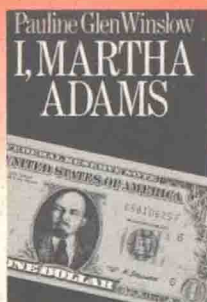
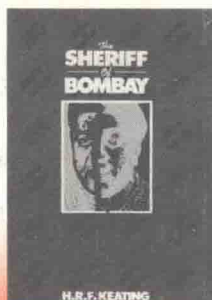


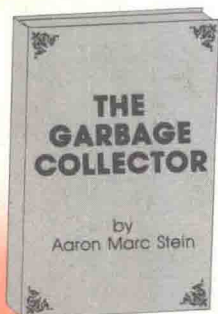
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of Bombay*  
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THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB ®

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From the very beginning Inspector Ghote had no doubt about the identity of the killer. His anxieties and embarrassment arose only from the thought of making the arrest and the outcry it was bound to bring.

And the worst of it, he thought when he looked back from the height of his troubles, was that he had been sitting at his desk before it had all started worrying that of the full number of major crimes recently committed among the seven million inhabitants of Greater Bombay not one had been allocated by the Assistant Commissioner, Crime Branch, to himself.

Did the A.C.P. believe he could not cope with a difficult investigation? Was that why he had been landed with this unending and unsatisfactory business of the chain-snatching case at City Light Cinema? Dammit, it was a matter for the men out at Matunga only. If the victim, lured to a dark corner by the promise of a black-market ticket when the "House Full" boards were up, had not been the son of a major general in the Army, the theft of his neck chain, even though it was platinum and worth rupees six thousand, would never have come to C.I.D. Headquarters at all.

And he himself would never have been faced with hours of troublesome investigation, just as prolonged, just as detailed, as if it were a first-class murder affair, and with little chance, as everyone knew, of final success. A gang of chain-snatchers, once they had got hold of a prize like that, would make off fast and lie low, perhaps in their native place hundreds of miles out of Bombay. But despite this, because the victim was the son of a man with a high position in society—why, the matter might go up to the Legislative Assembly even—every possible witness had to be hunted out and questioned.

*Arre*, it was almost more work even than a murder case.

He had actually been about to hoist himself up from his chair and go off again to Matunga and that little lane behind the City Light

Cinema to try once more to dig out a decent witness when his telephone had rung.

"Ghote."

"A.C.P. here. Come up, Ghote. I've got something for you. Something I'd take on myself only I'm tied to this bloody desk all day."

"Yes, A.C.P. Sahib. Straightaway, A.C.P. Sahib."

Something so important that the A.C.P. would like to be handling it himself? What could it be? A major inquiry. Definitely a major inquiry. Perhaps he had all along been being kept in reserve for a major inquiry.

He leapt to his feet, gave one swift glance to the small square of mirror that hung on the far wall of his cabin, brushed a somewhat sweaty hand over his hair, pulled his shirt a little straighter and left almost at a trot.

Only at once to encounter Inspector D'Sa.

Grizzled, long-serving Inspector D'Sa, one of the last of the breed of Anglo-Indian and Indian Catholic officers who long ago at the time of the British Raj as well as in the years afterwards had been the backbone of the Bombay force. Inspector D'Sa, on the verge of retirement, stuffed deep and spilling over with memories of days gone past and liking nothing better than to pour them out over anyone he could manoeuvre into listening. Inspector D'Sa, his own particular bugbear.

"Ah, it is you, young Ghote."

"Yes, yes, D'Sa Sahib. But I am very much in a hurry. A.C.P. Sahib—"

"You remember I was telling you only yesterday, man, about how things used to be in Bombay? About how high moral standards were, even among the natives. Begging your pardon, young Ghote."

"That is quite all right, D'Sa Sahib. I am very much allowing for the way you were taught in your community in the old days. But, please, I must—"

"I won't keep you a minute, man. My God, have you youngsters got no politeness nowadays?"

"But—But a very important task is—"

"I just want to show you one thing, Ghote. Something that proves my point right up to the hilt."

"Well, yes. Then what is it only?"

"Look, man. Look at this."

From the top pocket of his plain-colour bush shirt D'Sa took a small flat object. He held it out in the palm of his hand.

Ghote looked down. It was a picture, a tiny, crudely coloured picture of a woman, a Western woman it looked like, dressed in a short red skirt and a bright blue blouse.

"Well," he said, after a little, "I am not seeing anything altogether proving what you are saying about old-days morals, D'Sa Sahib. A picture of a girl only. And now I must—"

"No, look. Look, man, look."

D'Sa twisted his upraised palm to and fro.

"Now do you see?" he asked.

Ghote saw.

The picture was evidently one of those trick ones covered with clear plastic strips in such a way that you saw one thing looking from one angle, something different looking from another. In this case the slight shifting in D'Sa's palm had simply stripped the girl of all her clothes.

"Well, yes," Ghote said. "I suppose such a picture would not have been seen in Bombay when you first came into the service, Inspector."

"No, it would not. And where do you think I got hold of this, man?"

"I am having no idea whatsoever. But, D'Sa Sahib, the A.C.P. himself—"

"A boy was selling them, Inspector, selling such displays of flesh and obscenity on the footpath in Hornby Road, not one hundred yards from this Headquarters."

Ghote experienced a momentary impulse to point out to Inspector D'Sa that the name of the street had long ago been changed to Dadabhai Naoraji Road and that nowadays almost everybody called it D.N. Road, and to add as well that measures in yards had been officially replaced by metres many years ago. But he knew that to do so would only get him embroiled in yet other arguments.

"Well," he said instead, "that is not really so terrible, Inspector. In Hutatma Chowk they are selling on the footpath sex cassettes, from England also. And, so they tell, in them you are made to hear all the sounds of intercourse taking place."

"The vendors should be whipped, Inspector," D'Sa broke out. "Whipped in the open *maidan*."

He gave a sharp, reminiscent laugh.

"At least my toe connected with the backside of that boy in Hornby

Road," he said. "And sent every one of his filthy pictures into the roadway except the specimen I kept to show you, man."

Ghote thought of the boy's little stock of merchandise brought to sudden ruin. But again he checked a comment.

"Yes, yes, but I must be going to the A.C.P.," he said, turning away.

"Quite right, Inspector. Never keep a superior officer waiting. That's the way I was brought up in the days when the police service was the police service."

But Ghote was already at the entrance to the winding stone stairway leading up to the veranda outside the A.C.P.'s office.

Just as he was about to step into its coolness he heard D'Sa call out again.

"Oh, Ghote. One thing more. The Police Vegetable and Flower Show, I would want some help—"

Ghote poked his head back into the sun.

"Sorry, Inspector," he called. "Too much of work-load now."

Let old D'Sa organise the Vegetable and Flower Show on his own. That was about all he was fit for these days.

He took the winding stone stairs at a run, hurried along to the A.C.P.'s door, paused one instant to draw breath, looked in through the glass panel in the door, saw that the A.C.P. was unoccupied, knocked once and went in.

"Ah, Ghote. Good man."

Ghote clicked his heels to attention in front of the A.C.P.'s wide semicircular desk.

What was the task he was about to be assigned? The task that the A.C.P. himself would have liked to have taken up?

"The swashbuckler, Inspector. That mean anything to you?"

The swashbuckler. The swashbuckler. Had he misheard? What could the A.C.P. be talking about? The only Swashbuckler he had ever known of, and that had been long ago in his teenage days, had been a British film star, called then by all his friends, who did not fail to see each and every one of his pictures, invariably the Svashbuckler. But Swashbuckler or Svashbuckler, the A.C.P. could not possibly be referring to that figure of old.

"A film star, Inspector. British film star. I should have thought you'd have at least heard of him. I'd have hoped you'd have had the guts to bunk the class in those days and go and see his films."

"Yes, sir. Film star, sir. The Svashbuckler, sir."

He had had the guts, once or twice, when he should have been in class to pass through the classic-arch entrance of the old Edward Cinema and sit, feet tucked comfortably under him, watching hypnotised the Svashbuckler's daring feats until the moment came when, with the tension suddenly released, he in common with almost all the young audience felt impelled to jump up on his seat and cheer. But he could hardly claim still to have those guts.

"The fellow's here, Ghote."

"Here, sir?"

He actually took a quick look round the A.C.P.'s big, airy office to see if this mythical figure was somewhere in the room, concealed perhaps behind the screen that hid the cot on which in times of emergency the A.C.P. slept? Or sitting quietly, unnoticed till now, in the shadow of the big standing fan underneath the huge wall map of Bombay and its police districts?

"Not here, Inspector. Not in this room. In the city. Here in the city. Camping at the Oberoi-Sheraton."

"Yes, sir. Of course, A.C.P. Sahib. At the Oberoi-Sheraton Hotel."

Of course a big star, a real hero, like that would be at the Oberoi. Or shouldn't he rather be at the Taj? Wasn't a hotel like the Taj Mahal, built in the British days, somehow more in keeping? But no doubt he had chosen the newer, more modern, more American place for some good reason.

"We've been asked by the Minister of State for Home to show him round Bombay, Inspector. Before he goes off for *shikar* somewhere."

"Oh yes, sir."

Going off to shoot game was much more the idea of the man he had in his mind. Once it would have been tiger. Hadn't he gone after a wounded tiger single-handed in one of his films? But those days were long gone. The tiger was a protected national asset now. Yet no wonder the A.C.P. wanted to take on this duty himself. Such a famous star. To show him all the best of Bombay. It was hardly a first-class murder inquiry, but it was an honour all the same.

"Chap wants to see the Cages, Inspector."

The Cages. The notorious brothels that were at once Bombay's boast and its shame. Of course, they were a tourist attraction. Guidewallas who got hold of innocent visitors always made a point of



taking them there. But all the same. For the Svashbuckler to be taken to see them. For such a hero. Such a White Man. Such a god. It was not at all the right thing.

"But, sir—But, A.C.P. Sahib—"

"Yes? Yes, what is it?"

"Well, sir, are the Cages only a proper place for such a gentleman to be seeing?"

"Good God, Ghote, are you embarrassed to do it? What is there to be embarrassed? I myself—Well, as I was telling, I am one hundred percent desk-bound. But the fellow wants to see the Cages, and see them he will."

"Very good, sir. I would do it to my level best."

"I should hope so. Simple enough duty. And if you don't know your way round in Kamatipura the fellows in Vigilante Branch tell me there's a Dr. Framrose with a dispensary in Falkland Road. He looks after the girls there, and is always ready to be helpful. Get him to take you to the best place."

The A.C.P. gave a quick frown and a twitch of his moustache.

"That is to say the most decent place, Ghote. The most decent place."

"Yes, sir. Yes, A.C.P. Sahib."

Inspector Ghote beat a hasty retreat.

But the embarrassment he felt was as nothing to what he was to feel, dizzily dismaying, before his visit to the Cages with the Svashbuckler, that star of old, was over.

Embarrassments and complications seemed to pile up from the very start of Inspector Ghote's tour of Bombay's most notorious area as guide to Douglas Kerr, known to countless former small boys the world over as the Swashbuckler—and to former small boys in India as the Svashbuckler. Yet all were to pale into ridiculous insignificance before what came as the climax to the evening.

First there was the fact that in the Oberoi-Sheraton lobby, under its great lines of hugely elaborate twelve-foot-tall chandeliers, Ghote entirely failed to recognise the famous film star, his teenage idol. The Britisher who stepped out of one of the smoothly whirring lifts and stood looking round for him among the lengthy rows of aligned black leather sofas had longish grey hair in place of the dazzlingly fair short-back-and-sides that had singled out the Svashbuckler in his days of glory. His sagging, heavily flushed cheeks and thickened neck were related only remotely to the clean-cut good looks that had been the model and envy of all those boys of—was it?—twenty years before. And the nose, though straight and Greek godlike as ever, was red. Even purple.

At last, however, Ghote had been driven to realise that the semiwreck standing there looking about him must be his once-upon-a-time hero and had successfully introduced himself and led his charge out to the police vehicle and its patiently waiting driver. But conversation as they made their way through the still thick late-evening traffic towards the Kamatipura area was mined with unexpected difficulties.

"Is it you are pleased to be back once more in India, Mr. Douglas Kerr?"

"Prefer to be called Carr, if you don't mind, old boy."

"But, please, your name is being spelt K-E-R-R, isn't it?"

"Pronounced Carr. Surprised you don't know that, if you're as much of a fan of my work as you said you were."

"Oh, yes, indeed, Mr. Douglas Ker—Mr. Carr. I was always a very, very great admirer of your many feats."

"Only two, old boy."

"Only two feats? But I am thinking—"

"Feet. Feet, old boy. Things you have on the end of your legs, don't you know."

In a moment, or a little longer, Ghote had got the joke. He laughed.

"Oh, jolly good."

A silence fell. Their driver honked viciously on the car's horn and squeezed up beside a long red double-deck bus and trailer. As they drew level a blast of searing fumes from its diesel exhaust came through the open window beside the Svashbuckler.

He flung himself half over Ghote on the rear seat beside him.

"Christ, what was that?"

"It is some exhaust fumes only. But, you see, if we are putting up the glasses next to us it would become altogether too hot inside."

The Svashbuckler resumed his upright, though slumped, position.

"I knew India wouldn't be exactly cool," he muttered. "But they told me this was the best time of year."

"Well, so it is, Mr. Douglas—Mr. Douglas Carr. November is the finest month in Bombay. But surely you must be remembering that?"

"Remembering? Why should I, old boy?"

"From your films. There were three of them picturised in India I am recalling, *The Svashbuckler Meets the Evil Kali*, *The Svashbuckler's Jungle Adventure* and *The Svashbuckler Meets the Evil Kali Again*."

"Made in England, old boy. You don't think we'd come all the way out here just to shoot a few location sequences, do you?"

"But the tiger? When you went after the wounded tiger, single-handed only?"

"Few pots of plants in the old Denham studios, so far as I remember. Plus a bit of stock of some snarling brute or other. Magic of the movies, old son."

"Yes. Yes, I am seeing."

Ghote leant forward and rasped into the driver's ear.

"For God's sake, get a move on. Do you think we are in a funeral procession only?"

But complications were not over for him even when they reached Falkland Road and abandoned the car to make their way on foot

through the thickly drifting crowds of prospective customers eyeing the girls who lounged against doorposts or, garishly dressed and thickly made-up, were looking out of the thin blue-painted protecting bars of the full-length, street-level windows, origin of the much-vaunted name of Cages. As they pushed past the gawpers and the vendors of food, balloons, pictures of the gods and a score of other things, suddenly above the tumult of the calls of the rowdier would-be customers and the insults flung back from the balconies of the battered wooden, slogan-daubed, advertisement-pocked old houses, above the blare of *filmi* music from the narrow little restaurants, above the squeaking of the vendors' bleating balloons, there came a shriller screaming cutting its way above everything. It drew Ghote's attention, and the Svashbuckler's.

There, outside one of the houses, was a Western woman of some considerable age, her short stringy body nondescriptly clothed in a cotton blouse and bleached-looking flowered skirt. She was holding open in front of her a large reporter's notebook, and from the balcony above, accompanied by that extra loud shriek of abuse, one of the girls had flung at her a bucket of water. Of water, or worse.

Ghote looked round, hoping that a patrolling constable might be there to sort out the trouble. There was not one anywhere in sight. He decided it was his duty to go to the rescue, little guessing that this chance encounter and the advice he was about to give would lead before very many days had passed almost directly to sudden death.

"*Ek* moment, please," he said to the Svashbuckler. "I must just find out what that Western lady is doing in this locality. She appears to be altogether in a soup."

"But—But, I say, old man, is it—Well, isn't it asking for trouble? I mean, those girls up there look pretty rough customers."

"Nevertheless," Ghote said, "the lady is a visitor to India only, and a lady also."

He had hardly time to reflect that the Svashbuckler's attitude was scarcely that of the man he had watched, long ago, entering bars in tough New Orleans, in wicked Surinam, in frozen Alaska to mop up whole roomfuls of sailors insulting his heroines before he had pushed his way through the bystanders and reached the lady with the notebook and, he saw, a well-soaked skirt.

"Madam," he said, "I am a police officer and you are seeming to be

in grave troubles. May I ask what it is you are doing here? This is a very, very notorious area."

"I should hope it is," the girl's victim replied in a strongly accented American voice. "That's what I'm here for."

"But, madam," Ghote said. "Madam, the only class of women in this locality are—They are gay girls only, madam."

"Gay girls? Gay girls? Boy, I've heard whores called by any number of substitute terms since I landed in this country: 'magdalenes' and 'members of the ignoble profession' and 'crossers of the moral barrier' and 'women of doubtful character.' But that I do believe is the worst yet."

From behind his shoulder Ghote heard the Svashbuckler break out into a great bray of laughter.

"Nevertheless, madam," he said, determinedly addressing the lady with the notebook, "it remains true that this is an area devoted to prostitution only. It is not at all proper that you should be here."

She gave a sprightly look round about.

"Seems to me there are plenty of people here just to rubberneck," she said. "Just because all of them are males, doesn't seem any good reason why I shouldn't come too. Specially as I'm here for strictly scientific reasons."

"For scientific reasons, madam?"

Again Ghote heard a bellow of laughter from the aging British film star.

"I am a sociologist, I'd have you know, officer. Dr. Dorothy Ringelnatz, North Adams State. And I'm in Bombay to make a study of behavioural attitudes among Third World prostitutes. Tonight I was carrying out a little preliminary field-work—only the subjects seemed to object."

She looked down at her bleached old skirt, patched with a large area of wetness. Ghote confirmed through his sense of smell that what had been flung at this extraordinary visitor was not water.

"Madam," he said, "I would most strongly advise for you to secure the company of some Indian sociologist if you are wanting to make further visits to this area. But now, please, let me find for you a taxi. In what posh hotel are you staying, please?"

"Well, I guess you're right, officer. I can't say I've made much effective contact here tonight."

Dr. Ringelnatz closed her notebook with a definitive snap.

Ghote, to his great relief, spotted the yellow roof of a taxi halted to set down a pair of prospecting customers not far along the street. He shouted and waved and managed to catch the driver's attention.

"Well," came the Svashbuckler's loud tones as at last the cab's door closed on the rescued American, "I'll be able to dine out on that lady when I get back home, never mind the night that lies ahead."

The night that lies ahead. Ghote's heart sank. Was his hero of old really intending to do more than just look at the Cages and their occupants? And, if he was, what should his own attitude be? Would he actually have to stay there and wait for the girls' notable client in case, a fairly unlikely event in fact, he was robbed? And what about the rather more likely event of his catching an infection? What could he do about that?

But perhaps this Dr. Framrose whom the A.C.P. had suggested as a knowledgeable and reliable informant would be able to persuade the Svashbuckler to behave with discretion.

He set off along the crowded street in search of the doctor's dispensary, ignoring the shouted invitations from the blue-painted barred windows and dark doorways and hoping that the Svashbuckler was proof at least against the cheap allurements of the more blatant of the girls thrusting forward half-naked bosoms or turning to flick up short skirts—like the one worn by the girl in Inspector D'Sa's trick picture—to display cheeky behinds.

Tea boys with their newspaper cones of snacks and glasses of milky liquid clutched in strong fingers dodged away in front of them. Squatting circles of card-playing pimps and hangers-on glanced up angrily when they chanced to brush against their backs. Slow rivers of male humanity, young and old, the bare-chested and the well dressed, mill-hands and briefcase-clutching babus, flowing in counter-currents along the narrow thoroughfare, jostled them and swerved to either side to let them pass.

Then at last, just beyond the big Olympia Café, he spotted a painted sign on a wall proclaiming *Dr. Falli Framrose, Sexologist, F.R.S.H. (U.K.), Sex Diseases, Sex Changes*. He pushed his way towards the place, a wooden house as narrow and dilapidated as any other in the street, and no cleaner. But inside light shone brightly, and it looked as if the doctor was at least there.

Could he be relied upon to issue a sufficiently stern warning about the dangers of frequenting the houses of his neighbours?

Ghote stepped up into the barely furnished front room of the narrow house, the ex-film star at his heels.

Dr. Falli Framrose was not a person whose outward appearance immediately impressed. To begin with, his face and narrow bald skull were blotched all over with the dark patches of leucodermia, the skin disease that inbred Parsis often suffer from. Then he was, as well, fearfully thin, the very opposite of the picture of well-fed healthiness that a hundred film idols had established as the peak of desirability. Finally the large horn-rim spectacles he wore had slipped almost half-way down his long droopy Parsi nose in a manner which hardly gave the impression of high efficiency.

Ghote introduced himself and his distinguished visitor.

"Ah, yes. Come to see the sights, eh?" Dr. Framrose said in a high-pitched erratic voice. "Come to see the coupling and the copulating going full swing. You know what it all means to me? I'll tell you. Buboës and itches, sores and syphilis. That's what it all amounts to in the end, see it from my point of view."

Ghote took a quick look at the Svashbuckler. Yes, an expression of apprehension had appeared on the face that once had smilingly confronted any danger the magic of the cinema screen could produce. Well and good.

"My Vigilante Branch colleagues are telling that you would be the best guide to a decent brothel, Dr. Sahib," he said. "If you are able to take the time I would be very, very grateful."

"Yes, yes. I'll lead you to my good friend Heera's. She's as typical a *gharwali*, a madam, as you'll ever see."

He gave a cackle of laughter.

"That's to say," he added, "as rapacious, unfeeling and self-seeking a woman as you could find. Come along, come along."

From a nail on one of the pale green, decidedly scabby walls he plucked an old black umbrella and hung it down his back from his ridgelike left shoulder. But at the door he darted back in again.

"Drugs cupboard, drugs cupboard," he said. "Must make sure that's locked. They'd break in here and take every blessed thing out of it, poisons and all, if they thought they could get that open. You know that every man jack on this street is a thief, don't you?"

Ghote did not feel the need to confirm or deny the statement to his British companion. He watched the doctor plunge into an inner room and saw him test vigorously the doors of a strong-looking steel cupboard attached to its far wall.

Well, at least he seemed to have a good sense of responsibility. And he had put a first-class scare into the Svashbuckler.

"Now, sir," Dr. Framrose said, scuttling back into the room and addressing the film star, "you are a foreigner in a strange land. So let me tell you what we in India do for our *filles de joie*, of which shortly you will be seeing some prime specimens."

He pushed his slipped spectacles back up his long nose with a thin sliding finger and turned to Ghote.

"You are acquainted with that excellent work *The Ten Princes*, Inspector?" he asked.

"It is a film only?" Ghote inquired. "I am not seeing many films nowadays, I regret."

His answer seemed to please Dr. Framrose, at least to judge by the vigour of his cackling laugh.

"Work of prose, Inspector," he said at last. "Work of prose from the seventh century, one of the glories of our Indian heritage. Now, sir . . ."

Out in the street, amid the raucous blare of two or three different *filmi* tunes emanating from the open-fronted restaurants on either side, with the sound of quarrels and the whistlings and croonings of feminine enticement, with the tea vendors' cries of "*Chai . . . Bis-coot*" loud in their ears, the doctor seized the Svashbuckler by the elbow and, hurrying him along, retailed the ancient wisdom in a voice that swooped and soared as high and low as the massed violins and cascading silvery *jal-tarangs* of the music all around.

"The duties of the mother of a courtesan, sir. As told by the sage of old. One, to provide nourishment from the earliest age to develop stateliness, vigour, complexion and intelligence while at the same time harmonising the gastric calefactions and the secretions. Then, instruction from the fifth year in the arts of flirtation, major and minor. A conversational acquaintance with grammar—most important that—and profound skill in money-making, in sport, in betting on fighting cocks and games of chess. Next, obtaining wide advertisement for her charms and beauty through astrologers and others and finally raising



her price to the highest when she has become an object of general desire."

They came to a halt in front of a house no more dilapidated than the others, its doorway no darker, the girls behind the bars of the ground-floor room as brazen.

"Now, sir," said the doctor loudly. "Take note, all this at street level is of no concern to our good *gharwali* Heera. She operates on the floor above. A much more select establishment. There you will be able to observe the gastric calefactions and the secretions at their most charming, and I myself shall take the place of the astrologer in praising their particular beauties and skills."

Ghote began rapidly to alter his opinion of Dr. Framrose. Was he not positively encouraging his distinguished visitor to debauchery now? To dangerous debauchery?

As they were about to enter the narrow doorway, where on a bench under the light of a paper-garlanded, fly-blown electric bulb, sat three girls from the establishment above, one of the whores from behind the bars reached out and caught at Ghote's arm.

"Ten rupees only," she cooed.

He shook her off and began to follow the doctor and the big shambling Britisher inside.

"Eight rupees," the whore called out after him more loudly. "Six. Four. Two. Four rupees on the cot, two only on the mat."

Ahead there was a narrow flight of ill-lit stairs, steep almost as a ladder. In the wake of the others he set foot on them. It was when he was nearly at the top that there occurred the incident that was almost completely to overwhelm him with the perplexities it brought in its train.

There was a passageway straight in front with three flimsy partition doors off it. Only the weak light coming through a window behind them illuminated it, and his view was partially blocked by the tall figure of Dr. Framrose and the bulkier one of the Svashbuckler. But, as his head had come level with the bare boards of the floor, his attention had been attracted by a sharp scuffling at the far end.

Stepping up higher, he had seen, or half-seen, in the gloom two people. One of them, the nearer one to him, was a woman, a huge fat creature dressed in a gaudy red sari with a wide gold border. And the other, beyond her and all but hidden by her, was a man.