
TIBET
LHASA
MT. EVEREST
NEPAL
KHATMANDU
BHUTAN
ASSAM
BENARES
CALCUTTA
INDIA
MANDALAY
BURMA
BAY OF BENGAL
RANGOON
SIAM

Land of the Eye

A Narrative of the Labors, Adventures, Alarums and Excursions of the Denis-Roosevelt Asiatic Expedition to Burma, China, India and the Lost Kingdom of Nepal

BY

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NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

IN CANADA, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINTED IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

19. *THE LAND OF THE EYE*

WE CAME TO PATNA, at last, the last large town in India where we could leave our cars, and drove exhausted down the fourteen crowded miles of its single street. The ex-Prime Minister of Behar, with marvelously long hairs in his ears which he kept caressing, told us that the ferry was crossing the sacred river Ganges almost immediately. We wired for private cars on the night train to Raxaul. We garaged our Dodges. We whispered good-by to India with the last of our strength, saw our sixty-five pieces of baggage hurled on the deck of the little *S.S. Sasipur* and sailed diagonally across the Ganges towards the flames of the cremation fires on the other shore. As far as we could see along both banks there were fires consuming the flesh of men, all but the navels which would be floated to paradise by the holiest river in the world.

"There's the train!" said Armand. "Good Lord, it's moving!"

The *S.S. Sasipur* collided with the bank and we

rushed ashore in the wake of Ram, our warrior cook, who drove an army of laden coolies ahead of him. The train was backing up now, then again it was moving slowly forward, sashaying back and forth as if the thing were worried that, once stopped, it might never again go journeying along its narrow tracks. I yelled to the Indian engineer to give us a chance to get aboard, but he ignored me. A body came hurtling out of one compartment as it minueted past. The poor beggar tried to enter another and again was flung out on his head. When we finally leaped aboard and collapsed into our own two cubicles the man was making a sensational exit from a second-class carriage, straight out, a perfect swan dive into a pile of coal dust where most of him disappeared.

Jack was tugging on one of my feet when I wakened in the morning, and leaning farther out the window than I thought any man could balance. The train had stopped.

"Raxaul," he said. "And that's Nepal. And the back side of those mountains is Tibet."

Explorers should be unemotional people, accustomed to marvels, but I felt a shiver—as delightful as the beginning of a sneeze—run up my spine when I looked across the frontier and saw stretching from far east to far west the stupendous Himalayas. The horizon was rimmed with snow-capped peaks glittering pink and gold in the first light of dawn, five hundred jagged miles of them, the roofs of the world beneath which lay Nepal and Tibet.

Already the atmosphere was changing as the winds

from Central Asia came roaring over those roofs, to slumber in Nepal and drift drowsily towards us. There was less perfume in the air than in India, and even though it was wafted over twenty miles of jungle and swamp it still bore the sweet clean smell of snow. Mount Everest, almost thirty thousand feet high, was sending a breeze from near Heaven to welcome us.

We changed into an even smaller train consisting of an engine and a single car with the shield of the Maharajah of Nepal emblazoned on it. An elephant, curiously hairy-browed, watched us impassively as our train did deep-breathing exercises in preparation for its trip through the Terai, that fever-haunted and tiger-infested country that is the first natural barrier to Nepal. A holy man bearing an iron trident in his hand and with the trident of Vishnu painted on his forehead, squatted beside the tracks and scratched alternately his matted hair and the wrinkled envelope of his chest which had been skin long ago before he had befouled it with dung and ashes. As the train started a tall lunatic wearing an enormous helmet came dancing up to our window to make bugle noises with his cupped hands.

This, before breakfast when we were still groggy from lack of sleep, was not inspiring. We waved him away and he went crawling on all fours into a sort of kennel where he apparently lived.

Raxaul and India were behind us at last; so too was Birganj, the border station of the Nepalese railroad. For twenty miles we puffed and jerked across the fearful jungle of the Terai, keeping our eyes peeled for

tiger and rhinoceros, as both were frequently seen along these tracks. Here the Maharajah went hunting, explained the dapper youth in European clothes who sat beside me, and in two months last year had shot one hundred and thirty tigers. Himself? Yes, he was a Nepalese returning home from school in India. Nepal? We would not be allowed to see very much, said young Thapa smugly; we would be guarded. A German entomologist who had slipped away from his guard a few years ago had had his entire collection confiscated, films, bugs, everything. Yes, the Nepalese wanted to keep their country secret from prying western eyes, but he himself had traveled the length and breadth of it. He had climbed to the sacred Lake of Gosainthan, sixteen thousand feet high in the Himalayas, and had seen beneath its icy waters the temple of the god Mahadeo, and the god himself. Of the thousand pilgrims who started on that pilgrimage, as they do each year, only a hundred returned with him. The rest had died of cold and hunger. On the way back he had offered prayers for them at that other lake where great serpents lived in nests of snow.

Our little train staggered out of the jungle to a little station marked "Amelekhganj," at the end of the line, and we moved ourselves and baggage to a very ancient Buick which would take us a few more miles to Bhimphedi where the road ended and we should start the climb over the Himalayan foothills, the Mahabharat Range.

"Maharajah car," said the driver. "Thirty rupee." So that was it; and that would be it for the length of

our stay. The Maharajah, running his ideal kingdom of Nepal like a private estate, would tax our every move for the privilege of peering into the last of the forbidden lands.

We rocketed out of Amelekhganj over an admirable but stony road. We climbed into the hills and looked down at bald, serrated escarpments of sandstone. The dry beds of cascades, which during the wet weather must have been torrential, swung past us, then great waterfalls sliding beneath the road, with the first clear water we had seen since Europe. We rounded a cliff on two wheels.

"This," said Leila, "is the end." I rather wished it were. I was so numb with the thought of imminent death that I could not feel Armand's lean knees boring through the cloth jump-seat and into my back. We careened over a ridge and volplaned down with the motor cut off, for our fiend of a driver was conservative with gas. He was so conservative with brake linings, too, that apparently he did without them.

"To die," quoth Armand, "when one reaches one's goal, to die in Paradise."

I reached over and slapped our driver on the back of the neck. "Slow down!" I shouted. "*Kubberdar!*" But when he screwed around in his seat to stare at me I just gave up and gently screwed his head back again until it faced the road ahead.

It was only on the upgrades that we had a chance to see the people of Nepal, lighter than the Indians and with the suggestion of Mongol heritage in their eyes and cheekbones, the men wearing a sort of white

jodhpurs which fitted the calf and was surmounted by a flounce of shirt-tails around the waist. The collarless shirt overlapped itself at the throat and was held together by a civilized vest.

Little skull caps were perched jauntily on straight black hair. The women, with brilliant, belted dresses and gold earrings like carafe stoppers, marched sedately upon their errands. Tough, snappy little Gurkha soldiers saluted us, and pilgrims from Tibet, with square, seamed faces, glowered.

We came roaring through the sunlight, but ahead was a blue wall of rain joining neatly the peaks of the Mahabharat Range, a wall of mystery from Heaven to earth enclosing the sacred valley of Khatmandu. We bounced through a village of cane huts and ground to a stop before a gaping hole in a cliff a thousand feet high. A little shrine stood beside the cave, but to what god it was devoted I could not tell, the idol was so smeared with yellow and vermilion unguents which the devout had rubbed upon it to make their prayers adhere. Large and little bronzed and verdigrised bells were hung all over the shrine.

Our driver got out to buy a tiny red and yellow canna from an old man who sat at the entrance of the cave. He touched two fingers to a tray of red and yellow paints, tied the flower to the windshield, daubed his forehead with the paint, refreshing the caste-mark that is called a *tilka*, raised his two hands in prayer and quietly got into the car again.

None of us spoke. We also felt that we should be beholden to the gods if they permitted us to pass in

safety through the tunnel to the valley beyond. A secret land should be entered like this, I thought.

We roared away into the evil darkness, haunted with demons. Water dripped upon us from the timbers overhead and a gaseous odor caught at our throats. We tore along dizzily, regardless of anyone who should be coming toward us, and when we emerged into rain we felt we had sunk to another depth away from the world, through still another layer of reality towards a land which would exist, perhaps, only in our own dreaming minds. Perhaps there was no Nepal; perhaps these mountains and quiet valleys were an uninhabited place which men could people and make glorious only by their own imagining.

Without slackening speed our driver raised his hands again in thankfulness and we sped through great fields of corn that wound away over the hills to the north. A doe by the roadside gazed sweetly at us. We skidded through a village of houses which we were soon to recognize as typically Nepalese, chalet-style buildings with jutting eaves supported by carved struts outthrust from white walls. Their windows were tightly grilled with intricately engraved lattices of wood. The cleanliness of the streets, the mountains, the air like a thin cologne, was reminiscent of Switzerland and Haute-Savoie. Nothing could be more unlike the swarming, festering India we just had left. There was peace on this land, and kindliness. There was nothing to warn us that in the corners of it and the dark places, the temples and the secret courtyards, lay bleeding horrors which we should come to know and remember

always. I was to smell blood at banquets in New York, and wake at night to the sound of gurgling death that was only my water faucet.

Now we were climbing steadily, to three thousand and four thousand feet according to Armand's altimeter, when suddenly we saw far ahead in the road a troupe of giant Hanuman monkeys. They disappeared up the face of the cliff and we forgot them. Suddenly a boulder came hurtling just in front of the wheels of our car. An accident, we thought; a landslide. But we had not gone fifty yards when another terrific rock, weighing at least a hundred pounds, shot from the cliff above, bounced twice on the slope beside us, barely missed a fender and went plummeting into the river far below.

The driver held the accelerator to the floor and chattered wildly.

"He says it's the monkeys!" Chand told us. "They always throw stones when white people come."

It was incredible, but it was true as we saw a few minutes later. We were straining from the sides of that machine of hell, staring at the bare top of the cliff, when Jack shouted. The driver slammed on the brakes, which did not stop us at all, while we watched three old, gray monkeys crawling busily around a large rock which seemed to be balanced just on the edge of the cliff face. The car rolled steadily on. Jack flung himself over the front seat at the gear shift but Ram, Chand, and the driver were all blocking his way. We watched, fascinated and helpless, as the rock tipped slowly over the edge, then came straight for us. Jack

groaned. Roy laughed. Ram, Chand, and the driver cowered beneath the dash. Armand whistled with sheer admiration at this zoological wonder. Leila swore shockingly. I just looked, wondering vaguely whether I could recall these individual reactions when I should be writing books in some other life.

The rock landed like a meteor, five feet behind us, and stayed where it fell, half buried in the road.

"Step on it!" Armand bawled at the driver.

He did. We careened up hill around corners, while I fumbled for a cigarette and reflected upon this peaceful land which even the beasts wished to keep inviolate. The gods of rain, at least, had realized we would bring no harm to Nepal, for the blue mist was lifting as we approached Bhimphedi, the town where we would spend the night. The sun, like a coin sinking into the dark fist of an Asiatic magician, slid smoothly into a crease of the mountains, and the last of its rays fell upon the high empty house which was to be ours.

We set the canvas cots on the stone-paved floors, rigged mosquito netting from wall to wall with a labyrinth of strings that confused us almost as much as the mosquitoes, and went out separately into the growing darkness to see what we could of the town before night filled it completely.

I should be contented here, I thought, but I was ill at ease. I should feel at home in the land I had sought from childhood, but I felt a stranger. Not an intruder. No; I felt more like a ghost, barely visible, returning, a benign ghost of whom the villagers were quite unafraid. Most of them had probably never seen a white

man, yet they showed no curiosity and were too polite to stare. Men smiled quickly in the candle-glow of their open shops and continued their selling of tobacco, small potatoes, onions, green peaches, cloth, filthy lump salt (the black kind which is supposedly aphrodisiac) and rice of various colors. Or they would look up from the games they played with cowrie shells or from the smoking of their silver-mounted water pipes, acknowledge me, then promptly forget what was just another ghost in their ghost-ridden land. Both men and women were only occasionally beautiful, but all showed a character which the bland natives of India lacked. They were a hardier people, of obvious pride and independence, and there was not a beggar anywhere.

I followed music through the narrow stone streets until I came to a square that was filled with it, with the sound of various bells and of flutes and drums. Four groups of musicians sat at shrines devoted to Ganesh, Hanuman, Siva, and Bhairab, paying no attention to one another but each chanting and plying its instruments to attract the attention of its god. Our Princess in Calcutta had said that her people were musical; they were once so famed as musicians, indeed, that when Prithwi Narayan with his Gurkha army captured Kirtipur in 1765 he ordered the lips and noses to be cut from whoever could not play a musical instrument. The name of the city was changed thereafter to Naskatipur, "The City of Cut Noses," and, needless to say, it has fostered musicians ever since.

Without pausing in their song the first group gestured me to a place on the ground with them. They

were swaying wildly, clinking small cymbals together, beating with the heel of one hand and the fingers of the other upon conical drums which were painted black and red. One bearded virtuoso, holding a baby in his lap, played a kind of primitive harmonium with amazing dexterity. His hand was quicker than my eye, a blur of action, yet I felt that it was precise in its aim at the yellow keys even when it struck a note too lightly to sound. The rhythm was elusive; it was barbaric in beat yet sophisticated, with a subtle counterpoint of bell-notes and flute-notes and a whispering that overlaid the almost hysterical song.

High in the dark above us was the idol of Hanuman, the Ape, a figure of red clay obscenely dancing. And the great eyes of Buddha which we were to see everywhere throughout Nepal glared from the roofs of temples to remind man that Buddha watched his every move. This was The Land of the Eye.

26. *BHATGAON THE GOLDEN*

DAY AFTER DAY slid down the glacial mountains on the east of the valley and up the mountains of the west. The sun blessed us. Here was the fullest peace, so much of it indeed that we were not once disturbed by an invitation to visit His Highness, the Maharajah. He sent us, with never a message, great salvers of fruit and vegetables, haunches of venison which he himself had shot, said Hospitality, and on one occasion six dozen eggs. These eggs passed the entire morning for Chand, our warrior cook. For hours he sat breaking them into a little bowl, grunting at each and spitting on each and finally flinging it over his shoulder to the mongoose which, when it could no longer swallow, delighted in smearing the yokes on the outside of his muzzle as if somehow he might absorb them through his skin. Egg after egg went sailing, until Leila came, horrified, into the yard.

"Maharajah eggs all bad!" said Chand. Zoom, went another one.

We appreciated the thoughtfulness of the Mahara-

jah, particularly regarding the venison which was the only good meat, excepting Colonel Rand's steak, we had eaten in a very long time. But if His Highness was shooting deer these days he was certainly not tending to business so strictly that he could find no time for us. We decided to start filming anyway, to get what we could of background shots so long as we were not explicitly forbidden to do so. Let Hospitality, that Winchell in Wonderland, write us up in his scandal book; let Thapa groan at the thought of the punishments that would afflict us all, we none the less had a film to make, a perfectly respectable and serious record of Nepal. On our own heads be it.

So Thapa groaned across the wheel of the ancient Dodge with Jack beside him antiphonally chanting "Home on the Range." In the back squeezed Armand, Leila, Roy, Hospitality, and I plus the most essential assortment of moving picture apparatus. We toured, breathless; there was scant room for breath on that condensed expedition.

We crossed a modern steel bridge on the sacred Baghmatti River, and gulped—there was only room for half a gulp—at the sight of a bloated white corpse floating past. A hundred crows were fighting to ride and swill upon it. They would cling to the blisters left by the inadequate cremation fire and plunge their beaks out of sight into the flesh. The corpse would spin over; they would go down fighting for their victuals. But the soul of that corpse didn't mind, for it was at peace and purified by these sweet waters. Under the bridge it went, the modern and civilized bridge, away and away

till there was no body left but only a skeleton that sank slowly, a symbol of the horror and the really admirable faith of the East.

Ahead of us lay the *maidan*, the immense parade ground, with a thousand troops vigorously drilling. They were smart little fellows in their natty brown uniforms and jaunty cloth hats; the Gurkha, I thought, has the qualities of the mongoose; he is as quick, as spontaneously friendly, as deadly as that small prince of civets, and I could see why it was recounted that he left a swath of broken hearts when he went to the service of India. The greatest lovers, they were reputed to be, as well as the greatest fighting men in Asia.

I was thinking it was my turn to draw a breath now, as I had plainly seen Armand draw his; I had felt him inflate at the other side of the car. I was just preparing for this feast of air when an explosion like the collision of planets rocked the Dodge.

"High noon," said Thapa.

"Maharajah boom," said Hospitality, not to be outdone. It was twelve o'clock all right; we should never be doubtful of it again with that cannon-clock of the Maharajah booming to all the valley that even time was under his omnipotent control.

We drove slowly around the *maidan*, admiring the accouterments of the Nepalese officers. They were dressed in scarlet and sat upon tiger skins, and from their helmets waved Bird of Paradise feathers which had been brought from Borneo three thousand miles away. Whenever they paused to review the troops a

corps of coolies rushed forward with whisks, and squatted to swish the flies from their horses' bellies.

All major generals in Nepal—and there are many of them—said Thapa, are legitimate sons of the Maharajah, but all illegitimate sons are lieutenant colonels.

Beyond the *maidan* stood the palaces of these sons and grandsons, square white edifices of marble, utterly unsplendid. And beyond these was the Singa Durbar, the palace of the Maharajah, impressive by its size alone rather than any architectural beauty. A high iron fence surrounded its gardens and ponds and fountains. The palace, white and supine, lay across the center of the twenty-acre space; to the right were infinite stables and to the left the private zoo in which were housed whatever animals of the chase His Highness had wounded and not killed. There, said Hospitality, lived the Royal Rhinoceros which must be killed at the exact moment of the Maharajah's death.

That seemed to be rubbing it in a bit, I thought, considering that the Maharajah had reputedly killed forty-seven rhino (and one hundred and thirty-five tiger) during a three months' hunt last year.

We turned from these monuments to massacre and drove west, over undulating fields of corn, to the small village of Thini. There was only a single street of it, running up and over a hill, walled on both sides by two- and three-story houses of the lovely old Newar form: low eaves, long struts of symbolic carving, latticed windows of perfect proportion, unlike any others in the world. The usual bright brass pots shone in the

shops beneath them, and loops of material block-printed black or red in a great variety of patterns.

Roy, Jack, and I debarked to get a shot of Armand and Leila riding up the street in the ancient Dodge, but at that moment it began to drizzle. Roy waved a handkerchief to Thapa to signify that the camera was ready. I crouched beneath his tripod with the Ikonta suspended by its strap from my teeth while with one hand I held up the light meter and with the other threatened Hell to the curious crowd that clogged our scene. It rained, and up went a hundred umbrellas, obliterating what little light was left, adding another darkness to our patient film.

It was not polite, of course, as their guests, to yawp at them, but yawp we did, even Hospitality with an apologetic and decently Brahman yawp. It did no good. They began to imitate us. More and more umbrellas went up until I, who can face a cobra at a fair distance and am terrified of female umbrellas in New York, fumbled for the kazoo and jumped away tootling "The Jolly Old King of England" upon it. I blew and I blew, and the umbrellas surged after me. I yawped into the kazoo, for you play it that way, and the crowd left the cameras to follow the madman down the long Thini street. It was a ruse we should employ often thereafter.

Again we were jammed breathless into the car and driving through sun again. Markets appeared in the most unlikely places, in the midst of an open field where old men sat cross-legged selling red onions beneath oiled-paper parasols painted with dragons. Holy

yogis limped slowly down the road, raising twisted fingers as we jolted past them. They were begging, said Hospitality, who was still trying to out-smart Thapa, for "rice, *pice* or anything nice." If these were fair samples of the Yoga philosophy which so excited idle matrons in New York, our culture seemed in a bad way indeed.

We circled Khatmandu by an abominable road. We were going to Bhatgaon, said Hospitality, Bhatgaon the Golden City that had fired my young imagination when I had first read Father Giuseppe's *Researches.* My heart beat faster, for great dreams too rarely come true, but it fails me now in seeking to describe that strangest and loveliest city in the world.

You come upon it gradually, through a scattering of houses of the Newar type, past the huge tank called Siddha Pokri, three hundred yards long and one hundred wide, which was built in the seventeenth century during the reign of Bhim Sen and stocked by him with goldfish imported from China across Tibet and the four-mile-high passes of the Himalayas—the hardiest fish in the world, they must be, to endure such a journey, or the torture and humiliation inflicted upon them by maiden aunts with stagnant water and tiny bowls.

The people of Bhatgaon believe their city to resemble the conch shell of Vishnu Narayan, the rounded and broader end lying towards the northeast and its point southwest. It is smaller than the other two cities of the vale, Khatmandu and Patan, but its streets are wider and cleaner and its buildings far better preserved, for at the time of the Gurkha conquest Bhatgaon was

surrendered without resistance to Prithwi Narayan and consequently escaped the plunder which those other cities experienced at the hands of the invaders.

You pass the tank, and the streets dwindle for a while before you, funneling towards the Durbar Square. Balconies of superb grill-work carve the sunlight into kaleidoscopic patterns where it strikes the flagstone streets. Lattice windows wearing carved peacocks flank you to right and to left. You pass through wooden colonnades, rich red in tone, through carved gateways with the stylized phallic emblems of Siva upon their tops. Griffins of green stone drowse before many doorways, and above them, one on each side to warn off marauders, are painted the eyes of Buddha, the vigilant eyes of Nepal.

Bhatgaon's Durbar Square seems an architectural bedlam when suddenly you emerge from the half-shadowed streets and are confronted by it, a hundred gilded roofs, tier upon tier, flinging spots of sun like golden coins at your eyes, a score of temples so closely packed that it is hard to tell the limits of the square. Somewhere near the center on a twenty-foot cube of stone is a stupendous bell, suspended between granite columns from a granite beam, and overlooking this, on a great pillar surmounted by a lotus of stone, sits the magnificent figure of Rajah Bhupatindra Mall, the greatest of Bhatgaon's rulers two hundred years ago.

Serene and arrogant, clothed entirely in gold plate, Bhupatindra Mall looks over the finest building of his reign, the Durbar Hall with its gilt-copper door. It is intricately embossed with a myriad designs from both

Hindu and Buddhist lore, dragons, twisted lizards, cherubim with tails, lions rampant, elephants, gods and goddesses with innumerable arms. Scriptures in Sanscrit are woven between these figures, admonishing the faithful and calling his attention to some of the minute but monstrous creatures that are bound to get him if he won't watch out. The smallest design is significant to the initiate, a scroll, a leaf, a bell; each has its esoteric implication, and here of course are the eyes of Buddha, benevolent and baleful both.

But although the Buddhist elements of Bhatgaon are immediately obvious, they are decadent; they are rapidly dying before the encroachment of the fierce Hindu cults. Most of the Newar populace is Hindu, and their temples outnumber by three to one the graceful pagodas of Buddhism. And though these pagodas are of themselves lovely there are many which it would be unwise for the prim to enter. For Buddhism, here in decay, has absorbed the worst of Hinduism; the Tantric philosophy, if it may be called a philosophy at all, has rotted the foundations of decency from Buddhism in Nepal, and the Bhatgaon temples are the theater of its obscene practice. Buddha may smile benignly at the gate, but behind his back, crouched in the corners where the shadows are deep, sprawling along the rafters of the cells inside these temples, are images so obscene as to make you shudder when you learn, quite truly, that they represent the orgies performed even today by men and women of the Tantric cult.

The debased come here to worship the revolting Vajra Satwa, the sixth and last of the Celestial Bud-

dhas. The gongs are beaten, grease is rubbed on the images, libations of perfume are made to the gods and then libations of blood. And the sexual climax of the ceremony is devoted to that Sankara Acharya who sometime in the eighth or ninth century destroyed most of the Buddhist literature of Nepal. He began his crusade in India as a Brahman priest, swept through Nepal and over the mountains to Tibet, where he was finally killed by the Grand Lama who finished a violent discussion with him by transfixing his shadow to the ground with a knife. Sankara fell upon the blade, which slit his throat and killed him instantly. The Newars now say that it is in consequence of this pious act by the Grand Lama that the Buddhist religion is more pure and its scriptures more numerous in Tibet than in Nepal. And, forgetting the reverence still paid viciously to Sankara Acharya, they point with horror at the Hindu "Holi" festival in honor of Krishna, when on the eighth day before the full moon of the month of Phagun or early March, there are parades of hysterics marching the streets of Bhatgaon and flinging wet scarlet powder at one another to simulate virgins' blood. The sacrosanct Buddhist temples are thus befouled, and among the worshipers there are, invariably, the most sacrosanct Buddhists themselves. It is a jumble of obscenities from two literatures and two faiths which not even the devotees attempt to untangle.

The Taumari Tol, a smaller square, lies a short distance away, surrounding the pagoda known as the Nyatpola Deval, or the Temple of the Five Stages, for it stands on five terraces penetrated by a flight of

enormous steps. Gigantic figures, carved in stone and colored, stand on each side of the stairway; first two enormous, mustachioed wrestlers, then two elephants on the step above, then two lions. Two griffins look over the heads of these, and on the top step, guarding the temple so ferociously that I should think twice about entering, even were I permitted, are the deities Singhini and Vyaghini, the most powerful of all these Bhairavis, these "Terribles," as they are called. Though Singhini and Vyaghini are supposed to be great enemies of the demons of evil, the temple they guard was originally planned as a shrine for the noisome Tantric order mentioned above. It is recorded that at the time of its founding, in 1700 A.D., the king himself brought three bricks for it, as an example to his people, and this act so stimulated the citizens of Bhatgaon that in five days all the materials needed for its construction were heaped upon the spot. Then the gods lent a hand, and in five days more the temple was finished. The gods worked diligently by day, but at night their revels were so flagrant and debauched that even their Tantric worshipers were frightened to observe such evil, and would not worship there. The temple has remained unoccupied ever since, a memorial to an ultimate, the godly sin that passeth understanding.

Wonder is heaped upon wonder in Bhatgaon. The Golden Door is astonishing, the pillar of Bhupatindra Mall breath-taking by its clean and fantastic beauty, the Tantric temples admirable and appalling; but it is the temple of Bhavani, of the Buddhist Heavens, that makes you despair of cameras and color film. A long-

shot of it will show the magnificent brazen dragons guarding the entrance, the twin lotus pillars with gilt lions atop them, each holding a double flaming banner of burnished gold, a great bronze bell which a pilgrim is ringing, perhaps, before she makes her offering of rice and flowers at the shrine. A holy *saddhu* sits cross-legged before it, his beard reaching to the ground and his arms held skyward, paralyzed, emaciated, for he has held them in this position for many years as proof of his piety.

But the long-shot will not show you the astounding details of the building, the frieze of strange beasts' heads, the golden façade with its intertwined patterns of religious symbols, nor the beauty of the windows which instead of being latticed with wood are grilled in flower patterns of strips of metal gilt. A close-up will miss the majesty of the whole, and neither one shot nor the other will record the odor of grease, vermilion, incense, cow's urine exuding from the slime which the devout have rubbed upon the shrine itself until it is almost completely obscured.

As we walked around this fabulous city, filming the crowds of pilgrims, of traders, of holy men against a background of architectural miracle and natural magnificence—for the Himalayas raised their snow peaks above it all—we glimpsed occasionally the inner life of Bhatgaon through a half-open doorway leading to a court where stone gods were clustered and the families living on the court were making their private offerings. We were forbidden here. I should gladly have taken off my shoes or crept on bended knees in pure worship

of such mystery and beauty, but I was waved gently away. I was apart from this, a follower of an arid faith, a foreigner, unclean.

A whimsical sheep-herder from Tibet looked up at me and made noises of condolence, for he was a wanderer too, having come over the hostile mountains with all his trade goods strapped on the backs of his sheep. Four long-haired beggars danced around me, singing. A Gurkha soldier winked as he passed me, and whistled, of all incredible tunes, "Tipperary," for he had been in the war. Armand and Leila called that it was time for lunch.

27 o *MASSACRE AT THE KOT*

"LET IT BE KNOWN," said Armand, swatting a fly with one of Ram's rubber pancakes, "that we wish to see the best dancers of Nepal. All of them." He fixed Hospitality with a glare that meant he would brook no further nonsense. "And let them assemble here, in our own yard, tomorrow, not later. If they have pressure, like His Highness, tell them that we have rupees."

Hospitality said only "Sssssss . . . ," but tomorrow our dancers came, hundreds of them, crowding into our walled garden until there was scarcely space for ourselves. All were masked and costumed to represent the fiends of their exotic pantheon. Some of the masks were wood, some papier-mâché, some were ragged cloths with a single eye and a round degenerate mouth from which radiated a web of varicolored wrinkles. Some were upside-down with beards growing over their foreheads and eyes where their mouths should be, and some had semi-precious stones suspended from their greasy hair.

Their musicians followed them with a weird collection of instruments, flat drums like dishpans, long drums of giant bamboo, horns, bells, kidney-shaped violins. And as the dancers leaped crazily into the yard so did the musicians burst into a frenzy of music that nearly split my skull with its din. Perhaps there was rhythm to it and musical design, but it seemed that each man of the score of them was playing independently in a vicious effort to drown out the others.

All morning they danced while we wandered among them, choosing the best of the lot for performance and costume. The garden wall was covered with onlookers who kept up a continuous circling as they were pursued by a tiny policeman with a switch. He was an inefficient switcher, for he carried a strange pair of English brogues in one hand and they seemed so heavy that he was always on the point of being dragged by them off the wall. Still he switched eagerly and made the most hideous high-pitched sounds which we could hear even above the babel of music.

"We've got eighteen," said Armand. "That's enough. You tell them, Thapa, to come here three weeks from today, twenty-one days from today." He gave each man a slip of paper signed with his name, so that none but those we had chosen would return. The others we pushed out bodily with the help of the policeman who beat them with his shoes.

But one old man refused to budge, a gross little fellow with ugly, small, plump hands, a minor Lama, Hospitality explained, sent by the Maharajah "as a gift." He would do the ritual hand gestures of Lamaism

for us, a signal honor. We were not impressed, but as it was unwise to affront His Highness by rejecting the fat gift, and as moving picture film was too precious to waste, Armand sent me off with him and Thapa to make a few still photographs.

"French film," Armand advised me, "unless he's much more charming than he looks." "French film" is no film at all. The suggestion of using it, common to all moving picture producers, means only that an empty camera should be cranked at those whom it is impolitic to offend. French film is the social mainstay of any expedition.

We drove off into a drizzling rain, Thapa and the Lama and I, waving good-by to Hospitality who by now was completely baffled as to where his duties lay, whether with the four-fifths of the expedition who were going to sit at home and work on notes for the commentary of the film, or with the fifth member who unquestionably was driving away to forbidden territory with the Maharajah's plump gift.

I had the poor grace not to hold the hand of the gift when I flung my arm across the back of the front seat and he clutched at it, but I smiled pleasantly.

"He's a unique," said Thapa. A eunuch, I assumed. "He's a unique in the service of Subha." That was Hospitality. "And of the King," he added.

Since Thapa had first arrived to shepherd us I had wondered at his bravery in continually baiting Hospitality who was the Maharajah's own ambassador. Now I understood as Thapa explained in his quaint English. The eunuch Lama was the fatted skeleton in Hospi-

tality's closet, and Thapa, blithe, debonair, unscrupulous as a flea, had turned his secret information into blackmail. He was quite frank about it, and rather proud. Don't misunderstand, he said in effect, the Lama is an accredited Tibetan Lama right enough, though he has never had the sinew to climb the mountains to the spring of his religion. And then my chauffeur said convincingly an extraordinary thing. The Lama, he said, was one hundred and thirty years old.

I looked back at the man, drawing my hand into the front seat with me. He was as bland and brown and greasy and unlined as a new-made cruller. One hundred and thirty years old, Thapa repeated. He was present in 1846 at the massacre of Gagan Singh and the King's ministers. He was present twenty years earlier at a festival dedicated to Bhairab during which the eunuch priests slashed themselves with knives to the mad accompaniment of drums and flutes, while among the onlookers the hysteria spread like a wave and man after man, fascinated by the music and the heady stench of blood, sprang with a sword amongst the eunuchs and like them beatified himself by castration. Then he ran screaming through the city with the severed parts in his hand, until he threw them into one of the temples he passed in his fanatic flight. The priests of the temple thus honored must thereupon furnish him with female clothes, and these he must wear, if he lived, for seventy-seven years.

Our Lama was among those celebrants, but not of them, yet.

It was not the seventy-seven years that bothered me

about a man who looked sixty at the most, nor Thapa's exorbitant claim that he was indeed over a century old. It was the recollection of a rite which Thapa could never have heard about in the small Indian schools he attended, the rite of Attis in ancient Phrygia, of the monster named Agdestis whose genitals, severed and planted, produced a pomegranate which the mother of Attis held to her bosom until it flowered into a son. Artemis of Ephesus and Astarte of Heliopolis had demanded the sacrifice of virility in very much the manner that Thapa had just described.

Perhaps, I thought, there was after all some reason to the theory that the folk of Nepal were descended from the army of Alexander the Great. If a custom which, to my knowledge, had been originally Near Eastern, had seeped through the deserts and the jungles and the mountains to far Nepal, if this could be accepted as I felt it had to be, reason could no longer balk at the fantastic Alexandrian theory nor the statement that a nasty old man was one hundred and thirty years old.

"Now the King," said Thapa, blowing his horn gently at a sacred cow in the road.

"What King?"

"The King of Nepal." And he went on to tell of the strange dark lives of the Kings of Nepal. Since the accession of Jang Bahadur to the Prime Ministership long ago the kings had been utterly powerless, and though their signatures were required on important documents of State they had no word in State affairs; they had not even a rupee of their own. Otherwise they

had everything. The present puppet king lived in a palace hardly less sumptuous than his Prime Minister's. The fairest, the softest, the most artful girls of Nepal were chosen by the ministerial cabinet to keep him contented, and over these our gift Lama presided; the sweetest opium of Mongolia was brought to him in jars of jade and its use encouraged alike by the paramours and the family physician. He must be contented; he must be a good little boy and keep his fingers out of the Nepalese jam-pot which should by rights be his. To this end he had been enticed even before puberty with the dissipations which, in his twenties, left him vitiated of mind and body both.

"There his palace," Thapa said.

Squat and glittering white it stood, like a hospital, a sanitarium. There was a bandstand in front, where musicians skilled in erotic rhythms would play to a king who slumped in debauch behind curtained windows.

"Once," said Thapa, "he wanted to be an athlete. Now at night sometimes you see him, one foot on one horse, one foot on other horse, galloping through the garden over flowers. But his head aches so he falls hard off."

Poor little king, with all in the world he could want, except a country to call his own. I can imagine no more tragic scene than that one in the garden, the king riding two great horses, heroic and free for the instant before his vices overwhelm him and he "falls hard off."

The Lama in the back seat leaned forward and stroked the neck of Thapa, who jumped as though a

leech had settled on him. The Lama whispered and I shivered at the sound.

"He says go to Bodhinath, his temple of Tibet, where he will make hands at you."

I shivered again and reached for the eight-inch lens, a hefty bludgeon. Mr. Hilton had led me to believe that the undying Lamas of Shangri-la had good clean minds. I wouldn't trust this old polyp with a mouse.

About three miles to the east of Khatmandu rose the largest Buddhist temple in the country, the Bodhinath or Kashachait, one hundred and thirty-five feet high. We saw from a great distance the blue and white enameled eyes on its spire, staring straight at us, daring us to swerve from Buddha's Golden Way. Nowhere else in the world are there temples such as this. Nowhere had I ever seen such an awesome religious edifice, so powerful in all its proportions, so vital in the effect produced by those colossal eyes. It is because of them, of course, that you feel the temple to be charged with a living faith, and not merely housing some quaint Oriental religion.

The Bodhinath is old beyond the records of Nepal, but it is believed to have been built over the tomb of an eminent Tibetan Lama named Kasha, who came on a pilgrimage from Lhasa, died, and was either cremated or interred at this spot. It is the magnet of all the great pilgrimages which occur during the winter months and is kept in repair by the authorities at Lhasa. The pilgrims clean away the weeds and moss with which it becomes covered during the rains, repaint the divine eyes

on the four sides of the spiring *toran*, and mortar the minor fissures in the masonry.

The temple stands upon a square and very massive base which is composed of three broad terraces, rising one above and within another. From the top terrace rises a concrete hemisphere ninety feet across. This is encircled by a series of niches, each containing a stone relief of Amitabha, the third Divine Buddha; there were hundreds of them, precisely alike, gazing serenely towards every part of Nepal. The square *toran* with the terrible eyes ascends from the hemisphere and supports a spire in the shape of a pyramid, the thirteen steps on each side of which are covered with plates of copper gilt. The crown of this stupendous monument which seems half temple and half the idol of a god, is forever so freshly gilt that the reflection of the sun upon it can be seen like a heliograph for many miles. I have seen it by moonlight, a halo of gold floating over the sleeping town.

My Lama was whispering at me and beginning to weave his hands, for a fine drizzle had begun and he was eager to have his performance over with, now that Thapa and I had declined his advances; we were not, as Lincoln Colcord insists on saying, romantical. But Thapa had a better idea. He led us around the temple, drawing his hand over the hundreds of prayer wheels set into its base as a child draws a stick along a picket fence. With the revolution of each a prayer for Thapa went up to Heaven. We made the circuit just as the rain was squeezed full force from the sturdy Himalayan clouds, and ducked for shelter into one of the

small *vihars*, or monasteries, which alternated with silversmiths' shops around the temple's flagged court.

I saw hands at first, more hands, the corded and tapering hands of the Lama who officiated here. They were in the light and shadow cast by a lattice window upon them as they very slowly turned the pages, or rather the boards, of a wooden book. An old man he was, a priest of eighty, said Thapa quietly, and added that he would die before very long, for he had not followed the Way as had our gift Lama, who would live forever, of course.

The walls of this small room were entirely painted with Buddhas, and in the center of the floor was a golden eye. Vermilion grease for anointing the images hung in a pot like a witch's caldron by the side of the great wooden book. Old prayer wheels, their prayers rubbed out by a thousand years of pilgrimage, were heaped in one corner. I wondered if it would be possible to buy one, but I am a poor business man; I am shy of offending people or even their gods in which I do not believe. I was humbled by this saintly old man who kept his finger on a word of Sanscrit all the while we were there.

But our gift-eunuch, who would live forever, felt otherwise. He fondled my camera until I could feel its bellows shrink. I pulled out the roll of Panatomic film and replaced it with Super XX, for there was so little illumination through the rain-drenched window that the light meter gave no reading at all.

Quick as a wink the eunuch snatched a brass bell from his colleague, a brass miter with brass earlaps

from a shelf, and commenced the ritual gestures. He minced and postured and lifted one ankle to the knee of the other leg, ringing the bell meanwhile, pointing to it, twisting his fat fingers in a manner that was horrible to watch and yet full of grace.

I had the feeling that those hands could do murder, that they could pull a serpent apart. They would join fingers lightly, slither back to back; a palm would pat an elbow, caress the bell, splay its fingers and suddenly make a circle with the forefinger and thumb—exactly like the ad for Ballantine's Beer—so quickly and smoothly, gesture flowing into gesture, that I had to use a camera speed of one five-hundredth of a second to separate them.

All the while the old eunuch was chanting, a weird litany which sounded like "*Shambu-nath nia . . . O-denis nia . . . Sakya-mu nia . . .*," varying constantly as he named the ceremony for which each series of gestures was prescribed. This one was for a marriage, this to consecrate the sacred elements, this to bless the head of a Buddhist novitiate. His eyes rolled, his tongue flicked in and out, he performed ballet steps with heel and toe. Absurd as it appeared, I could not deny that the man was an artist and an actor.

Now he shook violently the bell, or *Ghanta*, and swooped from somewhere amidst him the small brass thunderbolt of Indra called *Vajra* in Nepal, an instrument like a dumb-bell but with quadruple claws instead of a knob at each end. He banged the two together and sank the claws around the clapper of the bell, for the Vajra and the Ghanta are the Buddhist equivalents

of the Hindu Lingam and Yoni, the male and female principles of life.

"*Aum* . . ." he chanted, "*mani* . . . *Padma* . . . *Hom*," an invocation which has never been satisfactorily translated but means, in sum, "O the Triform Godhead is in him of the Jewel and the Lotus." Both the Vajra thunderbolt and the invocation—*mantra* is the proper word for it—are of Hindu origin but have been adopted by Buddhism.

Dr. Henry Oldfield writes of the Vajra: "The scriptures say that a contest once occurred between Buddha and Indra, in which the latter was defeated, and had wrested from him his chief and peculiar instrument of power, the Vajra or thunderbolt, which was appropriated as a trophy by the victor and has ever since been used by his followers as the favorite emblem of their religion. Buddhists regard this as the sacred symbol of their divine master's victory over the King of the Hindu Heavens; and they venerate it accordingly, as the Mohammedans venerate the crescent, and as Christians venerate the Cross." It was another instance of the blending in Nepal of these two antithetic religions.

When I clipped the Leica to my belt again the old eunuch was still going strong. He was enthralled by his own words and gestures; perhaps, though I doubted it, by the esoteric significance of them that was quite lost upon the infidel.

"Thapa," I said, "don't think I doubt you, but ask the Lama of this place how old he thinks our eunuch is."

The Lama raised his finger from the book, tapped it down lightly as he recited at length some story of which

I could understand only the words "Gagan Singh." He stood in shadow for the sunlight now had slipped behind him to illuminate a brilliantly painted Buddha on the wall.

"One hundred and thirty years old," said Thapa. "He was present at the massacre following the murder of Gagan Singh. It is recorded."

When I looked incredulously at the eunuch Lama he seemed to be having a fit, for he was waving his arms like a windmill and prancing like a fat rabbit. "Boom!" he roared.

"That is the shot," said Thapa, "that killed Gagan Singh."

The old man was leaping about the monastery now, booming and wailing and swinging wide his arms as he enacted the story of the terrible massacre of September 14, 1846. The jangling of the bell in one hand was like the clash of swords, the brass thunderbolt in the other banged violently against prayer wheels, Buddhas, conch horns, to represent the firing from the old double-bareled muskets. I sat on my hunkers in a corner, out of harm's way, but the Lama Superior moved not an inch. He stood apart from the world, surrounded by the sunlit golden glory of his yellow robe, marking with a lean forefinger his place in the wooden book. He spoke absently to Thapa from time to time, and Thapa told the story to me. I listened eagerly, for it was from this historic massacre that the revolutionary new order in Nepal was dated. The King was deposed; the Prime Minister, the great Jang Bahadur, achieved the omnipotent control which has remained in his family ever since.

It was in 1846 that life in Nepal had come to such a sorry pass that the King, half-idiotic, attempted to rectify matters to his people's and his own advantage. The Queen, who acted as Regent for him, was midway in a reign of terror. The severed heads of ministers were popping out of the palace like peas from a pod. The Queen was a one-woman Gestapo who executed on the slightest suspicion whoever seemed to stand in the way of absolute power for herself and the eventual crown for her son. The Prime Minister, Martabar Singh, was assassinated by bullets and slashes of a dozen *khukris* ("swish-swish-boom-swish . . . glug . . . glug . . . glug . . ." said the Lama), his body hacked to pieces in the presence of the King and Queen and flung out of the palace window. Soldiers loyal to him were led into the swampy Terai and left to rot of the awful *awal* fever. Their families were beggared by the appropriation of all their animals, chickens, goats, buffaloes, which were sacrificed before the terrible image of Khal Bhairab, in the Durbar Square of Khatmandu. There the corpses remained, until the pariah dogs and the flies were done with them, a putrid warning to those who would oppose the Queen.

Among these, however, was the King, a half-wit and a coward, but both sensible and desperately brave enough to try to stop the concentric swirl of slaughter that was rapidly approaching himself. He feared the Queen, but even more did he fear one Gagan Singh, the Queen's confidential attendant and paramour. This Gagan had originally been a menial in the palace and had risen on stepping stones of royal beds until he

reached that of the Queen, from which the King had long been deposed. Now with the execution of his namesake, Martabar Singh, the Queen made him Commander-in-Chief of the Army and vested in him, though without title, all the powers which the Prime Minister had had before.

The King stormed impotently about the palace, and tore the buttons from all his coats. If his honor was to be avenged and his very life preserved, it was necessary to destroy Gagan Singh. He disclosed his plan to his two sons by a former marriage and they in turn to several generals who were known to be still loyal to them. General Jang Bahadur was not consulted, for he was a nephew of the murdered Martabar Singh, and it was thought, mistakenly, that he was a follower of the Queen.

("Pish!" said the Lama.)

So on the night of September 14th, at 10 P.M., Gagan Singh was murdered ("Boom!") while at prayer in his own house. The hired assassin escaped in the confusion that ensued, but he thereby accomplished the death of thirty-one military chiefs.

The news of the murder was quickly brought to the Queen, who had been awaiting her lover at the Hanuman Dhoka Palace. Seizing the sword of state in her own hand, she rushed afoot to the late general's house, shed never a tear over the body she adored, but, vowing vengeance on the murderers, proceeded to the Kot, or Court of Military Assembly, and ordered bugles to be blown for the collection of the troops, and messen-

gers sent to demand the immediate presence of all civil and military functionaries of the State.

Our Lama came out of curiosity and was admitted because he was the only religious representative available. He was a man when he entered the quadrangle of the Kot, completely a man; when he left he was altered considerably.

High on a balcony stood the Queen of Nepal, brandishing her sword in the torchlight and demanding the name of Gagan Singh's murderer. There was silence but for the padding of bare feet as Jang Bahadur, scenting new blood, surrounded the Kot with his own troops. Someone shouted the name of Bir Kishor Pandi, who was one of those the King had made privy to his plan, and he was immediately put in irons and chained to the gate. The Queen flew down the stairs, brandishing the sword of state, and would have hacked the chained man to pieces had not her ministers restrained her, and our Lama, so he claimed, thrown his arms around the prisoner.

The Queen accused one man after another, each minister by name; they accused each other; any one of them might be the next to go. *Khukris* were drawn. Another of those ill-fated Singhs, Abhiman Singh, tried to escape to his troops when shots rang out within the building ("Boom," etc.), and one of Jang Bahadur's brothers split Abhiman nearly in two. Our Lama scrambled up the ladder that led to the council hall just as the crowd was rushing upon Jang. Jang's brothers and his bodyguard fought to his rescue, killing all in their way, slashing right and left even among their own men, bat-

tering out the torches until that small room became a black pit of slaughter through which the Queen's laughter, on the floor above, shrieked cruelly.

Outside, the troops of Jang Bahadur shot everyone who attempted to leave the Kot. The bodies writhed in a heap before the fearsome image of Khal Bhairab. Inside, Jang, seizing this priceless opportunity, was fighting not only for his life but for possession of Nepal, in perpetuity. Down the corridors and through the little rooms his men pursued the unarmed ministers, hunting them like rats, feeling in the dark for a body to quiver and then fall upon it. Whoever was unarmed, and there were many of these, was considered an enemy and slashed to ribbons.

Our Lama fled screaming to the ladder, fell down it head-first in the dark, but he was too late. As he slid he heard the mad laughter of the Queen above him. The sword of state came hurtling down, caromed off the wall, bounced on the top step, somersaulted as his head struck the ground below. The sword gave him only a glancing blow, but it unmanned him. He had just time before he fainted to crawl through the river of blood to the street where he saw the King slinking towards the house of the British Envoy, tearing buttons from his coat.

("Pip . . . Pip . . . Pip . . . Pip . . ." said our old Lama.)

28. *THE PLACE OF THE DEAD*

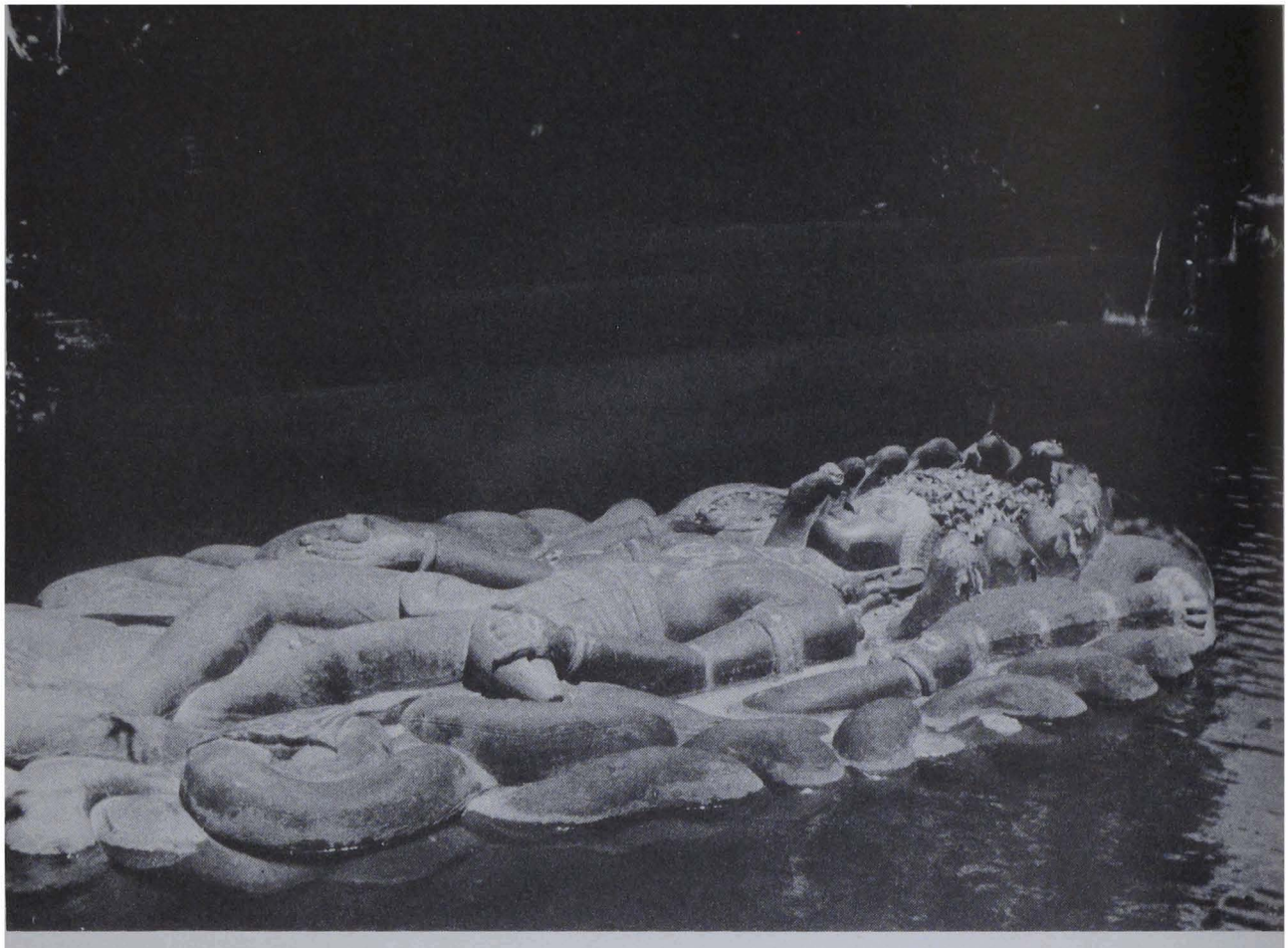
"THERE'S NOTHING like it! Anywhere!" said Armand, and all the expedition's hearts were chirruping because he was cheered again. "It's fabulous! It's as remote from the world we know as Mars! It's a town of the dead, but it's as vital as . . ."

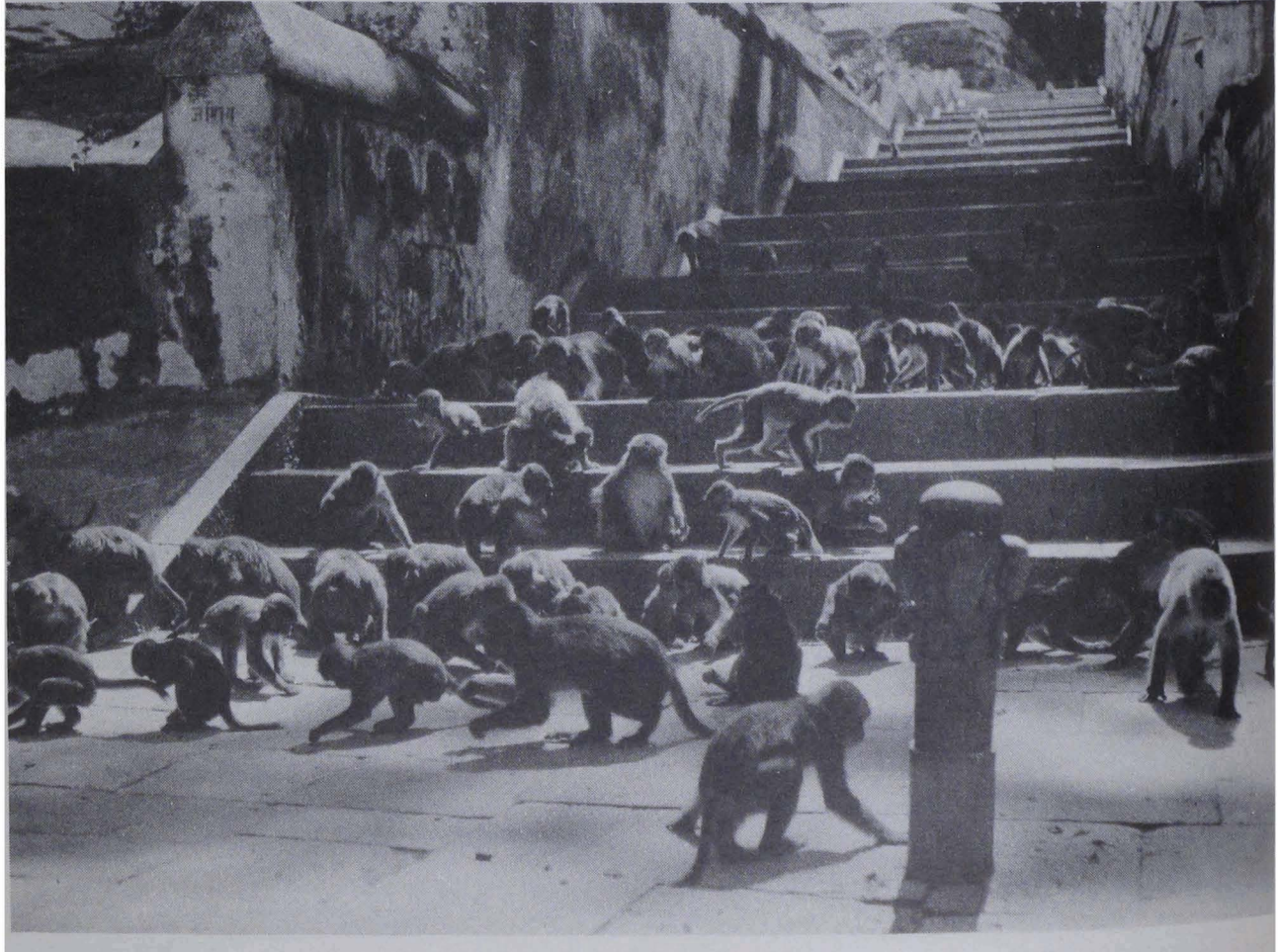
"What is?" asked Leila. "If you don't mind . . ."

Armand looked at all of us as if we were willfully misunderstanding him, for such was his preoccupation with a suddenly discovered and photogenic wonder that its name seemed unimportant.

"Oh . . . Pashupatti. One of the holiest spots in all of Hindustan. And it is here in Nepal." I could see he was thinking that we were not very quick to follow him, but we were trying hard. "I spent the morning at the Maharajah's museum, making stills of the most extraordinary old books that were dated way before our Christian era. Old Vedas that made my head swim—I hope, by the way, that you got those river shots, Roy—and manuscripts which I swear are done in pictograph!

(*Upper*) THE PLACE OF THE DYING





(*Upper*) NARAIN, THE GOD OF THE MIRACLE, FLOATING IN HIS BED OF

Think of it! Central Asian pictographs here for the filming! Incidentally, Dave, you'd better check this with Colonel Rand, and if he confirms it get some color stills. Anyway, Thapa took me past Pashupatti on the way back and it's the most . . . Look, are we going or not? By the time we get our stuff set up, it will be five o'clock. The long shadows will be fine about then, but in another half hour they will stretch clean across the gorge."

No one asked what shadows or what gorge, for this exuberance was too precious to meddle with. It was more precious than food on an expedition, as all of us knew. Jack went whistling out to the Dodge, reset the carburetor almost in the time it took us to squeeze in, and we were off in a flurry of jay-walking hens.

The reset carburetor showed its own exuberance and carried us through the Durbar Square to the terror of all the populace but one, an albino dressed in pink who was sitting on a high platform and making insane dance gestures with his hands. A colleague for the Lama, I thought, but just then Armand's quicker eye went past him and he called to Thapa to stop. Behind the pink boy on that stone platform was suspended what must be the largest drum in the world, fully eight feet in diameter, with a drumhead of mottled grayish leather.

"Rhinoceros skin," said Thapa. "The Maharajah shoots him."

"When is it beaten? Can we film it?" Armand was out to wring the soul from Nepal by now.

"In the morning," Thapa replied. "It calls the people to their prayers."

We spun on again, out of town, dividing the crowds of women who were on their way home to the hills after a day's imperceptible marketing. They might have exchanged a handful of beans for a carrot, or a few pounds of uncarded wool for a bit of cloth woven by their more patient urban sisters. But they were happy. They chatted gaily, swinging strong mountainy hips. The sun flashed warm on their earrings and nose rings, and the cleanest wind in the world whipped back their little jackets to show a triangle of skin the color of new potatoes. And I recalled an astute remark from a book by Somerset Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlor*, which I had been reading just the night before, in which, describing the sights of travel in Indo-China, he observed, "I could not fail to notice how much character it gives a woman's face to display her navel. . . ." Mr. Maugham was in a mood of facetiousness rare to him during that journey; I too was elated by Armand's infectious enthusiasm for the scene that lay ahead of us, but I noted with pride the seriousness with which I reflected that the navels of Nepal were neatly made. This was by no means an unimportant discovery, for throughout India, through Africa, the South Seas, the crude methods of child delivery and consequent maternal care produce the most appalling navels, whereas here in Nepal, among mountains as effectually isolated as the remotest Pacific island, there was apparently—I confirmed it later—an obstetric science of considerable skill.

Still, this was Buddha's home, I thought, and as he was the most famous student of one navel, at least, that ever lived, his disciples could do no less than devote

some attention to what had pleased their Master. As the umbilical cord is the conduit of life it is not surprising that there should exist an extensive navel-lore which varies but little across the world. The Tuhoe tribe of the Maoris attributed the power of making women fruitful to certain trees upon which the navel-strings of children had been hung. In Australia, in the Caroline Islands, among the Cherokees the cord is preserved, according to Frazer, as a talisman which may profoundly affect the child's later life, and in peasant Germany today I have known a midwife to present the cord to a baby's father with the counsel to guard it carefully, for should it be lost the child would certainly die.

I had become as exuberant as Armand by my discovery, and now even shared with him the ghoulish but sociologically justifiable hope that we might see some poor Indian come to Pashupatti to die.

"There's your navel-worship again," I said.

"Where?" said Armand dreamily.

"At Pashupatti, at Benares, at any cremation ghat. The navel is always plucked from the burning corpse and set adrift on the sacred river. I've seen it countless times in Ceylon, as you have. Not nice, I grant you, but there you are. Now look, in Nepal . . ."

"Hell!" said Jack. "We hunt for corpses, we hunt for navels. We're explorers. Judas!"

Down we went to the valley where the most sacred Baghmatti River meanders from the hills bordering Tibet to the Indian province of Behar. The legend tells that Kaskat Sand, the fourth mortal Buddha, ascended Mount Sheopuri during a pilgrimage to Nepal, and

there he met a party of traders coming down from Bhot, which we now call Tibet. They were cocky fellows, well-to-do, bringing all kinds of wonderful trade goods for barter with the Nepalese, blankets of yak hair, crystals, agate, turquoises, gold dust, gold and silver ores, ponies, watch-dogs, and sheep. The sheep carried loads of rock salt, that precious commodity, upon their backs.

The traders were inclined to scoff at the old ascetic, Kaskat Sand, but they made camp with him, and before the night was over, before any of them had slept, before Kaskat Sand had reached midway in his quiet, conversational preachment of the Buddhist faith, they all were begging him to initiate them into it. They would build a shrine right here, they said, and sacrifice all their trade goods, with the exception of the animals, which Buddhists may not kill. They would inlay a shrine with their precious stones, and spread their carpets on its floor, and leave their salt where the lean wolves could get it. And one of them, an exceptional artist, would fashion an image of Buddha from the great rock which was protecting them from the wind.

Kaskat Sand would baptize them, he said, but nowhere could they find a drop of fresh running water. So he placed his hands against the rock, and pressed his thumbs beneath it, and when his prayer was ended there rushed forth instantly a cataract of water in which he proceeded to baptize the new disciples. They were as good as their word, for all that winter they labored in the snow to cut an image on the rock. They enshrined it handsomely, but the shrine has mostly crumbled now, and the spring which was formed from it has grown

through the years to become the sacred Baghmatti River.

There was a sudden blowing of conches and horns as we drove through the streets of Pashupatti, but it was not for us. We were not welcome at all in this purely Hindu community. There was a funeral arriving, a pre-funeral, as it were, for the man on the litter was not quite dead.

The long cortège wound past us, the trumpeters in front with long wooden Tibetan horns, bound with brass and semi-precious stones, belling at the end in true horn fashion but holed like a flute. They made a hell of a din. The dying man was carried by four pink-turbaned fellows on a litter. Torches were propped in each corner of it, and their sparks spattered over the winding-sheet. Behind came men with tiny drums, and behind them came the mourners, looking more bored than bereaved.

I had raised my camera for a shot of this odd procession when I saw through my finder a flash of white. It was Hospitality's scandalous notebook, recording, unquestionably, that not only did we put the evil eye upon the living but upon a poor devil who was already at the point of death. I waved. He waved and joined us.

"Sssssso ssssssick," he said.

Armand descended like the wolf from the fold. "You remember the Lama?" he demanded in a burring, menacing tone. "The old gift Lama? He has told us, so to speak, all. Now will you lend me your pencil?"

Hospitality blanched white and green. It looked as if his ears were decaying. Slowly, with a sizzle of humil-

ity, he passed the pencil to Armand who tucked it far away in the band of his hat. Then we went into the labyrinth of Pashupatti's shrines.

Here is literally a city of death, yet it has a weird, unworldly loveliness. The river runs through a gorge in the center of it and disappears on each side into canyons so narrow and so dense with arching foliage that the water there can scarcely be seen. In the cliffs are cells, tier upon tier of them, arduously chiseled by the fakirs of ten centuries who have come to absorb the beneficence of the river and meditate through all their days upon life and death. They have paled in the gloom of the caves and canyon, and when you see them climbing laboriously up their frayed rope ladders they look like nothing so much as three-toed sloths. Like animals they peer from their dens suspiciously. Their hair is matted. They are ulcerous and foul. They are very holy.

The canyon walls diverge as the river comes to the place of the temples, and along the left side rise courts and squares at various levels, each cluttered with temples, shrines, stupas, topes, with images of the gods, with isolated gateways leading nowhere but cherished by barren women who believe that by passing through them they will conceive. The great temple of Pashupattinath is in the middle of this religious welter, surrounded by immense walls to deter the gaze of the unbeliever. But the temple roof glitters gold above, with its elaborate phallic finials saluting the sun, and over the wall can barely be seen the golden prongs of a huge trident, the scepter of Shiva, forty feet high. The temple is said to commemorate the flight of Shiva in the

form of a gazelle on a day when he had wandered the earth without his trident and so could not defend himself against the demons. He took refuge in the sacred wood called Shleshmantaka, in the remains of which Pashupatti now stands.

Somewhere within these walls, we knew, was the colossal statue of Nandi, the sacred bull of Hindustan, heavily plated with gold, which several envoys of a hundred years ago had described, but we were forbidden to see it. At first Hospitality claimed it didn't exist; there was no kneeling bull ("Kneeling, eh?" said Armand). Then there might be a bull, and finally there was indeed, the most sacred, the most beautiful, the most magnificent god's image in the world, Hospitality admitted, almost in tears, gazing far up to where his pencil reposed in Armand's hat.

He was given the pencil, but with a bound he was out of reach of us and reciting the pat phrase he had learned for such occasions as this: "But in London there are places where *we* may not go."

Even Thapa was adamant. Once, he explained, a German geologist had forced his way into the temple and looked at the bull, and the Maharajah had been obliged to pay nearly a lakh of rupees (about $40,000) to have the precincts cleansed by the holiest men in India and Nepal. Since then it had been forbidden for non-Hindus even to glance at it through the secret door.

But a gateway opened on the other side of the steep stone stairs and I had a momentary glimpse of the astonishing life within. It was a grassy court surrounded by brown *sal* wood buildings, webbed with carvings and

anciently decayed. A dozen *saddhus*, nude but for gee-strings, sat on the grass or lolled in the shade of the walls or paced back and forth aimlessly. One wore antique glasses and stared at the sun as he walked, turning at the corners of the court with his eyes always full upon it. One, who had saved all the hair of his body since childhood, had pig-tails so long that they dragged on the ground behind him, for he had woven the combings back again in the belief that he was thus insuring his integrity. Perhaps he ate his fingernails as well. You could carry this business, I thought, to unpleasant extremes. There were young men and old, all bearded, but the youth who caught my eye was a bronze-whiskered giant in a leopard skin. He bared his teeth at me, yellow teeth with food caked between them, half crouched and paced toward me like the beast whose skin he wore.

I held my ground and rubbed the sweat from my hands against my trouser pockets. I could smell him before he reached me, and as he advanced I wondered whether I would be able to smash in those teeth before they gave me rabies. But he stopped, close enough for any agile bacillus to jump, and put out his hand to caress my shoulder tenderly.

He led us without a word down the stairs to the river and stood thoughtfully by while we filmed the colorful crowd at the ghats. Continuous steps led up from the water to a long pavement where groups were gathered around the sellers of flowers and temple offerings. Some sold coconuts, the emblem of female fertility, brought over the mountains from the Indian shore; some sold

rice by the dozen grains. Men, women, and children swarmed to bathe in the sacred river, to drink its cleansing waters. With the greatest of dignity the girls would raise their gorgeous saris as they waded out, hold the cloth in their teeth, scrub themselves mysteriously under water and gradually let the saris descend as they emerged. Some threw coins to the Baghmatti, and the husky youths whose livelihood was the retrieving of them slipped into the water quietly, as if to relieve a goddess of baubles for which she had no further use.

The life of Pashupatti had a quality which was at the same time vivid and serene, gay and grisly, the great crowds worshiping in gladness at the flanks of the sacred bull or in the life stream and the death stream of the river. But within the cloistered cells along the pavement of the river bank lay princes and beggars, hoping with all their hearts for one thing only, that they should die neither too soon nor too late but at that moment of their souls' dusk, between waking and dreaming forever away, when the *gurus* should immerse their feet in the sacred river.

To us, it seems a strange ambition. To the Oriental there are beauty and the fulfillment of a proper destiny in being dragged from one's deathbed in, say, Central India, jolted over the mountains in a basket, and decanted into a river which is chilled by the Himalayan snows. All the long life long, he'll say, death is at my feet; now let it chill them gently in these good waters, that my heart shall be prepared for its embrace.

Heaped into corners, sprawled against walls engraved with demons, lay the dying. Many were near skeletons

already, some were festering packages of fat. I envied them their faith, but I thought too how terrible it must be to lie here testing one's soul, plucking at it with the mind to see if it were loosening from the poor body, saying, in effect, "Soul, are you ready? If we go now to the river, will you leave quietly, or will you torture me still?" And when the soul is ready, the body that bears it is borne down the steps of the ghat to a slanting slab of stone where it reclines, its feet laved by the goddess of the waters as the feet of the poor were laved by Christ, tenderly and sweetly, until the soul departs.

The wild *saddhu* who had not bitten me led us across the bridge to an assembly of temples and shrines that were as austere as those of the other bank had been gaudy. There was row upon row of gray stone shrines dedicated to Siva, each containing the god's phallic emblem, a huge black *lingam* rising from the female emblem of the *yoni.* I stood in shadow as an exquisite Hindu girl, dragging a goat by his ears, went to one of these. The animal bleated when the smell of death, of a thousand past sacrifices, reached him from the shrine, but the husband held it now while the girl entered on hands and knees, touched her forehead to the stone phallus and sprinkled marigolds around it. Then the goat was pushed in, its throat extended across the phallus and deftly cut by the man, so that the emblem was inundated with blood and the encircling cup of the *yoni* filled.

I turned suddenly at a hideous sound behind me and just over my head. A dozen sacred rhesus monkeys had found me out and were making a terrific racket of either

welcome or menace; I couldn't tell which. Leila was feeding them corn which the *saddhu* had procured for her, and when he whistled a hundred more came leaping from shrine to shrine down the hill, swinging in the trees above them, loping like dwarfs on the stairs. One old fellow, whose hind legs had been broken in some monkey battle, walked laboriously on his hands for a few yards, rested, swung himself onto his hands again, and finally came to sit peacefully at my feet, his mouth open to receive the kernels as I dropped them.

Roy had set up his camera between two huddled images of the sacred bull and had started to film the increasing swarm of monkeys when a cow came limping across the scene. All her back was raw, the hair and hide burned down to the quivering veins of her flesh—the work of Mohammedans, said Thapa. There were few Mohammedans in Nepal; they had never been able to obtain even a fraction of this country as they had almost all of India once, but those who were here, disguised as Hindus, constituted a religious Fifth Column to fight both Buddhism and Hinduism from the earth. Sabotage was rare, but it was terrible. Here was an example of it, this pathetic cow whose back had been soused with kerosene and set afire, to prove to the Hindus that their so-called sacred cattle were under no protection of the Hindu gods.

"Coo! Coo! Coo!" called the *saddhu*, and the monkeys came rollicking down from the temple roofs and up from the shrines by the river, mostly females with babies like minute jockeys riding on their backs, or hanging on for grim life under their bellies and trying

to feed en route. For these hundreds of females that swarmed around us there could have been no more than a couple of dozen males. They were twice the size of their ladies, long-fanged and fierce to snatch the corn from our hands. There were three tribes of them, said Hospitality (it was his turn now), which must be fed, at government expense, on three separate occasions each day, for there was a feud among them which made it impossible to feed the three tribes together. The criss-crossed scars on the faces of the old warriors attested that.

Leila too had her scars of monkey battle, earned at Putnam, Connecticut, on that amazing menagerie of a farm. Now she was in the thick of the milling animals and stooping to pick up a baby which seemed a day or two old. It was no more than eight inches tall, a twisted and pitiful creature, abandoned by its mother because its spine was broken and it was paralyzed from the waist down.

Painfully it dragged its body from step to step, its legs limp behind it. It made mewing noises as it reached for Leila's hand.

Armand cried suddenly, "Leila! Be careful!"

I lowered my camera to see three savage males snarling at us from the roof of a temple, and a fourth jumping up and down with fury upon the headless body of the sacrificial goat.

"I can't leave it like this!" Leila protested. "We've got to do something!"

Roy whirred his camera to catch a scene as frightening as any I had ever beheld. Every monkey had

dropped its corn, and the hundreds of them, fangs bared, were pacing slowly toward us; and though they were small, that army seemed as terrible as the little Gurkha infantry must have been to the immense Englishmen who once had attempted to invade Nepal. A similar scene flashed across my memory: I was in Andorra, that little nation in the Pyrenees, sitting idly on the crag of a mountain top when a parade of ants passed by my feet. One little ant ran alongside the ranks of the others, trying to break in, but they would have none of him; he was outcast. Again and again he tried to get into the procession, sometimes by force, sometimes, apparently, by pleading with an ant whose carelessness in keeping file might mean that he didn't value the position, but always he was sternly rebuffed, until I, taking pity on him, breached the ranks with a stick and put my favorite in. Then that happened which raised the hackles on my neck. The whole parade right-faced, at right angles to their line of march, and started towards me. Their line was about four feet long and consisted of perhaps three hundred ants, but all of them turned as by a word passed from mouth to mouth and approached me. I can't say that they looked angry or seemed wild with vengeance. They resembled more a punitive expedition, intent upon righting a wrong which had been done to the mass of them. They had chosen to expel one of their members from their ranks, and as I had interfered with the execution of this proper law I must be chastened. I would have been too, I believe, had I not jumped up in real alarm, apologized and set off down the mountain by another route, a shamed Gulliver retreating from

Lilliput. Roy's respect for the ants and his homage of feeding them, I could well understand.

"I'm all right," said Leila. "Keep on cranking, Roy." But she was over-confident. She had just touched the crippled baby when a ferocious beast hurtled through the air and landed upon her shoulders. Another one leaped for her throat. A dozen screaming females plummeted from the temple tops. All hell broke loose in the small shapes of a score of monkeys leaping upon Leila and tearing at her legs. We could scarcely get to her because of the barrier of brown bodies between us. There were hundreds of them now; all three tribes must have joined forces against the alien enemy. Armand was shouting and plowing forward, but I couldn't hear what he said. An occasional monkey was snapping at me now, although they knew that Leila was the one they must destroy. I kicked and smashed at them, hoping to God the Hindus would stay out of this, for we were unarmed. Jack was beating them down with his topi. Roy was making wilder noises than they were and slashing them with a camera strap.

I looked for Leila. She had fallen and disappeared beneath a squirming, screaming, tearing hill of monkeys. She couldn't last. They would kill her in a matter of moments if we didn't reach her.

Armand was fighting closer, kicking up monkeys like plowed earth from a furrow, while I worked as near to him as I could, catching the beasts by a leg or a tail and flinging them into the sacred Baghmatti. It was like fighting an army of maniacal children; you couldn't loose their hands from your clothes nor their small

sharp teeth from your flesh when they had gripped it. Armand's face was covered with blood when he bent over the writhing, living pile that had Leila in it, somewhere.

"The tripod!" he yelled.

"For God's sake, the tripod!" I yelled to Jack. It was thrown from hand to hand with the precious Akeley still upon it, until Armand clutched it by one leg and swung the heavy camera against the animals. It catapulted them away. We could see Leila, bloody and limp on the ground. Another swipe with it and a dozen more fell away. My own hands were so thick with blood that I could scarcely hold them to sling them into the river now. Back and forth like a pendulum Armand swung the tripod and camera, throwing monkeys to right and left—one square in my face—battering in those demoniac little brains that had one thought only, to tear to ribbons the hateful soft flesh on the ground.

We cleared a space around her. One by one we beat off the bigger males that were left until the last of them gave up and retreated to the temple roofs.

Armand knelt beside the bloody body of his wife, his breath rasping like a grindstone, and tremblingly turned her over. Her torn hands held her hat tight to her face.

"All right, Leila. It's all right. They've gone."

Slowly her hands lifted the hat away. She tried hard to grin.

"Don't ever tell me I fainted," she said weakly. "Because I didn't. Am I all in one piece?"

Miraculously she was. The monkeys had torn her tough khaki clothes to shreds, but they had bitten her

seriously in only a few places, mostly on the back. What had begun as an attack upon her had apparently become a tribal battle with her as the battlefield, a mass of bodies packed so tight that they could do her no great damage. She was bleeding freely and her scalp was splotched with red where the hair had been torn from it, but she was, thank God, alive.

Thapa and Hospitality were nowhere to be seen; the crowd of threatening Hindus was responsible for that. They were crossing the bridge toward us, toward the infidels who had defiled their holy ground and flung sacred monkeys into the river.

"Here we go again," said Armand, reaching for the tripod. But when the crowd had almost reached us, our *saddhu*, our blessed beggar, swooped Leila to his filthy shoulder and made away with her through the crowd. We followed at his heels, lugging the smashed equipment. We reached the car, where Thapa and Hospitality were calmly sitting. And we drove home fast.

33. *THE $1,000,000 HAT*

AT SIX in the morning, after three hours' sleep, I was wakened by a sound like that of escaping steam. I pawed my way through the tangled mosquito netting and saw that Jack and Roy were both up on their elbows listening. There came a small explosive sound like "O!" then another steamy emission followed in a moment by the dissyllable "orry."

"Sure enough," said Roy. "It's Hospitality."

"Sssso ssssorry," said Hospitality, leaning through the window and twitching recklessly at Jack's net. "You must be ready. It is the Day . . ." He backed out suddenly as Jack's great foot moved deliberately toward him. After two hours more of sleep we rose, bathed standing in basins, ate a breakfast of rice and eggs and put on the linen suits that had been freshly pressed for the occasion. We were a dapper-looking expedition with the exception of my trousers which had been pressed crosswise like sailor pants. I had entrusted them to Thapa, who knew a *dhobi* immeasurably better than

the one we had been employing. It was too late now.

Through the streets of Khatmandu and round and round the market we roared to the accompaniment of a fine fanfare on the horn as Thapa announced that this was a royal mission we were set upon. Hospitality beamed and bowed to right and left.

"Hoi!" yelled Armand, tapping Thapa with the gold snuff-box he was bringing to the Maharajah. "Straighten it out!"

We straightened out at fifty miles an hour, which was the noise limit of that ancient Dodge, and in a few minutes were being saluted by half a troop of soldiers at the Palace gate. Hospitality kept right on bowing and I kept thinking of those flattened trousers in regard to the prestige of the expedition. They were a public scandal, I judged by Armand's eyes when he looked at them twice and turned hopelessly away.

Up the marble steps we walked, the trousers flapping, and down the long colonnaded porch, Armand and Leila first, moving with poise and dignity, then Roy and Jack with me between them feeling like a bow-legged sailor. I sought desperately to revise the scholarly appeal with which I had planned to beseech official aid for my projected story of Nepal. Unless I could talk through a window it would sound silly any way I put it.

The door was opened for us by a colossally turbaned Gurkha. We were led to a broad staircase paneled with a poster-type mural depicting at a length of sixty feet the courage of Jang Bahadur on an occasion when he was thrown from his elephant and had to shoot the

tiger as it leaped over his head. In front of this on the middle landing stood a stately old man, beautifully dressed in European clothes and wearing a modest medal of some sort in his lapel. As we had not seen even a photograph of His Highness we had a moment of indecision as to whether this was he, come halfway, in a democratic fashion, to meet us. He shook hands all around.

"How do you do?" he said. He walked beside Leila up the stairs. "A good journey?"

Bright flunkeys made way for us as we entered a sumptuous reception room. (Flap-flap, went the trousers.)

"His Highness the Maharajah of Nepal," announced the old man who had welcomed us, His Highness' secretary. The Maharajah came forward from the end of that immense and amazing room. Slowly he passed the great fountain that was made entirely of crystal. Slowly he passed the grandfather clock that also was made entirely of crystal, works and all. He had seemed haughty, arrogant, when we saw him upon his elephant a few weeks ago, but now he was benignity at its simplest. The patent leather shoes with cloth tops and buttons, the tight Nepalese trousers, the visored station master's cap with its brooch of diamonds and rubies not quite in the middle of it, the old-fashioned gold bifocals, effused a comfortable atmosphere, not at all what I had imagined at the prospect of confronting one of the wealthiest and holiest men in the world: the Lieutenant General His Highness (Ojaswi Rajanya Projjwala Sri Sri Sri) Maharajah Joodha Shum Sher Jang Bahadur

Rana G.C.S.I.G.C.I.E., Honorary Colonel of all the Gurkha Rifle Regiments of the Indian Army, Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of Nepal.

The secretary introduced us and His Highness shook our hands in the Indian fashion, high and with a little jerk.

"How do you do?" said he also. "A good journey?" His false teeth were perfectly made for smiling.

He led Leila to a red velvet love seat in the center of the room and sat beside her, while the rest of us followed (flap-flap-flap, I went; if I could have done a hornpipe I should have been more at ease) to a long row of chairs placed at right angles to them. On the other side and parallel to us sat the secretary, three high officers, and one of the Maharajah's legitimate sons attired in jodhpurs and the sort of loudly checked racecourse jacket which my wife has never permitted me to wear.

It was a desultory conversation, transmitted through the son and the secretary. First His Highness had some difficulty in establishing who was the Roosevelt, Armand or Leila, and then which of his own daughters had sent us to Nepal. He had forgotten already, there were so many of them. What was her name, the Princess?

Leila passed this buck to Armand and Armand to me. The question whirled through a maelstrom of exotic names, clicking and caroming away again, sinking into my desperate memory, until at last it came to rest against its answer.

"Saya Mala," I said. "Saya Mala Chowdree. Would Your Highness . . . ?"

But His Highness was looking happily at Leila and smiling in reminiscence. Yes, he remembered, it seemed.

Armand was talking now of the miracles of burden-carrying performed by the Nepalese coolies. Surely the healthiest people in the world, he said. The stamina of a nation should be judged by its meanest citizen.

The answer came circuitously back to us. Yes, when His Highness was in Milan he was impressed by the loads the peasants carried, so he encouraged it in Nepal. The people would be grateful one day, he said.

Did His Highness by any chance know, Leila asked, the Khan of Kalat, whom she had visited when she drove a truck around the world? He was the fattest man in Baluchistan and the strongest, a champion weight lifter.

His Highness knew him indeed, but did she know the Lama Wangdi who could lift a man by his ears, without the ears coming off? That was really remarkable. And had she heard of the nun called the Thunderbolt Sow, the strongest woman in India fifty years ago, and almost as greatly revered as the Dalai Lama?

Yes, we knew the legends of this real but fantastic creature.

Had we heard that when her Buddhist convent was attacked by Mohammedans the Thunderbolt Sow had smeared herself and all the nuns with pig fat, thus saving their virtue from the porcophobiac invaders? Three hundred pigs she had herself flung upon them from the convent walls.

"Your Highness," I said, "would . . . ?"

But His Highness was on his feet now, and still talking of weight-lifting as he led us through one wing of the palace. The next huge room was a simple frame for two throne chairs which were upholstered in cretonne plush, if that is imaginable. The room beyond was small but memorable for the array of Major Generals whom the Maharajah introduced to us as his sons, but if there was a day's difference of age among them I couldn't detect it. It was a very neat row of sons.

On the mantelpiece were photographs of Kings and Rajahs, above the affected signatures of Kings and the clean simple Sanscrit of Rajahs who were wise enough and generous enough to use the script still customary in Nepal. In the midst of them, but back a bit, was a sleek portrait of Adolf Hitler, signed in ink, and dated January 14, 1938. It would now be interesting to know what Adolf Hitler was doing upon that day.

The sons of the Maharajah, parallel as pickets, moved towards me as I was trying to remember Hitler's date without making an obvious note; they wanted to shake hands with me, but they did not smile. So I flapped away in my damned sailor trousers after Armand and Leila and Jack and Roy who had followed the Maharajah into the next amazing room.

The light was dazzling here, blaring like trumpets from every corner, blasting from wall to wall and so violently into my eyes that I raised them to the ceiling for relief and there saw a congregation of plaster angels, flat on their backs against it, smirking. Surround-

ing the room were a dozen caricatures of Armand who stood in the middle of it, for the walls were inlaid with carnival mirrors, the monstrous mirrors that pervert your body to that of a dwarf, a skeleton, a hyperthyroid, always an idiot, but the Maharajah was in the shadow of the hall beyond. Leila flickered from mirror to mirror, swelled and diminished, grew two heads where one should be, and I stood stock-still to observe at last how my trousers should have been pressed.

All this was distressing enough, in the chambers of a Maharajah, without the circular iron staircase, like a fire escape exactly, which corkscrewed into the ceiling between the shins of two cherubim.

The Maharajah's flashy son approached Armand from all sides through those dizzying mirrors.

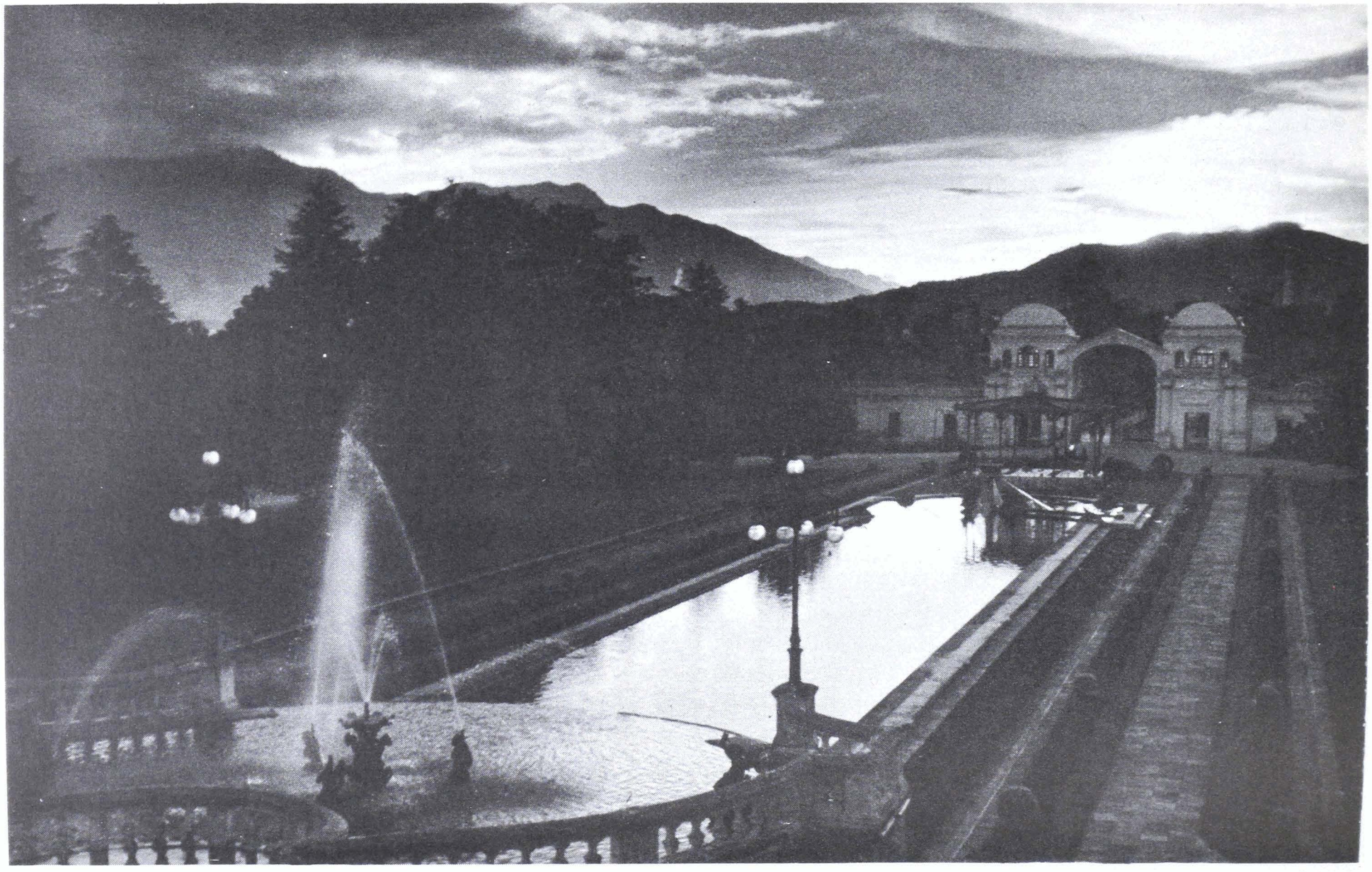
"You will please pose for His Highness now," he said.

That is one way to take photographs of the mighty; you pose for them behind your cameras; you are the butt of the action, not they. Similarly when I once sought an audience with Father Divine he replied (through the pious and luscious white secretary whose knitted sweater was much too tight for her) that *he* would interview *me*.

Leila asked with her most engaging smile whether it would be possible to film His Highness in the extraordinary helmet which everyone had heard of, though less than a hundred Europeans had ever seen. It is intrinsically the most valuable headdress in the world, I believe, and is said to be insured by Lloyd's for the equivalent of one million dollars in rupees.

HIS HIGHNESS THE MAHARAJAH OF NEPAL
WEARING THE $1,000,000 HAT

THE CRYSTAL PALACE OF THE MAHARAJAH



THE GARDENS OF THE MAHARAJAH OF NEPAL

The son said he thought we might film it. He would speak to his father. If we would wait a few minutes he would accompany us to the Thuni Khel, or big parade ground, where we might pose for the troops.

"That's luck," Roy grunted as we walked back past the photo of Hitler, the cretonne thrones, the crystal fountain, and the solid crystal clock which was inscribed:

"Dulce et Decorum est pro Patria Mori."

"That," said Armand, "means 'The Duce decorated the Moors in the name of the Fatherland.' "

When we reached the parade ground the Maharajah had already arrived, accoutered in khaki and astride a magnificent stallion. We set up our cameras and sound equipment beneath the enormous tree which for centuries had been the court of the early Rajahs. The Maharajah cantered past, while we busily posed for him, but we posed even better with our color cameras when his favorite son, Nara Shum Sher Jang Bahadur Rana, who had solved the telephone problem, galloped up in a uniform of bright scarlet and black, wearing a fine feathered helmet and sitting a saddle of golden leopard skin. Cannon were fired; the band played, of all tunes, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," and across our finders marched and re-marched two thousand troops. They may have been great fighting men but they were very poor paraders, and would be particularly unimpressive on film because they filed past in ranks of four. What we besought was a solid mass of them, a body of color and organized action, but it was impossible to obtain, for they had been trained to march in narrow ranks so

that they could climb the ribbony trails of the mountains.

Nara Shum Sher rode into the midst of us so fast that I tangled in my flat trousers while trying at the same moment to get this action photograph and to get away from him. He announced that we might now pose for His Highness in the museum. Away he went and away went the Maharajah beside him, posting so high that I could see the horse's head through his crotch. As quickly as we could we packed our bulky and delicate equipment and drove to the "museum" in the faithful Dodge.

We were led to the back door, the tradesmen's entrance, I should judge it, and followed the secretary into a galleried hall which was surrounded by life-size oil paintings of the royal family. They were made in curious ways, some with house paint, apparently, some with the paint piled in spikes half an inch long so they might catch all the light there was in that dim hall and the better represent diamond buttons. Three, which Leila pointed out, nodding her head seriously and appreciatively, had photographic prints of faces pasted upon the painted necks.

An abattoir of hunting trophies lined the walls. One in particular caught our attention, the head of a gigantic rhinoceros which sat, like St. John's, upon a golden platter, for the back side of it had been sculptured and painted to depict all the gory innards which were seen when it had been amputated.

The secretary smiled when we admired it with constricted throats. In the cellar, he said, were heads and

skins of animals piled four *guz* (four yards) high and weighing twenty *maunds* (1,640 pounds). The Maharajah had killed them all.

A strip of sunlight lay diagonally across the floor. It widened slowly and we turned to see the front doors opening. Between them, flanked by sons, stood the Maharajah, now wearing a dark blue suit to which was affixed a row of medals. The sudden sunlight revealed splendor in what had seemed little less grim than a waxworks gallery before. At the end of the room stood another pair of thrones—they seemed to be everywhere, ready for quick dealings—and marble columns grew like huge stalagmites from the sunlit floor to taper into the darkness of the high ceiling. A carpet of red velvet interwoven with gold thread lay before the thrones, and a tiger skin with jeweled eyes was spread before the door.

It was not this magnificence that held our eyes, however. It was the helmet, that great treasure of Nepal, which an orderly was passing to His Highness. He put it into Leila's hands while we all prayed she would have the strength not to let one million dollars' worth of frangible jewelry fall. She passed it back like a hot potato, and the Maharajah put it on, without a word, as befitted one's conduct in the presence of such beauty and power and holiness as was represented by this crown which had come down through countless generations of Maharajahs and Kings, from the God Siva himself, it was believed, to the Maharajah Joodha who wore it now.

There was not a millimeter of it that was not jew-

eled, mostly with diamonds and pearls. Over each ear hung a cluster of emeralds the size and shape of a bunch of grapes. There was an emerald as long and thick as a large man's thumb on one side, and on the back was another, the size of a cocktail sausage. The ruby on top was an inch in diameter, blood red with a blazing globe of sunlight in its heart. Tawny bird of paradise plumes swept from the front to the back in a graceful arc.

His Highness turned slowly so that we might see the exquisite details of the helmet, the minute engraving on some of the flat emeralds, the double head of three-eyed Siva designed in diamonds, and the peacock that was made of dozens of small carved emeralds.

The secretary came forward but I was scarcely aware of him. "Do you wish to film His Highness," he asked, "with or without his specs?"

So brilliant was the helmet in the sun that the needle of my light meter ran beyond its scale, and so great was the contrast between the jewels and the Maharajah's clothes that we had to illuminate him from the neck down with our large sun reflectors. He shifted uneasily as that blast of hot light fell on him. He was trying to be sporting, but the sweat slid over his forehead, and between his heavy brows came the frown that condemned men to death or the slow torture I had seen a few nights ago at Gaokarran. Roy and I worked furiously with five cameras, the 35 mm. Akeley, the 16 mm. Kodak with color film, two Leicas loaded with black-and-white and Kodachrome and the Ikonta for a long-shot still. Armand talked charmingly to the secretary, but the translation was lost upon the suffering Maha-

rajah, and even Leila's smile, scarcely less dazzling than the helmet, fell with an almost audible plop into the darkness of His Highness' mind.

"Cut it," said Armand, when the sons also were beginning to look grim.

We moved to the cool shadows. The Maharajah put the helmet carelessly over the horn of the gruesome rhino head. A golden *khukri,* the curved knife of Nepal, was placed in his hands and he in turn presented it to Leila with the second smile of the day.

The secretary translated through grinding teeth. "His Highness . . . wishes . . . you to present this *khukri* . . . to your cousin . . . the President of the United States . . . with the best wishes of the Maharajah of Nepal. . . ."

Leila was unaware that Roy was still filming. Graciously she accepted the splendid golden blade, and thanked His Highness on behalf of the President and ourselves. The doors swung slowly together; the band of sunlight was squeezed to a bright wire across the floor and then was dissolved by darkness. We packed and went out to face the credible reality of Hospitality and the dear shabby Dodge.