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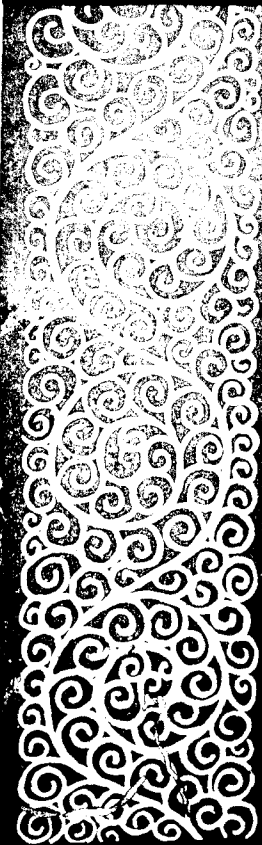
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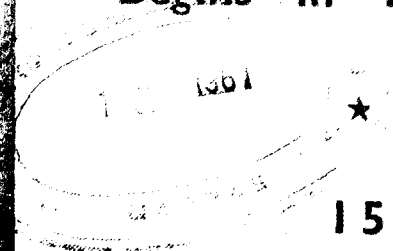
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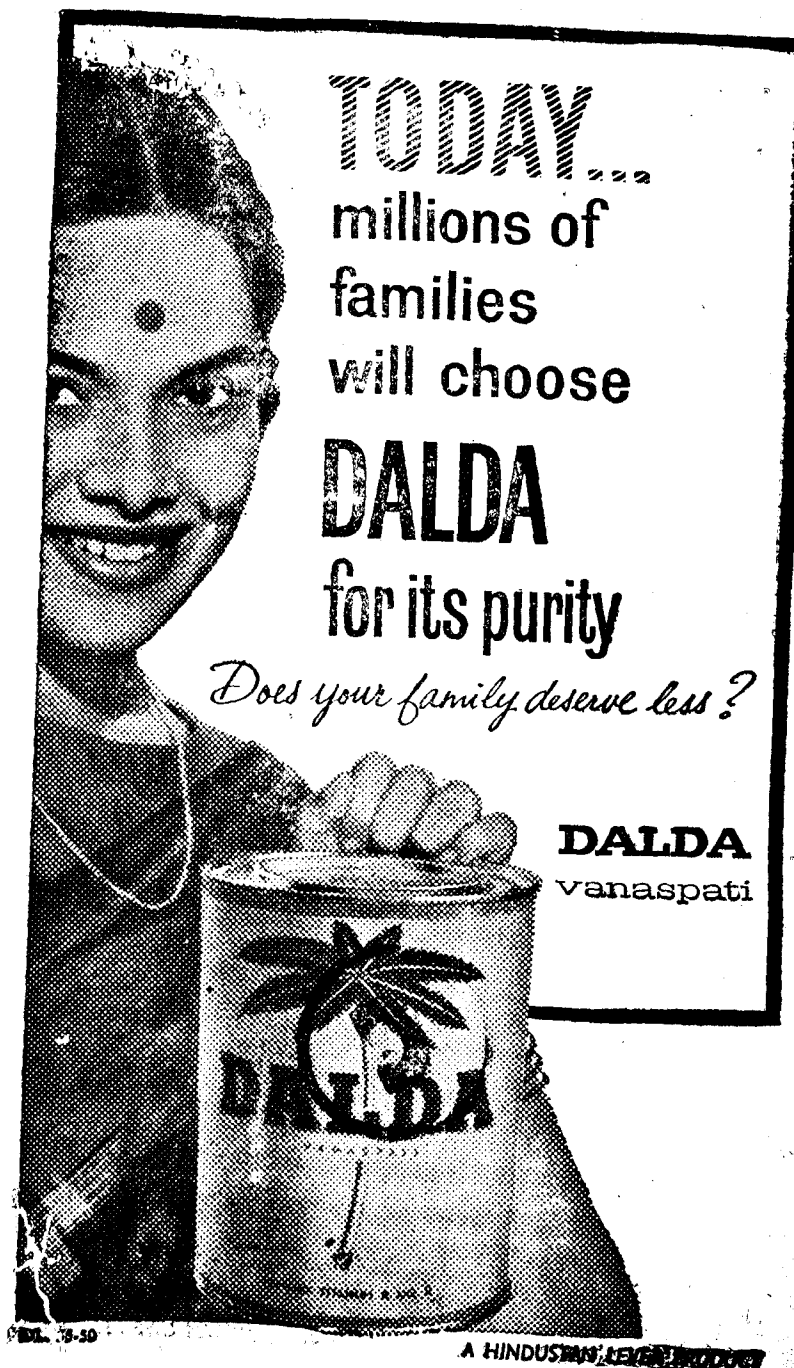
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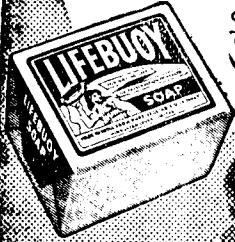
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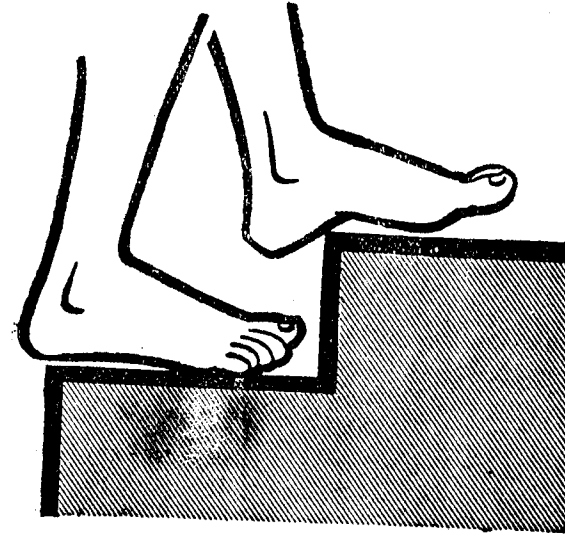
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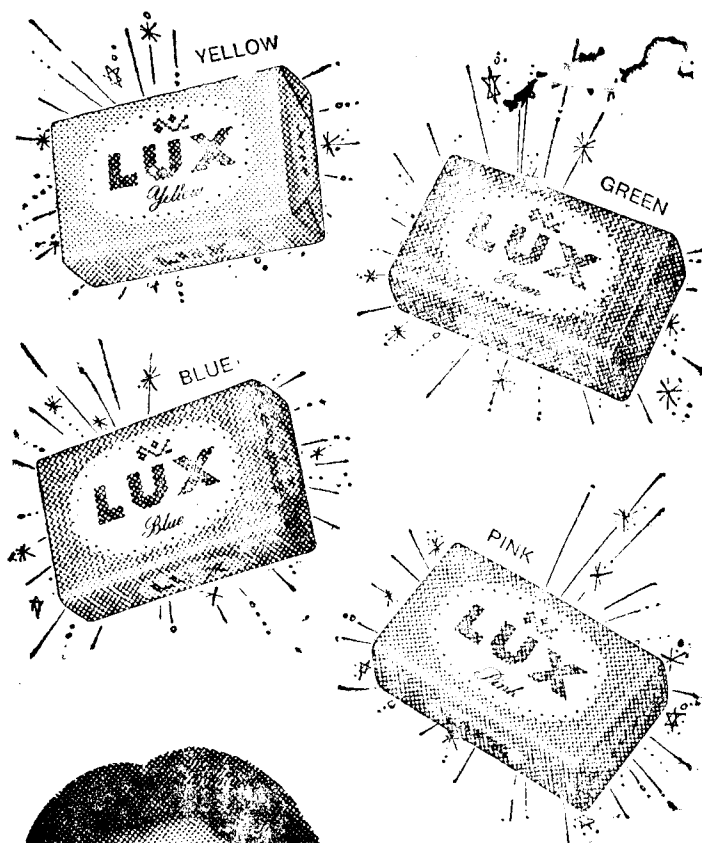
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April '61

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LEADING MONTHLY FOR HOME AND FAMILY

6th Year of Publication

Vol. 6

APRIL 1961

No. 2

EXIT OF SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH Africa has walked out of the Commonwealth on the racial issue. Will the Commonwealth become stronger on account of its exit? It is not easy to answer this question. The newly independent African nations, which met in a conference recently, are concerting measures to speed up the liberation of the whole of the continent and win freedom for each and every original inhabitant of Africa. Can this goal be reached without the conflagration of a war with all its terrible consequences? Surely, the 'white' governments of Africa will not be sitting with folded arms. There will be more dangerous spots like the Congo which the U.N. is finding it so difficult to control. And then it will be extremely difficult. Who knows that it may not turn into global war, with the West and the East finding themselves in the opposite camps?

It would have been far better to retain South Africa in the fold and continue the attempts to convert it to the common-sense point of view. Nothing will be gained by expulsion. Let us remember how we have been trying to get New China admitted to the United Nations. Our argument is that if we find a seat for Communist China she will behave with a better sense of responsibility and become less belligerent.

When Japan left the League of Nations, that world body collapsed. Even though South Africa is wrong-headed and perverse, the Commonwealth would have stood to gain more by retaining the S.A. Union. Loss of a limb does not make one stronger. That is the grim truth.

INDIA MAGAZINE

SHORT STORY

BY K. SUDHAMA

EASY MOVE

It was like a case of jumping from 500 the frying-pan into the fire

WHENEVER I passed by the house at the western end of the street facing the small park, my eyes would automatically go up until they rested on a pretty woman leaning over the parapet wall. Dark she was but how beautiful! Her creeper-like slenderness and supple figure captivated my soul. It is true that no other woman had caught my fancy as this.

I often went into the park and sat on a cement bench from where I could feast my eyes on her unobserved. It was a disused park full of over-grown plants. The grassy path was full of thorns and you couldn't walk bare-footed. So nobody frequented the park and the only watchman had nothing to watch over. He would go to the neighbouring street and play bridge with a friend.

There was only one small dome light in the centre of the park and it shed a dim lustre after 7 p.m. I would lie on my back on the bench and look up at the woman and drink in her beauty.

A chokra would take tea to her in a tray and she would

spend nearly twenty minutes sipping at it. Every movement and gesture of hers were graceful. She had a room in the upper storey into which she now and then moved but she didn't stay there long. There was a powerful bulb which threw strong light not only over the terrace but also over a part of the park. So, you see, I could observe even the minutest of her movements.

It was clear to me that she was expecting some one. For three or four nights I observed that a man who might be about thirty-five or so, with his beard and whiskers unshaven with a furtive look about him would stand under a peepul tree in front of the house. He was strong and well built. With the beard off he might have been handsome. His dress too was not proper. The woman from the balcony would beckon to him to come up. There being no other house at that end opposite the park, nobody (but myself) witnessed this interesting scene. The man would hesitate for a while, would look this way and that, would satisfy himself that nobody was watching and then

INDIA MAGAZINE

in a jiffy would dart up the flight of stairs.

I saw them locked in each other's arms. She was love-starved and hungry for his kisses. After an hour or so, the old woman would loudly call for her daughter. "Manju, come down for the meal. It is past ten. Be quick."

The man would unceremoniously hurry out and Manju would begin to dress. I would gaze with open mouth at her perfect body—which seemed like the statue of a goddess that had suddenly become animate. Sometimes I saw the man coming back, pocketing something and disappearing quickly into the shades of the night. Once I wanted to follow him and find all about him but the attraction in the room above was great and I stayed on every night until eleven when she would go to bed and turn off the light. Then I would trek back wearily to the heart of the city where the bustle and hustle of traffic and the crowds on the roads would keep me on my toes.

One night after the mystery man had gone, the two women ran to the front of the house and shouted in terror; "Help! Help! There is a snake in the kitchen." But it was past ten-thirty and there was a sharp drizzle. No one was moving about in that God-forsaken place except myself. I dashed out of the park and approached the ladies. "Don't be afraid," I said. "Give me a strong stick or iron rod and show the place

where the snake is hiding. I will finish it."

Manju's mother led me in and showed the kitchen. I looked at the reptile and then laughed. "Ladies, it is only a water snake." So saying I caught hold of it by the tail without fear, went up to the park and threw it off there amidst the bushes. When I came back Manju spoke and her voice and behaviour showed her admiration for my resourcefulness and presence of mind. "You see, sir, the very sight of a serpent harmless or poisonous, paralyses us with fear. Anyway we thank you for reassuring us and giving us back our peace of mind."

Manju's mother pressed me to take a cup of tea. From that day onwards I was a regular visitor to their house. Already an unexpressed love had sprung up between us. At a glance I understood that they were on hard times and were looking for some source from which they could borrow. Once when I took out my pocket book a dozen hundred rupee notes fell on the floor. Manju picked them up and handed them to me. "Suppose I take them all and return the money after a time?" she asked me half-seriously and half-jokingly. I at once seized her right hand boldly and placed the notes on her palm. "They are yours. You may return them when and how you please. I shall place more at your disposal if you want it."

The old woman on learning of my generosity came to thank me

warm-heartedly and would not let me go without taking my meal. After food, Manju invited me to come up to the terrace. There under the moon, sitting close to me, her cheek brushing against mine like a rose petal she told me her story. The man who visited her every evening was her husband. He was wanted by the police on a charge of murdering an aunt and robbing her of her money. He was hiding for a year and Manju had to support him. He had been planning to disguise himself and run off to some foreign country. He had been earning Rs. 500 and maintaining the family. Now they were ruined and they did not know what fate was in store for them.

She was weeping and was in my arms before I made any move. My heart's desire was within my grasp. My heart was pounding fast. "Oh, you are marvellous," she whispered and sank in my arms again. "You will never leave me, will you?" she asked with new endearments. "Before God I swear I won't," I gave her a pledge.

It was the most exquisite hour of my life. Suddenly we were startled by loud footsteps on the staircase. There was a squad of policemen looking for her husband. But they caught me and led me to the station. I too was wanted by them in connection with some pocket-picking cases, you see!

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TRAGIC TRUTH

She had lost her heart to a man but was wise enough to marry the one who was devoted to her.....

"PREMA darling, you are far sweeter than before," said Jagdish, clutching the young woman by her shoulder. Come, sit close to me. Let me see your beautiful face once again. It is five years since we met, is it not?"

It was dark outside and the rain and wind were competing with each other to make the night gloomy and terrible. He turned a small bulb inside the car and he saw her looking radiantly lovely. He gasped as he looked at her wet blouse outlining her firm ripe figure.

But Prema was writhing in discomfort. She was almost near the brink of tears and she had difficulty in controlling them. She cursed herself and Fate for landing her in this awkward situation. She had been walking home from the picture-house after seeing the second show of a musical film which she had long been waiting to see. From her youth she was mad after pictures and when they had more than a good sprinkling of songs she

would see them at any cost. As a maiden she was living in sordid poverty and scraped money to see films as some means of escapism. Her mother toiled hard to feed herself and her daughter. She prepared cakes and sweets and sold them from door to door. Out of pity and sympathy many respectable families placed regular orders with her for the supply of her edibles. On occasions like the festival of lights they presented new clothes to both mother and daughter.

Prema had been petted and spoiled by her mother. Being an only daughter and delicate-looking, she was allowed by her mother Lakshmi to have her own way. Lakshmi was such a doting mother that she stinted and starved herself to give her daughter the best of food and clothes.

Prema was screen-struck and she went to see some picture once every two days. She dined money out of her mother or took advances from her customers and managed to see films regularly.

When she was grown up there were two young men who regularly escorted her and footed the bill. One of them was Sridhar and the other Jagdish. The latter was a very rich young man who had an indulgent father who allowed the widest latitude of freedom to the son. He was preoccupied with the pursuit of women and he did not mind if his son followed suit. He had a car of his own and naturally tempted Prema to have a ride with him whenever she was so inclined.

Sridhar was poor but he was earning a decent income as a canvassing agent for a cosmetic firm. Whenever he took out Prema he behaved like a gentleman to her and though he was very much in love with her he never took advantage of her poverty. He had strictly honourable intentions and had plans of approaching Lakshmi for her consent to his marriage with Prema.

The young woman was fascinated by the glamour boy Jagdish and was more free with her smiles in his presence. She exerted all her charms to win his favour. When Jagdish found the moment ripe he was quick and daring in his caresses. He sat with her in the dark corners of the theatres and flirted with her to his heart's content. It was clear that she was a fool and victim of his romances. One night when he took her to his own bungalow where there was not a soul she

fell into his trap. She had never seriously known before the mysteries or the implications of love. She went home weeping and was about to confess everything to her mother but held her tongue on second thoughts. Such a revelation about her affair might have far-reaching consequences. Her mother might blurt out the truth to her friends who might spread the scandal. She might burst into a fit of fury and scream her head off. Then she might prevent her from going out. And what about the pictures which were so necessary for her very existence? That evening she thought that the previous night's experience was not so awful or disgusting. So she dressed herself in her very best and sought out Jagdish. The affair went on merrily for two months until Sridhar seemed to know about her secret. He gently tackled her about it and drew out a confession from her. Then he gave her a solemn warning. "Jagdish is a rake. He has ruined many innocent young girls and he won't stick to any woman for more than a few months! He begged of Prema to think of her future. When she wept in remorse Sridhar promised to marry her if she gave a promise in return that she would not think of another man except himself.

She knelt at his feet and touched them with her hands in reverence and love. He raised her up, embraced her and kissed her for the first time. The very next day he had a talk with

AGREED!

"My wife and I agree on everything."

"Have you no opinion of your own?"

Lakshmi and obtained her ready consent to her daughter's marriage with him. He had forgiven her past folly and like a gentleman made no reference to her affair with Jagdish. They were truly happy until the call came from his company to go on tour for four months.

It was during her husband's absence that Prema saw the picture and was caught in the rain on her way back. And Jagdish picked her up and hustled her to his side. He signed to his driver to speed on and reach the bungalow. He dragged his former sweetheart into his arms and overwhelmed her with his kisses. The glamour boy had hypnotised her again and she made no vigorous protest when he led her up to his room.

When early in the morning she hurried back to her husband's home, she found Sridhar had returned in the night. He barred her entry and quietly told her to go back to her mother. He had sensed the whole tragic truth.

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3. Give at once the value of the product:
(6—1) (6—2) (6—3).....(6—9)
4. Give one word for: abnormal increase of currency.
5. Spot the misprint: No garden without its needs.
6. Straighten out GETMAN to give a word in Physics.
7. What part of the body is affected by Pyorrhoea?
8. Which is the longest river in India?
9. Is this word correctly spelt: ACCOMODATION?
10. What does A. B. C. stand for in the newspaper business?

(See Page 25 for Answers)

V. K. Doraswamy.

Short Story

By D. N. Devchand

THE FAIR FOOL

One mistake led into another. Jyoti saw the writing on the wall.....

EVERYONE in the town was shocked. Such a beautiful woman who looked so pretty and sultry, as Jyoti, was found hanging in her bedroom under mysterious circumstances. Her husband Sethna had returned home after an absence of several months. She was leading a gay care-free life. Her cousin Madan often came to her house to enquire how she was getting on.

Sethna had gone to a neighbouring town the previous evening to see his very old mother. He had suddenly conceived a great affection for his wife. He felt he had neglected her for long. He had been manager of a sugar mill far away, situated a little beyond civilization. Jyoti dutifully came to live with him but she was a passionate lover of city life and all the excitements and pleasures that go with it.

Near the mill life was very dull and uneventful. During the

night she was startled by the roar of wild beasts and she dreaded to go out even in daytime. So she told her husband that she would go back to the city. Since she and his mother often quarrelled and could not get on together Sethna permitted her to take up a separate house and live near his mother. They would meet once a week and exchange formalities. But the old lady was too old and infirm to move out of her house and she was already looking forward to her last journey from the earth.

Remittances from Sethna were prompt. She could command money at any time she wanted. He never questioned the items incurred by his wife. He honestly believed that a fashionable cultured woman like his wife should have the liberty to spend as much as he liked. He had full faith in her unshakable virtues. Though seemingly frivolous, she was true to her hus-

band. One or two friends of his hinted to him that a wife's place was by the side of her husband. But he paid no heed.

For some time, it is true, Jyothi remembered her marital vows though she did not love her husband with her full heart. She went to parties and pictures and was even flippant in her talk. But she cared greatly for appearances. She had male escorts but she kept them at arm's length when they tried to tempt her or made suggestions.

The only exception was Madan, her aunt's son, who was employed in a motor engineering firm. He was very tall, handsome and polished in his ways. He had plenty of money and no worries. He often did not know what to do with his salary and allowance which were surplus cash. At the instance of his mother and Sethna himself, he paid periodical visits to Jyoti and enquired after her health and welfare.

At first Jyoti was indifferent to her cousin but his engaging talk won her over completely soon. In his company she found time flying fast. Nobody mistook them as they moved like brother and sister. Some neighbours even thought so.

But a night of rain and thunder made all the difference and brought about a change in their lives. He had taken her out in his car after a hot day in office. The heat of summer was at its

NO TROUBLE

Lung Specialist: "It is my considered opinion that a man who sings at the top of his voice for an hour each day will never be troubled by chest complaints in his old age."

Student: "He probably won't even be troubled by old age."

worst, and they were panting for breath in the congested heart of the city. He suggested that she would accompany him in a drive for nearly thirty to forty miles and come back after cooling their heads. She jumped at his offer.

Soon the car was madly careering along the roads and reached a famous picnic spot in the country side. They spent some time gazing at the quiet landscape, but suddenly a violent wind began to blow. The sky was quickly overcast with thick, menacing clouds. Earth and sky were rent asunder by vivid flashes of lightning and loud peals of thunder.

Jyoti was jittery and scared and Madan's encouraging words were of no avail. Suddenly a thought occurred to him. He drove on with difficulty for two miles and reached an old traveller's bungalow. There were no tourists staying there at the time. Only an old watchman

was there. He was already half asleep in a cozy corner.

Madan tipped him handsomely, paid extra charges for a night's stay and got a large comfortable room with sofas, chairs and double bed. The room seemed almost sound-proof and when he brought in Jyoti she was delighted. A terrible storm had already broken out, and trees were uprooted by the hundred. The bungalow alone escaped the fury of the cyclone.

After a time, Madan rose to go to another room, instructing Jyoti to close the door and go to sleep without fear. But the young woman on an impulse ran up to him, and threw her arms round his neck. Madan had been expecting this romance to fructify for a long time though he was careful not to make the first move. He had been terribly in love with her.

Early next morning she rose with a guilty feeling but soon got over it. From that day Madan visited her house by stealth and stayed with her for a time. Nobody knew about this affair except the housemaid but she received high wages and kept silent.

Early one morning Jyoti was half awake. Madan was sleeping soundly. He had come rather late and did not leave the house at 5 a.m. as usual. He had always been discreet and

scrupulous. At that time Jyoti was aware that some one was staring through the window which was partially open. Horror of horrors! It was her mother-in-law's younger sister who had been sent by her with an important message from her son.

"So it has come to this. Oh poor Sethna! My poor Sethna! What a fool you are to be absent!" she muttered loudly to herself.

In the following week Sethna had mysteriously resigned his job and returned home all of a sudden. He went to see his mother to have a talk with her.

Jyoti knew that she had been discovered. She was too sensitive and sensed a change in her husband's attitude. She took an easy way out of her dishonour. She hanged herself to death.

THE BRUTE

"In a few years," said the artist to his landlord, "people will look at this miserable studio, and say: 'Arbuthnot, the famous artist, used to live here.'"

"If I don't get the rent by to-night, they'll be able to say that very thing tomorrow."

SHORT STORY

FINAL DECISION

BY B. G. TRIVEDI

The matron was too strict and would not tolerate any indiscipline.
The young nurse shivered in fear at her sight.....

DR. SAHAI and nurse Savitri wandered along the dark lonely avenue leading away from the hospital. It was past ten and the road was absolutely deserted. Between the overhanging branches the pair could glimpse the stars and the crescent moon forming a picturesque pattern among the leaves.

He led her on to a cement bench between two trees and they both sat close to each other, cheek to cheek. His arm was thrown round her neck and he was drawing her still closer into an embrace.

She gently resisted him. "Oh, Sahai, we are getting reckless, aren't we? Remember, please, I was transferred to this hospital only three months ago and

you are already taking me in your arms."

"What if?" retorted Sahai. He cupped her beautiful oval face in his palm and kissed her fiercely on the lips. "My dearest, no one knows when love comes into a person's life and how mad it will make its victim. It may come down on a man as a tornado descends on a town and will leave a trail of wrecked hearts. Shall I quote to you some poets on the glory and greatness of love, honey?"

She rested her head on his shoulder and asked him laughing. "Sahai, you have strayed into the wrong line. You should have been a poet and written instead of a doctor. What is the use of

your stethoscope except to determine the nature of illness? You have not obeyed the inclination of your heart in choosing this profession. Of that I am certain."

"You think so, Lady? You are wrong. I tell you, and I will show you how mistaken you are in holding that opinion," he said, shaking himself off. He got up from the bench, took out his stethoscope from his pocket and hung it round his neck. Pointing to it, he informed her in a mock serious tone, "Now, lady, I also at times examine hearts that become sick with love. I can suggest remedies also."

He then bent down and examined the heart of his companion, much to her amusement. He pretended to be very grave as he listened to her heart beats. "Your sentiments are a bit unstable, lady. Sometimes they make you burn hot and toss sleepless on the bed. Sometimes they turn you cold and make you indifferent to life and surroundings."

"Let me suggest the remedy. If you go on allowing your dictates of the heart to get the better of your head, there is danger, I warn you. What you need every evening after sunset—preferably after 10 p.m.—the last thing before going to bed—is half a dozen kisses, one or two warm hugs. I will show you here and now how it is to be done."

Suiting his words to action, he clasped her tight in his arms and

kissed her and crushed her to his heart's content and left her breathless. "That is the right tonic, young lady, and that leads the way to the altar of matrimony. Now will you still contradict the fact that I know something about hearts?"

Dazed and happy, she consulted her tiny wrist watch and exclaimed, "Ouch! it is five minutes to eleven and I have to be in the hospital on the stroke of the hour. I have to run along, Doc."

Sahai tugged at her arm to restrain her from going alone. "I shall come along with you and leave you at the gates. Promise to wait for me at the same hour as today. We shall have to probe this matter of the heart still further and analyse the results of our research work."

She just nodded assent and walked arm in arm though at a rapid pace. The matron was a strict disciplinarian and was very harsh and severe upon Savitri in particular. Though she was forty-six and had a far from pleasant visage she had fallen in love with Sahai and fancied that he too was fond of her in his own way. He was considered the most handsome bachelor and had wrecked more hearts than mended them. Girls simply ran wild after him. Matron Madhu fell foul of any nurse who crossed her path. It was now Savitri who incurred the full displeasure and fury of the matron. She wrote daily some remarks about Savitri's incompe-

tence for the job. But the senior authorities simply ignored her effusions and no action was taken. This made Madhu more furious and unbalanced. When she came late even by two minutes she called for a written explanation.

This night in particular Madhu had seen Sahai going out into the night with Savitri and she was glowering with rage. When Savitri reported for duty it was ten minutes past eleven. "It is impossible to maintain discipline with such a frivolous woman like you! I will see to it that either you are suspended or I shall resign my post. One of us must get out, that is certain," she shouted thumping the table.

Early next morning as soon as she finished her work Savitri went to Dr. Sahai's residence and knocked at the door. The surprised male attendant informed her that he was still asleep and requested her to wait.

But hearing the noise, Doctor Sahai himself came out to see who the caller was. He was astonished at the sight of his red-eyed sweetheart and at once sensed that something must have happened in the hospital. He took her into his study and seated her on a sofa. But no sooner did she start to speak than she burst into a flood of tears. Then mastering her emotions she told him of her decision to resign with immediate

TOO THICK

SHE: "How do you like my new coat?"

He (looking at her face): "Fine, only you got it on too thick!"

effect and return home. She had had enough of that wretched matron Madhu who would not brook the sight of a cheerful smile or youthful appearance.

He bent down and kissed away her tears, slowly taking her in his arms. "That is allright Your decision suits me too, dearest. I was about to ask you to resign. We are going to marry tomorrow and when I introduce you to Madhu as my wife, turn up your nose at her. Won't that be funny?"

She was too happy to speak and only laughed.

—o—

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Short Story

By Vijaya Mehra

A PROMISE TO KEEP

Marriage and love complicated matters for Ashok.

It was the worst period of trial for him...

ASHOK was the very picture of sorrow and dejection. He was in the depths of gloom which no amount of coffee could dispel. He paced the room numberless times, with his hands locked behind his back. He shook his head and tried to close his eyes and thereby shut out the scene that danced before his mind. He was in a terrible fix; he didn't know what to do.

To any outsider it should have been a matter of jubilation for Ashok. His marriage was coming off in three days. The wedding party was to leave for the bridal place in Rajkot. They were all agreed that the bride-to-be was a charming girl who would prove to be the ornament of any household. Brinda was not educated beyond the elementary stage in the school but she was intelligent and well behaved. She went to the temple every evening and offered prayers to Goddess Devi. The man who won her hand must be very lucky indeed, so they said. Ashok's

parents and sisters were very happy about the choice and were greatly impressed with the girl. They had even begun to talk about Brinda as one of their family and were busy planning what portfolio in the household should be assigned to her as soon as she joined them.

But Ashok alone was scared stiff. The whole thing was distasteful to him even from the betrothal stage. His heart was not in it and he had told himself so several times.

The truth was that he had already given his heart to some other woman. He had been married before but he lost his wife under tragic circumstances. His first wife Malini was a perfect little beauty full of symmetrical proportions. Whenever she went out in the streets she drew many admiring male glances. She walked with a proud, graceful bearing and there was dignity every inch of her. True, Ashok was very much in love

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with her during the first few months after marriage. The admiration that other men had for her made him very jealous and possessive. Malini too was very happy but that happiness was only a brief spell:

Malini suffered three miscarriages and the doctors in the hospital advised her to go back to her parents' home and take complete rest for at least six months. This, they said, would restore her to normal health and make her fit enough to resume her marital relation. Ashok was really anxious that his wife should go home and stay away from him for some time. So he readily accepted the doctors' advice and took his wife to her parents' village.

But his mind was fickle and he could not help staring at other beautiful women. Very near the office where he worked there was a block of flats occupied by people of all sorts and classes. He had a friend there whom he visited often. He noticed a buxom woman—a comparative newcomer who had rented an apartment on the fourth floor. She wore flimsy dress which hardly hid her attractive breasts and besides she had a well-built figure. Whenever she passed by Ashok which was often—she directed her killing looks at him and he became enamoured of her at once.

The friend whom he tapped for information told him that the new-comer was one Leela, one of the dramatic troupe which went

THE OPPOSITE!

'WHATEVER you say I shall believe the exact opposite', said the judge.

'Guilty!' said the accused.

on tour from place to place. She was next in importance to the leading actress. The troupe was likely to stay in the city for another three months since their drama, so full of songs and dance numbers, was having a record run. When the friend added that he was vacating his room and going to join his family in the next town, Ashok took it over and paid the rent.

He remained there every night till one or two a.m. and then only went to his parents' home in the suburb. His parents and sisters thought that Ashok was distraught with grief over the prolonged absence of his dearly beloved wife and he was trying to overcome his feeling of loneliness. They never questioned him about his movements, and left him to himself.

Meanwhile, Leela had sensed his motives and understood why he had taken up a room. She sent Ram, who was living with her, to speak to Ashok. Ram, though tall and sturdy, was a timid fellow and made a hesitant approach to Ashok. He invited him to his flat for a chat over a cup of tea.

But Ashok was nervous and scared. Supposing the husband became jealous and fell foul of him, what was to be done? Anyhow he took a risk and went up. Leela welcomed him with a smile. She was more provocatively dressed than before. Her nylon sari was more revealing and more daring. Her companion also was cordial and he talked to him for a few minutes. Then he suddenly jumped up. "Leela, I forgot to see the Manager. I am going to the company's headquarters and may return only in the morning." He then snatched a bag and walked out.

Leela drew him into a long conversation and learnt about his marriage and his present loneliness. She told him that from her twelfth year she was with the troupe and was quite comfortable. Her perfume and the nearness of her soft velvety body were too overwhelming to Ashok. He just bent down and kissed her on the neck. "I apologize to you, Leela, for what I have done. But you are too lovely and I couldn't resist it. I shall go now. Your husband may return any time and may get furious with me."

"Husband, indeed! No, he is just a companion, going on my errands. He is not even my lover" she said, and pulling Ashok into

her arms, she turned off the light.

He had become her slave. Her word was law. When Malini returned he neglected her. She went back home and drowned herself in the river, knowing that her husband had transferred his affections to another woman.

Leela knew of her hold on Ashok. He begged of her to stay with him and not to go with the dramatic troupe. She consented to stay on condition he would think of having no other woman in his life. She exacted a solemn promise from him before a picture of Lord Krishna whom he worshipped. Soon she gave birth to a boy and this made matters more complicated.

Now, was he to marry again or keep his promise given in all solemnity to Leela? By morning the wedding party had to start by train and he had to wear a new outfit suitable to the occasion. Leela was creating a scene whenever he visited her. He thought for long and came to a decision. By midnight when everybody was asleep he took a little box and left the house—and vanished into the darkness. Till today there has been no trace of him.

Answers to Quiz for Fun

- 1 Short 2 Brilliant 3 Zero 4 Inflation 5 Weeds 6 Magnet
- 7 Gums 8 The Ganges 9 No 10 Audit Bureau of Circulation

A NEW NOVEL BEGINS:

GRANNY'S TRIUMPH

Instalment One

By P. VENKATESAN

HIS Granny, like everybody's granny, was an old woman. Really old, too, but with a difference. She had been old and wrinkled for the twenty years that he had known her. The women of the neighbourhood said that she had once been young and blithe, but that was hard to believe for her grandson. Old, so terribly old that she could not have grown a day older. He was even certain that she had stayed on at the same age, ever since he could remember.

That day she said as he was starting out for the evening, "Why don't you fetch some good jaggery and coconut from the market, Giri?" Girishan had planned to go towards the river bank that evening and not to the fly-ridden market place, and he felt reluctant to oblige her. But she was insistent. She reminded him.

"Tomorrow is Thaipooam".

"What's that, Granny? Then-gai Paisam?" he cried.

"The Poosam Festival" Granny corrected him, ignoring his joke.

"Oh....."

"I want certain things for use tomorrow. It's not for me! It's only to make some sweet stuff for you".

"Really! then do prepare Thengai Paisam, Granny. Please do" he almost pleaded jumping with joy. Granny prepared several sweets with her deft hands. One on each occasion. Gulab-Jaman, Rasagulla, Burfi, Jalebi. But Girishan's mouth watered for Thengai Paisam; that was his favourite.

Granny also seemed to have felt pleased and she smiled broadly. Girishan thought that now was the time to work up matters and he shouted, "Rami, Rami". The servant woman soon appeared on the threshold and stood outside by a sack of rice, leaving a respectable distance in between.

But a lady, who was the wife of a district judge, cannot be

put off so easily. And besides, the presence of the unclean servant woman was distasteful to her. She simply could not brook the idea of sending her to the market. She said sternly.

"Rami is no good. If you're not going, I'll go myself."

A trick occurred to Girishan. He suddenly feigned backache and slumped down on the bed. Ten minutes and Granny would forget her errand. Oh, Eh.....

Ten minutes. Girishan found to his bewilderment Granny standing before the bed ready to administer her treatment with the brick. She had not forgotten to bring Velu and Muthu too, her neighbour's servants, to hold the patient tight, if need be from fretting.

Hot sweat, hotter than the brick which Granny held in her hand, stood on Girishan's brow. You have seen clothes being ironed. Clothes, yes. But have you ever even heard of human beings pressed hot? Monstrous, indeed, it would be if the latter. Yet, it was quite a common practice under the roof of No. 17, in Prasanna Vinayagar Koil Street. When Granny had a backache, she got someone to run a warm brick over her back. She knew there was nothing like localised heat for releasing aches and pains and what could be better than a flat heated brick for applying heat to the exact spot? There was also a fable widely current in Malnad that Dr. Vajapayee, the famous

physician, first learned this art of brick-therapy at her feet though he called his brick differently (Infra-red lamp).

And today when her grandson complained of backache, Granny prepared herself to practise her ancient art of healing.

To escape the ordeal Girishan lost no time in confessing his guilt; grumbling a great deal, he got up, dressed himself and started out to do the marketing for Granny.

* * *

As he passed through the Grocer's lane and neared "The Thambi's Cafe" Girishan came to a halt and debated whether or not he should have his tiffin. Iddlies were really a speciality in this fixed-price eating-house and would be hot even up to midnight.

Before making up his mind he looked at the illuminated clock at the criss-cross of the road. It was a quarter past nine. He remembered that Granny would be waiting for him at home with her food cooked in the morning and now gone horribly cold. It was also the fag-end of the month and out of the twelve rupees she allowed him for his sundry expenses, he had only some small change left in his pocket. This sum was the equivalent of six iddies without coffee, or three iddies with coffee, whichever he preferred. But if he restricted himself to just one iddy and a cup of coffee, he would have a balance

sufficient to meet his bus-fare (up-end only) to college for the remaining two days of the week. Anyway he had to go without smoking. There was a touch of melancholy at the thought. This last was his chief extravagance and his principal amusement of an evening after boredom in college.

A moment's reflection. He walked on. "I shall go home straight," he told himself and strode rapidly along.

* * *

Climbing the steps of the verandah, Girishan heard Granny talking inside with someone in a loud voice.

It was Gopi, the Secretary of the National Cultural Club, that had come for him. It appeared he had come at 7 O'clock itself and was waiting. Of course, he was all along being regaled! Granny had a knack of engaging anyone (be he a gay or gloomy visitant) in lively conversation for any length of time. She had a fund of her paternal episodes to narrate in detail. Tonight she had pitched upon her father's father who had taught at the Tamarind School; he had been no ordinary brain; he had been different from the others. He had solved the most difficult problems in a moment but made mistakes in summing up dhobi's bills; He had been known as Mathematics Subramaniaiyar by one and all.....

"He must have been a very learned man", ventured the

N. C. C. man. Evidently her gab got on his nerves. That an interruption might perhaps check her further flow of talk, was his desperate hope.

But Granny only corrected him, "He was a very learned man", and went on; "They say that the great grandfather is born again as the great grandson. And our little Giri has the same nose and the same forehead as he had".

It was at this juncture Girishan intervened and put an end to Granny's prattle. "But why the deuce has the fellow come that night?" he thought. He ransacked his mind without success. Then abruptly he asked, tapping him on the shoulder, "What do you want with me, Gopi?"

Gopi began to laugh.

"You remember your old promise?"

"No", said Girishan promptly, to be on the safe side.

"You promised that I could count on you for an article any time I was hard-pressed for one. You must help me now. You know we are going to have the Cultural Renaissance Week soon, and we are going to bring out a souvenir on the occasion. I couldn't get any one to write on a very humorous subject."

"What's that about?" Girishan asked, interrupting him, rather anxiously.

"Decoying, of course" said Gopi coolly.

"You mean girl decoying".

"Yes".

"I am a Sociology student. I can't write on that subject. O! what a topic! My professor will eat me up."

"Don't worry. I won't put your name".

"But why not some other topic?" Girishan almost pleaded, for he could not brook the thought of his article appearing in print without his name appended to it. "Any other topic, any other subject please".

"Impossible," said Gopi and shook himself free.

Girishan threw another "please" but this time the Secretary made a bid to go.

"All right". Girishan at last agreed. "But you must surely print my name you know", he entreated.

* * *

Granny's call again sounded from the kitchen. "Do you want your food or not?"

"Yes, but just to please you; that is all. I am not hungry, I must tell you that" Girishan replied.

But this was a patent lie. Hunger was gnawing his vitals. Of course he knew he could not but opt to swallow the cold stuff. In fact he pleaded lack of appetite just to make Granny know that and warm him up to dine.

Granny knew her grandson well. She softly came to him and said very earnestly, "You must eat your dinner, my boy". And as if for a distinguished guest, she bustled about the store-room which was only a portion of the kitchen partitioned off with a cupboard of pickles. She cleansed his platter and placed it before him, filled his tumbler with hot water and drew the bronze rice pot nearer and sat down in order to be able to serve him without getting up again.

Girishan ate in silence, took a drink of water (partially cooled by now) out of the tumbler that was by his side. He suddenly remembered about the article, and hurried over the remnants in his dining plate. He was going to pen his maiden article right that night. God knew what was in store for him. Perhaps his long cherished dream of becoming an author might come true. He felt like discussing all his future plans with Granny but soon dismissed the idea. He knew it would be no good ever talking to Granny about his aspirations. All that was completely beyond her comprehension. She could understand only edibles and dinner and procuring a Government clerkship in order to adjust the family economy. No use talking to her about anything else. Best to sit up by himself and start his cherished career. Everything has a beginning.

He said to his Granny, "I'm now going to write an article."

Perhaps I may have to sit up the whole night. You mustn't mind my keeping awake."

* * *

Once in his room which was a thatched hut upstairs, Girishan said to himself, "Come, I must get to work".

He first adjusted his table light, which cast curious shadows of his head on the pad and then set to work. But just then he found that he had nothing to write on except a quire of brown paper. That was a drawback, but he could make use of the sheets by writing in a bold hand. After all the first effort was going to be just a rough one. He dipped his pen in the inkpot and wrote at the top of the page in his best hand "DECOYING". He neatly wrote the word in capital letters. Then he searched his brain for an apt introductory sentence.

Ten minutes.

He still remained with his forehead propped on his hand, his pen poised and his eyes fixed on the quire of brown paper spread out in front of him.

What was he to say? Of all that he had read about in his ancient cultural history, he could now remember nothing, not a single anecdote or fact, absolutely nothing. Suddenly it occurred to him that he must have some really good paper to begin with, and not that dirty paper. He remembered that he had in his cupboard still some stock of his old College examination papers which he had once managed to

smuggle out with the active co-operation of the office peon, Tirumalai.

Fetching them, he opened the white sheets full length and again wrote at the top of the page, "DECOYING". But this time no decoration business, he told himself and went straight to the heart of the matter.

"Decoying is an art and, as such, it is neither purely a skill nor wholly a gift. It is a combination of both, you might say....."

Then he broke off, not knowing how to lead up to what was to follow, the Prelude, the history, etc. Ten minutes of reflection, he decided to postpone the introductory page till the following day and to proceed at once to a description of its technique. And he wrote down:

"Firstly, the students of decoying should start with," But he failed to produce anything further. In his mind's eye he beheld various devices,—dressing in one's best with stiff "pucker-free collared shirts, tweed pants, flinging meaningful glances, etc. etc., but he could not hit upon a single phrase or word to express what he knew of the art. He scanned through the mountainous quantity of reference material he had around him and after a mighty effort, produced the caption; "Fundamentals of identification....."

He then threw his pen down and rose from his chair and put off the light. He got disenchanted with his own fancied talent.

(To be continued)

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WOMAN'S PAGE

GEMS AND GLAMOUR

DRAMATIC jewels set the glamour tempo for most women, giving pleasure that lasts a lifetime. Famous beauties through the ages have had their preference. Cleopatra collected pearls and emeralds, some of which were engraved with her own image. Catherine the great liked unusual gems Brazilian aquamarines, Siberian Beryl, Uralian amethysts. Unhappy Marie Antoinette had a passion for diamonds and once owned the famous Regent diamond (143 karats), now in the Louvre in Paris.

Many of the world's most famous gem stones have belonged to British queens. In the 16th century Queen Elizabeth treasured her pearls, and loved countless strands. Queen Victoria was especially jewel-conscious and the jewellery of her era is still very elegant and still worn fashionably. She admired opals and increased their popularity.

The late Queen Mary was especially fond of jade, although she loved all jewels, having many diamonds, opals, sapphires and also emeralds in her collection. Gracious Queen Mother Elizabeth cherishes pearls, collects coral and treasures a turquoise given her as a wedding present by the late King George VI. The turquoise, which is said to bring success in love and money, is the birthstone for December, as is lapis lazuli, known in medieval times as a cure for melancholy and fever.

Queen Elizabeth II has exquisite taste in jewels. She loves diamonds and has inherited many fabulous gems. Her collection, accumulating rapidly, will probably be one of the finest ever assembled.

Small stones can also be used to trace a design on one of the new gold dome rings so chic today. While not many of us have discarded wrist watches

besprinkled with small diamonds if we have, these sametiny chips can be reset in the band of our newest watch. A pair of gold earrings will look precious and elegant if set with the tiniest of discarded heirloom stones, no matter how small.

There's another good reason for taking stock of older, though genuine stone jewellery. To be absolutely up to date, jewellery should have a modern look, no matter whether it is "real" or "costume."

Haven't you noticed, especially among more mature women, even though they are impeccably dressed and up-to-date fashion-wise, how an old-fashioned pin will spoil the whole effect? In having a piece of real jewellery remodelled, you lose none of its exquisite taste and beauty. Real stones are always good.

Diamonds particularly are glamorous and provide inimitable sparkle wherever worn.

Glamorous ladies of the past were less fortunate than we are today. "Costume" jewellery with a handicraft look which defies even a connoisseur to detect it from real precious stones was unheard of. Today, when fashion is in such an elegant mood, appropriate jewellery is more important than ever. It provides just the right foil for subdued colours, the slim silhouette and the need for contrasting textures. Just as one costume is not suitable for all occasions, there's

SO SURE

The timid little man rose to leave.

"Do you have to go home early — as usual?" exclaimed an irritated associate. "What are you—a man or a mouse?"

"A man, of course," he replied with dignity.

"What makes you so sure?" asked his tormentor.

"Because," explained the little man meekly, "My wife is afraid of mice."

correct jewellery for every ensemble, and almost everyone can afford good costume jewellery.

Multiple bracelets have been the vogue for a season or so but are still favoured, though some bangle bracelets are wider this season, studded with semi-precious stones, with the wider part of the bracelet covering the wrist, the narrow side beneath. Narrow bracelets are best worn in groups, while chain bracelets are especially good-looking, perfect complements to chic short gloves.

Certainly jewellery was never more exciting and costumes never more elegant as a background.—G.C.

Short Story

By T. K. Ramachandran

RIFT IN THE LUTE

She was starving and desperate. And she wreaked her vengeance in an unusual way.....

WHEN Prema knocked at the door her mother opened it with a whisper. "Your husband came back an hour ago. He saw me fondling the baby and asked where I was. I said you had gone to the temple. Baby is in the cradle now. Go up and talk to him."

She climbed up the stair-case with deliberate slowness and uncertain steps. She wondered what he would say about her absence. Had he made any discovery? Fear clutched at her throat but the next instant she calmed herself. As she stepped into the room he was reading a novel with great interest and looked up only when she stood before him. He got up with a smile and stretched out his arms. They were locked in a tight embrace and he eagerly sought her lips.

"You are sweet as ever," he murmured. "I don't know how I managed to carry on without you. A railway sorter's job is always like that. For me the nights are days and vice versa."

Both laughed as he led her on to the bed and impatiently pulled at her dress. "I have weaned baby," she told him, sinking on the pillows with him. "He drinks only cow's milk now." He switched off the light and the room was plunged into darkness. There was a shaft of moonlight filtering through the cracked shutter of a window and it fell on the cot, revealing their bodies.

The next day as he returned from the bazaar with a cloth bag of household requisites he looked sullen and morose. "Prema," he called her. "I met my old auntie, Jumna Ba. She said you are always going home late after attending temple worship and the bhajans. Then it appears you go to some friends' houses and chat with them. Your mother is there of course to look after baby but I don't approve of a wife who does not return home by 7 p.m. On alternate weeks I go on tour and I can't check your movements. But can't you behave decently? My auntie was derisive in her laughter and said something

about powerless husbands and wayward wives."

"That wretched old hag can never keep a civil tongue in her head. She is the worst scandal-monger in this town," said Prema, scorn blazing in her eyes.

Satish sprang from his chair in a sudden burst of anger, seized hold of her pigtail, gave her stinging slaps on the face and threw her down. He kicked her hard in the bottom until she screamed. Then he put on his shirt and coat and left for his office. All the time Prema's mother and baby too, cried aloud.

It was only after half an hour that the pathetic chorus died down. The mother raised the daughter to a sitting posture, smoothed her hair with a comb and gave her a cup of hot tea to forget her pain.

"Once a month he creates such a scene," wailed Prema's mother, "His aunt is a devil incarnate. I am watching for an opportunity to wring her neck and throw her body into a well. One of these days I mean to do it whatever comes."

Prema wiped her tears and fondled baby on her lap. "He speaks and behaves as if he is a lord born with a silver spoon. He knows we are starving and he gives us just one-third of his salary. I never thought he would let us down so badly. When he comes home he expects to be entertained like a prince. All the favourite dishes that he

names must be prepared in pure ghee and he eats like a wolf. Where is money for all this?"

"Several times I have asked him to pay more every month but he has turned a deaf ear. How he lectures me on wifely duties. You have married me to a nice man indeed."

"Prema's mother threw up her hands in despair. "What am I to do? We never thought he would degenerate so. When your father and I saw him for the first time he was amiable and well-behaved. After seeing you he said he would either marry you or remain a bachelor all his life. He promised to take every possible care of you and so we consented to the marriage. Your father has left me a helpless widow and we two are thrown on his mercy. Oh, God! How I wish that my life was ended here and now!"

She beat her head with both her hands until Prema came and embraced her. Both wept together and parted. The daughter forgot her grief and put on her best clothes and made up her face like a glamour girl. She took a red plastic purse and sallied out. She asked her mother to take every possible care of baby and keep awake until her return.

She hired a cycle rickshaw and travelled five miles to the Cantonment area. Night had set in and the street lights began to twinkle. Opposite the hospital entrance she got down from the rickshaw and dismissed it after paying the fare. She showed a

token to the watchman at the gate who at once admitted her. She went into the special ward and approached the last bed. A young woman, who was a pitiful bag of bones was stretched on it, her eyes closed.

"Mala," she called in a low soft voice.

She opened her eyes and beamed welcome.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

The patient shook her head.

"I am a burden to my husband and to my parents. Prema, when I am gone, get a good girl for my husband. I hope and pray she will make him happy. For a whole week he has been by my side. My parents have come today and they will watch over me. Prema dear, don't forget me when I am gone. The ties of friendship that were formed in our school-days should never be severed—even after death."

Her husband Vishnu quietly entered and smiled at the visitor. The patient looked at him and urged him to go home and take rest. "I am anxious that you shouldn't break down," she urged.

After some hesitation he left the hospital, after giving some instructions to his father-in-law and mother-in-law.

Prema left a few minutes later. She found Vishnu waiting for her at the gate. "What do you think of her condition? Do you think she will recover soon?"

There were tears in her eyes. "Her life is in God's hand and let us hope for the best. Now it is getting late. Mr. Vishnu. I have to go back five full miles to reach my place."

"I shall engage a tonga for you and leave you safe near your house. Please come to my house and wait outside while I go in and change my clothes. My present dress is awful."

She waited for more than half an hour. He must be bathing, she knew. The lights were burning and she went in to hurry him up. He was just combing his hair and a pleasant perfume was emanating from his direction. "I am sorry to keep you waiting like this," he said apologetically and invited her to sit next to him.

When he finished his toilet he came close. "You are far prettier than I thought, Prema," he said, suddenly seizing her in his arms.

In her heart of hearts she knew she had come only for this—the culmination of a long secret romance. She buried her face in his shoulder and wept and told him of the cruelty at home. "I just heard your husband is running after a low-class woman," he whispered.

She gave him a kiss and stayed in his arms for a long hour. When they emerged from the house it was past ten. She held fast to her purse which he had filled with his money.

IN A LIGHTER VEIN

MISSED A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

BY T. RAJAGOPALAN

EVEN after his continued sojourn in foreign countries Srinivasan looked with a sense of repulsion at the English way of hair-dressing. It always pleased him to see women with long plaits swinging like a pendulum as they walked. Whenever his matrimonial issue was raised he told his mother he would marry any girl with long hair even though she was not very much good to look at. 'Long hair turns even ugly women beautiful,' he would exclaim. His adoring and extolling women with long hair was resented by his sister Lakshmi because she had a braid like a rat's tail about which she was always self-conscious. To secure a lady of Srinivasan's dream and desire his mother was prepared to wait for any length of time to have such a lady as his wife.

One evening towards sun-down, Srinivasan and his friend Sharma, dressed immaculately, went to an exhibition where there was a sea of humanity. Many lasses were there parading their beauty, mostly made up. Srinivasan's heart jumped with joy when he saw a lady at a distance with a long plait, longer than he liked, who was making some purchases. His eyes sparkling with curiosity leapt to see her face. Dragging the hand of his friend, he walked fast towards her. For his curiosity he would have galloped towards her like a swift-footed horse but for the hustling crowd. But by the time they reached that place she had moved away from there and was going out of the gate.

Soon these two were on the road chasing her as a hungry tiger would chase its kill. Sharma,

unable to equal his friend in his fast walk stopped in the middle. Srinivasan didn't care to pick him up lest he should lose sight of her. Her desire to see her, naturally gained an upper hand at that moment. When he was at a fairly close distance to her, as ill-luck would have it she entered a bungalow without affording him a chance to see her face. He looked this way and that at the bungalow to see her, even at the risk of appearing like a man in suspicious circumstances. But she didn't at all come out. Disappointment was writ large on his forehead. Meanwhile his friend joined him and they left, Srinivasan wringing his hands in despair.

But a silver-lining in the cloud was he was able to make a note of the house. So the possibility of having a look at her was still open to him. He thought that if he passed that way daily he was sure to see her at least once. Twilight was lingering still and darkness had not yet set in. His friend left for his house lest he should court the anger of his father if he went home late. But Srinivasan trudged along to the river-bank and sat on the sands. He was revolving many thoughts in his mind about her, imagining so many things till it was quite dark, all the while scribbling undecipherable letters on the sand.

He reached home with a dispirited countenance. His sister questioned him about it, but her voice didn't enter his consciousness until she shook him

heavily catching hold of his arms and cried: 'Seenu.'

He looked up at her and said with mild reproach: 'Lakshmi, please don't disturb me. Leave me alone.'

'No I won't,' she said with emphasis and stood her ground. 'You must reply me why you are not your usual self today.'

Srinivasan kept silent for a while and said: 'Missed a golden opportunity.'

'What! did you pitch upon any girl of your choice?' she asked smiling.

'Yes, Lakshmi,' he replied, rather involuntarily.

'May I know who that blessed woman's.'

'Had I known her why should I be like this?' he said with dejection, 'I saw her this evening in the exhibition. Oh! what fine long hair she had, you know. I followed her but before I overtook her she entered the house, not enabling me to see her face.'

She, instead of sympathising with him, broke into a peal of laughter at his disappointment and was about to leave him when he stopped her and said: 'Lakshmi, I'll tell you where her house is. Will you kindly for my sake meet and make her your friend?'

'And then make her my sister-in-law,' she smiled with mockery.

'Yes, Lakshmi,' he said anxiously.

—Contd. on Page 41

SHORT STORY

By S. K. DATTARAM

AN EXQUISITE EVENING

*She was as clever as she was beautiful....
She invited him for a chat and a meal.....
and for a merry time.*

AS I was preparing the statement of account for submission to the manager, Janaki, the girl typist, swept past my table. There was a trail of perfume that overpowered me. "You have forgotten your lunch, Mr. Mohan. What will your wife think when she returns next month and finds you so famished?"

She laughed like a new bell and smiled sweetly on me. She was about to sail towards the canteen when I accosted her. "Miss Janaki, when you have had your bite, will you please type this personal letter for me?"

"By all means, Mr. Mohan. I will send you the typed sheet and the envelope in time for posting. Don't talk to me please for paying for these little services. That

is nothing. I will get offended if you mention money again."

She went a few steps towards the exit, glanced at my slip of paper, folded it and put it inside her blouse. Then suddenly she turned back, "Mr. Mohan, I shall wait for you at the canteen". It took me fifteen more minutes to finish the tabulation. I shoved my papers into the drawer, straightened my tie and started for the canteen.

We all knew that Janaki was a flirt though of a cautious type. Where women are concerned I am a very curious fellow. That prying nature was born with me and I suppose I can never overcome it. I am the father of three children and supposed to have a better sense of responsibility. My friends and neighbours credit me with high intelligence and

speak of me as a man of integrity and polish.

My wife thinks I am like the traditional hero who would observe "eka patni vratha"—who would be content with one woman for one life. If the reader will excuse my frankness I would like to confess I was the pet of two love-starved women in my teens—before I married. It was an elderly woman who was living with her grown-up sons. She was living next door to ours and she often invited me to share her food or read under her lamp with her sons. My parents were too poor and were glad when I proved less burdensome to them.

So I would go there and spend most of the time. Sometimes I would read by her lamp and drop off to sleep and would get up early in the morning. One night when the lamp had been blown out and it was pitch dark all around she seduced me and taught me the mysteries of life. At first I felt ashamed and disgusted but somehow I grew to relish it.

Some women on the hunt have an innate sense that enables them to find out whether a particular man is susceptible to their charms and set to work immediately. It was so in the case of a widow who was the mistress of a very old but rich man who visited her twice a fortnight. He approved of her choice of me as an errand boy. I used to carry her messages discreetly to the old man and ran to the bazaar to buy her household requisites. She paid me a small sum every

month which I passed on to my needy parents. Besides, I was her secret lover behind the old man's back. Only I got tired of her and walked out. My college days were over and I had to seek a decent full-time job.

Dear reader, how silly of me! I should have set down my impressions of Janaki first, is it not? In the first month she came to serve in our office she wore a faded saree. There was a rent in it which she hid tactfully. But she was very efficient. She had her education in a convent school. Indeed she was as efficient as she was good-looking. Even her shabby dress could not obscure her magnetic charms. The Manager, usually hard-headed and close-fisted, gave her liberal advance and asked her to get some sarees and other sartorial equipment. Once while suddenly opening his door to consult him on an item of office expenditure, I saw Janaki sitting on his lap. He was kissing her and crumpling her dress. I withdrew in haste and approached him only next day.

The boss was usually a very orthodox man, very much devoted to his wife and children. But the fair newcomer had tempted him with her coquettish ways. Rather, it would be incorrect to say that she took the initiative in such matters. Her beauty was stunning and intoxicating and any man looking at her could not help burning with desire. She was so perfect—fair complexion, black hair, a body full of voluptuous curves that her flimsy dress hardly attempted

to hide. That is why our rishis of yore ran away from temptations and took refuge in forests or caves. So the puranas emphasise this truth.

And in that office we were not saints, to be sure. The men ran after her and I knew that she was liberal with her favours. But none talked about her in the office. We all knew the manager's fondness for her and were strictly formal with her.

This time the boss was down with typhoid and it was a safe bet that he would not get up from bed for another month. A very old senior clerk was acting for him and nobody was afraid of him. He was too good and docile even to speak sternly or rebuke the servants.

I used to give Janaki personal letters for typing and she would readily oblige. But we were more free in the absence of the boss. Now she had invited me to the canteen. She was alone in a corner sipping tea and apparently waiting for me. The rest of the staff had already gone back to their seats as it was past two.

"Mr. Mohan," she said as soon as I began attacking a toast, "you yourself told me you are feeling lonely at home since your wife is away. Why not come to my house and see my mother and elder sister? They would be delighted to meet you. Come this evening with me. Another thing. You must have your meal with us. That is a promise, isn't it? Are you hesitating?"

I was excited. "With pleasure" I said. "I will be charmed to visit you all. It is O.K." I told her.

I couldn't concentrate on my work and I was constantly consulting my wrist-watch. As previously arranged I went to the bus terminus in the evening where Janaki joined me. When we reached her home it was 7.30. To add to my romantic mood there was a full moon overhead and the entire landscape was bathed in a flood of light.

There was only her mother to receive us and she spoke a few nice words to me on being introduced. She then went into the kitchen and quickly prepared a meal.

"I am sorry, Mohan," said Janaki with an apologetic air. "My sister has gone to our brother's house and will come back late."

She took me into her room after the meal which we had eaten in silence. She gave me a pan and then sat close to me. "Don't you know, Janaki, that I love you with all my heart?" I whispered. My arm slid round her waist and I pressed my lips against hers in a passionate kiss. She responded with warmth and ardour and together we stayed until midnight. Then she begged of me to go home as it was wise to keep up appearances.

Back home I got back a little of my sense which had deserted me that day. The insurance cover I had received from a friend for Rs. 400 was missing from my pocket. The letter I had asked Janaki to type was in acknowledgement of its receipt.

ARTICLE

HIRAKUD:

A Tourists' Paradise

By Ranadhir Das

HIRAKUD Dam, the pride of India, is one of the sacred temples of modern architecture of the twentieth century. The small Hirakud village of the past, has now developed into a beautiful attractive town after the construction of the great Hirakud Dam. It was inaugurated on 13th January 1957 by our Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Situated at a distance of 11 miles from the Sambalpur district Hirakud Dam is now in the path of controlling the constantly threatening flood due to river Mahanadi and the frequently haunting famine of the rich State, Orissa. It is the longest Dam in the world having 650 million of C.H. of earth and 40 million C.H. of concrete and masonry. It has been built up with an approximate amount of 100 crores.

The Hirakud reservoir is the biggest artificial lake in Asia with an area of 288 square miles. It is more than four times Bhakra lake and a shore line over

400 miles. It has a capacity of 6.6 million acre feet. This project provides irrigation to 85,87,094 acres of land having 200,000 tons of additional food grains per year. This is the biggest block of Hydroelectric project in India, with a capacity of 270,000 k.w. and will produce 1000 million units of energy. The turbines and generators are the biggest of this kind so far installed in India. The project supplies power to Aluminium factory at Hirakud, steel and fertilizers at Rourkela, ferro-manganese plant at Joda, cement factory at Rajgangpur, paper mills at Brajaraj Nagar; mining loads at Koira, Nuamundi, Cuttack and Baragark.

The total length of the main dam is 15,784 feet. At night the whole dam including the dyke (15 miles) are brightly illuminated. Streams of visitors from all over the world are coming to see this greatest achievement of India, since its construction. The revolving Gandhi Minar located at the left abutting hill

and the Jawahar Minar in the right abutting hill overlooking the dam and the reservoir are alone attracting more than 200 visitors daily. The Gandhi Minar is 64 feet in height, having attractive park and fountain at the entrance. The project has got a beautiful air-conditioned rest house (Ashok Nivas) by the side of the Jawahar minar at an altitude of 800 feet.

The Hirakud island is another spot that attracts large numbers of picnickers. This is situated on the down stream of the main dam and is planned for a biological park. This is equipped with various botanical species. The zoo, started with deer, pigeons, parrots, etc. is far expanding. A beautiful swimming pool is also soon going to be constructed in the island.

Hirakud reservoir provides excellent opportunities to the enthusiastic anglers. It is also delightful to hear melodious tunes of the cow boy's flute or the local maiden's folk song.

More thrilling scenic beauties will be seen on the right side of the dyke. During the winter a large number of Himalayan ducks pass by Hirakud on their way to Chilika lake. So winter is the best time for the amateur shikari to fire the ducks. The big shikaris can enjoy their game at 'Bar Pahara' at the far end of the dyke. The place is crowded with wild animals including Royal Bengal tigers.

In Doubt !

A superintendent of a zoo was mailing an order. He began: "Kindly send two mongooses."

Somehow that didn't seem right; so he started again with, "Kindly send two mongesees."

Finally he settled his problem by writing:

"Kindly send me a mongoose."

Then he signed his name and added a P.S.: "Send another one with it."

At night one will thrill to enjoy the sight with the galaxy of lights all round.

The tourist information, state transport and project authorities will gladly extend all the facilities to the visitors.

— Contd. from page 37

'But you say you haven't seen her face.'

'Even if she is not very good-looking I don't mind. She has such beautiful hair!'

When he gave her the address she exclaimed with wonder: 'Oh, that's my friend Meena's house.'

At this revelation Srinivasan's delight knew no bounds. But that was only short lived since to his unpleasant surprise she continued: 'But she doesn't have long hair as you say. On the contrary she has only a bobbed hair. That braid was an artificial one, I know.'

—o—

INDIA MAGAZINE

Article

By John O'Hare

THE TREASURE HOUSE OF KNOWLEDGE OF ALL AGES:

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

THE British Museum is world-famous. It is in Bloomsbury, in the centre of London, and has been in existence for more than 200 years. It was founded to house the treasures of Sir Hans Sloane, a physician and scientist, who died in 1753 and offered his vast private collection of manuscripts, books and works of art to the nation. From this beginning grew an unequalled treasure house of knowledge.

Montagu House, the former home of the Duke of Montague, was the first building to be used for the British Museum, but as the original collection was added to, Montagu House became too small to hold it all, and was pulled down. The present building was put up on the same site a little more than a century ago. There have been several additions since. It is one of the noblest buildings in London, with 44

massive columns dominating the front. It has a dome larger than that of St. Paul's Cathedral, although curious enough this cannot easily be seen from the street. All the rooms are on the grandest scale, some of them being 100yds. long.

Whole History of Mankind

The exhibits in the British Museum are so numerous that it would take a lifetime to examine them all in detail. Gathered from all corners of earth, some have been excavated from buried cities, others brought up from the bottom of the sea. They cover the history of man from his earliest days, through the great civilisations of antiquity, the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages, up to modern times.

You can see there mummies older than the Pyramids; tools that were in use when mammoths

roamed the earth; words that were written before the time of Moses and the house-hold goods of families who have been dead 10,000 years. There are plenty of examples of the glory of Greek sculpture and the grandeur of Roman statues. You can look at the wonderful Portland Vase that was smashed to pieces by a lunatic visitor and put together again so skilfully that the naked eye can hardly see the joints.

The British Museum has books written and illustrated by monks centuries ago, perfect as print, with the blue, gold and red lettering unfaded, as though they had been done only yesterday. There are Bibles printed in the languages of the North American Indians and books printed by William Caxton. You can read the last letter written by Admiral Lord Nelson before the battle of Trafalgar, and turn to the diary of Captain Scott, open at the last page, and see how the marks of his pencil grow faint as the great Antarctic explorer's hand froze in death.

Echoes of Great Men

The signature of William Shakespeare is there, and you can examine the handwriting of other great men and women, poets, soldiers, sailors, statesmen, kings, queens, churchmen, philosophers and scientists who have made history and literature.

For instance, there is a page written with a quill pen by Charles Dickens, complete with blots and alterations, a letter written

by King Henry the Eighth, one by Oliver Cromwell and another by Sir Francis Drake. In yet another the poet Alfred Tennyson complains of the pile of letters he found on his door mat when he returned from a holiday. Wherever you look in the manuscript room, you will see an immortal page.

The Reading Room

Perhaps the most famous part of the British Museum is the Reading Room. This is immediately below the mighty dome and is in the form of a giant circle, with rows of desks radiating from the centre like the spokes of a wheel, with "cliffs" of books towering up all around. There are miles of bookshelves underground too, and the catalogue alone runs into many huge volumes.

Many famous people have used the Reading Room for study and research, and many well-known works have been written there. The novelist, William Makepeace Thackeray, is one of the authors who composed chapters in the Reading Room, George Bernard Shaw wrote his first play there and a regular visitor, who always sat in the same seat, was Lenin.

People from all over the world visit British Museum and in the tourist season one may hear all known languages spoken in the hall.

In fact, the British Museum is a first-class education, and it is free.

Short Story

By Meruvyn Mandis

"ONE FOR THE ROAD"

He averred to her there was no other woman in his life
and he was sorry he had to bid good-bye to her.....

IT was nearing midnight, when Johnny took the stairs to the first floor of the expensive apartment house. He was on his way up to see some one very special; and this someone was a girl—the girl he loved. Loren was the only one who had been able to stir in his hard heart, the age-old emotion. They had been very close to each other, when tragedy obtruded to separate them. He had not seen her for five years, and was looking forward, eagerly, to this meeting.

His name was Jonatha Cyrus Bond; but in certain circles he was referred to as "The Trigger". His uncanny deftness with a gun had earned for him a place of respect among other denizens of the underworld. Tough and ruthless; he lived by a code peculiar to men of his type; He always remembered a favour and never forgot or forgave an injury. There were many who would like to have seen him put away; but the brave few who

had tried were no longer around to tell about it.

When he reached the landing he turned right, and walked along the corridor. He passed two doors and stopped before the third. On it, raised in the wood figures of old, was the number 37. He pressed the bell-button and waited. The seconds ticked by; and then he heard the soft tread of approaching footsteps. The lock clicked, and the door was slowly opened.

Loren looked up at her caller with wide-eyed innocence. She was wearing pink pajamas, slippers, and a black silk kimono. As recognition gradually came to her, her expression changed to one of astonishment; of incredulity. Her lips formed the word 'Johnny!' but the sound died in her throat.

Johnny pushed into the room and closed the door. Without a word he gathered her into his arms. His mouth came down on

hers, hard and demanding, with the accumulated passion of five long years. As the soft curves of her body were pressed against his, she felt a series of delightful sensations pass through her. Johnny was the only man who could make her feel this way. He had but to take her in his arms, and her soul soared into the heavens like a moon rocket.

With great effort he released his hold on her, and walked over to the nearest chair. Loren leaned back against the door, afraid to trust her legs. She could not control the wild beating of her heart, and her body was all a-tremble with the excitement of the last few moments. Only when she was sufficiently recovered, did she speak. Her voice sounded somewhat tired.

"Tell me all about it, Johnny. I didn't think I'd ever see you again."

"How could you think, baby?" he replied. "You should have known I'd come back. You should have known I couldn't forget you."

Loren shook her head slightly. There was the faintest indication of a smile on her lips. "Same old Johnny." She said, "You haven't changed. What are you going to do after this?"

Johnny shrugged his shoulders. "I'll get by, somehow. I always do. I've been in worse situations than this."

"Well" said Loren "As the saying goes, what will be, will be. Let's have a drink for old times, unless you're in a two....."

COAT (OF POWDER)

SHE: "How do you like my new coat?"

He (looking at her face):
"Fine, only you got it on too thick!"

"There's always time for a drink, baby." Johnny interrupted. "Make this one for the road, one half-of-a long road."

Loren walked over to the miniature bar in the corner, and poured two drinks. She brought his across to him, and then dropped into an upholstered chair opposite, kicked off her slippers, and drew her legs up under her. This was her favourite position, and Johnny thought she looked very cuddlesome.

He raised his glass. "Here's to the happy times we have had together." He sipped his drink and looked round at the room they were seated in. The last word in luxury and comfort, it reflected the temperament, taste, and character of its beautiful owner. It was far better than the last flat she had occupied; the one that held tender memories for him.

He looked across at her. "You know, baby, I'm damn sorry I didn't get out of this town earlier and take you with me. Maybe things would have turned out different. I was getting a little tired of having to cut down every cheap assassin that came up against me. When I discovered Blanco's plot to kidnap Bill Wesson's little son,

had to stick around. There was nothing in common between Wesson and myself; but he was good Police Chief; upright and incorruptible; and a constant worry to the big operators like Blanco. Besides, he had done me a favour some years ago, and I didn't want to see anything happen to his little boy. I couldn't go to his office as many of his cops were in Blanco's pay. A phone didn't ring on his desk without Blanco receiving information about it. But I managed to get a message through to him, to meet me at a deserted cottage on the outskirts of the town. He was not to tell anybody about it.

"That night when I left you to keep my appointment with Wesson, I didn't dream that I would not be seeing you again for many years. It was your birthday, I remember; and we had planned a little celebration later in the evening at your flat - just the two of us. In the years that followed, I often retalled your last words. You had said 'Come back soon, Johnny. There's a champagne dinner and a whole night of love waiting for you.'

"I couldn't come back; because when I arrived at the cottage Blanco's boys were waiting for me. You know the rest from the newspapers. The cops picked me up in a semi-conscious condition, and smelling of alcohol. There was a gun in my hand and Bill Wesson lay dead in the same room. He had been shot through the head and heart. It was the neatest frame-up and double cross I have

known. Blanco paid big money for the tip-off.

"A cop had been killed and the entire police force were thirsting for my blood. I didn't stand a chance; I was sent up for life."

He paused to finish his drink, then continued. "From the day I entered that prison I began working out my escape. Step by step. Systematically. For weeks, and months and years, I bided my time, as I couldn't afford to have anything go wrong. Today my carefully laid plans, and years of patience were rewarded, and I busted out."

He stood up and looked at the dial of his wristwatch. "Time is running out, baby; I have to go now. They'll have an alarm out for me by morning, and I must pay Mister Blanco a visit before I leave this town."

He walked over to her chair. "I have loved you dearly, Loren" he said. "I guess I still do. And for me there can be no other. It's tough that we have to part this way; but now could it be otherwise?"

As he stopped over her, she raised her lips to receive his. Kissing her gently; he straightened up, and looked down at her for the last time; drinking in all her delicate loveliness. Then he spoke. His voice was low and chilling; his words deadly in their significance: "So long, Delilah."

His right hand came out of his pocket, and cracked three times. A dark red stain was slowly spreading across her left breast as Johnny closed the door softly behind him, and made for the stairs.

IN WRONG ARMS

SHORT
STORY

BY

C. S. N. PANDYA

He was in love with the younger sister but a great shock was in store for him one night.

MY new co-tenants were quite an interesting lot. The head of the family was an old woman Indu by name. She had two daughters, Mrinal and Uma. The elder girl, who was about twenty-four and very attractive, was married. Her husband, Prakash, who was older than Mrinal by about twenty years returned from work late in the evenings. He seemed to be of a quarrelsome type. Soon after he took his meal there would be a battle of words among the mother, her first daughter and her husband. The second daughter Uma would be studying by the lamp—she was still in the school-going stage but she was already a budding beauty and I thought she would in the course of years become more

beautiful than her elder sister. The mother would ask her younger daughter to close her books and go to bed and not keep listening to the unsavoury details of the conversation of the elders.

They were residing upstairs and I was living on the ground floor. My mother had gone to my elder sister's house near Allahabad. She had scheduled to visit my younger sister in Lucknow and it would take at least six to nine months before she returned home. The house was ours and we reserved the downstairs portion for our use.

If I was so minded I would prepare my own meal but I was often lazy. There was a hotel near my office, which served good food and I had a regular

account there. At home I had an electric stove and prepared hot tea or ovaltine which I took with crisp biscuits.

Uma made friends with me two days after the family moved in. I should say the ovaltine and the biscuits and some of the fried stuff I used to bring from the hotel must have lured her into my room.

She was not unwelcome. I was courteous and kind to her and insisted on her sharing what I had. Once she got over her shyness she was all smiles (ah! how charmingly she smiled!) and began to chatter on with ease and informality. She never seemed to think I was a stranger and thought nothing of rubbing shoulders with me. She told me it was her last year in school and she was struggling over Mathematics. And she engaged me to solve her problems for her.

When her studies upstairs were interrupted by stormy scenes and quarrels she would bring her books into my room as if it was her own and continue to read. For my part, I was very proud to have such a pretty companion who had complete trust in me. The way she coaxed me to do her sums was bewitching. She would bring her olive-skinned face close to mine with its scent of sandal and jasmine and show her rosy red lips and pearl-white teeth. Once she sent my blood coursing wildly in my veins by brushing her lips against my cheek.

Upstairs the quarrel went on and on until midnight and poor Uma slept over her book in my

room. She looked so fascinating that I couldn't help imprinting a kiss—with brotherly affection of course—on her forehead. But she slept on until her mother peeped in with an apologetic look, woke up Uma and led her up.

Occasionally both the sisters would invade my sanctum. The elder one would prohibit me from attending to the stove, compel me to sit like a lord and get the beverage ready. The two would fuss about, bringing the tray, the saucers and cups and would serve me as if they were waiting on a king. It would make me laugh and then it would be my turn to wait on them as if they were queens. At such happy moments I would sing some catchy film tunes and they would listen in amazement and wonder. The mother for her part was so fond of her daughters that she never interfered with them and let them do what they pleased.

Once I asked Mrinal, "Are you not afraid of your husband? What will he think if he finds you in another man's room?"

She laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "You see, he comes home only after 9 p.m. and then you know what happens upstairs."

I kept quiet. I envied the swarthy ugly-looking fellow who had married such a cuddlesome beauty. With her big soft bosom she had a provocative figure. She knew I was staring at her but did not feel embarrassed. But the next moment I felt ashamed and penitent. I was really in love

with that peerless beauty—her sister—and here I was unashamedly gazing at her sister—yes, in the very presence of Uma.

The party broke up, however, as I had to leave for office in a hurry. That night I came back rather very late. There was a fierce quarrel in progress and I heard even some pots and pans being hurled across. Mrinal's husband was creating a nasty scene and her mother was bawling her head off at him. "You are welcome to do as you please. But I want to be left alone in peace and Uma must be able to complete her studies."

I could not make head or tail of it all. But this much I understood. Mrinal's husband was leaving them. He was taking his wife with him. The coast was now clear for me, I thought. As soon as Uma was out of school I would claim her in matrimony. Before that we would be meeting every night and a little wooing was not out of the question. She too was not averse to it. What a delightful creature she was. Her very presence radiated a soft light and enveloped me in joy. To be in her arms would be very heaven indeed.

I was fast asleep with those thoughts and when I woke up I had the surprise of my life. Next to me on the bed was Uma—her head on my pillow and her arm round my neck. When did she come? It was very dark and I should have left the door open even as I dropped off to sleep. Love for the angelic creature came like a flood and swept me

TRUTH

It was the man's first visit to the psychiatrist. Among other questions, the doctor asked: "Are you troubled by improper thoughts?"

"No, doctor," the man answered. "In fact I rather enjoy them."

off. I strained her in my arms and kissed her like mad. She was not asleep and kissed me with equal warmth.

"When did you come?" I asked her.

"He left us an hour ago," she said. "Mother and Uma have gone to a friend's house and will come back in the morning. I was afraid he may come back and hit me. So I secured all the doors with two locks and came into your room to see you. Do you love me, don't you?"

I had a great shock. It was Mrinal in my arms—not Uma!

"Yes, I love you too," I whispered tightening her in my arms.

Early in the morning as she got up to go, I asked her, "Mrinal, are you not afraid of your husband? Won't he murder us both if he finds us in this state now?"

"Husband indeed!" she scoffed. "Fate made me his mistress for a while. We are rid of that rogue. He has left me for another woman!"

ARTICLE

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

By G. PRABHU

THE Shastras exhort us at every turn that man's stay on the earth marks a stage in the transition of the soul. There is continuation of life after death. All that one sheds is the body, which in fact proves to be burdensome and cumbersome to the soul.

But what exactly happens when the icy hand of death is laid on the human frame? Among the mortals who actually suffered death and, miraculously enough, have managed to survive, is that great writer Paul Brunton.

For a short while, he recalls, death descended on him and he left his body on the earth below. He could at the same time watch and witness what was happening.

Exquisite

He had an exquisite experience, more a sense of exhilaration and elation than a feeling of dejection or sorrow on having

to leave the earth. He says: "It was very pleasant and much freer, the body and brain seem to be a clog which, when shaken off, leaves one calm and free."

After floating in unusual light and radiance for some hours he came down to the earth. From this extraordinary experience he was thoroughly convinced that there is life after death.

In 1933, a similar remarkable incident happened in Nellore. Sharma was twenty-two years old, studying in college. He had gone to a friend's house to attend the birthday celebrations of the latter's baby.

On the previous night he had been drenched in heavy rain and was feeling uneasy. While the priests were sitting round the holy fire, invoking the gods to bless the little boy, Sharma felt himself becoming unconscious.

His friends sitting round him understood that he was in the throes of agony approaching

death. Sharma wanted to say something, but no coherent words came.

There was a gurgling sound in his throat—almost a rattle. His host was anxious that the happy celebrations in his home must not be marred by the death of someone even though he might be his friend.

And he was pleading with Sharma to go to his own house, which was not far off.

But one of Sharma's true friends, Sethuram, jumped to his side, rubbed his hands and chest, poured some soda water into his mouth and went on massaging him. He was dragged nearer to the holy fire and his body began to warm up.

Sharma, to the surprise of all those gathered, turned his wondering eyes all round and began to speak. "I had a strange experience. My soul, tied as it were by a silken thread, began to soar, up into a new land of light.

"And what a delightful experience it was. At the same time, I was able to watch my friends, my mother and sisters weeping. I will never, never forget this experience."

On the same day, be it noted, another man called Sharma residing in the same town passed away. Is it not reasonable to conclude that the messengers of Death sometimes get confused over names?

In a South Indian village (near Ramnad) a school teacher was given up for dead. He woke up just when he was about to be cremated. The mourners converted themselves into a congratulatory party and took the man back to his house in a triumphal procession.

Wife Saved

The young wife, distraught at her husband's untimely end, was about to commit suicide when "the dead man" rescued her from the jaws of death.

Near Poona, in the pre-Independence era, a butler named Ankiah, serving an Englishman, was bitten by a cobra. The bungalow was far away from any hospital and was almost isolated. The master was frantic.

He had no car to carry the patient away or to bring a doctor. One of the bearers brought in a *mantrik* from the neighbouring village and, before the sceptical white man infused, by his recitations, life into the blue-coloured body of the victim.

When the butler sat up he narrated an eerie experience of his. Though his body writhed in agony and his kinsmen shrieked over his passing, he was pleasantly lifted to an unknown region. The recitations of the *mantrik*, however, brought him back to earth.

SHORT STORY — PART TWO

WAS IT ROMANCE?

By "Teekaybee"

He was desperately in love with the girl but she disappointed him.....

(Continued from previous issue)

THE note book lay open coldly, the typewriter was uncared for—it was not even dusted. Kumar could not understand it. What had befallen Manian, his usually cheerful friend? He looked lost in thought, instead of being care-free and gay. Had he lost something? Did he have any disturbing news? Kumar enquired of him with great concern.

"No—nothing," said Manian and tried to smile. It was a blank, vacant smile, without life in it. Manian was not of a confident nature. Kumar was unable to endure his silence. He knew that deep down in his heart Manian was worried. He didn't like it and decided to set his mind at rest, if it was possible for him?

The officer called for a stenographer; Kumar glanced at Manian. He was crest-fallen and was in no mood to go. His eyes pleaded to Kumar for help. Instantly Kumar rose up to the occasion.

That evening Kumar suggested to Manian a picture. He was not very happy but all the same he accepted the suggestion.

The picture was going on. It was below expectations but they did not worry about it. At the theatre, Manian opened his heart to his friend. Slowly, bit by bit, he gave vent to his feelings. He emptied his thoughts. Kumar knew he was under a great emotional strain and a mental disequilibrium. "Poor chap" he said to himself. He always thought that only shorthand interested his friend, besides reading fiction. But he was mistaken in his calculations.

Suddenly, a bright idea seized him. It was with much difficulty that he made Manian agree to his idea.

X X
"How about going to the exhibition?" began Pankaj.

The idea put forward by his sister did not appeal to Manian; but he didn't want her to miss her pleasure for his sake.

"All right, anything for a change. Are you going to come as you are? Go—get dressed up," said he disinterestedly.

Pankaj hurried before Manian could change the programme.

Manian waited for his sister impatiently. She was busy in a fancy shop, doing some purchases.

The time-factor is forgotten where women are concerned. Pankaj was no exception. Manian strained his eyes. Presently, he saw her coming with a friend.

"Shantha, meet my brother, Manian, B.A., This, brother, is my friend Shantha, P.U.C. Am I not right, Shantha?" There was mischief in Pankaj's voice.

Manian's heart seemed to miss a beat. Did he need any introduction to this pretty girl who stood before him? Did he spend a moment without thinking of her? But having seen her face, words failed, to come out from his lips. He tried to say something. But his efforts proved futile.

"Is...he.....er.....is Sir your brother," Shantha broke the ice.

Pankaj failed to understand her friend's question.

"Do you know him already?" she questioned her friend.

"Nice to meet you here, Shantha. Have you come by yourself?" Manian managed to speak.

"No. My cousin has accompanied me. He's over there," Shantha waved a hand in the direction of a book-stall.

Pankaj was shrewd to discover familiarity in their conversation. How did her 'shy' brother know Shantha? Her doubts came in the form of a question.

"You seem to need no introduction.. May I know.....?"

Shantha cut her friend:

"Your brother is my short-hand teacher at the institute. So..."

"No, I was her instructor." Manian corrected Shantha's statement in a frustrated voice. But Pankaj seemed to take no notice of it. She had got a companion and needed, for the time being, no brother.

A good-looking bespectacled youngish man, immaculately dressed, came in search of Shantha. After the usual, 'glad to meet your' Manian remained quiet. But Sekhar never had the courtesy to take the hint. All the time, he was talking and talking about his journalistic proclivities and his achievements. Manian wondered at the intelligence of Sekhar though he was mercilessly boring him to death. Manners required of Manian to nod his head and say 'oh', 'yes', 'really' and 'of course'. Mostly, his replies were monosyllabic. He cursed his sister for leaving him in such a predicament. Pankaj seemed to be enjoying her afternoon with Shantha.

Manian saw his radium-dialled watch. It was seven O' clock. He 'remembered' an engagement at eight with a Mr. X. With a polite 'if you'll excuse me' to Mr. Sekhar and a 'good night' in his sweetest tone to Shantha, after barging in their conversation, he left his sister and hurried towards the exit.

In the bus Pankaj asked him:

"Oh, how did you enjoy yourself? I see you have become so very chummy with Shantha's cousin?"

"To hell with him," shouted Manian in a cold fury. Pankaj understood what it implied and never opened her mouth.

x x

Manian was in a state of desperation. Upto this period he had kept his friend's suggestion at the bottom of his heart, with misgivings as to its execution. But now it had forcibly risen to the surface. The sight of my charming sweetheart in her best evening dress and in her best humour was still lingering before his eyes. That superb beauty must be his. It was foolish to waste time hoping that things would spring up by themselves. He must do something about it. And Kumar's suggestion would be the best starting point.

Manian carried out his decision as soon as he went home. All that was needed was a piece of paper and a fountain pen. He began with "My dear Shantha" and then the matter gushed out from his heart as steam from a kettle. Those words that he wrote, how long had they been confined there, deep in his bosom! How many times had he wished to repeat them to her and did not, for want of courage!

He had always been a coward. But did courage pay in those matters? Should not one be very cautious lest he should lose everything? Manian was in a dilemma.

At last when he signed the letter, he yielded to his usual instinct. He signed the letter 'Bala' instead of in his own name. All that he wanted was to ease his heart by pouring out his thoughts on paper and make her read it.

And this anonymous letter was the one that was giving Shantha a headache. She tried to forget and ignore it; but in proportion to her attempts at forgetting, there grew in her heart a strong desire to find out the author of that strange letter. Who was that audacious 'Bala' who professed to love her much? How did he come to know so much of her as to comment on her intellect and childishness? Was he so near to her as to watch her every movement and was she so blind as to be quite unconscious of his close observation?

Your tennis ball springs up with the same force with which you strike it on the ground. Your large kite soars high with the same vigour with which you pull it towards you. And so do your thoughts when you want to suppress them. They gather intensity and then revolve in your mind with greater frequency. Try as you might, you cannot forget them; they would haunt you day and night.

Shantha had the same difficulty. She had no peace, that young girl. She suffered from a disease which every young person has to suffer, one time or another—the disease that people call love.

But she might as well have loved the vacant air. For she

knew not the person at whom all her pleasant thoughts converged. She had just a few lines of his handwriting over an evidently assumed name 'Bala.' For the rest she gave her imagination full play.

It was the first anniversary celebration of their commercial institute. A rejoicing crowd filled the hall. The distinguished guest, after finishing his long lecture on the importance of the twin arts of typewriting and shorthand, sat down to the great relief of the audience. There was a significant applause.

Manian cracked his knuckles and got up from his chair. He ought to have thought twice before undertaking to give the institute authorities a verbatim report of the speech. But how could he anticipate that the speaker would misuse the liberty given to him and take so much time as that?

He came out of the hall and strolled towards the lawn. Groups of students stood here and there, chatting and laughing. Through the loudspeaker issued the high-pitched voice of the principal who was offering the vote of thanks.

Manian went to a secluded corner and stood thinking. No doubt he was thinking about Shantha; his face lit up even though he was very tired. How particularly charming she had been that day! How sprightly and graceful were her movements! He remembered her peals of laughter at the time when the boys staged their little farce. They were still ringing in his ears.

"Are you not going home, Sir?" came a voice from behind him.

Manian spun round. He knew it was Shantha's voice.

"Oh, is it you, Shantha?" he exclaimed. "Have you started? Where are your friends?" He looked round and found that there was nobody about.

"They've gone. They didn't have the patience to sit through the lecture to the end!" She smiled.

Manian looked at her with a pang in his heart. She was very near to him and yet he had a feeling that she was far, far away. Her words were very familiar and yet he felt she was incorrigibly formal.

Immediately he had a strange idea.

He clenched his fist and sighed deeply. What if he told her that which was uppermost in his heart? Anyway it had to be done one day or another. And there was little hope to have another chance like this to talk to her in such loneliness.

He made a step forward. "I've something to tell you, Shantha," he said slowly.

Shantha made a surprised look at him.

"Yes, Shantha, I've been wanting to tell you this since quite a long time, but I didn't know how to. Even now I don't know how exactly to put it to you, but I'd manage, somehow. It is this, Shantha, I love you. I loved you the day I saw you when you were admitted in my class. Ever since that day you

have been attracting me towards you more and more closely. I have no peace; I cannot turn my mind towards anything else. Yes, Shantha, I feel I cannot live without you."

Manian paused for breath. "He was shy to look up at Shantha. I think I have made myself clear. I want you to think of it: I am waiting for your reply."

Shantha was nervous. She went up to a nearby cement bench and sat down. When she spoke her voice trembled.

"I did not expect this from you, no, I never did," she said, staring at the distant trees.

"But I have to give you more pain. I have to disappoint you," She continued. "No, Sir, I cannot love you!"

Manian paced up and down in front of her. He did not know what to do or say.

"You have always been kind to me and I have always admired your talents and good qualities. But as to accepting your offer of marriage, I am sorry, I feel I can never do it."

Manian calmed himself. He turned to her and said, "It is all right, Shantha. I'm glad that you have been so frank in your statements. I would not trouble you any more with my foolish sentiments. But just one final request: Would you care to tell me why you refuse me so decidedly?"

Shantha stared at him. She was troubled. Her heart was heavy. What was wrong if she confided in him and thereby eased her heart?

"I tell you, but you should not laugh at me. I am already in love but I do not know with whom!"

"What do you mean? You don't know whom you love?"

"Yes," Shantha nodded. "A few weeks back I got a letter. The one who had written it had expressed his attachment towards me in the most strong terms. I might have read that letter a hundred times. By and by I was drawn towards the author of that letter. I now find I love him. I am confident that he would make himself known one day. And I would wait for him."

Manian made a sudden movement. His heart beat loudly in excitement.

"Look here, Shantha," he shouted at her. "What's that letter you are referring to? One in green ink on a blue bond paper? Signed by 'Bala'?"

Shantha started. "How do you know?" she questioned, her eyebrows rising.

"I'm that 'Bala'; Shanthi," cried Manian. "Don't you know that my full name is Balasubramanian? I wrote that letter to satisfy myself—to ease my heart."

Shantha blushed heavily. She could not find her voice.

"Would you have me now, Shantha?" Manian asked. "Now that you know that I am your 'Bala'?"

Another heavy blush rose to Shantha's cheeks. It was sufficient answer by itself.

(Concluded)

A SEVEN-PART SERIAL STORY

INSTALMENT ONE

THE BRIDE'S VISITATION

By "REVATHI"

The hour of expectation for the beautiful bride turned into an hour of agony and unprecedented experience...

A MIDST peals of laughter, cheers and jeerings, Sridhar and Kamala entered the gaily decorated nuptial chamber.

Sridhar bolted the door inside. He gently placed his hand on his pretty wife's shoulder and led her to the couch.

A young girl was chirping a passionate song about Radha and Krishna. Her voice, sweet and sonorous, slowly ebbed away.

Everything was quiet. Sridhar switched off the light. In the dim light of the green lamp, he contemplated the young pretty girl that was his wife.

Her flawless face, her firm breasts, her dark eyes, restless and darting engaged in a never-ending game of hide-and-seek and her coy shyness proclaimed her virgin chastity.

Sridhar could contain himself no longer. He reclined on the

couch and drew the girl by his side. She came towards him trusting, shy and timid, with colour mounting on her cheeks.

Sridhar heard the sound of footsteps outside the door. "Who is there?" he shouted.

There was no answer. Sridhar looked at the door as if he would pierce through it. His face became pale. He looked frightened.

Kamala looked at him anxiously. Why was her husband upset over a trifle?

"We must be careful," he said almost in a whisper.

Next moment, he locked her yielding form in a firm tight embrace. It was as if he feared that somebody would tear her away from him.

Everything was again quiet. He felt reassured.

He took her face in both hands and peered into her eyes. "Kamala darling", he whispered,

Her hands tightened behind his back.

Oblivious of the world, they remained in the same manner for some time. Time stood still.

They felt the blood coursing through their veins like warm wine. They felt simultaneously that their real need for each other was urgent.

Sridhar shook himself and stood up.

He put her a meaningless question, "Do you love me?"

She was taken aback but composed herself, nodded assent and waited expectantly.

He drew her from the couch. He took off his shirt and gestured.

Kamala understood what he meant and went behind the curtain.

From where she was, she could hear her husband pouring himself a glass of milk.

She went to the couch again and lay, her heart beating with excitement.

She felt Sridhar's hand on her face, feeling the velvety smoothness of her cheeks. What exquisite joy. Her arm was entwining his muscular form.

"I am feeling strange," Sridhar said. There was fear in his voice. "Water, bring me some water" he cried.

Unmindful of the state she was in, she rushed to the table, took a glass of water and put it to his lips. He drank it in a gulp.

Her own throat was parched. She took the flask and poured the milk in a glass.

"Don't touch it, don't touch it," Sridhar shouted, his voice shivering in tremulous fear. "It is poisoned."

Her face turned pale. Something seriously was wrong with her husband.

She went to the door and unbolted. It was no use. The door was locked outside.

Sridhar was tossing in the bed in a paroxysm of agony.

Kamala knelt beside him. She now knew he was dying. Amidst gasps, he told her the story of his life. Her grasp on his shoulders tightened and her knuckles gleamed white when Sridhar unfolded the names of his enemies who had signed his death warrant.

Suddenly, he stopped talking. Kamala was alone with the corpse of her husband!

She draped the sari around her. Half an hour before she had undressed and how purposeless it ended.

She came to the balcony and looked at the city, her eyes ablaze with fire and hate. She would have burnt the city with all its people and Sridhar's murderers among them, had she the power.

But the days of miracles are past, she realised. No divine force would come to her aid now.

She switched on the light. She was standing before the mirror.

She could not recognise herself in the mirror. Her face was deathly pale.

With a sudden movement of her hand she wiped off the tilak from her forehead. She untied her hair and the flowers dropped on the ground.

There she stood, before the mirror, her hair dishevelled, her face pale and her young breasts rising and falling and her whole form rocking to and fro, as if in a trance. Her marriage had not been consummated.

She ran to her husband not caring that her sari had fallen down. She put her face on his face. He was still warm, though his heart stopped beating.

He lay, unaware of the showers of affection his wife was pouring on his lifeless form.

She put her palm on his head and took her vow. Somewhere in the dark, an owl screeched, foreboding death and destruction.

She came again to the balcony and leaned on the parapet wall and looked at the city for long. She threw her whole weight on the parapet wall and glared at the city menacingly as if she was an event that was going to happen to it shortly.

* * * * *

"Now what do you make of it?" asked Inspector Manohar.

The Sub-Inspector, Rajaratnam, a promising young man, with curly hair and charming face, more feminine in appeal which however belied the strength of his slim figure, hesitated a moment. He knew his superior too well to give any

SHE REMEMBERS!

"DID you see that charming girl smile at me?"

"Yes, the first time I saw you, I, too, had to smile."

bald or flippant reply. "There is no doubt that it is murder, Sir. The post-mortem examination of the body has overruled the possibility of the death being a natural one. The Doctor who performed the autopsy says that death is due to potassium cyanide poisoning, a large dose of which was found in the undigested milk of his stomach. The remaining milk in the flask was also tested. It was also poisoned. The question is 'Who put cyanide in the milk?' Any one of the wedding guests could have done it. That leads us nowhere. The Doctor says that death was *not* instantaneous. In that case, the dying man himself would have talked.....to anybody of his side....."

"What about the bride? Have you questioned her?" asked Manohar.

"The plot thickens," said Rajaratnam dramatically. "There is no trace of the bride. She has simply vanished into thin air, as it were. She is of mysterious origin. No parents or any relations. There is absolutely no clue as to her whereabouts. The nuptial bed has not been slept in."

"Find her. She might have done it." She had the opportunity what is more, she seems

to have been the only one person who was by his side when he was dying. She might have shouted, called for help, created a scene or any such thing. She didn't do any of these things. Instead, she calmly allows the man to die, slips out and vanishes....." The Inspector's voice rose in anger.

"Her disappearance is of course most unfortunate, sir. But she could not have planned it. I attended the wedding. The adoring coy glances she showered on her husband is no acting, sir. If ever, there was real love, I saw it in her eyes. Hindu girls do not go about murdering their husbands on the wedding night.....If she had shouted for help, no body heard her, sir. In these parts, they lock the nuptial chamber *outside*. Sridhar's parents did not hear the shouts perhaps. They were fast asleep."

With a puzzled frown, the Inspector asked. "How did the bride escape from the locked room? You see, there is a fallacy in your argument. She could not have come out of the room unless the door was opened. But when the mother of the deceased opened the door, she found only the corpse of her son."

"I have gone into the question in detail, sir," said Rajaratnam. "There is only one possibility. She must have jumped out of the Balcony. It is of course dangerous to jump from a height of 35' but then the girl must have been desperate. There was a thick growth of grass beneath. The girl might have broken her

neck. She might have also escaped unhurt. It all depends on which part of her body first made the impact on the ground.

The subsequent rains had washed away the traces I think sir, the bride entrusted her fate to providence. If she dies, she would be following her husband.....If she lives.....I do not know what she intends doing. The providence had willed that she should live.....I am afraid sir, we are the spectators of merely the first scene of a great human tragedy."

"Don't go sentimental" said Manohar, the elder of the two, who was anything but romantic. "It can be suicide.....I have heard of cases, when young men commit suicide at the first night.....out of sheer shame.....you see, unable to consummate and all that.....Have you considered that possibility?"

Rajaratnam looked at his boss with a new regard. The idea had not occurred to him. Of course it was possible. Why didn't he think of it? At least it was a way of escape. If the murder could not be found, they could cling to the suicide theory.

Miles and miles away from the Police station, where they were conferring, in a cosy bungalow, a young woman, pale and dishevelled, was deeply immersed in the pages of a diary, tears rolling on her alabaster cheeks like pearls. The mourning bride would have laughed irresistibly, had she heard the suicide theory to which the police were clinging.

(To be continued)

Astrological Forecasts for April 1961

PLANETS AND YOUR FORTUNE

The following predictions are based on the movement of the Nine Planets in the 12 Rasis according to Gochara as also that of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto which are upagrahas. The positions of the planets from Janma Rasi (Moon's Place) are taken into account in forecasting the effects. Those running a favourable Dasa or Bhukthi will experience the evil effects in a lesser degree and those running malefic Dasa or Bhukthi will experience the evil effects in a greater measure.

By T. V. RAMAN

Planetary transits during the month: Mercury transits to Meena on 6-4-'61. On the same day Venus transits to Meena. Venus is exalted in Meena while Mercury is debilitated in that Zodiacal sign. This conjunction gives rise to a rare "Neecha Bhanga Raja Yoga." Mars continues its stay in Mithuna. Rahu stays in Simha. Kethu continues to remain in Kumbha. The effects of these are embodied in the following predictions.

MESHA

(Mars 4, Bharani 4, Kirthigai 1.)

Mars, Lord of the Lagna, is well posited in the 3rd house. Therefore your health will be good. Neptune in the 7th house aspected by exalted Sun is sure to bestow on you good luck. The "Raja Yoga" conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the 10th house is considered to be rewarding feature in astrological parlance. Your profession or business will come to limelight. Kethu in the 11th house indicates financial gains. The period is good for those in politics, social service and film activities.

Lucky Days: 3rd, 15th and 21st.

Household women should restrict diet and try to obtain more rest and amenities. Girls studying will make headway. Success is in the offing for women engaged in journalism, politics, social service and cultural activities. The period is beneficial for women in jobs.

Lucky Days: 8th, 17th and 25th.

VRISHABHA

(Krithigai 3, Rohini 4, Mrigasirsha 2)

Venus Lord of the Lagna, though debilitated in 11th house attains "Neecha Bhanga Raja Yoga."

But the Janma is hemmed between malefics. Hence you are likely to be afflicted with abdominal and chest ailments. The conjunction of Rahu, Uranus and Pluto in the 4th house may cause irksomeness in the home-front. Kethu in the 10th house will keep you dignified in your office or business. Sun-Venus-Mercury in the 11th house indicate financial gains. The month is prosperous in general. Business men will meet with big financial gains. Period is lucrative for politicians, social workers and those connected with film activities.

Lucky Days: 9th, 17th and 24th.

Household women will have to take special care about their health. Further the family happening may not be very peaceful. Many unmarried women will get married. Love affairs will happily ripen into marriage. Period is excellent for women in jobs. Women engaged in politics, social service and film activities will be able to combat opposition and carve out an unique position.

Lucky Days: 13th, 17th and 21st.

MITHUNA

(Mrigasirsha 2, Arudra 4, Punarvasu 3)

Mercury, Lord of the Lagna occupies an exalted position in Meena in the 10th house which is excellent on point of fame and prosperity. Neptune in the 5th house will keep you happy and dignified. Jupiter and Saturn forming "Vibareetha Raja Yoga"

and "Neecha Bhanga Raja Yoga" may bring financial windfall. The conjunction of Sun, Venus and Mercury in the 10th house will bring your profession or business into limelight. Those engaged in politics, social service and film activities will be able to carve out good positions for themselves.

Lucky Days: 4th, 12th and 19th.

Household women may have to take special care of their health. Those in jobs will meet with sudden prosperity. But a difficult period will be experienced by those engaged in politics, social service and film activities.

Lucky Days: 8th, 16th and 24th

KATAKA

(Punarvasu 1, Pushya 4, Aslesha 4)

Sun, Lord of the 2nd house occupies exalted sign in Mesha in 9th house, which indicates fame and prosperity. The position of Neptune in the 4th house will keep you lucky. Kethu in the 8th house indicates wasteful expenditure. Venus and Mercury forming "Neecha Bhanga Raja Yoga" will bestow on you luck and prosperity. Exalted Sun in the 10th house will bring your profession or business to limelight. Persons engaged in politics, social service and film activities will have to reconcile with enmity and opposition.

Lucky Days: 10th, 17th, and 27th.

Household women should take special care of lung, abdominal and chest complaints. Family affairs may not be very pleasing. The progress of students will be retarded. Persons engaged in politics, social service and film activities will have to combat enmity and opposition.

Lucky Days: 12th, 17th and 26th.

SIMHA

(Makara 4, Pooram 4, Uthira 1)

Sun, Lord of the Lagna stays in 8th and 9th houses. This apart, Rahu, Uranus and Pluto afflict Janma. Hence take special care of your health. The progress of students will be well maintained. Mercury and Venus in 8th house may bring sudden windfall. Mars in the 11th house indicates financial gains. Those in jobs will manage very well. The period is prosperous for those in business, journalism, politics, and film activities.

Lucky Days: 15th, 19th and 24th.

Household women should guard against eating stale food and risks through accidents. Your husband's health may cause anxiety to you. Students will make headway. Those in jobs will get promoted. Women engaged in politics, social service and film activities will be able to combat enmity and opposition and carve out unique positions for them.

Lucky Days: 12th, 17th and 23rd.

KANYA

(Uthira 3, Hastha 4, Chitra 2)

Mercury, Lord of the Lagna is posited in the 7th house and forms "*Neecha Bhanga Raja Yoga*." Your health will be good. Venus, Lord of the 2nd house is, in exaltation in 7th house, which indicates sudden improvement in finance. There will be auspicious and happy functions at home. The conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 5th house forming "*Kendra-Panchama-Yoga*" will bring you good luck and prosperity. Mars in the 10th house will keep you well in your office or business. The career of persons engaged in politics, social service and film activities will be highlighted by fame and prosperity.

Lucky Days: 7th, 13th and 24th.

Household women will find the period very happy and enjoyable. The family finance will improve. Many unmarried women will get married. Love affairs will ripen into marriage. Women in jobs will find the period prosperous. Women engaged in business, politics, social service and film activities will meet with fame and honour.

Lucky Days: 8th, 16th and 27th.

THULA

(Chitra 2, Swathi 4, Visaka 3.)

Venus, Lord of the Lagna is in 6th hidden house but exalted. Your health will be good. Your finances will improve. The conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in

4th Kendra will bring luck and prosperity. Kethu in the 5th house will keep you worried. The conjunction of Venus and Mercury in Meena will bring a financial windfall. Sun in the 7th house may bring about a happy journey. The period is excellent for students. Those in jobs will manage well but will be overburdened with work both at home and in office. Persons engaged in business, politics, social service and film activities will be handicapped.

Lucky Days: 3rd, 7th and 21st.

Household women will find the month somewhat depressing. Women in jobs will find the period beneficial. Period is prosperous for women in business, politics, social service and film activities.

Lucky Days: 10th, 13th and 24th.

VRISCHIKA

(Visaka 1, Anuradha 4, Jyeshtha 4.)

Mars, Lord of the Lagna, is in 8th hidden house. Hence restrict diet and try to obtain more rest and amenities. The conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 3rd house indicates financial gains and help through brothers. Kethu in the 4th house is likely to cause irksomeness in household affairs. Rahu, Uranus and Pluto in the 10th house will keep you well in your office or business despite difficulties. Those engaged in politics, social service and film activities will have to reconcile with temporary setbacks.

INDIA MAGAZINE

Lucky Days: 7th, 13th and 24th.

The household affairs may not be happy. You may have to bestow greater care and attention on your child. Students, journalists, and those engaged in politics, social service and film activities will have to lie low for the time being.

Lucky Days: 3rd, 14th and 25th

DHANUS

(Moola 4, Poorada 4, Utharada 1)

Jupiter, Lord of the Lagna, is in the house of debilitation. This apart, Mars aspects Janma. Hence restrict diet and try to obtain more rest and amenities. Jupiter and Saturn in 2nd house will keep your finance good. The conjunction of Venus and Mercury in the 4th house will keep you happy. Rahu, Uranus and Pluto in the 9th house will affect your father's health. Neptune in the 11th house will result in financial gains. Those in jobs will get coveted positions. Persons engaged in politics, social service and film activities will come to limelight.

Lucky Days: 6th, 14th and 27th.

Household women will find the period extremely lucky. There will be happy occasion at home. Those of you remaining single will happily get married. Love affairs will ripen into marriage. Students will progress well. Those in jobs will get promotions. Women engaged in politics, social service and film

activities will win recognition and fame.

Lucky Days: 13th, 17th and 19th.

MAKARA

(Utharada 3, Sravana 4, Dhanishta 2)

Saturn, Lord of the Lagna, is in Janma in conjunction with Jupiter. Take special care about your health. The position of Kethu in the 2nd house may cause eye complaints and is likely to affect your finance. Hence take care of expenditure. The progress of students, journalists, those in jobs and those in politics, social service and film activities will be retarded. Mars in the 6th house indicates liquidation of debts and disappearance of enemies. Uranus, Rahu and Pluto in the 8th house indicate risks through accidents and chances of venomous bites. Avoid journeys as far as possible.

Lucky Days: 4th, 13th and 24th.

Household women should take special care about health. The progress of students will be mildly retarded. Journalists, women in jobs, and those engaged in politics, social service and film activities will have to remain calm and collected and not get perturbed over trivial misfortunes.

Lucky Days: 6th, 17th and 27th.

KUMBHA

(Dhanishta 2, Sathabhisha 4, Poorattadhi 3)

Saturn, Lord of the Lagna, is posited in the 12th. This apart, Kethu is in Janma. Take special care about abdominal and chest complaints. Venus and Mercury in the 2nd house will keep your finances perennial. Exalted Sun in 3rd house indicates financial gains. Rahu, Uranus and Pluto in the 7th house may affect your partner's health. Students will make rapid progress. Those in jobs will manage well despite hardships. Persons engaged in politics, social service and film activities will have to lie low for the time being.

Lucky Days: 6th, 17th and 23rd.

The period is not good for household women. The progress of students will remain untarnished. Those in jobs will manage well. Women engaged in politics, social service and film activities will have to reconcile with minor reverses.

Lucky Days: 8th, 17th and 24th.

MEENA

(Poorattadhi 1, Uthirattadhi 4, Revathi 4)

Jupiter, Lord of the Lagna, is in 11th house. This apart, Venus and Mercury occupy Janma. Your health will improve. Exalted Sun in 2nd house will keep your finances well. Family

Contd. on page 77

New Mystery Serial

Instalment Eleven

By Lindsay Hamilton

THE BLACK ASP

THE STORY SO FAR:

Lady Muriel Waine is eloping with Nat Bingham when their car is attacked by three masked men, and the leader, "The Black Asp," takes Lady Muriel back to town—to her friend Mrs. Arkwright. Muriel fully realises from what she has been saved. But who is the Black Asp? And how does he come to know her movements and intentions so thoroughly?

Tony Wilmot (Mrs. Arkwright's nephew) finds life "doosed fatiguing". Major Grier, of the Intelligence department, is his friend. The Major is puzzled by the queer behaviour of Bingham, who, since the attack by the Black Asp, is a nervous wreck. Grier believes they may be on the brink of solving the mystery of a series of abominable crimes. One thread of the tangle is blackmail—by a creature known as The Flail.

Jack Parnell—known as Gentleman Jack—has just been released from prison. He comes out to find his daughter Susie missing. He is nearly frantic with anxiety, when he receives a note, "Ask Bingham".....

Sonia Deane is Bingham's ward. She is attacked by two ruffians, but is rescued by a masked man calling himself "The Black Asp," who tells her he loves her and intends marrying her. Sonia has no idea who this man can be. That night she sees him enter the house from the balcony. In the morning Bingham is found murdered. But Sonia cannot believe that her splendid laughing cavalier can be a brutal murderer.

Mrs. Arkwright invites Sonia to stay with her until things are frightened out.

On Bingham's body is found a note of warning from The Black Asp, and a letter from Parnell, also a list of twelve names. Major Grier points out that these are all names of women who have died

by their own hand in circumstances that point to blackmail by The Flail.

Are The Black Asp and The Flail one and the same person?

And has Parnell or The Black Asp murdered Bingham?

Lady Muriel receives a mysterious message from The Black Asp suggesting she calls on Sir Andrew Gale, the Surgeon.

Tony makes lazy love to Sonia, and takes her rebuff with the same nonchalance.

The Black Asp suddenly appears in the garden and makes love to Sonia. Although he refuses to reveal his identity, and she has never seen him unmasked, Sonia realises she loves this mysterious stranger.

She sends Tony to warn The Black Asp against any possible trap. The Black Asp escapes but Tony is too drunk to give any clear account of his meeting to Sonia...

Now read on:

"A gentleman to see you, sir.
A Mr. Otto Beutz".

Major Grier swung round in his chair and exhibited every sign of marked interest.

"Send him up at once," he ordered.

One quick glance as his visitor came forward, shewed him a man of well groomed appearance. He noted the neatly trimmed golden beard, frank smile - a little too frank - a flash of white teeth, cold brown eyes, forehead faintly lined and between the eyes two deep furrows in the shape of a V.

"Sit down, won't you?" said Grier in his friendly way. "Have a cigar."

"Thanks, I will."

Beutz seated himself and took a cigar from the box Grier pushed over to him. He cut the end carefully and with slow deliberation. Grier was watching him intently through half-closed eyes. He was now lighting the cigar. The first match broke and he flung it away. The second went out before he had taken more than two or three puffs. With the third he was more successful, but the hand which held the match trembled uncontrollably. He turned half sideways as though to hide it.

Under a service strain, thought Grier. A strong man, too, by the look of him. Well, he had seen strong men crack up before. They always took it worse; held on longer, but the break when it came was more devastating in its violence.

"You came to us for information a little while ago," began Beutz. "I had not then taken active control. Gant is a good man at his own job, but officious. He thought he was doing right, but unfortunately his manner is a little offensive."

Grier was more than ready to agree with him on that point but he was more occupied in wondering why Beutz had sought him out. Certainly not to apologise for the insolence of one of his staff.

"Then you agree to give the information I want?" he asked bluntly.

"Most willingly. That is the object of my visit; to offer whole-hearted co-operation," said Beutz with a smile.

But Major Grier was not so sure.

"Very courteous of you," he remarked. "But forgive the curiosity. It isn't courtesy alone that brings you here, Mr. Beutz?"

Beutz seemed to be considering the point for a moment or two.

"I may as well be frank," he said at last. "I want information from you and I'm ready to give you all the help I can in return. Nat and I were good friends though we didn't meet very often. And I am going into this business heart and soul. I can help you and I guess you can save me a lot of unnecessary labour."

Exactly, thought Grier. Well there was something to be said for friendly co-operation.

"You think you can help us find Jack Parnell?"

MUSIC ROOM!

"And what room is this?" asked the prospective buyer while being shown over the house.

"Oh that! That's the music room," explained the agent.

"The music room? But I don't see any piano!"

"It's not necessary. You just wait until your neighbour switches on his radio!"

Beutz shrugged.

"Is that all the story?" he asked quickly. "that is the point I want you to clear up."

"No, it is not," said Grier. "There is a deal more in the case than meets the eye."

"The Black Asp?" suggested Beutz calmly.

"Ah; So you know that, do you?"

"I'll tell you," said Beutz, and began to speak in a quick nervous manner. "It isn't only to avenge my cousin. It was that at first. But now there's something else - my own life. I am marked down. I know it. That fiend - my God, Sir, we've got to get him."

"How do you come to know of the Black Asp?" asked Grier slowly.

"Through Gant. He knows Nat was terrified of him. A few weeks before he was murdered, he set Gant to try and track him down, to get some clue to his identity. That's all we actually know?"

"And you? You say you're marked down. Have you been threatened?"

Beutz seemed reluctant to answer the question.

"Not yet," he said slowly. "But as sure as I'm sitting here I know it's coming. You can laugh at presentiments. I've laughed at them myself, but I don't, now. Do I look the sort of man to be afraid of imaginary shadows? Things have happened -oh, too trifling to mention. I don't particularly wish to convince you that I'm in danger so long as we work together to get the man. Who is he? Has nobody an idea about it?"

"Not the remotest," said Grier ruefully. "I was hoping for some clue from your agency. Bingham must have known him. My own idea is that at some time or other he was associated with him."

"We are looking into Bingham's history," said Beutz. "If anything turns up likely to be of any use to you, We'll let you know. Perhaps you could come round and talk it over."

But something else was in Grier's mind at the moment. Suddenly he fired a challenging question.

"Bingham knew the Flail?"

In the act of knocking the ash of his cigar, Otto Beutz jerked his hand against the corner of the ash-tray and sent it to the floor. When he looked up his expression was quite blank.

"Did he? I don't know. Who is the Flail?"

Grier did not reply, for at that moment the door opened and Tony came lounging in.

"Lo, Major, old lad. Just blown in to see when you're coming to cheer us up again at Red Gables. Oh sorry! You engaged? Why, if it isn't Mr. Getto Blotts."

"Beutz," said that gentleman coldly.

"Of course, Beutz. - Grotto Beutz. I remember it now. Doomed bad memory as a rule. How's the jolly old heart going on? Sorry an' all that but I forgot America'd gone dry. If you'd waited a few minutes you could have had a cup of tea, Cucumber sandwiches too. If there's anything I like it's cucumber sandwiches."

Beutz ignored him contemptuously.

"Well, what brings you to town, Tony?" asked the Major.

"You, dear old lad you. We miss your soothing voice. Dash it, I haven't slept properly since you went away."

"The loss of sleep seems to be doing you good. I haven't seen you so lively for a long time."

"Worry, Major, worry. I found a grey hair in the bath this morning. Anyway, you'll come."

"As soon as I can, Tony, in a day or two now I think."

At that moment the telephone bell rang and while Grier was answering it Tony turned the flow of his conversation onto Beutz again.

"Yes, Major Grier. What? Who are you?"

The Major turned round on them with a look that silenced even Tony. You could have heard a pin drop.

Then suddenly Grier leapt into feverish activity.

"That call," he shouted to the operator. "Where from? Then find out quick-us; yes-oh, a public call box, was it? Thank you." He replaced the receiver. "Him I might have known."

"What's up, Major Grier?" asked Tony. "Anything serious. Has somebody pinched the Houses of Parliament? Better put all the pawn brokers wise."

"The Black Asp - damn his impertinence!" said Grier snappishly. "He has the cheek to tell me he's getting short of cash and intends to help himself from a bullion train to-night."

"Wish him luck," said Tony. "It's rotten being hard-up."

"A practical joke, surely," scoffed Beutz.

"He'll find it a poor joke if he tries it," said the Major, and then to Beutz, pointedly. "Are you going now? I'll come over as soon as possible."

Beutz rose and departed.

"Queer chappie," said Tony almost before he was out of the room "You wouldn't think it to look at him, but he he's doomed religious, got a weak heart, a bad memory and hates strong drink like poison. Just think of it - and he's an American."

But Major Grier was occupied with more pressing matters. There were precautions to be taken for the safe transit of the bullion from Liverpool. It was hours later when he returned again to the problem of Otto Beutz and his thoughts concentrated then on one thing.

Why had Otto Beutz lied about The Flail?.....

At the rear end of an empty parcels train drawn up in a Liverpool dock station, two men stood chatting. A third jumped down from the next coach and joined them.

"No stowaways, Harry," he reported. "That ought to ease your mind."

The man addressed as Harry turned to his companion, a younger man, and laughed.

"He'd better ring up Scotland Yard and let'em know" he remarked sardonically. Windy lot of beggars. If we was to take notice of half the blamed madmen who reckon they're going to smash a bank or do their God. Give 'em twelve months down Scotland Road district and they wouldn't get the jim-jams for nothing."

"What's up with a trip to town, anyway," his companion rallied him. "Nice soft job I call it."

"Wish I was coming," said the third.

The guard of the train was walking towards them examining his lamp as he came.

"It's all right," he said chaffingly. "I'm not after your bullion."

I went to test the vacuum brake, that's all. Regulations. Shows we're vacuum-coupled the whole length of the train."

The two detectives went into the van and watched with interest. He lifted a small lever and there was a loud hiss. One of the two pointers on the clock sank back to zero and then began slowly to mount again and remained steady at the figure twenty. "Engine making vacuum again," explained the guard, and dropped off the footboard. "Got to see everything's all right. I'm further up the train. Want locking in?"

"None of your impudence, youngman," said Harry with a simper. "You've got two millionaires aboard this trip, and don't you forget it."

One of the score of red lights ahead turned to green.

"See you at Euston," shouted the guard. Should be a non-stop run with any luck."

His lamp showed green and he held it aloft. Chuff, Chuff, Chuff, from the engine. He swung into the footboard and entered his own van.

"Wish I was on a turn like this regular," he remarked to the roof. "Better than milk trains, juggling blooming churns like a star turn on the music halls."

In the bullion van at the rear two detectives were settling down to a game of cards.

"You're expecting no hold-up then?" said the younger man.

Then, seeing Harry's expression of scornful amusement, he hastened to add, "I was only thinking London wouldn't kick up a shine for nothing."

"Tchah! You've been reading Deadwood Dick, my lad," scoffed Harry. "In America now, there'd be some chance, with its stretches of wild country and it's blamed gunmen. But this ain't America, thank God."

"Precautionary measures", suggested the other.

"That's all we are, blamed precautions. If it wasn't for a strict sense of duty I'd have a snooze and make up for the sleep I lost last night trying to rope in a woman down Scotland Road district. A female devil, murdering mad. Methyated spirits as usual."

He went on to regale his companion with the choicest of his experiences and adventures: yarns all of them treating of sordid life; exciting some of them and relieved of their worst realities by a touch of humour and not a little coloured by that innate desire for artistic perfection which some would call imagination.

The hours passed away pleasantly enough. Harry finished another anecdote and consulted his watch.

"We'll be in Euston in about half-an-hour, or three-quarters," he predicted.

At that very moment the train began to slow down. The brake rattled and went on gently; not

more firmly. A hundred yards or so at a crawl and the train stopped altogether.

The young detective went to the window and looked out. He could see nothing but the side lamps of the guard's van higher up and the black darkness of the embankment. A steady hiss of escaping steam came from the engine.

On the other side of the train the guard too was looking out. The signal he could see was against them.

"Cranston Junction," he said, and, as though that were sufficient explanation, turned back into the van.

He was busy making up his report while the opportunity was good. The engine whistled shrilly and went again to the window just in time to see the red signal change to green. The train began to move again as he closed the window.

"Three minutes' delay—call it five."

He noted it down in his journal.

Forty minutes later the train drew up at No. 1 platform of Euston Station and the guard swung down.

"Right on the dot," he commented admiringly. "Four and a half hours. That's what I call....."

He stopped with his mouth open.

A moment or two later he was at rear of the train; the centre

CERTAINLY

"One last question before I engage you as my valet. Can you tell when an iron is too hot?"

"Certainly, Sir, when the clothes start to smell or burn."

of a group of police and plain clothes men, trying to answer the dozen questions flung at him from all sides.

The bullion van had vanished.

"Cranston Junction", was all he could tell them. "That was the only halt."

Less than half-an-hour later all wires leading to Rishington, the station nearest to Cranston Junction signal box, were working at red heat. Had they been susceptible to the heat of human emotions they must have curled up and melted like silver paper.

At the storm centre the Rishington station-master, a thick-necked, ginger-haired man of the name of Giles, was getting harassed into a frenzy like that of a baited bull. Into his ear was pouring a clamouring hubbub from all quarters. He looked as though he might at any moment tear the telephone from the wall and stamp on it.

"Is that Rishington station? This is Danby North signal box. 'I can't get.....'"

Clamour again.

"Rishington Station! Rishington Station! Is that Rishington?"

Why the devil don't you answer?"

"Get off the line," shouted Giles. "Hullo Danby North."

"This is Danby North. You went off. I can't get in touch, Cranston Box."

"Rishington! Rish-ing-ton!"

"Get to hell off the line, will you."

A highpitched voice chipped in.

"Are you Rishington?"

"No, Hades—Danby North," roared Giles. "What's that about Cranston box?"

"Can't get on to him; and the Scotch express has been held up here half-an-hour."

"Rishington! Get off the line everyone but Rishington."

"Oh hell and blankety blank. Get off the blank line. I'm talking to Danby signal box."

"This is Euston speaking."

"I don't care if it's the All Mighty. Get off!!!"

"Inspector Williams, Scotland Yard, speaking from Euston. Get that? Cut out the talk. There's a bullion van missing off the Liverpool special. Van probably uncoupled at Cranston Junction. Hang on. Night station-master will speak to you."

Giles wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Danby calling Rishington Station. Hello! - Hello!"

"Shut it off a minute," howled Giles. "Euston's on the line."

"Hello! Is that Rishington? This is Blakey of Euston, About this break-loose. Do you know anything about it?"

"No. Danby North has just reported Cranston box out of action."

"Have you done anything yet?"

"Who in the name of Hanover could do anything with this racket going on?"

"Well, you'd better get a pilot engine on the job quick. You can send up a relief for Cranston on it. The police are being warned. They should be on the spot by then."

It was on the tip of Giles' tongue to start an official wrangle on the difference between giving impossible orders and carrying them out. But he refrained and got onto Danby North again.

"You can let the Scotch express through at a crawl," he said "and send a relief man for Cranston on it."

Phew! That was that. But still the wires up and down for miles along the line buzzed and clamoured with a confused turmoil of questions and orders. And for the officials concerned life was bad.

In the meanwhile messages were flashing out to police stations in the vicinity. A stupenous attempt was being made to draw a cordon of twenty miles radius around the spot. All towns

was there. He was already half asleep in a cozy corner.

Madan tipped him handsomely, paid extra charges for a night's stay and got a large comfortable room with sofas, chairs and double bed. The room seemed almost sound-proof and when he brought in Jyoti she was delighted. A terrible storm had already broken out, and trees were uprooted by the hundred. The bungalow alone escaped the fury of the cyclone.

After a time, Madan rose to go to another room, instructing Jyoti to close the door and go to sleep without fear. But the young woman on an impulse ran up to him, and threw her arms round his neck. Madan had been expecting this romance to fructify for a long time though he was careful not to make the first move. He had been terribly in love with her.

Early next morning she rose with a guilty feeling but soon got over it. From that day Madan visited her house by stealth and stayed with her for a time. Nobody knew about this affair except the housemaid but she received high wages and kept silent.

Early one morning Jyoti was half awake. Madan was sleeping soundly. He had come rather late and did not leave the house at 5 a.m. as usual. He had always been discreet and

scrupulous. At that time Jyoti was aware that some one was staring through the window which was partially open. Horror of horrors! It was her mother-in-law's younger sister who had been sent by her with an important message from her son.

"So it has come to this. Oh poor Sethna! My poor Sethna! What a fool you are to be absent!" she muttered loudly to herself.

In the following week Sethna had mysteriously resigned his job and returned home all of a sudden. He went to see his mother to have a talk with her.

Jyoti knew that she had been discovered. She was too sensitive and sensed a change in her husband's attitude. She took an easy way out of her dishonour. She hanged herself to death.

THE BRUTE

"In a few years," said the artist to his landlord, "people will look at this miserable studio, and say: 'Arbuthnot, the famous artist, used to live here.'"

"If I don't get the rent by tonight, they'll be able to say that very thing tomorrow."

something and fell sprawling. He picked himself up with queer sensation in the pit of his stomach, for the thing which had tripped him had yielded softly beneath his foot and had slid with him a little way down the embankment.

Fumbling for his torch in the dark, his hand touched a cold face. He drew it back hastily. It was wet with the peculiar slippery wetness of blood.

Ah! The torch! It was against his foot. He flashed it on. One glance at that face was enough to show life was extinct. He had been shot through the centre of the forehead. A few yards away lay a second figure, a man considerably younger in appearance. He was breathing faintly and at first sight appeared only to be asleep. But on raising him, Hodge found that he was bleeding slightly from a contused wound in the back of the head.

"I've a first aid outfit in the car," said the owner of it helpfully. "I'll go and get it."

"Good!" Hodge seemed relieved. "I'll leave him to you while I take a look round."

He was down on the line and had taken only a few steps when he came upon the end of the missing bullion van. It stood deserted and without lights, on the up line immediately below the road bridge.

Inside all was confusion. Ingots of gold lay scattered about anyhow. The robbers had got away with as much as they could

carry, and had left the rest strewn about like old bricks in a builder's yard.

Some of the yellow metal was streaked with deep crimson as though a bleeding carcass had been dragged across the floor of the van.

Shortly afterwards Constable Hodge was joined by two other members of the force. They came from the direction of the signal-box. The relief man had arrived, and the riddle of Cranston box's silence was solved. The signalman, an elderly man, had been lying unconscious. It looked as though he had been struck down with some blunt instrument from behind.

Twenty-five miles away the alarm reached Sergeant Baker as daylight was breaking. Stop all lorries! And there outside his own house, which was also the Police Station, stood a covered lorry.

He rushed out to it immediately. It seemed deserted. He walked round to the front slipping on his tunic as he went. Two oil lamps threw out a yellow gleam into the shadowy grey of dawn. No driver in the seat! No sign of a—what was that? It sounded like a low groan. It seemed to come from inside the body of the lorry.

He ran to the rear and swung himself up over the tailboard. In the dim light he could make out what seemed to be a heap of lifeless humanity. No! One of them stirred. Now another.

in a jiffy would dart up the flight of stairs.

I saw them locked in each other's arms. She was love-starved and hungry for his kisses. After an hour or so, the old woman would loudly call for her daughter. "Manju, come down for the meal. It is past ten. Be quick."

The man would unceremoniously hurry out and Manju would begin to dress. I would gaze with open mouth at her perfect body—which seemed like the statue of a goddess that had suddenly become animate. Sometimes I saw the man coming back, pocketing something and disappearing quickly into the shades of the night. Once I wanted to follow him and find all about him but the attraction in the room above was great and I stayed on every night until eleven when she would go to bed and turn off the light. Then I would trek back wearily to the heart of the city where the bustle and hustle of traffic and the crowds on the roads would keep me on my toes.

One night after the mystery man had gone, the two women ran to the front of the house and shouted in terror; "Help! Help! There is a snake in the kitchen." But it was past ten-thirty and there was a sharp drizzle. No one was moving about in that God-forsaken place except myself. I dashed out of the park and approached the ladies. "Don't be afraid," I said. "Give me a strong stick or iron rod and show the place

where the snake is hiding. I will finish it."

Manju's mother led me in and showed the kitchen. I looked at the reptile and then laughed. "Ladies, it is only a water snake." So saying I caught hold of it by the tail without fear, went up to the park and threw it off there amidst the bushes. When I came back Manju spoke and her voice and behaviour showed her admiration for my resourcefulness and presence of mind. "You see, sir, the very sight of a serpent harmless or poisonous, paralyses us with fear. Anyway we thank you for reassuring us and giving us back our peace of mind."

Manju's mother pressed me to take a cup of tea. From that day onwards I was a regular visitor to their house. Already an unexpressed love had sprung up between us. At a glance I understood that they were on hard times and were looking for some source from which they could borrow. Once when I took out my pocket book a dozen hundred rupee notes fell on the floor. Manju picked them up and handed them to me. "Suppose I take them all and return the money after a time?" she asked me half-seriously and half-jokingly. I at once seized her right hand boldly and placed the notes on her palm. "They are yours. You may return them when and how you please. I shall place more at your disposal if you want it."

The old woman on learning of my generosity came to thank me

SHORT STORY

THE VICTIM

By K. R. CHANDRAN

THE two women Radha and Prema stopped and stared at each other. They were in a crowd struggling at the ticket counter of the railway station. There was a surging mass of people who were milling round the ticket-counter to get tickets for a special train to carry them to a big mela.

The fight at the counter caused a regular stampede in which women screamed and children shrieked. Then only the authorities announced that two more ticket counters were being opened immediately—one of them specially for the ladies. The women joyfully emerged from the crowd and went in the direction indicated by the announcer. It was while waiting to buy tickets that the old friends Radha and Prema encountered each other. At first they stared at each other unbelievably; then recognition gleamed in their eyes. They warmly clasped each other.

"Where had you been all these years?" asked Prema.

"I am asking you the same question," retorted Radha with a laugh. "You look not a day older since I saw you in Kanpur twelve years ago."

Prema giggled. "But, Radha, you look more beautiful even though you are past twenty-eight. Is that not something to be proud of?"

They had bought their tickets but the train was scheduled to arrive only two hours later. So they retired to a corner of the station platform where only a few people were squatting. The two women sat chewing pan. They were silent for some time, gazing at the stars that were now peeping out one by one. There was a majestic moon already sailing gracefully between white fluffy clouds.

"Radha," said Prema breaking the silence, "We were like sisters in our youth and would not think of separation for a day. Now that fate has brought us together again, we should manage to keep in touch with each other."

"It was you who suddenly disappeared from home. You don't know how many days I wept over your loss. I thought you must have been abducted by some fellow and then killed and thrown into a river. Are you not an educated girl? You could have written a letter from wherever you found yourself to your parents. You could have posted the letter even without affixing stamps. That would have reached the addressee safer. At least you could have written to me. I would have conveyed your message to your parents."

"Ah, I remember very well how agonised your parents were. They sought the help of the police who cast a wide net all over the State. They circulated prints of your photo to the different stations with other particulars given by your parents."

"Your father then inserted an advertisement in the leading papers begging of you to return as your mother was dying of anxiety and grief at your disappearance. They waited for months but the police did not succeed in tracing you out. Then they consulted some astrologers. One of them, known for his accurate predictions, said that you were not dead but the parents would not be able to see you."

A CONVERT

Young Hopeful — "Father, what is a traitor in politics?"

Veteran Politician — "A traitor is a man who leaves our party and goes over to the other one."

Young Hopeful — "Well, then, what is a man who leaves his party and comes over to yours?"

Veteran Politician — "A convert, my son."

Your mother was broken-hearted and died raving about you. Your father followed her in six months.

"Your brother Hari was equally grief-stricken but he never gave up his search for you. He relinquished his job, sold up all his property and was determined to trace you out. He was staying in a hotel. He had his fortune in the form of cash in his box and often told my father of his intention to go out in search of you. My father tried to console him and persuade him to marry and forget his sorrow."

"Do you know, Radha, your brother at one time loved me very much and I too was very fond of him. But one day he said that the sight of me reminded him of yourself and begged to be excused for his inability to marry—me. In fact, he said he

was not going to marry at all. His one and only aim was to find you out wherever you were. And one night he disappeared without taking leave of us. We never saw him afterwards. I was mourning like a widow over his loss but soon my parents had me married to another man but he died two years later, leaving me a son. My father died after five years. Only my mother is living with us. Not a day passes without mother making a sad reference to you. Don't you see Radha how you were the main cause of the ruin of your family."

Radha was wiping her eyes. But the tears did not stop flowing. Prema patted her on the shoulder in comfort.

"Prema, you may remember there was a young man by name Sunder who was always shadowing me. Somehow he captured my heart. I fell for his glamorous ways and high style of living. He was in truth a hypnotist. That fact I discovered later. One night, as desired by him, I met after 9 p.m. near the station. He sprinkled some powder over my head and hypnotised me into obeying him. I became his slave and carried out all his commands. He made me get into the train and took me to Bombay. It is needless to say I became his mistress. After some time he got tired of me but he was still my master. He rented a large room in a dubious lodging house. He brought in three more gils who

Appointment

"I am calling to make an appointment with the dentist," said the little boy.

"I'm sorry, he's out," replied a nurse.

"Thank you. When will he be out again?"

had once been loved by him, like myself. Other men secretly visited us and paid him lots of money.

"But under his hypnotic spell I had no will of my own and could not think for myself. I forgot all about my home, parents and my brother. The nefarious trade in the flesh was going on until one night we heard shouts. Sunder had been stabbed by someone. 'So you rascal, you have ruined that innocent girl. I know she will die of shame if I see her', shouted the assailant. 'But here is God's punishment. Take it, rascal. I feel avenged now!'"

"I thought I heard my brother's voice but the assailant had disappeared. We girls were taken by the police to a rescue home. I am now doing some sewing and needle work, Prema, and eking out my livelihood. You see, I was caught in a trap."

"There is a box of money left by your brother with us. Come and take it," said Prema.

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