



OVERDRIVE®

ReaderWorks

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Vengeance of Vishnu

George Jenks

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I

IT was a quiet night in the police station. Lieutenant Craig, behind the desk, yawned at the empty blotter and wished the clock didn't tick so loudly. Terry Maginnis, of the reserves, in the back room, dropped his briar pipe, and it sounded almost like a pistol shot. Then, when Terry had sworn devoutly for a second or two over losing a pipeful of tobacco, the deadly silence gathered again and the lieutenant shook himself to keep awake.

He was in the middle of a long-drawn out yawn when the telephone clanged with its usual startling suddenness, and Craig reached eagerly for the instrument, hoping for something to break the monotony.

"This is the police station. What do you want?" he demanded sharply.

The voice that came jerkily over the wire had a curious, hollow sound and waxed fainter toward the end. "Send an officer to Overview Lodge and notify the morgue. I shall be dead when your man gets here." There was a pause. Then: "*Listen!*"

Lieutenant Craig, experienced in the sound of gunshots, heard a roar on the wire that could have been caused only by one thing, and called out excitedly to Maginnis: "Terry, you and Jim Callery beat it to that Overview joint, overlooking the river. You know where it is. That old guy down there has just plugged himself. I heard the shot on the phone. Get a move on. I'll call up the hospital to send an ambulance. He may not be dead, though he said he would be. Telephone me from the house."

Maginnis and Callery were out of the front door by this time, but the former called back: "All right, 'loot.' I got ye. What'll we do wid th' corpse if there is wan?"

"We'll send the wagon later and bring it here," snapped Craig, who already was ringing up the hospital. "On your way!"

Overview Lodge was a rambling two-story stone house, whose damp walls suggested that the river must often creep up there while its small-paned windows, the old-fashioned weather vane on the Moorish cupola, and the filagree ornamentation of the rotting wooden veranda, were all in the style of architecture a hundred years old at least. Standing back from the narrow, unfrequented road, amid a funereal thicket of birches, elms, and hemlocks, it looked like an ideal home for a student, to whom the street noises of a great city would be a real distress.

As a matter of fact, it was a student, Doctor Theophilus Yeager, who lived there. He had inherited the home from his father and grandfather, and there he wrote his books about the strange peoples of little-known countries he had visited, and particularly about their religious beliefs and the curious manner of their devotional rites and sacrifices. Regarded as an authority on the lore of Asiatic nations, he was said to know more about Thibet and the unexplored regions north of the Himalayas than any other man in America.

With him in Overview Lodge was only one person, his tall, bronze-visaged, black-bearded, white-turbaned attendant, whom he called Chundah. This tall, silent man bought what food was required for himself and his employer, and did all other errands necessary. He also prepared their meals. The doctor did not require any personal attendance; he made his own bed, and kept his room clean himself, Chundah having no more to do with it than to supply clean linen.

Doctor Yeager—although mixing not at all with the outside world, except that he went to see his publishers now and then, and had some friends in a certain learned society to which he belonged—had not the traditional appearance of a recluse. He was an ordinary-looking person, who might have been a lawyer or business man. He wore up-to-date clothing, shaved regularly, and seemed to enjoy life in a healthy, wholesome way. Chundah also dressed like an average American—when out of doors. In the house, however, he wore the white trousers drawn in at the ankles, and a loose white blouse—both, like his turban, immaculately white—which had been his customary garb in India before he entered the service of Doctor Yeager and came with him to America.

A swift ten-minute walk brought the two policemen to the lodge. They were on the veranda, with Maginnis keeping a sharp lookout for possible thugs about the grounds, and Callery trying the front door, before the ambulance left the hospital.

"The door's open, Maginnis," called out Callery cautiously. "Come on!"

"D'ye mean it was act'ally open, or jist unlocked, Cal?" asked Terry.

"Open, I said," rapped out Callery impatiently. "Where's that Injun? Hey, Chundy!" he whispered, slipping along the dark hall to where he supposed the kitchen must be. "Come out, if you're there." He turned his flash light on the hall and into the kitchen, but both were empty.

"Arrah! Phwat's th' use o' skitterin' aroun' down here, Cal?" broke in Terry Maginnis impatiently. "Sure this lad, Chundy, or phwatever his name is, has beat it. Av course he has. An', be th' same token—git up the shtairs or let me go." And he moved to push Callery aside.

But Callery was just as eager to go up as Maginnis, and the two were side by side as they pushed open the door of the room which they knew Doctor Yeager used as a library and general living room. There was a green-shaded student lamp alight on the massive table, and some manuscript lay in front of the big swivel chair

which apparently had been carelessly pushed back when its owner got up. Maginnis looked at the top sheet of paper, and he saw that the person writing on it had stopped so abruptly that he had not finished the last word, leaving it "amu," but with an up stroke after it, like the beginning of another letter.

"Faith, phwat d'ye make o' this now, Cal?" asked Terry, pointing to the paper. "Do ye think he was thryin' to write 'a mule' an' got tangled up in his shpellin'?" Anyhow, he shtopped writin' mighty sudden." Maginnis had walked to a heavy portiere of wine-colored velvet, deeply edged with massive gold fringe, and swept it aside. "Howly saints, phwat's that beyant? Come here, Cal. Begorry it's himself. He laid down on the bed, so that he c'u'd pass out aisy—rest his sow!—then he put th' gun to his ear, or somewhere that suited him, pulled th' trigger, an' niver moved. But?"— Maginnis stopped and scratched his head, knocking his cap sideways over one ear— "how th' divil did he lay that sheet all so smooth an' nice over his own corpse whin he was as dead as Mike Mulligan's p'isened cow? That's phwat stumps me."

"He was a much smaller man than I thought, too," remarked Callery, who, with Terry Maginnis, was staring at the long, grisly form stretched on the bed under its white covering. "He don't make much of a ridge under the sheet."

"Ye're right," assented Maginnis in awed tones. "Be the Lord, he's shrunk a whole lot since I last laid eyes on him. He must have been sick. Well, we'll take a look an' see. We don't even know he's dead up to now."

There was a lamp in a bracket against the wall, with a reflector which sent a powerful shaft of white light full upon the bed. Terry Maginnis, as an experienced policeman, had often seen dead persons, so it was with perfect coolness that he seized one side of the sheet, and, with a twitch, revealed what lay beneath. Then he jumped back, and from his mottled white lips there came forth, in a husky, awe-stricken whisper, as he touched himself piously on forehead and chest in the symbol of his religion: "D'ye see it, Callery? Or has the divil bewitched me eyesight? Phwat is it lyin' there before ye?"

"It's a skeleton, Maginnis. That's what it is," returned Callery, as much puzzled as his companion.

"Well, begorry, we know he's dead amnyhow," said Terry, adding, with a sigh of relief: "Well, I'm glad I'm not crazy, Cal. If ye hadn't said it was what ye did say it was, faith, I'd have resigned from the force, because I'd ha' been no further good to it even if I shtayed."

It was a grotesquely horrible sight upon which the two policemen gazed, for the skeleton was attired in a comparatively new suit of bright-blue silk pajamas, with a round mandarin's cap of the same hue stuck rakishly on one side of the smooth white skull, which, together with the grinning mouth, gave the impression of an awful bald-headed creature enjoying some ghastly joke of the other world. The blue silk blouse was open at the top, revealing the crumbling breast bone and partly sunken ribs, while at the bottoms of the blue trousers long, fleshless feet, the big toe gone from one of them, pointed straight upward side by side.

There was no disorder about the bed: From all appearances, the skeleton might have gone calmly to bed like a living person, having prepared for rest in night clothes, and, straightening out comfortably, drawn the sheet over its face and dropped off to sleep. Or, what was the reasonable supposition, some person or persons had brought the dreadful relic of mortality from somewhere, dressed it in Doctor Yeager's pajamas, and left it in the bed. Still another theory, which occurred simultaneously to both Maginnis and Callery, but was dismissed at once, was that the doctor might have died a long time ago and lain in bed long enough for his outer tissues to decay.

"Ah, what are ye talkin' about?" grunted Terry Maginnis, when Callery ventured this suggestion. "Didn't we both see th' doctor on th' street within the mont', an' amnyhow didn't he call up th' station an' say he was goin' to die, and didn't Craig tear th' gun go off whin he done it?"

"And you think Doctor Yeager could have shot himself twenty minutes ago and shed all the flesh off his bones—eyes, hair, and all—by now?" sneered Callery.

"I didn't say that," was Terry's indignant rejoinder. "It's puttin' foolish talk in me mout' ye are. But here's the skeleton, an' the doctor's gone, wid that heathen hired man av his also missin', an', be jabbers, I'm goin' to telephone th' station like th' loot told me, an' let him say phwat's to be done."

Howld on! There's th' ambulance!" he exclaimed, as the clang of a bell sounded outside. "Kape yesel' quiet, Cal. Don't say a worrd till th' doctor boy gives his opinion. L'ave it all t' me. It's young Doc Griffiths."

The young fellow in the white jacket and uniform cap, who breezed into the room, nodded familiarly to the policemen. "Hello, Terry! What's broke loose in here?"

"Faith ye c'n see fer ye'sel', doc," returned Maginnis, stepping aside and pointing to the bed. "This here's what we found. Give it a name if ye wull."

Doctor Paul Griffiths glanced at the bed and turned wrathfully on the two officers. "Say, what kind of game is this you're giving me? Who rung up the ambulance?"

"Lieutenant Craig done it," replied Maginnis with dignity. "He didn't know phwat was down here. All he had to go by was a repoort that there was a suicide or killin', an' he sint Callery an' me to look intil it. How long sh'u'd ye say that bird on th' bed has been there?"

Doctor Griffiths did not reply at once. His professional interest was aroused, and he was bending closely over the bed.

"Think it's Doctor Yeager?" asked Maginnis ironically.

"It may be," was the startling and unexpected reply of the ambulance surgeon. "Wait till I've finished my examination. Here's something around the neck, held by a thin silver chain. I wonder—— Yes, here's a clasp."

He took the chain from around the spinal bones where in life there had been a neck, and held up to the lamp, in the hollow of his hand, a flat, bronze disk of irregular shape. On it were some strange characters that showed plainly through the green corrosive surface of the medal.

"It's an ancient Brahminical amulet, dating from the time of Genghis Khan or thereabouts," pronounced Griffiths, after a minute examination. "I know Doctor Yeager used to wear something of this kind around his neck under his clothing. I remember seeing it when he was operated upon at a clinic in the hospital about a year ago."

"Sure, I rec'llect," interrupted Maginnis. "Something th' matter wid his head, wasn't it?"

"Yes, there was a trepanning operation, and——" Doctor Griffith had lifted the skull, which came away in his hand from the rotting spinal column, and at the same

time the mandarin cap fell off. "By Jove! Look here, Maginnis—and Callery. Get this! Get this! Here's where the round piece of bone was cut out. You can see the teeth marks of the trepan if you look close. I wish I could tell when this was done by looking at it. But I can't. But it is in exactly the same place as the operation on Doctor Yeager's head. Could it be possible that—"

Doctor Paul Griffith did not finish his thought aloud, but, putting the chain and amulet on a table near the bed, he replaced the skull at the top of the spine, and, looking at it critically with his head on one side, remarked: "That seems to fit all right. He looks quite himself again. Now I'll see how these bones were all arranged so well without being articulated. Without any ligaments, it is queer they hang together."

He worked in silence for ten minutes. Then, looking up as Terry Maginnis came into the room after he and Callery had searched the house and telephoned Lieutenant Craig, he said: "I can't tell anything about it. If that Hindu valet of his were here——"

"Well, he isn't," declared Terry disgustedly. "Sorra wan of him or any wan else is about the place. There ain't a sowl here, barrin' our three selves."

"The only thing is to hold a regular inquest," interrupted Griffiths in a brisk tone. "Take care of that amulet and chain, Terry. Good night!"

"You stay here an' watch this thing on th' bed don't git away, Cal," said Maginnis, when they were alone: "I'm goin' to th' station to repoort to the loot. It's a quare thing—a mighty quare thing."

II.

WHEN a real tempest is raging down the Hudson, with fiercely driving rain and spiteful squalls, then look out for a bad night on the wooded heights of upper Manhattan. It was on such a night—chilly, misty, black, and full of eerie sounds as the wind whistled through the trees or shook the creaky old slatted sun blinds of the ancient houses still numerous in that historic region—that Doctor Paul Griffiths, now a full-fledged M. D., with a practice of his own, stood by the side of the large, open fireplace in his newly furnished library, looking down at his former classmate, Murray Plange, who sat in a morris chair and puffed thoughtfully at a long-stemmed hubble-bubble.

"I tell you, Murray," Griffiths was saying, "I never was satisfied with the perfunctory finding of that coroner's jury in the Yeager matter. The fact was that neither the coroner nor the police could make anything of it, and they took the easiest way out. They buried the skeleton in the grave in a corner of the grounds from whence it had obviously been taken, and laid it all to somebody or other who wanted to play a grim joke. Bah! That's nonsense!"

Murray Plange, pulling luxuriously at his pipe, expelled a mouthful of the water-cooled smoke and grunted.

"Well, go on, Murray," blurted out Griffiths. "Say it. I can see you have a suggestion. What do you think?"

"I haven't come to any conclusion yet," answered the tall, lean, bronzed man in the chair, stretching his feet toward the blaze of the hickory logs on the hearth. "But didn't the police try to find Doctor Yeager?"

"Of course they did," was the impatient reply. "They set all the ordinary police machinery in motion, and would have made some arrests if they could have found anybody to pinch. But Doctor Yeager had lived absolutely alone except for his Indian valet, Chundah, and Chundah vanished on that night, too."

"They went away together, eh?"

"No one knows," said Griffiths. "They were not seen to come away from the house, either singly or otherwise. That is not strange, for the house is very lonely, and there are several ways to approach or leave it—by water, as well as land. Old Theophilus Yeager, grandfather of the last one, built the place when there were no street cars or railroads or any other public means of getting about in this neighborhood—it's only a mile from here—and it was a natural thing for him to make a boat landing at the foot of the cliff, with rough steps leading down to the water. The old fellow was a great hand for having all conveniences. He even had his own private cemetery, in which he was interred according to strict injunctions in his will. He is the only person who was buried there, however. The second Theophilus Yeager died and was buried at sea, and the third one has vanished, as you know."

"And all this about the last Yeager was three months ago," observed Murray thoughtfully. "I suppose the police have stopped thinking about the case?"

"Well, yes—actively, I should say. But of course they have the records and would get busy if anything new turned up. Otherwise, it will have to go into the list of criminal mysteries never solved, of which New York, like all other large cities the world over, has its share. I've sometimes thought it must have been the work of a crazy man."

"I don't," exclaimed Murray Plange crisply. "But go on. Was anything stolen from the house?"

"Nothing," replied Doctor Griffiths. "Moreover, there was no confusion indicating a struggle. It seemed as if Doctor Theophilus Yeager might have dug up the bones of his grandfather himself, arranged them in his own bed, and then departed on some mysterious journey. That's why I say it may have been the work of a crazy man. It is quite possible for a person to go insane on the instant, and this Yeager was a curious sort of chap, always delving into mysticism and uncanny possibilities, and it might have turned his brain. I was present at the trepanning operation—— By the way, I have the skull. Lieutenant Craig, of the police, was a friend of mine—he's captain of the same precinct now—and he helped me to get it just before they closed the casket. Like to see it?"

Murray looked at him sharply. "You speak as if it were Doctor Yeager's skull, Paul. What has the trepanning operation on his head to do with the hole in the old skull you found with the rest of the skeleton on that bed?"

Griffiths laughed as he went to a glass cabinet and unlocked it. He brought out a white skull in one hand and something that he did not at once show in the other. "I did not mean that, of course, Murray," he said. "But it happens that a similar operation had been performed on the owner of this headpiece, whoever he was. That was one reason I wanted to have it. Look!"

"Curious coincidence," observed Murray Plange, smoking calmly, without offering to touch the ghastly thing, although the doctor extended it. "Put it on the table, won't you? What's that in your other hand?"

"Not so curious, from a medical point of view," declared Griffiths. "The brain trouble may have been hereditary. As to what I have here, you can see for yourself."

he added, as he held up a thin chain of tarnished silver, with an irregularly shaped bronze medal dangling from it. "You've been in India. What do you make of this?"

Murray Plange took the medal, glanced at it cursorily, and then put down his pipe and bent closer to study the characters, nearly obliterated by time, which covered it on both sides, "Where did you get this," he asked without looking up.

"It was around the neck of the skeleton," answered Griffiths. "I took the liberty of appropriating that, too, when the police decided it would not help them to find the people who had put the skeleton there. I could see for myself that it had the name of Genghis Khan, with some hieroglyphics I could not read, on one side, and some small writing, in what looked like Sanskrit, on the other. I could not decipher it, even if I knew the meaning of the words, anyhow. But—"

Murray Plange got up from the chair to look at the medal in the shaded light of the reading lamp on the table. Then he turned to Griffiths: "This is an amulet, given by a Brahmin priest, which preserves its wearer from punishment for all evil deeds of which he may be guilty——" He paused, and a strange light came into the clear gray eyes beneath their heavy pent of black brown. "*Except one.*"

"You mean——"

"I mean," answered Murray impressively, "that the wearer of this amulet, if he were killed, must have desecrated the temple of Vishnu, the Sun God, in one of the many ways in which it can be done, especially by a white man. That, and that only, would account for his being put violently to death while he wore this protecting emblem."

"Always presuming that he was killed by some fanatical Hindu, a follower of Brahma, eh?" smiled Griffiths.

"Great heavens, man!" burst out Plange. "Do you doubt that? Of course it was done by an East Indian. I had made up my mind to that as soon as you began to tell me about the way the skeleton was found, with all the larger bones, at least, in their places. And many of the smaller ones, too, for that matter, where it was possible to make them stay after being assembled. I spent six months in northern India, in the very shadow of the Himalayas, and although the natives never trusted me entirely—they are always suspicious of white men—I had an opportunity to see more of their religious observances than falls to the lot of the average traveler. Of course being American helped a lot. If I'd been English, I guess I'd never have come out of that region alive. Back in the hills they are not so loyal to the British flag as they are in Cawnpore, Calcutta, and Bombay. It was then I learned about these amulets. You can see that the sacred language of the Indo-Aryans, Sanskrit, is used on this one, and that the name of Genghis Khan is added, making it seem as if that jolly old potentate indorsed what is written. Nothing slow about those Brahminical priests, let me tell you."

"But all that doesn't explain whose skeleton this was?" objected the doctor. "The police thought the old grave of the original Yeager, who died a quarter of a century ago, had been opened, but were not sure. But even so, assuming that the bones belonged to the old man, how do you connect that skeleton with the disappearance of his grandson, who we know was alive within three months?"

"Are you sure the skeleton did not belong to the grandson?" asked Murray in a curious, tense tone. "This hole in the skull is just where, at the clinic, you saw the trepan go in. How do you know his grandfather had a similar operation?"

"By this skull," answered Griffiths with an impatient shrug. "Here's the hole. You are not asking me to believe that our Doctor Yeager could have been killed and all the flesh stripped from his bones between the time that the police lieutenant was called up by the dead man and the moment when the two policemen found the skeleton?"

Murray Plange smiled wearily as he placed the amulet and chain on the table and looked at the skull, still in the doctor's hand. "My dear Paul," he said, "in the first place we don't know when Doctor Yeager was killed. It might have been a week before the lieutenant was called up on the phone. Of course, I don't suppose it was the dead man who did it. You've said that the voice was not clear, and that it came in jerks, which would make it still easier to disguise it. These Indians are clever. They can imitate anything. And, by George, they can do anything. If you've ever seen the Indian fakirs——"

"I haven't," interjected Griffiths. "But I've read about them."

"I've *seen* them," went on Murray. "Among things I have seen them do is to take the flesh off the bones of a *living* man, showing a skeleton, right in the open, in broad daylight, and put it on again. Mind you, I *saw* that."

"Imagination — hypnotism!" explained Griffiths with a contemptuous grin.

"Perhaps," conceded Murray Plange. "But it didn't seem so. Well, as I was saying, we don't know when Doctor Yeager was killed, or whether he was killed at all. We only know that he vanished that night and that a skeleton, dressed in his pajamas, lay on his bed. Also that there is a hole in the skull such as you had seen made by surgeons in the hospital some months previously, and that there are other small scraps of evidence which indicate that this was his skull in life and that the bones on the bed were his."

"How could they be?" ridiculed Doctor Griffiths.

"Let me see that," requested Murray, nodding toward the skull. "No, I don't care to handle it. Put it on the table. Have you a magnifying glass—a strong one?"

"Certainly," replied Doctor Griffiths, going to the cabinet from whence he had taken the skull, and where an imposing array of glittering surgical instruments and other clinical paraphernalia showed in the light of the lamp and fire. "Here's one. It's very powerful. I need good glasses in my profession."

Murray Plange took the magnifier without comment and held it over the skull. Then he placed a finger gingerly on the gray-white frontal bone and examined his finger tip through the glass.

"The East Indians have a process by which they remove all the flesh from a corpse in about two hours," he said half-musingly. "They use some strong corrosive which is their own secret, and afterward apply another substance that dries the bones and removes all traces of the first process— except that they can't prevent this fine powder forming on the surface. See!" He held the glass in front of his finger, and Griffiths nodded, "Now," went on Murray, "here's a theory. It may be all wrong, but I give it for what it may be worth. You see, this powder——"

He stopped and looked at the door of the room leading to the rear part of the house. It was of ground glass halfway down, and silhouetted dimly on this

semitransparent window the figure of a tall man wearing a large turban. "Who's out there?" he demanded in the sharp tones of a man whose nerves are on edge. "Looks like some one in Indian dress."

"It's my man," answered Griffiths coolly. "A mighty useful fellow. Acts as chauffeur, does most of the housework that the maid finds too heavy, and has an expert knowledge of chemistry. He and I have had many pleasant hours in my laboratory. Name's Lunga Sen, speaks excellent English, and is a high-caste Hindu. He prepares and eats his meals apart from the rest of us, and I dare say he goes through his devotions in his own way in his room on the top floor. Aside from that, he's as matter-of-fact as you or I. Want to see him?"

Before Murray Plange could answer, the telephone on the table rang clamorously, and Paul Griffiths, picking up the instrument with the celerity of a young doctor who is after all the patients he can get, placed the receiver to his ear and sent forth a well-modulated "Hello!" A moment's pause, and he replied to something from the other end: "Yes, this is Doctor Griffiths speaking... What? Overview Lodge? Doctor Theophilus Yeager's old home? Why, I thought the house had been empty for three months.... You—you are—— ... What do you say?" hurriedly, "You are Doctor—— Say it again! ... Wait! Wait!"

The awful expression of horror on his usually placid face made Murray Plange wonder just what Doctor Griffiths had heard over the wire, but he had to wait till the doctor had called in vain three or four times, and at last, after jiggling the hook without result, had banged the receiver into its place and turned to his friend with a blanched face and quivering lips.

"Murray," he stammered in hollow tones, "it was, I think, Doctor Yeager speaking, and he said 'Come quickly. By the time you get here I shall be dead.'"

"Good God!" exclaimed Murray Plange "Why, those were the very words of the telephone into the police station from Overview Lodge on that night three months ago, weren't they?"

"The same—in effect, at least," answered Griffiths, pressing an electric bell button at the side of his table to summon Lunga Sen to bring out his automobile. "Coming with me, Murray?"

"You couldn't keep me away," was the emphatic response.

III .

LUNGA Sen sat stonily at the steering wheel. He had not taken time to put on the long leather coat and chauffeur's cap he usually wore in the car and his voluminous white turban shone in the blackness of the road almost like another headlight. The rain had stopped and the wind gone down, but it was one of the darkest nights Lunga Sen ever had seen in New York. There was not even a solitary star in the heavens to break the mystic, velvetlike blackness.

"Drive carefully on this road, Lunga Sen," warned Griffiths from the rear seat, which he shared, with Murray Plange. "There are holes and big stones in the way. But we're nearly there. The next wide gateway. You can drive right into the grounds."

There was no reply, but Griffiths knew the taciturn Lunga Sen always did as he was told so long as he was silent. When he took the trouble to speak it was usually to make some objection, for, as a high-caste Hindu, he had somewhat inflated ideas of his own dignity and was inclined to be independent on occasion. With calm skill he slowed down the car to turn into the gateway. Then he jammed on the brake and threw off the power in one swift movement, as out of the deep shadows suddenly appeared two men, who stood full in his path. In the strong light of the car lamps it could be seen that one was in police uniform, while the other wore a civilian business suit, with a broad-brimmed soft hat pulled down over his eyes.

Griffiths recognized them at once. "Hello, captain!" he hailed. "Did you get a telephone call, too?" "I sure did, doc," replied a gruff voice, unmistakably that of Hugh Craig, who had been a police lieutenant three months before, but who since had been made a captain, in charge of the same precinct. "It was the same nutty spiel from somebody who said he'd be dead when we got here that came to the station that night my men found the skeleton in bed. I have Maginnis with me. He's the man who found it. How is it you are here, doc?"

"The same telephone message came to me," replied Griffiths. "The voice was jerky, but it sounded something like Doctor Yeager's. There's a light up in his room, I see. I didn't know any one was living in this house since he and his man—that East Indian guy—vanished on the same night."

"There hasn't been any one here till now," broke in Maginnis. "Faith it ain't no longer agone than lasht night thot I tuk th' trouble to walk all 'round th' premises, thrying th' dures an' sich loike, for me own satisfaction. Not thot I wanted to be doin' it nayther, fr I'm not seekin' th' society av no man phwat passes off in th' quare way this same Yeager—"

The pushing open of the house door by Craig cut off Maginnis' long-winded exposition, and a minute later all four—Craig, Griffiths, Murray Plange, and Maginnis—were in the library. All except Plange had been in this same room three months before, and they noticed that the table and swivel chair looked just as they had then. The manuscript, with its half-written word at the end, was gone, but the shaded lamp, alight, was there, and in a general way there was nothing to indicate that thirteen weeks had elapsed since they had passed through to find the grisly remains of mortality stretched upon the bed in that other room.

"There's the telephone," remarked Captain Craig fatuously as he pointed to the instrument on the table. "But who used it? I could have sworn it was Yeager. Well," he continued, in what he meant to be a careless tone, "I guess we'd better take a look into this other room. Want to open the door, doc? You'll have to pull the portiere aside first."

Doctor Paul Griffiths knew the reputation of Captain Craig for bravery, so he only smiled as he walked over to the doorway and reached for one of the heavy portieres. But he did not get a chance to move it, after all. Lunga Sen, who, unnoticed, had followed them up to this room, stepped in front of the young man, snatched the portiere out of the way, and flung the door beyond wide open.

Doctor Griffiths was the first to enter the bedroom, however. He swept past the tall Hindu, and after one glance at the bed uttered an ejaculation of horrified amazement and fell back for the others all to see.

Stretched out on the bed, in a suit of bright-blue pajamas that might have been the identical garments worn by the skeleton three months ago, and with a mandarin's cap of blue perched on one side of his head, was Doctor Theophilus Yeager, stone dead, with a long-bladed, jewel-hilted dagger of Oriental design plugged into his left breast. Griffiths seized the handle of the weapon, and with some difficulty—for the blade had gone completely through the dead man's heart and the point

was imbedded in the ribs—drew it out. He hardly noticed that Lunga Sen had taken the dagger from him, for he was bending over the body to determine, if possible, how long Yeager had been dead.

“Not more than ten minutes, I should say,” was his verdict when he had assured himself that no life remained, and after he had felt the back of the neck. “It’s still warm. He must have died instantly. The dagger did not go through the pajamas, and——”

“Ah!” cried Captain Craig, stepping forward. “That looks as if he were killed before they were put on him.”

“I should say that was the way of it,” replied Doctor Griffiths coolly, as he fumbled inside the garment. “The coat was pulled open a little and the dagger forced in between the two sides in such a narrow opening that it would have been practically impossible for a hard blow, such as this was, to have been delivered while it was on. If it had been, the murderer could hardly have avoided making some kind of mark on the silk.”

“You’re sure it is Theophilus Yeager, doc?” asked Craig. “No mistake about the identity, is there?”

“I don’t think so,” replied Griffiths. “But you knew him in life. Look and tell me what you think.”

“It’s Doctor Yeager all right,” replied Craig, staring at the set, unruffled dead face. “He doesn’t look like a man that died a violent death, either. But that’s nothing. He probably got it so quick that he didn’t have time to know he was attacked.”

“Niver knowed he was hurted, I’d say,” added Terry Maginnis. “As for it’s bein’ Doctor Yeager, why, I’ll shwear to that. I’d know him anywhere, dead or alive. That is,” he added cautiously, “so long as he has flesh on his bones. All skeletons look alike to me, av coorse.”

“The dagger ought to help us find the person who did it,” went on Captain Craig. “Where is it, Terry?” he asked, looking about.

“Lunga Sen had it in his hand the last I saw of it,” said Griffiths over his shoulder, for he was still examining the body. “There’s no amulet around his neck, Murray,” he continued in a lower tone to Plange.

“Why should there be?” asked Plange. “I don’t know,” was Griffiths’ slow reply as he straightened and looked steadily into his friend’s eyes. “But somehow I couldn’t help thinking that the amulet we found three months ago on the skeleton might—that is—you see——”

“There would not be anything of the kind here. The amulet you showed me at your house tonight is the only one in the possession of the Yeager family, you may be sure of that. Such things are not thrown around lightly by the Brahmin priesthood,” declared Murray in a tone of conviction.

“But don’t you think there is any connection between the disappearance and subsequent murder of this Doctor Yeager and the skeleton we found here three months ago?” asked Griffiths, rearranging the blue coat of the pajamas on the dead man’s breast where he had been searching for the amulet. “This affair now is as strange as the finding of those bones, it seems to me.”

“Say, where the deuce did that cheese knife go?” spluttered Captain Craig, who, with Maginnis, had been looking about the bed for the dagger. “If that guy in the white turban is doing any monkey business with it, he’ll find himself under arrest the first thing he knows. Terry, go down and see whether he——”

He was interrupted by a great scuffling and banging in the adjoining library, accompanied by ejaculations in a strange tongue, followed by a heavy thump, as if somebody had fallen to the floor.

Griffiths was first through the doorway, with Murray Plange by his side and the two police officers close behind. What they saw was Lunga Sen, holding the long-missing Chundah by the throat with his left hand, while with his right hand he flourished the jeweled dagger that had killed Doctor Theophilus Yeager. At his feet lay another man in the same sort of white Indian raiment, except that his turban had fallen off, allowing his long black hair to trail over the rug.

“Look out there, Terry!” bawled Captain Craig. “Get that knife!”

Terry Maginnis was too far back to get it, but Doctor Griffiths, with the activity and readiness of a skilled football player, leaped headlong at Lunga Sen and snatched the knife away just as it came within a few inches of Chundah’s breast.

“Good work, doc!” shouted Craig, his sturdy arm going around Chundah’s neck and pulling him away, while Murray secured Lunga Sen, “Look after that guy on the floor. What’s wrong with him?”

It was Murray Plange who answered. Dropping to one knee by the side of the still form, he pulled aside part of the white robe and showed a rapidly widening stain of dark red over the chest. “Stabbed through the heart, captain,” he said solemnly. “Look!” He pointed to the dead man’s forehead, on which three white lines had been made with some sort of indelible pigment. “He’s a Brahmin high priest.”

“Baboo Keshub Chundah Sen!” said Lunga Sen stonily. “I know him. He was here to avenge Vishnu, the high god. He finished his work. Then he used the dagger on himself. The vengeance of Vishnu was complete. He killed the man who insulted the god in Benares, who was the grandfather of this man on the bed. Three generations have died for it. The second Yeager was killed at sea. The third was obliged to wait till the holy moon was in the sky, which came tonight.”

“What kind of jargon is this, Lunga Sen?” demanded Griffiths angrily. “What are you talking about?”

“He is telling the truth, Paul,” interrupted Murray Plange. “The vengeance of Vishnu is always worked out in one way. The eldest son of the family of the offender is killed up to and including the third generation, as the holy writings of the god demand, and the same form is followed. The stabbing is done always when the moon is in a certain quarter, while the victim is sitting or standing. Then he is arrayed in sleeping garments and stretched upon his own bed.”

“But the skeleton we found lying on this same bed three months ago, after Doctor Yeager had telephoned the police station that he was about to die—how do you account for that, Murray?”

“If the sahib will listen, I think I can clear that up,” broke in Lunga Sen. “Baboo Keshub Chunda Sen bound me to secrecy in the name of Vishnu of the Ten Avatars. But Baboo Keshub Chundah Sen is dead, and I may speak. Know, then, that there was a secretary whose name I do not know who was in the service of Doctor Yeager, the grandfather of this one,” he pointed to the bed, but immediately brought his hands back to his side as before, “and this secretary was killed by

mistake by the avengers who believed him to be the doctor, violator of the temple at Benares.”

“Can't you get along a little faster, Lunga Sen?” urged Griffiths. “Do you mean that the skeleton we found on that bed was the secretary's?”

“Suffering Mike!” interposed Captain Craig excitedly. “Why, that would be Morrison! I worked on that case. He disappeared when old Doctor Yeager was killed, and it was thought that the secretary might have killed Yeager. I was just on the force then I wasn't much more than a kid, but I was big and husky, and they took me on. Go on, Lunga, or whatever it is. Let her loose!”

“The secretary was stabbed by one of the avengers. But when Baboo Keshub Chundah Sen came in to see that the work was well done he knew there had been a mistake. So he had the body taken down into the old cellar, where no one ever went, for the walls were crumbling in. A hole was dug by four of the avengers he had brought with him to America in case there might be an attempt to interfere with the holy work——”

“Holy work!” shouted Craig indignantly. “I always knew there was something wrong with these Indians snooping around up here. But go on.”

“The hole was dug and the body was laid there, anointed with something that would soon remove the flesh, except at the hinges of the joints,” went on Lunga Sen coolly. “Afterward, when Doctor Yeager, the grandsire, came back to his house, he suffered the death as it had been written, and was buried in the corner of his own grounds, where the grave is to-day. It is the will of Vishnu that always a condemned man shall be warned in some way what is to be his fate, and Baboo Keshub Chundah Sen, when he found that the moon was not in the sacred quarter at the time that he and the avengers came to kill this present Yeager, three months ago, had the secretary's skeleton brought up from the old cellar, carried on a stretcher blanket, and laid it on Doctor Yeager's bed, dressed in the doctor's own night raiment. Then the doctor's amulet, which came down to him from his grandfather, was put on the neck of the skeleton, and Yeager was taken away until a fitting time should arrive for his punishment.”

“You mean to-night, Lunga Sen?” asked Murray Plange gravely.

Lunga Sen raised his eyebrows and spread out his hands, palms upward, for an instant.

“You see!” was all he said, nodding toward the bed. “According to the commands in the holy writings, it is always a skeleton that is used as a warning. The laws of the god are immutable, except when the execution must be carried out at sea, as was the case with the father of this third and last Yeager. That is all. I have told what I know.”

“It is, eh?” cried Captain Craig indignantly. “Well, if this Baboo Catchup, or whatever his name is, has croaked himself, by the Lord, we've got you, Lunger! Get that fellow, Maginnis!”

In a flash Terry Maginnis had seized Lunga Sen's long brown hands and clapped handcuffs about his wrists, the Indian submitting in dignified silence.

“You don't think Lunga Sen had anything to do with it, do you, captain?” asked Griffiths. “I should be sorry to think so, for he has always seemed to be seven-eighths American. Besides, he is hardly old enough to have taken part in killing and burying that secretary. This dead man, Baboo Keshub, is over seventy, I should say, and even Chundah must be nearly fifty.”

“That's right,” agreed Craig. “I'm taking him, too. Get the bracelets on him, Terry. Here!” holding out a pair of handcuffs from his own pocket. “Use mine. I'm going to break up this whole Indian game as sure as I'm a policeman. I wouldn't trust Lunger any more than I would Chundah or any of the others in the gang. I'll take them into my back room, and if they don't come across with the truth, why——”

It was not necessary for him to finish. The sinister meaning was all too plain. But neither Lunga Sen nor Chundah betrayed emotion. Both were standing with their hands crossed flatly on their breasts. The handcuffs just allowed them to take that attitude.

“Well, I hope you're right—that Lunga Sen is innocent,” declared Murray with a shrug. “But that fellow, Chundah, seems to be in bad. It looks as if Baboo Keshub has had him working for Doctor Yeager just so he could play the spy and arrange matters easily for Vishnu's orders to be carried out. Where has Chundah been for three months, and where did he keep Doctor Yeager all that time, out of sight?”

“We'll get that,” put in Captain Craig grimly. “He'll tell when I get to questioning him. They all do. To me it looks like the chair for him. He was the fellow who telephoned to-night to me and Doc Griffiths, I'll bet.” He turned sharply on Chundah. “Where have you been keeping yourself since that night you faded out of here, Chundah? And who killed this Doctor Yeager?”

But Chundah, his handcuffed hands still crossed on his bosom, merely bowed his head in silence.