

outer edge with a finger-nail. There was the little nick that he had made in the soft gold when he struck it against the cell bars in the jail at the Mir Khan Palace!

That put another thought in his head. It was less than two hours since Yasmini danced in the arena. It might well be much less than that since she had taken off her bracelets. He laid a finger on the dead man's stone-cold hand and let it rest so for a minute. Then, running it slowly up the wrist, he touched the gold. It was warm. He repeated the test on the woman's wrist. Hers was warm, too. Both bracelets had been worn by a living being within an hour—

"Probably within minutes!"

HE muttered and frowned, and then suddenly jumped backward. The leather curtain near the bed had moved on its bronze rod.

"Aren't they dears?" a voice said in English behind him. "Aren't they sweet?"

He had jumped so as to face about, and somebody laughed at him. Yasmini stood not two arms' length away, lovelier than the dead woman because of the merry life in her, young and warm, aglow, but looking like the dead woman and the woman of the frieze—the woman of the lamp-bowls—the statue—come to life, speaking to him in English more sweetly than if it had been her mother tongue. The English abuse their language. Yasmini caressed it and made it do its work twice over.

Being dressed as a native, he salaamed low. Knowing him for what he was, she gave him the senna-stained tips of her warm fingers to kiss, and he thought she trembled when he touched them. But a second later she had snatched them away and was treating him to raillery.

"Man of pills and blisters!" she said, "tell me how those bodies are preserved! Spill knowledge from that learned skull of thine!"

He did not answer. He never shone in conversation at any time, having made as many friends as enemies by saying nothing until the spirit moves him. But she did not know that yet.

"If I knew for certain why those two did not turn to worms," she went on, "almost I would choose to die now, while I am beautiful! Think of the foggy museum men! (She called them by a far less edifying name, really, for the East is frank in that way, especially in its use of other tongues.) What would they say, think you, King sahib, if they found us two dead beside those two? Would not that be a mystery? Don't you love mysteries? Speak, man, speak! Has Khinjan struck you dumb?"

But he did not speak. He was staring at her arm, where two whitish marks on the skin betrayed that bracelets had been.

"Oh, those! They are theirs. I would not rob the dead, or the gods would turn on me. I robbed you, instead, while you slept. Fie, King sahib, while you slept!"

But her steel did not strike on flint. It was her eyes that flashed. He would have done better to have seemed ashamed, for then he might have fooled her, at least for a while. But having judged himself, he did not care a fig for her judgment of him. She realized that instantly and having found a tool that would not work, discarded it for a better one. She grew confidential.

"I borrow them," she explained, "but I put them back. I take them for so many days, and when the day comes—the gods like us to be exact! Once there was an Englishman to whom I lent the larger one, and he refused to return it. He wanted it to wear, to

bring him luck. Collins, of the Gurkhas. A cobra bit him."

King's eyes changed, for Collins of the Gurkhas had died in his two arms, saying never a word. He had always wondered why the native who ran in to kill the cobra had run away again and left Collins lying there after seeming to shake hands with him. Yasmini, watching his eyes and reading his memory, missed nothing.

"You saw?" she said excitedly. "You remember? Then you understand! You yourself were near death when I took the bracelet last night. The time was up. I would have stabbed you if you had tried to prevent me!"

Now he spoke at last and gave her a first glimpse of an angle of his mind she had not suspected.

"Princess," he said. He used the word with the deference some men can combine with effrontery, so that very tenderness has barbs. "You might have had that thing back if you had sent a messenger for it at any time. A word by a servant would have been enough."

"You could never have reached Khinjan then!" she retorted. Her eyes flashed again, but his did not waver.

"Princess," he said, "why speak of what you don't know?"

He thought she would strike like a snake, but she smiled at him instead. And when Yasmini has smiled on a man he has never been just the same man afterward. He knows more, for one thing. He has had a lesson in one of the finer arts.

"I will speak of what I do know," she said. "No, there is no need. Look! Look!"

She pointed at the bed—at the man on the bed—fingers locked in those of a woman who looked so like herself.

"You see—yet you do not see! Men are blind! Men look into a mirror, and see only whiskers they forgot to shave the day before. Women look once and then remember! Look again."

He looked, knowing well there was something to be understood, that stared him in the face. But for the life of him he could not determine question or answer.

"What is in your bosom?" she asked him.

He put his hand to his shirt. "Draw it out!" she said, as a teacher drills a child.

He drew out the gold-hilted knife with the bronze blade, with which a man had meant to murder him. He let it lie on the palm of his hand and looked from it to her and back again. The hilt might have been a portrait of her modeled from the life.

"Here is another like it," she said, stepping to the bedside. She drew back the woman's dress at the bosom and showed a knife exactly like that in King's hand. "One lay on her bosom and one on his when I found them!" she said. "Now, think again!"

HE did think, of thirty thousand things, and of one impossible idea that stood up prominent among them all and insisted on seeming the only likely one.

"I saw the knife in your bosom last night," she said, "and laughed so that I nearly awakened you. Man! Are you stupid? Will that ready wit of yours not work? Have I bewildered you? Is it my perfume? My eyes? My jewels? What is it? Think, man! Think!"

But if she wanted to make him guess aloud for her amusement she was wasting time. Had he known the answer he would have held his tongue. As he did not know it, he had all the more reason to wait—indeinitely, if need be. But interminable waiting was no part of her plan. Words were welling out of her.

"I gave a fool that knife to use, because he was afraid. It gave him

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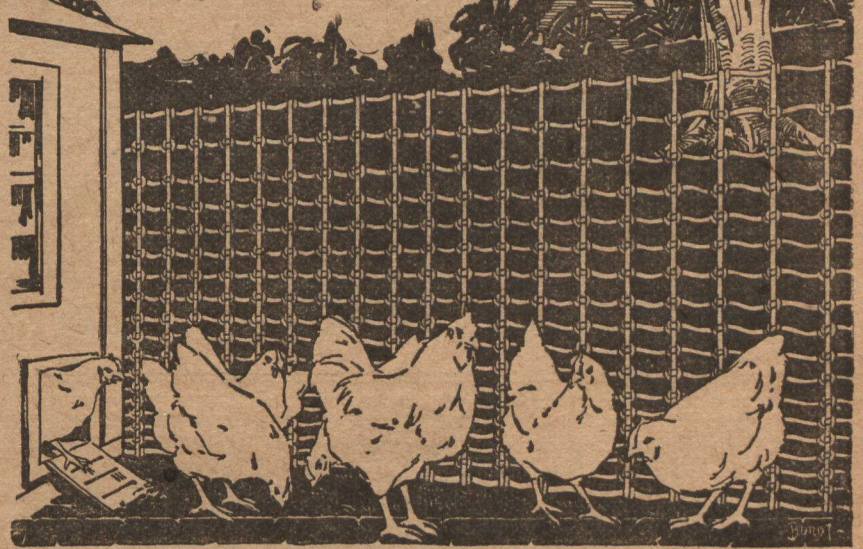
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