been studying under master cooks since he was ten years old, and, as our dinner had shown, was accomplished in French cuisine. He had an apprentice, a very young boy, who lived and slept in the kitchen, helped with the meals, was paid nothing and considered himself lucky to be learning from such a master.

“These Bengali Buddhist cooks are a clannish lot,” said Peter. “There are many of them employed here, for they are famous cooks, and each day they gather at a privately held auction, bringing with them all the leftover articles of food from their employers’ pantries. At this auction, which only the unofficial union of Buddhist cooks knows about, they can pick up, by exchange, condiments, fruits, special oils for salad dressing, and all sorts of little extras. Usually no money changes hands, one leftover being traded for another, but occasionally they bid in some articles for cash, when that special item is needed for that day’s menu. Since the master of the house writes down in his cook’s order book each day the menu he wants for the day, the shrewd trader usually manages to clear a few pennies each day which he can slip into his own pocket, with no loss to his master. And these cooks exchange gossip, as well as foodstuffs, and they know a lot that never gets into print.”

The cook made his appearance, looking slightly anxious until Peter had assured him that both the sahibs were delighted with

their dinner, at which he bowed gratefully. But when Peter began to ask him if he had heard any rumors of any approaching disturbances, either in India or on the Tibetan frontier, he froze up like a clam. We got nowhere. Peter and I grinned at each other after he left.

“Do you know,” said Peter thoughtfully, “I wonder if he thought we were trying to pump him about disturbances which might possibly be caused by Communists? Burma is simply crawling with Communist agitators, you know, and it would be very easy for them to slip across the border from the Arakan. But he either doesn’t know, or doesn’t want to talk. So that’s that.”

For the rest of the evening we talked of other things, but I noticed that at times Peter lapsed into preoccupied silences. At the end, when I was about to turn in, he said abruptly, “Before you leave Delhi, I want you to meet a very interesting friend of mine. His name is the Khwaja Hassan Nizami, a really wonderful old gentleman who is known as the Khwaja Sahib. He’s the head of an important sect of Moslems, and I’m sure you will find him fascinating. Suppose I see if he can receive us tomorrow. Would you like to meet him?”

I said I would be delighted, and Peter announced the next afternoon that the Khwaja Sahib would be “at home” to us that very evening. After dinner we hailed a tonga and set out. I heard Peter say to the driver, “Hazrat Nizam-ud-din,” and I asked what the words meant.

“That’s the name of the village where the Khwaja Sahib lives,” he explained. “As a matter of fact he virtually *owns* the whole village. It lies on the southern fringe of New Delhi, in the same general direction we took yesterday. It has a population of several thousand, all of whom think of themselves as the Khwaja Sahib’s disciples and servants. The village is named for his famous ancestor, Nizam-ud-din, who is venerated as the Saint. I’ll show you his tomb.

“His descendant, the Khwaja Sahib, whom we are to meet, is

not only the spiritual head of the important Moslem sect known as the Chishti Sufis, who now number more than one hundred and twenty-five thousand members, including many in Iran and Afghanistan, the original homes of the family, but he edits and publishes his own weekly newspaper, *Manadi*, which has a circulation of fifty thousand. He takes the keenest interest in social, educational and political affairs and his advice is much sought after by Moslem leaders of various shades of opinion. All in all, he is really a most remarkable character."

By this time we had passed through a maze of unlighted streets and were entering the village, a thickly crowded warren of low buildings whose walls gleamed white in the moonlight. The tonga picked its way through the narrow streets until it came at last to the entrance of an even narrower lane, where it stopped. This was the end of the road, as far as the tonga was concerned. As we got out, a tall and red-bearded man in a long robe stepped forward and greeted Peter, speaking rapidly in Urdu. He was smiling, but in the dim light of the overhanging lantern at the street corner, his beard gave him a ferocious appearance.

"This is the Khwaja Sahib's assistant," said Peter to me. "He's been sent to guide us the rest of the way." And in a lower tone he added, "His name in Urdu means 'Lover.'"

"Lover" motioned us to follow him and stalked ahead into the labyrinth of dark passageways. Veiled figures, Moslem women in purdah, their faces safely hidden from the prying eyes of the outside world, could be seen at the edges of the rooftops against the moonlight; and other shadowy forms brushed by us on the street. Lover turned off suddenly through a gateway leading into a walled courtyard, led us across this and then a second courtyard, and then up a long flight of wide, stone steps and ushered us out on a terrace, high above the village. A tall, extremely thin figure rose to greet us. It was the Khwaja Sahib.

He was, I thought, in his seventies. His beard was grizzled with

white. He wore a spotlessly white robe of thin muslin, and on his head was perched a sort of skullcap of pink satin. He wore thick spectacles.

In a somewhat high and penetrating but resonant voice he greeted Peter as if the British colonel were a long-lost brother. It was easy to see that Peter enjoyed not only the respect but the affection of this famed religious leader.

Chairs were brought out for us by the servants who had been hovering in the background. Another servant was sent to fetch the guest book, in which we were to inscribe our names. Turning back its pages, the Khwaja pointed with pride to the signature of E. M. Forster, author of *A Passage to India*, and to that of many other British notables, including a former viceroy, Lord Curzon.

The old gentleman seemed much interested in the fact that my home was in San Francisco and told Peter, who was acting as interpreter, that he had made a number of converts to his religion in the United States, including a Jewish family living in San Francisco. The Chishti brotherhood, he explained through Peter, is a tolerant and peace-loving sect which teaches that all good religions tend to the same end.

The Khwaja Sahib asked if I were acquainted with the American Ambassador to India, Dr. Grady. I replied that I had known Dr. Grady's brother in California and that the Ambassador and Mrs. Grady had been most kind to me since my arrival in New Delhi. The Khwaja Sahib watched my face anxiously and then addressed another rapid sentence to Peter.

"The Khwaja Sahib says he is most anxious to meet the Ambassador," Peter translated, "and wonders if you could arrange a meeting for him."

"Tell him that I have an appointment to make some photographs at the Embassy tomorrow morning, and that I'll ask the Ambassador if I can bring the Khwaja Sahib along," I replied. "Provided, of course, that you can come with him, Peter."

The venerable old gentleman nodded vigorously when this was translated to him, and the brief interview was soon ended. Lover escorted us back to our waiting tonga and we rolled away through the shadowy streets. I wouldn't have been the least surprised if we had encountered, in the moonlight, old Kutab himself or some other bejeweled emperor who had paced this very spot, his moonlit garden, six hundred years ago.

The next morning a telephone call to the American Embassy was rewarded by a cordial invitation from Ambassador Grady to bring the Khwaja Sahib along with us. We managed to get a taxi, our photographic equipment was stowed on its top, and Loren, Peter and I drove to the Khwaja Sahib's village to fetch the old gentleman. This time, in the bright light of day, we discovered that the Khwaja's establishment included at least one wholly modern feature—a garage. As we got out, Peter gripped my arm and pointed at the garage door.

“Hold on!” he said. “Here's the very spot where the Khwaja Sahib barely escaped being assassinated!”

“What!” I exclaimed. “Who would ever try to assassinate that mild old man? Are you joking?”

We stepped over to the door. There was a tablet fastened to it, bearing an inscription. Peter pointed to it.

“This commemorates the affair,” he said. “Soon after the first World War, a Hindu reform movement arose, calling for ‘Aryan purification.’ The Khwaja Sahib fought it vigorously for six long years. It was said that by his influence at least half a million Moslems were kept from joining the new cult. Its leaders were so infuriated by his opposition that they tried again and again to kill him. The final attempt was made on January 30, 1928—the date is here on this tablet.

“At half past seven that evening the Khwaja returned from a visit to Delhi, accompanied by his father-in-law, Sayid Mohid

Sadiq, and parked the car in front of this garage. The assassin was lurking in wait for him. But Sayid Mohid Sadiq, opening the left-hand door, was the first to step out. Mistaking him for the Khwaja, the assassin fired. The bullet struck him in the throat as he tried to shout a warning to the Khwaja. Then the assassin ran toward the Khwaja, just as he stepped from the right-hand door. He fired when less than ten feet away. The bullet grazed the Khwaja's ear and buried itself in the garage door. The next shot also missed its victim and struck the door. The third shot likewise missed and buried itself in the door. The assailant then turned and fled, with the Khwaja Sahib in pursuit. As the man ran, he fired a fourth shot at the Khwaja, but this, too, missed. Sayid Mohid Sadiq lived only a half hour. The murderer was never found."

The Khwaja Sahib's red-bearded assistant, Lover, who had come out to guide us to his master, excitedly pointed out the bullet holes in the door.

"Remember, that's not the only time that the Khwaja has escaped death miraculously," said Peter as we went on toward the courtyards, with Lover in the lead. "Other attempts on his life had failed, too. After that one, his enemies gave up. Apparently they came to believe he carries some sort of charm."

"Me, I carry a twenty-dollar gold piece as a lucky piece," I said.

This time Lover conducted us to a small building, a short distance from the terrace on which we had met the Khwaja Sahib the night before, the ground floor consisting of a single large room. Here we found the head of the Chishti Sufi sect squatting cross-legged on the carpets which covered the floor in a bewildering array of color. By his side was a modern dial telephone. Around him were seated, also on the floor, a number of his followers and business assistants. It was very warm in the room, and, in spite of his thin body, the Khwaja Sahib was sweating profusely.

He got to his feet at once, welcomed us graciously, and we set

off for the Embassy. There he made an instantaneous hit with the Ambassador and Mrs. Grady. His commanding presence, his courtly manners and the truly saintlike sweetness of his smile impressed us all. When, with Peter acting as interpreter, he inquired if he might give a dinner party in honor of the Gradys on the approaching Saturday, they accepted the invitation at once. The Ambassador then accompanied Loren and me on a stroll through the Embassy grounds to arrange for the photographs to be taken later, leaving Peter and the Khwaja Sahib to continue their conversation with Mrs. Grady. When we returned a few minutes later, we found them deep in animated talk.

The Khwaja Sahib was profuse in his thanks when we took him back to his village, and when I asked if we might make photographs of the six-hundred-year-old tomb of his illustrious ancestor Nizam-ud-din, the Saint, he not only gave us permission but personally escorted us across the courtyard to the walled enclosure surrounding the tomb. This was holy ground, and, as we had been instructed, we took off our shoes before venturing on it.

The tomb of the Saint stood in the center of the enclosure. A low marble railing surrounded the tomb itself, and above the grave rose a beautifully proportioned cubicle of white marble supporting a domed canopy of marble, inlaid with mother-of-pearl; screens pierced with exquisite patterns took the place of windows and admitted a softened light on the grave. It was truly a little gem, a white pearl glowing beneath the blue sky.

As we went back into the courtyard through a doorway of white Jodhpur marble, Lover, who had been standing respectfully by the door, suddenly fell to his knees and kissed the Khwaja Sahib's feet.

"Hey!" shouted Loren. "Why didn't somebody tell me he was going to do that? That would have made a wonderful shot!"

"Why, we didn't know it ourselves," I replied. "You're right, it

would have made a swell picture, but I guess we're too late now."

But Peter explained to the Khwaja Sahib what we wanted, and the old gentleman graciously consented to go back and come out a second time. As he again emerged from the doorway, Lover again prostrated himself and again kissed his feet. It couldn't have been done better in Hollywood.

The Khwaja Sahib then invited us to come back for tea at five o'clock that afternoon. On our return we were ushered into a long narrow room opening on a large inner courtyard. We found many guests had already arrived, among them my friends Bob Trumbull, correspondent of the *New York Times*, and Percy Wood, who represented the *Chicago Tribune*. Among the Moslems present the one of most striking appearance, I thought, was an imam, or leader of the prayers recited in mosques. He had an extremely handsome face, and wore his robes with great distinction. A Moslem guest told me that the imam's ancestors had held that religious post under the ancestors of the Khwaja Sahib for hundreds of years, and that the magnetism of the present imam when he conducted prayers was so great that any one of several thousand Mohammedans would commit suicide if he told them to do so. We later asked the Khwaja Sahib if this were true, and the old gentleman seemed definitely annoyed at the suggestion that anyone beside himself was entitled to a little glory. He replied with some asperity that the imam was nothing more than a most ordinary man, and that he had no distinguished ancestry at all.

While tea was being served, the Khwaja Sahib's private orchestra, consisting of five musicians, entertained us. The music included a great deal of moaning and groaning from the number-one man, who wrestled with a miniature piano which he carried in his arms while he wailed out the story of his song in the most anguished tones.

On Saturday afternoon, a few hours before the dinner party

which the Khwaja Sahib was to give in honor of Ambassador Grady, Peter rushed into my room with a sizable sheaf of manuscript in his hands.

“The Khwaja Sahib has just sent this over,” he said. “It’s the speech he wants to make at the party tonight. I’m to translate it into English as he makes it, and he wants us to go over it in advance to be sure it’s all right.”

The sum and substance of the address, as Peter translated it for me, was that thirty thousand of the Khwaja’s disciples had now registered with him their intention of making the pilgrimage to Mecca which every faithful Moslem considers it his duty to make at least once in his lifetime. There had been no ships available during the war. Now that the war was over they wanted to get off for Mecca with no further delay. The Khwaja Sahib earnestly hoped that the United States could provide the ships, pronto. He mentioned the fact that it was the Arab Moslem world that had produced great amounts of oil for the United States, and hinted that it was no more than right that America should do something for the pilgrims in return.

There seemed nothing in the speech that the Ambassador could object to, up to this point. But then Peter came to a passage in which the Khwaja Sahib said that he was sure that he had an ally in the gracious wife of the Ambassador, since they had a common ancestor.

“Hey, hold everything!” I interrupted. “What’s this about Mrs. Grady and the Khwaja having a common ancestor?”

“She is of Spanish descent, isn’t she?” asked Peter. “And isn’t there a good deal of Arab blood in the Spaniard?”

“Nonsense!” I protested. “Mrs. Grady’s father was Senator Del Valle, of Los Angeles. Hers is an old California family of Spanish descent, it’s true, but what’s that got to do with Arab blood? How did this come up, anyway?”

“Well, when we were talking to her at the Embassy the other

day," said Peter somewhat sheepishly, "Mrs. Grady happened to mention that she had Spanish blood in her veins, and from there the Khwaja Sahib jumped to the conclusion that they had common ancestry. He's a direct descendant of Mohammed, you know, from the Prophet's daughter Fatima. He liked the idea and told me he was going to put it into his speech."

"Well, it will have to go out," I said. "There'll be a lot of people from the Embassy there tonight, and they'll certainly be surprised to hear that Mrs. Grady is of Arabic descent. No, out it goes!"

"I told him so," said Peter. "But, as you see, he insists on leaving it in."

"Well, you're going to do the translating as he speaks, aren't you?" I asked. "When you come to this, you can just leave it out, or change it, and he'll never know the difference. With all this trouble brewing now between the Hindus and the Moslems, you certainly can't have it said here in Delhi that the American Ambassador's wife is an Arab, or the next thing to it. After all, the Ambassador has to get along with Hindu just as well as with Moslem."

Peter agreed, and that night he did as I had suggested. No one batted an eye. Ambassador Grady responded cordially to the address, promising to do what he could. The whole party was a brilliant success.

On the way home Peter said to me, "The Khwaja Sahib certainly seems to have taken a fancy to you. When I told him you are about to leave for the northwest frontier, he asked me to bring you to see him again before you go. I told him you are leaving tomorrow night and might not have time, but he was very insistent about it."

"Well, he's certainly a wonderful old gentleman," I said, "and he's been more than kind, but that's only because he regards *you* so highly. By all means let's go out to say good-by to him tomorrow."

So we drove out to the village once again, on Sunday afternoon, and the dear old man seemed genuinely sorry to hear that this was my visit of farewell. We could stay for only a few minutes, as I still had some packing to do, but when we rose to go the Khwaja Sahib lifted his hand to detain us.

“You must let me give you something to serve as a reminder of our friendship,” he said. “I cannot let you go without this.”

Beckoning to his red-bearded assistant, Lover, he gave him a rapid order. The man hurried away and returned almost at once with three objects which the Khwaja Sahib took from him and placed one by one in my hands.

The first two were books, one of which had been written by the Khwaja, strangely enough on the Duke of Windsor and Mrs. Simpson, the other containing a preface which he had written. The third gift was a small pillow slip of yellow silk, less than two feet square. On it was printed a rectangle divided into twelve compartments, in each of which strange and beautiful characters were inscribed.

“I understand from Colonel Green that you are going into the farthest northwestern corner of India, and into countries beyond,” said the Khwaja Sahib, with Peter translating as he spoke. “There are many members of our faith in those regions. Keep this always with you, wherever you go, and if you are in trouble it will surely be of help to you.”

I stared at the bit of yellow silk in my hands, wondering how on earth it could ever be of help to me. But he evidently attached so much importance to it that I thanked him earnestly. Then, fishing in my pocket, I brought out the gold piece I had carried there for so many years.

“Tell him, Peter,” I said, “that this is a lucky coin and that I want him to keep it, and I hope that it will bring him the same good luck that it has brought to me. You don’t need to mention that I won it in a poker game.”

The Khwaja Sahib accepted the gift with a bow, but with a twinkle in his eye. I told him good-by with genuine regret. He was not only saintly, he was human.

As we jogged homeward in our tonga, I asked Peter what the Khwaja had meant by saying that there were many members of his faith in the region to which I was going. I had thought that the inhabitants of Ladakh were chiefly Buddhists in religion.

“Oh, he probably got the notion that from Kashmir you were going on to the west, into Afghanistan and Iran,” Peter replied. “That’s the region from which his ancestors came, so many hundreds of years ago, as I told you. There are probably many of the Chishti Sufi sect there today, but I doubt if there are any in Ladakh.”

I was silent for a moment. Suddenly I recalled the curious scene I had witnessed at the little curio shop—the naked wrestlers in the hidden courtyard, and their sinister play. I described the scene to Peter.

“You don’t suppose they belong to one of those secret organizations, do you?” I asked. “Or that they are killers, like the ancient Thugs?”

Peter shook his head. “I wouldn’t think so,” he said. “Perhaps they were just professional acrobats, practicing up for roadside shows. Anyway, that wasn’t the method the Thugs used—their usual method was to strangle their victims, using a sash.”

“A sash!” I exclaimed. “That’s odd, because now that you mention it, I remember that one of the men watching the wrestlers was wearing a sash. I noticed it because it was the same color as the loincloths the wrestlers wore—sort of a pale purple. Fuchsia, perhaps.”

“And its wearer—he was a Hindu, too?” Peter asked.

“Why, yes, I suppose so,” I said. “I really wasn’t looking at him closely. I was watching the wrestlers. He wasn’t a white man, if that’s what you mean. But why do you ask?”

“Oh, I was just wondering,” said Peter carelessly. “If that color were the badge of some secret organization, as you suggest, it would be interesting to know if its membership were international. In that case, it could hardly be restricted to any one religious faith. A member might be either Moslem or Hindu or of no religious faith at all. It’s something to keep in mind.”

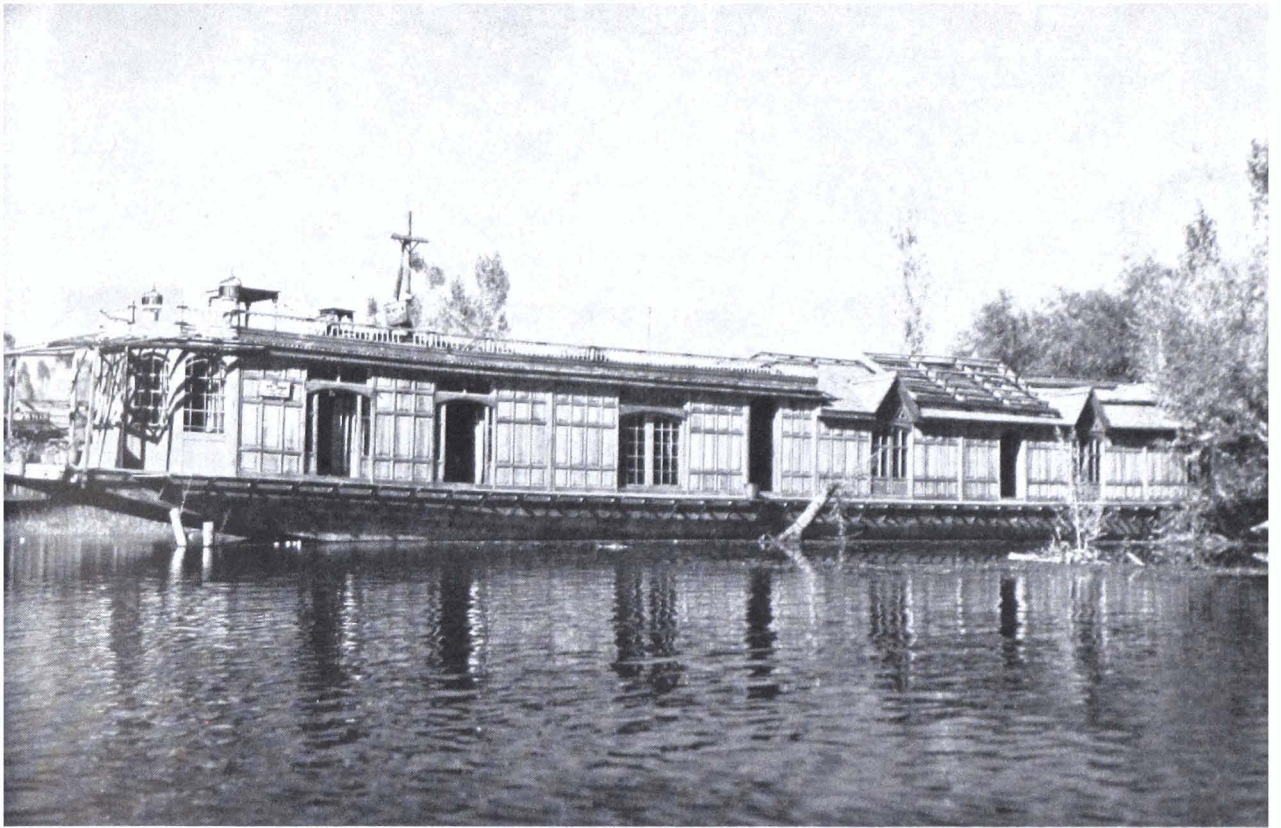
I agreed; but I couldn’t imagine that it would be of any importance to me, personally.

Back at Peter’s, I found that a truck had been sent by Cook’s travel agency to take our heavy luggage to the railway station. I stowed the two books that the Khwaja Sahib had given me into one of the trunks, but on an impulse tucked the yellow silk pillow slip into a handbag. Peter watched me as I did so, with a slight amusement in his eyes.

“Well, you told me yourself that the Khwaja Sahib advised me to keep it always close to me,” I said defensively. “Didn’t he say it would be a help in any trouble?”

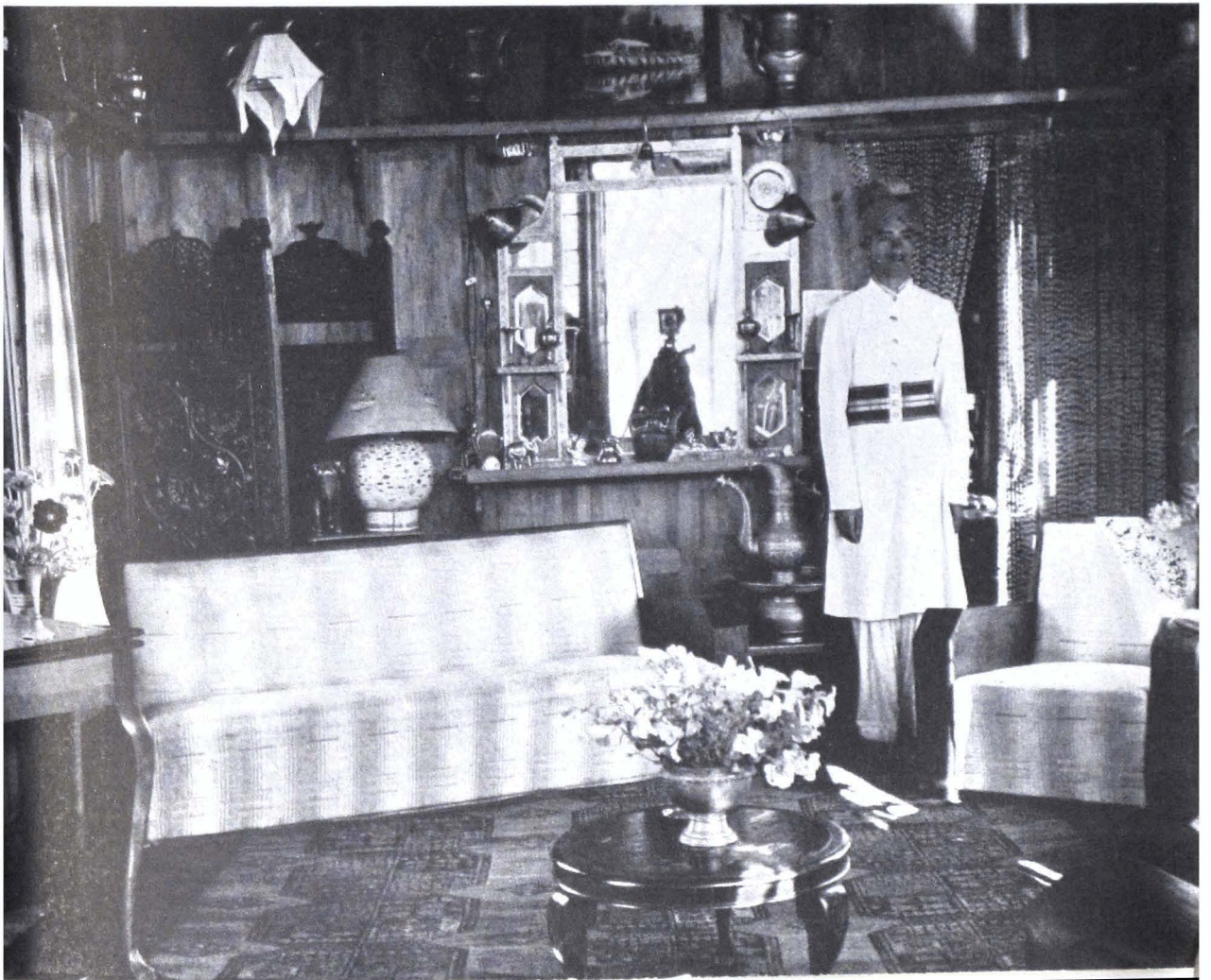
“There won’t be any trouble up where you are going,” said Peter confidently. “You won’t be in any danger anywhere, unless you run into outbreaks of rioting on your way up or on your way back. And let’s hope there won’t be any.”

“What a consolation you are to me, Peter!” I laughed. “Here, give me a hand with this strap.”



THE HOUSEBOAT *RITZ* AT SRINAGAR, KASHMIR—OUR HOME FOR MANY WEEKS

OUR LIVING ROOM ON BOARD THE *RITZ*, WITH NABHA THE BUTLER





SETTING UP CAMP AFTER THE COOK-GUIDE'S FALL FROM HIS PONY



THE ACCIDENT THAT NEARLY ENDED THE EXPEDITION

Thrown from his pony, our cook-guide groans on the ground for more reasons than his dislocated hip.

III

The Last Englishman

THE railroad station in Old Delhi is, I verily believe, one of the busiest places on earth, railroad station or otherwise. Certainly it was that night when we took the train for the Northwest. Trains were arriving and departing from all sides, and the platforms between the tracks were heaped with boxes, bundles and burlap-wrapped bales in bewildering confusion, while between these islands of piled-up baggage swirled a human flood composed, it would seem, of half the population of India. Turbaned men, veiled women, ragged beggars and half-naked children pushed this way and that, while sweating coolies shouldered through the crowd, pushing creaking carts filled to overflowing with all sorts of freight. Hawkers of sweetmeats and bottles of brightly colored soda water cried their wares. An occasional shrill blast from a Lilliputian locomotive pierced through the uproar. Heat, grime, dust and, above all, the stifling humid air of the train shed added to our discomfort. We watched Medhi, our newly acquired servant, keeping check on our multitudinous boxes as they were loaded into a baggage car, and then walked back to our compartment, accompanied by Peter Green, who had come to see us off. Almost immediately the signal for our train's departure was given, and we were off. Peter waved us good-by. I was never more sorry at any parting.

Our compartment was designed to accommodate four passengers, but Loren and I found to our satisfaction that we were its only occupants. Medhi was in a third-class carriage, forward. Just as the train was moving out of the station there came a furious

pounding at our door, and an angry voice shouting to us to open up at once.

I opened the door and was confronted by a wild-eyed individual whose dark face was almost purple with heat and fury. He was dressed in a crumpled suit of white, but his headgear was that of a Mohammedan. He shouldered his way in and demanded angrily, "What's the meaning of this outrage? How dare you lock this door?"

"Well, why shouldn't we?" I countered. "We thought we had this compartment to ourselves. Are you booked in here, too, sir?"

"Most certainly!" he almost screamed. "And I intend to stay!"

"Well, take it easy," I said soothingly. "Make yourself at home. There's room for all of us."

He glared at me for a moment, then his face worked convulsively, and he dropped to a seat and buried his face in his hands. His shoulders shook with terrible dry sobs. Loren and I looked at each other wonderingly, but kept silent. At last the man pulled himself together.

"Forgive me, gentlemen," he said, his voice trembling. "I am almost out of my mind with worry. If I had not found room on this train I would have killed myself."

His haggard eyes pleaded for our sympathy.

"Hear me!" he implored us. "Only a half hour ago I received word by telephone that dreadful events have occurred today at a place no more than fifty miles from here. Throughout this region, as you must know, there are a hundred Hindus to every Moslem. This morning a party of a dozen Hindus came to the house of a certain Moslem and accused him of hiding a Hindu girl in his house. It was false, but they then raped his wife and daughter and murdered them. He escaped and quickly rallied thirty Moslems, overtook the murder party and wiped it out. But then the Hindu population rose in overwhelming numbers, slaughtered every Moslem in the place and are now roaming the whole coun-

tryside in bands, seeking for others to murder. I rushed here to the station and was just in time to board this train."

"And you are going to this place, into almost certain death?" I asked incredulously.

"My wife and daughter are in a village not twenty miles from where this happened," he whispered. "May Allah protect them!"

He lapsed into silence, staring at the floor. We could think of nothing to say which would be of help to him in the deadly danger that confronted him and his family. When he left the train, at a little station, an hour or two later, I think he was not even conscious that he had spoken to us.

Our train rattled on through the night, and Loren and I dozed fitfully. Early in the morning, having reached Amritsar, we breakfasted. At Lahore, a little farther on, the train turned sharply to the north. All through the day we had glimpses of the road paralleling the railroad tracks. Along it plodded two miserable processions—Hindu families trudging southward and eastward to escape from territory which would soon be ruled by the new Moslem state of Pakistan; Moslem families tramping in the opposite direction, fleeing from Hindu territory.

The five-hundred-mile rail journey from Delhi northwestward to Rawalpindi, on the very fringe of the Northwest Provinces, occupied nearly twenty-four hours. The train reached Rawalpindi late Monday afternoon, and our mountainous pile of equipment was heaped up on the station platform. Before we could get it to our hotel, we were obliged to pay and pay. The railroad attendant into whose hands we fell claimed that we had a far greater amount of luggage than the rules allowed, and threatened to squeal on us if we didn't give him his cut. We finally paid him five rupees and were allowed to get the bags onto a truck bound for Flashman's Hotel, at which rooms had been reserved for us by Cook's agency in Delhi.

Our rooms were in an annex, a short distance from the hotel

proper, and were the same that I had occupied when last in Rawalpindi, in 1944. We had scarcely got our baggage stored away when a violent windstorm arose, blowing sand in everywhere. It seemed more like the Sahara than the Punjab.

When we turned in that night, our man Medhi announced that he would sleep across the threshold, so that no one would be able to get by him. He made gestures indicating that he would wring their necks if they tried it, and gritted his teeth as he did so.

“He certainly is one tough-looking baby,” said Loren, regarding him admiringly. “All but that hat. I can never get used to that hat.”

Like all Punjabi Mussulmans, Medhi wore a turban that flowed up and out behind the crown. It was by no means the type of turban we had become used to seeing. It had more dash and personality and was less like a turban than like some fancy headdress designed for Hedda Hopper. If Medhi’s face hadn’t so much resembled a hawk’s the turban would have given him quite a debonair appearance.

“Sleep wherever you please, Medhi,” I said. “But don’t forget that we are counting on you to take us to that falcon hunt tomorrow. We want to make pictures of that hunt, and I don’t mean maybe.”

We had been told in Delhi that the ancient and kingly sport of falconry was still practiced somewhere near Rawalpindi, and had tried to arrange through Cook’s to see it, but without success. Medhi had then assured us that he could arrange it. I just wanted to make sure.

“The sahib can count on Medhi,” he declared in his slow-motion speech. “Medhi always please the sahibs.”

“Just lead us to the hawks and we will be pleased,” I said. “But no hawks, and we will be two sahibs who are plenty displeased.”

Medhi beat on his breast like a cigar-store Indian back home.

“Medhi get hawks,” he insisted. “Medhi get everything!”

He went off somewhere at dawn the next morning and came back just as we were finishing breakfast, bringing a hired car with him. The cameras were loaded into it and we set off. The first stop was in front of a dingy dwelling in a crowded street not far from the hotel. Nothing happened here. It developed that this was the residence of one of Medhi’s relatives and that he had stopped here merely to show off. We then drove on to the outskirts of the town and finally drew up in front of a somewhat Victorian villa, with extensive grounds, on the Murree Road. It was surrounded by a high wall whose top was studded with broken glass, and there were two native guards at the gate. A neat sign on the gate proclaimed it the Villa Pilla. Medhi got out and entered into a long discussion with the guards, one of whom finally escorted him up to the house.

What in the world can such a place as this have to do with hawking? I wondered. We had not long to wait for an answer. Medhi soon returned, accompanied by two very distinguished-looking gentlemen, both of whom wore luxuriant black beards, as do all Sikhs.

“I am the Baba Sahib,” said the elder of the two Sikhs in perfect English, “the Baba Surindar Singh Bedi, and this is my son, Kanwar Sardul Singh Bedi. Your servant tells us that you wish to see our hunting falcons. It would be a pleasure to show them, but during the hot season we always send them away to the hills. We only hope that you can be our guests later in the year, when we have brought them back here. In the meantime, do come in and let us offer you some refreshment.”

We apologized profusely. We explained that we thought Medhi was bringing us to some public place, where we could pay for an exhibition of hunting with falcons, and begged them to forgive our blunder.

But the two hospitable gentlemen refused to listen to our apologies and insisted that we must come in. We were ushered into a large drawing room, and a servant was dispatched to bring in a tray of lemonade.

We soon learned that the Baba Sahib's father was the late Rajah Sar Baba Gurbaksh Singh, K.C.B., and that the Baba himself was entitled to use the title of Rajah, but had recently discarded it. He is the head of all the Sikhs, numbering many thousands, in this area, from Rawalpindi westward to Kabul in Afghanistan.

We had chatted only a few minutes when the tray of lemonade was brought in, and we were surprised to see that it was carried, not by the servant who had been sent for it, but by a young Englishman. He was dressed in khaki trousers, much faded but neatly pressed, and the khaki bush jacket of British troops in India; on one sleeve was the faded marking which showed that the insignia of a noncommissioned officer had once been sewed there. He hadn't the look of a servant, and, from the sharp glance that he gave us as he entered, I suspected that he had brought in the tray merely to give himself a chance to see who the Rajah's guests might be.

"This is Alfred," said the Baba Sahib, beaming. "Alfred, these are two American gentlemen, Mr. Smith and Mr. Tutell."

Alfred put down his tray and thrust out his hand. He was not a tall man but he had a paw as big as a ham. His accent showed him a Cockney born and bred.

"'Appy to meet yer," he said. "'Ot dye, ayn't it?" And with this he unceremoniously departed.

I was mystified by the presence of an Englishman, an ex-soldier, in a Sikh household, but before I could ask any questions Loren remarked to the Baba Sahib, "I notice that you have this place pretty well guarded, sir. You are not expecting any trouble, are you?"

The Baba Sahib's expression immediately grew stern. "If trouble comes, we shall be ready for it," he said. "Yes, we have already had trouble, serious trouble, and we are preparing to meet whatever may come."

He then told us that his family countryseat was at Kallar, eighteen miles from Rawalpindi, an estate on which stood a palace of two hundred rooms. His landholdings extended for miles around the palace, the farm workers living in various small villages. In March, four months before this, these villages were suddenly attacked by Moslem bands which massacred the defenseless villagers, men, women and children, without mercy.

"Let me list for you," the Baba Sahib continued, his eyes flashing, "the villages near my country property where these outrages took place. At Dhobaren, six miles from Kallar, five hundred and seven Sikhs, including women and children, were murdered. The bodies of eighty-six women were found in a single well, into which they had jumped to escape their attackers. In Thambli, six miles from Kallar, three hundred and twenty-five were murdered. In Bewal, eight miles from Kallar, three hundred and seventy were murdered. In Choa one hundred and fifty were killed. In Dazin twenty were killed. In Thoa two hundred and fifty were slaughtered. In Nara, ten miles from Kallar, two hundred were murdered. More than a thousand others of my people were murdered right here in Rawalpindi. In all, nearly three thousand Sikhs were massacred by the Moslems. I am of the sixteenth generation in direct line of descent from Nanak, the first great guru of the Sikhs, and in all the four hundred years since his death no such thing has ever happened to our people."

"How horrible!" I gasped. "Were there no survivors at all?"

"Many hundreds escaped and fled here," said the Baba Sahib grimly, "and I gave them protection within these walls until they could be escorted into safer territory. Now only my son and I re-

main here, with a few servants and a handful of guards, who are being trained by Alfred. But the Moslems know we are well armed and have not yet dared to attack us.”

At that moment there was a shrill whistle outside the house, followed by the sound of running feet.

“What’s going on out there?” I exclaimed.

“Oh, that’s just the signal for the drill that Alfred puts the guards through every day,” said our host, smiling. “Would you like to watch it?”

We followed him out-of-doors and to a small building at the rear of the villa, at the door of which Alfred had already posted himself. Guards were running toward the building from all directions; and as each one reached him, Alfred handed him a rifle and a cartridge belt from within the armory and barked out a curt order which sent the man running to his allotted post along the high wall surrounding the estate. We were amazed by the briskness and efficiency with which the little Cockney handled his men, and as we returned to the house I asked the Baba Sahib where he had managed to acquire such an admirable drillmaster.

His reply astonished me. “We picked him up practically out of the gutter,” he replied. “One of my servants reported that he had found an Englishman doing menial work in a fifth-class restaurant right here in Rawalpindi. He was sick and half starved, slept on the floor in a corner of the kitchen and was tossed scraps of food like a dog. How or why he had drifted here I don’t know and I shall never ask. Perhaps he had spent his mustering-out pay in a prolonged spree, had wound up penniless and was ashamed to ask for help. It doesn’t matter. I brought him out here, nursed him back to health, and he is as you see him now. He is devoted to us. This is his home. We are his people. He never wants to go back to England. For better or worse, our fight is now his fight. If any Moslem should ever try to break in here, Alfred would kill him without hesitation.”

It suddenly occurred to me that our man Medhi, who was sitting in the taxi at the gate, under the watchful eyes of the guards, was a Moslem.

“After what you tell me,” I said, “it seems odd that our servant, who is a Punjabi Mussulman, should have brought us out here to you.”

“Oh, that is quite understandable,” said the Baba Sahib. “Our hawks are the best in India. All visitors to Rawalpindi who are interested in falconry have always called on us, and we are delighted to receive them. Your servant knew that. We are only sorry that the hawks are not here at present.”

Father and son then joined in inviting us to return to dine with them that evening, and we accepted gladly. I hoped for another glimpse of Alfred, and I was not disappointed.

Through the dinner—at which we saw nothing of Alfred—the Rajah and his son spoke gloomily of their own prospects, in an India facing profound political and economic changes. They spoke again of the farmlands surrounding their ancestral palace at Kallar, and of the ruination wrought there by the Moslem raids on their villages. They were convinced that the attacks would be followed by others, as soon as the new state of Pakistan became established. “Mr. Jinnah has his eyes on Kallar,” they said darkly. They described their great agricultural holdings near Montgomery, two hundred miles to the southeast, on which eighteen thousand workers were employed. But these workers, they said, were now being incited to strikes and sabotage by Communist agitators, and their income from that source was being seriously threatened. And the interim government, they complained, had done nothing to help them.

“Where do these Communists come from?” I asked.

“If one knew the answer to that,” said the Baba Sahib, “one would know the answer to many questions. They are like the sands of the sea. There are so many of them, and they change

their positions as quickly. But wherever they go, they stir unrest.”

“Do you think that it was they who incited the attacks at Kallar?”

“The Moslems have never needed any urging to violence,” said the Baba Sahib bitterly. “But now that the British are leaving, there is no one to hold them in check. Would that our great leader Ranjit Singh were alive today!”

He gestured toward a portrait, framed in gilt, hanging on the wall. “Yes, that is Ranjit Singh,” he said. “He has been in his grave for more than a hundred years, but if he were here we would have no trouble either from Communists or Moslems. He would know how to deal with them!”

“And this other portrait?” I asked. “Who is that officer?”

The painting, hanging next to that of Ranjit Singh, showed a tall and portly man, dressed in a uniform of sky-blue, richly braided with gold, such as was worn by high-ranking officers in the Sikh service. But his features were European, rather than Indian.

“He looks like an Italian,” I observed. “He wasn’t a Sikh, was he?”

“That,” said the Baba Sahib, “is the famous General Avitabile. You are right; he was an Italian, a soldier of fortune who was military adviser to Ranjit Singh in his long and victorious warfare against the Afghans. Ranjit Singh drove the Afghans out of the Punjab and back into their own territory—the only successful invasion in Indian history, by the way, in that direction. Did you know that it was Ranjit Singh who took the great Kohinoor diamond, which is now one of the crown jewels of England, from an Afghan prince? Well, General Avitabile served the Maharajah Ranjit Singh so well that he was made governor of the province of Peshawar. The province was then in such a state of disorder that there was great difficulty in collecting any revenue, and no Sikh could venture outside the city without running the risk of

murder. In the first year of his residence five hundred Sikhs met with that fate.

“But General Avitabile ruled with an iron hand, and it was not long until all the unruly population was disarmed and the Sikh soldiery was able to maintain order. The general had a habit of getting things done quickly.”

“There is a story about him that illustrates that,” said the Baba Sahib’s son. “In 1839, during his third year as governor, he gave a great dinner one night at his palace in honor of fifty British officers. The great hall of state in which they were received was completely paneled in wood, ceiling as well as walls, and the panels were painted over with voluptuous scenes, principally of women in the extreme of undress. From this room the guests were ushered out on a balcony extending along the whole eastward façade of the palace, from which they witnessed a display of fireworks. A banquet followed, at which one course consisted of lambs roasted whole and stuffed with rice, raisins and pistachio nuts. After a prolonged session at the table, the guests were shown to their bedrooms.

“Next morning, when breakfast was served in the great paneled hall, they saw with astonishment that all the naked women portrayed on the panels had been provided overnight with trousers. One of the guests asked if this had been done because cold weather was approaching. ‘Not at all,’ said General Avitabile. ‘It is only because the wife of the British envoy at Kabul in Afghanistan is expected to pass through on her way to join her husband, and I was afraid that she might be shocked if she saw so much exposure of the female form.’”

“He must have been a fast worker indeed,” I observed. “Tell me, did he remain long as governor of Peshawar?”

“Only long enough to amass a fortune,” said the Baba Sahib. “You see, in that same year, 1839, Ranjit Singh died, and his successors were not strong enough to maintain the Sikh rule much

longer. General Avitabile decided to return to Italy. Fortunately for him, the immense wealth which he had accumulated consisted of jewels and plate—portable property. How he had acquired it I cannot say, but we, a century later, are not here to judge or condemn him. At any rate, difficult though it must have been, he managed to get it safely out of the country, bought himself a palace at Naples and lived to a ripe old age.”

Dinner over, our hosts led the way to the drawing room. “We cannot entertain you with a display of fireworks, such as General Avitabile provided for his guests,” said the Baba Sahib smilingly, “but perhaps you will be interested in an exhibition of dancing by a gypsy we have engaged for the evening. We think she is quite talented, and we would like to have your honest opinion of her art.”

He walked over to a gramophone—a portable—at the opposite end of the room, put on a record of native music and started it playing. As the first notes sounded, the door beside him opened, the dancer bounded into the room and struck an attitude.

I couldn’t believe my eyes. It was Alfred, in the dress of a gypsy girl.

Draped over his head and shoulders was a purple veil, spangled with silver. His blouse and his ballooning skirts were edged with silver, and at the middle of his forehead hung a golden disc. But it was Alfred, all right. The huge feet peeping out from beneath the skirt, the enormous hands and, above all, the long pugnacious jaw were certainly Alfred’s. He was as funny a sight as I have ever seen, and I had an almost uncontrollable desire to burst out laughing. I didn’t even dare glance at Loren, for fear we would both burst into roars.

I glanced, instead, at the Baba Sahib and his son and saw that they were watching Alfred with complete seriousness, and with not the trace of a smile. I didn’t dare to laugh.

Alfred went into his dance, twirling and pirouetting as if he had

been a gypsy girl from his birth, and with never the ghost of a smile on his dead-pan countenance. The record came to an end, Loren and I applauded politely, the Baba Sahib put on another record, and again Alfred twirled and swayed in the motions of the dance. The strangest thing about it was the deadly seriousness of the Baba Sahib and his son, as they studied Alfred's every move and every gesture. It was no joke to them. For some reason it was all grimly important.

The record stopped. Alfred made a little bow and skipped out of the room with a final swirl of his skirts. Not until then did our hosts say a word.

"What do you think of Alfred as a gypsy?" demanded the Baba Sahib, leaning forward eagerly.

I didn't know what to say. It was plain that they considered his impersonation wonderful, and I couldn't admit that in my opinion his disguise would not have fooled a blind man. "Very unusual," I answered, noncommittally.

"Yes, doesn't he do it magnificently?" the son chimed in. "Alfred does everything well."

Loren and I made complimentary murmurs, and he bent toward us with an air of great secrecy.

"Now," he whispered, "we can tell you what we have in mind. My father and I are determined to remain here, for while any of our people stay we cannot desert them. But our palace at Kallar is no longer a safe place, many of our properties are ruined, and the income of our family, which once amounted to a million of your dollars a year, may soon be only a memory. We have treasure in jewels and gold and silver plate worth several millions of rupees safely hidden here for the time being. But before any more attacks are made on us, and we are forced to leave, that treasure must be moved to a place of permanent safety."

"You have the same problem as General Avitabile had when he left Peshawar," I remarked.

“Exactly!” said the young Sikh. “Except that in our case we have no military escort at our command, as he did. But that worries us not at all—we have Alfred.”

Loren and I were too amazed to speak.

“Yes, Alfred is the one to move that treasure,” Kanwar Sardul Singh Bedi continued happily. “We have planned all the details, and he will be ready to start very soon.”

“Singlehanded?” I gasped.

“Of course,” said the Baba Sahib. “He has already made one trip, on which he took gold plate worth two hundred thousand dollars to a safe hiding place in territory inaccessible to Moslem raiders. That was several months ago, before the Moslem attacks in March upon our villages at Kallar. But now, of course, he is too well known in this neighborhood, and it would be unsafe for him to undertake a second trip unless in disguise. It occurred to Father that gypsies are safe from molestation by Moslems, and Alfred is perfecting himself in that disguise. He has been taking lessons in gypsy dancing from a Hindu teacher in Rawalpindi, and, as you have seen, he is already adept in that art. When the proper time comes he will slip away by night to one of our villages, hire an oxcart and come back here. The treasure will be loaded at night into the oxcart, covered with straw, and Alfred will be on his way. There isn’t the slightest danger that he will come to harm.”

Alfred, having exchanged his female attire for his faded British uniform, had returned to the room in time to hear the last sentence. Strapped to his waist was a leather holster from which protruded the butt of a service revolver, in readiness for his nightly rounds of the premises.

“That’s roight,” he said, “when me myke-up is on, they’ll mistyke me for the Queen of the Gypsies. And if all else fyles,” he went on, patting the heavy weapon at his side, “they will ’ave a bit o’ *this* before they get me.”

We thanked our hosts and said good-by. Alfred accompanied

us to the gate. As we climbed into our taxi, I happened to remark idly that in just one more month the British would be leaving India.

Alfred stiffened like a fighting terrier. "Let them go!" he growled. "Let them go! Hi stick 'ere! Hi sticks wiv these Sikhs! For a 'undred years the Sikhs 'ave stuck by the British, and now the British woipe their 'ands and walk out! Let 'em go—let the 'ole ruddy lot of 'em go! Hi st'y!"

He drew himself up and lifted his hand in a farewell salute. Looking back, we found something at once ludicrous and heroic in the figure of the little Cockney, standing there in the deepening darkness. He was the last of a long line.

At seven the next morning we set off for the remaining two-hundred-mile journey to Srinagar, capital of Kashmir. No railway enters Kashmir, and we made the journey by motorbus. Our numerous boxes and cases were lashed on the roof of the bus. There were only two other passengers, one of whom sat beside the driver. The other, who told us his name was Loco Afzal, boasted that he was a nephew of Mr. Jinnah's Ambassador at Large, Feroz Noon Khan, who attended the conference at San Francisco where the United Nations first convened. Loco Afzal was a supersophisticated Mohammedan, who bragged that he had traveled all over Asia and had lived in the Soviet Union. He claimed to be the proprietor of "the leading night club in Srinagar," known as the Bluebird. With a wink he confided that he was transporting heavily dutiable Scotch in a secret cache under the floor boards of the bus. He professed a great love for all Americans and suggested that he would be able to get for us anything we wanted in Kashmir at a discount.

The road wound along the flanks of low mountains, heavily wooded. At Murree, forty miles north of Rawalpindi, at an elevation of seven thousand feet, we had a glimpse of Himalayan

peaks, a hundred miles away. Here we turned eastward and, fifty miles farther on, came to the frontier of Kashmir and the border customs post. The Kashmiri inspectors searched us for beef, whose importation in any form is forbidden. Our sealed cases of motion-picture films were seized, to be sent on by another car to the chief customs office at Srinagar. They contained eighteen thousand feet of film. The inspectors said that only one thousand feet of film could be brought in by one person. My official letters from the British Government, requesting border courtesies, carried no weight. A new arrogance on the part of the native officials was evident, now that British withdrawal was near.

Heading eastward here, we continued our journey for another hundred miles, the bus rocking, shaking, rolling and lumbering along at twenty miles an hour. Darkness had fallen by the time the long, hard, bone-breaking trip was over and we saw the lights of Srinagar twinkling ahead. After trundling over a bridge spanning the Jhelum River, which flows through the city, the bus came to a stop at the company's depot.

The ubiquitous Mr. Ahsan Allah, head of the Army Agency, whom I had seen in Delhi only a few days before, was here to greet us. "Your houseboat, the *Ritz*, is ready for you," he assured us, "and I have a taxi ready right here."

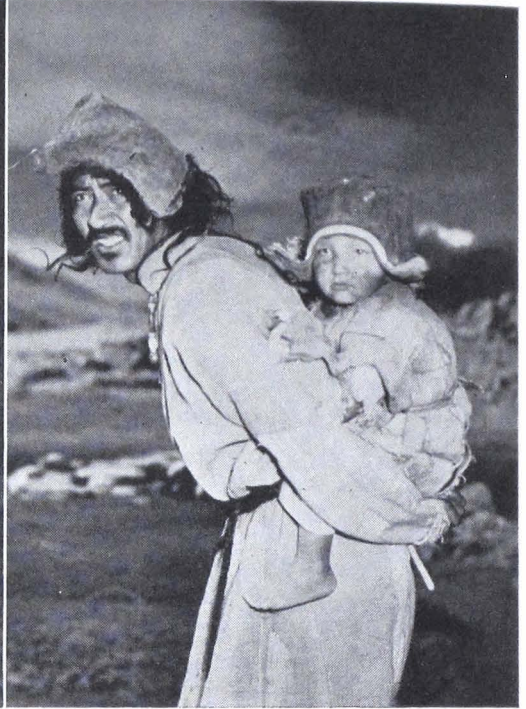
As our luggage was being loaded into another car, I heard someone call out my name, and turned to see the grinning face of a young Moslem peering in at the window. He had served as my bearer when I first visited Srinagar, three years before.

We drove out of the city for some miles to Nagin Bagh, where the houseboat was moored in one of the beautiful canals that lend so much to the charm of the place. Lights twinkled on the houseboat from bow to stern, giving it the appearance of a great yacht. As we climbed aboard, a handsome young fellow dressed in immaculate white came forward to greet us.

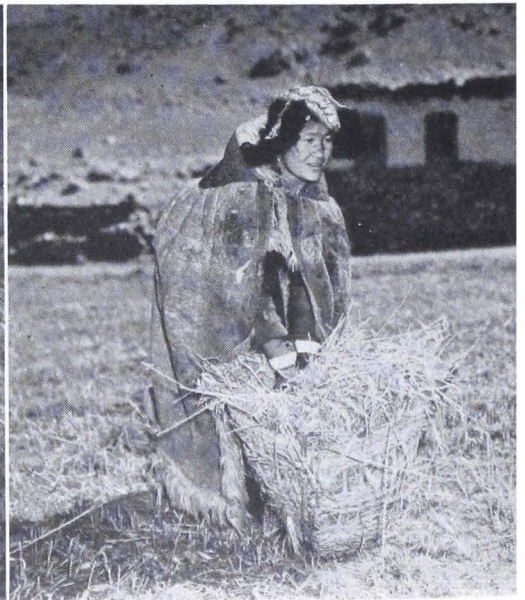
"I am Rajah," he announced. "Welcome to the *Ritz*!"



THE STAMPEDED PACK PONIES WERE ROUNDED UP AT LAST



TIBETAN MOTHERS AND FATHERS DON'T BUY BABY CARRIAGES



HARVESTERS—THE GIRL'S CAPE IS WORN SKINSIDE OUT

IV

Even in Paradise—

THE young man who thus welcomed us was of medium height, slender but muscular, black-haired, black-eyed, olive-skinned, and so Spanish in appearance—although he hadn't a drop of Spanish blood in his veins—that he might easily have passed as one of the sons of the late King Alfonso of Spain.

His name was Sidika Badhyari. "Rajah" was, of course, a nickname. He was twenty years old, already had two wives and was seriously thinking of taking a third wife. He was the owner of the houseboat and showed us around it with pardonable pride.

The houseboat, the *Ritz*, provided us with all the luxury of three bedrooms, with bath, a large living room, a perfectly appointed dining room supplied with fine china, three square meals and afternoon tea every day, and four excellent servants—all for fifteen rupees, or five dollars, a day. The rooms were all paneled in wood and lighted by electricity, the current being supplied by attachments to a power line on shore. The only charge over and above the five dollars a day was a small fee, collected by the government, for the use of the ghat, or landing place, at which the *Ritz* was moored. Rajah summoned the four servants who were to take care of us under his supervision—an older brother of his, whom we never knew except as Big Brother, and who performed all errands between the boat and the shore; a butler, named Nabha, whom Rajah paid fifteen dollars a month and who was prepared to serve dinner at any hour between seven in the evening and midnight; a very obliging cook; and a "boy" whose duty it was to keep our rooms constantly tidied up.

Loren and I got ourselves settled in our bedrooms, and our photographic equipment was stored in the third bedroom, with our man Medhi to guard it. Then, late as the hour was, Nabha served us a wonderful dinner, with hot soup, roast lamb, vegetables and a custard dessert. We felt that we had landed in luck; and we never had to change that opinion.

We slept in comfort that night, and every night during the month that we remained here. On this high plateau, five thousand feet above sea level, cradled by Himalayan ranges to the east and north, the air was always sweet and fresh, the days were pleasantly warm and the nights cool.

Bright and early next morning, our friend Ahsan Allah, manager of the Army Agency, arrived at the houseboat, driving out from town in a hired tonga. I rode back with him, being anxious to arrange at once with the proper authorities for the release of our sixteen thousand feet of film, which the border customs station had impounded when I balked at paying the two hundred seventy-eight rupees demanded as duty.

We went to the offices of the British Resident Officer, to whom I had letters of introduction from the viceregal offices in Delhi. This gentleman received me courteously, but wrung his hands and confided, almost wailing, that there was little that he could do to help me, and that after August fifteenth nothing whatever could be done. He gave me the impression that he believed that British prestige in India had collapsed like a house of cards, and that he was stunned by his government's decision to bring about Partition so soon. I was not surprised. Since my arrival in India I had found this attitude shared by almost every Englishman I met.

In the middle of our conversation the Prime Minister of Kashmir was announced. He was a Hindu, arrogant, cynical, suave, with a veneer you could cut with a butter knife. Ninety per cent of the population of Kashmir is Moslem, but as the Maharajah, Sir Hari Singh, is Hindu, he had filled all governmental posts

with Hindus. The Prime Minister observed to the Resident that he was starting on a fishing trip from which he would not return until after the fifteenth of August, and had therefore dropped in to say good-by. His tone all but said, "It will be a pleasure to find you gone before I return."

I was introduced to him and seized the opportunity to hand him the letter given me by the British Department of External Affairs, at Delhi, assuring me that I could state any problem to him and rely on his assistance. He scarcely glanced at it. Handing it back to me, he looked me up and down coldly.

"Mr. Nicol Smith," he said, with a pseudo-Oxford accent, "your films will not be leaving this country in the same condition in which they have entered?"

"No," I replied, "I hope they'll be exposed."

"Very well then, you will pay the customs duty, whatever the amount."

"But they will be shown as educational pictures," I protested. "No country I have ever visited has asked me to pay duty on films for such a purpose."

"Well, this is Kashmir," he said with a sneer, "and you shall pay."

He turned on his heel and walked out. There was nothing left for me to do but hand Ahsan Allah the two hundred seventy-eight rupees with which to retrieve my film. It was little satisfaction when the newspapers announced, a few weeks later, that the Prime Minister had been tossed into jail, charged with having stolen millions in public funds. My rupees had gone with the public's.

I next called on Mr. Gonsalves, obviously an Anglo-Indian of Portuguese descent, who was assistant to the Resident. He proved very helpful and was not a bit disturbed over Partition. He was retiring to England after August fifteenth on a pension. The Resident had passed on to him the letter from the Department of Ex-

ternal Affairs, and he at once telephoned the proper Kashmiri officials to supply us with the passports necessary for my projected expedition through Ladakh, the eastern province of Kashmir, to Tibet, and to Lake Pangong, the remote salt lake on the northern slope of the Himalayas, which lies partly in Ladakh (Western Tibet) and partly in Tibet proper. This done, he gave me a wealth of suggestions as to the gifts which it is customary to take to the Head Lamas of the various lamaseries (Buddhist monasteries) to which the road through Western Tibet would bring us.

In the busy days that followed—busy not only in completing the arrangements for our Tibetan expedition but because we were making a short motion picture depicting native life in Kashmir—we came to know Rajah, the young proprietor of our houseboat, better and better and to depend on him more and more. He was scrupulously honest, always cheerful, resourceful in solving any problem that confronted us, thoroughly likable.

Rajah was a Moslem. His father, a well-to-do owner of houseboats, had encouraged his son to take a first wife when the boy was fourteen. When Rajah was sixteen, his father presented him with this houseboat, the *Ritz*, and the youngster managed it successfully from the first. He now owned four other boats besides the *Ritz*. When he was eighteen, Rajah took a second wife. The first wife had been a native Kashmiri girl, the second was of Persian descent. Now, at twenty, he was thinking of taking on a third, a Hindu girl whom he had met at a picnic. His family was strongly opposed to the marriage, for Hindus and Moslems have been a-feudin' and a-fightin' for more than a thousand years. Rajah did not like Hindus in general, in fact he disliked them, but he was such a tolerant person that he did not permit this prejudice to extend to individuals. On the contrary, as he explained it to me, when he found himself so strongly drawn to this particular girl, in spite of his feelings toward Hindus in general, he figured that there must be something "extra special" about her.

His life was now divided between his Persian wife in the winter months and the Kashmiri wife in the summer months. Should he marry a third wife, he would divide his time among the three, giving four months to each. He had no intention of divorcing either of his present wives, but he explained that it is customary among Kashmiri Mohammedans that on the day of signing the marriage settlement the divorce settlement is also agreed on and signed. Thus, if the husband should say to his wife, "You are divorced"—for a Moslem divorce is as simple as that—the wife would know at once just how much money she could count on receiving.

I asked him which of his wives would cost him more, in the event of a divorce. "Oh, my Persian wife," he replied. "It would cost me twenty-five thousand rupees to leave her, whereas my Kashmiri wife could be sent home with six thousand rupees."

"Why such a difference?" asked Loren. "Is the Persian wife so much more attractive?"

Rajah smiled. "She is of a wealthy family, an only daughter," he replied. "Her father has a large carpet factory here, and many lacs—hundreds of thousands of rupees. They insisted on this settlement, for, although she won't need it, it is quite large and would more or less guarantee no divorce."

"Do you keep both wives in the same house?" I asked curiously.

"Oh, no," said Rajah. "My first wife lives in my father's house, and my second wife lives in *her* father's house, here in Srinagar. But I keep two guards to watch her. They are from the western frontier of Kashmir, and very tough. They watch her day and night."

"To prevent her from seeing strangers?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't allow her to see even her brothers alone," said Rajah, "nor to go shopping alone. The merchants bring wares to her father's house."

Additional light on Moslem wedding customs in Kashmir was

provided by Rajah's Big Brother—in reality, his half brother, being the son of his father's first wife—whose married daughter came with him to the houseboat one day. She was sixteen years old and had been married for a year, he told us. Her wedding had cost him eighteen thousand rupees, or six thousand dollars in American money. He said that weddings were expensive in Kashmir because of the feast to which all the relatives and friends of the families must be invited, and because of the many elaborate silver and gold ornaments which must be provided for the bride by her father. A father can rarely produce such a sum and so must go to the Hindu moneylenders. Only from the Hindus can money be borrowed, as the Koran forbids Moslems to practice usury. The Hindus demand three per cent a month on the sum, thus plunging the father so deeply into debt that, as in Big Brother's case, he is often unable to provide the wedding expenses for the second daughter. She is humiliated by having to wait so long before she can reach her elder sister's status. Big Brother bemoaned the alarming decrease in the tourist trade, which had begun in the war and was now worsened by the departure of the British from India. Not only had his income been cut, but he had been forced to sell one of his houseboats at a loss.

Rajah had been luckier. During the war, he had rented his houseboat, the *Ritz*, to the American Red Cross, to serve as a rest home for Red Cross nurses on furlough. Last year he had rented it to a real rajah, the younger brother of the Maharajah of Patiala, at a much higher rate than we were paying. But he agreed with Big Brother that this was the worst year for the tourist trade they had ever known. Fifty thousand people in Kashmir depended on it, directly or indirectly, for their livelihood, and the situation was indeed serious.

As we were discussing this, Rajah suddenly asked a question which I found hard to answer. "I like Americans very much," he said, "and I should like to go to see your great country, but

there is something I do not understand. During the war your American Red Cross girls who were staying on this boat would sometimes let me look at the American newspapers which had been sent them from home. The papers all said the same thing, that British imperialism must end and the British must get out of India. Why did they, your people who are so far away from here, wish that? We who are here in Kashmir would like to see more and more British, not fewer and fewer. What will happen to our houseboat business if they should all leave?"

I could only think that, for once at least, Rajah was mistaken. Although such expressions of opinion might have appeared in American newspapers prior to the war, I could not believe that they would be published after we had entered the war and were fighting as England's allies to keep the Japanese out of India. Certainly I had seen no such view. I could not help wondering, myself, what would happen, not only in Kashmir, but to the workers in the tea gardens of Assam, and to the post-office employees throughout India, and the clerks in the banks, and the railroad employees, and to all the vast and complex native civil service which the British had so intelligently and efficiently set up. Worst of all, what would happen when the growing discontent of India's millions was fanned, as it already had begun to be, by the infiltration of Communist agents?

A day or two after our arrival, Ahsan Allah, whose agency was to arrange for the pony caravan to take us on our way to Tibet, came out to the houseboat.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I should like to look over all the supplies you expect to take with you on the journey. I shall have to make a few notes to go by when we start building the packing cases, and to get an idea of how many pack horses will be needed. It is necessary, you understand, to get an idea of the size and weights of the different articles."

"Of course," I said. "You may come in and see for yourself."

We had stored all the equipment in the spare bedroom. Loren had unpacked the photographic supplies, and the boxes of chemicals and film were neatly stacked against one wall. Canned goods and camping utensils were arranged with similar neatness against the opposite wall, leaving just enough space in the middle of the room for our hawk-nosed servant, Medhi, to sleep on the floor. He got sulkily to his feet as we entered, but his piratical expression relaxed a little as he perceived from our visitor's yellow turban that he was a Moslem like himself.

"Hm, quite a supply!" Ahsan Allah conceded, as he glanced around the room. "Quite a supply! We shall need a good many cases and quite a number of ponies."

He moved along the line of loaded shelves, mumbling to himself and occasionally jotting down figures in his notebook. Suddenly he pounced forward. "What's this?" he demanded, pointing a trembling finger.

"What's what?" I said. "Oh, that's just some of the canned goods we brought from the States."

Ahsan Allah expelled a sigh. "Well, you are both lucky," he said severely, "that you are not in prison at this very moment."

"Prison!" exclaimed Loren. "What for?"

"Beef soup!" Ahsan Allah moaned. "Don't you know that the importation of beef, in any form, is absolutely forbidden by Kashmir? If you had been caught with these at the frontier you would have been in serious trouble."

"I knew that it was forbidden to bring in beef," I said, "but I never gave any thought to soups. As a matter of fact it wasn't I who ordered them, but my assistant Art Hall back home in California. They were boxed there at the store, and I never even saw them until the box was opened up here on the boat yesterday."

"How is it that the customs men did not open up the box at the frontier?" Ahsan Allah asked suspiciously.

“I don’t know. I suppose they were too busy with our cases of film. You know yourself what we had to pay to get back what they confiscated.”

“Well, we must do something about this right now,” said Ahsan Allah nervously. “If they ever find out about this you are in for trouble.”

Squatting down on the floor he began to peel the paper label from the can with his fingernail. We told Medhi, who had been taking in the whole conversation, to help him. When the job was finished, Ahsan Allah went on with his inventory of our supplies and found nothing more to arouse his objections.

“Well,” I said, when he had at last finished, “how much is the expedition to Lake Pangong going to cost us? As you see, we have all our own food supplies.”

“Not all that you need,” he said quickly. “You will need flour and various extras. I see you have only a very few cans of fruit. You will need more. You will need fresh eggs every morning, and although you can buy them from villagers along the way their cost must be included. You will need a large tent for yourselves, and a smaller one for the cook. Oh, there will be a number of items needed. For instance, you will doubtless want to take along a little brandy—for medicinal purposes of course. We can supply you with the finest grade of brandy at twenty-one rupees a bottle, an exceedingly low price.”

I told him to include a bottle or two and he assured me that he would see to it personally that the genuine article would be provided.

“Now,” I said, “suppose that the total weight of all the supplies comes to twelve hundred pounds. If each pack pony carries two hundred pounds, we will need not more than six, will we, besides the horses we ride?”

“Oh, you must not expect any pony to carry more than one hundred and fifty pounds over those high mountain passes where

you are going," he exclaimed. "You will need eight or nine, besides your saddle horses. That's a minimum number."

"Well, what's all this going to cost?" I repeated.

He did some more figuring and then said, "The cost will be between twenty-five hundred and three thousand rupees, exclusive of tips, of course. I shall ask you to pay fifteen hundred rupees in advance, before you start."

"Why the advance?"

"Because the man we send along with you to act as guide and cook will have to take that amount with him, to pay for the horses and the men hired to lead them. He will also buy the eggs and the firewood and any other incidentals you will need, out of that sum. We will not get our very small profit, I assure you, until you return and pay the balance due."

"When can you let me know exactly what the whole bill will come to?" I asked.

"Within the next few days, when I have figured everything out. I have given you a minimum and a maximum, but I can assure you it will not be more than three thousand."

"Very well," I said, "but I shall expect that the man you send along with us is competent and can speak good English. I shall need him to act as interpreter for me, and he must understand what I say to him."

"You need have no concern as to that," said Ahsan Allah with a great show of injured professional pride. "The Army Agency provides only the best. This man is not only an experienced caravanmaster, the best of guides and an excellent cook, but he speaks English fluently. You will be more than satisfied with him."

From the moment of Ahsan Allah's departure, Medhi became even more objectionable as a servant than he had been before. He grew increasingly sullen, shirked even the light duties he was called on to perform, and on several occasions was openly insolent. This attitude dated so markedly from Ahsan Allah's visit that we

began to suspect Medhi was under the impression we had committed some fearful crime in smuggling beef soup into Kashmir, and that he felt himself in a position to blackmail us.

The climax came a few days later, when Medhi swaggered into the living room and, with a sneer, handed me a letter which he had paid some Hindu scribe in the market place to write for him. I read it with amazement and silently handed it over to Loren.

“Go out on the deck, Medhi,” I said sharply, “and stay there till we send for you.”

He salaamed with mock humility and stalked out.

The letter was incredible. In it Medhi demanded an increase in wages. We were already paying him one hundred rupees a month, for doing practically nothing, and now he brazenly demanded that this amount be doubled! More, he wanted an allowance of two dollars a day “for expenses.” He complained that he did not like the food given him on the cook boat, which was moored alongside the *Ritz*, and that he needed the expense money to pay tonga hire, so that he might drive into town to get his meals.

“The nerve of him!” Loren burst out. “I always said he looked like a pirate, and now I know it! He knows he isn’t worth what we’re paying him—he’s only trying to shake us down, because he thinks he can blackmail us!”

“Well, he’s got another think coming,” I said. “This is ridiculous. It’s the last straw. It’s only lucky that we’ve found him out now, instead of up in Tibet. Back he goes to Delhi.”

We called him back, paid him his wages to the first of the month, gave him enough money for his bus fare to Rawalpindi and third-class railway passage to Delhi and told him to get out as quickly as he could pack his belongings. He gave us a murderous look, but deciding to keep quiet, backed out, gritting his teeth. Our faithful butler Nabha was sent to keep an eye on him while he packed up, but in spite of this surveillance Medhi managed by some sleight of hand to get away with an alarm clock,

Loren's pet flashlight and several other articles. Rajah came to our rescue. He followed Medhi to the malodorous native lodging-house in Srinagar where he was waiting for the bus, and, in the face of Medhi's violent threats to kill him, took the stolen articles away from him and smilingly brought them back.

Rid of Medhi, we felt that we were in a paradise without a serpent. For the lovely Vale of Kashmir is indeed a paradise. The heavenly lakes fringing Srinagar, an ancient city, still mirror the stately gardens which the Mughal emperors, with all of India to choose from, caused to be placed there three hundred years ago. The canals, along which hundreds of the native gondolas, shikaras, ply from one houseboat to another, are not hemmed in by stone walls but are like quiet streams, and on them spread acres of the lotus flower. In the green meadows close by the city, the wild rose and a hundred other flowers bloom in profusion; and always in the distance can be seen the exquisite blue wall of the encircling mountains.

We were honored one day by a visit from Colonel Reginald C. F. Schomberg, the famous British consular and Intelligence officer, who, since the death of Sir Aurel Stein, is perhaps the greatest living authority on Central Asia. Colonel Schomberg, whom I had met through mutual friends, had spent years in Kashgar and Chinese Turkestan (Sinkiang), and had made many a long and dangerous journey through the vast and little-known region where the lofty mountain ranges of India, China and Russia come together. He is the author of fascinating books describing these travels. He came attended by two of his Turki servants, natives of Hunza, who had accompanied him on many of his expeditions. Thoughtfully he brought with him maps of the territory through which I would pass on my journey to remote Lake Pangong and, spreading them out upon the table, made a suggestion for which I shall be ever grateful.

"Why don't you go to the Hidden Valley of Himis?" he asked. "I've marked the spot on the map, as you see; it's only a very few

miles out of your way, and," he added with a smile, "it's the nearest thing to Shangri-La to be found anywhere in the world today. It's known as the Hidden Valley because of its extraordinary location. Without a guide it would be difficult to find it. Throughout the centuries this undoubtedly saved the little valley and its lamasery from capture and destruction at the hands of Asiatic hordes, sweeping westward. Some doubtless passed it by because they were unaware of its existence, others because they feared that the single narrow entrance could be too easily defended. Whatever the cause, the lamasery of Himis has become the richest and most powerful of all the lamaseries of Western Tibet.

"And you'll have tremendously colorful scenes to photograph, if you find the Head Lama friendly. They've got a four-year-old child there whom they have put on the throne as the spiritual ruler of all Western Tibet. He is called the Skooshok and is supposed to be the reincarnation of the previous Skooshok, born at the same hour that the old Skooshok died, four years ago. And if you can get permission to photograph the devil dancers at the lamasery, you would have superb color for your film. Yes, Himis Valley is certainly the most exciting place in this part of Asia!"

From that day on I thought of the Hidden Valley as our chief goal. After all, the shores of Lake Pangong would be uninhabited. I couldn't expect to find any Skooshok or dancing devils *there*.

On the day following Colonel Schomberg's visit Ahsan Allah came out to the houseboat, bringing with him the contract. I signed it and then asked him when he was going to bring out the man who was to act as our cook and guide, so that we might look him over. Ahsan Allah said smoothly that we need give ourselves no concern on that point, he had picked out the very best man, and he would bring him out in a day or two.

"By the way," he added, quickly changing the subject, "your friend Mr. Walt Mason has arrived in Srinagar. He came in on

the plane from New Delhi, and I met him at the airport this morning. He will be here several days, and I have found a very good houseboat for him. He asked at once where you are staying, and I told him."

I was delighted. Walt Mason was a young American correspondent in India for the Associated Press. I had seen much of him during my stay in New Delhi, and we had become fast friends.

"That's grand news!" I exclaimed. "If you see him again, tell him I hope to see him just as soon as he can possibly get out here."

But it was not until the next afternoon that he appeared. Both Loren and Rajah were away, and I was at work in the living room when I recognized his familiar drawl, as he asked Big Brother if I were at home. I rushed out on deck and pumped his hand vigorously.

"Henry M. Stanley, I presume!" I said. "Gosh, it's great to see you, but why haven't you checked in here sooner?"

"Man, I've been busier than a bird dog ever since I stepped off the plane." Walt grinned as we settled ourselves for a jam session. "I'm on the trail of something I think will be pretty hot news."

"Any luck so far?" I asked.

"Well, not too good and not too bad. I haven't been able to get an audience with the Maharajah so far, but I did have a talk with His Nibs the Prime Minister."

"Oh, so he's back from his fishing trip, then. I hope your interview with him was more satisfactory than mine."

And I told Walt about the Prime Minister's arrogant ruling that I must pay duty on my films—a thing which had happened to me in no other country I had visited. "By the way," I added, "what did you ask him about?"

"For one thing, if there were any Communists in Kashmir," replied Walt with a chuckle.

"And are there?" I asked, thinking of what the Baba Sahib had told me in Rawalpindi.

"According to the Prime Minister, they are everywhere but in

the trees. He said that they had jailed so many Commie agents who had drifted in here from other parts of India that they had had to let them out again. There just wasn't room for them in the jail."

"Well, isn't that just dandy!" I said. "Catch them, and then turn them loose! A likely story! I wouldn't believe that bird under oath anyway."

"I'm just telling you what he said," observed Walt mildly. "Anyhow, I've got other fish to fry."

He said this with such complacency and with so triumphant a glint in his eye that I was sure something was in the wind.

"There's something you're holding back, Walt," I said. "It's written all over you. Come on—give!"

"It's got nothing to do with the Prime Minister," Walt protested quickly. "In fact, the very opposite is true. If he knew where I am going tonight he would be after me like a house afire."

"What's up?" I persisted. "Don't be so darned mysterious. Come on and tell me. You know I'll never spill anything."

Walt leaned forward. "You know who the Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah is, don't you?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"Why, yes, I've heard of him. He's reputed to be the real leader of all the Moslems in Kashmir, and, as you know, they outnumber the Hindus by ten to one. But the Maharajah, Sir Hari Singh, has kept the Sheikh in prison for quite a while, hasn't he? He probably feels a lot safer as long as the Sheikh is there."

"Yes, the Sheikh is in prison," said Walt, almost in a whisper. "But his right-hand man is not. So far, the man has escaped arrest by the Maharajah and his Prime Minister's Hindu agents, although they have hunted him night and day. They haven't been able to lay a finger on him. The guy has been too smart for them. Whenever they close in on one of his hide-outs, he has cleared out, just a few minutes ahead of them, and moved on to some other hiding place."

"And?"

“And tonight,” Walt whispered, “I’m to be smuggled out to meet him at his present headquarters!”

“Oh, baby!” I exclaimed.

“Sh-h-h!” said Walt. “Someone’s coming!”

I recognized Rajah’s voice. “Oh, that’s Rajah,” I said. “He is the owner of this houseboat. He’s a Moslem, and he thinks the Sheikh Abdullah is the greatest man in the world. Don’t worry about Rajah—he’s absolutely discreet.”

Rajah came down the steps and into the living room, then paused respectfully as he saw that I had a visitor. I introduced him to Walt and told him he might speak as freely to Walt as to me.

Rajah took his favorite position, squatting on his heels, with his knees under his chin. Over his head, on the wall, hung the picture of a piercing-eyed individual wearing a fez of astrakhan. Rajah had given it the effect of a shrine, placing two vases of flowers on the small table in front of it.

“Is that a picture of the Sheikh Abdullah?” asked Walt.

“Yes,” said Rajah, looking at it reverently. “He is our great man. He will save us.”

“Save you from what?” asked Walt.

“From the trouble that is coming soon,” said Rajah simply.

“You mean trouble between the Moslems and Hindus here in Kashmir, as there has been in so many other parts of India?”

“No, more than that,” Rajah said somberly. “I have just heard in the market place that a rising of the Pathans is expected, and very soon. Some even named the exact date—August twelfth. They are very bad, these Pathans, and when they are on the war-path they kill many people.”

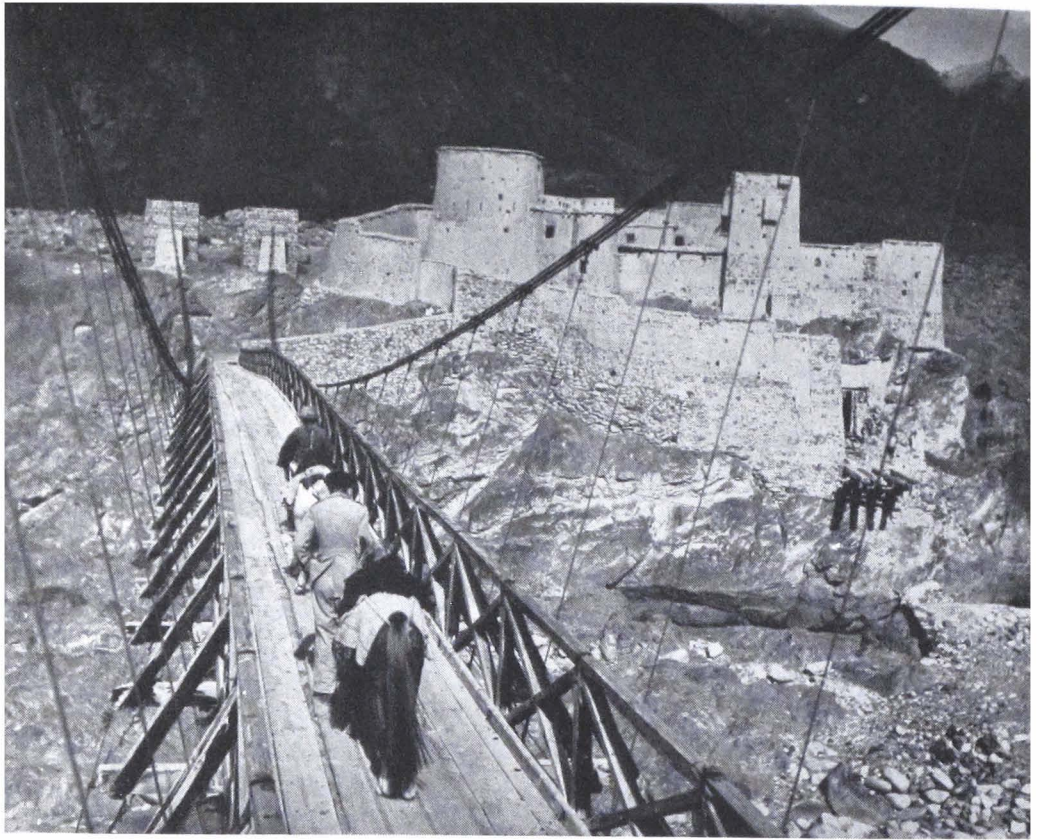
Walt Mason and I exchanged glances.

“Have you ever had any personal experience with them, Rajah?” asked Walt.

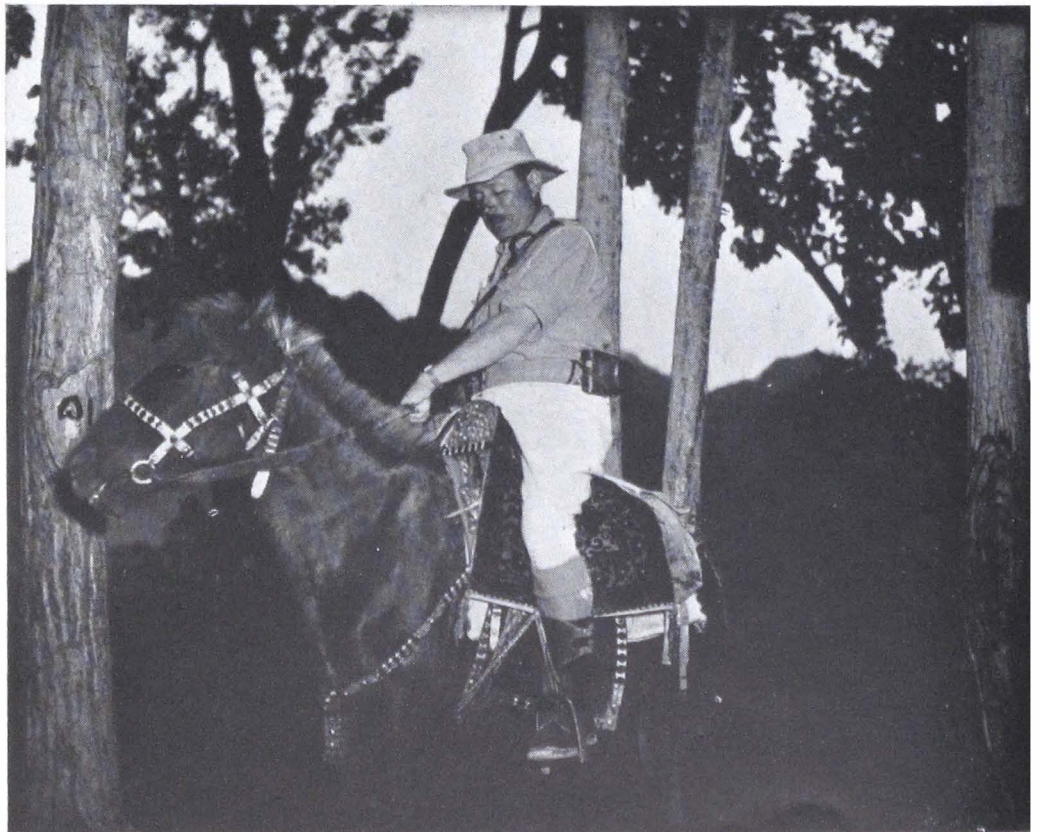
“No, but a cousin of mine was killed by a band of them near the



CHUNREZIG, "THE THOUSAND-HANDED," AT LAMAYURU GOMPA



FORTRESS OF KING NAGLUG, EIGHT HUNDRED YEARS OLD, AND
SUSPENSION BRIDGE SPANNING THE RIVER INDUS



COLONEL JOHN PEART SITS HIS ANCIENT SILVER SADDLE

Afghanistan frontier a year ago. They are very bad," he repeated, shaking his head to give emphasis to his words.

"But I thought Pathans were Moslems, like you," I said.

"They are Moslem," Rajah agreed, "but not like us. They are a peculiar sect of Islam. They are neither Sunni nor Shiah. They are fanatics. They will kill Hindus first, but afterward, when they are maddened with blood and are after loot, they will kill anyone, even us who are also Moslems. Of all Moslems the Pathans are the fiercest. They fight with everyone—even between their own families there are many feuds. The Pathans are not easily led. They do not take orders from any chief. No decision can be made within a tribe until all of its able-bodied men have got together and talked it over. Once they are agreed and have taken to the warpath, it takes a great army or a great man to stop them."

We were silent, and Rajah added bitterly, "Now, with the British leaving India, there is nothing to stop them. The Maharajah here has no stomach for fighting. The Pathans will drive him and his handful of soldiers before them as dust is driven before the wind." His gesture showed his contempt for Sir Hari Singh's native troops. Then his gaze rested on the portrait of the Sheikh Abdullah above him, and his look brightened. "It will take the Sheikh to stop them," he declared. "He alone can do it, and he will save us."

"But I can't believe that there will be any uprising of Pathan tribesmen," said Walt. "Surely that's just another rumor. The market places are always full of them."

Rajah shrugged. "Perhaps," he said, "but these were sensible men whom I heard discussing it. I believe it."

"And you think that after first killing the Hindus they will attack your own people?" asked Walt.

"They would, if they are not stopped," said Rajah. "But before they can get to our people the Sheikh will be out of prison, and he can handle them. He can do anything, even miracles."

“Well, with his connection in the new government at Delhi, from Pandit Nehru on down, he might be able to accomplish something, at that,” Walt conceded. “He certainly has some loyal and able followers.”

“None of the Moslems in Kashmir like the Maharajah, do they?” I asked Rajah.

“I have nothing against him myself,” said Rajah, “except that he is extravagant and cares nothing about us Moslems, who make up the bulk of the population. The Maharajah lives in his great palaces here and in Bombay and squanders millions of rupees, taken from the people by taxation, on his selfish pleasures. He keeps adding to his enormous collection of jewels, maintains a great racing stable and spends huge sums for his private fleet of airplanes, which are big enough to cross the widest oceans. We feel that he could do so much more to open up this land of Kashmir and make it a better place for all to live in.

“It is the most beautiful place in the world,” Rajah added proudly, “but there are very few here who have any money, except the Maharajah and his Prime Minister. The Sheikh is not like them. He does not want worldly wealth. He dreams only of helping the people of Kashmir. He suffers for them. He wants only to help us. That is why we call him great.”

Walt Mason glanced at his wrist watch and jumped to his feet. “Sorry, I’ve got to go,” he exclaimed. “Got a date to see a man bite a dog. That’s news, in any language.”

I asked Rajah to tell the crew of our shikara—we had chartered one of these gondolas, with the men to paddle it, for a dollar a day—to take Walt where he wanted to go. When Rajah had left the room, Walt explained that he had some errands to attend to before his secret visit to the Sheikh’s undercover man that night.

“And no matter what I learn from him,” he said regretfully, “I won’t be able to tell you what he says. I promised them that I wouldn’t file a story on the interview, and I’ll be able to use it only

as background material. What Rajah said about the threat of a Pathan uprising was very interesting. Say, if there's anything in that rumor, don't you think you had better call off your expedition and hop out of here while the hopping's still good?"

"I can't." I grinned. "I've already signed the contract, and if I should try to back out of it now, Ahsan Allah would have my blood long before any Pathan could get to me. Anyway, even if there is some ruckus, it will all be over before we get back. We won't see any of it."

It was an entire week before we heard anything more from Ahsan Allah. Then, in response to my indignant demand that he produce the man who was to act as guide and cook on the expedition, he came out, accompanied by a most repellent-looking creature. This was a tall, gaunt, thinly bearded ruffian, in a dirty turban, dirty clothing, and with dirty fingernails. He looked as evil as any of Captain Kidd's cutthroat crew.

"Who is this?" I said.

"This is Gulam Mohammed Kachero, your cook-guide," said Ahsan Allah proudly. "Gulam, speak to the sahibs."

Gulam favored us with a malignant smile and muttered something completely unintelligible.

"What's the matter with the guy?" asked Loren. "Can't he speak English?"

"He is a wonderful cook," said Ahsan Allah, beaming.

"Is this the man you told us could speak English fluently?" I snapped.

"Oh, that one is no longer available," said Ahsan Allah cheerfully. "He has decided to take a holiday. You will find that Gulam Mohammed Kachero is a very fine cook. You will have no complaints."

"And how, may I ask," I inquired frostily, "do you expect Mr. Tutell and me to converse with a man, thirty days' travel from here, who can only grunt when you ask him a question?"

“Why, just as you would here,” said Ahsan Allah, raising his eyebrows.

“But I don’t need him here,” I cried. “The man I need there is a good interpreter.”

“He is a very good cook,” insisted Ahsan Allah.

“What of it?” I yelled. “On this expedition an interpreter is more important than our food and the way it is cooked. After all we are carrying most of our food with us. We expect to eat mostly out of cans.”

“Out of cans, a great shame,” mused the manager of the Army Agency. “I am sorry, he is the best man I can get for you. He is a good guide and a powerful walker. He will keep well ahead of the horses and will have obtained plenty of fuel each night, when you make camp. Don’t worry. He knows where you want to go, and he will take you there safely and bring you back. I am sure you will have no complaints. I shall be around on Saturday for the fifteen-hundred advance.”

With this Mr. Ahsan Allah bowed himself out, taking the glowering language master with him.

“Isn’t there anything we can do, Rajah?” I asked, as we watched them disappear over the meadow.

“I am afraid not, now that you have signed the contract,” he replied. “If the contract had specified exactly who was to be supplied as cook-guide, mentioning the name, you could show that Ahsan Allah was not living up to the agreement. But, as it didn’t, I’m afraid you will have to accept this man. There is no other way out.”

“If only you had been handling everything, Rajah,” said Loren gloomily.

“I would have been more than happy to do so,” said Rajah. “There are few tourists here this summer. I might have gone along with you and brought all my people from this boat to look after you on the trail.”

“And what a grand job they have done for us ever since we got here!” I exclaimed. Then I had a sudden thought. “Rajah, what if we left some of our gear here on the boat, everything we don’t need to take along with us? Could you let us have it for half price and take you along with us, on salary, as our interpreter?”

Rajah thought this over for only a moment. “Why not?” he replied. “There is no business here anyway. I might as well take a holiday, and perhaps I can be of help to you. I have made the journey to Leh before, and I know the road well. Big Brother can watch over your things here on the *Ritz*. As for salary—why, pay me anything you wish.”

And so it was decided, on the spur of the moment, that our houseboat man should travel with us to Lake Pangong. Our work on the motion pictures we had been making in Srinagar was completed, and we would be ready to leave in the following week.

On Saturday the ninth of August, Ahsan Allah called to collect the fifteen hundred rupees.

“Gulam Mohammed Kachero will take good care of you,” he assured us once more, with a proprietorial smirk.

“Splendid!” I said sarcastically. “But he is definitely not what you promised us as an English-speaking guide. So Rajah has consented to come along with us. I am paying him a special salary for his services, but I shall expect you to take care of his food bill out of the money we pay you.”

“How much are you paying him?” Ahsan Allah instantly asked.

“That’s of no importance,” I said. “What is important is that since you promised something that you cannot produce you must bear your share of the expense for Rajah.”

Ahsan Allah protested, but we were adamant and said that otherwise we would take the matter up with the Prime Minister—something which we didn’t have the slightest intention of doing, but Mr. Ahsan Allah’s political activities had brought him into trouble before, and he had no wish to be involved again with that

unpleasant personage. He gave in at last, and I handed over the fifteen hundred rupees. He was plainly so anxious to get the money into his hands without further delay that he would have agreed to anything.

I thought no more of it until the next morning, when Walt Mason dropped in. "Well, what do you think about Ahsan Allah?" was his first question, as he stepped aboard the boat.

"What I think about that individual wouldn't bear repeating in polite society," I said.

"Where he's gone, he won't be in society, polite or otherwise, for some time," Walt observed with a grin.

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed. "Where has he gone?"

"To jail," said Walt. "Ibrahim, our houseboat man, saw him entering the sacred portals yesterday afternoon, and saw them close on him. Ahsan had come to call on me immediately after leaving you. He came to collect all the cash due him, and then he stayed for tea. He never said a word about jail. Then off he went and gave himself up. The Maharajah is apparently cracking down hard. The good Ahsan Allah has been allied with the opposition group, so back to jail he goes. It isn't the first time he's been there."

"This is a fine state of affairs!" I sputtered. "He collected fifteen hundred rupees from me, an advance on the expedition expenses, and now he's gone to jail with the cash. This is the end!"

"Oh, I don't think it's as bad as that," said Walt consolingly. "Ibrahim doesn't think so. It seems that Ahsan told his assistant at the Army Agency what was up, and the assistant was waiting for him outside the jail to take over the cash Ahsan had collected from you and me. Ibrahim was right there when Ahsan handed the cash over to his assistant. Ibrahim is an interested party, you see. He didn't want to wait for his pay until Ahsan Allah gets out. With the way things are going, that might be quite a while."

Sure enough, on the Monday following, the assistant manager


of the Army Agency turned up with assurances that all would proceed as scheduled. He would give Gulam Mohammed Kachero, the cook-guide, the money for expenditures along the road, he assured us. Saddle horses and pack ponies would be waiting for us at Sonamarg, fifty-two miles northeast of Srinagar, where the motor road ended and further travel could be by caravan only. Gulam would call for us on Thursday morning, he promised, with a truck that would take us and our equipment to Sonamarg.

Tuesday the twelfth came and passed without news of any outbreaks by the Pathan tribesmen to the west. I couldn't resist kidding Rajah.

"You'd better stop listening to those friends of yours in the market place," I said. "Here we are, all packed up and ready to shove off for Tibet, and there hasn't been a peep out of the wild Pathans."

Rajah was unmoved. "They will come," he said. "If not today, then later. Unless the Sheikh Abdullah is released from prison, trouble will surely come. There has already been plenty of trouble in other parts of India. But when the Pathans start on the march there will be the *big* trouble."

V

*Through the Door in
the Clouds*

LOOKING eastward from Srinagar across the green and fertile Vale of Kashmir one sees, miles away, the blue walls that hem in the valley. These are the western slopes of the Himalayas. Climb them until you are ten thousand feet above the level of the sea and you come to a door, the mountain pass called the Zogi-La, which opens on the ancient road that leads to Tibet.

We set off on the morning of August 14—the day before Partition Day. An asthmatic bus took us and our equipment over the first fifty miles, to the mountain village of Sonamarg, after which point travel is possible only by pony caravan. Thirty miles northeast of Srinagar the ascent became rapidly steeper, and the panting bus was obliged to stop frequently for a fresh supply of water. The road, in some places cut out of the cliffs, crossed and recrossed the narrow Sind River, tumbling westward down its mountain ravines. As we neared Sonamarg a mist shrouded the view for a little while, and then, suddenly dissolving, showed us gaunt and precipitous crags towering far above us on both sides, rising abruptly from the river for more than seven thousand feet. Beyond this grim gorge, the mountains opened up again into a wide valley. On our left were lovely meadows, fringed by a forest. We had come to Sonamarg, “the Golden Meadow.”

Sonamarg was a narrow tract of pasture land, eight thousand six hundred and fifty feet above sea level, stretching for some two miles between the foot of the mountain and the riverbank, where another superb valley met it from the southwest. Magnificent forests of fir and sycamore crept down the mountainsides to the

very edge of the meadows, dotted with silver birch trees and carpeted with alpine flowers. But neither the beauty of the flowers nor the majesty of the snow-capped peaks towering above the forests was enough to take my mind from my own particular trouble.

The name of this trouble was Gulam Mohammed Kachero. He was the shifty-eyed, straggly-bearded, piratical-looking Kashmiri Moslem who had been wished on us by the Army Agency to act as cook-guide for our expedition. We disliked him from the first.

We had been told by the assistant manager of the Army Agency, that my fifteen hundred rupees had been turned over to Gulam, who would act as paymaster and purchasing agent on the road. I didn't like the arrangement, but there seemed nothing to be done about it. I was only thankful that we had induced Rajah to come along with us.

We slept that night in the dak bungalow, a small house provided by the government for the shelter of travelers, spent the next day in making photographs of the beautiful Thajwas Valley near Sonamarg, and came back to the dak bungalow pretty well tired out. I asked Gulam to unpack one of the bottles of brandy which I had ordered from the agency at twenty-one rupees a bottle. He came back bringing a cheap brand which was sold at half that price. I protested.

"The manager of the Army Agency told me that the master picked this out himself," he answered with a sneer, and walked away.

But I forgot this insolence in the bustle of the next morning. The expected caravan from Kargil, nearly a hundred miles to the east, had arrived, unloaded its merchandise and was ready to take us on our way as far as Kargil. The roping of our boxes and bundles of supplies—tents, folding cots, food, camera equipment, altogether weighing some thirteen hundred pounds—to the backs of the pack ponies occupied all morning. We set off about noon, Loren, Rajah and I each mounted on a saddle pony. Each of the

pack ponies was led by its wallah, a man on foot. A miserable creature in rags, named Ismaili, who was a cousin of the cook-guide, and a nameless coolie from Sonamarg, both of whom had been hired by Gulam, trudged along beside the ponies. The coolie carried one of our cameras.

As I looked back at our little procession moving in single file, I was astonished to find that all of our baggage had been loaded on the backs of eight ponies, instead of on nine, the number for which we had contracted, and that our cook-guide had appropriated the ninth pack pony for his own use.

“Rajah, that cook-guide is supposed to walk, not to ride!” I said indignantly. “There was nothing in the contract about his having a horse. In fact, I was distinctly told that he was not to have one.”

Rajah looked unhappy. “Perhaps it would be best to say nothing to him just now,” he suggested. “He would lose face before the men, and it would make it difficult for all of us. I think it would be better to wait until tonight.”

We rode on. The road, little more than a bridle path, led through lovely rolling meadows, interspersed with forest. A nine-mile journey brought us to our camping place for the night, the small dak bungalow near the village of Baltal—a resthouse in a grove of silver birches above the banks of a mountain stream called the Zogi, beyond which was the foot of the steep ascent, the Zogi-La, which we were to undertake the next morning. Leading up the valley to the east, following the river, was the trail to the sacred Hindu mountain, Amarnath, with its holy cave, visited by pilgrims for a thousand years.

When the packs had been stored in the bungalow and the pony wallahs were preparing their evening meal by the bank of the stream, Rajah and I went for a stroll along the river trail. On the way I nearly stepped on a wriggling snake that had glided out

from behind a rock. Rajah yelled a warning and quickly killed it with a stone. It was short, thick, dark on top and yellowish underneath. Rajah said that it was a *gunas*, one of the two kinds of poisonous snakes in Kashmir.

“I do not like this,” he said, shaking his head. “This is the second bad omen we have had. I wish that the djinn would stay away from us.”

“What was the first bad omen?” I asked. “And what do you mean by the djinn?”

“I mean by the djinn an evil spirit—the evil spirit that lives up there,” answered Rajah gravely, lifting his hand in a sweeping gesture which included the great mountains towering around us.

It was hard for me to think that this worldly-wise young Mohammedan could believe in evil spirits. “Do you believe in such things, Rajah?” I asked incredulously.

Rajah smiled grimly. Then, ignoring my latest question, he said, “As for the first bad omen, did you notice the man who carried the still camera today from Sonamarg to this place?”

“Why, not closely,” I said. “Wasn’t he rather slender, with strange-looking eyes?”

Rajah nodded. “Yes, that’s right,” he said. “When I first saw him, this morning, he told me he could do magic. But I would have known it anyway.”

“Oh, come, come, Rajah,” I said. “And what’s the difference? If he can do some tricks that will amuse us, I don’t mind giving him a rupee or two.”

“Tricks mean nothing,” said Rajah, still seriously. “But what if he should decide that you were not to cross the Zogi-La tomorrow and journey on in search of the Hidden Valley?”

“What in the world could he do to stop me?” I exclaimed.

“All he would have to do would be to blow in your direction, with his eyes slightly turned up,” said Rajah, as if stating simple

fact, "and you would be sick for days, perhaps months. That is why I watched him all day and saw to it that he was not given too heavy a load."

I didn't argue about it. It was easy to see that Rajah believed implicitly in what he was saying.

"Do you still wish to speak to the cook-guide about the horse?" Rajah asked, after a silence.

"What would you do in my place, Rajah?"

"I do not think it is very important that you make Gulam walk. It is in the contract that there were to be nine pack animals. Gulam has been able to get the loads onto eight of them, and the weights are not too great, so for the time being I would say nothing. There is no use stirring up trouble."

Soon after daybreak the next morning our men began to replace the loads on the backs of the ponies, which had been tethered in the birch glade overnight. We were soon ready for the ascent of the Zogi-La. Our caravan scrambled down a short but steep hillside, crossed the Zogi stream by a footbridge, and started up a steep nullah, or ravine, leading to the north. There was little semblance of a road, only the expanse of loose shale and gravel over which the sure-footed ponies picked their way. In winter and spring, snow accumulates to a great depth and laden ponies cannot get through. Travelers can cross only on foot, and at the risk of their lives. The road is officially closed on October 15, each year, not to be reopened until June, and we should have to return well before that date.

Zigzagging back and forth over the stony trail, we climbed steadily, and as we did so the view across the Sind Valley beneath us became ever increasingly awe-inspiring. Above us jagged cliffs pierced the sky; below us were dizzying gorges. When, after a mile's journey, we had to stop to allow a caravan from Sinkiang (Chinese Turkestan), to pass us, it seemed as though there wasn't

an inch to spare between the outer horse and the edge of the precipice.

We reached the summit of the pass, more than eleven thousand feet above sea level, at noon. It had taken us all morning to make that climb of only three miles. We had done little talking on the wearisome march. Each man had kept his eyes glued on the trail.

We halted, a half mile farther on, for a noonday rest and a bite to eat, beside a mountain brook. While we waited, thinking that Gulam Mohammed Kachero would build a fire and make some soup, we noticed, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, a waterfall spilling down the mountainside, fed by a glacier hundreds of feet above it. A drove of a hundred shaggy ponies was being watered by native herdsmen at the foot of the falls, and a herd of goats was being driven up by other herdsmen to be watered when the ponies had drunk their fill. We watched the sight for a long time while waiting for Gulam. It was chilly here at the top of the pass, and we were hungry.

“What’s the matter with Gulam?” I asked Rajah, after what seemed an interminable delay. “Where is he? I haven’t seen him for more than an hour.”

“He has gone over there—” Rajah pointed toward the waterfall—“to buy firewood from the owner of the horses. Here he comes now.”

Galloping across the moraine was our cook-guide. In a few minutes he reached us, some sticks of firewood under his arm.

“They ask high price, three rupees,” he grumbled as he dismounted. “I do not know how I can manage on the small sum the sahibs allow me for everything.”

“Small sum!” I exclaimed. “You have three rupees a day for eggs and firewood, which is plenty, and you’ve spent it all on that handful of sticks?”

“That is what it cost,” he said insolently. “There is little wood

up here, only cow dung and burtza.” (Burtza is an oily weed that gives a horrible taste to all food cooked with it.) “Wood costs much more here than in the valleys.”

“Then, may I ask, why didn’t you buy it in the valley and bring it up here with you?”

“And how should it be carried?” he sneered. “Every animal has its load.”

“On your horse,” Loren suggested.

“The sahibs ride, and I ride,” the fellow announced with finality. And with a glare he stalked off.

“Pleasant, isn’t he?” remarked Loren. “Do we have to stand for this?”

“He has your money,” Rajah pointed out, with a shrug. “If you take his horse away from him, he will leave you.”

“He can’t do that, Rajah,” I said. “I have a contract with his employers. They’ve got to take us to Lake Pangong and back.”

“A contract meant something in the old days, when a British major was partner in the firm,” said Rajah. “Perhaps it may have meant something even up to last week, before Partition came to India. But now that the British have left Kashmir, the Army Agency doesn’t care what becomes of you. The head of the firm is in prison. You have advanced two thirds of the cost of the trip—and who has the money?”

“This wretched cook-guide, Gulam Mohammed Kachero,” I was obliged to admit.

Rajah nodded. “But I will watch him,” he added reassuringly.

Descending the northern slopes of the pass, at four o’clock that afternoon we came in sight of the Matayan glacier and of the snow-topped peak, nineteen thousand feet in height, that cradles it. Here we paused while Loren photographed the magnificent panorama. When he had finished, I jumped on my horse, a frisky Tibetan pony named La-La, crossed the bridge at the foot of the hill leading up to the village of Machoi, where we were to spend

the night in a dak bungalow, and let La-La take the trail to the resthouse at a gallop. When I reached the top of the hill I turned and waited for Loren.

Loren's horse, Mogul, had the same idea as La-La when he had crossed the bridge. But Loren, seeing the climb ahead, pulled in the reins and thrust his foot hard down on the stirrup. The rotten stirrup leather broke and he took a header to the ground. If the accident had happened ten seconds sooner, as he was crossing the narrow bridge, he would probably have plunged to his death in the torrent tumbling below. He escaped with some bad bruises and a skinned leg.

This was our first accident. Rajah was the next victim. On the following afternoon his horse shied, for no known reason, and Rajah went over on his head. He escaped with a splitting headache. Accidents have a habit of coming in threes. I wondered who the next victim would be.

That evening, after Rajah's accident, we decided to dismiss the coolie whom Gulam Mohammed Kachero had hired at Sonamarg. He was supposed to carry part of the camera equipment during the day and to help Gulam prepare the evening meal. But he was as surly as his master, Gulam, and refused to carry a load of more than twenty pounds. The cook-guide was furious when he learned we had fired his helper. Dinner was two hours late.

The next day's march took us through a high and desolate country of treeless mountains, whose lofty crags of red, brown and golden rock were seamed with cobalt shadows. As we entered the valley of Dras that afternoon, we passed fields of wheat, barley and buckwheat. It was plain, however, that the land supported only a scanty population. The place is swept by icy winds, we were told, and the temperature sometimes drops to sixty degrees below zero in the winter.

Early next morning, when we had just got out of our sleeping bags, as strange a little figure as I ever expect to see made its ap-

pearance at the door of the dak bungalow. He was not more than five feet in height, and his shoulders were so broad that he seemed almost as wide as he was tall. He was dressed in the usual costume of the country—a loose overcoatlike affair of dirty grayish felt, called a *gonche* or *choga*, reaching well below the knees, and fastened with a sash, in a fold of which was carried a variety of objects, such as a tinderbox, a cup, a knife and a wooden bowl for food. His trousers, of the same thick felt as the coat, had apparently been inherited from some larger and taller man. Unlike most of the Baltis we had seen along the trail, whose aquiline noses gave them a somewhat hawklike appearance, this man's face was broad and flat, of distinctly Mongolian type. He was carrying his felt boots in one hand. Grinning like a benevolent gnome, or a trained chimpanzee, the little fellow advanced shyly and made us a deep bow, a gesture which almost lost him his pants. He clutched them with his free hand just in time.

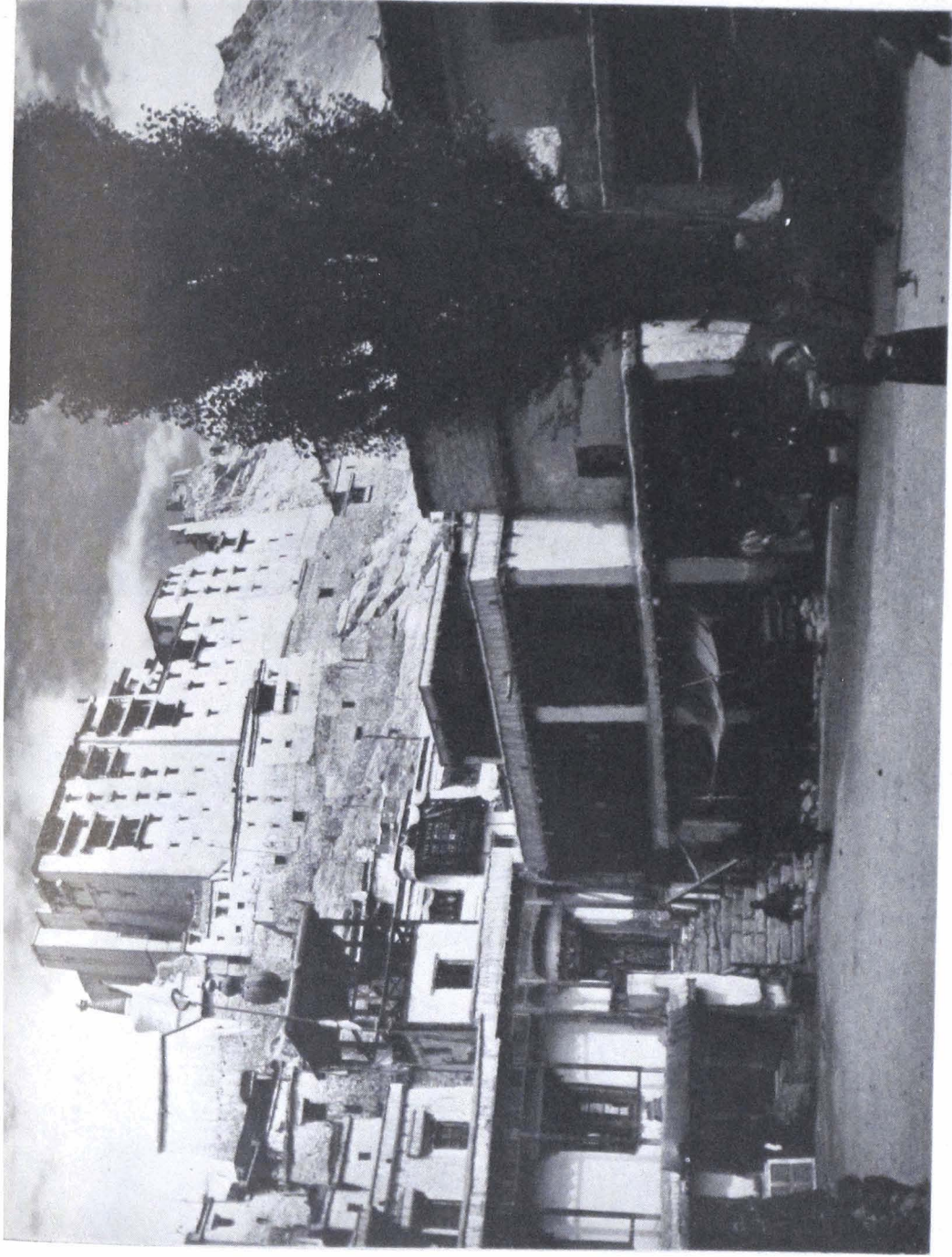
“Mr. Four-by-Four in person!” chuckled Loren.

“Who is this, Rajah?” I demanded. “Is he Puss in Boots?”

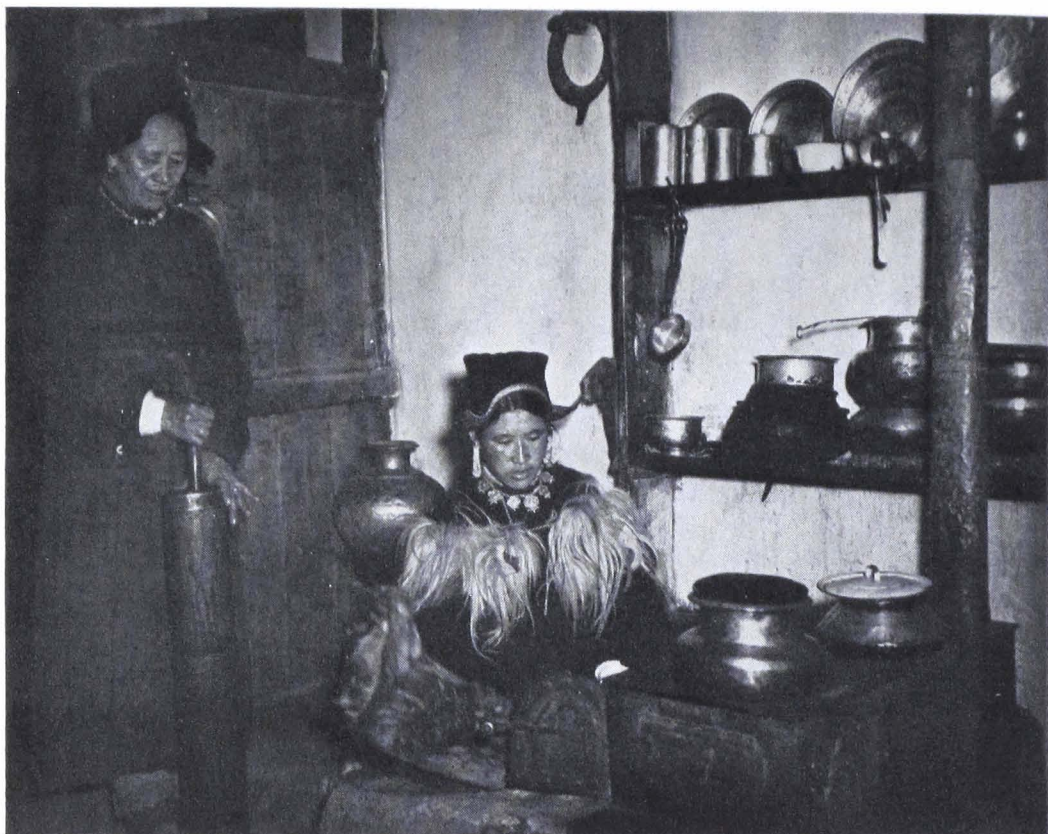
“This is the man who will carry the cameras,” said Rajah proudly. “He is not like the coolie you dismissed. He is strong and willing.”

Puss in Boots turned out to be all that was advertised. A load of sixty or eighty pounds strapped to his back seemed to make not the slightest difference to him. He ran up and down mountains with the greatest of ease. In one hand he always carried his boots, and with the other he held up his pants. And there was always a winsomeness about his smile which was charming.

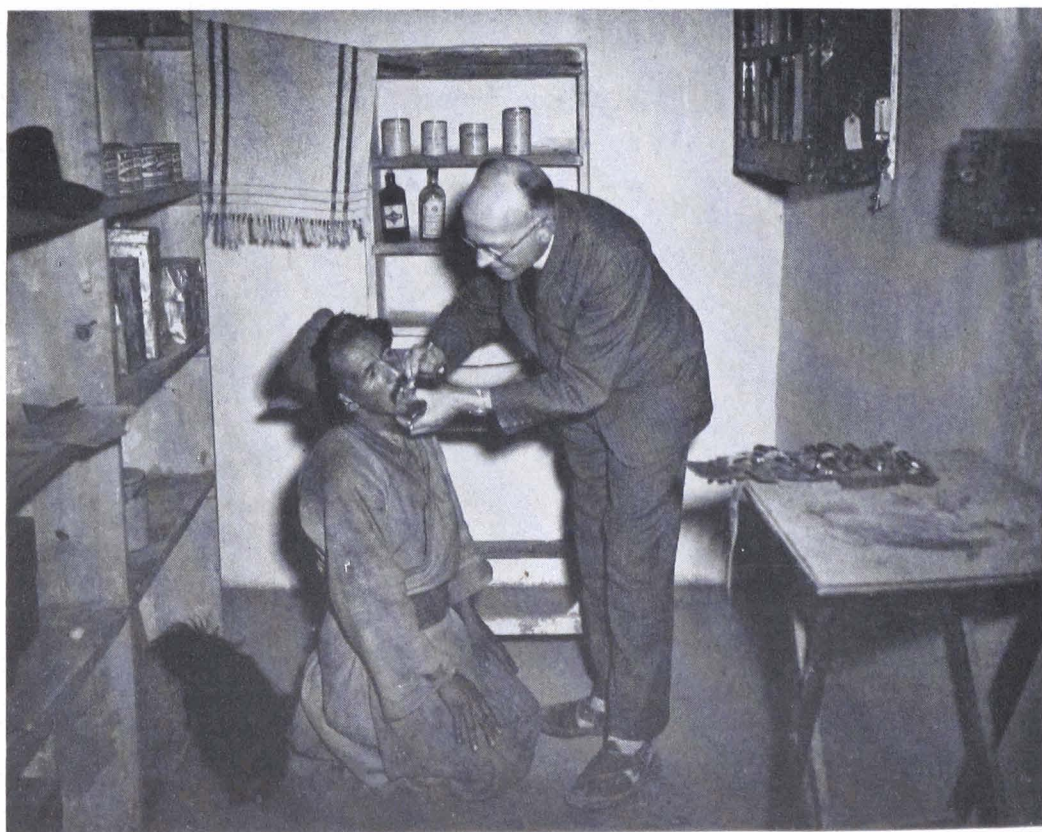
But Gulam Mohammed Kachero, the cook-guide, remained as disagreeable as ever. A mile or so beyond the village of Dras, we came to a group of peasant farmhouses, built of sun-baked mud, with narrow slits of windows. On their flat roofs newly harvested wheat was spread out to dry, and, near by, a young boy was threshing wheat with the help of a strange assortment of animals



THE EMPTY CASTLE OF THE KINGS OF LADAKH LOOKS DOWN ON THE "STREET OF THE BAZAAR" IN LEH, THEIR CAPITAL



LYDIA (at left) ENTERTAINS IN HER SPOTLESS KITCHEN AT THE CHRISTIAN INN AT LEH



WALTER ASBOE PULLS A TOOTH—FEE, TWO CENTS

—two cows, three horses and a zho—a long-horned, long-haired creature, mothered by a cow and fathered by a yak. The six were harnessed abreast, and were kept moving around the pole at the center of the circular threshing floor, treading on the wheat as they moved. The cow at the center was scarcely moving, the second cow was walking unhurriedly, the zho—which came next—moved slightly faster, and the three horses were urged on at progressively greater speeds. In fact, the outside horse, goaded on by the boy's shouts, was trotting as rapidly as a trained horse in a circus ring. We stopped to photograph the scene, and while we were doing this the wretched cook-guide moved along with the caravan and gained a lead which made it impossible for us to overtake him until late afternoon. As a result we went without lunch.

An hour later, while we were hurrying along the trail in the hope of catching up with him, we saw a party of five men coming toward us on foot and paused to let them pass. As they reached us, we saw that four of the men were carrying a native wooden bed, on which was lying a sick boy covered with a coarse blanket. The fifth man, who walked beside the stretcher, was, we learned, the boy's father.

The sick boy was incredibly wasted, his eyes were sunken deep in their sockets, his forehead was beaded with sweat. The father, lifting his haggard face for the first time and seeing white men, began to plead with Rajah, wringing his hands.

"He says that his son is very sick with pneumonia and asks if the sahibs have any medicine that will cure him," Rajah interpreted. "They are taking him to the hospital in Srinagar. They have already been several days on the journey."

"All the way over the Zogi-La and down the Sind Valley to Srinagar—on that!" exclaimed Loren, pityingly.

"It is the only way," said Rajah, shrugging. He kneeled beside the stretcher, gently pulled back one of the boy's eyelids as far as

it would go, and stared into the distended eyeball for a long moment.

"I think one of the sulfa drugs we've got with us is good for pneumonia," I interrupted. "I'll look it up on the chart."

Rajah suddenly rose to his feet. "It's no use," he said in a low voice. "There is nothing that we can do for him."

"Is he going to die?" asked Loren.

"Who knows?" said Rajah. "If it is the will of the djinn, certainly no medicine will help him now."

Loren stared. "Gin?" he asked. "What good would gin do, even if we had any?" He had not overheard what Rajah had said about djinns, that day at Baltal.

"I do not mean the liquor," said Rajah. "I mean the evil spirit who lives up there." And again he gestured at the mountaintops in the distance. "It is a gift which was given me at birth. When I look at a sick person, I can tell whether he is really ill or whether the djinn has got him. With this boy it is the djinn. There is nothing we can do."

He turned and spoke rapidly to the father, who, having heard him out, bowed his head and with tears running down his cheeks gave the order to the coolies to pick up their burden and continue along the trail. We rode on in silence.

Late that afternoon, after having plodded ahead for eight or nine miles more, we finally came upon Gulam the cook-guide encamped with our caravan beside a stream near the road. Loren and I were so angry with him that we dared not speak, but Rajah saw to it that we got a good dinner. As for Puss in Boots, who had carried the heavy camera on his back for all this distance, he seemed as fresh as when he started. I am sure he smiled even in his sleep.

One more day's march brought us through a valley of irrigated farms to the banks of the Suru River and to Kargil, the first and only sizable town in the two hundred and seventy-two miles be-

tween Srinagar and Leh, the capital of Kashmir's eastern province, Ladakh, which was once a part of Tibet and which still remains Tibetan in everything but government and name. Even though it was a metropolis compared to the tiny villages through which we had passed, Kargil consisted chiefly of one long narrow street, fringed with low shops, and its population was inconsiderable. We rode the whole length of this street of bazaars, and a mile or two beyond it before we came to the dak bungalow. The keepers of the bazaars salaamed to us as we plodded wearily by. It perked me up quite a little. No shopkeepers on Fifth Avenue ever did as much for me.

But, a little beyond the bazaars, I had the surprise of my life. From somewhere over my head came a woman's voice.

"Hello, there!" it said in friendly fashion. "Who are you, and where are you from?"

I glanced up and nearly fell out of the saddle. Framed in the open window of a house overlooking the narrow street was the smiling face of an Englishwoman.

"This is the New Zealand Presbyterian Mission," she went on. "Miss Drew and I are in charge of it. I'm Miss Roy."

I stammered out Loren's name and mine, and Miss Roy continued, "Oh, yes, we've heard from friends in Srinagar that you might be here soon. If you are staying over, we'd love to have you come for tea tomorrow afternoon."

We thanked her fervently and promised we would surely be there. "Well, can you tie that?" exclaimed Loren, as we rode on. "I wouldn't have thought there was a white woman within a thousand miles of this neck of the woods! And here we are, invited to tea!"

A mile farther on we crossed a bridge over the river and the road then doubled back along the opposite bank. Beyond the pint-sized post office and another small building which served as the

governmental hospital and dispensary, we came to the dak bungalow. It was a one-story affair but had many more rooms than any other we had seen, and we spent a most comfortable night.

As we were finishing breakfast next morning, a knock on the door was followed by the entrance of a complete stranger, a dark-skinned young Brahmin with flashing black eyes and the most beautiful set of teeth I have ever beheld.

“May I come in?” he inquired, beaming. “I *am* in. May I present myself? I am Dr. Koul. I am the local medical authority here. I am in charge of the hospital. I have been in Kargil one year and have two more to go. I heard only ten minutes ago that you were here, or I would have called last night. Is there anything I can do for you? Are there any questions you would like to ask?”

He didn't pause for an answer. Rajah had just come into the room, bringing a fresh pot of coffee, and the good doctor sniffed its aroma ecstatically.

“M-m-m!” he exclaimed. “My, but that smells good! I have not had any American coffee since I finished my studies in Calcutta.”

“Will you join us?” I asked. But Dr. Koul was already drawing up a chair. Rajah silently brought another cup. The doctor selected a cigarette from one of our few remaining packs and reached across the table for Loren's lighter.

“This is a treat, a real treat!” he bubbled. “About all I get here to drink is water. But there's no water like Kargil water, that's certain.”

Loren managed to get in a word while the doctor sipped his coffee gustily. “Doctor,” he said, “we have filled our canteens a number of times from springs along the trail and have drunk the water without boiling it. Is that safe?”

“Safe? This water?” exclaimed the doctor, staring as if he couldn't believe what he had heard. “Of course it's safe! I not only drink from the springs, I drink all I can get of the river water without boiling it. There's nothing more wonderful than this

river water. It is snow water. It is filled with health-giving minerals. It is magnificent!"

He leaned forward and tapped Loren on the knee. "Why, my good man," he continued with profound earnestness, "do you realize that if you are impotent and drink this water from the Suru you will regain your virility?"

Loren looked uncomfortable. I couldn't repress a smile.

"It has had this effect in many cases," the doctor asserted indignantly. "And women who could never conceive have come here and immediately are fruitful. There is nothing like this water! Safe? Of course it's safe!"

We wanted to laugh, but didn't dare to, in the face of the good doctor's earnestness. The doctor himself changed the subject.

"And where are you going?" he asked. "To Leh, I suppose? To see some of those bold Ladakhi girls, no doubt. Well, I don't blame you. But, tell me, what is your real reason for going to Leh?"

"To make travel pictures," I replied.

The doctor smiled, as if he didn't believe me. Looking at me through half-closed eyes he said slowly, "Do you think, Mr. Smith, that Russia has the atomic bomb?"

"I'm sure I don't know. There are a lot of people who would like to be able to answer that question, one way or another, but I am not one of them."

Dr. Koul was full of questions. What did I think of Russia? How soon would it be before a new great war started? And so on and on until at last I was obliged to hint that we had work to do. Dr. Koul did not seem offended, but as he got up to leave he stared at me curiously. "Your lips have been bothering you, haven't they?" he asked suddenly.

"That's right," I said. "They get terribly dry in this high country. We've been trying baby cream, but it doesn't seem to do much good."

"Baby cream—faugh!" said the doctor disgustedly. "It's no good

at these heights. Send your man along with me to the hospital and I'll give him some salve for you that will do the job in a hurry."

Rajah was back from the hospital in fifteen minutes, bringing a small box of salve for each of us. "You should have heard what that doctor said about you two." He chuckled.

"About us?" said Loren. "What could he have said about us?"

"Oh, he said he knew you were both American secret-service agents, looking for information on Russian activities along the border."

We both laughed. "And did he say how we planned to get such information?" I asked.

"Yes," said Rajah. "He said you would get it from caravans coming into Leh from Chinese Turkestan, who would know what the Russians are doing there."

"A brilliant idea!" I laughed. "Considering the fact that I can't speak a word of their language. What did you say to him, Rajah?"

"I said that was foolish talk," replied Rajah. "I told him I had been with the masters for six weeks, and that you are interested in nothing but travel pictures."

"What did he say then?"

"He laughed and said, 'Think of the mountain of dust some people will use to cover their footprints.' And then he said, 'Mark my word, the Americans are going to seize Kashmir and use it as a base of operations against the Russians.' So you see, the man is quite mad!"

Rajah then went out to hire horses with which to continue the trip, as those we had hired in Sonamarg were to bring us only this far, to Kargil. "If it is left to Gulam Mohammed Kachero to hire the horses, I fear we shall be here for another week," he observed. Loren and I spent the day in going over our equipment and making notes. Late in the afternoon we started off for the home of the missionary ladies, pausing at the little post office to mail letters home. "They will leave for Srinagar by runner within ten min-

utes," the clerk assured us proudly. "They will be there in a week." How far away Srinagar seemed—almost in another world.

The mission house was a two-story native dwelling, of sun-baked brick, surrounded by a fenced-in garden planted only with cabbages. A half-dozen Mongolian-looking children were peering from the gate and as we reached it they swung the door open. The oldest girl led us through the lower floor—evidently used as a schoolroom—and up an ancient rickety stairway to the living room of the missionary ladies. Here Miss Roy and her colleague, Miss Drew, welcomed us. As Miss Drew was suffering from a severe head cold, most of the conversation devolved on Miss Roy. Miss Roy had been stationed in Kargil for six years, Miss Drew for two. They told us that they had sixteen pupils at the school, between the ages of seven and fourteen years, and that all were Christians—a remarkable number in a community almost wholly Moham-medan. Loren and I happily munched quantities of delicious scones, cookies and fruitcake along with our tea.

"Miss Roy, we had a visitor this morning at the dak bungalow," I observed with my mouth full, "who seemed obsessed with the idea that we are a couple of American secret-service agents. I can assure you we are not. This gentleman—I believe his name is Dr. Koul—refused to believe us, but we hope that you will."

"Oh, you have already had a visit from Dr. Koul?" said Miss Roy with a look of amusement. "Quite a remarkable man, don't you think? But don't worry about us—we don't care what your business is, so long as you are not Russian agents."

"Don't tell me you have Russian operatives up here!" I exclaimed.

"N-no, not many," she said guardedly. "In fact, there has been only one whom Miss Drew and I met. It's just that we seem to have the subject on our minds. It's probably because of the families coming in here."

"Families?"

"It's only recently," Miss Roy explained. "About a year ago several families arrived from Yarkand, five hundred miles north in Chinese Turkestan, and settled here. We met them in the bazaar. They said that since the Russians moved into their beautiful country everything was changed, and they couldn't stand it any longer. They got out when the going was good. Since then several other Yarkandi families have arrived and settled here, for the same reasons. They brought with them all their belongings that could be carried. They want no part of the Russian system."

"And the Russian agent whom you saw?" I asked. "Was he a white man?"

"Oh, my, no!" said Miss Roy. "He was a Hindu, from Madras. How he got up here I don't know, but he came to the mission and represented himself as a Christian. He asked all sorts of questions about us and the pupils, and wanted to know how many missions there were in Kashmir and Ladakh—a silly question, for there are only two, this one and the Moravian mission at Leh. I don't know what he expected to learn, but it was obvious that he was a fraud. From here he went on to Leh, where he was arrested as a spy and sent to Srinagar in handcuffs."

"Did he mention the Soviet Union in his conversation with you?" I asked.

"Oh, indeed, yes! He dragged it in by the heels. He was openly pro-Russian."

"He doesn't sound to me like an intelligent agent," I observed. "It's no wonder they grabbed him."

"Oh, but the ones that go back and forth through here aren't as stupid as that," said Miss Roy. "You never see the agents who really get the job done."

"But if you never see them," I asked, "how do you know that there are any such persons passing through?"

"No one can be in this country overnight without his presence being observed," said Miss Roy, "and every stranger's actions instantly become known to everyone. There are only certain trails

that can be used, certain places where the traveler can find shelter. It is only the man with a plausible story who can pass undetected."

"In other words," I remarked, "there is a distinct difference between a bull in a china closet and ships that pass in the night."

The ladies' hospitality had been delightful, and I am sorry now that I wound up with that ridiculously jumbled metaphor. Miss Roy and Miss Drew, I apologize.

When we got back to the dak bungalow we found Rajah looking exceedingly gloomy. He had hoped that the owner of the saddle horses we had been riding would sell their leather saddles, but the man had slipped away to Sonamarg. Rajah had then hunted for leather saddles from one end of the bazaar to the other, but found none. All he could find were three miserably crude wooden contraptions, together with gear that consisted wholly of scraps of ancient and rotten leather. The equipment of the pack ponies, including that of the animal which Gulam was sure to appropriate, was no better. It seemed almost inevitable that accidents would happen.

But, in spite of our forebodings, we resumed the long journey to Leh early next morning. The new team of pony wallahs, the men hired to lead the pack animals, all belonged to the Shiah sect of Mohammedans, Rajah remarked as we started off. All the people of Kargil were Shiah, he said scornfully. He himself belonged to the Sunni sect, which had many more adherents throughout the world. It was plain that he had a poor opinion of all Shiah.

The trail to Leh led southeastward, first over a wide valley, then across a sandy plateau, and next, eight or ten miles from Kargil, entered a desolate defile, a wilderness of rock and sand, at the foot of which ran a narrow stream. For an hour or two the trail kept us in sight of this stream and then turned away from it and began the ascent of a high hill. By now it was noon.

At this point Loren drew rein and made a suggestion. "Look here, it's hot, and I'm hungry," he said. "Why don't we go down

to that creek, cool off with a swim and then have lunch there, before we climb this hill?"

"A swell idea!" I agreed. "Rajah, tell Gulam Mohammed Kachero to follow us with the caravan and we'll eat lunch there. We don't want him to go off ahead, as he did the other day."

Rajah rode back and gave Gulam his orders. We three, Loren, Rajah and I, then turned off the trail and rode down to the brook, after telling Puss in Boots to follow with the camera. We had our swim. No Gulam and no pack ponies appeared. We sat on the rocks and let the hot sun dry us. Still no Gulam. Finally little Puss in Boots hove into sight, smiling as always. Rajah rushed up to him and asked what had happened to the others. Then he turned to us, his eyes flashing.

"That miserable cook-guide only waited until we were out of sight," he exclaimed, "and then gave orders to keep on going! This cannot go on! The man has openly defied you, and because he holds the purse strings those wretched Shiah pony wallahs are obeying him—not us."

"Well, we'll certainly have a showdown tonight," I said. "In the meantime there goes our lunch. And the Lord knows when we will overtake him."

"Oh, no, we'll have lunch right here," said Loren.

"Here?" I exclaimed. "On what? Are you crazy?"

"Crazy like a fox," said Loren cheerfully, as he took down a bundle that had been lashed behind his saddle. "I knew that guy couldn't be trusted, so I brought this along, just in case."

He spread his raincoat, which had been wrapped around the bundle, out on the ground and proudly exhibited the contents of the package. "A can of Australian cheese, made in Milwaukee. Very tasty. A box of crackers. A tin of peaches. And look at this—fresh apricots!"

"Where on earth did you get fresh apricots, Loren?" I wanted to know.

"In Kargil, last night. An old man came along, selling them. They grow 'em right outside Kargil. They aren't much bigger than grapes, but they're delicious. And I washed 'em off with potassium permanganate last night, so you needn't worry about germs. Try 'em—they're wonderful!"

The lunch was a great success. There was enough for Puss in Boots too, who was grinning as if he had lapped up a whole saucerful of milk. But we three, when we had got back to the trail and started slowly up the long hill, wore gloomy faces. If the rebellious cook-guide continued to behave in this manner, we could hardly hope to continue the expedition.

"Never have I known a Kashmiri to act like this toward a sahib," said Rajah, in a puzzled tone. "It is insane. The income of our people comes chiefly from travelers from the world outside. If they all acted like this, no one would ever come to Kashmir. I cannot understand it. It is almost as if he had orders to make everything so difficult that you will turn back and give up the trip."

"Well, I don't understand it, either," I said. "But as soon as we catch up with that bird I'm going to make him understand that if there's any more of this nonsense, he is starting back to Srinagar by himself. I'm fed up."

But, as it so happened, I didn't have to get tough with him. Fate got a lot tougher than I could ever be.

It took us a full hour to reach the top of the long hill, and, just as we reached it, we saw Loren's pony, which was a little in the lead, suddenly rear up on its hind legs and begin to prance. Loren got it under control and then beckoned excitedly to us to hurry up.

We were there in a moment. Stretched out on the ground, moaning in agony, was Gulam Mohammed Kachero. His horse was nowhere to be seen, nor any of the pack ponies and their attendants. Rajah and I slid from our horses and bent over the man. Between his moans he managed to gasp out that he thought his hip was broken.

"He seems in terrible pain," I said. "I've got a bottle of morphine tablets in my medicine kit. I think we'd better give him a quarter grain."

"Sure," said Loren. "I can't stand the guy, but I wouldn't want to see a dog suffer like that. I hope it helps him."

"Hold his head up, Rajah," I said when I had got the morphine bottle from the saddlebag, "while I give him the pill. Tell him to hold it under his tongue and it will ease the pain."

While we were doing this, Loren walked on for a little distance until he could look over the brow of the hill. He came back to report that men and ponies were scattered along the farther slope, and that some of our boxes were lying beside the road, only a few feet from the edge of a gorge that seemed hundreds of feet deep. One of the men was leading his pony back and would be with us in a moment.

We managed to get the morphine pill into the cook-guide's mouth, but when it did not give him the instant relief he had expected, he began to groan more loudly than ever. When the man with the pony appeared, we took the sleeping bag and blankets that had been part of the pony's load and spread them out beside Gulam. The diminutive Puss in Boots picked him up like a feather and gently deposited him on the blanket, then squatted beside him, clucking sympathetically. Gulam kept on groaning. From the first pony wallah that got back, Rajah got an account of what had taken place.

It appeared that when the caravan reached the crest of the hill, the pony in the lead had become frightened by the clatter of a tin pot swinging from one of the packs behind him and had stampeded. The panic spread along the line, and all of the ponies rushed over the top of the hill and down the other side, dragging the men with them. The unfortunate Gulam, bringing up the rear, had been unable to control his pony with the rotten leather bridle reins and had been thrown off against the rocky mountain

wall on one side of the trail. The men ahead had known nothing of his accident, and had been busy recapturing their animals and picking up the boxes that had broken loose. One by one the men came back, leading their ponies, and as each pony arrived Rajah inspected its load to see if anything was damaged or missing.

"Everything is all right," he announced with satisfaction when the final load had been checked. "Everything but this one box."

There was a louder moan than usual from the stricken cook-guide as he recognized the box that Rajah was carrying toward us.

"It's his money box," Rajah explained as he set the box down on the ground. "But nothing has been lost. The cash is all in small bags, and they are untouched."

Then, beckoning us to come closer, he said in a lower voice, "All this is very unfortunate for him, but for you it is a blessing in disguise. He cannot walk another step, and from now on your money will be in your own hands. We will count it and give him a receipt for it."

"But we can't just leave him here," exclaimed Loren. "What are we going to do with him?"

"We will get some bearers from the next village," said Rajah calmly. "It is only a mile farther on. They will carry him back to Kargil and put him in the hands of our friend Dr. Koul at the hospital. It is a government hospital, and there will be no charge. If there are any extras, the Army Agency must pay them. You have given them their advance. The accident is their problem."

Rajah then called to Ismaili, the ragged little Kashmiri Moslem who had been hired at Sonamarg by the cook-guide to act as his bhisti, or waterboy. He was a cringing, servile little man, who had been unmercifully bullied by Gulam, and, I thought, was too stupid to act as a messenger. But Rajah told him just what was wanted, and Ismaili started off down the hill at a dogtrot.

While he was gone, we opened the moneybags and, carefully counting the coins they contained, came in for another stagger-

ing shock. I had advanced fifteen hundred rupees to the Army Agency, and here were only five hundred and seventy-three rupees and five annas!

“Where is the rest of the money?” I gasped. “We couldn’t possibly have spent the difference between this sum and fifteen hundred rupees since we left Sonamarg!”

Rajah passed on the question to Gulam, who immediately began to shake his head vehemently and shout in a shrill voice.

“He says,” Rajah explained, “that all the Army Agency gave him for the trip was seven hundred rupees.”

“He’s lying!” I spluttered. “How in the world could seven hundred rupees get us to Tibet and back? The man’s mad! And, besides, that would mean they were keeping back eight hundred rupees in Srinagar. What for?”

Rajah entered upon a long and stern questioning of the man and at its conclusion turned to us with a grim smile.

“I think he is telling the truth,” he said. “However great a rogue he is, this accounting only shows that he works for still bigger rogues. Besides the cash in hand he has receipts from the pony wallahs who were paid off in Kargil. That accounts for most of the difference, and the small sum spent for eggs and firewood since leaving Sonamarg makes up the rest exactly. He is willing to give a receipt for the cash we have here, and he knows that when we get back to Srinagar we can show this receipt. If he had stolen the eight hundred rupees it would mean prison for him in Srinagar. No, the Army Agency has held them. Why, I do not know.”

“Well, it’s even more serious than that, Rajah,” I groaned. “My letter of credit is back at Srinagar, in Lloyd’s Bank; it’s of no use to me here. I’ve got very little extra cash with me, not enough to mean a thing. It looks like the end of the expedition. We’ll have to turn back.”

“Oh, no, that is not necessary,” said Rajah, cheerfully. “I will get you all the money you need.”

“You?” I demanded, flabbergasted. “How on earth—?”

“Do not worry,” said Rajah, smiling. “Our family is well known throughout Kashmir. As soon as we get to Leh I can get all the money you need, from the merchants in the bazaar, on my signature. There is nothing to worry about.”

I could have hugged him.

“Now,” he went on, “we will get the receipts ready.”

He unearthed my writing kit from one of the bags, squatted on the ground and used the seat of a folding chair as a table. He wrote out the receipt in Urdu, made a copy of it on a separate sheet of paper and then read the document aloud to Gulam Mohammed Kachero, who groaned feebly as he listened but nodded in agreement. “He can’t either read or write,” said Rajah, turning to us, “but he sees the figures and takes my word for the rest. He’s ready to sign.”

“How can he sign, if he can’t write?” asked Loren.

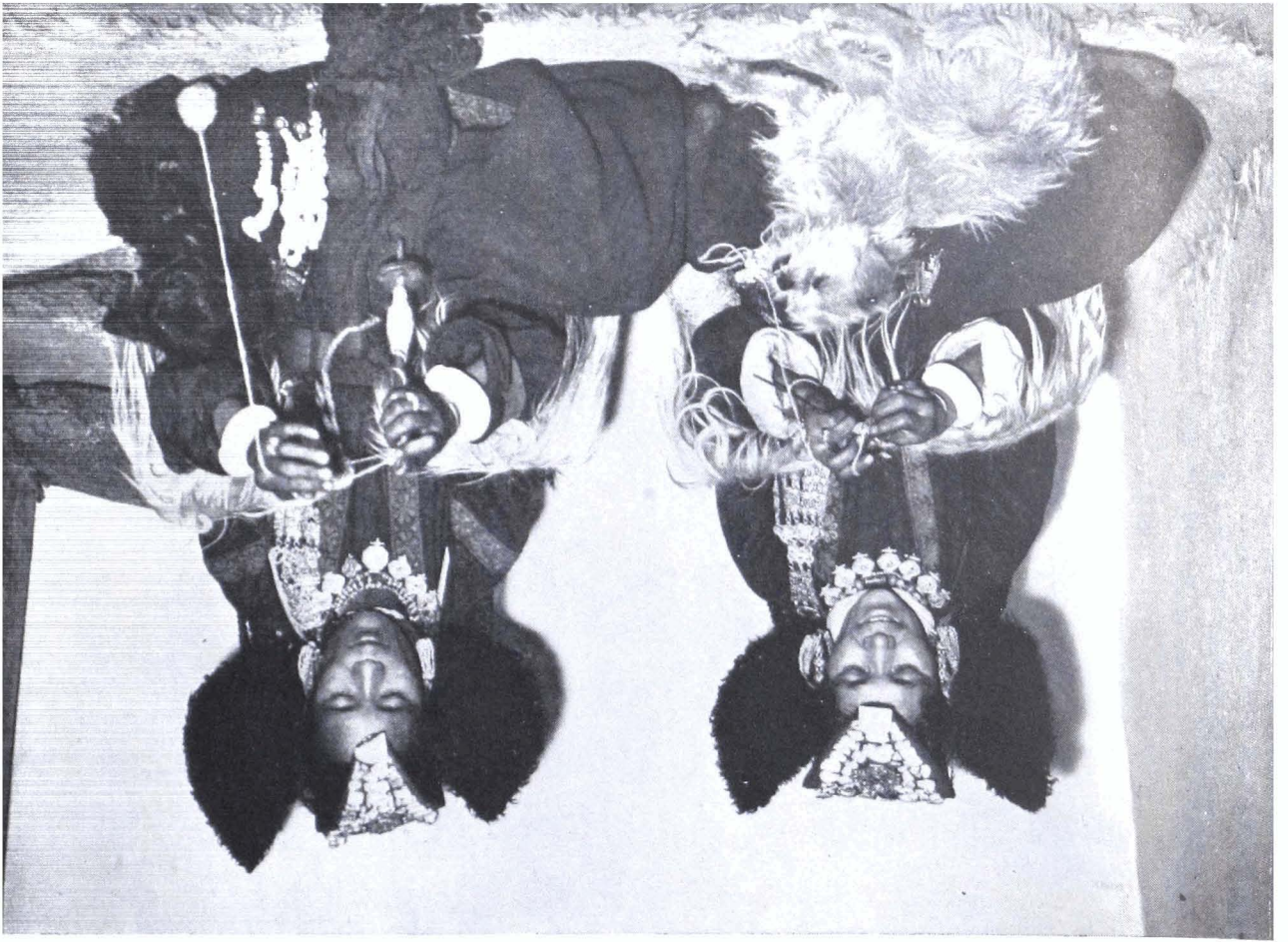
For answer Rajah pressed Gulam’s thumb over the open top of the ink bottle and turned the bottle over. Then he pressed the inky thumb against the paper, after which he wrote under the mark that this was the signature of Gulam Mohammed Kachero, witnessed by him, and added his own signature. I signed my name to the paper which stated that Gulam had turned the five hundred and seventy-three rupees over to me, and took the copy of the receipt, on which was his thumbprint. Gulam, still moaning, tucked the receipt away in a fold of his turban.

The eight pony wallahs, together with Puss in Boots, who had all been watching the whole performance and taking in every word, now moved off to where their ponies were standing unconcernedly among the boxes and bundles heaped up along the trail. They filled their brier bowls with barley-flour, known locally as *sattu*,

poured tea over it and molded the mess into dumplings, which they thrust into their mouths with relish. I doubted if Gulam had let them pause for a midday meal.

We were beginning to wonder what had happened to Ismaili, when, well after four o'clock, he came in sight, followed by four husky villagers who were carrying a crude stretcher. As soon as they reached us, an argument began over the amount they were to be paid to carry the injured man back to Kargil. They demanded thirty rupees, Rajah offered ten, and a compromise at twenty was finally reached. Rajah entrusted the money to Gulam, to be paid to them at Kargil, and took a thumbprint receipt from Gulam. To Ismaili, who was to go along leading the horse that had thrown Gulam, we entrusted ten rupees, to be handed to Gulam at Kargil for any extra expenses that might arise. I wrote a note to Dr. Koul, requesting him to notify the Army Agency, so that they might arrange for Gulam's transportation to Srinagar, and gave the note to Ismaili to deliver. Then the unhappy cook-guide who had caused us so much annoyance from the first was hoisted onto the shoulders of the four villagers, and the little group started down the long hill, the riderless horse bringing up the rear. As we watched them head down toward the valley, a rising wind increased the dust swirls around them until, as if they were being whisked out of our lives by the mysterious mountain djinn of Rajah's faith, they disappeared altogether from view.

At the village from which Ismaili had recruited the four men with the stretcher we made camp for the night in a harvested wheat field. Under Rajah's direction the pony wallahs set up our sleeping tent and the cook tent. He was already serving as interpreter, banker, guide and caravanmaster; he now took over as cook and gave us the best meal we had had since leaving his house-boat. Fed, we turned in at once; and it seemed not more than ten minutes later when I was awakened by angry voices outside the tent, sat up and realized it was daylight.



THE LADIES OF LADAKH SPEND MANY HOURS AT THEIR KNITTING

THESE JOVIAL YARKANDI TRADERS MAY BE RUSSIAN AGENTS





Rajah stuck his head through the tent flap. "What's all the noise about?" I asked sleepily.

"The four villagers who carried the cook-guide to Kargil have got back. They walked all night. They say they haven't been paid, and they want their money."

"Not paid?" I ejaculated. "Why, they saw us give the money to Gulam!"

"Yes, but they say he refused to give it to them. Apparently he decided to keep it for himself. Here's a letter from Dr. Koul."

I tore it open. "It just says that the man's hip is thrown out, as we thought," I said, "and that he wants to send him on to Srinagar at once. And he winds up by asking us to send him two hundred rupees immediately, 'for expenses.'"

"That's ridiculous!" said Rajah. "He must think we don't know that the hospital service is free. Don't send him a single rupee!"

"I don't intend to," I said. "How could I, out of what we have left? But what are we to do about these villagers?"

"Pay them," said Rajah. "I'll get a receipt, and when you make your settlement with the Army Agency you deduct that amount."

I peered out and saw that at a little distance behind the four men the rest of the villagers, including the womenfolk, had gathered. The women looked even more grim and threatening than the men. I gave Rajah the money.

In a few minutes he came back with the receipt, signed by four thumbs. "They quieted down as soon as they saw the money," he said. "Twenty rupees is probably more money than the whole village has ever seen at any one time. They are very happy now. They say that the cook-guide is a crook, and that the sahibs are suckers but honest men."

"Ouch!" I said.

VI

*The Land That Is
Still Tibet*

PUSS IN BOOTS came from the cook tent, bringing the pan of water that Rajah had already heated, and lingered to watch me as I shaved myself. Indeed, you couldn't have driven him away. To him, this was the most fascinating operation ever devised by man. He imitated my every move, rubbing his fingers over his own hairless face, grinning and chuckling as if the whole performance were being enacted for his special enjoyment. It started the day right for both of us.

Breakfast over, the tents were struck, the ponies laden, and we set off through a wild and desolate mountain country which, as soon as we had left the cluster of village huts behind, seemed wholly uninhabited. In all that day's march we saw only one human being—a post-runner, or dak wallah, as they are called, coming from Leh with his canvas sack of mail strapped to his back, who passed us at a dogtrot on his long journey to Sonamarg, hardly glancing at us as he jogged by. It was a country of sandstone cliffs and rocks, sharp in outline and brilliant in color, unlike any that we had so far seen.

After our noonday halt for a bite to eat, we had ridden only a mile or two when Loren exclaimed: "What in the world are those funny-looking objects over there?"

They were indeed queer. They looked somewhat like huge pear-shaped bottles, six feet high, standing at the edge of the road. They seemed to be made of sun-baked clay, whitewashed over. I had never seen anything like them.

"Those are chortens," Rajah explained, smiling. "And now you

know you are in Tibet. They are Tibetan Buddhist burial shrines. When a Buddhist priest—a lama—dies, his body is burned till only the bones are left. Then the bones are ground into a fine bone meal, to the accompaniment of drum beating, horn blowing and chanting. Out of this bone meal little images or statues of gods are made and placed inside the chorten. The chortens vary in size according to the importance of the dead lama, from a very few feet to as much as fifty feet in height. From now on you will see many of them along the road. They show, better than any signpost, that you are now in the land of Buddha.”

“Did you say we are in Tibet?” asked Loren in a puzzled tone. “I thought that when we crossed the Suru River at Kargil we were in the province of Ladakh, a part of Kashmir.”

“You are right,” said Rajah. “You are in Ladakh, and Ladakh is a part of Kashmir. When the Maharajah of Jammu seized Kashmir a hundred years ago, his Dogra soldiers turned eastward and swept over Ladakh also, which was then a part of Tibet. But the inhabitants, all Tibetans, were never driven out. The Ladakhi are still Tibetans, in blood, in language, in dress, in religion and in customs. That is why I say you are in Tibet.”

“Have it your way,” said Loren. “I don’t see anybody around here, living or dead, to deny it.”

The lonely road led on. An hour and a half later we came in sight of a lofty, fortresslike rock, framed between the mountains, and crowned by a long, low building whose white walls flushed red in the light of the sinking sun. This was the lamasery, or Buddhist monastery, of Mulbekh, the first lamasery that we had seen.

We rode on toward the village of Maulba Chamba (Mulbekh), which nestled at the foot of the majestic spire of rock. It was shortly before sunset when we reached the village. Shadows of exquisite pastel hues were creeping up the flanks of the mountains to the west, but the skies above the valley were bright, and the

blood-red rays of the setting sun flamed crimson against the huge rock on which the lamasery was perched. As we came closer to the foot of the mighty rock and, with eyes shielded against the sun, peered upward at the lamasery, we saw the figure of a lama, tiny at that height, come out on a balcony. Lifting a long trumpet to his lips he blew repeated blasts—unmelodious gruntings, echoing over the valley, a blatting so monotonous that we were grateful when it suddenly ceased.

As we entered the village we caught sight of a small group of people—three men and a woman—who were standing on a low wall at the edge of the road and evidently waiting for us. “Who are these people?” I asked. “A reception committee?”

Rajah peered at them. “Yes,” he said, “that is just what it is. That is the owner of our next caravan. This one, as you know, leaves us here and goes back to Kargil. The other two men are his younger brothers, and the woman is his wife.”

These were the first Tibetans, or Ladakhi, we had encountered, and I was fascinated by their dark Mongoloid faces and their queer costumes. In general, the loose *gonche*, or knee-length coat worn by the men, resembled the loose-fitting garment of the Balti villagers we had seen in the neighborhood of Dras, but where the Balti had made no attempt to dye his cloth, this Tibetan caravan owner had dyed his. The loose coat was of the same coarsely woven homespun wool, almost as thick as a felt rug, but was dyed in a dark purplish-red color, almost the color of a dark wine. It was folded over double in front, and tied at the waist by a woolen sash called a *skirax*. The Tibetans, I had heard, wear no underwear, but in order to protect their feet and legs against cold they generally wear *namda*, or felt socks, as this man did, reaching to their knees. His shoes, called *pabboes*, were of knitted woolen thread, heavier than yarn, with leather soles. His cap was cone-shaped, with projecting flaps which could be pulled down over the ears in cold weather, and it looked a good deal

like a flowerpot turned upside down. It was lined with quilted cloth, although fur is often used.

His wife's costume differed little from her husband's, so far as the *gonche* was concerned, which was of the same dark-red cloth. She wore a skirt of the same material; and in addition, over her shoulders, covering her back, she wore a goatskin, with the hair turned inside. This, it appeared, is an indispensable item of a Ladakhi woman's costume. It was used as a shawl, and while it served to protect her against cold and rendered easy the carrying of a child it was also regarded as an essential decoration. Weights, I found, are carried on the back in Ladakh, instead of on the head, as in India. Her shoes also were similar to those of her husband, but the headdress was quite different. It was called a *pairak*, and was made of a broad strip of cloth, studded with raw turquoises and extending from the forehead over the head and part way down her back. She also wore large lappets of black sheepskin which were attached to her plaited hair and stood out on both sides of her head as a protection to the ears against cold.

As we drew up alongside the quartet, all four broke into beaming smiles and jabbered what I took to be a welcome. The woman was holding a baby lamb in her arms. This she held out to me, and I took it gingerly.

"What's this gift for?" I asked Rajah.

"It isn't a gift," he said, after he had questioned her. "She thinks you might want to use it in your pictures and she wants you to buy it."

"Thank her, but tell her we can't use it," I said, handing the pathetic little animal back to her. "But how did she hear that we are making pictures?"

"Two of our pony wallahs were ahead of us," Rajah reminded me. "They probably got here an hour ago, and the word spread."

Our procession moved on, with the woman and the three men following, and by the time we reached the dak bungalow, which

stood in a good-sized field on the far edge of the village, half the population of the place was trooping at our heels. We moved in as soon as the pony wallahs had unloaded the pack horses, but still the crowd wouldn't go away. Heads were constantly peering in at the open door and in most instances they were the heads of women.

"These Ladakhi women are certainly not shy," said Loren. "They're not like the Kashmiri and the Balti women we saw on the way here. Don't you remember, if we happened to see one at work in the fields she would hide her face and stand with her back to us until we had gone by? But just look at these gals! There are a couple of them staring in right now!"

"No, they are not like the Balti women," Rajah agreed, "and even more unlike our Moslem women, who keep their faces veiled. Dr. Koul was right when he called them bold. There is no modesty here. In fact, you will find in Leh many people who are known as Arguns. They are the offspring of traders visiting Ladakh and of the women of this country. There are not enough women to go around here. In Kashmir a Moslem may have two wives, as I have, or even three, but here in Ladakh almost every woman has to accept three husbands."

"Three husbands!" I exclaimed incredulously. "Are you joking?"

"It is the truth," said Rajah solemnly. "The men outnumber the women many times in this country. All property goes to the eldest son. In return he must support his sisters and the two brothers next to him in age. The brothers may not marry, but they share his wife, and if she has any children they consider all three husbands as fathers. If the man has more than two younger brothers the youngest must leave home and earn their own living. If they cannot find work as farm hands or coolies, all that is left to them is to find shelter in a lamasery, where they are employed

as servants. A coolie has no chance of marriage, unless he is lucky enough to win the favor of a girl who is an only child."

"What good would that do him?" I asked.

"As an only child, the girl would have a great advantage," Rajah explained. "She would be an heiress, and she would not have to marry three brothers, in the usual way, unless she wanted to. If it struck her fancy, she could pick out a younger brother without a cent to his name and marry him. On trial, of course."

"You mean that it wouldn't be a permanent marriage?"

"It may be, or it may be not. It is a perfectly respectable marriage, one in which the husband is known as a *magpa*. But he has to be a model husband at all times. If his heiress wife is disappointed in him at any time, she can throw him out without any legal or religious problem whatever."

"Oh, brother!" exclaimed Loren. "And can he get rid of her as easily?"

"It would be practically impossible," said Rajah. "In a country where a man thinks he is lucky to have even one third of a wife, who would believe any charges made by a man who was so greedy as to want a whole wife to himself?"

"I can see your point," I said. "All the cards are stacked against the *magpa* from the first.

"That's it exactly," said Rajah. "The *magpa* as a rule doesn't have the ghost of a chance, and everybody knows it. This is a land in which the younger brother in a large family knows that unless he has the physique of a god and the charm of Siva himself all the cards, as you say, are stacked against him. So he doesn't try to be a *magpa* but resigns gracefully and enters a lamasery."

"What happens when a woman marries three brothers and the oldest brother dies?" I asked. "Does she have to stay on with the two junior brothers?"

"Oh, no," said Rajah. "She is under no obligation at all. If she

doesn't want to stay, she merely ties a thread to the finger of the dead husband, breaks it of her own accord, and thereafter is considered by law to be free of all three of them."

"Oh, brother!" said Loren, shaking his head. "What a country!"

We paid off the pony wallahs from Kargil next morning and hired a fresh crew from the red-coated gentleman who, with his two brothers and their joint wife, had come out to meet us as we entered Mulbekh. He and one of his brothers were to go along with us. The wife came to see us off, together with the spare husband who was going to keep the home fires burning. It all seemed to work out very well.

The ragged bhisti, Ismaili, who had escorted the unfortunate Gulam Mohammed to the Kargil hospital, had got back and reported that the injured man was resting more comfortably.

We had proceeded less than a mile on our way and were passing through a lonely rocky defile when our attention was arrested by a strange figure, much larger than life-size, carved in deep relief upon the face of an isolated boulder which stood close beside the trail. It was a seated figure, with a face of great serenity and peace, and to come upon it in this lonely and uninhabited spot gave one a distinct feeling of awe. Why was it there?

"That," said Rajah, in a slightly supercilious tone, "is supposed to be a representation of Buddha Maitreya, who will someday be born to bring peace to the world. The Hindus believe that their great god, Vishnu, has lived on earth at nine different times since the beginning of the world. His ninth incarnation, or avatar, was as Gautama Buddha, who was born two thousand four hundred years ago, and became the founder of the Buddhist religion. Vishnu's tenth reincarnation will be as this personage, Buddha Maitreya. When that will occur I do not know, and neither do they. No one knows when this figure was carved here. It may have been a thousand years ago, or only a few hundred years. Why this spot was chosen, I do not know, unless it was

to attract the attention of travelers, who have been passing this way for a thousand years and more. Many prayers have been made here by Buddhists."

"How do you know that?" I asked. "Have you heard them?"

Rajah pointed at the top of the rock, where many tattered bits of white cloth, fastened to twigs, were fluttering in the breeze.

"Those are prayers," he said. "The Buddhist lamas teach, and the people of this country believe them, that prayers can be made by wind power. I will show you many more as we go along this road."

Leaving the valley of Mulbekh, which itself was at an elevation of ten thousand feet, our path rose by a very gradual and easy ascent in seven miles to the Namika La, a pass whose elevation above sea level is thirteen thousand feet. The view from the summit of the pass was a striking one. As far as the eye could see, in all directions except one, was wave on wave of brown, red and chocolate-tinted hills. Curiously none of these gentle undulations seemed to be much higher or lower than ten thousand feet. Straight ahead of us was the exception. There, on the distant horizon, was a jagged row of peaks which towered well over the intervening country and seemed to pierce into the very sky.

"Do we travel in that direction?" I asked, pointing at the formidable range ahead of us.

"Yes, we shall spend the night in the valley down there," said Rajah, "and tomorrow we shall cross those mountains. It is hard to believe, but the pass which crosses them is only a little higher than this one. It is called the Fotu La, and its summit is less than five hundred feet higher than this. But some of those peaks above it are twenty thousand feet in height."

Just then we came to a mound of rocks beside the trail. A long pole and several shorter sticks had been firmly planted in it, and from these sticks fluttered more of the little white prayer flags. Some of the pieces of cloth were adorned with crude pictures of

horses, stenciled in black, and were evidently prayers for the safety of a caravan. Tufts of yak's hair were also attached to the top of the tallest pole.

"These Ladakhi people believe that a Tibetan spirit lives here in the rocks at the top of this pass," said Rajah. "A Buddhist traveler invariably ties one or more strips of cloth to these sticks when he crosses Namika La for the first time. It is his way of offering a prayer to the spirit, through wind power."

"Do the Ladakhi do this only when crossing a pass or when they come to a carved Buddha like the one we saw this morning?" I asked.

"They do it on all sorts of occasions," said Rajah. "When buying cloth, or when cloth is woven, it is customary to cut off a strip and make it into prayer flags. They tie them on sticks, poles, branches of trees, even on certain shrubs, fasten them on top of their houses, on their shrines and, in short, wherever the wind blows. They believe that as long as it moves there is prayer."

After our midday meal I saw Puss in Boots begging from Rajah the tin cans which we had emptied of their contents. He had done this ever since he had joined us at Dras, each time carefully cleaning out the cans and then hiding them under a pile of rocks near the trail. It was his plan to pick them up on his return journey home, and I imagined he would astonish his friends there with this wealth.

On the way down the far slopes of the Namika La that afternoon, tiring of the clumsy wooden saddle under me, I would dismount from time to time and walk. Whenever I did so, Puss in Boots would hurry up to my side, the camera strapped to his back, and smilingly help me over the rough places with one hand, while holding up his pants with the other. We camped that night at the foot of the valley. The temperature, which had been at eighty degrees at noon, dropped to zero in the night.

Puss in Boots, as usual, slept on the ground, curled up in a tight little ball, and seemed not to mind the cold in the least.

We began the ascent of the Fotu La the next morning, and after what seemed an interminable journey, up, down, and up again, we reached the summit of the pass at three in the afternoon, and began the descent. The scene was fantastic. The loose sandy soil of the mountainside had been washed away by centuries of rains until it was crisscrossed by deep gullies, which encircled countless cone-shaped mounds, as streets encircle houses. Here and there the yellow clay had been left standing in a long wall, like that of some ancient city, and elsewhere it took on the appearance of some ruined fort. It was like passing through a ghost city—the ghost of a city that never was.

We cautiously zigzagged back and forth on the narrow and sandy trail, which at times was so steep that only the utmost caution kept us from toppling off into the wilderness below. Having descended several thousand feet, however, and just before reaching the valley of Lamayuru, our destination for the night, we found ourselves in a narrow gorge. The trail at this point then led up and over the crest of a low hill, with steep mountains on both sides. Having reached the top of the rise, we saw before us, blocking the middle of the path, which here opened up into a wider area, a tall pink-stuccoed chorten. Rounding this bulbous pillar, we suddenly saw before us the enchanted valley of Lamayuru.

“Enchanted” it certainly was. I discovered that before the night was over.

The two sides of the valley were of quite different character. To our right the steep slopes had been terraced, and formed fields of irregular size, in which wheat was growing and at the foot of the slope green oases of willow and poplar trees betokened the existence of a stream. The slopes to our left were rocky and

gravelly, red-brown in color and topped by sheer palisades of sandy rock. Our road curved to the left, at the foot of these cliffs. A half mile from where we were standing, at the foot of the chorten, the road led directly to the breath-taking feature of the landscape—the lamasery, or *gompa*, of Yuru. It was a group of long, low buildings, the principal one only four stories in height, perched at the very top of the precipitous cliff, a hundred feet or more above the huddle of the peasant huts at its foot. One white-walled, red-eaved building rising above another, the whole effect was as of some strange Asiatic skyscraper, not built by human hands, but conjured into existence. “In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure-dome decree.” Above it, on tall flagpoles, splendid prayer flags fluttered against the opalescent sky; and from it the sonorous booming of Tibetan drums rumbled monotonously over the valley, like distant thunder.

“Is it real? Or is it a movie set?” exclaimed Loren, as we gazed incredulously at the fantastic scene before us.

“It must be real,” I said. “Other travelers have seen it and described it. But it certainly must come close to being one of the wonders of the world.”

We gazed and gazed, spellbound, and when at last we started on our attention was drawn by a curious wall, about four feet high and the same width, constructed of loosely piled rocks and extending for several hundred feet along the middle of the road, beginning at the chorten and leading toward the lamasery. On many of the stones making up the wall strange characters were deeply carved.

“What are all these stones heaped up here for?” asked Loren. “Do they serve any purpose, or did somebody just start to build a wall and then gave it up? Does it have any special significance?”

“That is what is called, by the Ladakhi, a *mendong*,” said Rajah, “but is usually known to travelers as a *mani* wall. You will see them in all parts of Ladakh. They are usually about this size,

but when we get to Leh you will see one, just outside the city, that is about seven feet high. Yes, they have a great significance to all who believe in the Buddhist religion. Each stone that is placed on such a wall is supposed to be a good deed done. The writing on the stones has usually been carved there by wandering monks, who spend their lives in acquiring spiritual merit in this way."

"What do the inscriptions say?" I asked.

"It is the same one on each of the stones," said Rajah. "The words are '*Om mani padme hum.*' They are the words of the favorite Buddhist prayer, and are repeated by every good lama countless times each day."

"What do they mean?"

"I am not exactly sure," said Rajah, "because no two lamas ever give quite the same interpretation. The usual interpretation is, 'Oh, God, the jewel in the lotus, receive me!' By the way, when you pass by any *mani* wall, you must always pass along it to the left, keeping your right side toward it. That's to keep away the devils who would otherwise come at you from your left. And, if you will notice, even the horses in this country obey that rule. If you give them their heads, they will always pass a *mani* wall to the left."

"Come, come!" I exclaimed. "Do you expect us to believe that?"

"There's no magic about it," said Rajah. "It's just that they've been trained to do it from birth. Watch and see."

Keeping the *mani* wall to the right, then, we started down the hill toward the towering stage-set which stood ahead.

As we drew nearer, we saw that on the highest balcony of the *gompa* there were perched a number of lamas, all cloaked in dark red, like a row of hawks roosted at the top of a dead tree. It seemed certain that they were watching us, but not one of them lifted a hand to wave a greeting.

"I'm glad we brought along some presents for them," said

Loren. "We ought to get some good loot in return, from a museum like that. When do you think we can get to see them, Rajah?"

"Not before morning," said Rajah. "The lamas go to bed early, and it's almost dark now. And here we are at the dak bungalow."

We turned off the trail, followed him for a short distance to the right and entered the courtyard of what seemed the smallest dak bungalow we had yet seen. It consisted of two little rooms only, with an adjoining shed, which was used as a kitchen.

As we crossed the grass-grown little courtyard, we happened to glance upward. Far overhead, directly above us, was the lamasery, with the tiny figures of the lamas still visible on the balcony.

"Of course it's too far up there to make out their features," said Loren, "but, do you know, it seems as if I could look right into the eyes of every lama on that balcony, and there isn't one who appears any too glad to see us."

"They will be glad enough to see you when you take your presents up there," said Rajah cynically. "They are very greedy people."

The pony wallahs unloaded the pack animals and carried our gear into the bungalow, then went on with the horses to their camping place, a little farther down the hill. Only Puss in Boots lingered, to blow up the air mattresses which we had brought all the way from San Francisco. He regarded this as a special treat, and, as he sat puffing away, he was grinning for all he was worth. He was to leave us next morning, having agreed to come only this far, and we would hate to see him go. Rajah promised to have some more empty tin cans ready for him in the morning, and he hurried away happily after the others.

Scarcely had he gone, when I heard a tapping sound out on the front porch, and stepped out to see what it was. There before me was one of the oldest men I have ever seen anywhere. He must have been a hundred years old, at the least. His emaciated body

was enveloped in a cloak, very dirty, of deep purplish-red, and his closely shaved skull was covered by an ancient cap of the same color. His face was as yellow as old ivory, seamed with innumerable wrinkles, and a few straggly hairs protruded from his chin. But the most arresting feature of that mummylike face was his eyes. They were almost closed, but as he was continuously trying to keep them open they blinked on and off as if he were practicing the Morse telegraph code. They were unbelievably inflamed, and pus was oozing from beneath their reddened rims. The moment he saw me he pointed at his eyes with a dirty clawlike forefinger and began chattering in a shrill voice, not unlike that of an excited monkey.

Rajah, who had come to peer over my shoulder, listened, then shook his head. "He is a lama," he said, "but if he came down all those steps by himself it is a miracle. I cannot understand what he says, but it is plain that what he wants is some medicine for his eyes."

Loren joined us. "Holy mackerel, what eyes!" he exclaimed. "I know what to give him. There's some tubes of eye salve, Army surplus stuff, in our medicine box. Bring him in and I'll fish one out."

The tube having been found, Loren went to work with a will, although, a moment later, he muttered in disgust, "Gosh, there is more stuff coming out of these eyes than is going in!"

"You had better wash your hands thoroughly in hot water, when you get through," I observed.

"Any more suggestions?" asked Loren tartly. "Whew! I don't think this old boy has had a bath in fifty years!"

Once the contents of the tube had been used to good advantage, our ancient visitor, still blinking like a traffic signal, bowed gratefully and withdrew. By the time Loren had finished his ablutions, Rajah was preparing our evening meal. An hour or two later, tired out with the day's march, we were ready for bed. Loren

took one of the two small rooms; Rajah and I shared the other, I on my air mattress and Rajah on a pile of blankets and saddle rugs spread on the floor. There was no window in either room, and the only door in each room opened on the porch, so we left the doors open for ventilation, cold as the night was. We went to sleep immediately.

It must have been well after midnight when I suddenly awoke. I woke with the distinct feeling that something was amiss. But moonlight was streaming in through the open door and I could see Rajah lying peacefully asleep on his pile of rugs near the door. Nevertheless the feeling persisted, and I decided to get up and look around. As quietly as I could I pulled myself out of my sleeping bag and crept toward the door. But even the slight sound I made awoke Rajah, who slept like a cat, and he instantly leaped to his feet and glided ahead of me to the door, where he paused. As I reached his side, he made a gesture commanding silence.

I peered past him. A full moon had climbed high in the sky, and the whole mysterious valley of Lamayuru lay bathed in its unearthly brilliance. There was not a sound anywhere in the sleeping village.

I saw the Thing standing in the center of the moonlit yard. It was an enormous white dog, snow-white, taller than a great Dane, tall as a pony.

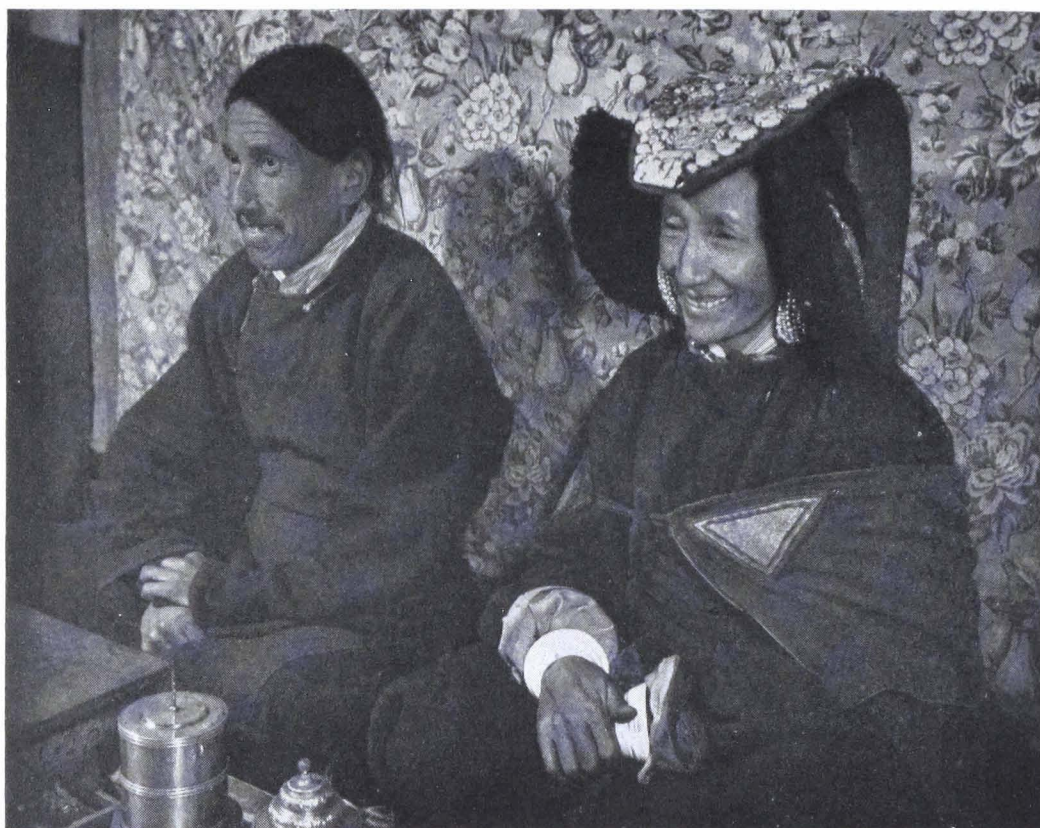
It turned Its head and looked at us. Its eyes were rimmed with red, like the eyes of the ancient lama who had come to our door that evening.

It turned away from us and began moving, without a sound, diagonally across the unkempt patch of grass and toward the opposite end of the porch where we were standing.

Unable to move or cry out, I watched its slow advance. Was I dreaming? I had heard of the ferocious Tibetan mastiffs which are sometimes kept to guard the approaches to these remote lama-



THE AUTHOR TELLS THE QUEEN OF LADAKH THAT HE ADMIRES HER HAT. This hat is studded with turquoises, weighs eight pounds, and is valued at thousands of dollars. The Queen's black lambskin ear flaps follow a fashion set by a Queen who ruled centuries ago.



THEIR MAJESTIES, THE KING AND QUEEN OF LADAKH



THE ROYAL SUMMER PALACE AT STOG, NEAR LEH—IT'S A WALK-UP
CAN'T BE HEATED, NEEDS REPAIRS—BUT THE SCENERY
IS MAGNIFICENT!

series of Western Tibet, but I could not believe that any mastiff, of any breed, could ever grow to this size. As I watched, it reached the veranda, crossed the narrow porch in two strides and went in through the open door into the room where Loren lay asleep.

I wanted to cry out, to warn him of the danger upon him, but then I thought that a shout might provoke the animal to attack him, and if I kept quiet, the great beast might ignore the sleeping man and withdraw.

Rajah started for the door through which the dog had vanished, and I followed. He reached the door, glanced into the room and then, with a look of utter bewilderment on his face, beckoned me to his side. I looked around the tiny room.

Except for Loren, peacefully snoring on his mattress, the room was empty.

There was no window by which the animal might have escaped. No door led into the other room. Except for the door by which he had entered, there was no way to leave. And he could not have come out without being seen by Rajah and me. The huge white dog had vanished into nothingness.

“My God!” I exclaimed in a hoarse whisper. “Where did he go?”

Loren turned and mumbled in his sleep.

“Sh-h-h-h!” whispered Rajah. “Let him sleep.”

Silently we turned and padded back to our room.

“Did we dream we saw that dog?” I demanded, still unable to believe what we had seen.

“Oh, no,” said Rajah, still in a whisper. “We did not dream it. The dog was here, and we saw him go into that room. But strange things happen at these lamaseries. Perhaps we were only made to think we saw him. But let us talk no more of it tonight.”

“But why should they do that?” I persisted.

“I do not know. This is a land of devils, and things happen here

for which there is no explanation.” After a pause he added: “Perhaps the lamas want to frighten us away. Perhaps they do not want us to stay here.”

“But what possible reason would they have for not wanting us here?” I asked. “This is a regular dak bungalow. Travelers always stop here.”

“Travelers used to stop here before the fifteenth of August,” Rajah corrected me. “Besides, it might be that they hold some strange ceremony at this time that they don’t want outsiders to see.”

“Well, I can’t think of any easier way to get rid of people,” I said. “There wouldn’t be enough gold in all of that lamasery to make me stay here another night. Did you ever see anything as big as that dog?”

There was no answer. Rajah was curling himself up in his blankets.

“I don’t believe that even the late Mr. Houdini could equal that trick,” I went on, half to myself. There was still no answer. Rajah was already asleep.

By mutual consent we said nothing to Loren about his nocturnal visitor. In the light of morning it just didn’t seem to make any sense to say that a huge snow-white dog had entered his room and there vanished into thin air. That was something no one would believe unless he had seen it himself.

Our first visitor in the morning was Puss in Boots, who came to get his wages and say good-by. For once he wasn’t holding his pants up with one hand and the camera equipment with the other. Rajah gave him his money and added the couple of tin cans we had emptied at dinner and breakfast. The little fellow seemed even more pleased by the tin cans than the silver coins and promptly festooned them about his neck with a piece of string. Then, smiling and nodding, he pointed at the leather bag also slung around his neck. From time to time, along the way, we

had given him a cigarette. He hadn't smoked any of them, but had stowed them away in the bag, one by one. Now, pointing at the bag, he rattled off the longest speech we had ever heard him utter.

"He is telling you how grateful he is for the cigarettes," said Rajah. "He has saved every one of them, he says, and is taking them home to his old mother. He is very fond of her, and she is very fond of tobacco. This will be a great treat for her. There is nothing he could take her, he says, which could please her so much."

"The little fellow is really full of appreciation, isn't he?" said Loren. "I wish the others were like him. Puss in Boots is in a class by himself. Let's give him some more cigarettes, and really set his old lady up for the next month."

We added a pack of cheap cigarettes we had bought in Srinagar to his store, and a few more coins. His smile now broadened to a tremendous grin, and he bobbed his head up and down until I thought it would come off. A moment later he started back on his long journey to Dras, nearly a hundred miles behind us. Even on his tireless legs, it would take him four days. We watched him until he had disappeared from view around the chorten at the top of the hill and were sorry to see him go. No more cheerful companion ever lived.

A few minutes after his departure, one of the Tibetan pony wallahs we had hired in Mulbekh wandered in and begged from Rajah whatever scraps of food had been left over. He ate them at the kitchen door, from a wooden bowl lined with silver, which he took from inside his girdle. The dark wood of which the bowl was made had been polished on the outside till it gleamed like mahogany. It struck me that the silver-lined bowl would make an excellent ash tray, and I asked Rajah to see if the man would sell it.

While Rajah was dicker for the bowl, the ancient lama whose eyes had been doctored by Loren paid us a second visit. This time

he was accompanied by another lama, a much younger man. The salve had done wonders for the old man's eyes. He was no longer blinking like a traffic light, and his eyes were actually half open. The two lamas waited patiently while Rajah went on with his negotiations for the bowl, watching the proceedings with interest; and when the deal was at last concluded and Rajah paid the man ten silver rupees, the price finally agreed on, I fancied I saw a gleam in the eyes of the Ancient One.

I bore my prize off to exhibit it to Loren, who was shaving in his room. "What do you think of that?" I asked triumphantly. "I'm going to take it home for an ash tray. Rajah says that it's made from the wood of a tree that grows only near Lhasa, in Tibet proper. It's called a briar. I paid one of the pony wallahs ten rupees for it."

Loren examined it admiringly. "Say, I'd like to get one of these myself!" he exclaimed. "But ten rupees is a lot of money, in the state that this expedition is in. Maybe I can get one when we reach Leh, if Rajah raises the money there."

"I hope you can," I said. "By the way, your patient is back, and is waiting for you. You sure did wonders for him. He's lost that traffic-blinker look."

"Oh, that's the salve," said Loren modestly. "United States Army surplus medicine will cure anything. Well, let's have a look at Grandpop."

Grandpop and his friend had moved up to the porch, and as soon as the old man saw Loren he began pointing to his eyes and nodding his head. Then, to our astonishment, he reached into his robe and brought out a briar bowl that was the counterpart of the one I had just bought, except that it was far older and dirtier.

Loren stared at it with open mouth, and then suddenly began to chuckle. "So you want some more salve, do you, Grandpop?" He grinned. "Well, here is where you and I do a little horse trading!"

He popped back to his room and returned in a moment with a second tube of the omnipotent salve. Walking over to the Ancient One he held the tube up under his nose and waved it before the old man's bleary eyes.

"This is what you want, old boy, isn't it?" he asked tantalizingly.

The old man couldn't understand the words, of course, but the invitation was unmistakable. He nodded and cackled and reached for the tube.

"Sure, you want it," chuckled Loren, keeping it just out of his reach. "It's marvelous stuff. The best the old U. S. Army ever turned out. Guaranteed to cure anything from warts to fallen arches and spots in front of the eyes."

"Never heard any claims like that from Uncle Sam." I grinned.

"Don't be a killjoy and spoil my stuff," said Loren, without taking his eyes off his quarry. "Uncle Loren wants a silver briar in exchange for this tube and he is going to have it!"

With this, he tapped on the rim of the Tibetan bowl with the tube of unguent, for emphasis. Grandpop gave a chirp of joy, grabbed again for the tube, got it and cheerfully let go his hold on the bowl. Loren brought it over to show it to me triumphantly.

"It's older than yours, and the rim is cracked on one side, but so much the better," he boasted. "It's an authentic, Grade A antique, right out of the hands of a lama who is so old that he probably knew Buddha personally. And all for free!"

"You'd better let Rajah give it a thorough scrubbing in boiling water," I said. "Remember where it came from. Rajah's gone to the kitchen to clean mine."

"I'll clean it myself," Loren announced, and headed for the kitchen.

Our ancient but spry guest wasted no time. He had already managed to get the cap off the tube and was squeezing the salve out in great gobs. By the time Loren got back he had not only

plastered it over both eyes but had also distributed it all over his forehead, cheeks, nose and chin and even his ears. There was hardly any salve left in the tube.

Loren held out the briar bowl for my inspection. No question about it, a thorough scrubbing had greatly improved its looks. The wood gleamed, the silver shone. It was truly a museum piece. No wonder Loren was proud of it.

Just then our ancient visitor's wrinkled left eyelid began to quiver suddenly under its layer of salve and finally, like a newborn chick breaking through its shell, popped open. The right eye followed suit, and then, as soon as they focused on us, he marched over to us and held out his hand for his briar. Loren unsuspectingly handed it to him.

The elder statesman scarcely paused to examine it. His parchmentlike fingers turned it over only once before he tucked it away inside the folds of his shawl. I saw the action, but Loren, who was lighting a cigarette, did not.

"Hey, Loren, he intends to keep it!" I gasped.

"He what?" exclaimed Loren. "Hey you, lama, give me back my cup! You got the medicine!"

The left eyelid of the pious old fraud fluttered in what seemed to me a highly self-complacent wink. He made no move to return the bowl.

"It looks to me as if you had got the run-around, Loren." I chuckled.

Loren was furious. "He can't do this to me!" he spluttered. "Tell him that for me, Rajah!"

The patient Rajah addressed himself to Grandpop's friend, the younger lama, and reported back. "He says he is perfectly willing to sell his briar to the master," Rajah translated, "for twenty rupees."

"Twenty rupees!" shouted Loren indignantly. "Why, Nicol paid only ten for his, and it was in much better condition!"

“Ah, but mine doesn’t go back to Buddha’s time,” I said.

Loren ignored this crack. “What about the medicine, Rajah?” he demanded. “Doesn’t he intend to pay for it?”

“He says it was free last night, and of course he thought it would be free this morning,” said Rajah, after a further conversation with the lamas. “As for the briar, if you don’t want to pay twenty rupees for it, and insist on being paid for the medicine, he says you can scrape it off his face and put it back in the tube.”

“But the briar,” groaned Loren. “Didn’t he give it to me for the medicine?”

“He has explained that,” said Rajah. “He said he saw us buying the briar from the pony wallah, and as he owns another one besides this he brought this out only to see if we wanted to buy it. He says he can’t understand why you walked off with it and washed it. He claims he never even thought of trading it for the medicine. He admits that the medicine is good, but not that good.”

“Get him out of here!” said Loren. “Get him out before he gets my shirt!”

Rajah managed this so diplomatically that the two lamas departed with smiles and bows. But they had no more than disappeared around the corner of the courtyard wall when I heard a cackle of laughter come floating back, which could have come only from a very, very old man.

Five minutes later, although it was still only eight o’clock in the morning, two more lamas arrived. They were very young ones. They announced that the Head Lama was now ready to receive us, if we would come immediately, and that they would guide us to the lamasery.

VII

 *I Don't Like Lamas*

"DON'T tell me we have to climb up there on foot!" I exclaimed, gazing apprehensively from the dak bungalow courtyard at the precipitous ascent leading to the lamasery buildings at the top of the cliffs. "I'm no human fly."

"Oh, no," Rajah said reassuringly. "I've already sent around for three of our horses and they are waiting. Ismaili will stay here to watch our supplies. We three will ride."

"What about the lighting inside those buildings, Rajah?" asked Loren. During the past month Rajah had been watching Loren at work so intelligently that he knew just what was needed. "There's no lighting at all," he said. "I think it would be best to take only the still camera and flash bulbs."

We induced the younger of the lamas who had come to guide us to carry the still camera in its case, strapped to his back. He panted and puffed all the way up the trail, and it was plain that he didn't have the physical prowess of little Puss in Boots. But then, there was never anyone who could equal Puss in Boots.

We didn't forget our presents for the Head Lama. We had been told in Srinagar that if we took presents we might expect gifts in return, and, as this was reputed to be one of the richest lamaseries in Western Tibet, we looked forward hopefully for something particularly choice.

As we climbed the steep and narrow trail leading to the entrance gates of the *gompa*, which were at the very top, I caught occasional glimpses of the valley spread out below us. The scenery of the valley of Lamayuru is of the most rugged description. With the

exception of those tiny plots of terraced land at the foot of the hills, the whole panorama, as far as the eye could reach, seemed a wilderness of rock and sand, like the dry and uneven bed of a prehistoric sea.

At the edge of our path, at frequent intervals, supported by square pedestals of heaped-up rocks, stood the curiously shaped Buddhist funeral shrines, the chortens, which had now become a familiar feature of the road. Some of these were twenty feet high, and capped like mushrooms.

The outbuildings of the lamasery, which included storehouses for grain, were erected at successive levels along the upward spiraling road, and, as each one was topped with fluttering prayer flags, the general effect they gave was that of a wretched county fair or carnival, deserted alike by exhibitors and visitors. At the top, outside the wall surrounding the main building, we dismounted, left our horses in charge of the pony wallah and walked through the untended gate into the courtyard. There wasn't any reception committee.

The first thing that caught our attention was a deep niche in the wall on our right, in which three cylinders, about a foot in diameter and mounted on spindles, stood side by side. Around each cylinder was fastened a roll of paper or parchment on which a Buddhist prayer was inscribed. The lama leading us gave each of the wheels a spin as he passed, muttering as he did so the inevitable *Om mani padme hum*.

"There are your prayer wheels," said Rajah. "Every time the lama gives the wheel a spin it is considered the same thing as repeating a prayer. In this way the lamas gain merit for a future life. But it is important that the wheel be spun in the right direction. If he should carelessly spin it in the wrong direction, the prayer would have the opposite effect, they believe, and would harm him in another life."

"Are prayer wheels all the same size, Rajah?" I asked.

“Some are so large that they can be turned only by water power, like a mill wheel,” he replied. “Others are so small they can be carried in the hand and used at home or when on a journey. Look, here comes a lama with one of them.”

Sure enough, a lama strolling along the other side of the court was busily spinning in his hands a prayer wheel hardly larger than a baby’s rattle.

Skirting a circular outdoor court where, we were told, the lamas perform their religious dances on certain holy days, we were conducted to the main building, a long, low structure of the simplest architectural lines, and then ascended a steep flight of stone steps to its upper floor. Here we were ushered into the central prayer chamber or chapel, or, as a place of worship is called in India, the chaitya. This was a high-ceilinged room about thirty feet square, the roof supported by wooden pillars darkened with the grime of centuries. When our eyes had gradually grown accustomed to the dim light, we saw that the rear wall, facing the entrance, was hidden by four tiers of massive shelves, on which rested a bewildering number of statues of Buddha, large and small. Occupying the most prominent position at the center of the bottom shelf was a large seated figure of Buddha, flanked by smaller statues. These, we were told, represented his Prime Minister, his physician and other worthies among his disciples. The upper shelves held a great many more of the same personages, but these were not in as good condition and seemed more or less discarded. The statues were of wood, brass, bronze and gilt. Small oil lamps burning in front of the lowest shelf, which was plainly the place of honor, threw a feeble gleam upon the statues there, and gifts of flowers, grain and rice had been placed there. On similar shelves which lined the side walls there were stacked what seemed at first glance to be miniature coffins, but which on closer examination turned out to be vast numbers of Tibetan manuscripts.

Ancient, incredibly musty hangings of tattered Chinese silk,

embroidered with fantastic designs, hung from the cobweb-shrouded crossbeams.

We were told by our guide that the lamas held their services twice daily in this chaitya, at nine in the morning and at three in the afternoon. We were fortunate in being just in time for the morning service.

When we first arrived, there were only a half dozen lamas in the chapel. These were seated on the floor. Three of them soon began to recite, in a shrill singsong chant, some prayers from one of their coffinlike books. They rocked their bodies back and forth as they did so. Next the lamasery orchestra filed in, carrying their musical instruments, and seated themselves near the chanting priests. Their instruments were formidable. They included several gongs, the largest of which was suspended from a pole placed on a stand. But the instruments which most fascinated me were the huge brass trumpets, four or five feet in length, widening from mouthpiece to outer rim like a megaphone.

The moment the group who had been reciting the prayers came to the end of their singsong chanting, the orchestra "went to town." Although the music resounded with almost deafening loudness in that comparatively small chamber, it was curiously interesting. Unlike Chinese music, which I had supposed it would resemble, it did not assault the ear with strange dissonances. I had read in the accounts of travelers in Tibet the claim that in the lamaseries one might hear music of extraordinary merit, based on the most ancient and scientific principles of musical composition; I can only say that I found it in its general effect not unattractive.

As the orchestra finished, the other lamas of the *gompa* began to file in. They were all "Red" lamas. This doesn't mean that they were believers in Communism. It means, merely, that they were adherents of the older sect of Tibetan Buddhists, which had its beginnings in Tibet thirteen hundred years ago. The word refers to their costume, the cloak of a dark purplish-red, topped

with a cap of the same color. The other sect, the "Yellow Hat," is of comparatively recent origin, having been founded only five hundred years ago. Its members also wear the red robe, but yellow hats. There is little doctrinal difference between the two, though the Yellow Hats are somewhat more austere, frowning on wine and women, if not song. They predominate in Tibet proper, while in Western Tibet (Ladakh) almost all the lamaseries are Red.

The monks who now came trooping in all wore costumes like that of Grandpop whom we spotted among them, still blinking furiously. Some wore no caps at all upon their closely shaved skulls. Most of them were old men. Their robes were patched, spotted with grease and unbelievably musty. There were about a hundred of the lamas, taking up most of the floor space, and there was a smell of stale sweat about the room and its occupants that grew in intensity as the minutes passed. I wondered if they ever bathed themselves or washed their garments, and decided in the negative without hesitation.

The chapel was much too small and ill ventilated for so many people. Yet, when compared with other rooms which we saw later, it seemed to be their largest assembly room. The lamasery, which from a distance had seemed so superb architecturally, now appeared, when viewed from within, as dreary as a Bowery lodginghouse. It was as though one had stepped around a gorgeously painted curtain, merely to find oneself in the sour darkness of a rat-infested medieval dungeon.

The chapel services were brief, consisting only of a prayer read aloud by one of the senior lamas, to which the assembled lamas murmured responses. The Head Lama came in just as the services ended. He was a heavy-set man who, I should judge, was in his early sixties. He was not in the least emaciated, as were so many of the others. On the contrary, he looked as plump and well fed as Al Capone in his palmiest days. His little eyes, encased in rolls of fat, were cold, shrewd and calculating. There was no aroma of

spirituality about him. He took no special part in the prayer service, and I suspect he had timed his arrival so as to be on hand for the presents, for as soon as the prayer meeting broke up he came over toward us, followed by many of the lamas, jostling one another in their eagerness to see what the handout might be.

I handed him the four packages which we had decided, back on the houseboat, should be given to this particular lamasery. The Head Lama opened them without enthusiasm. It was as if he performed this same chore every day. We knew that it had been a long time since any traveler had been to Lamayuru, but you wouldn't have thought so to watch him. There wasn't even a transient flicker of interest on his face as he examined them.

The gifts consisted of a flashlight, complete with extra batteries, two pairs of sunglasses, and a copper-lined *papier-mâché* bowl. There was a murmur of admiration from the lamas looking over his shoulder as the bowl was unwrapped, but he merely grunted and put it to one side. There was no question about it, the bowl was the most popular item with his followers, if not with him.

The flashlight was turned on, and then quickly off—for good, I imagined. Afterward, when we had groped our way through the murky light of the endless narrow passages of the *gompa*, I wondered why the lamas had shown no interest in it. Perhaps they had grown so accustomed to the darkness of their surroundings that they shrank from a bright light in any form whatsoever.

I had to show the Head Lama what the sunglasses were for. In the half-light of that dank and shadowy chapel, the dark glasses gave him the incongruous appearance of a blind beggar at a street corner. He seemed unable to grasp the idea that they were intended for a protection to the eyes in bright sunlight, and not for use indoors. Balancing them none too firmly at the end of his nose, he gropingly peered about first at one and then at another of his disciples. None were now paying any attention to him. Loren had begun making his photographs with the aid

of flash bulbs, and whenever he popped a bulb and tossed it aside, the lamas were on it like a lot of schoolboys tussling over a football. The Head Lama went on stumbling around the room, vainly trying to get the glasses into a position that would produce results. We left him there.

A few minutes later, when we had returned from a tour of the dreary cells and were photographing three large Buddhas in a room near the chapel, one of the lamas came hurrying in with Loren's sun helmet. Loren had left the topee in the chapel. The Head Lama, who by that time must have taken off his sunglasses, came on it and thought it must have been left there intentionally, as another present for him. The messenger had come to ask if this were so. Loren was fit to be tied at the very thought.

In another room adjoining the chapel we were confronted by the gigantic statue of a personage with a dozen heads sprouting from his shoulders and innumerable arms emerging, fanlike, from his sides. I wanted to call him the Thousand-Handed Buddha, but Rajah said it was not Buddha at all, but a gentleman named Chunrezig, a disciple who had followed Buddha's teachings so faithfully that he was venerated almost as Buddha's equal. His compassion for the sufferings of mankind was so great that Brahma had provided him with a dozen heads, instead of one, and with a myriad of hands to extend help to all in trouble. He was, moreover, credited with being the author of the prayer *Om mani padme hum*, which has been repeated billions of times by pious Buddhists through the centuries.

I had brought along my shooting stick, the portable seat that is the world's greatest gift to tired mankind, and while Loren went about his photography I decided to use it. As luck would have it, I picked a spot on the floor that seemed to be covered with concrete. There were several lamas standing around, but they only snickered as they watched me. I settled myself on the seat, and

the next thing I knew I was flat on the floor. Luckily I had retained a grip on the shooting stick. A yawning hole gaped in the floor beside me. Through it I could see, a dozen feet below me, the stone floor of the room below. The "concrete" on which I had rested the point of the shooting stick was nothing but dried clay, plastered over an old hole in the floor.

I was a little miffed. The compassionate Chunrezig hadn't stretched out a single one of his thousand arms to save me. And the lamas— Could it be that this was one of their favorite traps for visitors? We could hear their laughter still following us, as we wound our way down the steep path to the dak bungalow below.

"Well, how did you like your first visit to the lamasery?" Rajah asked me pointedly, as our horses picked their way downward.

"Frankly, I was disappointed," I admitted. "The inside of the *gompa* is so different from the outside. It's all so shabby and dirty. And, Rajah," I added with a frown, "how could such stupid-looking creatures as those up there ever have anything to do with creating such a thing as we saw last night? Somehow they just don't seem to look smart enough. I have heard tales of suspended animation and levitation, and all sorts of supernatural happenings taking place in these *gompas*. Are they all moonshine?"

"Was the great dog you saw last night all moonshine?" he retorted.

"No, I don't think so," I said slowly. "You said you saw it, too. But how do you explain it?"

"I can't," Rajah confessed. "But don't ever be deceived by externals in this country. Those lamas may look shabby and stupid, but they are far from it."

"What about the way they scrambled for the flash bulbs?" I asked. "You must admit that they acted like children."

"Something new to them, that's all," said Rajah. "The bulbs are

bright and shiny. Though the lamas acted like children, they are not children. You saw last night how smart the old man was with Loren."

"That's true," I agreed. "He got the medicine and kept his briar bowl."

"Exactly! They may look shabby, but they have great wealth in these *gompas*, hidden away where no one can see it. And they have great wisdom. But it is for them alone. The dog last night was a mere nothing. They can perform miracles which you would not believe possible. Never underestimate these lamas."

Loren, who had come down the hill more slowly in order to keep an eye on the pony wallah who was now carrying the camera, overtook us as we reached the dak bungalow.

"Well, that was a fine lot of presents we got from the Head Lama in return for what we gave him," he observed sarcastically, as we dismounted.

"There was nothing in the whole *gompa* that I would have paid a dime for," I said, "so I don't feel too badly about it."

"I could have used one of those small brass Buddhas for my den back home," said Loren moodily.

"What for?"

"For an incense burner. Several of my friends would have liked them, too. There were at least a dozen of them on the stock-clearance shelf in the chapel that would have been just dandy."

"Oh, but the lamas would never part with any Buddha," declared Rajah firmly.

"Well, then I agree with Nicol," said Loren. "There wasn't anything else worth having."

"The thing I can't understand," I put in, "is that they never even offered us anything. How could Mr. Gonsalves and his assistants, back there at the Residency in Srinagar, have been so mistaken about it? They were all very positive that we must take presents with us, and equally positive that we would get some in return."



LHASA TERRIERS, GIFT OF THE QUEEN, FILL
THE AUTHOR'S FUR-LINED BOOTS



THE *ONPO*, OR COURT ASTROLOGER, CAREFULLY
MAKES PREDICTIONS TO THE QUEEN'S TASTE



"That's right," said Rajah. "It used to be that way, but, as you have seen for yourselves, it is not any more. Since the British cleared out on the fifteenth of August, the exchange of gifts has come to an end. In the past the lamas handed out souvenirs only because they thought it politic to do so. Remember, most of the travelers passing through there have been British officials. What the lamas handed out was probably of little value to themselves. What they got, if only in good will, was important."

I was still sulky. "What about that antique Chinese porcelain bowl," I demanded, "that was given to one of Mr. Gonsalves' friends and afterward brought a small fortune when it was auctioned off at Christie's in London?"

"It had probably been kicking around the lamasery for years," said Rajah cynically, "and was of no particular use to anyone in the *gompa*. If they had really thought it was valuable, they would never have parted with it, you may be sure."

"But if they still expect presents, why not hand out a few?" I persisted.

"They don't expect them any more. Have we met any other travelers on the trail? The answer is no, and for a good reason. There aren't any. The few who will manage to come in the future will not be in a position to grant favors, and the lamas know it. If they do give presents, they won't get any in return. The lamas have never really liked the idea of visitors from the outside world, and have accepted gifts only because they felt it was unwise to refuse. Now that they no longer have that fear, they will be as inhospitable as they please."

"Well, let's get out of here," I said. "I'm fed up with the place. It's only noon, and we can easily get to Khaltse before nightfall. Let's get a bite to eat and be on our way."

We sent Ismaili, the ragged and incompetent bhisti who had been saddled on us by the equally incompetent Gulam Mohammed Kachero, to tell the head pony wallah that we would be ready to

start as soon as the ponies were readied. He set off, grumbling.

“By the way,” said Rajah, as we watched the man shamble away, “Puss in Boots told me just before he left that he had seen Ismaili sewing a ten-rupee note into the lining of his jacket the other night.”

“Where would Ismaili get ten rupees?” asked Loren skeptically. “It’s a cinch that he never earned them.”

Rajah smiled.

“Say, you don’t suppose that’s the same ten-rupee note that I gave him for the cook-guide at the time of the accident, do you?” I exclaimed.

“That’s exactly what I think,” said Rajah.

“But how can we be sure?”

“It will all come out in time. What is it you Americans say? ‘Give a man enough rope . . .’”

“‘ . . . And he will hang himself.’ ”

So we said nothing to Ismaili and set off from Lamayuru early in the afternoon. For some little time our path led downward and along a wild ravine shut in between towering cliffs. For several hundred yards the descent was the steepest we had encountered on the entire journey. From there the unevenly shaped cliffs abutting on the trail forced it to cross and recross the Hangru stream, a narrow but angry torrent, tumbling in wild fury from the misty peaks far above, on its way to the lonely Indus River, several miles below us on the trail.

At first our path wound back and forth through the brilliant purple rocks like a wriggling snake, only to straighten out when it entered an extremely narrow gorge. Here the lofty precipices formed at times almost an arch above our heads, and there would be stretches for some little distance when one could see, from the trail, only a thread of lapis-lazuli sky.

For two hours and more we continued through this somber

canyon until at last our trail opened into the austere valley of the Indus. The ancient river, which has its source on the northern slopes of the Trans-Himalayan range, hundreds of miles to the southeast, here flows to the northwest. Two hundred miles beyond this point it is turned by the barrier of the Karakorum range, flows southward through the western section of Kashmir, and empties at last into the Arabian Sea, at Karachi, having passed, in its fifteen-hundred-mile journey, from the intense cold of eternal glaciers to the torrid heat of the Indian lowlands.

Here, there was no sign of human life. We turned southward and followed the western bank of the lonely, muddy stream for a mile or two, until, welcome sight, we came to a bridge spanning the turbulent river, which had narrowed to a width of scarcely a hundred feet. On the far side of the river a ruined fort of yellowish sun-baked bricks had once dominated the approach. I had read that both the bridge and the fort had been built in the year 1150 by the mighty warrior, King Naglug. How many times had that bridge been rebuilt, I wondered, since it was first erected at this very spot, eight hundred years ago! But I fancied that some of the original stone piers that had anchored it still remained; and it was fascinating to reflect that in all probability the Mongolian hordes of Genghis Khan had crossed here, only sixty years after the bridge was first built, and Tamerlane had passed over it, nearly two hundred years after Genghis Khan, on his way to sack Delhi of its riches in 1398. But now there was not a sound, except that of our own voices and the voice of the rushing river.

"Only two horses can cross at the same time," Rajah warned us, breaking in on my thoughts.

"What's the matter, isn't it safe?" I asked, reining in my pony.

"Not for more than two at a time," Rajah repeated. "It's a suspension bridge, and there's considerable sway to it, if a whole string of horses pass."

As the first two horses started across the bridge, it began to sway, but only slightly. It was stronger than it looked, and, thanks to Rajah's warning, we all crossed safely.

A short distance beyond we came to the upland village of Khaltse, where we spent the night. The dak bungalow stood in the shadow of a mighty cliff, on the summit of which were the ruins of the great castle of Bragnag, built by the same King Naglug. We slept, I'm sure, as soundly as he.

We made an early start next morning. We were now only fifty-three miles from Leh, and the pony wallahs quickened their steps without urging. This, in contrast to the arid region to the west, was fertile country, watered by mountain streams descending to the Indus, and there were groves of apricots and fields of grain. But we made only one stop that day, a brief one, for our midday meal, at the tiny resthouse at the village of Nurla, poised high on the very edge of the cliff above the Indus—a cold and uninviting spot even on a warm day in August. By seven o'clock that evening we had completed twenty-two miles, the longest march in any one day since leaving Sonamarg, and arrived at the dak bungalow at the village of Saspul.

As we turned into the compound, we saw with some dismay that we were not the first comers. "Look at all those horses," exclaimed Loren gloomily. "A traveler on the road at last! And from the size of that caravan there must be quite a party. Here's one time we will be lucky if we can get a room."

After two weeks of finding ourselves continually alone upon the trail, the realization that we were not the only travelers in this remote and deserted region struck us with a surprise out of all proportion to the situation. It seemed to rob us of the prestige we had been giving ourselves. Then, realizing how neatly our somewhat smug complacency had been punctured, we laughed.

Even in the descending dusk we could see that the dak bungalow was a two-storied one, the first of the sort that we had seen

on the trail. Lights shone cheerily from the upper balcony, and there appeared to be considerable activity, with much coming and going.

Suddenly we heard a voice calling in English, "Ambrose, Ambrose, where the devil are you?" and a moment later, not as loudly but quite distinctly, "More hot water, man, and plenty of it! Step lively!"

"Sounds like an Englishman," I said.

"Yes," said Rajah. "An army man, I should guess. I'll ask one of his pony wallahs."

He was back in a moment. "It is an English officer," he said. "He has come from the Kulu Valley, a five weeks' journey through Rupshu."

I knew only that the Rupshu area was a tract of many thousand square miles lying to the southward, between central Ladakh and the northern frontier of India, containing large brackish lakes and including the barren Zaskar range, a northern extension of the Himalayas, which is so high and cold, according to one traveler, that "when one of its few inhabitants visits Leh, situated at eleven thousand five hundred feet above the sea, he is apt to complain of its low situation and enervating climate." What, I wondered, would an English Army officer be doing since Partition Day in such a cold, remote and barren corner?

"He is traveling alone," Rajah added. "There are two rooms for guests in this bungalow, on the floor above. The kitchen is on the ground floor. I shall bring up your things in a moment."

Rajah had constantly warned us that "first come, first served" was the policy observed at the bungalows, but that no man traveling alone could have two rooms. Loren and I would share one, the British officer would have the other. Rajah would sleep downstairs.

We climbed the stairs. From the room to the right of the landing emerged a burly figure, a massive, red-cheeked individual in

his late forties or early fifties. He was wearing corduroy riding breeches into which he had been well buttoned, beautifully polished boots, from which the dust of the day's journey had already been removed, an open shirt and a tweed jacket.

"I'm Colonel Peart," he rumbled, holding out a huge paw. "Colonel John Peart, care of Grindlay's, New Delhi."

I knew that Grindlay's was a bank. I thought this was an odd way for a military man to introduce himself, but we were soon to learn that Colonel Peart was no run-of-the-mill person.

We introduced ourselves. "We're Americans," I added, "going through to Lake Pangong, to make travel pictures."

"Come in, come in," he urged us hospitably. "Ambrose, chairs for the sahibs!" Ambrose, a turbaned Indian, quickly moved two chairs to the table by which the Colonel had been sitting. "And two more cups and more hot water!" the Colonel added.

The cups appeared as quickly as the chairs, and as we seated ourselves the Colonel whispered three beautiful words: "A little Scotch?"

We were so grateful that we could only nod. And, mixed with the hot water, the Scotch sent up a heavenly aroma. After our long day's ride, nothing could have been more welcome.

"Only been here a few minutes myself." The Colonel chuckled. Except when shouting for his servant, he spoke in so low a voice that I had to lean forward to catch the words. "Been on a holiday for weeks. Now that we're washed up out here in Injia, thought I would make the trip I've always wanted, before leaving for good. You up from Srinagar?"

Without waiting for a reply, he continued: "It's back to Somerset for me, I suppose, within the next few months." He settled himself in his chair. "Half my life in Injia, and now it's all over! But there's a lot of other blokes in the same situation. Of course I might go to Tasmania."

The prospect didn't seem to daunt him. He chuckled again.

Indeed, he seemed to find everything in life amusing, and his joviality increased as he continued to press the bottle on us. By the time I had finished my fourth cupful, I had forgotten all the aches and pains of the last two weeks. But when our generous host held out the bottle to me for the fifth time, I weakly protested.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly," I said. "And besides, Colonel, you've been on trek for five weeks and in very cold country. You still have a ten-days' journey ahead of you, at the least. This must be the last of your Scotch. You'll need it."

At this remark of mine, the Colonel threw back his head and roared with laughter. "Hah, that is good! My last bottle! That is rich! Ambrose, Ambrose!"

The servant appeared instantly. "How much Scotch have we left?" his master demanded.

"Of Scotch, there are four bottles which remain," said Ambrose calmly. "There are of course other bottles."

"Such as?" the Colonel prompted.

"The amontillado sherry, the port, the sixty-year-old brandy, the——"

The Colonel waved him away. "That's enough," he interrupted. "The others are minor. I just wanted these gentlemen to know that we are not straining ourselves when we ask them to join us in refreshments."

We all had still another Scotch. After being thus assured that this remote dak bungalow in Ladakh could produce an apparently limitless supply, we felt it was pointless to refuse.

"You will at least do us the honor of dining with us tonight, Colonel," I said with simple dignity as we rose to go. "It will be, I fear, but a simple seal, I mean a sample male, but kind hearts are more than coronets, and simple—— There's that word again! Don't dress. Don't bring Lulu. Don't fire till you see the whites of their eggs."

"Of course, of course," said the Colonel. "That we will, but

only if you will allow us to bring our eggs and curried rice to the general dish, and a bit of something else.”

“Did you notice how the Colonel always says ‘we’ in referring to himself?” I asked, as we floated back to our own room. “A bit odd, don’t you think?”

“What’s odd about it?” said Loren belligerently. “The only difference I noticed was that the Colonel on the left speaks a little louder than the one on the right. That’s his privilege, isn’t it?”

“Oh, you noticed that, too?” I said. “Well, I only invited one of them. You heard me.”

The dinner was a great success. The Colonel’s “bit of something else” turned out to be a bottle of excellent Portuguese sherry and the finest French brandy one could desire. By now we were back in the Colonel’s room.

We drank the sherry out of white and green jade cups, also provided by the Colonel. This jade was new to me. It was rougher than the jade mined in Burma and sold in the Canton market as Chinese jade, but very effective when used as a receptacle for sherry. The roughness afforded one a good grip on the cup. Turning my empty cup over in my hand, the better to examine it, I complimented the Colonel on both the sherry and the cups.

“Bought the cups in Leh,” he confided, pushing the bottle toward me, “and a great bargain, at that. The white ones were only a rupee each, the green ones two rupees. The jade was mined in Sinkiang; the cups had just arrived by caravan, when I collared them.”

“Thirty cents for a jade cup! Think of it, Loren!” I exclaimed. “We shall have to get some for ourselves.”

“You certainly got a bargain, Colonel,” agreed Loren, admiringly.

“You haven’t begun to see anything, yet,” the Colonel declared. “Ambrose!” he shouted.

Another servant, not Ambrose, came running. “Where’s Am-

brose?" snapped the Colonel. Ambrose, it appeared, was engaged elsewhere. The Colonel spoke to this retainer rapidly in the man's own language.

"Ambrose will be here with it in half a mo," the Colonel assured us. "This boy will tell Gulam, and Gulam will give the message to Ambrose."

"And who is Gulam?" I inquired. The Colonel obviously had quite a staff.

"My cook. He is a Moslem."

"And what is Ambrose?"

"A Hindu. I have one of each."

I wondered if the good Colonel hadn't wisely prepared for any eventuality by having as his two personal servants one of each, as he had said, of the two main opposing religious faiths of India.

"Do they get along well together, Colonel?"

"Certainly, excellently. I would tan their hides if they didn't," the Colonel sputtered.

It struck me that in ten words the Colonel had condensed the policy that had enabled England to maintain comparative peace in India for the past ninety years. And now England was withdrawing!

"Your servant is the first Hindu I have ever heard of with the name of Ambrose," I remarked.

"It really is Ambrosia," the Colonel admitted with a sigh. "But who could have a servant with a name like that? We shortened it to Ambrose, which suits us much better."

Loren gave a whistle of astonishment. Ambrose had just entered, carrying with difficulty an unwieldy object, so large that he could hardly get his arms around it.

"What on earth is it?" I asked.

"It's a Talmuk," the Colonel replied reverently. The word meant nothing to me. But as we could now see, when Ambrose had placed the object at the Colonel's feet, it was a saddle—a

huge silver saddle, the silver appliquéd on wood, and adorned with semiprecious stones.

“Where did it come from, Colonel?” I gasped.

“I bought it in Leh last week, in the bazaar. Paid down sixty-five chips for it. It’s undoubtedly of ancient Talmuk workmanship, not Tibetan, for they told me it was brought to Leh over the high passes of the Karakoram from Yarkand centuries ago. I had a time, I assure you—” the Colonel panted as he lifted the heavy affair off the floor and to his lap—“getting all of it that’s here, which isn’t by any means the whole of the outfit.”

“You don’t mean to say there is even more of it?” It seemed to me that there was already more saddle on the Colonel’s lap than anyone could possibly find necessary.

“Yes, they told me that there was once a silver headstall with a big central stone,” said the Colonel, “but it was carried off into central Tibet long ago. And there are supposed to be one or two other pieces kicking around somewhere in the vicinity of Leh, no one knows just where. I got all of it that could be found within a radius of fifty miles. The rest might be in Mongolia by now, for all I know. I did my best to trace it, but no luck.”

“It’s not very comfortable to ride, is it?” Loren ventured.

“It’s not bad, since I bought that little number over there,” said the Colonel, motioning toward a small but thick rug in the corner of the room. “That cost me almost as much as the saddle. It’s a Tibetan rug. Now I ride very comfortably.”

I thought that the Colonel had earned any comfort there might be. He had just crossed, on what he called a pleasure jaunt, one of the most desolate tracts in all Central Asia—one in which there wasn’t even a native village in eleven days of travel. With the possible exception of the desolate Lingzitang plateau and the uninhabited soda plains to the north and northeast, there could not be a grimmer corner, I imagined, anywhere on the entire continent.

I leaned forward to examine the saddle. "It looks as if it were silver on wood," the Colonel pointed out, "but it isn't, precisely. It's silver on brass, and it's the brass that's fastened to the wood. Very rare. It belongs in a museum, really."

I agreed enthusiastically. It required no effort of the imagination to think of it as having once belonged to Tamerlane the Great, or even to Genghis Khan. Here it was, back at the very spot where their armies had once camped. I stared at it, fascinated.

"And tomorrow, before you leave, I hope you will let me photograph you on the saddle," said Loren.

"We shall see about that." The Colonel's reply was not too enthusiastic.

"Isn't there anything we could give you to repay you for all your hospitality, Colonel?" I asked, after the magnificent saddle had been lugged away by the faithful Ambrose.

"Oh, quite," he chuckled. "If you have an extra pair of shoelaces and a bit of dubbing to spare, I shall appreciate that."

I had noticed at dinner that the Colonel enjoyed our instant coffee. "Certainly," I said, "and how about some of our prepared coffee as well?" We had a small extra tin which I thought, since he was traveling alone, would last him nicely until he got to Srinagar.

"Oh, I don't wish to deprive you of anything," he said quickly. "You have a long trip ahead."

"You won't. We can spare a tin easily." I went to the balcony. "Rajah," I called down, "will you have Ismaili get out a small tin of coffee and give it to the Colonel before he leaves in the morning?"

VIII

*In the House of the
Evil Drug*

EARLY next morning the good Colonel resumed his journey back to Srinagar, but before he left the dak bungalow he obligingly posed for his picture, mounted on his great silver saddle. It wasn't until some time after his departure that we discovered our wretched man Ismaili had played us a scurvy trick. Instead of giving the Colonel a *small* can of coffee, as we had asked him to do, he had given him a *large* can—no doubt in the hope of getting baksheesh. We were glad that the Colonel got the coffee, but we gave Ismaili a fearful bawling out for the good of his soul. It didn't do the least bit of good. He just glowered.

Only thirty-two miles now remained between us and Leh, ancient capital of Western Tibet. The journey would require two days. The first day we set off in a drizzle of rain, which fortunately continued for most of the day, making the traveling cooler and giving us relief for our lips, which had become badly chapped by the wind and sun. Never far from the Indus River, the trail crossed a high plateau, then wound downward toward the village of Basgu. The cliffs in this region were studded with old ruins and the rocks were of brilliant color and of unbelievably fantastic shapes. On one eminence stood the ruins of a castle which had long been besieged by the Mongols, three hundred years ago, in the days of Gyalpo Delegs (1640-1680 A.D.), a Tibetan ruler. At three in the afternoon, having come fourteen miles, we reached the village of Nimu and decided to stop there overnight.

This early arrival gave us an opportunity to check over our

food stores and to count over exactly what we had left and didn't have. The morning's experience with Ismaili and the tin of coffee had been disquieting. The job took an hour or more and we were just completing it when Ismaili came up to us and began jabbering at Rajah in a loud voice.

"What's the matter with him?" I asked.

"He wants to know why we are counting all the food," said Rajah. "He is very angry because he thinks we suspect him of something."

"Oh, of course we don't," I said sarcastically. "But tell him that since he is here, he is to wait. There is something I want him to do."

Ismaili watched me suspiciously as I fished my leather brief case from my green duffel bag and extracted from it the unsigned receipt which I had made ready for his signature at the time of the accident to his cousin, the cook-guide, Gulam Mohammed Kachero. We had entrusted ten rupees to Ismaili, to be given to Gulam when they reached Kargil; but in the hurry and confusion he had gone off without signing the paper.

Rajah told him he must sign it now. Instantly an angry torrent of words issued from Ismaili, and after I had listened to it for about ten minutes, if not longer, I lost my patience. "What's the matter with him?" I demanded. "Why doesn't he sign it?"

Rajah looked intently at Ismaili for a moment and then sighed. "He doesn't want to," he said simply.

"He doesn't want to?" I yelled. I could scarcely believe my own ears. "But he has to! Does he deny getting the ten rupees?"

If looks could kill, I am sure mine would have withered the impudent rogue on the spot.

"No," said Rajah, "he doesn't deny getting the ten rupees. How could he? We all saw him take them. What he says is that he did not give the money to his cousin when they got to Kargil, for the reason that he had already lost it on the road."

“What?” shouted Loren. “Why, he has already told us at least three times that he gave the money to Gulam!”

“Sure,” said Rajah, “but now that he has to put his mark on the receipt he doesn’t want to. He’s afraid it will get him into trouble.”

“But that’s exactly what he’s got to do, trouble or no trouble. Puss in Boots was dead right. That’s exactly where he’s got it—sewed in the lining of his jacket.”

Faced with our indignation, he finally signed. Like his cousin, he could not write his own name, but was obliged to smear his thumb with ink and press it on the paper. Rajah witnessed the signature. Ismaili slunk off. It was plain to him that we had caught up with him at last.

Next morning, when the pony wallahs announced that they didn’t want to go on to Leh that day, because of the rain, we suspected that Ismaili had put them up to this. They wouldn’t budge, until we had offered them a few extra rupees. We wondered if Ismaili collected his cut.

But we were on our way by nine o’clock, with only eighteen miles left to go. Ten miles from Nimu, in the steep valley of Phyang, is a Buddhist lamasery four hundred years old; at Spitok, three miles farther on, is another, still more ancient, built by Gyalpo Bumde five hundred years ago; but we did not pause to visit either one, for I had had my fill of lamas at Lamayuru, for the time being, and was anxious to reach Leh before nightfall.

We came to Leh shortly after six o’clock, through the great gate which plunges one directly into the bazaar—a street lined with tall poplar trees, stretching uphill from one end of the town to the other, and bordered for most of its length by shops and stalls and open-air markets. Leh has a population of several thousand, and it seemed as if every inhabitant, young or old, was in this street. The rain of the morning was far behind us now, and although there were storm clouds on the horizon, brilliant sunshine lighted

up the huddled roofs of the ancient city and shone upon the gray-white walls of the castle of the kings of Ladakh, built by Sengge Namgyal hundreds of years ago, perched upon a hill overlooking the town.

Although most of the people upon the street were Ladakhi, there was a sprinkling of turbaned Moslems, a Hindu here and there, a few Tibetans and more than a few stalwart fellows whom Rajah pointed out as being Yarkandis from Sinkiang (Chinese Turkestan). Their costumes were easily distinguishable from those of the Ladakhi people. They wore high boots of black leather, skullcaps embroidered with blue, and huge padded coats, coming below the knee, which looked very warm. They walked with a swagger and gave the impression of owning the place. Their caravans, some loaded with skins and others with numdahs—squares of heavy felt—had recently arrived in the bazaar from Yarkand, a five-hundred-mile journey over the high passes of the Karakoram. The numdahs would eventually reach stores in New York, ten thousand miles away, and women looking at them might exclaim, "How quaint!"

We rode slowly up the long street, the people staring at us with as much interest as our own in them. Halfway up the hill we came to the little post office and I dismounted and hurried in eagerly. There was only one letter waiting for me. It was from Bill Alexander, of Adventure Films, in New York, acknowledging the receipt of some material I had sent him from California before my departure, nearly three months before. I realized, as never before, how far we were from home.

Near the upper end of the long street we came to the dak bungalow and wearily, gratefully, slid down from our saddles. The caretaker, or khidmatgar, an old Moslem, opened the doors for us. The bungalow had two large bedrooms, a living room and a small bedroom, all on the ground floor, but they were cold and dark. We asked for a fire to take off the chill, but found

the firewood was more expensive in Leh than in any of the villages through which we had passed. It cost several dollars for a very small amount.

The old khidmatgar showed us the guest book, in which we were to write our names and the date of our arrival. The date was Friday, the twenty-ninth of August. We had left Srinagar on the fourteenth of August. Not including the first fifty-two miles, traveled by motor truck, we had ridden two hundred miles in fifteen days, an average of about thirteen miles daily, over difficult trails. We were tired out. We turned in early.

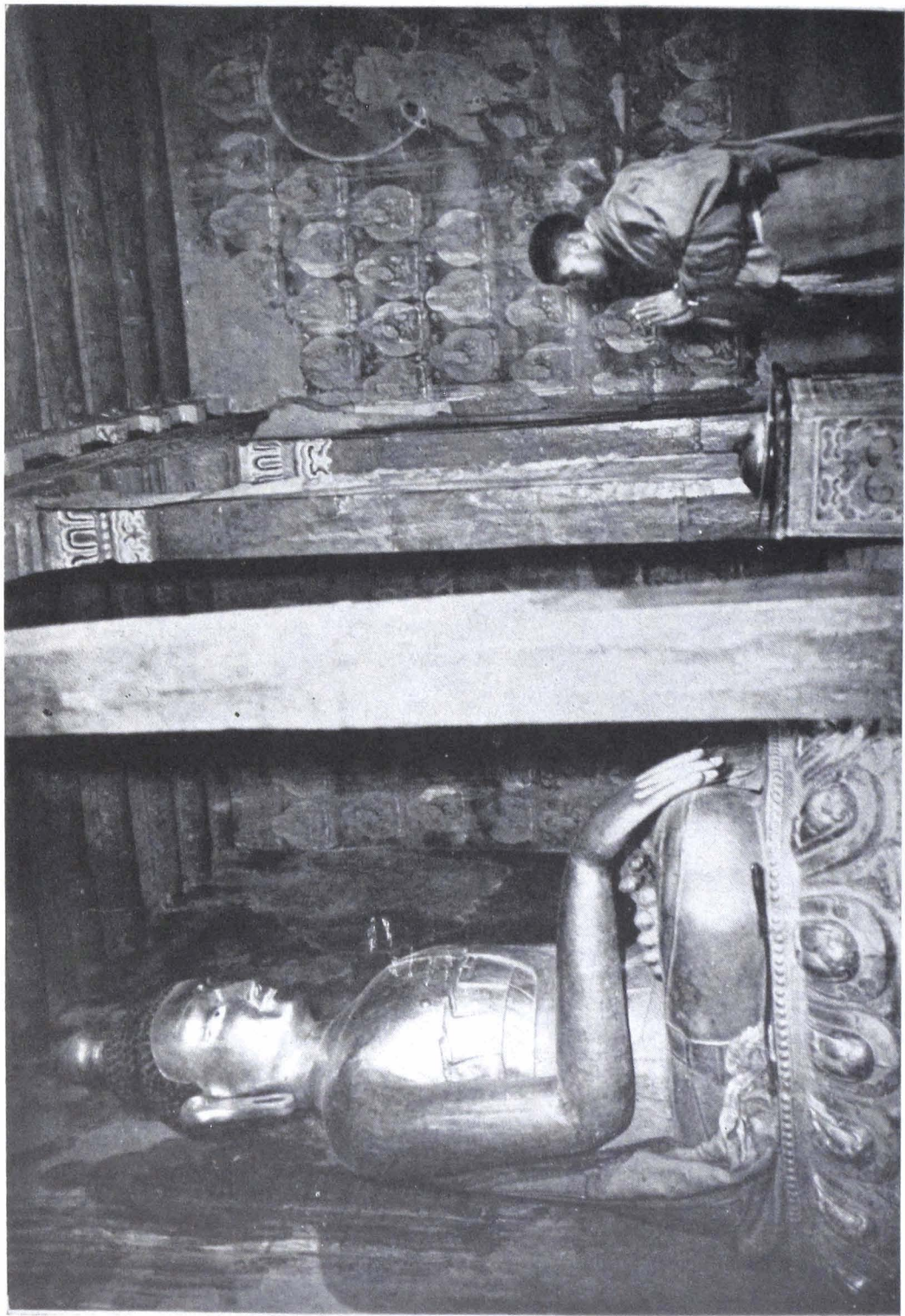
Next morning we walked back down the hill to the post office, having been told that they expected a runner with mail from Srinagar that morning. There was nothing. But we enjoyed a stroll through the bazaar, watching the people. The women, most of whom wore wine-colored robes, all had on their shoulders the capes of goatskin with the hair turned inside. Again we were struck by the robustious appearance of the Yarkandi traders, contrasting with the meek demeanor of the Ladakhi farmers and townsmen. One of the traders, who did not look unlike Gary Cooper, had opened his shirt, exposing his bronzed chest, and went swaggering all around the bazaar, much to the open admiration of a number of Ladakhi girls who trailed along in his wake, giggling.

True to his word, Rajah had no difficulty in obtaining in the bazaar the additional money we needed for the rest of our trip. With this load off our minds, the walk back uphill seemed nothing.

The home of Walter Asboe, the English Moravian missionary was right next door to our dak bungalow, and we stopped in there to introduce ourselves. Mr. Asboe and his wife were the only white persons in Leh. They had transformed a native house into a charming little home, and the garden inside the compound



THE SKOOSHOK OF HIMIS—AT THE AGE OF FOUR, HE IS THE
TITULAR RULER OF THE LARGEST BUDDHIST MONASTERY IN
WESTERN TIBET



THE CHAGDZOD (Regent) OF HIMIS AT HIS DEVOTIONS BEFORE THE GOLDEN BUDDHA,
A STATUE SEVENTEEN FEET HIGH AND A THOUSAND YEARS OLD

wall was a mass of flowers. They were most apologetic because they could not ask us to stay for luncheon, explaining that they were leaving for home the following month and that their china-ware was already packed and everything was at sixes and sevens.

Mr. Asboe was, I judged, in his early fifties, a rather short but wiry man, highly intelligent and, as I quickly learned, very good company. Mrs. Asboe, a kindly, sweet-faced and cheerful little woman, was somewhat younger than he. They had lived in this area for twenty years, and Mr. Asboe spoke Tibetan fluently. He very kindly took us over to call on the Wazir, the official locally representing the Kashmir Government. The Wazir had just moved into the house of the British Joint Commissioner near by, vacated when Britain decided to withdraw her representatives.

The Wazir told us that he had received a letter about us from the government offices in Srinagar, and assured us that he would do all in his power to make our stay pleasant. We gave him a complete report on the behavior of the cook-guide and his accident. The Wazir then said that when we were ready to go on to Lake Pangong he would supply us with a chuprassy, a servant of his, as guide-interpreter. The man had been to Lake Pangong and could speak fluent Tibetan. The Wazir said he would arrange for our caravan. He also volunteered to send word to the Skooshok of Himis that we were coming to his valley and to request that we be granted an audience with the four-year-old child, the reincarnated spiritual ruler of that region. We presented the Wazir with a fountain pen and went away happily. Scarcely had we got back to the dak bungalow when a huge basket of fresh vegetables—potatoes, onions, cauliflower, carrots and what not—arrived with the Wazir's compliments. It seems that this is the customary present in Leh to people arriving or departing, and corresponds to flowers or candy. There couldn't be a more sensible idea. It was just what we wanted.

Walter Asboe called at the dak bungalow bright and early the following morning and asked if I would like to go with him to see a hostelry conducted by the Moravian Mission. I was of course delighted. As we descended the winding path sloping downward toward the bazaar, he told me something of his work as a missionary, and I saw that he thought nothing of traveling twenty miles in a day, in any sort of weather, to visit people in sickness or in trouble. It was plain that he truly loved the peoples of this cold and harsh corner of the globe, and that no wild mountain trail, however bleak, ever kept him from his search for those he might help. However arduous his labors, he bubbled over with good humor.

“You might see me pulling a tooth before our walk is over,” he remarked with a smile. “This is probably the only place in the world where the charge for an extraction is only three cents, and twelve if an anesthetic is given.”

I laughed. “This is a pretty remote spot, isn’t it?” I remarked. “I don’t suppose you get many visitors from the outside world, do you?”

“No, and some of those we have had have been pretty shady characters,” he replied. “Before the war, we had more than one German agent here, posing as this or that. One of them was a nudist, and used to take sun baths on the hill just outside of town. The Ladakhis came from far and wide to stare at him. Another one claimed to be an American, working for Yale-in-China, but he was a German like the rest. Recently, of course, we have been having a different breed of cat.”

“What are they?” I asked.

“Russian agents.”

“In disguise?”

“Oh, these were not Russians from Moscow. They were Yark-andis, just like these fellows you have seen here in the bazaar.

They weren't very bright, and they couldn't have learned anything, anyway, for there is nothing of military importance they could learn here."

"I imagine it would be very easy for Russia to move in here, if she wanted to," I suggested.

"Very easy indeed," Asboe agreed. "The little fort on the edge of town, garrisoned by a handful of soldiers, is the only protection the city has. Who could stop them? In their usual fashion they could invent some 'incident' on the border and then move in here on the pretext of preserving order."

"Just where is the frontier between Ladakh and Chinese Turkestan, or Sinkiang?"

"The Karakoram Pass is generally considered the frontier. I believe, however, that you must continue beyond it for several days before you come to a place called Suget Quaral, which is definitely over the border in Sinkiang, and is the first place where there are Chinese officials."

"How strong are the Chinese in southern Sinkiang?"

"Apparently, from what we can learn, these officials are no more than puppets. Russia has complete control."

I had heard, in Delhi, of a narcotic drug called charas, extracted from the seeds of hemp, which had formerly been shipped in great quantities from Sinkiang into India, through Leh.

"You have heard of charas, of course," I said. "From what I have heard, the British used to collect a substantial revenue from its importation. But I'm told that it doesn't come through here any more—not officially, at least."

"That's true," said the little missionary, for once without a smile. "One package of it, a package you could easily hold in your hands, brought in two thousand rupees in duty. Why, the British kept a special officer here, just to collect the duties on charas. He is a man known locally as the Aksakal. The revenue

collected was enormous. It is an evil drug, but there was nothing we could do to stop its importation.”

“Well then,” I said, “isn’t credit due to the Chinese, who started their campaign against opium and other noxious drugs before the war, for cutting off the charas trade? Those Chinese officials in Sinkiang can’t be complete puppets, after all.”

Asboe shook his head. “I don’t think the Chinese had anything to do with it,” he said. “It’s just that trade of all sorts has fallen off since the Russian domination of Sinkiang began. In the last ten years the trade coming over the Karakoram into Leh from Yarkand has shrunk to a mere trickle of what it used to be. Even the numdahs have dropped off enormously. What’s left? Only a few felts and Yarkand saddlebags, that’s all. The rest is going to Russia. Whether that includes the charas, I have no way of knowing, of course. It’s not coming here.”

That seemed to dispose of charas. “What do the Yarkandis do for passports when they cross the frontier?” I asked.

“They were supposed to go to Kashgar, where there was a British consulate, to get their visas. But it was a month’s journey in the wrong direction, and many never bothered. Why, only a few months ago there were several of these traders who came to me to help them. They had no passports and had got into trouble with the authorities here.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“Oh, the local customs officer, the Tahsildar, was going to arrest them. But they paid over some money and got out of it. They wanted me to write to the Chinese consul in Calcutta and get passports for them, so the same trouble wouldn’t come up in the future. They brought passport photos for me to send on with the information. There’s only one photographer in Leh, a Hindu, and he charged them four dollars apiece for them. I sent them on, but have had no reply. In the meantime the men have gone home. There are always a number of these Yarkandis coming

and going without papers of any kind. The border is so wild they can easily slip through."

By this time we had gone halfway down the long bazaar. Mr. Asboe paused in front of an unpretentious building, two stories high—no house in the entire town was any higher—and said proudly, "Here we are! This is the Christian Inn."

When he had told me its story and had shown me through the building, I was not surprised by his pride in it.

"Ten years ago," he said, as we climbed the steps, "there stood on this spot an ordinary native dwelling house, owned by a Ladakhi woman, a widow named Choskyt, who had been converted to Christianity. As she was dying, she told me that she had no children or relatives and asked me what she should do with her house. I suggested that she leave it to the Mission, to be transformed after her death into a Christian inn, to give lodging not only to travelers and pilgrims but to their beasts of burden. She did so.

"We found that the house was badly in need of repair and not large enough for the purpose intended. It had to be torn down, and the houses on either side of it, which shared walls in common, had to be shored up with beams. We had no money, but everyone gladly contributed his labor. All materials had to be obtained in the neighborhood. This meant that trees had to be cut down and sawed into beams and planks by hand, and stones for walls blasted out in the hills and dragged here. But this building was completed and opened in 1938. It is open day and night and no person who comes here is refused shelter. Twenty men can be lodged on the upper floor. On the ground floor are the stalls for pack ponies and yaks. There is room there for two or three caravans and stalls for about sixty animals."

As we entered, the missionary pointed to some framed verses hanging in the hallway. They had been written by some English visitor, and they read:

THE CHRISTIAN INN

A small dispensary, with medicine complete,
And healing salves to comfort weary feet.

And for your beasts? Christ made them, too.
He cares for tired mules and jaded yaks.
To them we offer shelter, as to you,
And healing ointment for their poor galled backs.

But man is more than beast, so we provide
Food for the soul, with an evangelist
To tell of Heavenly food, and of the Guide
Who is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The little Moravian evangelist's face shone with a glow from within as he recited the lines, and I could not help but think of St. Francis of Assisi . . . Saint Walter of Tibet . . .

I remarked that I had noticed that Tibetans treated their horses and dogs with kindness, and asked Asboe if this were not generally true.

"Oh, yes, they are very fond of them," he replied. "I don't believe I have ever seen a Ladakhi strike a horse or a dog. The Buddhist religion, like that of the Jains in India, teaches that there is a soul in every living thing. Therefore, they think it is wrong to mistreat or kill anything, even a louse. Even when an animal is very sick and cannot be cured, they would not put it out of its misery—at least not in the same way that we would. They would tie a cloth over its nose and say that it suffocated by accident, or leave it on the edge of a cliff, so that it would fall over—by accident."

"Will a devout Buddhist eat meat?"

"Oh my, yes, as long as he himself hasn't killed the animal. At a lamasery I visited the other day I found one of the lamas ill from undernourishment and told them he needed some meat to build him up. They sent a man at once to Leh to buy some meat.

As long as a sick man has not killed the animal himself he can have all the meat he wants."

"Do you have someone in charge here at the Inn?" I asked. "Surely you haven't time to manage it without some help."

"The manager of the inn is a woman named Lydia," Asboe replied. "She is a Ladakhi woman who was converted to Christianity more than twenty years ago, when Bishop Peter was in charge of the Moravian Mission here, and became a servant in his household. When the Christian Inn was opened ten years ago, she was made the matron, and she has done a wonderful job here. Since the Inn is open to everyone, there have been some rough characters here at times, as you may imagine. But Lydia never has any trouble with them. She has a knack of quieting down the most unruly. In fact," he added with a chuckle, "she keeps the whole place so quiet and orderly that a high Buddhist dignitary, a Skooshok, no less, scandalized his followers by choosing to stay here, in preference to a lamasery."

"Where did he come from?" I asked.

"He came from faraway Lahoul, but he also is head of a smaller *gompa* about forty miles from here, and he was paying this whole region a visit. He told the lamas that the Inn suited him quite well and he would stay here while in Leh. Lydia treated him just like anyone else. Ah, here she comes, now!"

The woman coming toward us looked as if she might have stepped out of the Middle Ages. She wore a long robe of deep blue-black, reaching to her ankles, and a bonnetlike hat. Hers was one of the strongest faces I have ever seen, full of character, and in her deep eyes was the look of a person who would always face life without fear.

Lydia, speaking to Mr. Asboe only in Ladakhi, accompanied us on a tour of the building. The sleeping rooms were without beds, the guests sleeping on rugs they had brought with them or on the bare floor. "We don't serve meals," said Mr. Asboe. "Our

guests get their food in the bazaar and cook their meals in their rooms." He pointed to a small pile of dried horse dung on the floor of one of the rooms. "That's what most of them use for fuel," he explained. "Wood is too scarce and costly."

We came at last to Lydia's kitchen, into which she ushered us with modest pride. It was spotlessly clean. Shelves against the walls held an array of copper pots, pans and dishes, gleaming like red gold. Pinned to one wall were several illustrations, apparently clipped from the pages of a London magazine that had somehow found its way to this distant spot. I walked over to examine them. They were photographs of the platter-lipped Ubangi women of central Africa, around whose elongated necks were the metal rings they wear as jewelry. I was floored. Why Lydia considered these pictures worth looking at every day I couldn't imagine and didn't dare to ask. It's a strange world.

Lydia served us with tea and barley biscuits, and as we drank our tea Walter Asboe told me the strange story of the last Mongolian invasion of Tibet and Kashmir—an invasion which did not happen hundreds of years ago, but less than ten years before this.

"Because of its position in the caravan routes," he began, "Leh is visited, perhaps, by more strange people than any other city in central Asia. Let me tell you about the strangest who have ever come here—the Hussok people.

"This all happened only a year or two before the war. It started first with rumors. In Leh we began to hear that there were a large number of wild men over the border and that they were coming this way. At first no one knew where they were coming from, or why. Then it was learned that they were Hussok people, from Mongolia, far to the north of the Tibetan border. They were said to be robbing and pillaging as they came. The Wazir decided something must be done about it before they descended on the city. When they were only a few miles away he sent the soldiers out from the fort. There were three thousand of the

Hussoks, outnumbering the soldiers many times. But the soldiers were better armed and took the Hussoks by surprise. They surrendered. They had moved right down across Tibet, murdering and stealing as they came, and no one had dared to resist them until then. Many a caravan had fallen prey to them, and they had loaded their ponies with rich rugs, bales of silk, bars of gold, jeweled ornaments, ancient saddles, medieval armor and goodness knows what, and were driving great herds of sheep and goats before them. They were a wild-looking crew—sort of twentieth-century Huns, with the costumes and manners of the twelfth century.

“Well, the Wazir confiscated most of their loot, if not all of it, and then he didn’t know what to do with the captives. They couldn’t be driven back the way they had come, and of course there was no room for them here. Finally it was arranged for them to keep on going west, to the Zogi Pass, and then to turn south till they came to part of Kashmir which borders on the Punjab and is malarial. This was in the month of November. Snow was falling and it was bitterly cold. Many of them died on the journey. Their corpses littered the pass.”

“Did they all die?” I exclaimed, horrified.

“No, not all. A few of them are supposed to be still alive, somewhere on the northwest frontier. In the melting pot of India they pass almost unnoticed.”

When I returned to the dak bungalow, the afternoon had grown dark and cold. Rajah met me at the gate. “There is a man waiting to see you,” he said. “He brought a gift of vegetables. He says he has had a letter about you from the Resident at Srinagar. I believe he used to be the charas officer under the British, but now he acts as the head man between the merchants here and the traders who come into Leh. He calls himself the Aksakal. He is a native, but he speaks English.”

I went on into the living room. A single kerosene lantern on a

table, and the flickering flame of a tiny fire that Rajah had built in the fireplace gave the only light in the room. The man waiting for me was tall and dignified. He wore a dark-red robe which almost touched the floor. His gray hair was cropped closely to his skull, and in his cavernous eye sockets his eyes were deep and penetrating, but he had the look of a sick man. In the shadows of the room his tall form in its long red robe suggested Cardinal Richelieu, lacking only the red skullcap and the jeweled signet ring. His voice was low and gentle. It was difficult to believe that through this man's hands had once passed the evil drug that crazed its addicts.

I thanked him for his gift and, in the course of our conversation, mentioned that I had been visiting the Christian Inn.

His face lighted up. "Ah, then you must have met Lydia!" he exclaimed. "I am a Christian, as she is, and have known her for many years. She is a wonderful woman! There are, of course, many unbelievers who come to the Inn, but Lydia never has any trouble with any of them. She knows how to combine firmness with tolerance. She had an experience many years ago that came near to shaking her faith in Christianity, but she survived it, and I don't doubt but that that experience helped to give her the Christian charity that she shows now."

My curiosity was aroused. I urged him to tell the story.

"This happened more than twenty years ago," said the Aksakal slowly. "Lydia was very young. The Moravian Mission was in charge of Bishop Peter—it was before Walter Asboe came here—and Lydia was called on from time to time to help out with the housework at the Mission. One day the Bishop received a message, to his great surprise and joy, from the Skooshok, the Head Lama, of a *gompa* at Triksé, a lamasery situated about eleven miles from here."

"Excuse me," I interrupted. "I thought that there is only one

Skooshok, the one who rules the lamasery at Himis, which we are planning to visit.”

“Oh, no, there are not a few Skooshoks in this country,” said the Aksakal. “It just happens that the one at Himis is the top Skooshok in Ladakh, outranking all the others. This fellow, the Skooshok of Triksé, was a pretty important man in his own territory. Bishop Peter was delighted to hear that such an influential Buddhist had decided to become a Christian, for that was what the message said, and he invited the Skooshok to come at once. The Bishop had just completed a translation of the New Testament into the Ladakhi language, and the Skooshok couldn’t have arrived at a more opportune moment.

“As for Lydia, she was thrilled. For a Skooshok, the divinely appointed spiritual ruler of a *gompa*, to want to become a Christian was wonderful news.

“The High Lama stayed at the mission house for six weeks and was an excellent pupil. Then one evening when the Bishop returned from a day’s trip to an outlying mission, he discovered that the lock on his desk had been broken and the Mission’s entire cash on hand had been stolen, together with his shotgun. The Skooshok had also disappeared, along with the cash and the shotgun.

“Next morning the Bishop mounted his horse and rode sorrowfully over to Triksé to report his loss to the monks. A crowd of excited lamas, even more downcast than he, rushed out to tell him *their* sad story. It seems that the Skooshok had returned from Leh on horseback the preceding evening, had gone immediately into the prayer hall, the great *dukang*, had shot the heads off all the Tibetan gods and Buddhas there, and had then rifled the treasury of all its valuables. This job thoroughly completed, he departed, bag and baggage, after announcing that he was quitting. He made it plain that he was fed up with being a reincarnated

spiritual ruler of the Buddhist faith, and that Christianity was, to him, only a pain in the neck. With this he stalked out and, since he was the Skooshok, not one of the lamas dared stop him.

“Two years later, the Bishop was in the bazaar one morning when a caravan from Eastern Tibet came in. From the merchant who owned the caravan he learned that the former High Lama had become the most successful highway robber of his time in that region. But somebody must have bumped him off since then, because they’ve got a new Skooshok at Triksé now, a mere child.”

“But where will that get them?” I objected. “Isn’t the new one just the same old playboy, reborn?”

“Not this time,” said the Aksakal grimly. “They had had him reborn once, and that was enough. This time they washed the slate clean and started from scratch. They’re taking no chances.”

“How did all this affect Lydia?” I asked. “It must have been a shock to her.”

“It was,” said the Aksakal. “It must have tried her faith when this old skeesicks who had pretended to be a Christian suddenly revealed himself as a reincarnation of Billy the Kid. But she thought it all over and reminded herself that, after all, he had shot the daylights out of all the idols in the lamasery, so she wrote it all off as a fifty-fifty decision. She learned tolerance, and that’s something you’ve got to have plenty of, around here.”

“And what about you?” I asked. “Did it shock you, too?”

“Yes, it shook me quite a bit at the time,” replied the old gentleman. “But I got over it. I adjusted myself. You see, I have always been thrown into contact with worldly affairs, even more closely than Lydia. For years I was the charas officer here in Leh, and, after all, one who handles such a business must be reasonably—well, reasonably reasonable.”

“That reminds me,” I said. “There are two things I want to do while I am in Leh. For one thing, I would like to buy some of those green and white jade cups from Sinkiang, if you can tell me

where to find them in the bazaar. For the other, I am curious to know what charas looks like. I understand that its importation is now cut off, but, with your knowledge of the trade in the past, perhaps you can tell me where I might examine some."

The Aksakal rose to his full height and regarded me sternly. He looked more than ever like the late Cardinal Richelieu. "I haven't the faintest idea where you could find any charas," he said coldly. "To my knowledge, there isn't a grain of it in the whole city. As for the jade cups, you won't find them in the bazaar, but if you will go to the house of a merchant who lives on the edge of town, he may be able to supply you. He speaks English, so you won't need to take an interpreter along. In fact, it would be better to go alone. I think you would find him . . . shall we say . . . more reasonable?"

He gave me directions for finding the house and took his departure.

Next morning Loren and Rajah and I held a council of war and decided that it was time we got rid of Ismaili, whom we had tolerated so far only because we thought we needed a cook's helper. After the way in which he had made free with our dwindling supply of coffee and the incident of the ten-rupee note, there was no love lost between us. Walter Asboe had promised that he could produce, for the rest of our journey, a cook and a cook's helper known as Thunderbolt and Lightning, so the last excuse for retaining Ismaili was gone. We promptly went over to call on the Tahsildar, the local revenue-collecting officer next in rank to the Wazir, taking Ismaili with us.

Ismaili, one of the top grafters of all time, on a small scale, had already worked us for two pairs of socks and a sweater, bought in the bazaar. Loren had given him a pair of heavy pants. Now Ismaili demanded that we buy him a coat, which would cost fifteen rupees. I maintained that this would have to come out of his tip, when we settled up with the Army Agency at the end of

the journey. Ismaili, shutting his eyes to the fact that it was his cousin, Gulam Mohammed Kachero, who had hired him for the Army Agency, insisted that it was we who had hired him, direct. He carried on like a maniac. We offered him twenty rupees in addition to his wages, on which to get back to Srinagar, but he refused them. We finally agreed to give him twenty-five—sort of portal-to-portal pay. The Tahsildar, who wanted to go for a ride on his horse and was bored with the whole business, quickly decided in our favor and Ismaili was out of a job. He started back for Srinagar that afternoon.

With Ismaili off my mind, I decided to take a stroll and see if I could find the shop with the jade cups. Leaving the main street behind me, I found myself almost immediately in a tangle of narrow lanes and alleyways in which, for a time, I thought myself hopelessly lost. But I kept on and on until at last, on what must have been the edge of the town, I found myself confronted by a long wall which was higher than my head and which evidently enclosed a property of some size. Midway in the wall was a heavy door, and as I approached it I saw that it was standing ajar. I ventured in.

At the farther end of the courtyard, some children were playing. But at sight of me they vanished around the corner of the house like a covey of quail.

The house was of two stories, flat-roofed, with thick walls of sun-baked brick, whitewashed over. The windows were mere slits, and the doors were massive.

I began to think I had blundered into a private dwelling place. There was no shop sign visible. Just then the heavy door swung open and I was confronted by a turbaned individual, evidently a Moslem, of dark, intelligent features.

“Excuse me,” I stammered. Then, in my embarrassment, I tried pidgin English. “You sellum jade cups?” I ventured. “You catchum jade cups all same Sinkiang chop?”

"Cut the double talk," he replied, smiling broadly. "Sure, we've got jade cups for sale. Jade, rare rugs, unset turquoises, anything you want. Won't you come in?"

I gaped. "Why, you speak English like an American!" I exclaimed.

"And why not?" He chuckled. "For the last five years my headquarters have been in Calcutta, where I was doing business with your GI's. I sold 'em enough junk to sink a battleship. No, not junk," he corrected himself hastily. "Good stuff. Curios. Swell stuff to take home to the folks."

"Calcutta?" I asked, looking at him more closely. "I was in Calcutta quite often during the war. But I don't remember your shop."

"No, I don't think we ever met before," he said. "Were you stationed there?"

"No, I was just shuttling between Delhi and Chungking and Kunming. I didn't have much time for exploring the bazaars."

"Of course not," he agreed. "Well, come in, sir. We got in a shipment of jade cups from Sinkiang just a few days ago, and there is a fine assortment to choose from."

The room into which he ushered me was bare of furniture, except for a row of chests which stood against one wall, and some heaps of small Tibetan rugs piled here and there. "Are you interested only in the cups," he asked, as we entered, "or do curios in general appeal to you?"

"I am fascinated with everything I find in this part of the world," I admitted.

"Good! Then I will show you some other articles first. Nothing would please me more than to show you all of our stock, from now on until Wednesday, if you like. On Wednesday I leave on a trip. I like to talk to Americans, and you are the first one I have seen since I left Calcutta. Just make yourself comfortable on one of those numdahs. If you have the time, so have I."

He unlocked several of the great chests and took out tray after tray and placed them on the floor beside me, keeping up a running fire of conversation as he did so. In speech and movements he seemed more like an American than an Asiatic. I kept staring at him.

“I remind you of someone you know,” he said suddenly, with a smile. “Possibly an Armenian from somewhere in California?”

I was startled. “I am a Californian,” I said. “But how did you know?”

“I didn’t. But there were a number of GI’s in Calcutta during the war, who were second-generation Americans of Armenian parents. They all came from around a place called Fresno, in California. Everyone seemed to think I was the same type.”

I agreed. His olive skin, piercing black eyes and finely-modeled features were characteristic of a considerable number of Californians of Armenian descent whom I had seen at home.

A tray filled with small stones of an exquisite blue-green caught my attention. I picked it up. “These are pieces of turquoise, aren’t they?” I asked. “Like the ones your Ladakhi ladies sew to their hats and shoulder capes?”

“Yes, we have them here for sale, in all shapes and sizes,” he said proudly. “The collection for sale in this room is probably the best in the entire country. We always carry them in stock. They’re moved quickly—just as nylon stockings and fountain pens used to be gobbled up by the Chinese when they were flown over the Hump.”

I smiled. He was talking like a traveling salesman from Chicopee Falls.

Then the jade cups began to appear. There were dozens of them. The cups, whether green or white, were lovely to behold. After them came drawersful of the wonderful pashmina shawls, woven of the finest wool, that unbelievably soft and warm wool which is shorn from the underbelly of Kashmiri goats. Then



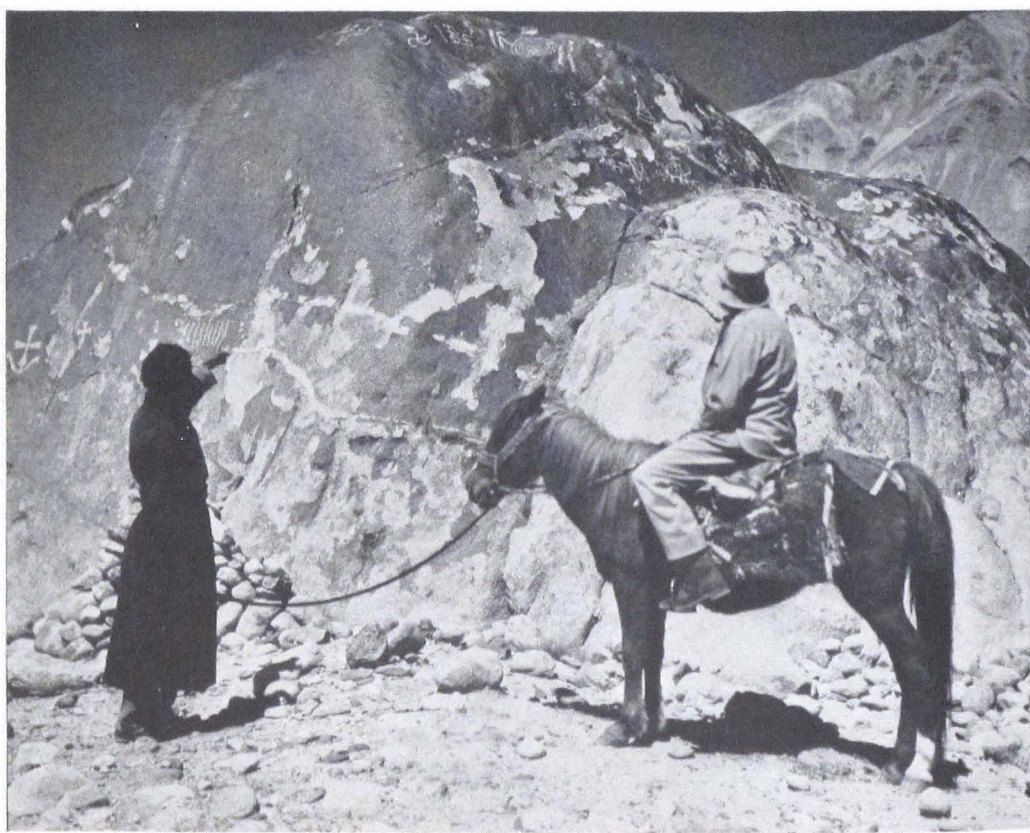
MASKED DEVIL DANCER OF HIMIS LAMASERY



WHEN DEVILS TAKE OFF THEIR MASKS, THEY'RE QUITE HUMAN



BOYS ONLY THIRTEEN YEARS OLD SERVED AS PONY WALLAHS ON THE GRIM ASCENT OF THE CHANG LA, A PASS MORE THAN EIGHTEEN THOUSAND FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL



CARVINGS MADE BY NESTORIAN CHRISTIANS, NEAR TANKSE, EIGHTH CENTURY. NOTE CROSSES, EXTREME LEFT

followed multicolored rugs, tiny in size but brilliant in pattern, and tray after tray filled to overflowing with strings of beads in amber, cornelian or silver. There seemed no end.

“What is that?” I asked curiously, pointing at a single tray which he had started to pull out from a chest. It was full of something that looked like grains of a coarse tobacco. Among all these treasures it alone seemed worthless.

He slid it quickly back into the chest. “Oh, that?” he said carelessly. “That’s for snake bite. Finest remedy in the world. Never fails—good with any kind of a snake. I wish I had had some of this with me in Calcutta. I could have retired on the profits on what you saw in that drawer.”

“Retired in Leh?” I asked quizzically.

“Are you kidding?” he retorted. “I want to see Broadway before I die—not just hear about it from the kids I had to bail out of a jam in a crap game.”

“Where does the stuff come from?”

“From Tibet proper. I’m off on Wednesday to get some more.”

“Do you have to travel far?”

“About three weeks, more or less, to a place called Rudok, a few stages beyond Panghur Lake. Some of my family will meet me there with a new supply. It’s very valuable. There isn’t much of it around. Not nearly enough.”

“Does your family live there?”

“No, they live in Lhasa, the capital, the Holy City. Ours is one of the few big families of Moslems in Tibet. They are sending one of my cousins to meet me.”

Suddenly we both became conscious of a feeling that there was a third person in the room. I think we turned simultaneously to face the intruder.

The man was young, tall, well built and darkly handsome. There was nothing of an Asiatic look about his features, although he was wearing a Tibetan robe, fastened at the waist with a silken

sash of a lavender or fuchsia color. Curiously he reminded me of someone I had seen somewhere, in some far-distant place—although not, this time, someone in Fresno, California. He was standing at the far corner of the room, near a door leading into another part of the house. For a moment no one spoke.

Then the shopkeeper seemed to pull himself together. “Pardon me a moment,” he said to me quickly. “I will be back immediately.”

The two men glided together from the room as quietly as shadows. It was as though they had done this many times before. The shopkeeper closed the door behind them.

He was gone much longer than he promised. For a while I stared idly at the numerous trays on the floor. Then, tiring of looking at objects which I had already examined, I wandered over to the row of chests and opened a drawer at random. It was filled with the same dark pellets that the shopkeeper had said were snake medicine. I opened another drawer. It, too, contained them. A third drawer held still more. Odd, I thought, that here was so much snake medicine, when the shopkeeper had bewailed the fact that his supply was running low. There was enough right here, I thought, to cure the bites of all the poisonous snakes in India.

I had once again dropped to my knees and was examining the various assorted trays upon the floor, when the Americanized shopkeeper came bustling back into the room. “I am sorry for the interruption,” he said. “It was just some tiresome details about our caravan for Wednesday.”

I said it didn’t matter, picked out several jade cups and also bought enough pieces of turquoise to be made into a bracelet for my mother—blue-green being her favorite color—and rose to go. The merchant insisted upon escorting me on my way. “It is growing quite dark,” he said, “and you might quite easily lose your way.” He guided my steps through the maze of alleys until

we came in sight of the feeble lights of the dak bungalow, and there he left me.

That evening I asked Rajah if he had ever heard of a medicine made in Tibet and reputed to be a sure cure for snake bite.

"Oh, yes," he said, "it is highly prized in India and very rare. Very little of it gets into India. Like charas, it is worth its weight in gold, or even more so, for one could find ten lots of charas to one of the snake medicine."

"Have you ever seen any of it?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen any charas?"

"Yes."

"What does it look like?"

Rajah described its appearance. As he did so, a sudden picture leaped into my mind—not of the sinister drug which he was describing, nor of the "medicine" which I had seen, and which, I had no doubt, was the same drug, but of the young man whose face had seemed one that I had seen before. Again I saw the sun-drenched courtyard behind the shop in Old Delhi where I had watched the naked wrestlers. Again I saw the spectators watching that murderous sport—and among their faces was the face of this same young man!

"Nonsense!" I said to myself. "It couldn't be the same man. What would he be doing up here. What difference does it make, anyway? I'll never see him again!"

Charas, a drug made from hemp, similar to hashish, from which came the word assassin! Well, what of it?

IX

*We Meet Royalty*

After breakfast next morning I strolled over to the Asboes' bungalow, hoping to find them in. As I entered the garden gate, Walter Asboe emerged from his front door, accompanied by a tall stranger. The little missionary beckoned to me to join them.

His visitor wore a wrinkled robe which seemed little better than that of the ordinary peasant, and I supposed that he was one of Asboe's native converts. Untidy wisps of hair straggled to his shoulders. He had a pleasant, amiable face, on which was a continual grin.

"Good morning, good morning!" cried Asboe cheerily. "Let me present you to the King of Ladakh!"

I was flabbergasted, but I could see that Asboe wasn't joking. I managed to make a bow and to mumble something. The King nodded eagerly, while Asboe spoke to him in Ladakhi, smiling at me all the while. Then the King made a long reply in his native tongue, which Mr. Asboe translated.

The King said that he had heard we were coming to Leh. As travelers to this part of the world were few, he and the Queen always enjoyed meeting them. He understood that we planned to continue on down the Indus Valley on our way to the Hidden Valley of Himis. The road would take us past his palace at Stog, and he hoped that a visit to the palace would not inconvenience us.

I said that we had always hoped that someday we would meet Their Majesties, and that we had brought along some gifts for them from the outside world. The King said that he and the

Queen would expect us on the following Thursday and, still nodding and smiling, let himself out of the garden gate and ambled up the street.

“Did you notice how he brightened up as soon as you mentioned gifts?” Asboe chuckled, when the King had departed.

“That must have been because of your powers as a translator,” I said. “The gifts aren’t really that good.”

“Well, the King will like them, whatever they are,” said Asboe. “He doesn’t have an overabundance of anything. The Queen rules the roost in that ménage, and although she’s a very intelligent woman, it must be confessed that she is a bit of a pinchpenny. You would never guess what he came here for this morning.”

“I couldn’t possibly guess,” I said.

“Well, it took him half an hour to work around to the subject, but what he wanted was to borrow five rupees.”

“Five rupees!” I exclaimed in astonishment. “Why would a king need to borrow a dollar and a half? Hasn’t he got bushels of money in revenues?”

“Not this one,” said the missionary. “For the last hundred years—ever since the treaty with Kashmir—the kings of Ladakh have been kings in name only. Of course they have vast lands, nominally theirs by inheritance, but their only revenue is the few thousand rupees allowed them each year by the Kashmir Government, out of which they have to pay very heavy expenses.”

“Such as?”

“Well, you see, he is a Priest-King, and there are certain times of the year when great hordes of lamas descend on him at Stog and have to be lodged and fed free. The Queen shells out the money for their visit, but only the bare minimum. I think that she secretly begrudges the hungry lamas every morsel they get. And she doesn’t believe in letting the King have any spending money.”

“But if the King is hard up at the moment and wanted to

borrow five rupees from you, why did it take him half an hour to get around to the subject? Why didn't he come out with it immediately?"

"Oh, that wouldn't be good etiquette. A request for a favor is never made without a present, and business is never stated until the last possible moment."

"And the loan? Would you class that as a favor or as a business transaction?"

"A little of both. He brought me a present. He nearly always does—usually some vegetables from one of the royal farms. But this was a business transaction just the same. He always pays up."

We heard more about the King and Queen that evening, when Mr. and Mrs. Asboe came to dine with us at the dak bungalow. We had warned them that all we had to offer was our American canned food, but they said that it would be a treat. Rajah did himself proud. We had canned mushroom soup, veal loaf, lima beans, potato cakes, onions, macaroni au gratin, six kinds of sauces, and wound up with coffee—some of our treasured instant coffee which had escaped Ismaili. Mr. Asboe said grace and we all fell to.

"I hear that the King has invited you to visit the palace at Stog," said Mrs. Asboe over the coffee. "You'll enjoy it, I'm sure."

"Yes," I said, "but I still can't get over his borrowing five rupees from your husband. I should think he could always tap the royal treasury."

"No, the Queen takes good care that he never gets hold of the key," said Mrs. Asboe. "He's always broke. In fact, there have been times when he has needed even less than five rupees. Walter, tell them about the Residency gardens."

"That's quite a story." Asboe chuckled. "Several months ago, when it became known up here that the British were going to leave India on the fifteenth of August, and that the British Resident Commissioner would leave Leh, the King came to me and

said that since the British were departing he hoped that he could get back the royal gardens, which were a part of the Residency and of his ancestral property. He asked if I would get together the facts concerning their history and write a letter to the British authorities for him, asking for their restoration. I was glad to oblige him, and had the letter ready for his signature in a day or two. But on one pretext after another he put off signing the letter, and the weeks slipped by. Finally, only two days before the scheduled departure of the Resident, he sent word that he was ready. I rode to Stog, got the royal signature and addressed the envelope. Four and a half annas—about eight cents—were needed for postage. The King looked embarrassed and very unhappy. He shifted from one foot to another. Finally in desperation he turned to the Queen. Even then he just looked at her helplessly, and she snapped, ‘Well, it’s got to be done, and that’s all there is to it!’ And she reached under the voluminous folds of her dress and brought out a tiny coin purse. Out of it she took the four and a half annas and handed them to me, not to him. ‘Mail it!’ she said. ‘It should have been done long ago!’ And of course it should. The King had just postponed the inevitable as long as he possibly could.”

“What happened?” I asked curiously.

“The Wazir moved in on the fifteenth—the day the Resident moved out. Now His Highness hasn’t a chance of ever getting his property back—not unless Ladakh breaks away from Kashmir someday and goes back under the rule of the Dalai Lama of Tibet, to be Tibetan politically as well as in race, speech and religion, which she always has been. But that’s a long, long chance.”

“Does the King ever go to Srinagar?” I asked.

“He used to go twice a year. He was a member of the Assembly. The round trip took a month, but all he had to do when he got there was to raise his right hand. That meant that he voted as

the government wanted him to. All expenses of the journey were paid. But he soon got tired of it. After a while he would start off but would get only about halfway—say to Kargil. Then he would pretend he was ill and return to Stog.”

“Where does he live when he comes to Leh? Up in that enormous palace on the hill, towering over the town?”

“Yes, but he goes there only once a year, at the time of the celebration of the Tibetan New Year. The Queen won’t go there at all. She hates it. The building is five hundred years old, you know, and hasn’t had any repairs since the Middle Ages. The Queen is afraid that the rafters will cave in at any minute, and the whole gigantic pile come tumbling down on the bazaar. When she comes to town, she much prefers to stay in the little house they have at the end of the bazaar. She is a very practical woman. When it looked for a time as if they might get the Residency back, as well as its gardens, she said that they could never afford to live in the main building, and she would have to stay in one of the outbuildings, which were much smaller and easier to heat.”

“What about the place at Stog? Is that smaller than the Residency?”

“Oh, no, it’s much larger. It has about forty rooms, huge ones. It gets terribly cold there, and in the winter the King and Queen move into one small room, hardly larger than a closet—it’s about eight feet square—down in the basement. It’s the only room they can afford to heat.”

“I can well believe it. With firewood costing what it does here, I don’t see how even a king can afford it.”

“Well, we are allowed a special price for what we use at the Mission, at least we have been in the past, or we could never buy it, either. The fuel problem here is dreadful. There are only three alternatives—wood, dried dung cakes, or burtza, the oily weed that smells so horribly.”

“Fortunately, Walter and I can stand the cold weather pretty

well." Mrs. Asboe laughed. "I think what annoys him most is answering the strange letters he gets from all over the world."

"What kind of letters?"

The little missionary smiled. "Oh, all kinds and all types," he replied. "No two are alike. For instance, one was from an American lady who had an invalid brother. With only that to go on, could you guess what she wanted me to send her?"

"I won't even try," I said. "What was it?"

"I'll tell you." Asboe chuckled. "She wanted Himalayan sand."

"You're joking! What on earth did she want Himalayan sand for?"

"Don't ask me. She never explained. But listen to this: There was a man who wrote to me from England and directed me to go several miles from Leh and lower myself down over a cliff by a rope, reach into a hole in the side of the cliff and take out five eggs, the eggs of a very rare red-beaked blackbird. If there were only four eggs in the hole, then it wasn't the right kind of bird. I was to leave the eggs there and keep on looking for the five-egg variety."

I just shook my head. "Unbelievable!"

"Then there was the German who sent me a candle, a lantern, a short rope, a jar of sirup and several little sponges. He wanted me to go to a glacier which is at an elevation of eighteen thousand feet—and I was to go there in the middle of the night. There I was to fasten the sponges along the rope, dip the sponges in the sirup, light the candle in the lantern and wait for *Parnassus Imperator*, a very rare butterfly. Specimens would bring fifty dollars apiece in Europe, he said. It is a butterfly with white wings and pink spots around the edges. It has unusually tough wings for a butterfly, because it lives among snow and ice at that altitude, in temperatures that would freeze the stoutest man—or so the German said. I didn't go to find out."

"Don't forget the professor at Bombay," Mrs. Asboe reminded

him, "who sent you sensitized plates in a sealed package and wanted you to take them to an altitude of not less than eighteen thousand feet and build a shelter for them there, to protect them from animals. You were to leave the plates in this shelter for four months and then return them to him in Bombay, so he could see what effect the cosmic rays had had on them."

"Don't any of these people realize that you have work of your own to attend to?" I asked.

"I don't know what they think," the missionary said, smiling, "but I never cease to marvel at the strangeness of some of their requests."

The conversation shifted to a discussion of our plans for proceeding on our journey. I confessed that Loren and I had not been feeling too well for the last week and thought that we ought to postpone our start for a day or two. But the King of Ladakh was expecting us to arrive at Stog on Thursday. One can't put off an appointment with Royalty—it just isn't done!

"Don't worry about it," said our missionary friend reassuringly. "I'll just write him a note and say that you can't get there till Saturday. He won't mind."

This was the note:

BEFORE THE FEET OF
HIS MOST PRECIOUS EXCELLENCY
THE KING OF LADAKH:

The two Sahibs who are here now and who whilst travelling to Leh contracted a minor illness are feeling debilitated in their bodies, therefore would you be good enough to postpone the feast you were preparing and allow the Sahibs to visit you on Saturday? Therefore both the Sahibs and myself are greatly hoping to come into your Presence on Saturday, instead of Thursday.

With my greetings to Your Excellency and your Queen,

Yours,

WALTER ASBOE

Mr. Asboe translated the note into the Tibetan language and, next morning, sent it off to the King by special runner. All was well!

On Saturday morning we set off for Stog, which lies some seven miles to the southeast on the western bank of the Indus. Our retinue—since we were going on a visit to royalty, this is the proper term—now included the chuprassy lent to us by the Wazir; Thunderbolt, the cook, and Lightning, the cook's helper. With genuine regret we said good-by to Mrs. Asboe, whose kindness we would always remember.

As our little cavalcade rode out of the city we overtook an animal that looked almost prehistoric—a camel. Camels are a common sight in India, but this was the first and only one we had seen in Western Tibet. The slow-moving ungainly beast carried two riders, a man and a woman, the man seated in front, the woman behind him, clinging tightly to him. A servant walked ahead of the camel; another servant brought up the rear. The little procession was a reminder of the caravans of centuries past.

A little farther on, Walter Asboe reined in his pony to speak to an old man standing beside the road. I noticed that the old fellow held his hand over his mouth throughout the brief conversation, and asked Asboe what was the matter with him.

“Oh, that's just superstition.” The missionary smiled. “When a Tibetan holds his hand in front of his mouth while speaking to you, it's because he is afraid that if he doesn't your soul will enter into his and do him harm. They're full of such beliefs.”

“Such as?”

“Well, after a funeral the near relatives of the person who died keep to the house for a full month. They believe that if they went out it might affect the harvest and harm the fields.”

A moment later he called my attention to a peasant who was walking along, carrying a covered jar. He paused to ask the man what was in the jar and then rejoined me.

“Just as I thought,” he said. “It’s goat’s milk. Did you notice the jar was covered? That’s not to keep the milk from slopping out, or to keep germs out—a Tibetan knows nothing about germs. The cover is to keep out the evil eye, which otherwise might harm the person who drinks the milk.”

“How about the lamas?” I asked curiously. “Are they as superstitious as the peasants?”

“Oh my, yes!” exclaimed the little missionary. “Just for example, if you should see a lama reading one of his religious scrolls, you must be very careful that your shadow doesn’t fall on it. He would be sure that it would bring him all sorts of bad luck.”

Next my companion pointed out a farmhouse against which a ladder had been left leaning. “Notice that ladder?” he said gravely. “There’s plenty of room to walk under it, but no Tibetan would dream of doing so. It would bring bad luck.”

I laughed. “You win!” I said.

When we had ridden three miles or so, Asboe pointed across the valley to a white dot that could be clearly seen on the lower slopes of a mountain in the distance. “There’s the palace,” he said. “How far do you think we are from it?”

“Oh, a mile or two,” I replied.

Asboe smiled. “It’s four miles away, as the crow flies. The air is so clear at this elevation, about eleven thousand feet, that distances are deceptive.”

Actually it was two hours before we reached Stog. We had first to cross the Indus. The river had there divided itself into three streams, so shallow that the pack animals were able to ford them, although we ourselves used the bridge. Another hour’s ride, passing fields of barley and the huts of the peasants who, like feudal serfs, cultivated the land for the royal family, brought us to the foot of the hill which was crowned by the palace of Stog. Here the trail led near a grove, thickly grown with poplars and

willows. Although it covered only four or five acres, it was by far the largest piece of woodland that we had seen anywhere in the two hundred miles or more that we had traveled since leaving the Sind Valley. Asboe advised us to ask permission of the King and Queen to camp here, assuring us that we would find our own camp more comfortable than any room in the palace.

Much to our surprise, when we had passed the woodland grove and reached the foot of the steeper ascent leading to the palace, we found the King and Queen waiting there to greet us. We were flattered.

The King was dressed as he had been when I met him at Walter Asboe's house in Leh, earlier that week, wearing the same dusty and wrinkled robe of red cloth, and with the same untidy wisps of hair hanging down the back of his neck. His hat, which had evidently seen considerable service, remained firmly planted on his head. This did not surprise me, for Mr. Asboe had told me that Tibetans consider the head too honorable to be uncovered. On entering a house they do not remove their caps, but shed their shoes. The only time I was ever to see the King without his hat was in his private chapel. When wandering around inside the palace he never removed it.

The Queen, however, was attired in a wondrous costume, the like of which was never seen outside of Tibet. Her voluminous robes of purple velvet—since purple, in Ladakh, is the color denoting royalty, as it is in many other countries—reached to the ground. Around her shoulders was a superb Tibetan shawl of deep red, with a magnificent border some twelve inches in width. Great hoops of seed pearls were suspended from her ears, and about her neck were two large strings of turquoise, carnelian and amber. Pinned to her shawl were jeweled butterflies, also embossed with seed pearls, and on her wrists she wore numerous bracelets of ivory.

But it was her hat that provided the truly fantastic feature of her

costume. It was a huge affair, extremely elaborate, and, framing her face somewhat in the manner of a sixteenth-century ruff, it had a distinctly Elizabethan air. As did the hats of all other Ladakhi women, it descended halfway down her back, in a streamer studded with large pieces of turquoise. At the front of this hat, attached just inside the rim and surrounded by choice bits of turquoise, was a tiny porcelain box, delicately painted with flowers of microscopic size—the work, I was told, of some great artist of ancient China. I was not surprised to learn that this extraordinary hat weighed eight pounds and was valued at several thousand dollars.

And even more astonishing than the hat as a whole were the “blinkers” which formed part of her head covering. They were great flaps of black lambskin which covered her ears—and would have covered, indeed, any ears short of an elephant’s. Ear flaps are worn by many women in Ladakh, but none of such a size; and as I stared at the Queen’s pair I remembered what Mrs. Asboe had told us at dinner a few nights before. She had said that in ancient times one of the queens of Ladakh had had a great deal of ear trouble, and her ears eventually became permanently disfigured by the court surgeon’s attempts at operation. To hide the scars she had devised the scheme of attaching shields of black lambskin to her hat, thereby setting a fashion which all the women of Ladakh have followed ever since—although no woman may wear a pair as large as the Queen’s.

The faces of both the King and the Queen were beaming with smiles of welcome. They smiled and nodded all the way through Walter Asboe’s interpretation of their speech of welcome and his rendering of our thanks in return. We were old friends at once.

Asboe seized the opportunity to ask if we might camp in the woods. Apparently the Queen thought this was a dandy idea. She said she was sure we would be more comfortable in our tents

than in the palace, and she thought we would probably prefer our own menu, also. How about a fresh vegetable or two? And before we could answer she had sent one of her servants posthaste up the hill to tell the cooks and gardeners to get busy, but quick. She and the King would sit with us, she said, while we ate our midday meal, if we didn't mind, and then we must come up to the palace and visit with them while they entertained us with a banquet which, she added, we would probably care only to sample. She was charming. It is no wonder that the British, as I afterward learned, consider her the cleverest woman in that part of Asia.

So the King and Queen rode back with us to the grove of trees and looked on with lively interest as we pitched camp. Our boys had hardly started to put up the tents when a half dozen of Her Majesty's house servants began to arrive with the food she had sent for. There was enough for an army. This first installment included three dozen eggs, two pounds of butter, a huge jar of milk (covered, to ward off any evil eye), four live chickens, quantities of carrots, peas, cauliflower, onions, China tea and numerous spices.

We responded by presenting to Their Majesties the gifts we had brought along with us. To the Queen we gave a silver pencil which wrote in four different colors. She was delighted with it, and announced that she would send it to her only daughter, a Buddhist nun. Next we gave her a pair of sunglasses (which we hoped she would find more useful than the Head Lama of Lamayuru had found the pair we gave him) and a cake of perfumed soap. This really wowed her. She sniffed at the soap appreciatively at least a dozen times while we were eating our lunch. Finally we gave her a flashlight, equipped with extra batteries, but this the King immediately took away from her. It fascinated him.

To the King, we gave a jackknife with six blades and two ounces of saffron, the spice which is highly prized in Ladakh not only

as a seasoning for food but also for its use in the purification ceremonies of the Buddhist faith. At sight of the jackknife the King immediately laid aside the flashlight and, grinning like a schoolboy, spent the rest of the time in opening and shutting its various blades.

Gathering up their treasures, the King and Queen took their departure before we had quite finished our meal, saying apologetically that they must return to the palace to see that everything was in order for the reception. They would expect us, the Queen said, in about two hours.

After they left, I asked Walter Asboe if the daughter whom the Queen had mentioned was her only child.

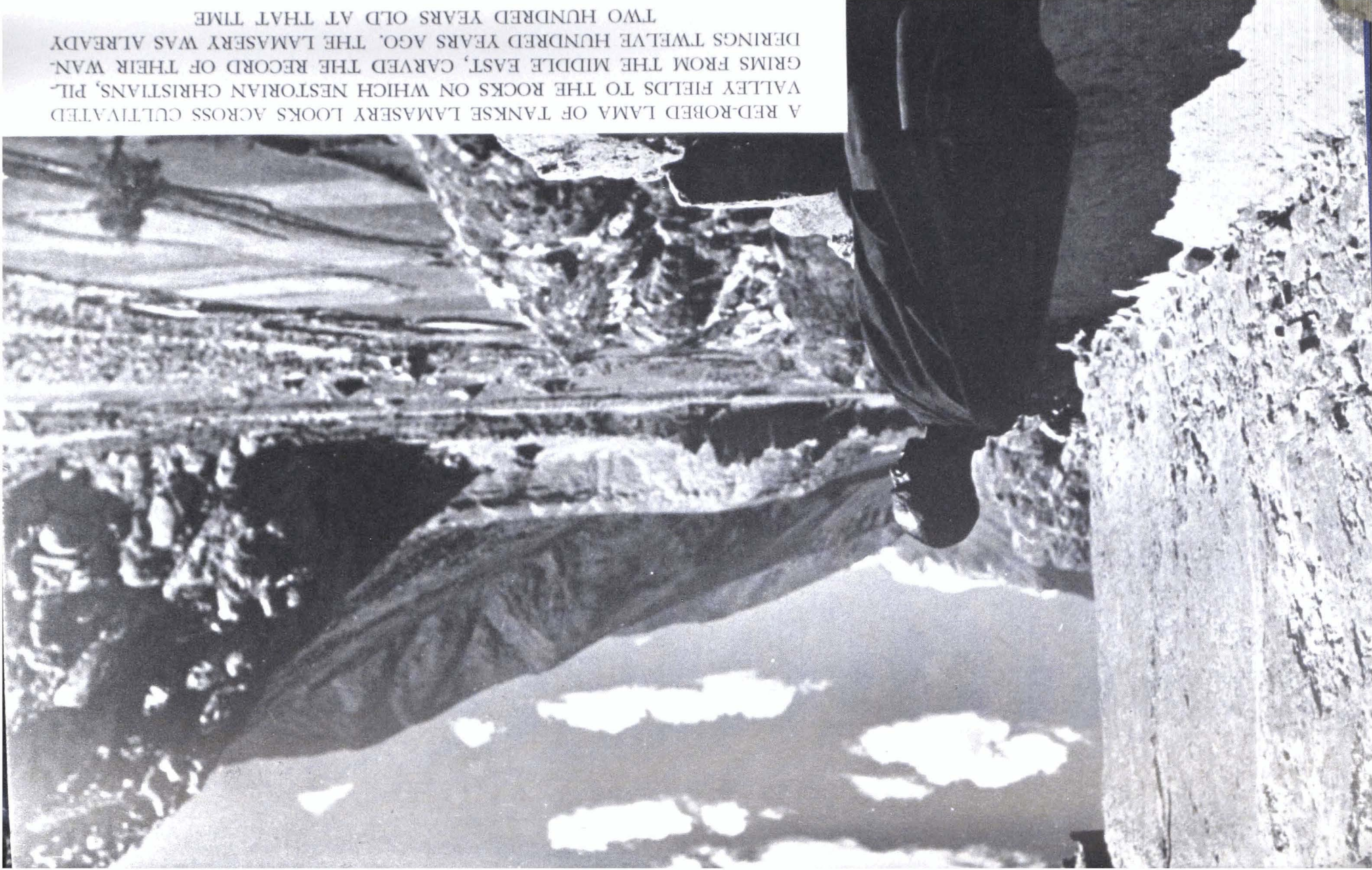
“Oh, no,” said the little missionary, “she has two sons. The older is now twenty-one. He will become king when his father dies. He is at school in Srinagar, but I hear that he’s not doing very well in his studies. He takes after his father, I’m afraid, rather than his mother. The King is amiable, but hardly what you would call brilliant. And then there’s a younger brother, now about fourteen, who has been made the Head Lama of the lamasery at Mashro, east of Leh. In the event of his brother’s death, he would be next in line for the throne.”

“The Queen looks very young to be the mother of a twenty-one-year-old son,” I remarked.

“Yes, but she probably married when she was fourteen, as most girls do in Ladakh. She’s probably still in her thirties. If she has any wrinkles, they would come from worrying over how to make ends meet on their limited income, and over how to find a suitable wife for her older son.

“That’s been no easy problem. She’s had it on her mind for years, but it isn’t settled even yet. A couple of years ago she heard that the Prime Minister of Ladakh had returned from a trip to Lhasa with word that one of the many daughters of the ruler of Sikkim, south of Lhasa, might be an eligible bride. So

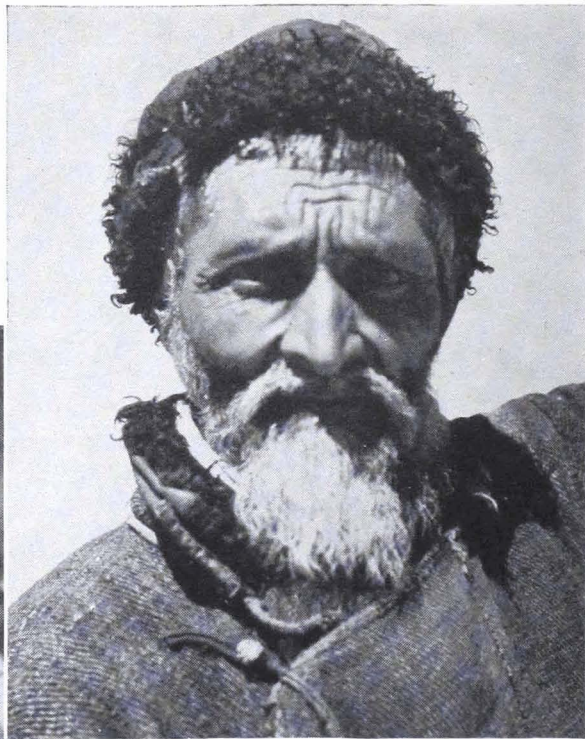
A RED-ROBED LAMA OF TANKSE LAMASERY LOOKS ACROSS CULTIVATED VALLEY FIELDS TO THE ROCKS ON WHICH NESTORIAN CHRISTIANS, PILGRIMS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST, CARVED THE RECORD OF THEIR WANDERINGS TWELVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO. THE LAMASERY WAS ALREADY TWO HUNDRED YEARS OLD AT THAT TIME





Mask (above) of the Founder of Tankse Lamasery, his youthful disciple beside him.

This ragged beggar (below), beating his drums, made himself a nuisance to us.



TOWN FATHER

Sidik Bat (above) told of a fabulous ruby.

the Queen promptly sent off one of the King's lamas as an ambassador to the ruler of Sikkim, who also is a Buddhist. Month after month dragged by, but the only letters the Queen ever got from the lama ambassador were vague, although he kept assuring her that 'negotiations were proceeding'—whatever that meant.

"In spite of this she felt that progress was being made and, several months ago, asked me to write to the leading jewelers of Srinagar and find out what a suitable engagement ring would cost. She had heard that the Sikkim princess had had an English governess, and the Queen thought that a ring more or less in the English style, a ring with a circlet of small diamonds, would show the princess' father that even in faraway Ladakh people knew what was what in the great world outside. The jewelers wrote that such a ring, with five small diamonds, would cost seven hundred rupees. The Queen gulped, but a hard look came into her eye, and I knew that however she had pinched pennies in the past they would now be pinched till they screamed.

"But as more weeks went by and still no definite word came from the lama at Sikkim, the Queen began to wonder if it would be wise to send the ring. What if the princess should accept the ring, and still refuse to come to Ladakh?

"And while she was still pondering over this horrid thought, an even grimmer problem reared up. The Prime Minister of Ladakh had got wind of the negotiations and sent a very disquieting message to the Queen. He pointed out that the palace of Stog, which was built a hundred years ago, was badly in need of repairs and was so drafty that the princess of Sikkim would never consent to live in it. The King and Queen, he said bluntly, had better make up their minds to do one of two things—either fix up the palace and heat it adequately, or build a modern bungalow for the young couple.

"The Queen was sunk. She knew only too well that the royal income would never stand the strain, whether she repaired the

palace or built the bungalow. Besides that there would be the expense of the marriage feast, to which a thousand persons must be invited. In her misery she came to me again and begged for my advice. It had occurred to her, she confided, that she knew of a perfectly nice girl, just the right age for her son, who would be, or should be, deliriously happy to marry him, and without any of this nonsense about central heating and what not. The girl lived in Lahoul, where the Queen herself was born, and where people sleep on blocks of ice by preference. In fact, the girl was the Queen's own niece, her son's first cousin. But why be stuffy about it? Why not just call her a 'distant' relative? Lahoul was distant enough, wasn't it? There couldn't possibly be a better match! The Queen's only problem now was to crawl out of any agreement with the princess of Sikkim. Would I suggest some way out of her predicament?

"Of course she didn't want advice. All she wanted was approval of what she had already made up her mind to do. So I merely suggested that she call in the *onpo*, the court astrologer, and ask him what the signs and portents had to say about the matter. If the stars pointed thumbs down on the Sikkim marriage, why, of course, there couldn't be any argument about it."

"And what happened?"

"Just what you might expect. The Queen consulted the astrologer the next day, and at once sent off word to the lama in Sikkim to tell the princess' father that the whole deal was off, and to come home as soon as he could. The lama got back last week, looking as if he had been pulled through a wringer. And so he had. He had come home by way of Lahore, and at the station there he stepped off the train right into the arms of a mob of Moslems who were looking for Hindus to murder. They stripped him right down to the skin before they decided that he wasn't a Hindu. But he told me, privately, that this didn't compare with the worries he had had in Sikkim. He had found out as soon

as he got to Sikkim that the so-called princess was only an illegitimate daughter of the ruler, and he hadn't dared to tell the Queen the truth. So he had just stayed on, month after month, sending back evasive letters and praying for some miracle to happen. But the Queen thinks he did such a wonderful job in getting her out of the Sikkim entanglement that she has boosted his pay and sent him off to Lahoul to make the new wedding arrangements."

"How will her son like that? He hasn't even seen the new candidate, has he?"

"No, but you must remember that he never saw the other one, either. But there won't be any objections. He and his father the King have the same motto—'Mother knows best.'"

"I don't blame them!" I said heartily. "She is a wonderful woman!"

At four o'clock that afternoon we started up the hill to the palace. Halfway up the ascent we came to the first of a series of broad stone steps that led to the palace. Here two large black Tibetan mastiffs barked and growled at us ferociously, but we saw, to our great relief, that they were chained. Several stablemen came running out and, after making signs that we must dismount here and climb the rest of the way on foot, led our horses up a path to the courtyard and stabled them. We climbed and climbed. I thought the steps would never come to an end. More and more I appreciated the trouble to which the King and Queen had gone, when they had come down to meet us. But at last we reached the level of the palace, an enormous square pile of white bricks. Inside, we were led up one more flight of stairs and down a long passage which brought us to the reception hall in which the King and Queen awaited us.

The room into which we were ushered was large, high-ceilinged and airy, with windows giving magnificent views of the surrounding mountains and of the Indus Valley far below. Its walls, and the supporting arches as well, were painted over with designs

in which a delicate blue and soft rose tint predominated, mellowed by the years to a most exquisite harmony. Through one arched window there was a breath-taking view up a valley to the great snow-capped mountains at its head, mountains whose central peak equaled the Matterhorn in terrible majesty.

The room itself was bare of furniture, except for the four camp chairs which had been provided for Walter Asboe, Loren, Rajah and me, and a tiny table holding a single glass jar filled with wild flowers. The King and Queen sat, or knelt, on cushions placed on a small Tibetan rug which was spread on a dais, with their backs to the window and its superb view. They had of course removed their shoes, but the King had exchanged his ordinary robe for a very natty garment of extremely fine material, somewhat Chinese in its cut. I have an idea it was his Sunday-go-to-meeting outfit, and the Queen had told him he must wear his best. With his long locks now neatly tucked behind his ears, and his weedy mustache, his face in profile somehow reminded me of St. Gaudens' medallion portrait of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Our arrival was the signal for the other guests to enter. There were about a dozen of them, led by the King's secretary, who, Asboe told us, had recently returned from a trip to Lhasa, and all were attached in one capacity or another to the royal household. All the men, like the King, kept their hats on, but all had removed their shoes on entering the room. None was introduced by name.

"Are their names too difficult to pronounce?" I whispered to Asboe.

"They would be difficult to remember, even if one knew all of each man's name, but no one does. A Tibetan always has three names: his house name, a private name by which he is usually called, and a secret name, which is never divulged."

Tea was soon served. One swallow was enough for me. Its ingredients included soda, butter, milk and salt, and the *tout ensemble* tasted exactly like soapsuds. But the servants kept on

refilling the bowls of the other guests and each man's capacity for the drink seemed inexhaustible.

"Do they always drink this much tea at a party?" I whispered.

"Oh, certainly." Asboe smiled. "At a feast the first hour or two is spent merely in drinking tea. This allows the late-comers to gather. Tibetans are avid drinkers of tea and of barley beer, which they call chang. Forty cups of tea is not too much for them at a single sitting. As you can see, the servants keep the cup constantly filled. You take a sip, and the servant immediately pours in some more."

Along with the tea, some unpalatable cookies and a sort of Tibetan pretzel, utterly tasteless, were served. We made only a pretense of nibbling at these dainties. No one seemed concerned, least of all the royal pair. When the tea drinking was at last concluded, we were taken to see the King's private chapel, where there were several lamas at their prayers. Here the King removed his hat for the first time and knelt reverently in front of one of the altars, between two of the lamas. We photographed him at these devotions, then, on returning with him to the drawing room, thanked the royal pair for their hospitality and asked if we might come back next morning to make some more pictures and say farewell. When Walter Asboe had translated this, adding the flowery compliments customary, the King and Queen folded their hands before them as if in prayer and bowed to each of us. The audience was over.

Back in camp, we went to bed early, but at three o'clock in the morning we were awakened from a sound sleep by a terrific blowing of horns and trumpets up on the palace hill. The unearthly symphony sounded like a New Year's Eve celebration at Times Square, but Walter Asboe explained that it was merely the windup of a week of special religious celebration, held at this time of year.

On our final visit to the palace, the next morning, the Queen

graciously summoned the *onpo* to pose for our cameras in his ceremonial dress. His robes were far more elaborate than those of any lama, and the sleeves of his bodice were of yellow silk. He wore a great high-peaked hat, in the true medieval fashion of sorcerers and astrologers. He seated himself on the ground and went through all the tricks in his repertoire—ringing hand bells, beating a small drum, reciting and chanting incantations from his mystic scrolls. To cap it all he picked up a human thighbone which had been fashioned into a flutelike instrument, and blew weird notes on it. As I watched, fascinated, even though this mumbo jumbo seemed to me childish and ridiculous, a disquieting thought entered my mind from nowhere and whispered. *What if this grotesque charlatan can really read the future? Is sickness or even death waiting for me somewhere along these lonely and desolate mountain trails? Could he foresee it? Could he give me warning?* But even as I asked the question, its foolishness struck me and I laughed at myself inwardly. “Hey, Loren, we’d better be moving,” I called. “Remember, it will take several hours’ ride to get to the Himis lamasery, and we must find the Hidden Valley before nightfall!”

The King had seemed a bit downcast that morning when we first arrived. Walter Asboe asked if anything was troubling him, and the King confided that he was depressed because the flashlight we had given him wouldn’t work. Surprised, we asked to see it. Sure enough, it seemed dead. We unscrewed the cap to look at the batteries. There weren’t any there at all!

When we asked what had become of them, the King said sheepishly that he hadn’t wanted to set the palace on fire, so he had taken out the batteries and put them safely away in a chest. Behind lock and key, he said, they couldn’t cause any mischief.

This time we put the flashlight in charge of the Queen.

As a farewell gift the King and Queen presented me with a pair of Lhasa terrier puppies, male and female. They were so

small that they could fit quite comfortably into the pockets of my fur-lined coat. We named the male Pangong, in honor of the lake which was our objective, and the female one Chang La, for the lofty mountain pass which we must cross before reaching the lake. On the road they traveled in a basket which was strapped to the back of one of our pony wallahs, but at night they slept luxuriously in my fur-lined Kashmiri house boots. Unfortunately one puppy died on our return journey. I gave the other one to a friend.

The King and Queen, all smiles, came down to our camp to see us off. Their simple unaffected friendliness warmed our hearts. Long may they rule!

We rode with Walter Asboe as far as the bridge over the Indus, where we told him good-by and watched him start off on his lonely ride back to Leh. Then we turned our ponies' heads south-eastward, never far from the river, along the trail which climbed steadily toward the high Hidden Valley and its ancient lamasery of Himis.

THE wheat and barley fields of the royal family were behind us as the terrain along our trail and far up the slope of the hills to the right became desert that was extremely arid. But for some little distance cultivated fields continued on our left, fields that were irrigated by the river. Then, after a few miles, the country grew barren, equally depressing and bleak on both sides of the trail.

It was a sandy, desolate journey of some twenty miles from Stog to the Hidden Valley of Himis, and the sun was low when we arrived. We had continued straight up the Indus Valley until we turned to the right and ascended a steep trail. Leaving the river we climbed the slope of the mountain for several thousand feet, passing by *mani* walls, chortens and barley fields, then, at last, reached the shoulder of rock that hid the entrance to the valley.

What entrance? There seemed to be only a great wall of insurmountable rock before us. As we approached it Rajah pointed at the sky. Looking up, I saw a giant bird circling far overhead, a great golden eagle that gave the impression of being a sentinel on duty, here at the mysterious entrance to another world. We rode on. And suddenly there opened up before us the ravine through which we could go.

As we passed single-file through the narrow cleft into the Valley of Himis, huge, jagged rocks pierced the sky on both sides of us. Rocks flamed reddish-brown in the setting sun or became mottled in the patchwork of a harlequin, black and white, in the shadows.

The valley was a narrow one, with the huge lamasery nestling near the foot of one of the great rocky cliffs at the far end, and almost hidden under masses of foliage. The waters of a lively stream danced down the mountainside as we climbed toward the guest-house compound at the foot of the *gompa*.

The trail leading up through the Hidden Valley to the *gompa* was a narrow one, with no room to stray to either side. There was more foliage here than we had yet seen on our journey, screening the fields which represented part of the *gompa's* wealth.

As we approached the lamasery the trail became ever and ever steeper and a cold wind came whistling down from the mountains, in strange contrast to the heat of the trail during the day.

It took us only a half hour to reach the compound from the cleft in the rocky wall; but as soon as we stepped into the drafty guest house, walled in on only three sides, we were shivering and climbing into our fur coats, fur gloves and caps. We were at an elevation of thirteen thousand feet and in the coldest spot we had so far encountered on our journey. I slept snugly that night in the inner lining of my arctic bag, which was to be a *must* from that time on, as we traveled east at eighteen thousand feet and over the Chang La to Lake Pangong, in the barren highlands, almost uninhabited except for nomad herdsmen.

When we were having dinner that evening I noticed that one pony wallah after another would stick his head around the corner of our pavilion. It aroused my curiosity.

"What's the matter with them, Rajah?" I asked. "They seem nervous. I've never seen any of the pony wallahs act like this before."

"They do not like it here in the valley," Rajah told me, with an expression that brought to mind his talk of djinns. "They are anxious to be paid so that they can be on their way and not have to spend the night here. I told them I would pay them off when the masters had finished their evening meal, and not before."

“It’s certainly luck, Rajah, that you are with us,” I commented. “Without you we would never have been able to get funds in Leh to continue the expedition. But if we let our pony wallahs go tonight, how are we going to get our equipment out of here?”

“The *gompa* lamas can supply us with men and animals,” said Rajah. “Apparently they have already started to bear down on our pony wallahs to get them out of here so that their own servants may take their places.”

At this point our chuprassy entered the drafty room with the cheering news that in the morning we were to see the *Chagdzod* of the lamasery, who was a sort of regent during the infancy of the Skooshok.

Our Moslem chuprassy, who was called Gulam Haidar, was a very efficient man and I was certainly pleased that the Wazir had given him to us. His costume had looked to me more than adequate but since we had reached this cold valley I wondered if he were comfortable. He wore a robe of the usual red cloth, with a sweater underneath this *gonche*, and for all occasions his head-dress was a knitted woolen nightcap with tassel of brown wool. On his feet he wore Kashmir sandals and heavy socks.

The following morning I had a shock when I went into the kitchen behind the guest bungalow and found Rajah wrapped in an old brown blanket and huddled miserably over a wretched fire. He was pale as a ghost and felt very bad from mountain sickness. I gave him several pills. Within a short time he felt much better.

The *Chagdzod* of the lamasery was true to his word and came to see us that morning shortly after breakfast. With him were several assistants who did the talking. He just sat and listened, his broad and intelligent face impassive and severe. They told us that there were no devil dancers available in the valley at the time and that the costumes were also all in villages at some little distance. They were all very voluble except the *Chagdzod*. He

remained silent. It was obvious that the Wazir's letter had been able to accomplish nothing. India's influence, since the British departure, was apparently at an all-time low in this region. Perhaps the Yarkandi agitators were being more successful than we had thought.

But, as Rajah and the chuprassy went on with their interpretations, I got the idea that the *Chagdzod's* assistants were leaving the door open: that if some silver crossed their palms there would be a sudden change of mind. With so few travelers coming to Himis I wondered why they were being so coy. I had been quite prepared to pay for the ceremony.

Many years before, in a wild jungle area of Dutch Guiana, I had learned my lesson when I met an almost naked Djuka savage who refused to dance for our camera—*unless* he received the exact sum he had obtained when he had put on the same dance for a camera crew that was getting background for a Clark Gable picture called *Too Hot to Handle*.

The moment I asked Rajah to tell them that we would pay for the inconvenience of getting the dancers and the costumes back together again, the lamas' chattering stopped and they were ready to get down to business.

"They are going back to the *Chagdzod's* office and will discuss the price among themselves. Just as soon as they have arrived at a figure they will send for you," said Rajah.

"Fair enough," Loren commented. "I'll have a chance to go over the equipment in the meantime. There are a little oiling and general checking that won't do any harm."

An hour later we were bidden to the room of the *Chagdzod*. To reach his quarters we had to climb up and down dark, damp corridors and stumble over interminable stone floors. We passed along one long corridor blocked with dozens of small prayer wheels set in niches—two to a niche. Lighted and mirrored they might have been part of the *décor* of an ultramodern home.

As we entered the *Chagdzod's* office some ten minutes after leaving the guest house we saw him, freshly attired, seated on the floor with his back against the wall. He was squatting in a little padded area about the size of a dog kennel, enclosed with a tiny railing only a few inches in height.

In his hand he was holding a black Tibetan, or as they call them in Leh, a Lhasa dog. He was dressed in what looked like a toga, made of various cloths of red and purple. A strand of huge wooden beads was coiled about his neck. His feet were encased in high boots of thick red cloth.

He still did not speak a word, letting his assistants talk for him. We chatted for a few minutes and then Rajah and our chuprassy had a private conference.

"Come," said Rajah when they had finished. "I will take you back to the guest house. By the time I return the *Chagdzod* will have arrived at a figure. By leaving, you will give the impression that you are losing interest; and that will speed them up."

Rajah returned and he and our chuprassy bearded the *Chagdzod* alone. The assistants were excluded from the final chat. I had great confidence in Rajah's ability to deal with the *Chagdzod*.

Twenty minutes later Rajah was with us again. "It is arranged," he said.

"How much?" we asked in unison.

"He wanted one hundred and twenty-five rupees but he finally settled for sixty-five—" Rajah began to enumerate on his fingers—"plus the musical alarm clock for the Skooshok, a specially fine flashlight with six extra batteries, and one tola of saffron for himself. The dance is promised for two-thirty this afternoon."

"How," I asked a trifle sarcastically, "will the dancers be able to get here from remote villages by then? It's after ten o'clock."

"They are probably in the fields," Rajah explained. "Remember that the religious communities assist in cultivating the soil in Ladakh and are in many places the chief landholders. Here

they own the entire valley and this is harvesttime. Besides," he added, and waved a hand at the towering buildings overhead, "there could be an army in the *gompa* and no one would know there was a soul about."

Shortly after two P.M. several assistants of the *Chagdzod* came to call for us and carry our folding camp chairs up to the courtyard where the dance was to be held. They placed the chairs on a balcony overhanging the yard which promised to give an excellent view.

Loren began his work by taking "inserts" of wall paintings and of one of the lamas spinning a huge prayer wheel. Then the orchestra appeared and he went into high gear on it. Following that, he photographed the two prayer flags, which must have been between twenty-five and thirty feet in height. The poles were tufted, as usual, with yaks' tails, and a considerable number of strips of white prayer cloths fluttered from them. They were larger than any we were to see in the other lamaseries of Western Tibet.

The members of the orchestra were all dressed in red, and each man sported a hat of a different shape. There were a man with cymbals, two with trumpets and a very sour individual who never changed his expression throughout the entire ceremony. He played an overhead drum. The musicians immediately took their place at the right of the throne, which was covered with a magnificent cloth of old-rose brocade.

The great fifteen-foot doors of the *dukang* or Hall of the Gods, swung slowly open and out came two trumpeters to herald the coming of the Skooshok. Immediately behind were three lamas who were gentlemen in waiting.

The one in the center, a huge man, was carrying in his arms the child Skooshok, who was wearing a tall peaked red hat and a wondrous cape of golden cloth.

I had awaited the coming of the child Skooshok with deep interest because I had heard the story of how he had been chosen.

Some four years before our arrival in the valley, we were told, the former Skooshok, a very old man, had called the chief lamas of Himis into his room and said, "I shall die this afternoon!" He then told them the exact hour at which he would die.

"I shall be reborn," he told them, "beyond the great mountains." He gave them a description of a house on a certain street in a remote village. "Go there in four years," he commanded, "and a woman with a mole on her cheek will greet you. Beside her will be a spotted Lhasa terrier. Walk past her to a room beyond and there you will find a child playing on the floor."

He then motioned to a number of familiar objects which were on a table beside him and asked the assembled lamas if the objects were not well known as having belonged to him for years.

They all agreed that the familiar objects would forever be associated with him.

"I shall be that child," the old Skooshok is supposed to have said. "Place before me on the floor these objects which have belonged to me in this life. With them place other objects, of your own choosing, that I have never seen. When I have discarded those other objects, and picked out these, then you will know that it is I, your Skooshok, reborn!"

According to the sincere belief of the people of the Hidden Valley of Himis all this had happened exactly as the old Skooshok had prophesied.

As I looked at the child now he did give me the impression of being immensely wise and of having been familiar with his surroundings, here at Himis, many a long year. His was certainly not the bewildered expression of a child or adult who had arrived at Himis only a few months before.

And later when Loren took "stills" of the reincarnated spiritual ruler of Western Tibet the little Skooshok did not even whimper as the flash gun went off. Instead, he gravely stacked the exploded bulbs along the ledge of the throne and afterward took them back to his private quarters.

The child Skooshok was followed by five gorgeously attired dancers who came down the stairs into the courtyard wearing wide-brimmed hats, covered with streamers of silk. Death's-heads were sewn on the brilliantly colored robes in which their bodies were swathed.

These five were followed by four more dancers who were wearing magnificently colored death masks. Of these four, one, the smallest of the lot, was a jester. As the other dancers cavorted about the crazy-quilt pattern to the weird rhythm of the orchestra, this little fellow made his own grotesque gestures, directing most of them to us on the balcony.

His antics greatly amused the lamas who had come in from the fields to watch the affair. But what his gestures meant, or what the dances signified, no one seemed to know, or if they did they were unwilling to explain.

The dance over, the participants, like an American stage troupe after a rehearsal at the theater, rushed back into the *gompa* to change their clothes. There was no request for baksheesh. They all bowed to us as, a few minutes later, they filed past in their working clothes, headed back to their posts in the fields of the giant *gompa*.

Loren, who had been poking around in the confines of the *gompa* before the dance, now asked, through Rajah and our chuprassy, if we might make an interior scene in the great *dukang*. There was a huge Buddha there we had heard much about, which, we were told, was of gold plate, and whose shoulders were covered with a vast golden shawl. We knew that at times it entered into their ceremonies. The *Chagdzod* seemed more than willing and quickly gave his permission. Loren then suggested that it would make a better picture if the *Chagdzod* appeared in it, too, and he also agreed to that.

Loren asked Rajah to explain to the *Chagdzod* that as this was an interior motion picture we would have to use a magnesium flare and it would cause considerable smoke. Rajah translated

what Loren had said. Perhaps the significance of what Rajah told him entirely escaped him, for he showed no qualms; but the *Chagdzod* of Himis was about to get the shock of his life.

When the *Chagdzod* opened the high wooden doors of the *dukang* it was at first impossible to see anything through the gloom. Tiny oil lamps flickered dimly before the images of the gods. A few feeble rays of daylight got through from a windowed air shaft far above but they seemed only to deepen the darkness below.

In the lamaseries of Ladakh a prominent place in the *dukang* is always given to the statue of the founder. Himis proved no exception. There was a large one of Staksen Raspa, the founder, here, but in the vague shadows cast by the oil lamps it was at first only a blurred outline. The *dukang* was so dark that it was impossible to see, without flashlights or the flare, even the vaguest trace of the mounds of dirt and dust which were everywhere underfoot.

But when I turned on my flashlight we saw that the dust was several inches thick. It even covered with a coating of moldy filth the tattered flags and banners which hung from the many posts. Everywhere there were dust and dirt and decay. You were afraid to walk too heavily for fear that clouds of dust would envelop you.

"If any sparks drop in the right places when the flare is lighted this entire *gompa* is going to go up in smoke," I said, choking.

"You mean if they drop almost anywhere," Loren corrected. "We must be very careful," he added, turning to Rajah. "You hold the flare. If I tell you to duck out into the courtyard with it, don't hesitate. Get going. Here, we'll attach it to Nicol's shooting stick. It will be far enough away from your face then."

While Loren and Rajah were working on the attachment I played my flashlight about the great room. I marveled at the beautifully decorated door through which we had entered the

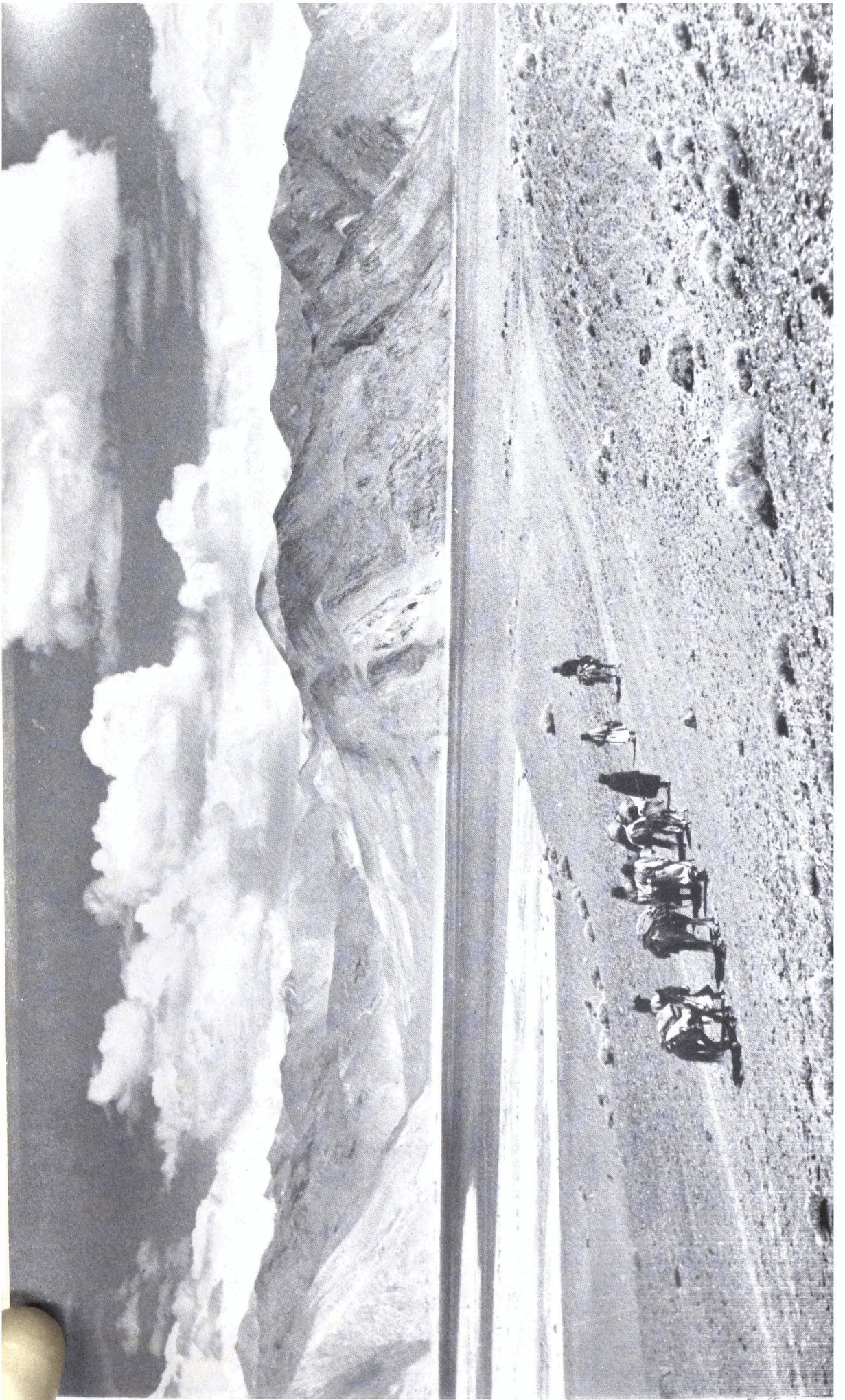


OUR CAMERA SQUAD AT LAKE PANGONG

Left to right: Rajah, three pony wallahs and the chuprassy



OUR COOK, "THUNDERBOLT," AND HIS HELPER, "LIGHTNING"



dukang, and at wall paintings showing a Chinese influence. The walls of the praying rooms are nearly always decorated with paintings and here the Chinese influence on Tibetan art was conspicuous, with the much-favored colors of red and blue.

Finally everything was ready. The *Chagdzod* was praying in front of the Buddha when Loren lighted the flare. It spluttered, fluttered and then died.

"What's the matter with it?" I asked. It was our last flare.

"I don't know, unless it got wet. But I don't see how it could have," Loren said. "It was wrapped in waterproof paper." He stared at it in despair for a moment. "Look," he went on, turning to Rajah: "will you go down to the bungalow and get some old rags and the bottle of gasoline? I'll tie the cloth to a long stick and soak it in the gasoline, then hold it under the flare. That'll do the trick if anything will."

When Rajah came back Loren made the feeder for the flare and lighted it. At first nothing happened. Then with a tremendous spluttering the flare caught and the vast ancient room with its tattered draperies and banners suddenly came to life and centuries slipped away.

It made a scene I shall never forget. The great golden Buddha seemed to come alive. I thought the eyes of the *Chagdzod* of Himis, praying in front of it, would pop out of his head as the magnesium flare brilliantly lighted the entire *dukang*.

Loren had his eyes glued to the camera. "Hold it, Rajah!" he cried.

Rajah, wearing goggles, my gloves and his own muffler, obediently said, "Do you want it any closer?"

"I'm getting plenty of light," Loren said and took his eye from the camera for a second. Sparks flew all around him. "Closer?" he shouted. "I'm almost on fire now!"

Huge billows of inky black smoke were encircling the Buddha's head. It looked now as if it were glaring at us.

"Grab the camera and come!" Loren shouted at the chuprassy,

who had his tasseled cap stuffed into his mouth, as the flare burned itself out.

We all rushed for the great wooden doors; but Rajah, on returning with the cloths and gasoline for the flare, had closed them to keep out the lamas. With our combined weights thrown against them, they slowly opened and we staggered out into the courtyard choking and spluttering.

Immense clouds of dense black smoke came billowing out of the open doors, and we warned the lama who was keeper of the *dukang* not to go into the hall for at least an hour, since it would be very dangerous. The *Chagd zod* made his excuses and left us as we waited to be sure that no sparks had landed in the banners to cause a fire.

We hung around until all danger of fire was over, and then made our way back down the hill to our bungalow. The whole day had been an exhausting one, and, after supper, we went to bed early.

Again—just as at Stog the night before—trumpets began to blow at three A.M. But this early morning “symphony” had five times the fury of the early morning concert to which we had been treated at Stog.

It was the works!

Our chuprassy assured us that this offering to the gods was an ironclad promise that no more magnesium flares would ever again be used in any of the *gompas* under the rule of the Dalai Lama of Tibet.

We had hoped, before we left, to spend an hour with the *Chagd zod*, making “establishing” shots of the courtyard for our dance sequence. But the chuprassy told us with a very grave face that our erstwhile friend had been called away. Nor would he be back while we were there. All the lamas in the valley were much upset about the terrific black smoke over the head of the Buddha and felt that the gods were very angry. The tremendous

number of trumpets with their eerie music that morning was an attempt on the part of the lamas to appease the gods.

Even our culinary staff, Thunderbolt and Lightning, were miffed at us until we explained, through Rajah, that we had done the same thing in our own places of worship. They accepted that and gave us a semblance of their former cheery selves.

“It is much better not to insist on making any more pictures,” Rajah advised wisely. “We must get out of here, and as soon as possible. If they get too excited anything might develop.”

We packed our tents and were on our way within the hour.

XI

 *The Eyes of the Mask*

JUST before sunset that evening we reached the village of Sakti, well beyond the raging Indus River, and at the foot of the pass that was called Chang La.

We were up at seven-thirty the next morning and were loading our horses near the building that had served overnight as a kitchen when I happened to notice two horses that were not a part of our caravan tethered close by. I asked Rajah whom they belonged to; but before he had an opportunity to answer, the kitchen door opened and out stepped a very striking individual, six feet tall.

He wore Kashmir sandals but no stockings, American Army slacks and a thin blue shirt. A green tweed hat with a brass lion stuck in the brim sat jauntily on the side of his head and he wore a mandarin coat of heavy gabardine. He had a tiny mustache and very handsome features.

When I first glanced at him I had a feeling that I had known him someplace before. I looked away and then quickly back again as I saw that the mandarin coat which he wore was held in at the waist by a fuchsia-colored scarf, wrapped several times around.

My mind flitted back to that day in Delhi many weeks before when the eldest of the Shanti brothers had suggested that I prowl through the shops along the Chandni Chauk to find the lady's evening bag that I was seeking.

I suddenly remembered, vividly, the small courtyard behind a shop into which I had wandered. I saw once more the two

enormous fellows, naked as the day they were born, except for loincloths of fuchsia-colored coarse silk, tightly stretched around their hips. I could see them moving warily around each other on the smooth sand of the courtyard with the lightness and swiftness of giant cats.

I knew as I gazed at the fuchsia-colored scarf which was bound around the waist of the stranger before me that it was the same color and texture as the loincloths of those wrestlers. And there was something about the way he stood—leaning slightly forward, although in perfect balance—that reminded me of them.

Then, as I stared at him, remembrance of something since Delhi tugged at my memory: the shop of the English-speaking Moslem in Leh, where I had gone looking for green jade cups, flashed into my mind's eye. I recalled the young man, wearing a Tibetan robe fastened at the waist with a silken fuchsia-colored sash, who had so silently appeared behind us as I talked to the shopkeeper. I had had only a brief glance at the tall, darkly handsome young man before he disappeared into the next room with the Moslem, but I was certain that this was the same man.

As I stared at him he smiled at me, displaying a superb set of teeth, and at the same time bowed ever so slightly. I bowed in return and spoke to him in English, giving my name. He shook his head gently and disappeared into the kitchen as I turned to Rajah. "Is he the man who owns the two strange horses?" I asked.

"Yes," Rajah replied. "He is from Leh and is traveling over the pass with us. He arrived last night after you had gone to bed. I asked the chuprassy about him but for once Gulam Haidar is strangely uncommunicative. This stranger has been questioning Thunderbolt and Lightning all about the master's activities. He has been writing down in a notebook everything they told him."

"But why? Why should he be interested in us?"

Rajah's expression was thoughtful. "I know it does seem

strange," he said. "The chuprassy says the man claims to be the son of a Moslem pir, or religious leader, though his clothes and actions would not seem to bear this out. I don't understand why he is questioning the servants. And I don't understand why they seem frightened of him and don't want to discuss him any more than the chuprassy does. It looks as though we might have him with us for a few days, as he says he is going to Tankse on business."

"Well, let's both keep an eye on him," I said, and I was even more thoughtful than Rajah had been.

It was nearly nine o'clock before we got away. Up, up and up we climbed until by lunchtime we had reached Camp Zingrul, five miles from Sakti, and at an elevation of a little over sixteen thousand feet.

We were feeling the altitude now, and the movements of the pony wallahs and the horses became slower and slower. One of the unusual features of the caravan at this particular time was the extreme youthfulness of the pony wallahs. We had changed both men and animals at Sakti; the group we had brought from the Hidden Valley had been paid off and were on their way back to Himis.

Our new pony wallahs averaged in the early twenties, but three of them could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen years of age. They might have been even younger. Each one of these boys owned his own horse and the family of the youngster had put him to work at an unbelievably early age. They had been across the Chang La several times and were old hands at such an experience.

Before we stopped for lunch Loren was panting and puffing. Although I was not troubled to the same extent I knew that we had reached a great height and I wanted no more than a minimum of exertion.

As we came over the top of a ridge to the short level stretch which bore the name of Camp Zingrul we saw before us a herd

of several hundred sheep under the direction of a group of curious-looking natives.

Rajah quickly pulled in his horse and motioned for us to do the same. The chuprassy and he quickly exchanged some words, and then the chuprassy approached the nomads to give them our greetings.

When he came back Rajah said, "The chuprassy tells me they are Chang-pas, Tibetan nomads, from a region thirty days' travel from here. Notice that the sheep are carrying packs? They each carry from twenty to thirty pounds, depending on the size of the sheep. They bring salt from their home region and are now carrying back wheat and barley on their homeward journey. Sakti is the farthest point they reach in Ladakh. They make two round trips every summer and when they come in June their sheep are sheared at Sakti, where they sell the wool."

While we watched them, the nomads continued with their duties as though we didn't exist. There was a little boy of nine or ten who was playing with a great shaggy shepherd dog that could have swallowed him whole. He was hugging the fierce beast affectionately and pulling it along as though it were a kitten.

"According to the chuprassy," Rajah went on, "these people are seldom encountered on the trail. He says he does not believe they have ever been filmed."

"Let's see if we can't get them," Loren said, although just to breathe cost him an effort. "I'd like a shot of that long-haired fellow over there. See—he's about to play on his flute."

We gave our horses their heads after we saw that the child nomad had safely secured the fierce-looking shepherd dog. We walked over until we were only a few yards away from the Chang-pas. They had herded the black and white sheep together in a circle, and three of them were preparing their midday meal, while the fourth entertained them with music from his strange flute.

Loren had just set up his motion-picture camera and had started to photograph the natives at their meal when my attention was attracted by a horseman coming over the ridge of the mountain from Sakti. It was the handsome stranger who had taken such an interest in our activities that morning. He approached us rapidly when he saw that we were studying the Chang-pas, and drew rein not far away. He did not seem interested in coming any farther, so I returned my attention to the herdsmen.

I saw that in the background was a *gur-gur*, the cylindrical wooden churn used for making tea. I had first seen one of them in Lydia's kitchen in the Christian Inn in Leh. It seemed, as with all the other peoples of this country, to play an important part in the preparation of any meal.

I watched them put tea and soda in water and then place the pan on a fire until all the water had boiled away. Then they poured more water into the pan and the same procedure was followed for the second time. After they had gone through the same process for the third time the tea had become quite red. What water remained in the pan was then strained and put in the *gur-gur*. On top of this went some salt, milk and butter. Then a wooden rod, with a circular-shaped piece of wood at one end, was moved violently up and down with great force until all of the ingredients were well mixed. When this was accomplished their tea was ready and they filled their briar bowls with it.

The tea was first sipped as it was, with great relish. After it had been sufficiently sampled, *sattu* or barley flour was added to each bowl and rolled around until they had dumplings, which were eaten ravenously with the fingers.

I was fascinated by these strange people, but they didn't return our curiosity. They didn't pay the slightest attention to us, nor did they seem at all disturbed while we photographed them.

Through the chuprassy, who was a fund of information, we learned that the Chang-pas have no lands but depend on their

flocks of sheep and goats for their livelihood. From birth to death their homes are in tents made of yak's hair.

A single yak's-hair tent was standing in the background. It had apparently been put up for overnight and we wondered why they would have planned to stay at such an altitude if they could avoid it. The chuprassy smiled and said that sixteen thousand feet, for them, was the rule and not the exception.

The tent, I noticed, was peculiar in form. It was constructed in two pieces which were not closely attached but were assembled in such a fashion as to leave an opening all along the top for smoke to escape.

"If there is rain or snow a piece of cloth is spread over the opening to keep out the water," Rajah explained. "They are constantly on the move, trying to follow the seasons to find pasture for their animals."

"Where do most of them live?" I asked Rajah, who in turn had to get his information from the chuprassy.

"The district called Rupsho," Rajah told me. "It is very cold but has excellent pasture lands. There is a big lake in their home area that is made up of three smaller ones called Mindum Saga, Kalche Saga and Sag Saga. It is from these lakes that they obtain the salt which they bring on the backs of their sheep to Sakti."

In fascination I watched the Chang-pa with the bronzed and heavily lined face; he continued to play his flutelike instrument and though I am sure he had never seen a motion-picture camera in his life it didn't alarm him. He smiled often as Loren made close-ups of him.

"Ask the chuprassy what language they speak," I said to Rajah.

"It is not at all like the language of the Ladakh people. It's called Drogskat. He tells me they have many curious customs. Would you like to hear about them?"

I said that I would, by all means, and the chuprassy related a few of them, with Rajah translating.

At home, before winter comes, the Chang-pa digs a hollow in the ground, about two feet deep. He places several rows of bricks at the edge and on the bottom. Then he puts his possessions on the bricks, and over this pitches the family tent. There he and his spend the winter months, entirely oblivious of what is going on outside. It might be remarked that he comes closer to resembling a hibernating bear than any human animal on the earth's surface.

Another curious custom of the Chang-pas is that their closest relatives abandon them in their last hours on earth. When one falls seriously ill his family leaves him in the hollow, takes down the tent and reassembles it a short distance off. If the Chang-pa who is ill passes away his body is left in the pit to be consumed by wild animals or predatory birds. If he gets better and can climb out of the hollow under his own power he does so and rejoins his family.

I was reminded of what Walter Asboe had told me about the usual disposal of the dead in Ladakh. The body is buried only if the person dies of an infectious disease. Otherwise it is cremated. When small children die they frequently are buried by putting the bodies between walls of the house or in between stones on a hillside.

The Chang-pas' method of slaughtering an animal also differs from that of any of the other inhabitants of Ladakh, Rajah went on to explain. To kill a sheep or goat, they prick the liver through the ribs. Then they force the animal to move until it drops dead.

Loren was exhausted when he had finished filming the Chang-pas; he stretched out on a flat rock in the sun before we started on to climb the pass.

We crossed the top of the Chang La at three-ten P.M. Here at an elevation of eighteen thousand four hundred feet we had one of the magnificent views of the world. Stretched out before us was the mighty Zaskar range with dozens of peaks over twenty-one

thousand feet in height. We felt that we were looking at the *Lost Horizon* country of James Hilton.

When we first started up the pass we had climbed a zigzag path that rose gradually. We had passed stone peasant huts that were like lonely sentinels in the center of rich green fields, irrigated by countless small canals. Then we climbed to the large moraine where we photographed the Chang-pas, a moraine left millions of years ago by glaciers extending far into the valley. Near the summit of the pass the only evidences of life we had encountered were hermit crows. At the summit there were only giant blocks of granite, between which we made our way.

But as we began to descend the far side of the pass we saw tiny marmots peeking at us from safe vantage points, looking like miniature balls of fire, their golden fur shining brilliantly in the afternoon light.

Shortly after five-thirty, after surmounting the snout of a moraine, we arrived at Tsultak Lake, where we made camp.

The lake was a gem. The turquoise blue of the water contrasted with the darker blue of the sky and the magenta-colored rocks of the near-by cliffs. Giant black yaks grazed at the water's edge. The sunset blush, on the snow-covered pinnacles beyond the lake, completed a dazzling panorama, beautiful beyond description.

Our camp that night was just under sixteen thousand feet. The temperature dropped to the low thirties by eight o'clock. By midnight it was bitterly cold.

Once again we had an occasion to give thanks to our efficient chuprassy. The moment he had finished answering our questions about the Chang-pas he had ridden on ahead with the equipment. When we arrived at the lake he already had the tent up and the air in our mattresses.

We slept on the very roof of the world, with a giant yak grazing outside our tent and the wind whistling eerily around us.

That is, we slept until two A.M., when Loren awoke gasping for breath and awakened me, too. He sat up and loosened the flap of the tent on his side and drew in great gulps of air. I was only half-awake but I heard him drop the flap and say, "What in the name of my Aunt Matilda is that character doing around here at this time of night?"

"What?" I mumbled.

"The Swiss yodeler with the green hat," Loren gasped. "He was nosing around outside our tent when I lifted the flap, or I'm seeing things."

"Okay, you're seeing things." I went back to sleep.

During the next few days we had occasion to wonder more and more about this curious individual. He always seemed to be going just where we were going. He was always friendly and he smiled whenever we looked in his direction. Yet each night he questioned the pony wallahs, the chuprassy and Rajah about the things we had photographed that day.

As Rajah remarked, we could not get rid of him without using force and that would not be too wise in this remote corner of Central Asia. Perhaps he *was* the son of a Moslem pir and just happened to be going our way—but why all the curiosity about us?

He was thorough. No member of the Russian secret police could have been more so. In time I came to think of him as "Stalin, Jr." I finally shortened this name and just called him "Junior" when I discussed him with Loren or Rajah. In fact we debated at some length just what Junior was up to when he wasn't watching us.

While descending the Chang La we saw a good deal of game. First, a snow leopard drinking at the edge of a stream. About an hour later our pony wallahs pointed out four *sharpu*, or mountain sheep, that were grazing at a green spot on the side of a hill.

The *sharpu* were a light, sandy-red in color and looked as though they were built for speed. The pony wallahs told us

that during the winter they have a black ruff which makes a sharp contrast with the rest of their coats.

By one o'clock we had dropped down to the valley and had come to the enchanting little village of Dargu. It was like a village of dolls' houses with a rippling stream running between grassy banks on each side of the village. There were little stone bridges over the water and several dozen houses of brightly colored sun-baked brick scattered along each side of the stream. It was a diminutive paradise.

We had our luncheon of hard-boiled eggs and crackers under a spreading willow tree by the edge of the singing stream. Our shadow, Junior, stopped to have a snack of his own a few yards down the stream, where he could always keep us in plain view.

After luncheon Loren took some stills of the lovely scene and while he was working we got a break, or at least we thought so at the moment, when a wandering drummer came staggering down the edge of the stream. He was almost blind, incredibly dirty and dressed in the most pathetic rags.

We tossed him a silver coin and he began to beat on his primitive drums with what appeared to be his last ounce of strength as Loren shot some stills of him. When Loren had finished, the old man held out his palsied hand for another coin. I was about to give it to him when Rajah interceded.

"No," he said. "You have given him enough. If you give him any more we'll not be able to get rid of him. He'll follow us."

The ancient drummer may have been half-blind but he seemed to know what was being said, and he knew instinctively that he was going to be the loser. The rataplan of his primitive drums was nothing compared with the wails and moans of protest that came from him. But Rajah was adamant and started to pack the lunch tins back into our saddlebags.

As we started away the old fellow pulled all the stops with his wailing and was so pathetic-looking that I weakened and tossed

him a coin. Rajah showed his disapproval, but I paid no attention because Junior, who had been drawing nearer and nearer as he watched the whole proceeding, now decided to take an active part.

He came over to the moaning drummer, bent down and whispered something in his ear. The dotard immediately stopped his wailing. He looked in our direction with his rheumy eyes, as Junior earnestly continued his whispering.

After Junior's pursuit of the past two days I had the uncomfortable feeling that his contact with the filthy old musician would mean no good for us.

"Do you really think you saw that Swiss yodeler—the fellow with the green hat—snooping around our tent when you woke up last night?" I asked Loren in a low voice, as I suddenly remembered.

For an instant Loren looked startled, and then he said slowly, "I'm sure I did. We'd better keep an eye on that lad."

"We will," I said grimly as we moved away.

That evening, just at sunset, we arrived at the foot of the extraordinary *gompa* of Tankse. The ancient lamasery topped a formidable pile of black boulders above us and looked as though it might have added to the horrors of Dracula. It was a wild and wonderful scene.

The original lamasery had been built more than a thousand years ago. A newer addition clung to the side of the rocky promontory about halfway up and resembled the nest of some giant bird. Towering above the *gompa* was a snow-capped peak well over twenty thousand feet in height. Except for a few trees in the campground near the foot of the *gompa* there was no vegetation on the great cliffs that climbed one above another. As we stared upward we were only tiny specks of humanity in a vast empty solitude.

We were glad when night crept over us and shut out the cold horror of the towering cliffs above us.

But the next morning was full of bright sunshine and cheer. The oppressive feeling of the night before was gone as we ate a hearty breakfast and eagerly planned the day's program.

That is, it was bright and full of sunshine until Junior appeared out of nowhere and began his routine of questioning our servants. To cap that, just as we were finishing breakfast, the ancient drummer we had encountered the day before came staggering into our camp, beating his primitive drums.

"O-o-o-h!" Loren moaned as he covered his ears with his hands. "It's too early for that. Shoot him . . . cut his throat . . . do something, anything to get rid of him! O-o-o-h!"

I looked at Rajah for help but he wasn't too sympathetic. "I told you yesterday not to give him a second coin," he reminded me. But he called the chuprassy and asked him to tell the drummer that we cared for none of his music.

The old man was agreeable. He gave us no music but he squatted close by and kept us under strict observation, while Junior crossed the little stream beside which we were camped and started up the Harong Valley toward the village near the lamasery.

We were saved from the further contamination of the filthy drummer by the timely arrival of Sidik Bat, the town father of Tankse, whom the chuprassy had engaged early that morning to guide us to the granite rocks Nestorian Christians had inscribed so long ago.

Sidik Bat was dressed in a robe of red cloth, which fitted him better than the *gonches* of the Tibetans, and a skullcap edged with Persian lamb. He had iron-gray hair, whiskers and really enviable sideburns.

After a mutual exchange of suitable greetings Sidik Bat led us across the stream from our little camp under the willow trees to a spot only five minutes' walk away, where he pointed out the famous rocks.

Here among rubble and stones stood the several large granite

boulders Dr. Helmut de Terra, noted geologist and explorer, had told me about back in New York City. The surface of the rocks was highly polished, from weathering, as Dr. de Terra had explained to me.

They were covered with Nestorian and Tibetan inscriptions. Many of the inscriptions were too badly preserved to be legible, others were quite well preserved, but all were completely strange to me. There were pictures of what looked like large deer, curious people and odd-appearing creatures which might have been birds.

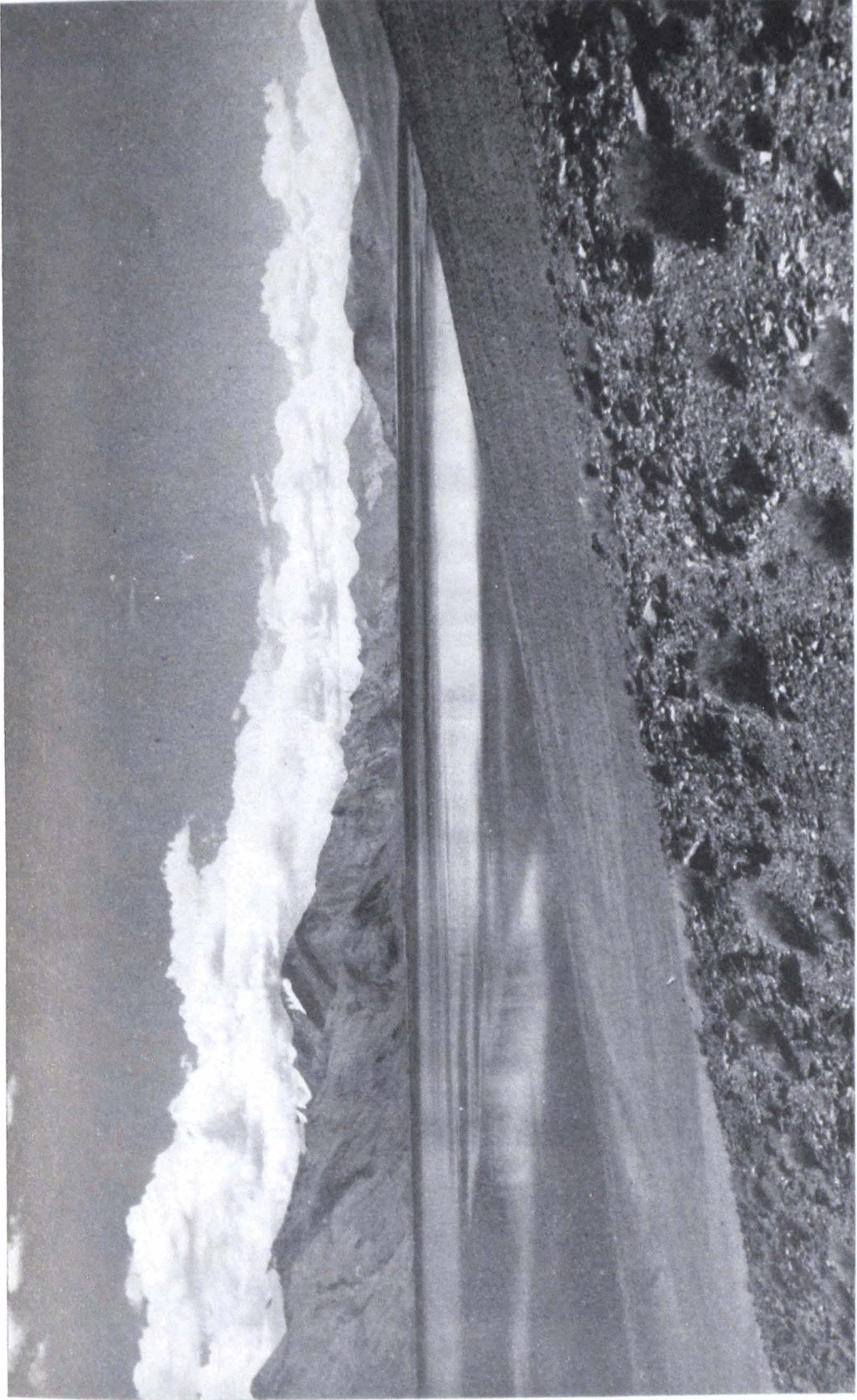
Most legible and important was a message which recorded the fact that in the eighth century a group of Nestorian Christians had stopped here at the *gompa* with their bishop, while on a journey to Tibet. Dr. de Terra had told me about this Nestorian message and said that it was written in Karoshti, an extinct dialect of Sanskrit, spoken in the first millennium A.D. all over Central Asia.

I had read, of course, that the Nestorian Christians, who objected to calling the Virgin Mary the mother of God, were expelled from the Byzantine church in the fourth century and had become successful missionaries in Asia. But Dr. de Terra had not told me of the great crosses on the rocks, just below the Nestorian writing.

These crosses which looked like the Cross of Malta had been put there, Sidik Bat told us, at the same time as the Nestorian writing. As I listened to Sidik Bat's musical words I felt that the centuries had slipped away and I was listening to one of the Nestorian Christians himself.

The snow-capped mountains of the Shayok Pass in the background, over which the Nestorians had crossed so many centuries before, and the wild beauty of Tankse itself made a picture that is indelibly printed in my mind.

When Sidik Bat finished his enthusiastic account of the writings on the granite blocks, Loren made some pictures and then we had



LAKE PANGONG, HIDDEN IN THE HIMALAYAS OF TIBET, IS NINETY MILES LONG



MAJESTIC MOUNTAIN RANGES FORM THE "GOLDEN DOORWAY TO TIBET" AT LAKE PANGONG

a quick luncheon of canned apples, crackers and water from our canteen. For some reason we were unusually thirsty.

The fruit finished, we climbed on our horses, which had been brought over, crossed the Muglib stream and rode along its grassy banks toward the *gompa* of Tankse.

It was a rough and gloomy path that led to the sinister building. After a time we passed tiny pens of rock which enclosed the *gompa's* animals, and the great, shaggy dogs which growled savagely at us. Soon we had to leave the horses, as they could not climb farther.

At the top of the steps, in front of the only wing of the lamasery that seemed to be in good repair, a Red lama was waiting to greet us. He had a huge key in his hand, and, anticipating our wishes with a smile, he stuck it into the medieval lock of the only building remaining.

Towering far above the *gompa* on the rocks, piercing into the sky as well as leading off in a maze behind us, were hundreds of yards of ruins. I felt that these ruins of Tankse were of supernatural causing. Such desolation as this had never been brought on any other *gompa*. It must have once been well-nigh invulnerable on this great rock. There was something about the location that fascinated me, and even before I saw the great wall painting I knew that they would excel any I had ever seen before.

Our lama was leading us now through dark stone passages into the *dukang*. Facing us, as the door opened into the inner sanctum of the holy of holies, was the mask of the founder. It held us speechless. The tiny oil lamps gave out a weird flickering light that lent to the statue an illusiveness impossible to describe. One moment the mask would be there in bold relief and the next it would have half vanished into the gloom and taken on a macabre expression intensified by the flickering light. And always the eyes seemed watching us.

The wall paintings, which we examined closely with our

torches, were superb. The lama told us, through our chuprassy and Rajah, that they had been painted twelve hundred years before, two hundred years after the lamasery had been built in the sixth century.

The *dukang* was damp and musty; and this, mixed with the incense that was burning there, made the atmosphere very heavy.

Loren made numerous stills, both in color and black and white, of the famous murals and of the indescribable mask of the founder. Then he "shot" several of the lamas in charge of the *gompa* and took several more pictures from the stone balcony which hung dizzily above the stream far below.

We presented our gifts, which back in Srinagar had been earmarked for Tankse, then descended to the spot where we had left our horses, and went on to our camp under the willow trees.

When we arrived back at our camp we were still terribly thirsty and there was no water in the canteen. We gave the canteen to Thunderbolt to fill and our tongues were hanging out because we knew that he would have to follow our hard and steadfast rule to boil the water for ten minutes. And then it would have to cool!

As Thunderbolt left with the canteen I noticed that the filthy old man with the drums approached him and they exchanged words. I turned away, thinking nothing more of it.

Loren and I were busy listing the subjects photographed that morning when Thunderbolt returned. We both took several long drinks of the cool water with no little relish. Suddenly it came to me that Thunderbolt had not been gone long enough to boil the water.

"How long has it been since we gave Thunderbolt the canteen to fill?" I asked Loren quickly.

He looked at me and then he glanced at his watch before he

said tensely, "I don't know, but I'm positive it hasn't been ten minutes."

We called Rajah, the chuprassy and Thunderbolt. The Tibetan cook hung his head as the chuprassy asked him if he had boiled the water.

"He says he did not think it necessary," Rajah told us in a moment. "The masters looked so thirsty he got the water from the stream."

Rajah waved a hand at the stream that meandered pleasantly through the meadow. "He says," Rajah went on, "that the old man with the drums offered to get the water for him from the stream."

"The old man with the drums!" I repeated angrily. "He would pollute the water by just touching the bottle. Why did he give *him* the bottle to fill?"

Rajah scolded the cook until he looked terrified. He slunk away at Rajah's command. When he had gone Rajah said, "I can't understand why he did it. He doesn't seem to be able to tell us why. In the future I'll see, myself, that all the water is properly boiled."

"All right," I said, but I had a strange premonition that there would be an aftermath to the episode. "Let's forget it now. Here comes Sidik Bat back again and I'd like to ask him a few questions about the *gompa* on the rocks. The place haunts me. I can't forget the mask of the founder and the strange way the eyes followed us everywhere. He may know more about it."

And, indeed, he did know more about it. As few travelers ever came through to this remote valley Sidik Bat had few chances to tell of the *gompa* at Tankse and he did it with relish.

His venerable appearance and the musical quality of his voice gave enchantment to his words even though I could not understand them until the chuprassy and Rajah had translated. Somehow he conveyed the impression that he was part

and parcel of the colorful story he was telling, instead of a person living a thousand years afterward.

“It all began when this country was very, very young,” said Sidik Bat. “And before that it began when the founder of the *gompa* at Tankse had a dream when he was a very young man. The dream revealed that during his lifetime he was to direct a *gompa* that was to have the rarest treasure on earth as its property.”

As he launched on his story a cloud of silver passed in front of the crescent of gold that was the moon, and I felt in the tranquillity of this lonely little camping ground that I, too, was a part of the ancient tale.

“But in this dream the nature of the particular treasure was not divulged to the mortal who was to become the chief lama of Tankse. Years passed and the boy grew to manhood and came to found the lamasery high on the peaks above us.” Now Sidik Bat raised his eyes to the sinister ruin high on the mountain behind us and a cold wind came sighing down the gorge to stir our fire.

“The wealth of the *gompa* at Tankse grew as its leader attracted many followers but never during his lifetime did it secure a treasure that could be considered the greatest on earth.

“The leader went to his death without the dream coming true, but the eyes in his mask in the *dukang* were deathless. The eyes and the face of the mask were so lifelike that down through the centuries the lamas in the *gompa* at Tankse believed he had never died. They knew the story of his dream and they believed that the eyes of the mask would never stop seeking until that greatest treasure had come to Tankse.

“And so it came to pass that in the eighth century a group of Nestorian Christians came to Tankse on their way to the holy city in Tibet. They were hardy men, but poorly dressed, and no one would have faintly dreamed that within the inner-

most folds of the garments of the poorest of them all there nestled the greatest treasure in the world!"

Here Sidik Bat paused again, and the flames of our fire died with his words until a chill blast whistled down through the gorge and sighed through the willow overhead. The flames leaped high then and Sidik Bat went on with his story.

"But the lamas in the *gompa* knew, because the seeking eyes of the mask in the *dukang* had come to glare with an intensity that they had never seen before.

"It was while they tarried here that the Nestorian Christians wrote their famous message on the giant rock before they decided to continue on to the holy city, Lhasa.

"And on that last day before their departure, the poorest of the poor men among them was drawn as if by some mighty magnet to the lonely Hall of the Gods at the *gompa*. This lone Nestorian was attracted unwillingly by the terrible strength of the thing behind the burning eyes of the mask. He was helpless to resist.

"No one knows where this unhappy Christian obtained his treasure. No one knew whether he had stolen it from a palace chest or from the body of some great warrior dead on a field of battle. Nor does it matter. It is known only that he took from its miserable hiding place on his own body the most matchless pigeon-blood ruby the world had ever seen. All the fires in hell could not flame as the fires in the heart of this greatest of all gems. After placing it at the feet of the founder, he withdrew, only to go wandering through the cavernous passages of the lamasery until he became crazed from lack of food and drink, completely insane. When he was found he babbled that the eyes of the mask had taken his treasure from him.

"Certainly the ruby was there on the shrine for all to see and no one could explain how else it had come into the room of the gods. The bishop and the other Nestorians, who had

delayed their departure to search for their missing one, laughed and scoffed at the idea that the poorest Christian of their lot could have had so great a treasure.”

As Sidik Bat paused again my mind went back to my luncheon with the Shanti brothers in Delhi and I remembered their telling me: “We are negotiating, at the moment, for the world’s greatest ruby. It is the most perfect pigeon-blood ruby that exists. It weighs more than thirty carats. For the past two hundred years it has remained in the possession of the same Indian family, but it is coming on the market now for the first time since the early eighteenth century.”

“And the ruby?” I asked Sidik Bat curiously. “Is it still among this lamasery’s treasures?”

“It was stolen two hundred years ago,” he said solemnly. “The eyes of the mask, ever since, have burned with the same intensity. The dream had been fulfilled but legend has it that now they are always seeking for a clue to how the ruby was stolen. There are many of us who would swear that the eyes follow one about the room. They seem to be——”

“I know,” I said, and I shuddered. Everything began to blur before my eyes and I felt indescribably weak. I tried to rise to my feet but staggered backward.

Loren and Rajah leaped to my side to steady me as Sidik Bat regarded me with piercing eyes that were not unlike the eyes of the mask.

“What is it, Nicol?” Loren asked anxiously as he helped Rajah hold me upright.

“I . . . I don’t know,” I said weakly and motioned for them to take me into the tent.

XII

*The Talisman*

I GOT to sleep after Sidik Bat had left, but I awoke in the middle of the night, deathly sick. I was drenched in a cold sweat and writhed with cramps that made me think I must have been poisoned. The paroxysms quieted down in a few minutes, and I managed to get back to sleep; but they returned in the morning.

Loren and Rajah gathered around me sympathetically. They saw at once that I was in no shape to continue the trip that day, as we had planned. Our chuprassy, who had gone into Tankse village to engage fresh horses for the next stage of our journey, came back and reported that none was available there, and that he would have to scour the neighborhood for others, which would probably take him all day. I was glad to hear this. It would give me time, I hoped, to get over the attack. By now I had diagnosed my trouble as a dysenteric fever, brought on, I had no doubt, by drinking the unboiled water which Thunderbolt had given us at the instigation of the old man with the drums. I was relieved that Loren had not suffered any ill effects from it. Luckily for me, I had included in our medicine kit a plentiful supply of sulfa tablets. I began taking these—four tablets every four hours. As the day wore on, I had some little relief and by nightfall I was considerably better.

Weak and miserable, I lay at the door of my tent. The day was warm and sunny. Between visits to see how I was getting along, Loren and Rajah took advantage of the enforced halt to make some still photographs of the magnificent Himalayan

scenery surrounding us, and of the Harong Valley below. Junior trailed along after them, watching their every move from a distance with that strange and unaccountable curiosity of his. Several times during the day he wandered through our camp; and each time he passed me he favored me with a smile in which I thought there was a distinct trace of mockery. In my fevered state it seemed as if he were saying, "Well, it won't be long now, my fine American friend, until you are carried out of here feet first." But as the hours went by, and he could see that I was growing better, instead of worse, the smile disappeared. In its place there was a puzzled frown.

Darkness was falling when the chuprassy returned with the horses he had rounded up. I slept well enough that night. In the morning I insisted that I felt well enough to travel, and by half past eight we were on our way. But I had ridden only a few miles when I began feeling too dizzy to stay on the saddle. I just managed to slide off my horse and crawl on my hands and knees to the edge of the trail, where I collapsed. Rajah and the chuprassy came hurrying back. I was so dizzy and weak that I was sure I couldn't travel another foot, even on the back of a horse.

But the chuprassy told us that we were about halfway between Tankse and a tiny native village called Muglib, where there was a good camping ground, and I feebly agreed with him that it would be better to go on. Together the two men helped me back on my horse. There is very little that I remember about the rest of that day's journey. As soon as we reached the place and my tent was put up I turned in and slept through the afternoon and the night, being awakened only at intervals to take my sulfa tablets. By morning I was sufficiently improved to insist that Loren, Rajah and the chuprassy continue on to Lake Pangong, leaving Thunderbolt and Lightning to take care of

me. They would not be gone more than three days at the most, and a three-day rest was just what I needed. Since I had no appetite for any food except canned soup and canned milk, to which only boiled water was to be added, I couldn't see how the two Tibetans could possibly go wrong.

"And anyhow, even if Thunderbolt should forget to boil the water long enough," I remarked, "there's no better remedy than the hair of the dog that bit me."

Loren and Rajah didn't see any humor in this, and felt that at least one of them should stay with me to watch over the undependable Ladakhis.

"It won't work," I insisted. "Loren has to go to make the motion pictures. Rajah has to be with you, Loren, to act as your interpreter; and the chuprassy has to be included because there's no telling what kind of problems may arise on the trail. As for me, I won't need any interpreter. I'm going to stay put, right here in my tent, until you get back. Rajah, if you'll get enough cans of soup and milk out of the pack to last me a week and put them here in the tent, I'll be all set. All I'll have to do is to call Thunderbolt or Lightning when I want to, and hand them one of the cans to get ready. By the time you get back, if the sulfa does what I think it will, I'll be as fit as a fiddle. There isn't a single reason why you shouldn't start right now, as soon as the caravan is ready."

They still didn't like the idea of leaving me alone. But I was adamant, and at last they gave in. Rajah then decided that half the number of pack animals could carry such equipment as they needed, and that the rest, with the men to attend them, could be left behind.

"If you're leaving these pony wallahs behind with the idea that they will be some sort of protection for me," I said, "you can forget it. Nothing's going to happen. This valley—why,

there couldn't be a more peaceful place in the world over! Nobody's going to molest us. Even Junior has gone, hasn't he? Has anybody seen him around this morning?"

No, he hadn't been seen by anyone. The self-appointed watchdog had apparently grown tired of prying into our activities and had taken himself off—for good, I hoped. I didn't know, and I don't know to this day, whether or not he was a Soviet agent. I recalled that the doctor at the dispensary at Kargil had suspected us, for no reason at all, of being American intelligence officers, and I now wondered if Junior were a Russian agent who had taken it upon himself to find out what our mission was. If he were, it seemed possible that he had jumped to the conclusion that since I was plainly too sick to continue the journey, the whole expedition would be abandoned, and therefore his mission as well as ours was over.

I drew Loren to one side. "Well, it's all yours from here on, Major," I said, managing a grin. "But then you don't need me, anyway. You know what's wanted. The only thing I want to say is that if that guy Junior turns up again, you'd better watch him like a hawk. Don't let him get near your films."

Loren knew what I meant. He knew that from the very first I had been nursing a pet idea. During World War II, I had often flown in a C-47 over the mountains of *Eastern* Tibet and had thought grimly that below us was not one level spot for a landing in all those thousands of square miles. Was the Lake Pangong area equally unfit as a landing place? That was what I wanted to know, wanted intensely to know. And now illness had made it impossible to see for myself!

I was wondering what Junior would have thought, had he known that Major Loren Tutell, serving with the United States Army Air Corps throughout the late war, commanded the Fifth Combat Camera Unit in the Pacific. . . .

Loren chuckled. "Don't worry," he said. "Isn't Junior a

bright lad? While we were making pictures up to now, he never let us out of his sight. But just when we start to shoot something that may turn out to be really important, he fades from the picture! Well, don't give it a thought, Nicol. Take it easy, kid, and we'll be back as soon as we can."

By half past seven, in the bright morning sunlight, the little cavalcade consisting of Loren, Rajah, the chuprassy and a half-dozen natives leading the pack ponies, was on its way toward Lake Pangong. I watched them out of sight, and then threw myself down on my mattress, dizzy with fever. Bitter disappointment, too, swept over me. To have come so close to my goal, the lake, and then find myself unable to reach it, seemed as cruel a bit of irony as Fate ever played. Mercifully sleep came, though it was filled with disordered dreams, born of the fever.

About noon I woke and tottered to the door of the tent, dragging with me a camp stool on which I sat to enjoy the warm sun for a half hour. As I sat there, a small caravan came into sight, approaching from the northeast. It consisted of only four animals, moving in single-file, two with riders and two with packs. I wondered idly if it had come from some region of Asia even more remote than the Pangong country of Tibet. That end of the valley, I knew, led not only to Lake Pangong but also to the wild Changchenmo, the North Country, and to the uninhabited soda plains north of the Lingzitang plateau, and, of course, far beyond that, to the mysterious Kunlun Mountains, a section of which no one has yet explored. I wondered if they might not have come from the Kunluns. It was idle to indulge in fancies, but it served to pass the time.

The little caravan circled the deserted farm stable which our men were using as a shelter and came to a stop a short way beyond it, where they made camp. I had neither the inclination nor the strength to walk over there. Without an interpreter

it would be impossible to question them. I got to my feet and went shakily back into the tent. My head was spinning again, and I began to realize that I had not been wise to sit out-of-doors so long. Instead of feeling better, I was worse.

But, feverish and restless as I was, I began looking about for something to distract my mind from my troubles. From my brief case I took the notebook in which I had made no entries for the past two days, stared at the blank pages hopelessly and then put it back. My eyes lighted on the tins of soup and milk that Rajah had stacked neatly for me on the rubber mat which served as a rug whenever we made camp, beside my sleeping bag. I picked them up, one by one, and read their labels word for word. It did no good. The mattress seemed to rock like a boat.

Still hoping to find something to take my mind off myself, I opened the lid of the foot locker which stood on the ground beside my sleeping bag and began rummaging about in it, for whatever object might meet my fancy. I pawed over one article after another, without finding anything to interest me. Then my fingers closed on a small roll of cloth, wadded between two of the jade cups I had bought in Leh, and I fished it out and spread it open on my knees.

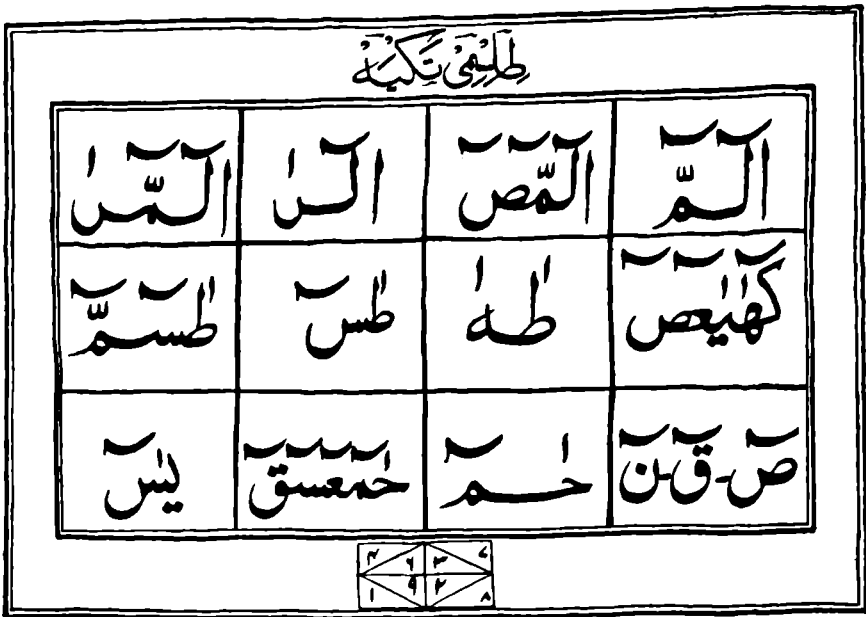
It was the pillowcase of yellow silk which the venerable Khwaja Sahib, supreme head of the Chishti Brotherhood of the Moslem Sufi sect, had given me at his home near Old Delhi, many weeks before.

It brought back a rush of memories. I could almost hear the voice of my friend Colonel Peter Green as he translated for the Khwaja Sahib: "There are many members of our faith in those regions. Keep this always with you, wherever you go, and if you are in trouble it will surely be of help to you."

I smiled. What help had it been to me? It hadn't kept me from falling victim to this horrible illness from which I was

now suffering. It hadn't even prevented the accident to our first cook-guide, the accident that had almost forced me to abandon my expedition at its very start. It hadn't saved me from being forced to pay a wholly unwarranted duty on my films at the customs office in Srinagar. In fact, it had been of no use at all, unless it was to keep the jade cups from breaking.

I was about to stuff it back between the cups when, in refolding it, I saw the curious hieroglyphics printed on its upper surface. I had forgotten they were there. I spread the cloth out again, right side up this time, and began to study them. By no possible chance could I make out their meaning, but it would serve to pass the time.



THE YELLOW PILLOW SLIP

The mystic characters were enclosed in an oblong rectangle which, in turn, was divided into three tiers, each containing four small squares. Below the large rectangle was a smaller one. The figures 1, 4, 6, 7 and 9 were recognizable, along with

what seemed to be an *N*, a *W* and a tumble-down figure 2. Was the whole piece of cloth used to play some game on, some Oriental form of checkers, and if so, why hadn't Peter Green told me about it? I pored over the thing for an hour, turning it this way and that, racking my brains to find some interpretation of the mystic characters, but could hit on no explanation that satisfied me. Curiously enough, this employment relieved the restlessness that had tormented me. I grew drowsier and drowsier. It was as if the strange writing possessed a hypnotic power. At last I could keep my eyes open no longer and dropped back to sleep. The square of yellow silk slid unnoticed to the mat beside my sleeping bag.

When I awoke, an hour or so later, it was with a feeling that there was someone besides me in the tent. I struggled up to a sitting position and looked around. There, just inside the tent, whose door flap I had left open, stood a tall figure, arms folded across his chest, patiently waiting—a stranger, a man I had never seen before.

My first impulse was to shout for Thunderbolt and Lightning, since I feared that the intruder had come for no good purpose. But I saw at once that he was smiling in friendly fashion, and, when his smile was followed by a courtly bow, I realized I had nothing to apprehend. Obviously he was one of the two strangers who had pitched their camp this afternoon close to ours, and he had come to pay a neighborly call.

He was young—in his mid-twenties, I judged—darkly bronzed, with keen black eyes, prominent cheekbones and a mass of tangled blue-black hair which cascaded over a bold forehead. He did not wear the usual *gonche* of the Ladakhi, nor was he attired in the quilted coat, skullcap and black hip boots affected by Yarkandis. From his broad shoulders a short heavy jacket flared out over baggy trousers stuffed into low

boots. Beneath the open jacket was visible the collarless shirt of heavy white cloth worn by the traders from Central Asia.

I spoke to him in English, but he only smiled and shook his head. Then, to my bewilderment, he pointed toward the foot of my sleeping bag. I looked in that direction. I saw the yellow square of silk lying there on the floor mat, but nothing else. Wondering why this had attracted his attention, I leaned forward, picked it up and held it out toward him. He moved slowly toward me, never once taking his eyes from the bit of yellow cloth, as if he were drawn by a loadstone. He took it from my hand spread it out on the mat, squatted on the ground beside it and touched his forehead with the index finger of his right hand; he followed this by subjecting the pillow slip to an examination that lasted for many minutes. I could not take my eyes from him, for I was as fascinated by his absorption in the inscriptions as he was in the signs which he was deciphering. At last he gave a deep sigh, rose, folded his hands together in a gesture of prayer—the same gesture I had seen made by the Queen of Ladakh when she told us good-by—and bent his head reverently.

Then he began speaking. The tones were rich and musical, but I had no idea what the language or dialect might be. I could only guess, from the manner in which he pointed at the yellow cloth, at me and at himself, that he was trying to tell me there was a bond between us which he considered of profound importance.

Once more he bowed, then left the tent, as silently as he had come. I struggled weakly to get to my feet and follow him, but the effort exhausted me and I sank back on my mattress. Through the rest of the afternoon I lay between sleep and waking. Daylight had faded from the sky before I gathered enough strength to light the lamp beside me. The cook, Thunderbolt,

had evidently been watching for that signal; in a few minutes he came in, bringing a jug of hot water, and prepared a bowl of soup and a glass of milk from the cans I pointed out to him. I drank both, and he went away beaming. I turned the lamp down low, and again I slept.

It must have been well after midnight when I awoke, gasping, from a nightmare in which I imagined that Junior had crept back from nowhere and had announced that he intended to strangle me. I lay there, my heart thumping, until I had convinced myself it was only a dream, and then reached over and turned up the light. As I did so, I heard a slight movement near the tent door and quickly twisted my head to glance in that direction.

The blood froze in my veins. Junior actually stood there.

He was leaning slightly forward, his face turned in my direction, his lean brown fingers fumbling at the long sash of fuchsia-colored heavy silk which was knotted around his waist. Although he was looking directly at me, there was no slightest sign of recognition in his eyes. Their pupils were dilated enormously, as if with some drug, and in his pale and dreadfully contorted face they gleamed with a fanatic light. A wisp of froth beaded his lips, which were parted in a terrible smile. Even as I watched, he untangled the knot of the long sash, unwound it swiftly from his waist and drew it caressingly through his fingers, looping it between his two hands.

Then, slowly, slowly, never once taking his burning eyes from me, he began moving toward me. I was paralyzed with horror. I was unable to utter a sound. The eyes held me frozen. They grew. They filled the universe. They held no mercy.

And still I might have shrieked in my mortal terror if a second dark figure had not, at that instant, bounded into the tent and hurled itself upon the murderous intruder. Instantly the two were locked in a terrific struggle. Back and forth they



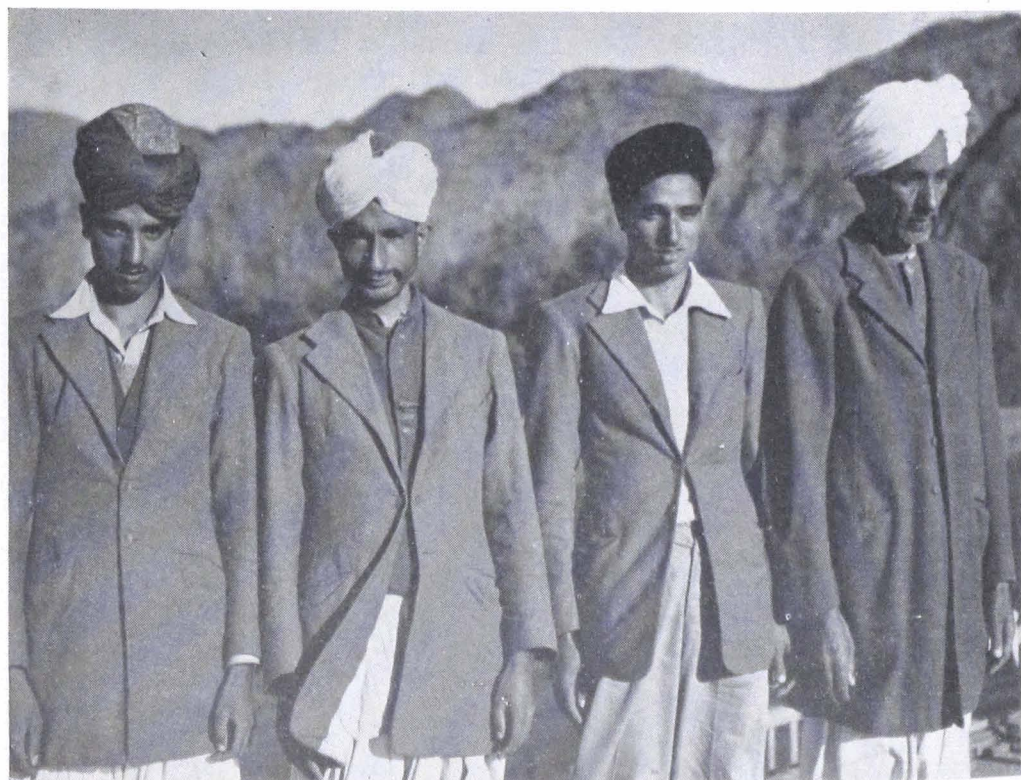
LIKE SOME MASSIVE CASTLE OF MEDIEVAL FRANCE STANDS CHIMRE LAMASERY.
AT THE RIGHT, A BUDDHIST LAMA'S BURIAL URN

THE LAMASERY OF TANKSE IS FABLED TO HAVE HAD AMONG ITS TREASURES
THE WORLD'S MOST PRECIOUS RUBY





AT TANKSE LAMASERY, PRAYER FLAGS, SURMOUNTED BY YAKS' TAILS, FLUTTER OUT THE BUDDHIST INVOCATION,
OM MANI PADME HUM



FOUR MOSLEMS OF KASHMIR WHO WERE MY FRIENDS—NABHA,
"BIG BROTHER," "RAJAH" AND RAJAH'S FATHER

surged, grunting and panting, while I struggled to free myself from the sleeping bag. Just as I did so, they tripped and fell to the ground with a thump, knocking the lantern from the foot locker as they fell. The light went out, the tent was plunged in darkness. I threw myself on the two men struggling on the ground, but immediately realized that I couldn't tell friend from foe. An elbow half stunned me, and I crawled out of the heap to hunt for a flashlight. By the time I had found it in the dark the scuffling had abruptly ceased, and I heard the heavy breathing of only one man, not two. Which of the two was the survivor, I didn't know. I flicked on the light.

There was only one man left in the tent besides me. Junior had vanished. The man on whom my flashlight rested was the young Asiatic nomad who had entered my tent that afternoon and shown such intense interest in the mystic piece of yellow silk which the Khwaja Sahib had given me.

My relief was so great that a wave of dizziness swept over me. Only a few seconds before, as I faced the maniacal glare of Junior, I had been so sure he would kill me that I had wondered how he would dispose of the body. By the time Loren and Rajah returned, he would have made away with it somehow. My disappearance would always be an unsolved mystery. People would say, "Whatever happened to Nicol Smith?" And the answer would be, "Oh, haven't you heard? He disappeared on one of his expeditions to Asia. The story is that he fell sick, and in his delirium wandered off in the middle of the night and was never seen again. Probably fell off some cliff, or was devoured by some beast of prey—tiger, or snow leopard, or some such man-eater." Although, come to think of it, I don't think that a snow leopard is a man-eater.

Such wild thoughts had raced through my head. But they were forgotten now. I caught the sound of a horse's hoofs clattering on the hard ground and rushed to the opening of

the tent. The flashlight rested for a moment on the horseman. It was Junior, the long scarf floating behind him, as, crouched low over the pony's neck, he rode hell-for-leather out of my life.

I tottered back into the tent and feverishly shook the hand of my smiling rescuer. He couldn't understand a word of the thanks I was babbling, but he couldn't mistake my gratitude. He just continued to grin until I released his hand and pointed at the square of yellow silk. Then he nodded vigorously, again pointed in turn to the silk, to himself and to me, and smiled more broadly than ever. It was obvious that he believed that the bit of silk constituted some sort of bond between us, but what it was I couldn't guess for the life of me. Finally he motioned toward his own camping place and, with more gestures, gave me to understand that I need fear no more trouble. We bowed. And he strode off.

For a long time I lay awake after his departure, trying in vain to account for the strange experiences of the day, asking myself questions to which I could find no answer that wholly satisfied me. On one point I no longer had any doubt—I felt certain, now, that Junior was a member of some secret and sinister organization that had sent him to follow me to this desolate spot with orders not to let me return alive. Their reason for desiring my death? The fact that I had blundered on one of their secret meetings would be, to them, reason enough. "Dead men tell no tales." And Junior would obey their orders unquestioningly. If my death could be brought about by seemingly natural causes, so much the better. There could no longer be the slightest question who had planned the trick by which I had been given polluted water to drink, and thereby been made deathly sick.

Then he had seen, with dismay, that I was apparently going to recover from the poisoning. He realized that he must put an end to me by violence. The method? He had seen the deadly handstrokes of the wrestlers whom I too had seen in

the hidden courtyard in Old Delhi. He wore the very color, the fuchsia, of their secret guild. But for *his* weapon he would choose the weapon of the strangler—the scarf. That was the tool of the still more ancient cult of murderers—the Assassins, who took their name from the evil drug, hashish, which inflamed them to fearful deeds. He had no access to hashish? He had access to something equally evil—charas, the dark sister of hashish.

He must have sought a hiding place, not too far away but safe from our eyes, in which to take the drug and wait through long hours for it to nerve him to his task. When the hour came, he was blind to every thought but one. He had been blind to the departure of Loren and Rajah. Had they been here, they would have been in equal danger. And where was he now? Was he urging his horse along the steep trails that led to Lake Pangong, hot in pursuit of Loren and Rajah? Crazed with charas as he was, he would not hesitate to attack. Did tragedy still hang over us?

I could not answer that dread question, nor account for the strange visitor whose entrance in the very nick of time had undoubtedly saved my life. Who was he? Where did he come from? Why had the inscriptions of the yellow pillow slip interested him so intensely? What was the connection between us and that bit of yellow silk? I turned and tossed, but found no explanation. At last, near dawn, worn out with fever and anxieties, I fell asleep. I slept until nearly noon. On waking, I found to my immense relief that the fever had left me. Shakily I made my way over to the cook's camp. But except for my own men, squatting around their interminable bowls of tea, the hillside was empty. The little caravan had departed. Thunderbolt, pointing at the sun high overhead and then at the eastern ridge where it had risen, made me understand that the stranger had been gone since daybreak.

The only witness to Junior's midnight visit was gone!

All that afternoon I debated with myself what I could say to Loren when he returned. The more I thought over the amazing events of the night, the less sure I was that they had really happened. They began more and more to seem like the events of a nightmare, the creation of fever or delirium. I had had wild dreams in the earlier hours of the night—could I be sure that the events which had seemed so real were not merely continuations of these earlier fantasies? True, when the chuprassy got back, he would learn from Thunderbolt and Lightning and the pony wallahs that a nomad caravan had actually lingered near our camp over that one night, but they would know nothing of the stranger's visit to my tent. They could not support my story. They had slept soundly all through the night—that was sure. And, if I had no one to corroborate me, who would believe the tale? In the bright sunshine of the day, it now seemed incredible to *me*. To Loren and Rajah it would seem as if my fever had grown worse. They had not wanted to leave me alone in the first place, and this might seriously alarm them. In the end I decided to say nothing at all to them about the matter. I could not be sure that from beginning to end the whole episode had not been a wild hallucination, the creation of my fever. They would surely come to that conclusion, as I myself had. Why worry them?

Months later, when I was back in the United States, I sought out a learned professor, an authority on Oriental languages and religions. I showed him the yellow silk pillow slip and asked if he could tell me the meaning of the strange inscriptions printed on it.

His face lighted up with interest as soon as he saw it. "Why, yes, I can tell you what it is!" he exclaimed. "This is very remarkable! It is a talisman, an object reputed to save its owner from all harm. The writing is in Arabic. Do you see these characters here at the very top? They mean *tilasm*, the Arabic

word for talisman. And joined to them is the word Takiya. That is the name of a certain monastic order, the Takiya Brotherhood of the Mohammedan religion. The Talisman of the Order of Takiya! A treasure indeed!"

"And the characters written within the large rectangle?" I asked breathlessly. "Those enclosed in the twelve squares?"

"Ah, they are also Arabic, but they are letters, not words. For their use here we must go back to the Koran, the holy book of Islam. In the Koran, which Mohammed the Prophet is believed by his followers to have written at the dictation of God Himself speaking through an angel, there are one hundred and fourteen divisions, or chapters, called suras. Some thirty of these suras are headed by certain letters of the Arabic alphabet. Arabic scholars have never agreed why these particular letters were chosen, but they all agree that the suras to which they are affixed are to be regarded as containing Words of God of special help in time of trouble. The smaller box below contains the Arabic numerals from one to nine, but you will notice that the number five is missing. That is because the devout Moslem considers the number five unlucky. Naturally it would be omitted here."

"And you say this belongs to a particular sect?" I asked.

"To a particular brotherhood of a particular sect," he explained. "The dervishes, the priesthood of Mohammedanism, divided themselves into sects, of which the Sufi sect was one. 'Sufi' means a follower of the Mystic Way. The priests of the Takiya Brotherhood, in the Sufi sect, are mystics. Such a talisman as this could be bestowed on an outsider only by the head of the organization, but it would be recognized at once by any member of the brotherhood who saw it."

"Does the brotherhood have members in Central Asia?"

"Oh, beyond any doubt. The teachings of Mohammed began to spread through the Orient a thousand years ago, and I sup-

pose there is no part of Asia which they did not reach. But tell me, how did this unusual talisman come into your hands?"

"It was presented to me in India," I replied, "by the Khwaja Sahib, the head of the Moslem Chishti Sufi sect, for whom I had done some slight service. And what you have just told me interests me extremely. I had this with me when I was in a remote section of Western Tibet. I happened to be in great danger. A stranger saw this talisman, whose meaning I did not know until now, and came to my rescue. I tried to thank him. We had no interpreter, but I got the impression that he didn't think thanks were necessary, and that he had helped me, in duty bound, because I possessed this object. Could it be that he was a member of this Takiya Brotherhood?"

"That is more than likely," said my informant without hesitation. "Undoubtedly he was a member of the order and recognized the talisman immediately for what it meant. He would know that you could not have had it in your possession unless it had been given you by the head of the order. It was his duty to help you, and, from what you say, he did."

XIII

*The Five Great Dogs
of Chimre*

FROM then on my strength came back to me rapidly. When, late the next afternoon, the returning caravan, with Loren and Rajah at its head, heaved into sight, I leaped up from the campstool on which I had been sunning myself and hurried, almost running, to meet them. I hadn't expected them for at least another day.

"Did you see anything of Junior?" I asked excitedly as they dismounted.

"No, not a hide or hair of him," said Loren, grinning broadly as he shook my hand. "Say, you're looking fine! A rest was what you needed."

"Did you get the pictures of the lake?" was my next breathless question.

"I'll say we did! Five hundred feet of motion film, and four dozen shots with the still camera. Boy, they'll be beauties!"

"Wonderful!" I exclaimed. With difficulty I kept myself from any further questions until the evening meal was over—it included the first solid food I had had for nearly a week—and Loren had stretched himself out on his mattress.

"Okay, spill it!" I commanded. "Give! Is the lake big enough for plane landings?"

Loren grinned. "Hold on a minute," he said. "One thing at a time—let me tell you first how you get there."

And this he proceeded to do. The valley in which our present camp was situated, near Muglib, was succeeded by another, much like it in appearance. Through this second valley wan-

dered a sluggish stream which spread out at times over marshy land. They had followed its course for about three miles, when it dwindled to a trickle and finally sank into the ground. The last springs of pure fresh water were found at about five miles this side of the lake. The trail then led upward until it opened out on a sandy plateau studded with rocks. Skirting two very small lakes, they found this plateau widening into a particularly sandy area and before long they came in sight of the northwestern shores of Lake Pangong. Here they made camp. The water was not salt, but brackish. In the middle of the night a violent sandstorm had almost blown them, tents and all, into the lake.

Pangong has been described by the noted geographer Ellsworth Huntington, of Yale, and by the famed explorer Sven Hedin, both of whom visited it some forty years ago, as being about ninety miles long, and between two and four miles wide, narrowing only at its center.

Loren's observations convinced him that its northern section had a minimum width of two miles for a distance of at least twenty miles, and that its depth was considerable, even close inshore.

Loren took from his pocket the rough notes which he had jotted down. He showed that there was ample room for a runway several miles long to be constructed at this end of the lake. In fact, he insisted, there was room for several runways here. The mountains to the northwest were low enough to be flown over easily by any aircraft after its take-off.

We looked at each other in silence. Certainly the United States had no interest in such a project. But would any nation? Could any aircraft be built that could conquer the sky-towering peaks of the Himalayas and the Kunlun ranges, which hemmed in this desolate and uninhabited spot? Time alone, not I, could tell.

The last rays of the sun, setting in glory, gleamed on two

snow-clad peaks far to the northward, painting them a shimmering gold. Through that golden doorway, leading not only into Tibet but into all the southern lands of the Orient, might not someday stream the sky-borne armies of invaders?

We broke camp next morning and started on our homeward journey, exulting over the good fortune that had provided perfect weather conditions at Lake Pangong and given assurance that the pictures there obtained would be magnificent. Loren jubilantly told me that the colors of lake and mountains were superb. The waters of the lake were of all shades of blue, from deepest indigo to lightest aquamarine; clouds, motionless as if painted on the sky, were mirrored on the lovely surface.

I kept an anxious eye on the box in which the films were packed. One thing was sure: Junior and his inquisitiveness had been very disturbing. His minute questioning of our servants as to our activities had put all of us on guard against him. It was inconceivable that he was prompted by idle curiosity; obviously he was serving, or attempting to serve, some directing power. We devoutly hoped that we were rid of him for good; but we could not yet be sure.

Our first stop on the homeward march was at Tankse. We had hoped to stay here only an hour or two at the most; but once again there was trouble with the pack ponies. It was necessary to change caravans, and we were delayed here for thirty-six hours. Rajah and the chuprassy were away from camp most of the next day, in the near-by village, arranging for the hire of fresh horses. Before nightfall we noticed, with some apprehension, a distinct change in the weather. It was obvious that winter was not too far away. Three hundred miles of mountain trail, difficult in the best of weather, lay before us. If early snows should fall, travel would be highly dangerous, if not impossible. . . .

Rajah returned with news that the horses would be ready

for us next day, and also with news about Junior. He had inquired from the villagers if they had seen him, but the village patriarch, Sidik Bat, and several others had replied that he had not been seen since our previous visit, and asked in turn if we knew anything about him.

"I told them that we had not seen him since we left Muglib," said Rajah. "I told them also that when we returned to Muglib he had vanished. All they had to give me was rumors."

"Rumors?" I said. "What sort of rumors?"

"Only that although he had not been seen in Tankse, several caravan men who passed through the village within the last three or four days reported that they had seen a man who seemed to fit his description, and who was leading one pack animal, traveling on toward the north at quite a rate of speed. If it was our friend, he must have taken a back trail from Muglib that by-passed Tankse and brought him to the north trail. He was obviously not enroute to Leh."

I nodded. I was not at all surprised. If he were traveling to the north that would mean only one thing, I was sure. In all probability he was heading for Sinkiang and the Russian-controlled Yarkand area. At any rate he was gone, and a good riddance!

Then a new misadventure befell us. Loren began to suffer from the same illness—dysenteric fever—that had laid me low. The pollution in the water we had drunk had merely taken longer to affect him. We left Tankse, but it took us the better part of a week to reach the valley of the Indus River for the second time. Though I seemed over the worst of my illness, Loren had to stay for several days at the lamasery of Chimre before he felt well enough to continue on to Leh.

We had skirted this, the most beautiful of the lamaseries of Western Tibet, on the afternoon of the day before we reached the foot of the Chang Pass. It was built of gray brick and, we

were told, was more than a thousand years old. It belonged to the Red sect, which predominates in Ladakh, and is a sister lamasery of Himis. We were informed also that both *gompas* had the same founder.

The lamasery of Chimre could be seen from a considerable distance, as it held a commanding position on top of a rocky promontory. The enormous rounded tower at one corner reminded us of Chillon in Switzerland, though the rest of the massive building had an individuality purely Tibetan.

The lamas, warned in advance of our arrival, were peering down at us from slits in the walls. Our caravan, passing the large chorten at the foot of the trail, wound back and forth as we climbed from the floor of the valley to the entrance court by a zigzag trail.

As we entered the courtyard of the massive edifice the chief lama came out of the great carved doorway of the *dukang* to greet us. He was followed by the most important lamas of Chimre. With Rajah and the chuprassy in their usual roles we were given a very pleasant welcome.

The chief lama pretended, at first, to be surprised at our arrival. A few minutes later he gave himself away by saying he had been expecting us. He told us that we could make any pictures we wished *but* we were not to make any bad black smoke. Our Himis exploits had caught up with us at Chimre. Aside from that the sky was the limit.

From the vantage points of the ramparts beyond the courtyard the chief lama pointed out the well-tilled fields below, fields which he told us were cultivated by the temporal lamas. There are, in Western Tibet, two types of lamas. The first are the religious ones who attend to the prayers, devil dances and other ceremonies. The second are the temporal lamas who till the fields, beg for alms one day and lend money the next.

When I asked the chief lama what he did with any extra

cash obtained from surplus crops he replied, through the chu-prassy, that there were many uses for it. One of the pleasantest, he told us, was employing it for the purchase of chang, the Tibetan beer that tastes a bit like apple cider and is made without hops.

On telling our host that I had never had any chang he sent for some, which we found very refreshing. Though it wasn't exactly what Loren and I needed to go with our sulfa tablets, it seemed to do us no harm. The chang was served to us from a pot more than five hundred years old. One must drink a great deal of this particular Tibetan beverage to become intoxicated. In a book published in Kashmir I came across this quaint description of its preparation:

In order to make it, they first boil some *giram* or loose grained barley in water, after which the water is thrown away and the barley spread on a carpet of yak's hair. Then a tablet or two of "Fabs," which is a locally made compound of soda and Eurotia, etc., is powdered and mixed with the *giram* which is then put in a sack. This sack is then buried deep in Bhoosa (chaff) and allowed to remain there for three or four days when it begins to give off a sour smell. When this smell appears, the contents of the sack are placed in a wooden cask, shaped like a drum, with a spout attached to the bottom. After putting the contents of the sack into this cask, they pour hot water from above, which, after three or four hours, automatically comes out of the spout. It is then filled into a pitcher. Then some hot water is again put in the cask which similarly is taken out after three or four hours. This process is repeated three times and then the contents of all three pitchers are mixed together. This is now their *chhang*, which does not require any formalities or special skill to make.

As we walked along the ramparts hearing about life in the *gompa* we gradually approached the far end where stood its flagpoles, tufted as usual with yaks' tails. At the end, to the right of the courtyard, there came into view what looked like five large

packing cases, except that they were of stone. Three of these unusual objects were on the ground and two were built above them.

“What might they be?” I asked the chief lama, pointing.

He smiled and spoke rapidly to the chuprassy. Rajah, in turn, translated. “That’s where the guard dogs of the *gompa* are kept. The chief lama claims they are the largest and fiercest dogs to be found in any *gompa*.”

A moment later, as we came into plain view of the inmates of the stone pens, I could well believe his boast. For there, in the Gargantuan dog kennels, were the five wildest dogs I had seen on our entire trip. For that matter they were the fiercest dogs I had ever seen on any of my journeys, including the red-eyed apparition at Lamayuru.

They were huge, somewhere in size between a Malamute husky and a St. Bernard. Their coats were a mixture of black, brown and a reddish-brown, almost cinnamon, shade. They had great ruffled manes like a lion’s, and when they barked they roared more like lions than like dogs. There was nothing about the din which they set up that resembled a dog’s growl. Their heads were outsize for their bodies but they were anything but clumsy. As they strained at the leather thongs that held them, thongs that seemed made with a cable stitch, they looked so violent and evil that when I asked Loren to photograph them he instinctively drew back.

“Sorry,” he said, “but we used the last flare in Himis, as you know, and it’s too dark in those pens to get any sort of picture. They’d come out on the films as shadows.”

I knew how Loren felt, and though I would have given anything for a picture of them as they roared at us I realized that it would be impossible to get it without special lighting. The chief lama seemed to understand what our problem was and gave a command that was quickly obeyed.

A young lama appeared, taller than any of the others, and

quite unusually handsome. He didn't look like a Tibetan, but more as a very dark-skinned Swede might look. He had a smile that seemed frozen on his face and he seemed to know his powers well.

The moment he appeared at the kennels the dogs changed completely. It was astonishing. They stopped roaring and straining at their leashes and their tongues came out as if they wanted to lick him, which was exactly what they did a moment later. He crawled first into one stone den and then into another, fondling the big animals as though they were house kittens.

The change in the dogs was so fantastic and their appearance now so benevolent that I started to move forward to pet them myself. The chief lama restrained me, shaking his head.

"Do not go near them," Rajah translated a moment later. "They are still as wild as they appeared a minute ago. It is just this *one* lama that can handle them. He has special powers which none of the others possess. They are friendly only with him. None of the others dare go near them."

"Who," Loren interrupted to say, "would want a picture of them now? They look about as savage as Mickey Mouse!"

I wondered what manner of man this lama might be. Why was he able to exert such a power over the dogs? But neither the chief lama, nor any of the others, if they knew, had the slightest intention of telling me.

That evening I found difficulty in sleeping. Perhaps I lay awake because it was so much warmer here on this side of Chang La, or perhaps again because it was such a beautiful night. The moon and a million stars were brilliant overhead, lighting up the entire valley clearly.

No matter what the reason, about midnight I stepped out of my sleeping bag, put on a light coat and strolled about fifty yards away from our tent.

Suddenly, as I stood gazing at the stars hung high above, a

faint pattering sound came to my ears, like the approach of many padded feet.

The sound grew closer and closer until, to my astonishment, the five giant dogs who were the guardians of Chimre, and the young lama who was their master, rounded a turn in the path from the *gompa* and moved by me with incredible speed. He had the five monsters on a long leash of leather and they were spread out fan-shape, neck and neck. Their feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground.

As I gaped in amazement they passed me only a few yards away, heading for the fields beyond. There, I watched them clear three feet of stone walls as if they were inches, the young lama taking each one in stride, until they were far up the valley and out of sight.

But the most remarkable thing to me was the face of the young lama. I could see it clearly in the bright moonlight and it had the same frozen smile he had worn in the courtyard earlier that day. The smile seemed to be engraved there. And he acted as though he were in a dream!

As I walked back to the tent it suddenly came to me that perhaps he was in a dream, a dream brought on by one of the mysterious drugs of the East. Then it occurred to me that if it was a drug it must be a powerful stimulant because the young lama had been moving at a speed that few sprinters would be able to equal.

But I was never to learn why, or where, the young lama was taking out his five shaggy beasts at such an hour.

The day after we left Chimre we reached the Indus River. It was so familiar to me now that it looked almost like home. We turned down along its bank with new strength.

About an hour later we encountered—of all people—the Moslem shopkeeper from Leh, the one who had learned American

slang from GI's in Calcutta. It was to his shop I had gone to find green jade cups, and it was his shop we had later dubbed the House of Evil Drugs. He was jauntier than ever, and in his GI English hailed us when we were still at a considerable distance. He was traveling with a small caravan of five ponies, so heavily packed that they looked as though he had quite a journey before him.

After he had greeted us from afar he rode up and reined in his horse to speak to Loren and Rajah, who were at the head of our caravan. Then he rode back to my side at the tail end of the group. "And how," he asked gaily, "is the American adventurer? Have you discovered any three-headed yaks or two-headed lamas?"

"No," I said, "but I ran into a green-hatted pal of yours who was heading back for the land of his ancestors when last I saw him."

"A pal of mine?" he said and his eyes became alert.

"A pal of yours," I repeated. "I saw him in your shop in Leh. The last time I saw him he was moving in the general direction of Russia."

The Moslem's eyes became beady as he shook his head doubtfully. "In my shop? Describe him, please."

I gave him as thorough a description of Junior as I could, putting considerable emphasis on the fuchsia-colored scarf Junior always wore around his coat.

"You must be mistaken," he said thoughtfully when I had finished. "I recall no one of that description who ever visited my shop."

"Let's skip it," I said shortly. I knew it was useless to argue with him. I was certain that I had seen Junior in his shop, but I knew that he would never admit it.

"Okay, we'll skip it," he said, "but I am sure it's no one you ever saw in my place. I know only a few people in Leh. Most

of my connections are in Tibet. As I told you, my family lives in Lhasa. I maintain our base in Leh only for trading purposes with this region, and on beyond." He waved a hand toward the east.

"Where are you going now?"

"To Rudok, in Tibet proper, beyond Panghur Lake. My brother is meeting me with some special goods and I—" He broke off and waved his hand toward his horses and pony wallahs, which had continued up the trail and were even now disappearing over the crest of a ridge. "I also have some goods for him—a different kind of goods," he went on and looked at me shrewdly. I knew that he wanted me to go on talking about his business so that he might find out how much I knew about it, but I refused to take the bait.

"Is it a long journey to Rudok?" I asked.

"About eighteen days. But what is time here? In Calcutta it was rush, rush, rush, because everyone was busy. Here in this golden doorway to Tibet I have nothing but time."

"And is the trip an interesting one?"

"It is all very much the same—great mountains, lakes and rivers. But the people, they are not all the same. Or—" He sounded undecided. "Perhaps they are all the same. I do not know. But tell me, are there any white men around Lake Pangong?"

I stared at him and I could tell by the barely perceptible change in the expression of his dark eyes that he knew he had made a mistake. I remembered that I had not mentioned to him, while I talked to him in his shop in Leh, that I was going to Lake Pangong. And I knew he remembered the conversation clearly, because he had recalled only a moment before that he had told me his family lived in Lhasa. So he must have seen Junior in Leh since we had last seen him riding off into the night, or how else would he have known that we had gone to

Lake Pangong? But that was not possible since Junior was heading in another direction. He must have received a message. But how?

“White men? What would white men be doing in such a remote part of Tibet?” I pretended astonishment at his question.

“I don’t know,” he said with a shrug, “except that I’ve heard some Russians are in that general region prospecting for gold. They came in over the Karakoram. You might have found them interesting if you had run into them.”

“Seems a little odd,” I said. “I thought gold is one of the things of which the Russians have plenty.”

“Does any individual, or any government, ever have enough gold?” he countered.

Then before I could reply he continued: “Since you are a traveler who likes to delve into the unusual, Mr. Smith, perhaps you might find it quite worth while to come along to Rudok with me.”

“Are there Russians prospecting for gold there, too?” I asked.

“If there were, they would be as interested in you as you would be in them,” he retorted with a knowing wink. “I will be seeing you again, perhaps,” he added, gave a half salute, turned his horse up the trail and left me at a gallop.

I wondered, as he became a speck in the distance, just how much he knew. And I wondered whether the Russians who were in this doorway area of Tibet were prospecting for gold, or whether they were bribing and corrupting with gold they had brought with them. It was a question that I could not answer.

Twenty-four hours later we were again in Leh.

XIV

 *Through Hell and
High Water*

THE long Street of the Bazaar seemed curiously quiet as we rode along it, on our way to the dak bungalow. Instead of the cheerful bustle, the smiling faces, the friendly salaams that we remembered, it was almost deserted; here and there a group of men broke off excited talk to stare sullenly at us. There was the feel of trouble in the air—indefinable, but unmistakable. When we reached the bungalow, my first concern was to get Loren into bed and to send for a doctor. He was a Hindu, graduate of a good medical school and appointed by the Kashmir Government as medical officer for this district. He advised that Loren rest for several days; it would be unwise for him to travel in his condition.

Then, at my first opportunity, I called on Walter Asboe. It was a joy to see the little Moravian missionary once again, but for the first time in our acquaintance I found his customary good spirits replaced by a look of deep anxiety. He lost no time in explaining what was causing it.

“Listen, there’s serious trouble brewing!” he exclaimed, his voice shaking. “Yesterday a caravan of traders arrived from the south, from Lahoul, having passed through the Kulu Valley. They brought word that the Hindus in Kulu, who outnumber the Moslems, had risen against them and had killed not only Moslems but also several Europeans living in that area. Among those killed, it is said, was my old friend Colonel Mann, whom I knew in Kulu more than twenty years ago, when he was secretary to Roerich, the Russian artist.”

“Roerich?” I echoed. “You mean Nicolai Roerich, the man who promoted a museum of Himalayan art on Riverside Drive in New York City?”

“That’s the fellow,” said Asboe. “I don’t know anything about his museum, but Mann was a good chap. I hope the rumor isn’t true.”

“Of course,” I said. “But you don’t expect any trouble here in Leh, do you? This is a long way from Lahoul and the Kulu Valley.”

“Anything might happen here,” said the little missionary earnestly. “The word of the Kulu killings ran through the bazaar like wildfire. Then another rumor sprang up, a rumor that two Moslem women had been murdered only fifty miles from here by some men from Lahoul. In Leh the Moslems far outnumber the Hindus, and bitter feeling in the bazaar against the Hindus is mounting fast. Violence might break out at any moment. If I were you, I’d start for Srinagar just as soon as possible.”

“But you and Mrs. Asboe—weren’t you planning to leave this week?”

“Yes, we were. But it’s hard to leave a place where we have worked so long. We expect now to be here for another two or three weeks. But you must go. Believe me, this is serious.”

I got back to the bungalow to find Rajah much perturbed by what he had learned during a stroll through the bazaar. He confirmed Mr. Asboe’s view of the situation and added the startling statement that a certain Kashmiri Moslem, he had heard, had arrived in Leh from Srinagar with the definite intention of murdering the richest Hindu merchant in the city. The murder would touch off a general massacre, said Rajah, and it was imperative that we get out before hell broke loose.

“But see here, Loren isn’t in shape to travel,” I objected.

“I’ll need two days to get the caravan together,” said Rajah

grimly. "If he isn't well enough to leave then, we may never be able to leave at all, unless it's by coffin."

A single day's rest did wonders for Loren, and on the second day the doctor gave him the "All clear!" signal. I tried to induce Mr. and Mrs. Asboe to come along with us, but the best that they could promise was that they would follow us within a few days.

I felt restless on our last night in Leh. After Loren had finished his packing and turned in I went out on the porch several times, stood there in the darkness and listened, luckily in vain, for any sounds of tumult in the town spread out below. If there was evil abroad that night, it didn't materialize. The next morning saw us early on our way, although a heavy mist shrouded the city. I breathed a sigh of relief when Leh was left behind us.

The mist soon cleared away, the sun shone bright, but the day remained colder than any we had yet experienced. Loren was shivering. "Winter's certainly in the air," he observed gloomily. "I only hope we can get over the Zogi-La before it sets in for a fare-you-well."

"If it gets much colder it will be tough," I agreed, "but if we get any heavy rains it will be just too bad. It wouldn't take much to wash out these trails."

"Don't talk about it!" said Loren. "It's enough to give you the creeps!"

We made eighteen miles that day and were more than glad to reach the guest bungalow at Nimu village late in the afternoon. A warm fire and a cup of hot tea did wonders in thawing us out, but we agreed that we must travel even faster from then on, if we were to keep ahead of unseasonable weather.

The following day was one we shall long remember. The morning was clear and still cold, and the brisk air stirred men and ponies to new life. We reached Saspul, ordinarily consid-

ered a day's march from Nimu, by noon, and should have been content to rest there; but we were positive that before nightfall we could reach the next village, Nurla; so we ate hastily and pressed on. We soon regretted the decision. Hardly had we left Saspul when it began to rain, and the cold grew more intense. The trail wound back and forth along the flanks of rugged mountains, sometimes along the brink of precipices overhanging the Indus River, and never very far from the river. It grew bitterly cold. I am sure that in the course of the afternoon the temperature dropped fully thirty degrees. The rain continued. My otter gloves were dripping wet. The short fur-lined coat I wore over my tweed jacket, two sweaters and two shirts, seemed to be about as effective as beach wear. Shivering miserably, I urged my pony on. Loren, still far from well, toiled along at the end of the caravan, with Rajah to keep him company. Every hour or so, to bring circulation back into my half-frozen feet, I would dismount and pull my toy pony along the trail for a mile or two. The icy rain never stopped. I began to think that not only the Asboes but we too had delayed our departure from Leh too long.

It was after dark when we reached the bungalow at Nurla. We fell off our horses and tottered into the tiny house, more dead than alive, profoundly thankful we had found shelter of some sort. From the chokidar, the villager in charge of the bungalow, we managed to obtain a small amount of firewood, and for hours we hugged the feeble fire, trying to thaw out.

Fifteen minutes after our arrival it began to snow.

The caretaker and the pony wallahs agreed in saying that this was the first time in eight years there had been a snowstorm so early in the autumn.

Our bungalow contained only two rooms, small ones. It was perched only a few feet from the edge of the cliff, high above the Indus. Its walls were of mud bricks, and the floor was

earthen. The low ceiling was supported by crossbeams of poplar wood, between which were wedged wooden slabs. The roof, within a matter of two hours after our arrival, was leaking like a sieve. There was nothing to do but crawl into our sleeping bags and hope that by morning the storm would be a thing of the past.

It was about four A.M. when I was awakened by the first great roar. It seemed to come from just outside the bungalow. It sounded like a million tons of coal rumbling down a chute. "What's that?" I shouted, struggling out of my sleeping bag and reaching for the flashlight on the chair beside me. The noise had also awakened Loren and Rajah. I could hear them moving about in the next room.

"Must have been a landslide!" Loren shouted back. And a moment later, as a second thunderous roar followed the first: "My God, the whole mountain is coming down!"

It wasn't quite as bad as that, but it certainly was impressive. As I joined Loren at the window and we stared out into the night we could see nothing but the whirling snowflakes, but we heard plenty. There was still another gigantic roar, as more huge boulders loosened by the snow and rain toppled to the hungry river below. For the rest of the night there was little sleep for any of us. We were too close to the edge of the cliff for comfort.

The next morning was bitterly cold, and there was no letup to the storm. It continued to snow—more snow, and still more snow. It was necessary to keep a fire going all the time, although the chokidar charged thirty cents for a log so small that it lasted only a few minutes. Finally he announced shortly before noon that there just wasn't any more wood available. Rajah told him sternly that if he didn't produce some more pronto, Smith Sahib would personally chop him up into little pieces and use him for firewood, piece by piece. This horrid threat did the

trick. Ten minutes later, glancing out, I saw a neat little pile of logs stacked by the front door—enough to last all night.

“I knew he had the wood.” Rajah sniffed. “He was just getting ready to demand black-market prices. No travelers can have been through here for a long time. There was no reason why he should have been so low on fuel. He can get plenty more for us, if we have to stay here longer—which Allah forbid! See, the snow has stopped falling.”

At that precise moment came the most terrifying rumble of falling rock we had yet heard. It lasted several seconds, and while it lasted I fully expected the bungalow to crash down on our heads. We stood rooted in our tracks. Then the sound died away, and with one accord we rushed to the one window looking out on the river.

Only a hundred yards from us, across a canyon, a cloud of dust was slowly drifting away from the foot of an almost perpendicular cliff, where the angry river leaped and swirled against the newly fallen mass that muddied it. Even as we watched, the ground gave way beneath one more giant boulder and it came hurtling downward, sending a jet of spray high in the air as it struck the churning caldron beneath. We turned away from the window in silence. There didn't seem anything to say.

We sat gloomily wondering how long it would be before we could resume our journey. Then we heard voices outside and a knock at the door. In filed the pony wallahs. Among them were men I had not seen before. Soon every inch of space in the room was occupied. It did not take their leader long to explain to Rajah what was on their minds.

“What do they want, Rajah?”

“The pony wallahs from Leh have come to be paid off. They are returning home as soon as the trail is safe. These new men, who will take us on from here as far as Bhot Karbu, announce

that they will not leave Nurla until three days have passed after the storm is over. They are afraid there may be more landslides, and they want to give the ground a chance to dry and harden, before they'll start."

"What do you think?"

"I think they know best. We had better depend on their judgment and stay on here until they give the word. After all, this is their country. They know the dangers of the trail better than we. If we tried to force them to start before they're ready, it might make them refuse to go at all."

We had no choice but to accept. The sun came out next morning, but, no doubt wisely, the men refused to budge. During the day we heard the rumble of a landslide only once, faint and far away, but it gave warning that all was not yet safe. We were cooped up in the bungalow for two days. On a shelf in one corner of the room I found a half-dozen paper-backed novels, left by some previous traveler, and I read them all. But Loren fretted over the fact, or possibility, that if we continued to be delayed by bad weather we might never reach the Zogi-La at all. The enforced idleness seemed to be wearing down his strength, rather than increasing it.

A second day of sunshine melted away most of the snow and brought with it a lessening of the cold. On the third morning our porters announced that it would be safe to go on. We passed through Khaltse village, descended the trail sloping to the river, gingerly crossed the swaying suspension bridge, under which the Indus was now rushing in a muddy flood, and came by midafternoon to the gorge leading toward Lamayuru. The sun still shone, the air was reasonably warm, and, as our ponies picked their way along the ledge above the swollen waters of the Hangru stream, I told myself happily that landslides were a thing of the past.

We had no warning. One moment everything was all right,

the next moment the thing happened. Loren was bringing up the end of the caravan. Rajah was riding just ahead of him; I rode just ahead of Rajah. There was a shout from behind me.

The outward edge of the trail, at the spot Loren had just reached, had begun to give way. The ground under the pony's hoofs was crumbling and slipping. The horse was struggling frantically to keep its footing, but it seemed certain that in another instant horse and rider would be carried into the gorge below.

Loren had the presence of mind to act like a flash. Urging his pony forward in one last effort, he hurled himself from his saddle and gained a foothold on ground that had not yet commenced to cave in, without letting go of the pony's reins. He was clinging desperately to the reins when Rajah and I reached him, but his strength was fading. Together Rajah and I managed to pull them to a place of safety. After only a few minutes' rest, Loren pluckily insisted he was ready to go on.

Nearing the end of the gorge and beginning to climb the ascent leading to the lamasery of Lamayuru, we found that the trail had been washed out for a considerable distance, and we were forced to pick our way for several hundred yards along the bed of a rushing stream—not the Hangru, luckily, but one of its smaller tributaries. Nevertheless, it was frequently several feet in depth, and by the time we reached the dak bungalow at Lamayuru a considerable part of our camp supplies had been soaked. Fortunately the cases containing the film had escaped any damage.

It grew colder, too, as the day waned, and bitterly cold by the time we reached the dak bungalow. We found one of the two rooms already occupied by a group of Kashmiri Hindu military officers, on their way from Kargil to Leh. Their traveling allowance apparently didn't include money for firewood, so we invited them into our room, where they warmed up enough to

confide that they had been ordered to Leh as the result of a radio message saying that trouble had broken out there. We had got away just in time.

We were able to cover only fifteen miles the next day, as it was again bitterly cold and there was a considerable amount of snow on the Fotu La. We holed in for the night in the dak bungalow at the village of Bhot Karbu. Two days later we were in Kargil, arriving shortly before dark and finding once again only a single vacant room in the large bungalow. The building was filled with barefooted Indians. The chokidar could not be located for hours. But our friend Dr. Koul, his loquacity unquenched, came to call on us within minutes of our arrival, with a hundred and one questions to ask about our experiences on the trail. We confessed that we had both been made ill by drinking polluted water. "Ah!" he exclaimed, reproachfully. "Didn't I tell you there is no water to compare with our Suru River water?"

We couldn't leave the next morning until Rajah had gone to the bazaar and cashed a check. We were practically broke. He came back beaming. The check, as usual, had been cashed on his signature. For collection it would have to be carried by runner all the way to Srinagar.

We then stopped by at the Mission School, where we had left with Miss Roy and Miss Drew the first seventeen hundred feet of film completed on the trip, and were treated with more of their delicious tea and cookies. We told them of the great kindness Mr. and Mrs. Asboe had shown us in Leh. But I thought it better not to alarm them by any mention of the rumors of trouble there.

Shortly after noon we were again on our way. We hoped to reach the village of Shimsha Karbu, sixteen miles distant, by nightfall. This is usually a relatively easy march, and as the weather had held fair all through the morning, we anticipated

no difficulty. But in one hour out of Kargil there came a change. It began to drizzle, a drizzle which soon became a pelting rain. Hourly it grew colder, until at last the rain turned into an icy sleet, making the path underfoot extremely dangerous.

By four o'clock we knew we were in a serious predicament. We would never reach the bungalow by dark. But there was no turning back. We had come much more than halfway. We could not stay where we were. There was no place on the narrow and precipitous trail to make camp, even if we had wished to. By now the storm was so violent that we must keep on, no matter how dangerous the road.

This last stretch, before Shimsha Karbu, is a desolate one in the best of weather; and in this vile weather, first in the twilight and then in the absolute darkness of the night, it was positively uncanny. As the driving rain and icy sleet showed no sign of abating, I suddenly felt that we had left the realm of human beings and were travelers in Dante's Inferno.

The madly leaping Shingo River, roaring far below us; the great shadowy unreal mountains towering far above us; the tiny trail leading so insecurely along the face of precipices, where one false step would plunge pony and man into the gorge below—these were not of this world; they formed the antechamber of another world. The rain and mist closed in upon us; we continued doggedly on into the emptiness ahead.

The road began to ascend, and the sound of the angry river grew fainter. We remembered that here the trail ascends a mountain spur that fills a bend of the river, then dips down to the bungalow at the foot of a long slope. So, as we reached the crest and began the descent, we knew that at not too great a distance ahead there would be shelter, warmth and hot food.

But by this time it was so dark that we could see nothing at all. We had to dismount and walk blindly, each one of us clutching the coat of his pony wallah, who in turn followed miraculously in the footsteps of his own animal.

In this fantastic fashion, believing that each step might be the last, we plodded on. The muttering of the demoniacal river, following us like an unseen beast; the cascades of pebbles which our footsteps set in motion, swelling, in my mind at least, to the roar of gigantic landslides; the damp wet fur of my gloves, now soggy and useless; the cruel turning of an ankle, as my sodden GI shoes slid on a particularly nasty hollow in the trail; the never, never ceasing drizzle of the icy rain—all may have been somewhere in my consciousness, but I no longer knew what was real and what was nightmare. And then, somewhere ahead, I heard a shout and knew that we were there.

Never had a bungalow looked so good as this one. We soon had a roaring fire going and were warming our half-frozen fingers and hands. Outside, winds from Tibet howled and whistled against the snapping wooden shutters as if in fury at losing their victims. Inside, we slept the sleep of the utterly exhausted.

The last thing I remember hearing was Rajah's voice, as from a great distance, saying: "It's snowing now for all it's worth. If this keeps up, we may have trouble getting over the pass."

I didn't care. As long as I didn't have to go out on that bitterly cold trail again, it would be all right with me if I had to stay in that warm bungalow forever.

But daylight drove us cruelly on once more. The snow, which had stopped during the night, overtook us at noon. By the time we reached Dras we were chilled to the bones and all we wanted was a roaring fire. We were astounded when the chokidar informed us that the fire which usually cost two and a half rupees would now cost us ten rupees. Rajah, as thoroughly chilled as we, and equally angry, went off to hunt up the local dealer in firewood and came back with the assurance that the price had not been advanced at all. The chokidar had merely been trying to put on a bit of "squeeze." Since the British had left and there was no one to report him, he felt safe.

We made our fire and thawed out gradually, but there was little conversation that night. We consumed quantities of tea and hot soup and went to bed. All we were living for was to get over the pass before winter closed in for certain.

It was during the next day's march that we saw the first of the living dead.

We had already been several hours on the go. Snow lay inches deep on the ground. Above it hung a damp heavy mist, incredibly cold, chilling us to the marrow and penetrating even the blankets which we had wrapped around us over the layers of heavy clothing we were already wearing. Out of the mist and fog materialized the shadowy figure of a man, walking toward us with wavering steps. He came closer, and we saw that he wore the fur fez of a Moslem, and that his clothing was mere rags, his arms and legs thin as pipestems, his cheeks gaunt with starvation. He did not even glance in our direction, though he passed close by us, his sunken eyes fixed on the trail along which we had just come.

"My God," I exclaimed, "can't we help him? The man's dying!"

Rajah shook his head. "He is already dead," he said quietly. "And look, here come others."

Four or five men, moving in single-file, followed the first. All were poorly clothed, in ragged garments that seemed no protection at all against the bitter cold, and two were barefoot. All were pitifully emaciated, brown skeletons, still walking. Rajah stopped the last in line and questioned him. The man seemed glad enough to rest for a moment.

"They are Moslem refugees from the Simla hills," Rajah reported. "There are others coming along behind them, whom we will soon see. The story brought by the Lahoul traders to Leh was a true one. The Hindus in that area murdered many Moslems, and these are some of those who managed to escape.

Several thousand have reached Kashmir. These are the first to enter this area. Some will try to reach Gilgit, going north from Srinagar, and others, like these, hope to reach Sinkiang."

"How can they ever survive in this cold country?"

"Many will certainly perish," said Rajah sadly. "Winter will overtake them on these mountain passes and they will die of cold and hunger. The crows may feast, and there will be skeletons on the road when the snow melts in the spring. But some have relatives whom they hope to reach, others are driven on only by panic fear and the determination to put as many miles as possible between them and unhappy India."

Before the day was over we had seen many more of these unfortunate refugees. The day was another nightmare. While we were fleeing to the warmth and safety of India, these faces mocked us.

Toward dusk, rounding a bend of the road, we came suddenly upon the dak bungalow at Machoi, half-hidden by a great drift. Outside the chokidar's hut close by was heaped an enormous pile of firewood—the prettiest sight imaginable. It was such a scene as one would expect to see on a Christmas card.

But there was no chokidar. His hut was deserted, and there was no one to open the locked door of the bungalow. As the minutes passed, our tempers rose. For one solid hour we tried to get into that bungalow without success. We couldn't spend the night outdoors. We would freeze to death. Loren tried to open the latch with wires, until his fingers were numb. No go. He finally broke a pane of glass in a door at the rear of the house and got that door open, only to find himself in the cubbyhole that passed as a bathroom. He was working on the door, also locked, which led to the bedroom, when one of our pony wallahs showed up with a big key which he thought might work. To the surprise of everyone, it did.

Before noon next morning we had reached the summit of the Zogi-La, and saw the storm devils that had snapped at our

heels all the way from Tibet slink back, discomfited, to the eastward. We were safe!

Late in the afternoon we reached Sonamarg, where we found waiting for us the car sent by the Army Agency—at double the fee agreed on. We were broke again, but we borrowed enough from the driver to pay off our men, loaded the equipment that had once taken nine ponies to carry—we packed it inside the car, outside the car and on top of the car—and were off.

It was dark when we got to Srinagar. Rajah's houseboat, the *Ritz*, had been moved from its old mooring at Nagin Bagh and was now moored much nearer the center of the city, in the canal leading to that lovely lake, the Lokut Dal. The houseboat lights shone out a welcome. Nothing was changed—all was just as it had been when we had left, nearly eight weeks before. Nabha the butler was all smiles.

"Has all been quiet, Nabha?" Rajah asked. "Before we left, there were rumors, as thou knowest, that the Pathan tribesmen were plotting to invade Kashmir as soon as the British got out on Partition Day. We have heard nothing since then. There is no more talk of that?"

"There is no more such talk," said Nabha serenely. "Allah be praised, the Pathans sit at home in peace! The talk was idle and is forgotten."

We sat down to a piping hot dinner.

WE WERE in no hurry to leave Srinagar. Both Loren and I were too weak from our illnesses to think of traveling another foot, if it wasn't necessary. We called the next morning on the one British doctor still in residence at the Mission hospital. After a comprehensive examination he told us that we should have as much rest as possible before traveling any farther. The long caravan journey back from the Pangong Lake region, sick as we were and without adequate medical care, had not helped either of us too much. He advised a rest of several weeks.

This suited us completely. We had arrived in Srinagar on Sunday night the fifth of October. Our plane reservations for the return to the States did not require us to reach Bombay until the middle of November. With weeks to spare it would certainly be much pleasanter to convalesce in the delicious air of the Vale of Kashmir than to swelter in the heat of Bombay, nearly a thousand miles to the south—to say nothing of the expense. Why go to expensive hotel rooms in Bombay when we could enjoy the comforts of life on the *Ritz* at so much less?

And so I went blithely off to Lloyd's Bank, in whose keeping I had left my letter of credit, to draw the cash with which to pay Rajah for the money he had advanced us on the expedition. There wouldn't be much, if anything, left over, but, I told myself, I would send a cable home and get what was needed in a day or two. I drew out my entire balance.

As the teller handed me the money, the young assistant manager who had always taken care of me asked if he might speak to me for a moment in confidence.

“Of course,” I said, wondering what was on his mind.

“It’s really none of my business,” he said apologetically, “but if, as you have just told us, you are planning to remain here for some weeks and are cabling to the United States for more money, I think you should know one or two things which have developed since your departure for Ladakh.”

“Yes?”

“Everything here is at sixes and sevens. Not in this bank, of course,” he added hastily. “Our depositors may have their money at demand. But one or two of the other banks—the Indian banks—are not doing that. Their depositors are permitted to withdraw only a fourth, or less, of what they have on deposit. But beyond that, Kashmir is in a very shaky condition financially. Her three great sources of income have been from tourists, customs duties and timber, which she floats down the Jhelum River into what is now the Dominion of Pakistan. At the moment there are no tourists, or practically none; the customs collections have come to a standstill; and the timber is no longer being sent down the Jhelum, for what was sent was seized by Pakistan. Pakistan contends that since ninety per cent of the people of Kashmir are Moslems the Maharajah of Kashmir should join his state with Pakistan, and not with the new Dominion of India.”

“But so far he hasn’t done either, I’m told.”

“That’s it exactly, and Pakistan is getting most annoyed. You would be amazed to learn how these political differences have affected ordinary business matters in the last month or so. Just for example—and this may concern you directly—all telegrams going out of Kashmir, whether to India or to the outside world, have to pass through the station at Lahore. Lahore has become a bottleneck. You would be surprised at what isn’t getting through. Strangely enough, if the message is of no particular importance it may go through without delay. But our clients tell us that messages of importance to them seem to get pigeonholed somewhere

along the line. And therefore, Mr. Smith, if you are thinking of wiring for money I suggest that you cable every possible source, not just one only, on the chance that at least one of your messages will get through without delay. Otherwise, you may be wondering several weeks from now why you have had no reply."

This was certainly disquieting. When I reached the post office I took my friend's advice—I cabled not only to my wife, but to my mother and father, my lecture manager and my bank.

Blissfully confident that the money would arrive within a week, Loren and I decided to give ourselves two weeks in Srinagar and to leave on the twenty-second, taking the bus to Rawalpindi, whence we would proceed by train to Bombay, by way of Delhi.

The next afternoon we were delighted by a visit from Colonel Schomberg, although he had come in only to say good-bye, as he was leaving immediately for London.

I started to tell the distinguished explorer how grateful we were to him for his suggestion that we visit the Hidden Valley of Himis, which otherwise we might have missed, and which had provided such unusual photographic material. But he cut me short.

"Sorry, old chap, I must run along," he said. "Got a long list of people to see before I leave. But I wanted to tell you that I got a message from the Asboes this morning. They've crossed the Zogi-La."

"Oh, that's grand news!" I exclaimed. "Then they'll reach Srinagar tonight!"

"No, they're coming on by caravan. Won't be here for three days. Will you give them a message for me?"

"Of course."

"Tell them to leave Kashmir as soon as possible. Tell Asboe not to delay their departure a moment longer than he has to. And I advise you and Tutell to do the same thing. When do you plan to leave?"

“We’re thinking of making reservations for the twenty-second on the bus to Rawalpindi. Our plane reservations, out of Bombay, are for mid-November.”

“The twenty-second?” repeated the Colonel. “I should get off sooner, if I were you.”

I was startled. “Any special reason?” I asked curiously.

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders. “It’s just the uncertainties of travel these days. With all the Punjab going up in smoke, the more time one allows one’s self for any journey, the better. I understand the trains are not running from Rawalpindi to Delhi because of all the massacres. You might find your journey to Bombay a more roundabout one than you anticipate.”

He hurried off. Loren and I talked it over. We decided to stick to our plan. We couldn’t bear to think of leaving sooner. The next morning we went around to the local American Express office and booked our seats on the bus due to leave on the twenty-second. Two well-dressed Hindus standing near us were arguing excitedly with the clerk, who wearily shook his head. As they turned gloomily away I asked him what was troubling them.

“They want seats on the Dalmia plane for Delhi,” he said disgustedly. “I told them they would have to see the Inspector General of Police. He has the final word on who goes and who doesn’t go. There’s a plane for Delhi daily, but it can take only twelve passengers. The I.G. decides the priorities, and the list is posted outside his office the day before. The howls are something awful.”

“Hindus are traveling to Delhi by plane?”

He laughed. “They’re fighting for seats,” he said. “Every time there’s a report of another Hindu massacre in the Punjab there’s another rush to get out of here. There aren’t seats enough for one in a hundred.”

Outside, Loren and I looked at each other. “Maybe we’d better find out about these planes,” I said. “Colonel Schomberg told us

the trains aren't running out of Rawalpindi any more. Let's talk to the Inspector General."

We hailed a tonga and drove across the city. There was a crowd outside the entrance to the building—all Hindus. There was a crowd inside on the ground floor—all Hindus. We fought our way up to the second floor. The corridor outside the Inspector General's office was jammed—all Hindus. It seemed hours before we were finally ushered in. The Inspector General listened to us in silence. He was a tall, dark, gaunt Hindu, with lines of worry under his weary eyes. Finally he asked when we wanted to leave. We told him. He consulted his lists. In a voice of gloom he announced that he was sure we could be accommodated on that date—approximately. He asked us to return on the twenty-first and check with his secretary for the next day's departure. He then told us that he liked the U.S.A. but did not care for the British, and the interview was over.

For ten days we waited anxiously for some reply to the cables I had sent to America. None came. Our scanty funds dwindled away, rupee by rupee. We grew increasingly alarmed. Finally, by noon of the eighteenth of October, when no telegram had arrived, our last rupee had been spent, and we owed in addition a considerable sum for rent, food and services rendered on the *Ritz*, we gave up hope. It was an intolerable situation. Desperately I went to Rajah and broke the news to him.

"Rajah," I said, "we're broke. We have money in America, but we have had no answer to our cables for funds. Our plane tickets from Bombay to New York are paid for. Can you lend us enough to get from here to Bombay?"

A look of pain came into Rajah's eyes. "I am ashamed!" he cried. "I am ashamed that I cannot advance you the funds you require. But for the first time in my life I am in the same position as you. I have more than thirteen thousand rupees on deposit in the Maharajah's own bank, but now they have passed a law that

a depositor can withdraw only a quarter of his funds. The rest is indefinitely frozen. I owe my servants for the summer months and there are many other bills which we always settle at this time of the year. I have not even enough cash on hand to pay them. I'm afraid that we are all what you call broke, together."

This was staggering news. I was panic-stricken. "What can we do, Rajah?" I cried frantically. "What can we do?"

Rajah sighed. "Let me think for a moment." He pressed his fingers to his forehead. In silence I watched him eagerly, and hope began to stir once more. He had never failed us. He would not fail us now!

After a while he looked up. "Have you any surplus camera equipment you'd care to sell? We might raise some cash on that."

"How about it, Loren?" I cried eagerly. "We can get along without the still camera and the second motion-picture machine, can't we?"

"Sure," said Loren. "We won't need them any more. And there's a lot of chemicals that any camera shop would be glad to get. They're hard to come by, even at home. And there's a couple of exposure meters we could spare."

"Very well then," said Rajah. "Give me an hour and I'll see what can be done." Within the hour he was back, bringing with him two portly Hindu gentlemen whom he introduced as the proprietors of the biggest camera shop on the Bund, much patronized by the tourist trade.

"We understand that you have some equipment you wish to dispose of?"

I tried hard not to appear overanxious to sell. "Possibly," I gulped and turned them over to Loren and Rajah, who carried on from there.

The two Hindus examined everything. Some of the equipment, such as the chemicals, was brand-new. Other items, such as the

still camera, had been used only on the expedition and were in perfect condition. The Hindus had brought with them their catalogue lists from the States and they knew the exact value of each and every item we were willing to part with. They took a third off on everything and then made us an offer. We accepted it, with what we fondly hoped was an air of lordly indifference. But when the shopkeepers had driven away in tongas heaped with their purchases, Loren and I did a dance of joy on the living-room rugs.

“This will be a great help,” said Rajah, counting over the rupee notes once more, “but not enough. Have you anything else you could sell?”

This stopped us cold. “There isn’t any more of the photographic equipment that I’d care to part with,” I said dolefully. “I can’t think of a thing.”

Rajah looked at me sorrowfully, as if he were about to ask me to give up my life’s blood and that it was all his fault. “That sheepskin coat of yours,” he said. “It would bring a good price here, and now that you have left the cold weather behind, would you mind parting with it?”

“I should say not!” I exclaimed. “And for that matter I can get along without my typewriter, and my fountain pen, and some cuff links I never wear, and maybe some other things. But where can we get rid of stuff like that? Walk along the Bund with a tray, yelling our wares?”

Rajah smilingly shook his head. “That will not be necessary,” he said. “If you’ll just spend the rest of the day in picking out what you don’t need to take with you, I’ll show you tomorrow.”

He was still keeping his plan tantalizingly secret when we breakfasted next morning, but as we left the table we heard the first of the daily procession of shikara merchants bawling his wares as he paddled alongside the houseboat. These boatmen-merchants in their narrow gondolas made the rounds of the

houseboats regularly, offering wares of all sorts—ornamental papier-mâché boxes, cheap jewelry, linens, carved woodwork and what not—but, having had no money to squander, we had always shooed them away. To our surprise Rajah now opened the window of the living room and beckoned to this fellow to come closer. When he was alongside, Rajah leaned over and helped him scramble on board and into the living room. Other boatmen, seeing the reception he had received, instantly converged on the *Ritz*. As fast as each one came alongside, Rajah hauled him into the living room, until there was room for no more. The hubbub was terrific, and we began wondering if Rajah had lost his mind. We certainly didn't intend to buy anything.

As the last man was wedged in, Rajah disappeared momentarily into our bedrooms, returning at once with my typewriter in one hand and, in the other, Loren's suitcase, stuffed full of articles we had marked as expendable. Before most of the merchants realized what was up, Rajah had started them bidding against one another. He was a natural-born auctioneer. He let one or two things go for practically nothing, and after that it was like taking candy from babies. Bids sky-rocketed. The merchants' natural cupidity quickly got the better of them, and although they had come expecting to sell, they couldn't let a bargain slip into the fingers of some competitor. My typewriter was among the first items snapped up. It was bought by a sad little turquoise merchant who looked poorer than any beggar on the street but was worth, as Rajah told me later, a half-million rupees. He was buying the typewriter for his head bookkeeper to use in making out foreign bills. Loren's two handsome suitcases went to a Hindu who looked as if he had been planning a long trip for some time—a trip that would take him a long way from the nearest Moslem.

Finally, some two hours later, we were sold out. Everything had gone, including a pair of sapphire cuff links from which the sapphires had been missing for years, and a gold tooth filling which I had been carrying around for months. There was

nothing they wouldn't bid on. Every single article brought its price. I'm sure we are the only Americans who ever went to Kashmir that witnessed such a sight.

By the time the sale was over we had enough cash to pay all of our bills and to see us safely out of Kashmir. Our worries were over, we thought.

On the morning of the twenty-first we went again to the Inspector General's office to see if our names had been posted for the morrow's departure on the Dalmia plane. They were not there. We finally managed to get in to see the secretary. He was all apologies.

"The Inspector General said that you wanted to go on or about the twenty-second," he purred. "He got the impression that a day or two later would not make any great difference to you."

"What day have you scheduled us for now?" I asked.

"Sunday the twenty-sixth. There have been so many government officials going back and forth to Delhi that it has put the civilian list a little behind. But we didn't forget you. You may definitely count on your seats for that day. The Inspector General is very fond of Americans and he particularly told me to look out for you."

He was so positive about it that we went on over to the American Express office and canceled our reservations for the bus that was to leave for Rawalpindi the next day. The agent seemed pleased. He explained that our two seats, together with another one, could now be turned over to a Mr. and Mrs. O'Kelly and their daughter, who had been on the waiting list for a long time. "They're in luck at last," he said.

We spent the next three days in repacking our remaining possessions, selecting only what could be taken with us on the plane. On Thursday afternoon it grew dark before we had finished and we turned on the electric lights, which got their power from shore. Suddenly they went off.

Rajah peered out the window. "All the lights in the city have

gone out!" he exclaimed. "Something must have gone wrong at the power station. That's at Baramula, thirty-five miles west of here." He got out some oil lamps, and we went on with our packing. Rajah went ashore, saying that he was going for a stroll around town.

In an hour he was back, looking more grave than we had ever seen him. "The Pathan tribesmen are moving toward the city!" he exclaimed. "It's they who cut the power station at Baramula!"

It seemed incredible. No one to whom we had talked during the past two weeks, since our return to Srinagar, had suspected that the Pathans were on the warpath. On the contrary we had been told that all danger of their invasion had subsided. But this was no rumor now. These raiders were the advance guard of the three hundred thousand wild frontiersmen who had been held in check for sixty years only by annual payment of millions of rupees. And now that the British had ceased to rule, and the payments were stopped, they meant to seize Kashmir. And who was there to stop their advance?

Two more days passed, filled with rumors. There were reports that English people, caught in distant villages, had been killed.

By Saturday morning the twenty-fifth there was a steady stream of Hindus leaving the city. They were going on foot, by car—the fortunate few who had petrol—and, if they had the price of a seat, by bus. We were told that single seats in busses were selling for two thousand rupees each.

We drove to the Inspector General's office to see if our names were posted for next morning's Dalmia plane. Neither he nor his secretary was to be found. There was no list posted.

I stopped in at the Srinagar Club, social center for British residents, and inquired if any arrangements were being made for the evacuation of civilians. There were still two or three hundred English people who had lingered on after Partition Day. The lady at the desk said she believed that provision was being made

for those who might wish to leave in an armed convoy, but she really didn't know just when the convoy would start. However, there was a tea dance to be given at the club that evening, and wouldn't we come?

We accepted gratefully and came back to the club shortly after six o'clock. Nearly a hundred guests showed up, and not one of them seemed in the least concerned. Not a word was said about the approaching Pathans. One might have thought this was a peaceful drawing room in England ten thousand miles away.

At nine o'clock we said good night, strolled down to the tonga where Rajah was waiting with the driver, and rattled home through the unlighted streets. We had gone about two thirds of the way to the houseboat, when, in a particularly dark stretch of road, six men suddenly surrounded the cart and brought it to a halt. We saw the gleam of knives. A lantern flashed in our faces. Immediately our attackers began chattering among themselves, and an instant later they had melted away into the darkness, as suddenly as they had come.

We had not even had time to cry out.

"It's all right," said Rajah calmly. "They took you for Hindus."

"They were Pathans?" I gasped.

"Oh, no, those were *goondas*, lawless vagabonds who have been roaming the streets, looking for Hindus to rob. As you know, the Hindus have been leaving the city and taking everything they own with them. The *goondas* rob them, but do not dare to kill. They are not like the Pathans."

We reached the *Ritz* in safety, but I slept little. I had had enough of Kashmir. I turned and tossed, wondering what we would do if there were no seats for us on the plane.

Early the next morning, Sunday morning the twenty-sixth, we drove out to the airfield five miles from town. Hundreds of Hindus were milling around the wire-mesh fence that enclosed it. Great boxes and bundles of their worldly goods rested at their

feet, far too heavy and cumbersome to be taken with them, even if they could get seats on a plane. Hope sprang up when I saw several planes, in addition to the Dalmia plane, standing on the field. Their crews were standing by while soldiers of the Maharajah's native forces removed their cargo of petrol and loaded the tins on trucks.

"If there's no room for us on the Dalmia plane, maybe we can hitch a ride on one of those!" I exclaimed.

Rajah shook his head. "They go back to Delhi empty," he said. "Their pilots have strict orders not to take passengers."

We made our way through the crowd to the entrance for the Dalmia plane. The guard at the gate stopped us. "But we're booked for today's plane!" I protested.

"That's not today's plane," he said. "That's yesterday's. There was supposed to be an extra plane sent up, but it hasn't come. These twelve people have been here all night. They go first. You'll have to wait your turn."

"Well, that does it!" exploded Loren. "If Saturday's load hasn't left by Sunday morning and we are scheduled for the second load for Sunday, it means we won't get out of here before the middle of next week, if then! By then the Rough-and-Tough boys will be here, and it will be curtains for the entire show!"

"Wait a minute," I said. "I've got an idea."

I plodded over to the entrance for the cargo-plane crews, squeezing my way through the crowd. One of the pilots was at the gate. Excited Hindus, with wads of one-hundred-rupee notes clutched in their hands, were waving the money at him but he looked at them stonily. I hailed him.

"Sorry," he said, before I could say a word. "No passengers. Absolute orders."

"That's not what I want," I yelled back. "But if you're going back to Delhi would you be kind enough to deliver an urgent message to the American Embassy for me?"

“Why, certainly,” he said. “I go past the Embassy on my way home.”

“It wouldn’t be too much trouble?”

“No trouble at all. A pleasure.”

I hastily scribbled a note to Dr. Henry Grady, the American Ambassador. I told him that Loren Tutell and I were more or less anxious to get out of Srinagar before our throats were cut by the Pathans who were headed our way. The Embassy’s military attaché, my friend Colonel Bennett, had a plane at his disposal—could it be sent for us? We would be ready and waiting at the airport the next morning, I said, and would stay right there until either the Pathans or the plane arrived. We hoped the plane would get there first. *R.S.V.P.*

As the pilot tucked the note away in his blouse, I remarked, “You know, I might have been in Delhi myself by this time, if I hadn’t given up the seats we had reserved on the bus for Rawalpindi last Wednesday.”

The pilot looked at me oddly. “The bus for Rawalpindi?” he said slowly. “Last Wednesday?”

“Why, yes. It was the last one out.”

“And you haven’t heard what happened?”

I shook my head.

“Then this will interest you,” said the pilot grimly. “There were four passengers on that bus—a Mr. O’Kelly, his wife and daughter, and a commercial traveler who represented an American soap company. I don’t know his name. Well, the bus got about halfway to Rawalpindi, when all of a sudden, on a lonely stretch of the road, the driver braked it to a stop. It’s wild country, you know, with the road running along under overhanging cliffs.”

“I know,” I said. “I came up here by that route.”

“O’Kelly stuck his head out. ‘What is it, a landslide?’ he asked. There was a gang of rough-looking men blocking the middle of

the road. Pathans, they were. And the next minute they had O'Kelly and the soap salesman out of the bus at the point of their guns and took all their money away from them. They were still standing there when another bunch of Pathans came up the road. One of them went up to O'Kelly and told him to hand over his cash. O'Kelly grinned at him and told him that his friends up the road had already taken it. 'You lie!' says the Pathan. And he yanked out his revolver and shot O'Kelly through the chest.

"He died with his head in his wife's lap.

"Then an officer in the uniform of the Pakistan Army came up and asked what was going on. When the salesman told him what had happened, he ordered his men to carry O'Kelly back to the bus, and sent a lieutenant with them to make sure that they got the rest of the way to Rawalpindi. They were stopped once more, by another bunch of Pathans, and they were all for killing the salesman, too, but the lieutenant talked them out of it."

He glanced at his watch. "Well, I must be off," he added. "Don't worry about the letter, sir. I won't forget it."

We watched his plane take off, then drove back to the houseboat. There was nothing to do but wait for morning.

We made a farewell call on Walter Asboe and his wife, who had come to see us soon after their arrival from Leh, and who were now staying with some missionary friends until the armed convoy out of Srinagar—if that ever materialized—was ready to go. Their cheerfulness had not deserted them.

We could eat little that night, although Nabha and the cook had prepared a marvelous spread. After supper Rajah joined us, taking his favorite position—squatting upon the floor, his knees pulled up under his chin.

"Hear me, my friends," he said. "What I say is from the heart. We are ready now. In the last few days I have been making all ready for my own departure. There is a hiding place which I know, not far from here. Food is stored there. If the Pathans

come nearer, I and my two wives and my people will go there, and they will never find us. This I ask—if the plane does not come for you tomorrow, you must come with us, and there we will stay until peace comes to Kashmir once more. This is my wish.”

I tried to thank him, and choked up.

All three of us had little to say to one another as we drove out to the airfield next morning. Perhaps this was because the jolting tonga made conversation difficult, but I don't think so. Strangely enough, at the entrance to the field, where there had been hundreds of refugees the day before, there was no more than a handful this morning. The others had apparently decided that it was useless to wait any longer for a miracle, and had set off on foot to cross the Banihal Pass to the south. Our driver insisted nervously that some bands of Pathans were only eleven miles away.

We stared anxiously at the southeastern skies. The minutes dragged by. My eyes ached with watching.

Suddenly Loren clutched my arm. “Look! Look!” he cried. “There, a little off to the right!”

Yes, there it was! It was not long till we heard the drone of its engines, swiftly coming nearer. But what was that? Another plane, and another, and still another, until we counted five in all, and the skies over us were throbbing with the roar of the engines overhead.

But Loren's face wore a puzzled frown. “Where's Colonel Bennett's plane?” he demanded anxiously. “It's not in that squadron. Those are troop carriers, Indian Army planes. Do you suppose that pilot forgot to deliver your note?”

The first plane taxied to a stop hardly a hundred yards away. The props of the huge C-47 had scarcely stopped turning over when the carrier began to disgorge its load—twenty-two Sikh troopers, the first of hundreds to come.

The Maharajah of Kashmir had at last decided to join his

state to the Dominion of India. These were the first of the troops that Pandit Nehru, Premier of the Indian Dominion, was sending him to aid his own feeble forces in driving back the advancing Pathans.

A moment later the pilot of the first plane came hurrying toward us. I planted myself in his path. "Excuse me," I said desperately, "but do you happen to know if the American Embassy's plane is coming up here from Delhi today?"

He grinned at me. "You're Nicol Smith, aren't you?" he said. "Colonel Bennett, of your Embassy, rang us up. He got your message, but he had heard that we were coming up here, so he asked us to pick you up. Got your gear ready? We'll be taking off in ten minutes."

We had just time to wring Rajah's hand.

The plane roared down the runway and climbed swiftly. As it gained altitude the lonely figure of Rajah grew smaller and smaller until it had vanished entirely—the figure of an Oriental whom Loren and I had come to think of as a brother. We had been through much together and we had never found him wanting.

THE END

