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Author of "Radio V-Rays"

BRAITHWAITE, stiff, very English, very conscious that it was he who upheld the law of dear old England in this forsaken Indian hole, sat at his desk in his snug official bungalow. On the other side of the window the tropical rain poured down in sheets from a purple night sky, but it was warm nevertheless in the bungalow—so warm, in fact, that the perspiration was running down Braithwaite's correct, imperturbable British face and making him feel deucedly uncomfortable. His white ducks and pipe-clayed sun-helmet glistened super-white under the glare of a brilliant carbide lamp which hung from the ceiling, swaying gently. His face looked white, too—it was white, and his high white forehead was deeply furrowed with care. Braithwaite was worried. Rather!

As a servant of His Majesty, Braithwaite regarded himself as a sort of underfather to those of His Majesty's subjects that happened to come within his jurisdiction. It was up to him to see that these subjects, even if they were for the most part a mongrel lot, were properly cajoled, rewarded, punished. At present he was thinking of punishment: the punishment that he would like to inflict upon the white

man Orthcutt, who could raise, and was raising, more rumpus than all the little brown men of India could raise together. Punishment, indeed!

"Bull" Orthcutt, such natives as spoke English called him, because of his bellowing voice and massive physique; the others had some devilish jargon which Braithwaite supposed meant the same thing. For the past four years Orthcutt had terrorized the jungle and hill districts for miles about Braithwaite's humble little "official" village—terrorized them consistently and efficiently. He had robbed, blackmailed, kidnaped, burnt and destroyed, for the mere pleasure he derived from so doing. Not that the man was not wicked—he was positively vicious. Of that Braithwaite was absolutely certain. A half dozen poor little farms had gone up in smoke, and Braithwaite strongly suspected that Orthcutt's had been the hand that applied the torch. Two old people and a young man had been found murdered, and since the police had been unable to find trace of any feuds or affairs of honor, which would have accounted for the three deaths—and the police had tried hard—it seemed that these crimes also could be laid rightfully at

Ortheutt's door. And Braithwaite was strongly disposed to lay them there. Strongly disposed, but he realized only too well that proof and conviction were another matter entirely. What was more, Ortheutt was clever; unless the man accidentally slipped up in his plans Braithwaite had very little chance of ever seeing him behind the bars. And he knew it!

So Braithwaite sat and worried and thought of his predecessor, who had gone home a broken man. He sighed, leaned back to examine the face of his watch, saw that it lacked an hour till midnight, and called his head boy. The boy came running, was before him so much sooner than he had expected that any other man but Braithwaite would have started violently from surprise.

"Tomorrow we ride out," Braithwaite told the alert-looking young native, calmly and curtly. "I go to try to get a case on a bad man. We may be gone several weeks."

"Yes, sahib?"

"That will be all, boy."

"Yes, sahib."

The lithe brown lad left the room, his sensitive feelings hurt by the rebuff. He later told the cook that some of these Englishmen were insufferably sure of themselves and a bit snobbish. All he had wanted to know was a few more details so that he might make ample preparation.

ABOUT the same time Braithwaite made his decision the renegade Ortheutt was returning home through the dripping jungle. He entered his hut and threw himself down, rain-soaked clothing and all, upon the filthy pallet of jungle grasses which served him for a bed. After a minute he remembered something, and got up and washed the stains from the blade of his long, razor-sharp knife, which he drew from a leather sheath inside his shirt. Regarding the blade for an instant, pensively, he tested the

edge first on the ball of his thumb, next on the week-old stubble which covered his vacuous face.

Thinking of where the keen blade had been, within the hour, Bull Ortheutt threw himself down a second time and went to sleep as peacefully as a child. Neither morals nor conscience had he.

IT WAS the next morning, not long after sun-up, that the aged potter Bey discovered the dead body of his daughter, who had been as beautiful as a new-born creamy rosebud, and the comfort of his age. Now, Bey was both a Buddhist and a fatalist; what God had planned would come to pass, and that was sufficient. It was karma. But the calm way in which he took the death of the lovely girl, regarding it as an act of fate, did not prevent him from reasoning that the bad white man Ortheutt had very probably had something to do with it, nor from vowing a terrible revenge. Old Bey was sure that it was Ortheutt, because he knew well that his daughter had refused certain demands which the renegade had had the temerity to make. She was—had been—a good girl, his daughter. Fatalist or no, Bey wept a little, and vowed to bury the body in secret, telling no one of the girl's death.

Bey had read or heard a tale once, of a Brahmin who had been robbed of his gold and had reason to suspect a certain man whom he knew. The Brahmin cleverly told no one of the theft, not even the man he suspected. Years later the man asked casually if his friend the Brahmin had ever recovered that money which had been stolen from him years before, and arrest and conviction had followed promptly. On as slim a thing as this Bey based his hopes. He picked up the slim body of the dead girl and took it indoors, laying it gently on the couch till he should finish the work

which was before him, a ten-foot statue of Buddha in repose, which he was making of the best gray river-clay for young Jamal.

Jamal had ordered that the Buddha be completed in time for the new hall of justice he was building in the center of the diminutive hill settlement in which he and Bey lived. Jamal was young, wise, and handsome. He was tall and straight as a reed, with flashing black eyes and the whitest of teeth, and his turbans were always clean and snowy. Jamal was a born leader, and as such he was recognized by the men of the village. They had practically made a king of him, and Bey was sure that his fellow hill-men would never regret their choice.

So far Jamal had dispensed justice wisely and well, though it was true that his methods were occasionally very novel. The new hall of justice which was to contain Bey's large statue of Buddha was a novelty, too—a utilitarian novelty. Jamal was, as has been said before, very wise. He knew that so long as he could supply new things that were both useful and novel, few of his childlike people would rise to say he was not the best leader they had ever had. Jamal, like all good kings, knew the people with whom he was dealing. And Bey the potter knew and respected Jamal, both for this and other reasons.

So Bey put from him as much as possible (for he was an old man) thoughts of Orthcutt and the girl, and turned to the slippery gray clay which he knew so well, and the reed framework on which he was building the statue of Buddha in repose. As he worked an occasional tear fell into the wet clay, for he was indeed an old man. Perhaps that explains the queer, fantastic, pitiful idea that entered his tired old gray head. Perhaps it was karma. Who knows?

BRAITHWAITE and his men beat about the stinking jungle for the best part of three weeks without finding a trace of Bull Orthcutt or anyone with sand enough (as Braithwaite angrily put it) to lay a formal charge against him. In a rage at his own helplessness and at the sheeplike people who preferred to suffer from the deprivations of the man rather than face him in court and risk his possible later revenge, the Englishman came finally to the hill village over which presided Jamal, the young, handsome, and wise.

But two days before him had come Bull Orthcutt, bloody and cursing. He had been quite efficiently man-handled and then trussed up like a fowl by the half dozen or so of Jamal's men, who had stormed his hut, which he had thought perfectly concealed, and which Braithwaite's men had never been able to find. Jamal had taken the man not because he thought with Bey that he had killed Bey's daughter, for he knew as little about that as did Braithwaite, but simply because he thought that Orthcutt had been causing too much misery among the brown people, and deemed it time that he be brought to judgment. Jamal was also a Buddhist and a fatalist, but he held the more occidental view of sometimes making of himself an instrument of fate.

Braithwaite entered the village and proceeded immediately to the hall of justice, because it was the largest and cleanest building in sight, and anything clean appealed to him after the filth of the jungle.

Jamal recognized him immediately, but gave no sign. "What do you wish, American?" he inquired.

"I am not an American; I am an Englishman," snapped Braithwaite, stiffening in spite of his fatigue. His immaculate ducks and polished riding boots had long since become ragged and vilely colorless—mere vestiges of

their former selves. He continued, wearily, "I have been told at other villages that the renegade called Bull Orthcutt might be found near here. Can you give me any help?"

He did not ask the concluding question at all meekly, but as an Englishman should address a heathen nigger, b'Gad. For was he not an officially appointed upholder of the law, and a helper to the king, b'Gad?

Jamal grinned, slowly and irritably. This was not like most Englishmen he had known; it might prove interesting. "Yes," he said, "the man Orthcutt is here—very close to you!"

Braithwaite started, looked over his shoulder, and leapt forward—a trifle too late. Two healthy sons of India, coming up silently from behind him, seized his arms and legs and had him bound before he quite realized, in the usual galvanic British style, what it was all about. Then: "Ho!" he roared. "So you're in it hand and glove with him, are you, you blighter?" Not waiting for an answer, he added, "You'll hear from this, man. You have deliberately detained me, so that you might warn an offender and keep me from bringing him to justice. Ho!" How he had planned to do this he did not make clear, seeing that he had absolutely no charge against the man and could not have kept him in jail five minutes. But then, Braithwaite was a very capable man. Or else he would not have received his appointment.

"Quite the reverse from what you say, is true," said Jamal, in his too perfect English, which smacked strangely of that Oxford which Braithwaite had never graced with his presence as an undergraduate. "I intend to administer justice to Bull Orthcutt promptly. I have rendered you helpless simply because, as a white man, you might be tempted to go to the aid of a fellow member of your race."

Braithwaite wondered if it was possible that the blighter smiled ironically.

"You might think my methods of judging a trifle obsolete," continued Jamal, respectfully, "even—er—senseless; so I have seen that you be rendered incapable of hindering me."

"Senseless!" spat out Braithwaite, who was very, very angry. "Probably so! About as senseless as—as that fat, stupid-looking thing over there."

He pointed at the newly completed statue of Buddha, which sat next to the bench where Jamal later planned to sit and deliver judgment. The Buddha was pointing, too. Old Bey had molded one arm so that a tapered forefinger stood out stiffly from the folded right hand and pointed straight ahead, accusingly, to the exact point upon which the clay eyes seemed to be focusing. Braithwaite saw, and shivered a trifle.

"Any man who calls Buddha senseless," remarked Jamal patiently, "is a fool. Christ, Buddha, Confucius—perhaps even Mohammed, were teachers given us so that truth, which is understanding, might not perish from this plane—from this earth, rather. The statue was finished for me only this morning by an aged craftsman named Bey, who is such a good friend of mine that he recently offered me the hand of his daughter in marriage, although that does not interest you, of course."

"On the contrary," said Braithwaite, a bit sarcastically, it must be confessed, for he was still angry, "it jolly well does. Where is the young lady now?"

A vestige of a frown crept across Jamal's dark face.

"The girl has been away," he said. "I have not seen her since she was about ten years old, but old Bey told me that she would be home soon. That was only a few days ago. When I asked after her health this morning,

thinking that he might have heard from her again, he told me that she had sent a messenger to say that she would be unable to come home for at least another year. I cannot understand it—.”

Jamal had been talking to himself, forgetting all about the Englishman. He recalled himself with a start, and spoke sharply to Braithwaite.

“We might as well start now as later, I suppose. Sit where you are and remain quiet, and you will see the justice of Jamal, king of this hill village. You need not expect aid from your servant, either,” he added. “He is weak because you did not allow him to bring along adequate supply-stuffs, and he has been tied up at his own request, anyway.”

This was not at all like Jamal, but the provocation was great.

JAMAL struck twice a deep-noted bronze gong, and the two giant fellows who had bound Braithwaite appeared.

“Bring the prisoner,” he ordered.

They spun on their heels and returned presently with the cursing degenerate between them. A crowd of almost naked natives, aware of what was going on, crowded through the door after them and filled the newly erected hall of justice, delighted that it was to be used so soon, grinning amusedly at the two white men, neither of whom at present was any too white. Their jabber made a bedlam of the place until Jamal struck once more on the gong; then all became so still that Braithwaite could hear his own breathing.

“Today we dispense justice,” announced Jamal, speaking slowly and distinctly, first in his native tongue, then in English. “What this man is accused of matters not—what we are interested in is that he is suspected of committing crimes that merit death for their reward. My method of judging whether or not Bull Orthcutt is

guilty of these crimes and should therefore be punished with death is one which has been used often by our forefathers in ages long past. On the hand of Buddha, great friend of truth and justice, I shall place a vessel containing wine. This wine”—Jamal was speaking directly to Orthcutt, now—“has the miraculous power of being able to tell whether or not a man is innocent. If such is the case, it will not harm him. *But if a man is guilty this wine will kill him!*”

“Wait!” shouted Braithwaite. “That is not justice, man. You know that he is ignorant, and therefore probably superstitious. You are playing upon that superstition.”

“Not so,” said Jamal. “You are an educated man.” He smiled slightly. “If you were in the culprit’s place the wine would decide *your* innocence or guilt, just the same. Do not presume that this is the first time I have seen this method used, American!”

“I’m English,” roared Braithwaite. “I told you that once, dammit! And I protest, dammit! This prisoner should be tried where there is real justice—in a British court of law—”

“Cease!”

The word shot from Jamal’s lips like the crack of a whip.

“Hold your tongue!”

It was a command. Braithwaite dropped his eyes from the burning ones which peered into his, and his mouth, which had been hanging open, slowly closed.

Jamal reached behind the Buddha and brought forth a canister of some red fluid which splashed and sparkled brilliantly in the rays of sunlight that entered through a large hole in the roof. He placed it upon the clay hand of the Buddha.

Orthcutt’s wrists had been unbound, but his feet were restrained by loose hobbles. At Jamal’s command,

"Drink!" he shuffled forward like one in a trance. Glancing apprehensively at the wine, he raised the canister to his lips. Once, and once only, he screamed, when he saw that the extended forefinger on the hand of the Buddha was pointing directly at him. Then he fell dead to the ground, his features and limbs twitching and jerking for some minutes after life had become extinct.

"My people," Jamal said, "the man was guilty. Remember what has happened in your presence to a guilty man."

Braithwaite and his man left for the official bungalow in the official village as soon as their bonds were cut and a little food had been supplied them. The servant paused for a moment to whisper to Jamal knowingly, "He will not have me punished. In his report to those across the ocean he will say that the 'matter of the man Orthcutt has been successfully taken care of.' He will not bother to add any of the details. *Aie-ee!*"

"Yes," answered Jamal, smiling a trifle wearily. "I know."

JAMAL smiled again that evening when he discovered an extremely poisonous little viper dead in the wine, where old Bey had surreptitiously placed it. He smiled a bit sadly, and pondered upon the many ways which fate has of punishing the wicked.

"If the poison had not killed him," he told Oca-Oca, his tiny pet monkey, "his own guilty conscience would have. Thoughts are things! I made him think that the wine *would* kill him because he *was* guilty, and his own mind slaughtered his guilty body. But then, I could have hypnotized him and made the same thing happen. And if everything else had failed, he would have eventually fallen into the hands of the English, and their laws would have punished him, finally. It would not have been so painful as the way Jamal, king of this hill tribe, did it, however, and it would have taken months and months of what they call red tape."

"*Thr-r-r! Ak-a-eee-e!*" said Oca-Oca.

BUT by far the oddest thing about the entire case was something which only tottering old Bey knew. For Bey had molded the soft, fragrant body of his beautiful daughter inside the hollow statue of Buddha in repose. And inside the long clay arm of him who was a friend of truth and justice, was the arm of the beautiful girl. And inside the accusing finger which had pointed straight at him, was the slim, dead finger of the girl whom he had killed.

Perhaps she smiled, quietly and sadly, too, as was the habit of Jamal, young, wise, and handsome, whom some day she would have married.

