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Even shrouded in a thick fog, the *Oriental Venture* was an impressive ship. She was new enough that the beams of her hull were still a gleaming chestnut color, and her sails were unstained and frosty white. A merchantman of 1100 tons, she was built for carrying cargo rather than for speed, and her sides bulged out so noticeably that her crew sometimes called her "Fat Ori." Today, at any rate, the ship was moving even more ponderously than usual. Her sails were practically limp and the wind negligible, which was unusual for this time of year in the Ceylon Straits. The dark and impenetrable mists made the scene even more menacing.

Under these difficult conditions, the *Oriental Venture*'s lookout had barely been able to find the crow's-nest to begin his watch. But even in the midst of this thick haze the ship sailed relentlessly onward, sliding very gracefully through a calm sea. She was in many ways as picturesque a sight as any landscape or mountain vista, except that in this case it was the hand of man rather than the hand of God that had made it all possible. And perhaps this was the reason for the fog, after all: perhaps blotting out this majestic ship was God's subtle way of defending His own monopoly on the sublime.

The *Oriental Venture*'s destination was Calcutta, the capital of Bengal, the most important province of the inexorably expanding British Empire in India. This Empire, colloquially known as "the Raj," was administered by the Honourable East India Company (the "Honourable" part was usually omitted in polite conversation, perhaps because it lacked credibility). Fittingly, therefore, the *Oriental Venture*'s holds were crammed with every comfort of civilized existence that a Company bureaucrat or a half-anglicized *maharajah* might require: fine tableware from Worcester, ornate frock coats imported from France, and even several crates of high-quality Virginia tobacco. On this occasion, though, the ship's most precious cargo was none of these. It was a girl, the nineteen-year-old beauty, Lady Emily Augusta Fitzroy, daughter of the wealthy aristocrat and Whig politician, the Earl of Oakhampton. This tall, statuesque, brown-haired, blue-eyed girl had been trapped in her cabin for most of the six-month journey from Southampton to Calcutta. Her only relief, in fact, had come in the form of a brief stopover in Cape Town, and a scenic climb to the top of Table Mountain. Her confinement, however, had not prevented her stunning good looks, nor her obvious melancholy, from becoming legend among the ship's crew.

Of course, for the most part, her Ladyship's only companionship during the voyage came not from humble sailors. Ever since the untimely death of the girl's maidservant just three weeks into the voyage, her temporary guardian, the Rev. John Paxton, had been constantly at her side. Paxton was a tall, thin, and very pale man who seldom spoke of anything but duty and honor and was, therefore, highly respected by protective fathers like Oakhampton, but was just as surely despised by girl-aristocrats like Lady Emily.

In her eyes, the main aft cabin of the *Oriental Venture,* where she and the priest spent most of their time, was nothing more than a prison, and a dank and dreary prison at that. Light reading and the occasional attempt at embroidery were very poor distractions indeed from the tedium (not to mention the sporadic dangers) of sea travel, but the worst part was that the girl's boredom left her little choice but to spend most of her time in

reflection. What she invariably reflected upon, moreover, was the terrible fate that awaited her once the ship finally arrived in Calcutta. There she was engaged to marry a man she had never met, but who was rumored to be the most brutal and corrupt of all East India Company officials: Warren Hastings, the Governor of Bengal. Lady Emily was nothing if not free-spirited, so the idea of being forced into a marriage she did not want was causing her terrible anguish.

Her Ladyship's presence on the *Oriental Venture* was the reason for that ship's escort, the Royal Navy frigate *Bellerophon*. On the rare occasions when the girl was allowed to take air on the deck, she often stared admiringly at this imposing vessel, not so much because of its size or the ingenuity of its design, but because *she* was the reason it was there. Never before had she been given such a graphic demonstration of her own importance, and this satisfied her vanity, even though it left her heart cold. On balance, she resented her father for sending her to India, and in her darker moments she even hated every man on this ship for playing a small role in her ordeal.

The Captain of the *Oriental Venture,* Mr. Price, was for his part only dimly aware of her Ladyship's bleak outlook. During his nightly dinners with Lady Emily and the priest, the Captain had noticed very little except the girl's extraordinary beauty. This was not particularly surprising, since her long, lustrous auburn hair, invariably piled high atop her forehead, in the style of the time; her entrancing sapphire blue eyes; her clear, smooth, and fashionably pale skin; her full and perfectly-formed lips; her coquettishly half-hidden, but unmistakably fully-developed *décolletage*; and her slender, graceful body, were usually more than enough to captivate any man. Still, Price had managed to perceive on one or two occasions that her Ladyship was not showing the customary enthusiasm of a young bride, but he reminded himself that she was a noblewoman, after all, and therefore undoubtedly headstrong. In time she would learn to be more sensible, and she would accept the fact that her engagement to Mr. Hastings was, in reality, a tremendous blessing.

On this foggy morning, however, Captain Price was not thinking about Lady Emily at all. His sharp gray eyes and his stocky frame were trained relentlessly forward in the direction of the *Bellerophon.* Even though the frigate was only about half a league in front of the *Oriental Venture*, in this thick mist she had been reduced to a dim shadow on the horizon, much too obscure a presence to ensure the Captain's full confidence. Already a course correction had been made because of the persistent bad weather. The two ships were now sailing far to the west of their natural course to avoid approaching any Ceylonese pirates in the fog. Price estimated that they had already completed nine-tenths of their journey, and so to risk any contact with outlaw vessels at this late date was, as he put it, "Not on."

About noon the mists slowly began to fade. Occasionally a beam of direct sunlight would even flash in the faces of the deckhands as they did their work. Captain Price took note of the clearer skies and at length he announced that he would take his lunch on deck, so as to supervise the improving weather personally. The seas were now extremely calm and ominously quiet, and so, every time Price heard a sharp sound while eating, he would start and look up. But whenever this happened the First Officer would have reassuring words, and the Captain soon became convinced that it was safe to begin planning the final phases of the voyage. Tonight Price

intended to invite her Ladyship to share an especially sumptuous meal, by nautical standards, in his cabin. As always, the Captain hoped that his hospitality would impress the girl, and that one day she might even compliment him to Governor Hastings.

About 1 o'clock, just as Price took the last bite of his sandwich of salted beef and stale bread, the air suddenly shook with a terrific bang. Captain Price jumped up from his meal, dropping his pewter mug full of ale onto the deck, and immediately he looked back at his First Officer, hoping for more reassurance. This time, though, there was a look of utter panic on the man's face. He had heard and understood the sound just like everyone else: it was, without any doubt, a cannon blast.

For several seconds after the bang there was total quiet, and Price had time to say the words, "What was -- ," but before he could finish, a succession of new blasts stopped him short. The sounds were very deep and resonating, and it was clear right away to those who were experienced in such matters that these frightful noises certainly could not be coming from any British-made gun.

All the shock and surprise on the *Oriental Venture* now transformed itself into furious action. The Captain ran towards the bridge just as the deckhands were manning the ship's twelve guns and trimming the sails. At the same time, the lookouts began scanning the horizon for enemy ships, but at this point they saw nothing. The blasts continued without interruption, and soon the din of cannon fire was accompanied by the sound of cannonballs smacking against the water.

Eventually these splashing sounds were in turn replaced by huge explosions in the distance, and from the bridge the Captain could now see flashes of light and great clouds of splintering wood on the *Bellerophon*. Gradually the acrid smell of gunpowder drifted back from the frigate and infected the nostrils of the frightened men on the *Oriental Venture.* Even from this far away, the shouts of the *Bellerophon*'s crew were also clearly audible. After a few moments, Price heard the sharp crack of the *Bellerophon*'s own cannon, returning fire for the first time. Muzzle flashes began to sparkle at the sides of that great ship, so it was obvious that she was defending herself, but against whom? Price now closed his eyes and waited for the first impact on his own ship to come. The suspense was terrifying.

The *Bellerophon* was still far in the distance and obscured by the fog, but it was obvious that the scene on that mighty ship was one of absolute carnage. Blooms of dust and debris appeared constantly all over her hull as she was struck by enemy fire, and gigantic conflagrations were now burning fiercely on her deck. Her guns were still blazing away, but there was no obvious indication that they had found their mark.

Captain Price watched as suddenly a volley of enemy fire breached the *Bellerophon*'s magazine, and the whole aft section of the ship exploded and scattered across an empty sea. As the ship began to sink, Price tried very hard to pity her crew, but he was too distracted by his own problems. All he could think about now was the great enemy fleet that still lay ahead, strong enough to blast a Royal Navy frigate to smithereens.

Minutes passed, and just as it began to appear that the *Oriental Venture* might have been overlooked by its would-be attackers, these illusions were suddenly shattered by the sound of a cannonball smacking into the ocean only a few yards ahead of the ship itself. Several more shots then came whirling in the general direction

of the *Oriental Venture*, and within seconds the bow took its first hit. Captain Price watched as one of his deckhands was hurled headlong into the sea by the explosion. Flames now began to lick upward from the deck, eventually reaching the forward mast and setting the fine white sails on fire. All this time the enemy was barely and only intermittently visible, so unfortunately the *Oriental Venture,* hardly a warship to begin with, had difficulty defending itself. Quite simply, its cannons had little at which to aim. Price was beginning to sense that the end was very near.

Belowdecks, Rev. Paxton had his arms locked around Lady Emily in a protective embrace. Both of them were panic-stricken, and Captain Price had given them no news at all about what was happening outside. At one point a sailor had warned them not to go up on deck, but this was all the information they were given. Rev. Paxton made a mental note of the Captain's lack of consideration for his guests, and he swore to the girl that, when all this was over, he would send a very stern letter to Price's employers. In the meantime, her Ladyship and the priest could do little except sit together in silence, shivering with fear each time the ship reverberated with yet another impact on its battered hull. Lady Emily thought to herself that her father truly was a beast to have exiled her to this horrible place!

Suddenly, two enormous cannonballs slammed against the *Oriental Venture*, one of which breached the hull below the waterline, and the ship slowly began to sink. For the first time, Captain Price was now able to make out some of the features of the enemy ships in the distance: they were pirate vessels of some kind, which was actually very surprising, because it was common knowledge that these brigands seldom chose to molest any British ship. So why were they attacking now? This raid, moreover, was clearly the result of meticulous planning. For one thing, Price had never before seen so many pirate vessels together in one place. This was nothing less than an armada, in fact. And so it had to be, since a single pirate sloop would never have lasted even five minutes against a true man-o'-war like the *Bellerophon.*

It was obvious, therefore, that these rogues had joined together for some very specific purpose, and the Captain had a good idea of just what that purpose was. It was surely no accident, he reflected, that only the bow of his ship had been hit by enemy fire. This left the stern, which contained all the passengers' cabins, completely untouched.

The pirate fleet began to move closer, and the sound of cannon fire abruptly stopped. Captain Price realized that the *Oriental Venture* and its crew were doomed, but he was hopeful that Lady Emily could still be saved. He ordered that the landing boat should be immediately swung out, and meanwhile the dozen or so marines on board were mustered on deck. The Captain then ordered his Second Mate to fetch her Ladyship to the bridge.

As he watched these commands being carried out, Price could feel the life gradually slipping away from his beloved ship. Strangely enough, the sweet, almost perfumed, smell produced by the burning linen of his beautiful sails distressed him even more than the sight of several of his crew members, who had been blown to bits and were lying in pieces on the deck.

The *Oriental Venture* now began to angle downward as her bow plunged deeper and deeper, and the

Captain watched as the first pools of seawater rose on the forward deck, slowly snaking their way amidships and aft. Soon it became apparent that the small landing boat would not be ready in time. Price swallowed hard, and he then ordered the marines to load their muskets, fix their bayonets, and line up near the stern. The rear of the ship was now thrust so far up in the air that nothing could be seen beyond it but sky, or rather fog, and so at first the marines had no idea of who or what they would be firing at.

This mystery was quickly solved, however. Just as Lady Emily and Rev. Paxton struggled on deck, clasping at the railings to keep from plunging towards the watery pit that was once the ship's bow, there was an unmistakable thud towards the stern. It was the sound of another vessel tapping against the *Oriental Venture*'s raised rudder. Soon a team of pirates could be heard calling out to one another in some bizarre native tongue. The marines braced themselves and aimed their weapons at the aft railings. Seconds later grappling hooks appeared at the stern, and the Captain immediately ordered her Ladyship and Rev. Paxton to take cover.

The marines held off the enemy for perhaps half a minute, but with accurate pistol fire the pirates gradually thinned the ranks of the ship's defenders until all of them were either dead or seriously wounded. Then, one after another, the pirates leapt over the railings and congregated at the stern, staring curiously at the terrified officers and seamen who were left alive.

Finally, a swarthy and shabbily dressed pirate commander alighted on the deck. The man's dark and piercing eyes now scanned the survivors until at last he located the girl, partially hidden behind Paxton's cloak. In perfect English the pirate said firmly, "Lady Emily, come with me, if you please." No one moved, and so after several seconds the man repeated his request, this time more urgently, "*Please come here*."

Suddenly, Rev. Paxton stepped forward on his own, looking the pirate commander straight in the eye. In an imperious tone, he said, "Sir, I order you in the name of His Majesty King George to leave this ship immediately, and I assure you that under no circumstances will this girl accompany you anywhere." The pirate raised his eyebrows momentarily, and then he pursed his lips very slightly. He appeared to be more annoyed than angry.

Then, with a single swift motion, the pirate commander grabbed an ornate dagger from his belt and swung it in an arc in the direction of the priest, grazing his neck. Instinctively, Rev. Paxton covered the wound with his hand. His pale blue eyes stared back at the pirate, vividly communicating his outrage. Slowly Paxton then fell to his knees. As the blood ran down his arm and his chest, he looked back for a moment at the Captain, but there was now nothing Price could do to help him. A few seconds later the priest fell face first onto the deck, and the blood, which was now pouring from his neck, began to gather in a pool beneath him. Eventually this red puddle turned into a collection of tiny rivulets, which the force of gravity pulled slowly towards the sunken bow.

After waiting a moment for the impact of the priest's death to be universally felt, the pirate commander again addressed Lady Emily, this time saying only, "*Come*." As he spoke, he cracked a slight smile and extended his right hand. After hesitating only briefly, her Ladyship took a deep breath, wiped a tear from her cheek, and stepped towards the pirate. The crew of the *Oriental Venture* and the members of the pirate boarding party all looked on as she gave the man her hand. Together the two of them walked calmly to the side of the

ship, where a rope ladder had been placed. With some difficulty the girl was convinced to climb down it onto a small pirate vessel that was waiting below.

Unfortunately, this was the last thing Captain Price ever saw, because seconds later a young pirate approached him carrying a long pike. After thrusting the weapon into the Captain's chest, the pirate then wrenched it out again and threw Price's limp body into the sea.

Her Ladyship was soon transported away from the scene of the *Oriental Venture*'s demise in a sleek pirate sloop, which sailed west, while the rest of the pirate fleet sailed east to Ceylon. The significance of this sudden division of the pirate armada was a mystery to Lady Emily, but to anyone who knew the habits of Ceylonese pirates it would have come as no surprise. These brigands distrusted one another almost as much as they distrusted the outside world. Therefore, whoever had paid the captains of several dozen pirate vessels to assist in the abduction of Lady Emily had decided that, once she was kidnapped, her Ladyship's rightful owner should not be open to debate. The easiest way to ensure this was to abscond with the girl.

Once Lady Emily's sloop had eluded its escorts, therefore, the ship's captain piloted it into a small, sheltered cove on the Indian coast, where neither pirate nor Englishman was likely to intrude. There the ship would wait until it was safe to take the girl to meet the mastermind of her abduction. The voyage to the tiny inlet took less than a day, and for most of this time her Ladyship was confined to a cramped cabin. Because of the smallness of the ship, it pitched violently from side to side with the motion of the sea, which had become noticeably more agitated since the short sea battle earlier. It was not long before she felt gravely ill.

Nausea was the least of the girl's problems, however. Her mind was now seized with visions of the fate which might befall her in the coming days. What did these rogues want with her? Like most young women of her station, Lady Emily was most afraid not of death, but of rape. She convinced herself that if these pirates meant only to take her life, and leave her virtue intact, it might be a blessing in disguise. She could not bear the thought of returning home to her father, rejected by her suitor, rejected by society, because her honor had been despoiled.

As it happened, her Ladyship was right to worry about her father's reaction to such a calamity, because the Earl of Oakhampton was indeed a hardhearted and puritanical man. His reputation for religious fervor was legendary not only among his fellow peers in the House of Lords, but also in his home county of Devonshire, where until recently he and his daughter had lived together in the Fitzroys' country estate, Marley Keep, a massive stone castle of 11th century design. Marley Keep was a drafty and isolated place, located several miles outside the town of Oakhampton in the open countryside. To the east of the castle, there were rolling hills and vast stretches of fertile farmland, but to the west lay the barren wasteland called Dartmoor, a fitting backdrop for the life of a man as cold and austere as the Earl.

Dartmoor was one of the most famous moors in all of England. Its landscape was dominated by great stretches of heather and low-lying bushes, occasionally broken by a solitary and scrawny Rowan tree, eking out its existence amidst fierce winds and frequent downpours. The dreary scene was completed by the presence everywhere of modest hills topped with rocky outcroppings, called "tors" in this part of the world. It was a forbidding place, which only a few brave shepherds and peat diggers chose to call home. It was also the view from Lady Emily's bedroom at Marley Keep, and as a child she had walked the moor on her own countless times, until she knew it by heart. Many a time she had sat on the peak of a tor, gazing out at the landscape, and

dreaming of the life that people must lead beyond the narrow world of Devon.

There was a good reason why the first Earl of Oakhampton, the present Earl's great-great-great grandfather, had chosen to put down roots in this unlikely place. This was because the moor, as desolate as it was, was also a source of considerable wealth, and Henry Fitzroy, who had been born a commoner, had been determined to gain his fair share of it. Unlike his eventual heir, Lady Emily's father, Henry had not cared a wit for religion. He was determined to make his fortune any way that he could, and in the end he did exactly that. Beneath the moor lay literally thousands of tons of peat, a mixture of various decomposed organic materials that the English for centuries had burned as fuel. Peat was often preferred to wood, because of the deforestation that England had suffered as a result of its dense population and its advanced state of industrial and commercial development. The ancient circles of stones and the ruins of prehistoric villages in the midst of the moor were a testament to the fact that the mining of peat had gone on here since long before anyone could remember. It was the first Earl of Oakhampton, though, born Henry Fitzroy, who had transformed peat-digging in the moor from a rustic tradition into a modern industry. Unfettered by any anti-monopoly laws, he had employed by the 1550s 90% of all the peat diggers on the moor, and he greatly expanded the scope of their operations. In the process the Fitzroys became immensely wealthy and well known, but this alone did not satisfy Henry. More than anything else he wanted to gain a peerage to legitimize his status. This would take more than just money, but luckily Henry was up to the task.

It was fortunate that Henry Fitzroy was not only an accomplished businessman; he also possessed remarkable political instincts. In 1558, Queen Mary, or "Bloody Mary," as she is often known, was on her deathbed, and much doubt existed whether the rightful heir to the throne, Mary's sister Elizabeth, would inherit the crown, simply because Mary had been Catholic and Elizabeth was Protestant. Henry Fitzroy sensed early on that Elizabeth would ascend the throne, after all, and she would have a long and prosperous reign. He therefore threw his support behind Elizabeth even before Mary's death, and he refused to sell any more peat to a Catholic government. In the event, Henry guessed rightly. Elizabeth became England's new Queen, and she wasted no time in dubbing the Peat Baron of Dartmoor "Sir Henry." Thus, he became a full member, or "Knight Companion," of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, a prestigious honor that he was most happy to receive. Elizabeth was all the more eager to bestow a knighthood on Henry Fitzroy because of his last name, an Anglo-Norman corruption of the French term, *fils du roi*, "Son of the King." The name implied (illegitimate) royal origins, although in this case any proof was lost in the mists of time. It was soon after he had been dubbed "Sir Henry" that Henry Fitzroy purchased the old castle of Marley Keep, which he reasoned was a residence suitably grand for someone in his now-exalted position.

The business acumen and political savvy of Henry Fitzroy were demonstrated once again in 1588, a year that looms large in the annals of English history. In that year, Philip II of Spain launched his Armada against Elizabeth, with the intention of annihilating her naval forces and depositing a massive invasion force on England's shores. Sir Henry responded to the call to defend the realm against the Catholic menace with admirable zeal. During the months leading up to the decisive battle at sea, Henry's peat diggers doubled and

redoubled their efforts in order to supply enough fuel to keep Elizabeth's troops and the country's innumerable militias warm and secure in their tents and barracks, awaiting the Spanish invasion. Luckily, the Spaniards were defeated at sea, but once again Sir Henry had proven his worth to the Queen. He was rewarded with an honor that exceeded even his own expectations: he was made the first Earl of Oakhampton, and thus a member of the House of Lords and of England's venerable aristocracy. When he died in 1590, he did so a happy man, and he left a legacy of enormous wealth, unshakable prestige, and still-unquenchable ambition to his posterity.

No one appreciated the legacy of Henry Fitzroy more than the current Earl, Stephen Fitzroy, Lady Emily's father. All throughout Marley Keep he displayed oil paintings, busts, and other likenesses of Henry and his other forebears. And, for the most part, the Earl had proven himself over the years more than equal to the task of carrying on his family's tradition of high achievement. Most importantly, the Earl had steadily increased the family's wealth. The peat digging industry had now become too small to contain the ambitions of the Fitzroy clan, so the Earl had invested heavily in the fuel of the future: coal. He did not know the coal mining industry as he knew peat, but he was certainly aware of the many opportunities to be had in this new and innovative field, and he exploited them brilliantly.

The Earl's favorite investment of all, however, was not coal. It was his shares in the East India Company. He had sunk much of the family fortune in the Company, in the hope that one day it would overcome its problems with inefficiency and graft, and would begin to rake in the profits that a monopoly of the India trade ought to bring. So far, this had not happened, and the meager dividends distributed to the Company's shareholders once a month were unimpressive by anyone's calculations. But the Earl was a true believer in the potential of India, and he thought he had finally found in Warren Hastings the right man to clean up the Company's act and make it what it should have been all along: a gold mine of riches, and a fountain of glory for the British Empire.

The Earl's deep commitment to Hastings' reformist rule of the East India Company explained in large measure why he was willing to betroth his one and only daughter to the man, but actually his reasons were far more complicated. His deeper motivation, in fact, had much more to do with his character as a man than with his endless thirst for profit, and here it becomes necessary to examine the Earl's past.

As we have seen already, the Earl was a hardhearted and bitter man, and there was much in his personality to predispose him to these traits, but those who knew him well were aware that there was at least one brief moment in his life when he had been the very picture of happiness and warmth. It was in his fortieth year, a year he had intended to devote to the pursuit of wealth and self-righteousness, like all the others he had ever known, when one day he attended a party given by the Duke of Devonshire. At this party Stephen Augustus Fitzroy, who had only recently inherited the Earldom from his father, met a beautiful young commoner named Miss Annabelle Weston, who was attending finishing school in the county seat of Exeter, not far from Oakhampton. The Earl was immediately captivated by the girl's thick chestnut-colored hair and her bright blue eyes, and in the weeks that followed he visited her often in Exeter. There, under the protective gaze of Miss. Weston's schoolmistress, they would walk the cobbled streets and cheerfully exchange banal observations on the

weather and the state of fashion at the Court of George II. This was in 1754, and it was not long until, much to his own surprise, the Earl found himself deeply in love. He accordingly asked for the girl's hand in marriage, to which she and her father gladly agreed, and on June 5th, 1754 the two were married in grand style at St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

The ensuing year gave the Earl a taste of conjugal bliss that melted the coldness of his heart entirely away. Annabelle Fitzroy proved to be a model wife and an ideal companion. She was refined enough that she mixed easily with the Earl's aristocratic friends and acquaintances, but there was still an earthiness and a spontaneous humanity about her which even the legendary cynic Stephen Fitzroy could not resist. It was not long after their marriage that Annabelle became pregnant with their first child, who would be the presumptive heir to the Earldom. When the baby, a beautiful and healthy girl, was born on May 2nd, 1755, she was immediately christened Emily Augusta Fitzroy, and both her parents doted on her shamelessly. She was the living embodiment of the happiness that Stephen and Annabelle Fitzroy had created for themselves, and which they were now so eager to share with their only child.

Unfortunately, this moment of contentment was not to last. A few days after she gave birth, Annabelle began to experience dizzy spells. Her skin went pale and sallow, she felt alternately hot and cold, and all her energy and vivacity faded away. The Earl sought the advice of the most eminent doctors in the country, but all they could tell him was that his wife had been seized by a mysterious fever. Her system had apparently been weakened by the experience of childbirth. The Earl could only watch with dread and horror as the life of his beloved slowly slipped away. She made every effort to appear in good spirits for the benefit of her husband, but it was clear that her will to go on living was deserting her at an alarming rate.

On May 17th, 1755 Annabelle Fitzroy died, and the Earl was utterly overcome by grief. In the past year, Annabelle's love had transformed him from a dour cynic and a bitter misogynist into a doting and affectionate husband and father. Now that his wife had been cruelly taken from him, he felt as though the transformation had been in vain, and that the God he had served so faithfully over the years had deserted him and left him with nothing. The Earl of Oakhampton was a destroyed man. As the days and months passed after his wife's death, he drew himself ever deeper into a cocoon of self-pity and loneliness. The newspapermen wrote that it was perhaps the most pitiable tragedy ever to befall any gentleman of quality in the West Country of England. Even the eyes of the prim and proper Duke of Devonshire were said to have welled up with tears when he first gazed upon the miserable wretch that Stephen Fitzroy had become.

Although the infant called Lady Emily would never know her mother, the truth was that her whole life would be scripted to an extraordinary degree by that poor lady's premature death. The Earl would henceforth carry on a bizarre love-hate relationship with his daughter, a relationship that any adult would have found trying, but for a young girl was pure torture. On one hand, young Emily was the Earl's only living remembrance of the wife he had so loved, the only lasting proof that the one year of bliss and companionship that was their marriage had ever existed. The Earl was, therefore, highly protective of Lady Emily, and, though he never would have told her so, he loved her as much as any father could. In fact, the one remaining fear which he permitted himself

in all his loneliness and desolation was that his daughter might someday be taken from him, just like his wife, and this he was certain he would never survive.

But there was a darker side to the Earl's relationship with Emily, and sadly it was this side which manifested itself much more frequently. It should not be forgotten that, although Lady Emily was the only trace of the life of Annabelle Fitzroy that remained in the world, she was also the cause, however innocently, of her mother's death. The Earl knew that if he had not pushed Annabelle to have a child so soon in order to give him an heir, his wife would probably still be alive. That little child, so loved by its parents at the moment of its birth, now served as a constant reminder to the Earl of the terrible price he had had to pay to bring a daughter into the world. On a certain level, therefore, the Earl resented his daughter; he even blamed her, in part, for her mother's death, and, more importantly, for the abject misery into which he had now sunk. This contradiction in the Earl's relationship with his daughter, his overwhelming love for her, and yet his revulsion at the consequences of her birth, defined everything that passed between them.

This melancholy girl, then, was the glorious prize that the pirates had captured by obliterating the *Bellerophon* and boarding the crippled *Oriental Venture* on that foggy afternoon in November 1774. The fears and anxieties rushing through her head as the waves tossed her from side to side in that tiny cabin on the pirate sloop can only be imagined. She could not know that the self-styled "King of the Tamil Pirates," Dinesh Karikalan, who had ordered her abduction, had left strict orders that the girl should under no circumstances be harmed. Karikalan may have been a greedy and ruthless brigand, but he was not stupid. Holding the bride of the Governor of Bengal for a quick and easy ransom was one thing, but raping her and leaving her for dead would certainly bring down on him the full wrath of the world's greatest Empire, and this was trouble he did not need. Lady Emily, though, could think of no reason to be optimistic about her future in the hands of these rogues. She imagined that, any minute, someone could step through the door and slit her throat, or worse.

After a few hours the door finally did open, and through it stepped a young pirate. Lady Emily was momentarily paralyzed by fear, but soon the pirate smiled and gently grabbed her by the arm, leading her down a passageway. She arrived at what appeared to be a mess hall. There were seven pirates seated at a long table, all of whom gazed fixedly in her direction. One of them beckoned to her to sit down at the only empty chair, which was located at the table's head. She did so, and immediately she noticed that all the pirates had cleaned their plates, but in front of her was a platter stacked high with an assortment of various strange native fruits and some dried meat, and beside it a glass of red wine. The wine was deposited in a heavy pewter cup, which because of its weight did not fly off the table as the ship rolled from side to side, but the liquid inside it sloshed around violently. It was not long before most of the wine coated the table rather than graced the cup.

The pirates gazed on Lady Emily for what seemed to her like an eternity. She could detect no trace of malice in their eyes, but still she was highly uncomfortable. In fact, the pirates were only admiring their captive. None of them had ever set eyes on a European noblewoman before, but stories of these delicate and graceful creatures had swept across the Orient during the years of European expansion, and they had thus acquired a remarkable mystique in the eyes of the natives. The pirates now gazed on her Ladyship with the same sense of

awe that a European would have reserved only for an Empress, or perhaps a demigoddess. Finally one of the pirates made a gesture of good will. He pointed down at the plate in front of Lady Emily and said in a thick accent, "Eat."

The pirate had meant this as a friendly suggestion, but Lady Emily took it as an order. Unfortunately, eating was the last thing she wished to do at this point. The motion of the ship continued to unbalance her stomach, and she felt as though she would be ill at any moment. But since a grizzly death seemed to be the only alternative, she quickly stared down at the platter and espied an innocuous looking fruit, similar to a black cherry. Gingerly she picked it up and placed it in her mouth. The sweet taste of the *Dong*, as the natives called it, burned against her tongue, and her stomach rumbled against this forbidden fruit. She swallowed it with difficulty.

Only a few seconds later Lady Emily felt a violent contraction of her abdomen. The pirates looked on in horror as she spat up the masticated fruit, and much else besides. She went pale with revulsion and shame, but the pirates' reaction surprised her. Their mouths all dropped open in shock. None of them had imagined that such an angelic creature could be subject to a phenomenon as crude and messy as seasickness. All their preconceptions of the girl as the embodiment of the purity and grace of the European Woman suddenly evaporated. It was rather like watching the Queen of England blow her nose on the Magna Carta.

The pirates felt great pity for Lady Emily because of the weakness she had shown, and they were by no means unaware that her fears had been just as much to blame for this unpleasantness as the rocking of the ship. One of the pirates stood up and led the girl gently back towards her cabin. There he explained to her in broken English that the pirates meant her no harm, and that she would soon be reunited with the husband she so loved. It was not exactly the reassurance that Lady Emily was looking for, but it was close enough. Very gradually, she began to relax.

In fact, the next two weeks were surprisingly dull. Anchored safely within a small cove on the Indian coast, the ship no longer rocked back and forth quite so violently, and the girl's appetite and sense of equilibrium returned. Her Ladyship even acquired a taste for Tamil cuisine – or at least a tolerance for it. All along, the sloop's captain refused to budge from where he had dropped anchor, since he was under strict orders from Karikalan to lie low.

Finally, though, the captain judged that it would be safe to venture forth, and the ship got under way and moved at top speed back to the east. After only a few days at sea, the ship arrived in the cool morning hours at a sleepy-looking fishing village on the Ceylonese coast. From the sloop, Lady Emily could see several large buildings clustered near a single dock, and behind them a vast expanse of massive, vividly green Kumbuk trees, stretching out towards a series of modest hills in the distance. It was now explained to her Ladyship that she was in for a small adventure: she would be disguised in a long black cloak and veil and would be accompanied by several of the pirates onto the dock and into the village. This all went according to plan, and, once the group reached one of the larger buildings, the doors were flung open, and Lady Emily was shocked to see hundreds of men sitting around a cavernous, smoke-filled room. The men were of every race and color imaginable: there

were blonde Europeans, dark-skinned and aristocratic Tamils, squat Chinamen, and even full-blooded Negroes, and all of them were haggling in a cacophony of strange languages. Little did her Ladyship realize that what had seemed from the outside to be a small fishing village was in reality a smugglers' and thieves' paradise, and all these men were rogues of the worst sort. Fortunately, however, they took very little notice of Karikalan's men and the shrouded girl they had brought with them. The few knaves who did look up at Lady Emily assumed that she must be a new concubine imported by Karikalan to serve in his legendary *harem*. How wrong they were!

It was not long before Karikalan's men and the girl left the "village," and, after a short walk, came to a muddy and quick-flowing river. Here they hired a barge towed by two teams of oxen to take them deep into the forested interior. Her Ladyship was informed that, before long, they would reach the hideout of the Pirate King, and she would thereafter be entrusted to the care of that excellent gentleman. Lady Emily tried as hard as she could to prepare herself for an audience with Karikalan. It was difficult, because she knew nothing at all about the man, except of course that he held her fate entirely in his hands. Predictably, anxiety began to build inside the girl once again. She prayed silently that the next few days would go well, and that God would spare her life and her virtue, as He had up to now.

*** 3 ***

Colonel Charles Edward Fuller was a late sleeper by nature, and when he was on leave it was usually mid-day before he stirred at all. It was noon now, and still he was dozing peacefully. The native prostitute he had hired the night before, a slight girl of no more than sixteen or seventeen years, had been awake since 7 a.m. Unfortunately, she had had little to do these past five hours except stare at the Colonel's naked back as he lay motionless on the boarding room's plush mattress. The girl had hoped that eventually the sun streaming through the windows and playing on Fuller's exposed skin would awaken him and that she would then be sent home, but after all this time she was beginning to wonder if that moment would ever come.

Finally, the Colonel flinched slightly, and in one sweeping motion he sat up, frightening the young girl who still lay beside him. He smiled weakly in her direction, and then he looked around him for a few seconds as if to determine where he was. At last, satisfied, he turned around and looked at the girl again, saying matter-of-factly, "You can go now, and come back tonight." Immediately she pulled on her dress, combed her hair, and left. Now the Colonel was alone, almost. The *punkah* coolie, a boy who operated the *punkah*, or fan, hanging from the ceiling, was still crouching uncomfortably in a corner of the room. He, though, was regarded more as furniture than as a human being.

Next Fuller propped himself up against the wall and began gazing out the window at the scene below. The boarding house was situated overlooking the River Hooghly, which flowed south to the Ganges Estuary and into the Bay of Bengal. From this room the Colonel had a clear view of one of the innumerable docks, called *ghats* in India, which had already made Calcutta a great center of maritime trade, even though the town was less than a hundred years old. The *ghats* in Calcutta were always very busy, and eclectic too. There, side by side, one could see British cruisers and merchantmen, native sloops, Chinese junks, and a great many other contraptions that Colonel Fuller still could not name, even though he had been in India for no less than ten years.

Undoubtedly the most amusing craft on the Hooghly were the long, sleek pleasure boats owned by private traders or by high officials in the East India Company, the bows of which were usually decorated with ornately-carved heads of horses, elephants, or peacocks. At this time of year, just after the monsoons, the Hooghly flowed towards the sea with unnerving rapidity, and the resulting choppy waters often caused the pleasure boats to become unstable. It was not uncommon for a native lackey on one of these boats suddenly to be knocked off balance by a strong current and hurled into the water or into the lap of his seated master, a hilarious sight. Indeed, luxury in Calcutta often took on a comic air, and Fuller had always tried to take it all in good humor, which was important, because unfortunately he himself did not have the means to participate in opulence of any sort. The Colonel enjoyed his view of the River, however, and he had even learned to tolerate the smell of the squalid and stagnant waters that collected between the *ghats*. The odor was unfortunately magnified by the fact that the natives insisted on bathing their filthy bodies in the Hooghly as a sort of religious exercise, but luckily Fuller had by now become accustomed to the stench.

Colonel Fuller was a tall man, lean and broad-shouldered. He had a certain aristocratic bearing as well,

which befitted an officer in the East India Company's "Bengal Army." His hair was dark and slightly graying, which complemented his blue-green eyes, and his skin was permanently tanned. All things considered, Fuller was an attractive man, but the truth was that there were very few European women in Calcutta to admire him, so he had long since ceased to admire himself, at least in physical terms.

Fuller came from an impoverished but respectable gentry family in Yorkshire, but, like so many other members of the English elite in India, over time the Colonel had acquired a sense of his own importance entirely out of proportion to his actual social rank. Perhaps because India was a country where a man like Fuller truly mattered (or so he told himself), he felt very much at home here. He had come to believe, moreover, that it was the destiny of the English people to bring order to this place, and he was exceedingly proud to be a part of this civilizing mission. The Colonel seldom thought of England, and in truth he had little desire to go back. Once a year he would write a long letter to his mother, and he would send her whatever money he had managed to save. Indeed, money was the one thing in India that was in plentiful supply. Most Englishmen there could easily accumulate a tidy sum, so long as they were, so to speak, men of the world. Indeed, one East India Company official, Thomas Pitt (forebear to the political dynasty that would later dominate Parliament) had profited so handsomely from his post that he eventually returned home with most of his winnings invested in a gigantic diamond worth more than £100,000, which he later sold to the Prince Regent of France. Moreover, "Diamond Pitt," as he became known, was by no means the most successful of the Nabobs. Throughout their careers, Company officials sometimes accumulated sums of more than £1 million!

But while so many other soldiers and servants of the Company lived like kings on their fat salaries (and even fatter bribes), the Colonel dutifully sent his own filthy lucre back to England to keep the family estate from sliding into bankruptcy. As a result, the Colonel seldom experienced first hand the full financial rewards that his colorful adventures might have brought him, and there was little prospect that he would ever return home to Yorkshire to receive the gratitude of his family either. The only attachment that might once have lured Fuller back home was to his father, but unfortunately the man had been dead for many years. He had been killed when young Charles was a boy of only seven, a casualty of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745.

Growing up without a father is difficult in any age, but in 18th century England, a place which valued a man's descent and family connections above all else, it was excruciating. Perhaps this was why Fuller's mother had imbued him with burning ambition and a strong work ethic at an early age. But Mrs. Catherine Fuller's greatest contribution to her son's future career was undoubtedly her purchase in 1763 of his commission in the Bengal Army. Before that he had served as a lowly sergeant in the regular Army during the Seven Years' War, and it had taken his mother all those seven years to save enough money to give young Charles his start in the service of the Raj. He had never looked back since.

Colonel Fuller had no permanent residence in India. Shortly after he had arrived in that country, he had progressed from being an artillery officer to a specialist in what would later be termed "covert operations," so his life was nothing if not peripatetic. The tents, boarding houses, and native palaces he inhabited while completing his various missions were the closest he ever came to putting down roots. Indeed, everything Fuller owned fit

neatly into four large trunks, and these could follow him almost anywhere so long as strong native backs were in ample supply, which they always were. When the military situation was quiet, the Colonel would come here to the Queen Anne boarding house near the *ghats*, and he would ready himself for his next assignment.

Today, Fuller was leisurely preparing himself to depart in about twenty-four hours on a secret foray into the heart of the Ganges Valley. His orders had come to him only recently from his commanding officer, General Algernon Colley, a man who ironically Fuller had never had the good fortune to meet. Colley was a close associate of Governor Hastings, and he even served on the Governor's shadowy new State Security Council. The Council had been set up only a month earlier, as a response to the recent formation of another body called the "Governor's Council," which had been appointed by Parliament to keep tabs on the ambitions of Warren Hastings.

The Governor's Council was composed of five members. One was the Governor himself, and another was one of the Governor's old cronies in Calcutta. The other three members were recent arrivals from England, however. Together they made up "The Majority," and they proved to be a constant source of frustration for Hastings. Their leader was a humorless and vain young man named Philip Francis, and he and Hastings had developed a hatred for one another, even though they had only known each other for several months, that was less akin to a personal squabble than to a full-blown private war of medieval vintage. Francis' opposition to Hastings was superficially based on his humanitarian desire to protect the natives from imperialist exploitation, and also on his determination to protect the Company's shareholders from unnecessary expense. Indeed, Francis made a show of quoting enlightened thinkers such as Adam Smith and the Baron de Montesquieu to justify his opposition to Hastings' policies. In reality, though, Francis was a man consumed by pride and ambition. He wanted nothing less than to replace Warren Hastings as Governor of Bengal.

The secretive State Security Council, then, had been formed by Hastings to subvert the Governor's Council and to escape the oversight of Philip Francis. The State Security Council would thus authorize from time to time various secret missions and discrete diplomatic overtures which were designed to carry on the imperialist vision of the Governor. It was these delicate missions that General Colley would periodically pass on to Fuller through an intermediary. Fuller's appointed tasks were as varied as discreetly negotiating a treaty with a native prince, assassinating a maverick Hindu holy man in the backwoods of Bengal, bribing a European mercenary in the service of an Indian *Nawab*, or besieging the fort of an Anglophobic *maharajah*, but they were always top secret, and they always carried considerable risk.

As the Colonel gazed out at the River, turning over in his mind the problems he might encounter in his next assignment, all of a sudden he heard the sound of military boots stomping up the stairs outside his room. Someone was clearly in a hurry, and Fuller had an instinctive dread that this man had probably come to see him. The intrusion was very unfair, the Colonel reflected, because he had certainly earned at least a short rest. Reluctantly, though, Fuller now stood up and reached for his clothes just as the man in the hallway began pounding on his door.

The Colonel had barely ever heard his junior officer, Lieutenant Faulk, raise his voice before, but he did

now. "Colonel, let me in!" Faulk yelled. "Something very important has happened. Please open the door!" Fuller asked the Lieutenant to wait a moment while he dressed, and he then ushered the agitated man into his small room, offering him a chair, which he hastily declined.

Faulk was still a boy really, not much over twenty, and he was still intoxicated by the glamor (if such a word applies) of military life. When not on a covert mission, he was almost always in a spotless uniform and regulation Army boots, even though many of his peers in India considered it an imposition even to dress for an official review. Faulk had inherited this fastidiousness, or so the Colonel gathered, from his father, who worked as one of the most respected surgeons in Cambridgeshire. In any case, the Lieutenant's obsession with keeping his uniform clean and in immaculate condition was fortunate, since the bright red cloth of his Army tunic complemented very nicely his golden blonde hair and his bronzed and youthful skin. Indeed, young Mr. Faulk was the very image of what most Orientals imagined an Englishman to be.

Today, though, the Lieutenant was not himself at all. He was completely out of breath, and his brow was covered in sweat. Colonel Fuller's curiosity was piqued, so he now asked Faulk sharply, "Well, what is it?" The Lieutenant took a deep breath, and as he exhaled he recited the speech that he had been preparing in his head for the last hour. "A Dutch ship came into the harbor last night, Sir," he said, "and it reported finding the wreckage of a British merchantman. The demolished ship was believed to be the *Oriental Venture*." "Good lord!" Fuller replied, but Faulk continued, "The harbormaster has just now inspected bits of the debris, and he confirms the identification. At midnight, a fleet of rescue ships was sent to the Straits to search for survivors. However, at 8 o'clock this morning Government House received a message by courier. I transcribed it for you, Colonel."

Fuller now took the piece of paper Faulk handed to him and moved towards the window to get more light. He read the note very quickly: "Greetings to His Excellency Warren Hastings, Governor of Bengal. I, Dinesh Karikalan, King of the Tamil Pirates of Ceylon, hereby inform you that Lady Emily Augusta Fitzroy, with whom you are well acquainted, is my prisoner. Shortly I will send five men to your territory, whom you are to pay the sum of £50,000 in gold. When I have the payment in my own hands, I shall release Miss Fitzroy forthwith. Yours, etc. Dinesh Karikalan."

Fuller immediately went pale. He took a seat and began stroking his chin, deep in thought. Perhaps a minute later he asked Faulk, "I'm to be sent for, then?" "Yes, Sir," was the rapid reply. "Naturally," the Colonel observed, and then he went back to his own private meditations.

These were most intriguing developments. Fuller had actually been passed over when the invitations to the welcoming gala for Lady Emily were sent out. As an officer of no great fame and with few high connections in the Company, it was true enough that the Colonel would not have been greatly missed at the ball. Still, this decision had infuriated Fuller, who took such affronts very personally. But now, he reflected, he was being summoned directly to the Palace to speak, no doubt, with Governor Hastings himself. The Colonel could not help but smile at this ironic twist.

There was, of course, a good reason why her Ladyship's abduction had caused the Governor and his

inner circle to turn to Fuller specifically. This was because, ten years before, when he had first journeyed to India, the Colonel had been captured and held hostage by these same Tamil pirates. His ship had been boarded, and Fuller had been kidnapped and kept locked in a small hut in the pirates' jungle encampment for over a year.

Even now, Colonel Fuller still remembered each and every moment he had spent in that wretched little room. He recalled the smell of his own waste festering next to him in a pit that had served as his latrine. He recalled the sound of his fellow prisoners screaming in agony as the most hideous tortures were inflicted upon them, usually for sport. He even recalled the terrible pangs of hunger he had experienced there, sometimes deprived of food for days at a time. Most of all, though, he remembered the awful loneliness. A man does not realize how much he depends on the companionship of others until it is suddenly yanked away. Just keeping his sanity in that wretched place had been an unforgettable ordeal. Finally, he had escaped one night by killing a guard and fleeing into the jungle. After reaching a town, he then chartered a small fishing boat to take him from Ceylon to Calcutta. When at last he reached the city, he looked like a beast, unshaven, his clothes in tatters and covered in grime, but still the English community there took him in. He even achieved a certain celebrity in India as the only European ever to have escaped the Tamil pirates. As often happened in such cases, his family had never received any ransom demand, and the authorities in Calcutta had assumed ever since his ship had disappeared that he was dead.

These frightful experiences, in any case, were the reason why Fuller was now being summoned before Governor Hastings. No doubt he would be asked about what sort of treatment Lady Emily would receive from her captors, and also about what would be the best strategy to free her. The Colonel now turned his thoughts to how he could answer these questions most effectively – and most profitably to himself. In the meantime, he barked a few orders to Faulk. "Where is Lieutenant Maxwell?" Fuller asked. "Find him and bring him here, and find Mr. Neelan too! I'll need my dress uniform as well. What time did you say they're expecting us?" "Three o'clock," the Lieutenant answered. "Very well," Fuller said, "you better go then."

But before Faulk was out the door, the Colonel had one more thing to add. He wanted the Lieutenant to understand that this was not just one more *crise du jour* – on the contrary, rescuing a girl of Lady Emily's quality, if it were possible, would be a huge and enduring accomplishment. This was, in fact, an opportunity for enrichment and fame on a scale Fuller had only dreamed of before now. He approached his young subordinate and said, almost in a whisper, "Do you know what this is, Faulk? This is our one chance to get ahead in this country, to step out of the shadows and make a name for ourselves. Do you have any idea what kind of reward will await the man who brings that girl back alive? You think about that, Lieutenant, and, for the love of God, *don't make any foolish mistakes*, understand?" Faulk was insulted by this lack of faith in his abilities, but he also knew that Fuller was right. This was a once in a lifetime chance.

Without saying a word, the Lieutenant quickly left the room and hurried down the stairs. As he burst onto the street and inhaled for the thousandth time that peculiarly Indian odor of curry powder and spices mixed with raw sewage, he swore to himself that, whatever happened, he would prove in the next few days that he could be trusted under even the most perilous of circumstances.

At about a quarter to three Colonel Fuller appeared in his full dress uniform and powdered wig in front of "Government House," and there he waited impatiently for the other members of his party to arrive. Every minute or so Fuller would glance at his timepiece, keenly aware of the need to be prompt. As the minutes ticked by, the Colonel began to worry that his comrades would never come at all. Now more than ever, he needed the support of his regular entourage, including his junior officers, Lieutenants Faulk and Maxwell, as well as his native commander, Mr. Neelan.

The reason for Fuller's nervousness was clear. This place had always intimidated him because of the great power it held inside. Government House was the focal point of a whole system, of a complex hierarchy, which for the most part included the Colonel only as a junior member. He would never have admitted it to a living soul, let alone to himself, but Fuller was actually *afraid* of this place. He was afraid of the men who walked in and out of it, from Generals and powerful administrators down to the lowliest of clerks, called "writers" in this part of the world. God help him, the Colonel was even frightened by the native servants who would occasionally stroll out of the building with buckets of squalid water and dump them onto the street. Even these wretches, Fuller reflected, were on more intimate terms with the Governor than he was!

Government House itself was built to be imposing. It was a massive Palladian structure with an elegant roof-balustrade topped by a series of decorative urns. It was, in short, a bit of Old Rome in the middle of the New India. Like so much of the fine European architecture exported to the East by the British, it was also prudently protected from unwelcome visitors by a high stone wall. Fuller had, in fact, never visited here before except to attend a garden party five years ago, and he had certainly never been here on official business. This made sense, though, because the secretive plans of the State Security Council were usually developed and implemented in much more discreet surroundings than this. Today, haste clearly had necessitated a change in routine.

As much as Government House intimidated the Colonel, the street just outside it, where he now stood, was soothingly familiar. It was Calcutta to a tee: in a word, it was chaos. Everywhere there were bullock carts, elephants, camels, and horse-drawn carriages shuttling their human and material cargoes to and fro. Perhaps most impressive were the *palanquins* – covered biers or litters carried on the shoulders of four or more native bearers, and usually containing just a single lucky passenger. The *palanquin* was the preferred mode of travel for the most elevated (and therefore most indolent) of the Company *nabobs,* many of whom "worked" for only three hours per day. Predictably, Colonel Fuller had only had the pleasure of being conveyed in this manner on one or two occasions.

All this hustle and bustle in the street outside of Government House fit perfectly, because Calcutta was above all a city of commerce. Technically, the Mogul Emperor, who still sat on his "Peacock Throne" in Delhi, permitted the English to live here only for the purposes of trade, and certainly not to bring "Western civilization" to the Emperor's subjects. Not surprisingly, therefore, the city was well-stocked with warehouses, retail stores,

banks, law firms, and transport companies. What it largely lacked, however, were any institutions of cultural or moral significance. There were, for example, thousands of Englishmen permanently settled here, but no one had yet bothered to build an Anglican church! Indeed, services were still held in the customs house. The congregation was pathetically small, moreover, and usually consisted mainly of naïve young women recently deposited on India's shores by the legendary "fishing fleet," the quarry of which was not fish but rich husbands. Thus, elderly *nabobs* with more money than sense would come to these services to ogle the latest entrants to the Calcutta marriage market. Needless to say, spirituality was usually the last thing on anyone's mind. Calcutta was, in short, a bustling metropolis, but it was a city that seemingly lacked a soul, be it Christian, Hindu, Muslim, or otherwise.

Besides being a place noteworthy for its commercial vigor and spiritual emptiness, Calcutta was also a city of remarkable contrasts. Here you would find prodigious wealth juxtaposed against wretched squalor; there were beautiful and modern homes nestled right up against miserable hovels and untended piles of stinking garbage and fresh manure; and there were also, against the odds, pockets of incredible virtue, enterprise, and piety right alongside the most deplorable indecency, sloth, and sacrilege. Calcutta was an enigmatic and ironic city, in short, but strangely most of her inhabitants seemed oblivious to her true nature. They were content to pursue the opportunities that the city afforded them and leave the hand-wringing to others. Most of the time, Colonel Fuller felt the same way, but occasionally his keen intellect and his conscience intruded, and for a moment he saw Calcutta for what it actually was, and he recoiled in disgust.

Luckily, the Colonel's nervousness while waiting for the meeting at 3 o'clock was abated to some degree by the notion that Lieutenant Faulk at least could be depended on to be present. Faulk was as precise and reliable as any man Fuller had ever known, even if the Lieutenant had not as yet been fully tested in combat. But the other two men whom the Colonel was waiting on, Lieutenant Maxwell and Mr. Neelan, were unknown quantities in a situation like this. Fuller had never been obliged to search them out at such short notice before, and he doubted that they could be found at all.

Even if they were successfully located, he doubted that Mr. Maxwell in particular would be presentable to the likes of Governor Hastings. Maxwell was a likable fellow, somewhat rotund and, therefore, perforce, jolly. He was also a Scot, like so many of the soldiers and officials who worked for the Company (Irishmen were also common here, but only in the lower ranks). Maxwell was intelligent in his own way, but also a heavy drinker, especially when on leave. This was a characteristic he had inherited from his father, a retired naval NCO. Maxwell was, sad to say, the "black sheep" of Fuller's unit, in the sense that the Colonel had little faith in his abilities, so whether or not he attended the meeting was perhaps unimportant.

If the Colonel had evaluated his men more closely, however, he would have found that in fact Faulk and Maxwell were remarkably similar. Though one was superficially precise, and the other superficially slothful, both were eager to make their way in the Army as best they could. Both were also fundamentally decent men, uncomfortable in the seamy world of covert operations. But Fuller had made his judgments about Maxwell's worth, and he was not about to change his views now. Maxwell was a lollygagger who might or might not show

up for the meeting that was soon to take place – it made no difference. Neelan, however, was another story.

Neelan Tiruchelvam, or Mr. Neelan as most Englishmen chose to call him (if they did not call him "boy" instead), was the Colonel's native lieutenant. He was Fuller's main link to the people and culture of India, about which the Colonel knew surprisingly little. In the earlier days of the Raj, during the 17th and early 18th centuries, most English soldiers and Company traders had been obliged to learn the native languages, and in many cases they even wore a variant of native dress. Now, though, since the British position in India had become more secure, Englishmen were no longer forced to make these compromises with the indigenous culture. Colonel Fuller, then, was a part of this new and more arrogant breed of imperialist, and he cared very little for the customs and traditions of the natives as a result. This meant, however, that Fuller had to rely all the more on Mr. Neelan as an intermediary.

Neelan's main skill was in choosing, hiring, and leading the very best of the native mercenaries. His men were always excellent fighters and, more importantly, as Indians they could travel throughout the country without drawing the attention that a regiment of flaxen-haired English dragoons invariably did. Mercenaries were even preferable to sepoys (native regular soldiers) in this respect. Neelan also knew how to tap into the vast existing network of native spies and informers, which gave the Colonel a distinct advantage, not only in accomplishing his assigned tasks, but also in reaping the inevitable rewards in plunder that his operational successes allowed. In short, each and every victory Colonel Fuller achieved in his forays into the dark heart of India was due in large measure to Neelan's unbending support.

As it happened, for all this invaluable assistance, Fuller had to pay only the most modest of fees. To supplement these regular payments in gold, the Colonel also provided Neelan from time to time with free lessons in European military tactics, fortifications, weaponry, and even social etiquette. In a more subtle way, Neelan taught Fuller as well. He helped him, for instance, to gain a minimal comprehension of the unspoken laws and ancient customs which informed the native approach to war. Granted, the Colonel did not really respect his Indian adversaries, as warriors or as men, but still he realized that it was best to understand them. The Colonel also slowly learned from Neelan just how brutal war could be in 18th century India. In the process, he learned to use blackmail, bribery, extortion, torture, and even wholesale slaughter, if need be, to achieve the goals set out to him by the elusive General Colley.

Neelan was the ideal man, as it turned out, to impart these harsh lessons about the art of war in India, because he had been born a *Kshatriya*, a member of the military and administrative caste in the old Hindu hierarchy. Neelan's father had been an accomplished general for a minor *maharajah* north of Madras before his death during the Seven Years' War. Before his demise, he had taught Neelan everything he knew about war and fighting, and much else besides. Neelan had followed his father in adopting as his favored god Indra, the god of air, rain, and lightning, who was also celestial prince of the Abode of Bliss called Swarga. In Swarga, it was said, the souls of the virtuous lived in perfect happiness, drinking precious milk from the cow called *Kamadhenu*, and eating golden fruit from the charmed kalpa tree. This was a fate which Neelan worked hard to earn by faithful service to his British master, and his merits as a soldier had been often praised by Colonel Fuller

as a result. It must be said that Neelan had come into the service of the British reluctantly at first, but over the years he had become accustomed to European idiosyncrasies, and by now he was largely reconciled to the arduous and somewhat melancholy life of an Indian mercenary working for the Raj.

Part of what made Neelan's life so difficult was the fact that the relationship between Fuller and himself, although it was in its own way quite close, was also distinctly unequal, and this had much to do with Neelan's "black" skin. For example, when Neelan instructed Fuller in the conduct of war in India, he was always careful to teach the Colonel what he needed to know in a respectful and deferential way. Neelan was silent unless spoken to, and his comments were always concise. He never contradicted a single white soldier, not even the lowliest cook or auxiliary, on even the most trivial of matters, and, particularly when unsure of himself, he tried to address Europeans with the respectful title of *Sahib*. As was expected of him, Neelan was also careful never to look the Colonel or other whites directly in the eyes. Indeed, if he had ever been asked what color Fuller's eyes were, he would have had no idea how to respond, even though he had worked under the man for over six years.

Because Neelan was required to keep a respectable social distance from Europeans, and because he seldom worked with the same group of Indian mercenaries for longer than a few weeks, he had established a reputation over the years as something of a recluse. This was a role that did not come naturally to Neelan, and part of him wanted very much to break beyond the confines of his life as a mercenary and establish true bonds of friendship with his fellow man. The past several years in Fuller's service had provided few opportunities in this regard, though, and so Neelan had simply steeled himself against the loneliness he felt and worked even harder to fulfill his duties as a soldier. It was frankly an unhappy existence, but it was one to which Neelan was by now well-accustomed.

A few minutes before the meeting at Government House was scheduled to begin, Colonel Fuller was gratified to see all three of his subordinates sauntering on horseback up the street. Lieutenant Faulk was in his dress uniform, as Fuller had expected, but even Mr. Maxwell looked presentable, under the circumstances. At the very least, Maxwell was not falling off his horse in a drunken stupor, and this in itself was reason to be pleased.

Mr. Neelan appeared as stately and unflappable as ever. In fact, his finely trimmed mustache; his satin robe, in crimson trimmed with white; and his saffron-colored turban, made him look more like a native prince than a soldier of fortune. Even when Neelan was clad in his usual native dress, though, he was an attractive man. He was tall, about six foot, uncommonly strong, though in a wiry, efficient way, and his fine features, punctuated by his smoldering and mysterious black eyes, were of the kind that native women found irresistible, and even European women professed to find mildly intriguing from time to time.

When the three men had dismounted and secured their horses, the whole party then proceeded immediately into the front hall of Government House, where they were greeted by the Governor's butler. This man ushered them into a wood-paneled map room at the back of the house, and there they were left alone. Lieutenant Maxwell was the first to speak. "I don't wish to be presumptuous, Colonel," he said, "but shouldn't

we have some idea of what we're going to say?" Fuller quickly replied, "You are to say absolutely nothing, Mr. Maxwell. I will do the talking myself. All I ask of you is to stand behind me and look as dignified as possible. If you are asked a question, indicate only that you are in complete agreement with what I've already said. Is that clear?" The Colonel looked at each man as he nodded his assent.

Then Fuller added, "Neelan, there's one thing I need to know: is it possible for you to gather together a team of skilled mercenaries very quickly? Say, at a few hours' notice?" Neelan answered that he could, but the expense would naturally be very great. This satisfied the Colonel, and he now moved towards the center of the room, with the other three men following closely behind. For a brief moment Fuller stared at the maps spread out on the table, and he noted that most of them were of Ceylon. The Colonel inadvertently took a deep breath, and he noted that the room smelled – was it even possible? – like an English garden! Hastings must have access to some remarkable imported perfumes, Fuller thought. He then began to look around him at the oil paintings on the walls and at the beautiful silk screen by the fireplace, but the Colonel soon became aware that gazing at all these fine things was only making him more nervous. Very quickly he went back to studying the maps.

Suddenly the sound of a parade of footsteps outside in the corridor made all four men look up. The door through which they had entered only minutes before now opened again, and a succession of grave and important-looking men, most of them in dress uniforms, walked into the room. Three words occurred to Fuller right away: State Security Council. The first two men were Majors in the Bengal Army, men whom Fuller recognized as members of General Lord Elton's staff. Logically enough, Elton himself was the next to enter. The General was imperious to the point of foppishness, and behind his back he was constantly mocked. Despite his many faults, though, Elton had risen on the strength of his noble birth to become Commander-in-Chief of all British forces in India, and for this very excellent reason he was universally feared. His characteristic handlebar mustache made him recognizable everywhere he went in Calcutta, which was usually, or so the gossips said, in the direction of the more depraved bordellos of the Muslim Quarter.

Following his Lordship into the map room was the Governor of Bengal himself, Mr. Warren Hastings. Hastings was a tall, thin man, only forty-one years old, but already the pressures of office made him look much older. He was wrinkled and balding, but his sharp brown eyes still communicated the lively intelligence that was his most obvious feature. The Colonel had never before been in the same room with this great man, but he had often looked forward to the opportunity. This was because Hastings, like Fuller, believed strongly that it was the destiny of the British to dominate India, and he used every means available to ensure that this destiny was expeditiously realized. Colonel Fuller respected any man who was willing to struggle fiercely (and ruthlessly, if need be) to achieve a worthy ideal. Hastings was just such a man.

In fact, Fuller and Hastings had much more in common than either of them knew. Both men had lost their fathers at an early age. Both men were from families whose wealth and social position had fallen over the years, due mainly to their imprudent political commitments. In the case of the Fullers, their stubborn support for the Stuart dynasty, even after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, had led to a steady decline in the family's wealth and influence. In the case of the Hastings, their bold decision to support King Charles I during the English Civil

War had caused irreparable damage to the family's fortunes. Daylesford Manor, the historic seat of the House of Hastings, was eventually sold out of financial necessity. It was one of Warren Hastings' most cherished goals that one day he would repurchase Daylesford and thus restore the luster and respectability of the Hastings name. Likewise, Colonel Fuller also devoted most of his earnings in India to the support of the family estate in Yorkshire, run by his mother. Both men, in short, prized their roots, and sought the aggrandizement of their family lines.

There were also, however, substantial differences between the two men. Hastings had received an outstanding classical education in England, whereas Fuller was almost entirely self-taught. Hastings, the son of a Rector, stubbornly refused to drink or to gamble, wore simple clothes, and generally eschewed corruption, at least in its most naked forms. Fuller, on the other hand, was more freewheeling in his attitudes to drink, women, and financial peculation. Hastings was also quite capable of showing respect and even veneration for native culture, especially as it had once existed in India's own classical "golden age" (he even learned Persian and Hindi and read all the more noteworthy Hindu and Muslim texts). True, Hastings certainly favored the extension of British influence throughout India, but he definitely did not support the wholesale extirpation of native norms and traditions. Fuller, on the other hand, was a hot-blooded and single-minded imperialist. He knew little about the natives and their culture, and he cared even less.

This modest divergence in Hastings' and Fuller's imperialist philosophies was in any case not known to Fuller, who, after all, knew Hastings mainly as the man who had brought order to Bengal as the province's first Governor-General. He had taken a region wracked by a terrible famine in 1770, and an administration consistently improvident with its funds, and transformed Bengal and its Government into a model of prosperity and accountability. And Hastings was also the man who, through the State Security Council and General Colley, gave Fuller his marching orders as a covert agent – orders that were clearly intended to support the extension of British rule. Perhaps in the end, therefore, the differences between Hastings and Fuller were largely differences of style, not substance. In any case, Fuller admired Hastings immensely, and he was enormously gratified to have this opportunity to meet him.

The two Lieutenants and Mr. Neelan also had a chance to look Hastings over before the meeting began. Each was, for his own reasons, genuinely impressed, but, of the three of them, Neelan was perhaps the most powerfully affected to be this close to the Governor. For a native, the embodiment of Britain's strength in India was never King George III, who was a remote figure at best, but rather this man, Warren Hastings. He was the one who had defeated the native princes time and time again. He was the one who had built the Raj into the most powerful Empire in India's history. None of this is to say that Neelan especially liked the British, who were, after all, alien conquerors and oppressors, but he still admired their strength. Neelan respected Hastings as the living legend that he was, therefore, even if this respect was also tinged with resentment.

Finally, two more Generals appeared at the door. One was General Scott, who was highly placed in the Bengal Army, but the second man was not immediately recognizable. He was ordinary looking, by and large, except that on the right side of his face a terrible scar ran from his forehead all the way down to his chin. Then it

occurred to Fuller: this must be General Colley! Fuller had heard rumors about the man's scar, but he had also heard rumors that Colley had a prosthetic leg made of solid gold (which would have weighed more than his entire body!), so it was difficult to know what to believe. In any case, it was intriguing finally to see the man in the flesh, although Colley showed no particular sign of being similarly intrigued to meet Fuller.

When at last everyone had filed into the room, Governor Hastings and his associates sat down in six chairs on one side of the table, while on the other side there was only a single chair for Fuller and his men to share. Apparently, it had been anticipated that the Colonel would come alone. Fuller preferred to stand anyway, and so naturally his subordinates did the same.

For a few seconds the Governor and his military commanders merely shuffled papers without casting so much as a glance in the direction of their guests. The Colonel had noticed long ago that men of high office seemed to enjoy pretending until the last possible moment that no one else was in the room. Fuller probably would have found this conduct infuriating in anyone but Hastings, but his admiration for the man was such that petty affronts like these could be easily forgiven.

Finally, General Lord Elton looked up impatiently at Fuller and said, "Would you care to sit down, Colonel?" Elton made this sound more like an order than a question, but Fuller was eager to establish a commanding tone, so he politely replied, "No thank you, Sir. I would rather stand." Lord Elton shrugged and looked away.

Governor Hastings then took a deep breath and began to speak. "Colonel," he said, "I assume you know why you're here. You possess, by virtue of your unique background, special knowledge of the Tamil pirates, and so of course we are very eager to hear your perspective on our current dilemma. I need not tell you that any useful information or assistance which you can provide will be most appreciated, as well as richly rewarded. Lady Emily is to be, God willing, not only my wife, but also a living symbol of the extension of the very finest aspects of our European culture to this wild country. What I mean to say is that much more than my own future happiness is at stake. The security of the Empire, and of the Raj specifically, may also depend on her Ladyship's safe return. I hope you understand this."

Fuller was very impressed by this short speech. He answered immediately, "Yes, Sir. I understand." After a brief pause, Hastings then added, "Good, then before we proceed I want you to look at this." The Governor now handed the Colonel a note, which he read as quickly as possible: "The £50,000 in gold is to be delivered by no more than two men to the beach at Ber Habi at noon on Saturday, the 14th of November. A ship will transport the payment into my own hands. Any interference with the ship's passage will result in swift retaliation against Miss Fitzroy, but if you pay the ransom as requested she will be immediately freed. Yours, etc. Dinesh Karikalan."

Since Saturday was tomorrow, Fuller reflected, these instructions left very little time indeed for creative strategizing. The Colonel assumed, therefore, that a decision had already been made about payment of the ransom. He now asked, "So what is it that you intend to do, Sir?"

Fuller received a very surprising reply. Lord Elton casually said, "What would *you* suggest, Colonel?"

Fuller instantly raised his eyebrows. He could not believe that there was any uncertainty on this point. He answered forcefully, "Well, I certainly wouldn't pay it! That would be absurd!" This answer seemed to shock everyone in the room. An undertone of perturbation was immediately noticeable. General Scott interjected, "Why absurd? £50,000 for the bride of the Governor doesn't seem like an unreasonable sum to me. You would prefer, I suppose, to wait until the price goes up?" Lord Elton concurred. "Indeed," Elton said, "since we have no idea of where her Ladyship is being held, what choice do we have? A rescue mission is out of the question. Let us agree on that."

The Colonel demurred for a second, staring at a picture on the wall. Then, calmly, he looked back in the direction of Lord Elton and remarked, "Strictly speaking, Sir, what you have said is not true. I would remind you that, although we may not know Lady Emily's precise location at this moment, we do at least have the means of finding it out. For one thing, there are over a thousand native sailors here in the port of Calcutta who could provide very reliable information as to the whereabouts of the pirate forts. Second, I myself was a prisoner of these same pirates led by Mr. Karikalan, as you must surely know, and I therefore have firsthand knowledge of where they have kept their victims in the past. Third, and most importantly, this note gives us exact information as to where several of these pirates can be found at noon tomorrow. If we were to capture these men, Governor, I assure you they could be motivated to tell us everything they know."

When Fuller had finished, Governor Hastings nodded his head. He then opened his mouth to speak, but before he could utter a single word Lord Elton interrupted him. "Are you seriously suggesting," his Lordship asked irritably, "that we attempt to abduct these pirate agents, on the off-chance that they *might* know Lady Emily's whereabouts, and on the very off-chance that a mission to rescue her *might* succeed? Are we actually willing to venture her Ladyship's *life* on such a scheme, all to save a mere £50,000? Preposterous!" Elton was now staring directly at the Colonel, daring him to reply.

"Let me say this, my Lord," Fuller answered swiftly. "You've just observed that £50,000 is a small price to pay for the return of one so dear, and you are certainly correct. But I ask of you this: when you buy an apple in the marketplace, Sirs, do you not scratch your head when the fruit is priced below the market rate? Here is such a case. This should give us pause. More to the point, what guarantee is there that Lady Emily will be freed once the ransom is paid? These pirates, after all, are legendary not only for their brutality, but also for their cunning. They know very well that her Ladyship is worth much more to the Governor than the sum they are currently asking for. Do not forget that many times in the past these pirates have proposed a certain figure for a ransom, and on its payment they demand a further sum, perhaps two or three times as great. And this procedure they may repeat in the case of a single prisoner as many as half a dozen times! Since their hostages are usually natives and not Englishmen, you may be forgiven for not knowing of this practice, but I assure you it is very real.

“And, Sirs, I might add that, as the prisoner's family is slowly drained of every penny of wealth they possess, the hostage himself is customarily tortured and abused. Indeed, he often dies as a consequence of his mistreatment, and certainly if the prisoner in question was a woman, she might expect -- ."

Here Lord Elton cut the Colonel off. "That's quite enough!" he said. "You paint a very alarming picture, to be sure, but you suppose a great deal that -- ." This time, however, it was Governor Hastings' turn to interrupt. He did so with extreme impatience. "May I remind you, gentlemen," he said, "that all of us here are on the same side, and with the same aim in view. My Lord, please let Colonel Fuller finish." In a raspy voice, the enigmatic General Colley now chimed in for the first and only time, saying, "Here, here." Elton immediately drew back in his chair and frowned, but after a moment he waived his hand in acquiescence, urging Fuller to continue.

The Colonel took a deep breath, and then he said, "All I meant to suggest is that her Ladyship is in very great peril. Our one goal at this time must be to separate Lady Emily from the source of that peril, her abductors, by any means necessary, and I will wager my life, gentlemen, on the fact that *payment of this ransom will secure us nothing.*" Fuller said this with particular emphasis, and then he continued, "So if appeasement is to be your strategy, Sirs, I am afraid, to be perfectly frank, that probably none of us will ever see this lovely girl alive again. I beg of you, consider in prudence whether a knave like Karikalan would ever give up such a glorious prize for a mere £50,000. It simply will not happen. You may also wish to consider just what the consequence will be when this plan of conciliation inevitably fails. What then? Not only will her Ladyship be doomed, but so will every man in this room. Can you imagine the reaction of Parliament and of the Company's shareholders to an unsuccessful courtship of these villains? My point, gentlemen, is that in this case half measures *will not* suffice. I find, Sirs, that in moments of crisis the most manly approach is usually the best. Surely you agree? Simply put, her Ladyship is now across the sea and in the hands of brutes. Well, then, what is to be done but that we should go and fetch her, and strike down any man who comes between us? I daresay a man of honor can do no less."

This speech seemed to have a powerful effect on everyone listening. Even General Lord Elton did not hazard an immediate objection to the Colonel's logic. Fuller's point about the potential Parliamentary reaction to payment of the ransom seemed to strike a nerve with Hastings, in particular, but the Colonel's appeal to manliness was also well-received. Several seconds of thoughtful silence followed, and during this time Lieutenants Faulk and Maxwell glanced at one another and exchanged subtle smiles, indicating their admiration for Fuller's rhetorical skill. Finally Hastings drew his hand up to his face and wiped the sweat from his brow. "So then, Colonel," he asked, "what is it exactly that you propose we do?"

Over the next half hour, Colonel Fuller presented a minutely detailed plan for the rescue of Lady Emily, a plan which he had developed in his head in the few hours since Lieutenant Faulk had visited him at the boarding house. He first proposed that every conceivable source of intelligence about the pirates be thoroughly canvassed. At one point during the conversation Mr. Neelan was asked to confirm the availability of certain sources of information, and he did so with the simple statement, "Yes, *Sahib*, everything the Colonel has said is absolutely correct."

Next Fuller referred to a map of the beach at Ber Habi. He indicated that a concealed encirclement of the location could be achieved if both land and naval forces were closely coordinated. The Colonel brushed

aside objections that the pirates, once captured, would be reluctant to reveal what they knew, and prudently no one pressed Fuller on this sensitive point.

After the location of the pirate base on Ceylon had been determined, the Colonel proposed that a force of roughly forty native mercenaries should be sent to the island, led by himself. This expeditionary force would then rescue her Ladyship as quickly as possible. The operation had to be completed rapidly, because Karikalan would be expecting his ransom party to return. As soon as he became aware of the betrayal at Ber Habi, Karikalan would presumably move Lady Emily to a new location, or dispatch her, and thus the opportunity to rescue her would be lost.

These and many other details Fuller discussed very masterfully with his hosts. It became obvious as the meeting went on that Colonel Fuller intended for his two Lieutenants, and of course Neelan as well, to accompany him on this mission. Faulk and Maxwell openly expressed enthusiasm for the idea, but Neelan remained silent, since strictly speaking no one had asked him for his views. In fact, when doubts were raised by General Scott as to the reliability and skill of Neelan's men, it was the Colonel and not Neelan himself who addressed these concerns. Fuller praised Neelan's leadership skills, and he even referred to him as "the most capable native warrior I have ever encountered."

After several hours of discussion, it was painfully clear that no amount of talk would ever wear down General Lord Elton's determined opposition to the Colonel's scheme. Nevertheless, Governor Hastings was at last prepared to make a decision. "Regrettably," he announced, "I must agree that it appears very unlikely that the pirates will release her Ladyship, even if we pay the ransom in good faith. We must be mindful as well of the dangerous precedent it would set if the British Government and the Company were to accede to the demands of outlaws in this way. I suppose there is no choice, then, but to try the Colonel's plan. Colonel Fuller, rest assured that you will be given everything you will need to complete this mission successfully. On a personal note, let me add that all our prayers will certainly be with you. We shall be counting on you and your men to rescue not just Lady Emily, but all of us, in fact, from this calamity. God help us if you should fail!"

On this ominous note the meeting drew to a close, and Fuller and his three subordinates prepared to move to an adjoining room along with Lord Elton's two staff officers. There they were to discuss what forces would be deployed at Ber Habi on the following day. But before Fuller left the map room, Governor Hastings took him aside personally. In a low whisper, he said to the Colonel, "I want one thing to be clear. If you encounter these pirates, and I hope you will, I want you to send a strong message that this sort of behavior will never be tolerated again. *Do not be subtle!* Where rogues like these are concerned, the old saying is true: 'He who spares the rod spoils the child.' Do you understand me?" "Yes, Sir," the Colonel replied, and Hastings turned and walked away.

The planning session lasted until about 7 p.m., and after that Fuller returned to the boarding house to gather his effects. As he rode back towards the *ghats*, the Colonel stared thoughtfully at the tall masts of the British and native ships, threading their way delicately into the evening sky. All of a sudden he noticed his heart thumping in his chest, and he became short of breath. He remembered that this was exactly how he had felt the

day he had enlisted in the Army in 1756, at the beginning of the Seven Years' War. He had felt much the same the first time he had been forced to kill a man during one of his secret missions on behalf of the elusive General Colley. He had slit the man's throat and then stood over him for almost an hour, watching the blood drain slowly from his body, and wishing that he had become a banker or a lawyer instead of a soldier. Besides horror, though, he had also felt empowered, more so than ever before. The way he felt now, with this difficult mission in front of him, was similar: it was fear and dread, yes, but these were mixed with equal parts exhilaration and anticipation. Fuller knew, after all, that the whole course of his life and fortune would be determined in the next few days. No wonder his heart was beating faster than usual!

*** 5 ***

As Lady Emily trekked into the wilds of Ceylon, pulled on a raft up a shallow, stinking river by two teams of oxen, she had little to do except brood on her unhappy fate. Occasionally, as a diversion, she would stare at the red, waxy tropical flowers that intermittently brightened the river's banks, or she would surreptitiously inhale the odor of her captors and guess at when the bodies of these rogues had last been touched by cleansing waters. Most of all, though, her Ladyship pictured in her mind the various indignities and assaults that could befall her in the hands of her chief abductor. To the men who now guarded her, after all, she was merely a parcel, to be delivered intact and on time. To the "Pirate King" who had expended so much money and effort to capture her, though, she was a *prize* – and what man, when he has captured the gleaming treasure which he seeks, does not run his rough hands across it, seizing his trophy with a glint of malice in his eye? Lady Emily shivered as she pictured a despicable pirate chieftain raising his unwashed and bloodstained hand to caress her own smooth cheek. She promised herself that she would try to think of something else, anything else, to distract her from this torment.

In the end, she chose to think of the past – her past. These ruminations were not always, in truth, as comforting as one might have hoped, but they at least gave Lady Emily a sense that there was a familiar, if imperfect, reality beyond the steamy jungles of Ceylon to which she might, if God favored her, someday return. Confronted with an unfathomable misery in her present and future, in other words, the girl now longed to return to the familiar misery of Marley Keep. She thought especially of her father, and of how the man had so single-handedly written the script of her life up to now. Rather uncharacteristically for her, she prayed that someday he might be allowed to do so again.

Lady Emily's childhood had indeed been utterly determined by her father's turbulent feelings towards her. He had insisted for one thing that she share in his isolation after his wife's sudden death. Just as he had cut himself off from almost all social intercourse, Lady Emily too was forced to journey the long road from childhood to womanhood with only her father and a small army of indifferent nannies and governesses to guide her. She had so few acquaintances of her own age that even as a toddler she was forced to make her way in the world as a rather pathetic facsimile of an adult. When she attended social functions, and this was rare, the assembled guests would marvel at the girl's good looks, but privately they would shake their heads over the way her father treated her. Stephen Fitzroy upbraided his daughter constantly, and he expected her to be as relentlessly proper and pious as he was. The girl did her best to oblige him, since he was the only father she knew, but the effect on her psyche was horrible to behold.

The life that the Earl and his daughter had led alone at Marley Keep was just as bleak and unfulfilling as their strained relationship would suggest. The distance between them was seldom more than a few rooms, but they might as well have been separated by the widest ocean known to man. There exists no greater tragedy in the world than two lonely people who, despite being near to each other, never reach out to achieve real affection and companionship. Such was the life which the Earl of Oakhampton had chosen for himself, and such was the

life that he had imposed upon his young daughter, who so clearly deserved better.

Lady Emily's childhood and adolescence at Marley Keep had forced her to become self-reliant to an extraordinary degree, and through her own inventiveness she had finally found two means to escape the confines of that drafty, dreary old castle. One of these offered her a purely physical escape – it was the moor. As soon as she was old enough to walk, the girl would ramble across that wasteland and explore its every crack and crevice. By now she knew its every secret. At first she had tried to make friends with the simple shepherds and peat diggers who made their living there, but, frightened by the girl's high station, they would always bow profusely and excuse themselves at the earliest opportunity. Eventually Lady Emily accepted that the moor was no place to get to know one's fellow man, but it was still an excellent place to get to know oneself, and this is what she did. She spent hours and hours on the moor, thinking, dreaming, and imagining the wide world that lay beyond Marley Keep. Sometimes her thoughts would even turn to her mother, a woman she had never known and never would know, but who she hoped was looking down on her from heaven.

In addition to walking on the moor, Lady Emily also sought refuge in literature. Perhaps the one truly kind thing that the Earl had ever done for his daughter was to force her at an early age to learn to read. Once she had done so, she never looked back. Her father's enormous library became for Lady Emily almost a universe unto itself, a place where she could step out of her dismal and tedious existence and, merely by turning a page, transport herself to times and places she had never dreamed of. The only restriction placed on her reading was that certain political books were forbidden to her, because the Earl thought their content might confuse a delicate female mind. He disallowed the reading of Bolingbroke, for instance, because he was too much a Tory, and he forbade the reading of John Wilkes, because he was not nearly Tory enough. But fiction, on the other hand, had never held any sway with the Earl, so young Emily was permitted to read as broadly as she wished in that genre, and it was in this way that she learned the most about the world around her. It was by reading Shakespeare's *King Lear*, for example, that the girl learned that Stephen Fitzroy was not necessarily the model father she had always assumed him to be, and that indeed it was possible for a father to be too indulgent and kind, rather than too strict and sour. It was by reading the adventures of Marco Polo that she learned of the existence of other countries and cultures, so different from England that they might as well have been inhabited by moon men. And it was in the old French *Chansons* that Lady Emily learned of a word called *amour* -- love. Her father had once known this word well, but to his daughter's knowledge he had never chosen to use it, and she never ceased to wonder why.

The only break in the reclusive and contemplative life led by both the Earl and his daughter came once a year, when they would undertake the long and bumpy carriage ride to London. There the Earl would do his duty by attending each and every session of the House of Lords. The 'Prince of Peat', as his fellow Peers called him behind his back, was famous for frequently interrupting the erudite deliberations of the Lords with the simple statement, "Ah, that's all very well, but what would Jesus the Christ have to say?" In point of fact, this was a fairly meaningless contribution, because the Earl would never expand on his interjection by postulating, for example, what the opinion of the one true God might be on the issue of toll roads in West Sussex. All the same,

the Earl felt that his contribution to the proceedings of the Lords was much too important ever to deny them the benefit of his pious declarations. Accordingly, every year without fail the Earl and his daughter would make the trek to England's capital, and the habit was eventually so ingrained in Lady Emily that she did not divide the year into Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall, as most people do, but rather into only two seasons: London and Devon.

One might expect that an isolated but curious girl like Lady Emily would look forward to these trips to the great city of London, which was then by far the world's largest, but this was not the case. The reason was simple: the Earl's townhouse in Berkeley Square was just as much a temple of solitude as was Marley Keep. And, indeed, the only thing worse than being lonely is being lonely while surrounded by hundreds of thousands of other people who manifestly are not. This was exactly Lady Emily's fate. She would wile away the long hours in the Earl's cramped townhouse – he did not see any need to impress London society with his wealth – while her father sat scowling in the House of Lords, occasionally bursting forth with an unwelcome and censorious observation about the darkening skies of public morality.

The only real human contact that Lady Emily was allowed during her stays in London came at her father's weekly dinners with the owners of the neighboring house, the Francis family. Brigadier William Francis and his wife Margaret were very much in the mold of the Earl himself, though of course their social station was much lower. Both the Earl and the Brigadier were old men, seemingly made older by their crankiness, whose favorite entertainment consisted in sitting at the dinner table and smugly congratulating themselves on their moral superiority. Both men considered themselves to be progressive Whigs, but in fact the only thing they were progressing towards, as far as Lady Emily could tell, was obsolescence and death. The Whig movement had long ago left them behind. It was now controlled by men like Charles James Fox, who tossed around radical notions like universal male suffrage and the separation of Church and State. Needless to say, the Earl and his Brigadier companion were mystified by such proposals. These dinners, at any rate, were unimaginably dull for Lady Emily. Only once was her interest piqued by the conversation. It was when she heard the Brigadier remark that his son, Philip Francis, had recently left for India to serve on the Governor's Council. The girl briefly imagined Philip as a dashing adventurer, but then she reminded herself that he was only a Francis, after all. The chances were that he was an even greater bore than his desiccated parents.

Shortly after Lady Emily's eighteenth birthday, a gradual but momentous change began to occur in her life, and it was this development that ultimately would prompt her father to betroth her to Warren Hastings. At age eighteen, it was unavoidable that Emily Fitzroy should have her "coming out" – that she would be introduced, in effect, into the narrow marriage market of the English elite. To deny her this opportunity, which in his heart of hearts the Earl would very much have liked to do, would have been universally acclaimed as less than "proper," and under these severe pressures the Earl simply had to relent.

Accordingly, a rather underwhelming series of balls and dinners were arranged to *fête* Lady Emily, and her father acquired a collection of cheap and frumpy gowns to make a suitably bleak impression on the marriageable young men of Devon and Berkeley Square. Much to the Earl's chagrin, even in the pathetic rags

he had bought for her, his daughter was positively luminous and irresistible. She had grown into a beautiful young woman, and he was only now beginning to realize it. She had the same sparkling blue eyes and long, thick auburn hair that people had admired since she was a little girl, but now she was suddenly tall – no less than 5 foot 9 – and, although she was by no means voluptuous, she was certainly what the humble farmers of the West Country might have called "a healthy lass." All in all, Lady Emily's father had regretfully to admit that the prospects for her in the marriage market were exceedingly good, especially considering that she carried with her the promise of a massive inheritance. For the first and only time in his life, Stephen Fitzroy now cursed the enormity of his fortune!

Faced with his daughter's growing popularity, and forced to watch her at long last blossom into a truly social being, all the worst aspects of the Earl's relationship with his daughter were suddenly activated. He could not bear to see her like this. He could not bear to see her happier than himself. That she had been nearby all these years, safely locked away in the chambers of Marley Keep, a fellow traveler down the road of introspection and loneliness, had served as the man's only real comfort in life. Now, as she pranced through the ballrooms of Devon, as she giggled with the ladies of the Court at Windsor, as she raked in the compliments of the young men who dared to call themselves her "suitors," the Earl felt as though she were slipping away from him for good. Worst of all, she made *friends*. And as she began to understand the joy that lay beyond the narrow world her father had made for her, he knew that his power over his daughter was evaporating before his very eyes. He felt as though his heart would burst, because, as unhappy as his life was now, without her it would be maddening.

The great change in her father's attitudes that Lady Emily's sudden introduction into society had caused was mirrored by a dramatic transformation of the girl's own mindset. At first she had approached the opportunity offered by her "coming out" timidly. She did not know how to converse with and to charm normal people, after all. Her first reaction was to withdraw into the safe cocoon that her father had so diligently prepared for her. But this did not last. As she became accustomed to the demands of social intercourse, and as she learned that there were people in the world far warmer and kinder than her father, she began to consider her 18th birthday as the most happy event of her life. It seemed that all her miserable days at Marley Keep had only been a preparation for this – her launching into a new and better world filled with friends, admirers, and even potential husbands! She was as joyful as she had ever been, indeed more joyful than she had ever known a person could be, but it was her very happiness that was to be her undoing.

Once more, the Earl of Oakhampton conspired against the welfare of his own flesh and blood. He was determined that, one way or another, Lady Emily would be his captive until the very end. He realized now that she would have to marry, but, if this was so, then it would be *he* who chose her mate, and he would choose a candidate suitably beholden to himself. Warren Hastings was the perfect choice. He was utterly dependent on the Earl's support at meetings of the Company's shareholders, and both of them knew it. Without Stephen Fitzroy, Hastings' amusing little empire would collapse about him in a heap of dust. Moreover, since Hastings lived in India – a forlorn and primitive place – Lady Emily as his wife would have few opportunities for socialization. There were almost no European women at all in the Raj's capital of Calcutta, which meant that for

the most part “European society” there consisted of card-playing and whoring in the dank streets of the Muslim quarter, activities from which the wife of the Governor would naturally be excluded. Lady Emily would be as much a prisoner at Government House in Calcutta as she ever was at Marley Keep. She would also be just as much under the power of her husband, and thus ultimately of the Earl himself. He could even demand that she visit him in England on a regular basis, and how could Hastings refuse? Moreover, Hastings was visibly tiring of his role as Governor of Bengal, just as his enemies in Parliament had long since tired of his machinations. Sooner or later he would retire to his country seat in Daylesford, and Lady Emily would be once again at her father's beck and call. It all made perfect sense.

Predictably, Lady Emily reacted to her father’s decision that she should marry Warren Hastings with horror and disgust. To her it seemed that her life had only just begun, and now her father wanted suddenly to separate her from her friends and send her away to the farthest corners of the Earth! It was unimaginable. The girl knew little about Hastings, but she was well aware that the faction in Parliament that opposed the Company's rule in India was always accusing him of corruption and cruelty to the natives. This was not an encouraging resume for a future husband, to say the least. Lady Emily was also wary of living in India, simply because the place was so utterly foreign, especially to her. True, she had read a few fanciful travelers’ accounts of the country, but that was all. Her one remotely accurate source of intelligence about the Raj came from a gigantic oil painting that hung in India House on Leadenhall Street, the headquarters of the East India Company, whose waiting room she knew well, as her father often made her molder there for hours on end. The painting portrayed a grandly-dressed *maharajah* shaking hands with a pink-cheeked Royal Navy Captain. The native appeared to be overjoyed to be handing over the freedom of his people to the protection of the British Empire. Frankly, Lady Emily doubted that such a scene had ever taken place.

Emily Fitzroy begged and pleaded with her father not to send her to India, after all. She tried every tactic she could think of: she feigned illness, she tried to run away, she even asked a lawyer if she had any legal standing to resist her father’s orders. Any of these strategies might have succeeded, except for one invisible obstacle that stood between her and defiance of her father’s wishes: guilt. For, although her father’s physical power over her was fast diminishing, his emotional power was still intact. The fact that the Earl and his daughter had shared so many years of loneliness and desperation together only made it that much more difficult for her Ladyship ever to consider open rebellion as a real option. As much as she felt betrayed by her father’s decision to send her away, therefore, the girl also felt a deep and abiding need to obey his commands. In May 1774, Lady Emily was at last shoved by her father onto the deck of a huge East Indiaman called the *Oriental Venture*, with a stern-looking priest named Paxton to see her on to Calcutta. It will come as no surprise that, shortly after she had left, her father began to miss her terribly and regret his decision, but by then it was too late.

What was worse, the Earl’s thoughtless actions had now led to consequences that were more catastrophic than he had ever imagined possible. Lady Emily, rather than becoming the reluctant bride of Governor Hastings, was now a prisoner of bloodthirsty pirates. Rather than serving as a rallying point, albeit against her will, for the expansion of British power and commerce in India, the girl had become a victim of the

very disorder and lawless plunder that her father so despised (and which so detracted from the value of his East India Company shares). In short, the stratagem that had caused him to send her to India in the first place was dissolving into a shambles, which, had he known about it, would have plunged him even more deeply into sorrow.

The irony of Lady Emily's fate was, however, not uppermost in her mind at this hour. She was instead listening to her captors explain to her that her journey into the dark heart of Ceylon was almost over. Beyond the next bend in the river, she would come face to face with the man who had masterminded her kidnapping: the "Pirate King." Strangely, rather than think immediately of her own peril, she thought instead, once again, of her father. She thought to herself how odd it was that the one man who had ruled her life up to now as a merciless despot could do nothing, absolutely nothing, to change her fate in the days ahead. If he only knew how powerless he had become, surely his heart would break – or would it break instead out of love for her? She honestly did not know.

The narrow cove at Ber Habi was only about twenty miles to the southwest of Calcutta, near where the River Hooghly emptied into the Bay of Bengal. It was also about five miles south of one of the main roads leading from Bengal into the heart of central India. This road was the nearest trace of civilization to Ber Habi, and so naturally the beach there was nearly always deserted. The cove was also far enough away from the main navigation routes at the Hooghly's mouth that very few ships would ever pass close enough to see what transpired there, while at the same time anyone standing on the beach itself could easily surveil the surrounding area. All in all, Dinesh Karikalan had chosen a fairly sensible location for his men to receive the ransom for Lady Emily, but still Colonel Fuller was optimistic that his planned ambush of the pirate representatives would succeed.

The cove at Ber Habi was formed by two thin bands of breakers, rock and sand that traced their way several hundred yards into the sea. The opening between these breakers gave Ber Habi the appearance of a natural harbor, but in fact the water was much too shallow to allow any sizable ship to anchor there, and wisely none had ever tried. The beach inside the cove was very expansive, stretching some 100 yards or more from the shoreline until it dissolved into a succession of low-lying grassy hills. These hills continued for several miles, until the land slowly flattened out again and became forested as one approached the Bengal Highway.

As Fuller had predicted, covering the cove with naval forces did not prove difficult. To avoid detection by the pirates, however, the ships had to anchor far from Ber Habi itself. Two frigates took up position several miles to the south in the open sea, disguised as merchantmen, and a frigate and a sloop waited to the east. All four ships had orders to set sail in the direction of the cove as soon as they detected a smoke signal from the top of a grass-covered knoll about a mile inland, where a keen-eyed English surveyor was stationed with a particularly powerful telescope. The plan was that, after the pirate vessel had arrived in or near the cove, the British ships would all converge at the mouth of the small bay, sealing off the enemy's only chance at escape.

On land, however, the situation was more complicated. Colonel Fuller, Lieutenants Faulk and Maxwell, and the 180 British regulars from the 1st Bengal European Regiment who were to be employed in this operation, had arrived on the beach at 6 a.m., while Neelan remained in Calcutta to muster his own men for the expedition to Ceylon. This early arrival had given Fuller plenty of time to survey the terrain at Ber Habi, and to position his men long before any pirate scouts had an opportunity to inspect the location.

Right away the Colonel posted thirty men to watch the road. They had instructions to intercept any native who seemed to walk away from the highway in the direction of the beach. This left 150 men for Fuller to position elsewhere, a ridiculously large number, especially since Karikalan would probably send no more than a handful of his best men to pick up the ransom. The problem was that these pirates would expect to meet only two men (and a large chest of gold) on an empty beach, so where could the remaining 150 soldiers be hidden? Since the beach stretched so far back from the shoreline, the only place left for the men to take cover was behind the small hills that lay between the beach and the forest. This positioning, however, would leave the soldiers an

uncomfortably long distance from where the transaction with the pirates would take place, exposing the two men handing over the “ransom” to considerable danger. The Colonel was particularly sensitive to this point, since he planned to be one of those two men.

The solution Fuller devised was ingenious, but somewhat risky. He ordered six large, coffin-shaped pits dug in the sand, and he then ordered six very reluctant soldiers to lie prone on their backs in the pits with their weapons at their sides. Next the men were covered in sand, with only a tiny reed sticking up in the air to allow them to breathe. By about 11 a.m., all six men were completely buried, and the mounds were smoothed over as much as possible to hide them from view. It was intended that Colonel Fuller and Lieutenant Faulk, who were to greet the pirates on the beach, would stand in front of the mounds to hide any imperfections in their design. The men buried in the sand could apparently still hear adequately, so it was decided that they would leap from their pits to attack the pirates at the sound of a code word, in this case, "King George.”

As soon as the preparations for the ambush were completed, the rest of the men, who numbered more than 140, were duly stationed behind the network of low hills beyond the beach. Fuller ordered their commander, Major Smith, to keep a close eye on the proceedings at the beach. The moment he saw the six men leap from the sand, Smith was to give all his men the order to charge. Until that time, the soldiers were to remain out of sight and completely silent.

At about 11:30, Fuller and Faulk took up their position on the beach. The Colonel tried to give encouragement to the men buried in the sand for the first fifteen minutes or so, but, since they could only hear him with difficulty and were in no position to respond, this well-meaning attempt at dialogue soon grew tiresome. At roughly 11:45, Fuller ordered total silence. He and Faulk now spent their time scanning the horizon, looking for any sign of approaching ships.

For a long time they saw nothing. The Colonel at one point tapped his foot against the wooden chest, which the pirates of course expected to be full of gold. Fuller smiled when the only sound this created was a resonating, hollow thump. Faulk tried to smile back, but his nerves would not allow it. The Lieutenant tried to steady himself by breathing in the warm, salty air, but it was difficult to control his fear.

At last the noon hour came and went, and Fuller began to worry. He looked back towards the Bengal Highway, however, and he felt better immediately: a faint plume of black smoke was snaking its way skyward. The signal had been given, therefore. This meant that the pirates were approaching, and the Navy was on the move.

Then, at roughly ten minutes past twelve, Faulk cried out, "Look!" The Lieutenant pointed at the horizon, and Fuller quickly made out what had attracted his attention: a tiny black spot bobbing up and down on the fast currents of the Hooghly estuary. It was obviously a ship, and it was moving very quickly in the direction of the beach. Five minutes later the little black spot had transformed itself into a small pirate sloop, and it had anchored itself at the entrance to the cove. A small landing boat was then lowered into the water, onto which five men descended.

Fuller watched as one of the pirates took up position at the rear of the boat, while the other four manned

the oars and began to row towards the beach. Lieutenant Faulk took out a small telescope and surveyed the scene. "I see five men on the landing boat, Colonel, and four left on the ship itself. It isn't much of a ship, is it?" Fuller frowned and replied, "I'll wager it's a fast one, though."

Slowly the landing craft made its way to shore. At last it beached itself and all five pirates jumped out of it into the shallow water. All five men had bare feet and wore the casual, but extremely colorful, attire typical of Oriental pirates. All of them were also swarthy and filthy, but that too was to be expected. The only one of them who stood out was the one who had taken command of the boat. He was an enormous man, perhaps 6 foot 4 and well over 300 pounds, and possessed a very fierce countenance. Fuller reflected that this huge man, who was armed with a massive curved sword with a decorative ivory hilt, could easily hack him and the Lieutenant to bits if he was so inclined. And he could probably do so long before the swarm of British soldiers hidden in the hills behind them had any chance to effect a rescue. More than ever, therefore, the Colonel was depending on the men buried in the sand for rapid support.

Just as the hulking pirate commander stopped about twenty feet from the two Englishmen and opened his mouth to speak, a sharp crack was heard in the distance, and then another. It was the sound of musket fire coming from the pirate sloop. Fuller correctly inferred that the men on the sloop had spotted the British ships moving up to encircle them, and these shots were intended to warn the men ashore of the imminent danger. The pirates in the landing party did indeed look behind them as soon as the shots rang out, and immediately they saw the captain of their sloop waving his arms wildly. He was shouting a warning at the top of his lungs, but at this great distance his words were impossible to make out.

Seized by a panic, Fuller and Faulk now shouted together, "King George! King George!", but distressingly nothing happened. After Fuller and Faulk had let loose this bizarre exclamation, the pirate commander looked at them quizzically. He and his fellow pirates then nervously began to scan the horizon in every direction, looking for signs of an ambush. There was, however, nothing at this point for them to see.

Fear now got the better of Lieutenant Faulk, and he began screaming at the top of his lungs, "*King George! King George!*" Not surprisingly, the pirates grew even more wary, and their commander now unsheathed his sword. At last the men in the sand responded, however, and they burst from the ground, scrambling slowly to their feet and tossing away the rags which had shielded their eyes from the dirt. Fuller had expected the pirates to turn instantly to fight, but what happened next surprised him. Apparently the otherworldly sight of six sand-covered monsters emerging from the bowels of the Earth provoked some kind of visceral terror in the pirates. Their eyes bugged out as if they had seen an apparition, and immediately they began scrambling back to the water's edge. Fuller and Faulk now drew their swords and pursued the pirates to the scene of their beached landing craft, with the six sand warriors following closely behind, their muskets thoroughly clogged and unable to fire, but their bayonets still menacing.

Simultaneously, the British soldiers hidden in the low hills beyond the beach leapt out of their hiding places, and within seconds a great throng of bellowing redcoats was surging towards the shoreline. When the pirates finally looked behind them after reaching their boat, they saw close at their heels eight Englishmen

variously armed, and they could also make out in the distance a small army of British regulars charging and closing fast.

Confused and terrified, the pirates now raised their arms in a gesture of surrender. Soon they were surrounded by a thick ring of red-coated English youth, with muskets and bayonets poised at the ready. Slowly the pirates were prodded away from their landing boat and back onto the beach. There they were forced into a sitting position and were tightly bound in preparation for the long journey back to the capital. The ambush had gone more successfully than Colonel Fuller had dared to hope.

As soon as it became clear to the captain of the pirate sloop that the landing party was doomed, he immediately ordered his crew to deploy the sails and move the ship at top speed southward into the open sea. By the time the sloop was oriented in the right direction and underway, however, the three British frigates and one sloop were not more than a league distant on either side. The pursuit did not last long. The *Rodney*, one of the two frigates moving in from the south, fired several warning shots across the sloop's bow, and in response the pirate captain abruptly trimmed his sails and flew the white flag. By about half past one the captain and his three sailors, in addition to the five pirates, were safely in British custody on the beach. The whole party could now begin its short march up to the Bengal Highway, where horses would be waiting to rush them back to Calcutta. The prisoners would then be taken to Fort William, the headquarters of the Bengal Army, where it was hoped that they could be persuaded to enlighten their captors on Lady Emily's whereabouts, and the sooner, the better!

As Fuller walked with the other officers towards the Highway, he was predictably in a jovial mood. At one point he slapped Faulk on the back, commenting sarcastically, "That was good work, Faulk. Perhaps you'll get a medal from *King George! King George!*" The Lieutenant was not amused.

*** 7 ***

That night, in the dungeons of Fort William, Colonel Fuller used every means at his disposal to learn the location of Lady Emily. Since interrogation was not technically within the Colonel's field of expertise, however, in this situation Fuller depended heavily on the assistance of the Fort's commander, Colonel Ryton-Park, who luckily was an accomplished sadist.

As it happened, it was quickly determined that the three sailors and the captain of the sloop were not pirates at all. They had been hired by the very imposing and gargantuan pirate commander, a man by the name of Ramesh Kanth, in the northern Ceylon port of Jaffna. Apparently these men had been told nothing except that they were to sail to Ber Habi, keep an eye out for British ships, and then sail back.

The sailors were quickly forgotten, therefore, and the questioning moved on to the pirates in the landing party. Since it was Mr. Kanth, the pirate commander, who was most likely to possess useful information, Fuller and Ryton-Park settled on him as the focus of the interrogation. This was a wise decision, because Mr. Kanth was a close confidant and trusted aide of Dinesh Karikalan, the Pirate King, and under duress, as he would shortly be, he would prove most cooperative.

Kanth's host at Fort William, Colonel Ryton-Park, was a most unusual man. He had been born in Oxfordshire to a very respectable and wealthy family, but, of all the professions he could have pursued, he had chosen to purchase a commission in the Bengal Army. For some reason, Ryton-Park, a short, wiry man with a tangled, greasy mop of gray hair, had felt a strange yearning to experience the East. The decision was a fateful one, because, shortly after his arrival in India, Ryton-Park would endure the most formative event of his life.

In 1756, the *Nawab* of Bengal, instigated by the French, had betrayed his English allies and attacked Calcutta. It was hardly a fair fight. The defenders of the town were outnumbered by as much as 100-to-1. A bungled evacuation had left a tiny, practically defenseless garrison behind to face a miserable fate. A young Lieutenant, Alexander Ryton-Park, was among them. As it happened, the scene of their defeat and humiliation would be – where else? – Fort William. Captured by the *Nawab*'s men after a short siege, Ryton-Park and 145 of his comrades were herded into a dank cellar, only eighteen feet by fifteen, which would shortly thereafter become known throughout the world as the "Black Hole of Calcutta." There the men would spend the night, in searing heat, without food or water, gasping for breath because of poor ventilation. Predictably, they died one by one while their tormentors looked on, mocking them openly. "An infernal scene of horror" was what one survivor had called it, and there were only twenty-three who made it out alive.

Ryton-Park had been one of the lucky few, but "lucky" was not precisely how he had felt at the time. His mind was permanently scarred by memories of his comrades moaning piteously next to him, scrambling over corpses to move closer to the few sources of air. Most of all, though, seared into his consciousness was the image of his native jailers: those fat, sweaty, slovenly, black-hearted fiends who had chuckled at the fate of their English prisoners. The glint of malice in their eyes as they spat in the faces of their victims; the uproarious laughter as they watched those parched and dying wretches lick the urinous film that coated the floor of the cell;

the spiteful oaths they uttered as they pulled the few survivors out of the Hole in the morning hours, only to beat them and kick them in the dirt – these were scenes that had convinced Ryton-Park, beyond any shadow of a doubt, of the baseness and brutality inherent in the native character. He knew instantly that the rest of his life would have only one purpose: to take vengeance on these dogs, and to ensure that no Englishman, and indeed no European man, woman, or child, would ever suffer at the hands of the natives again.

Ryton-Park was reminded in the weeks following the incident of the "Black Hole" of a few lines of a popular English song:

Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.

There was another part of the song, though, that affected him just as deeply:

The nations not so blessed as thee,
Shall in their turns to tyrants fall;
While thou shalt flourish great and free,
The dread and envy of them all.

Scarred as he was by his experiences in the "Black Hole," these words made a chill descend down Ryton-Park's spine every time he heard them. They expressed what had become his personal philosophy since his ordeal. One might think that he had been overcome by hatred. He did hate the natives – that was true. But it would be equally accurate to say that he was overcome by love – love of his countrymen, whom he wished never to see suffer in the same way again.

Quite simply, Ryton-Park had come to believe that that the natives were animals, and everyone with sense knew it. As animals, it was their right to treat each other like chattel, to enslave, to oppress, to torture, to disembowel, to rape, in short, to debase one another to their hearts' content. But the English were a higher race. They were free and virtuous, made in the image of God, not in the image of the vile specters that passed for "gods" in this place. Ryton-Park would be their champion. He would be the tireless defender of the English from the ever-present danger of native bloodlust and envy. Ryton-Park knew, as few other Englishmen did, just how precarious English hegemony in Bengal truly was. He would stop at nothing to see that this dominance was maintained, and that the natives retained a healthy fear, perhaps even an instinctive dread, of English power. Ryton-Park knew that, the very second that this psychological and physical power that the English had over the natives was weakened, savage retribution would follow. As long as there was breath left in his body, he would not let that happen.

After the "Black Hole" incident, Ryton-Park had risen quickly through the ranks. After he had been stationed in the country for only ten years, he was made a Colonel and given command of – what irony! –

Bengal's largest and most important stronghold, Fort William, the scene of his earlier brush with death. The Fort had more than symbolic value, however. It guarded the harbor and city of Calcutta, the capital of the Raj. Thus, no expense had been spared in constructing it. It was a huge octagonal structure, with three of its eight 'spires' nestled against the east bank of the River Hooghly. To the north of the Fort was the "European Quarter" of Calcutta, which included most of the important government buildings, while to the east and south of the Fort was the *Maidan*, an empty expanse of manicured lawn which gave the Fort's British and native garrisons a clear view of any potential attackers. Ryton-Park had been made commandant of Fort William in 1766, when he was only forty-two years old. Now, eight years later, he was still a Colonel, and he was still the commanding officer of the very same fort. Simply put, he loved what he did. Ruling over this gigantic edifice satisfied Ryton-Park's sense of mission. As the locus of British military power in Bengal, commanding the Fort allowed Ryton-Park to help ensure that the English population there would never again be threatened with annihilation. Just as importantly, commanding Fort William also gave the Colonel a chance to take revenge on his enemies, i.e. all those natives who dared to challenge British rule, or to insult or attack British civilization in any form. This was because, in addition to its strategic and military uses, Fort William was also employed for another, more sinister purpose.

It was in the cells of Fort William that all the principal political prisoners of the Raj were held. As a consequence, Ryton-Park had developed great skill in punishing these miscreants, and also in motivating them to adopt a more cooperative attitude towards the Government. Put more unambiguously, Ryton-Park and several of his most trusted subordinates were experts in the art of torture. They seldom failed to secure a complete domination, physical and mental, over their victims. Needless to say, this part of Ryton-Park's job gave him immense satisfaction. This was not merely because he enjoyed – yes, why not admit it? – watching the natives squirm, but also because he knew that he was doing God's work by abusing them. Indeed, Ryton-Park thought if it as a simple *quid pro quo*: he violated and tormented the natives so that they would never have the chance to do the same to him, or to anyone British. Their pain thus equated to the contentment and ease of the Europeans. It seemed like a reasonable bargain. In the process of inflicting these tortures on his native inmates, moreover, Ryton-Park regularly obtained intelligence that was of singular value to the Raj. This was why Fuller had come to depend on him so often, and why he had brought Kanth here tonight.

The degree of unpleasantness that an inmate of Fort William could expect to endure depended to a large extent on which part of the dungeons he inhabited. These dungeons had long been divided into three discrete levels, a reflection of Ryton-Park's methodical nature. The top level received considerable daylight through grates in the ceiling, and its cells were relatively spacious and well kept. English regulars guarded these cells, and the majority of their occupants were Europeans, mostly inconsequential political detainees who had imprudently annoyed one or more of the leading personalities in the Bengal Government.

The second level of the dungeon was reserved for more intractable and dangerous men, and especially for unrepentant enemies of the State. Its cells were small and usually pitch black. Prisoners on this level were often shackled to the walls, and in extreme cases they were only freed from this posture long enough to eat and

use the latrine. Not surprisingly, because of the hardships which men (usually natives) endured on the second level, most survived for only a short time.

It was on the third level of the dungeons, however – the bottom level, the darkest of them all, and home, incidentally, to the "Black Hole" itself – that Colonels Fuller and Ryton-Park were to spend their evening. Here they would "interrogate" Mr. Kanth with terrible vigor, while his four fellow pirates moldered in their second-level cells, listening to the sound of his screams echoing up the central stairwell.

Kanth had been knocked unconscious when he first arrived at Fort William. Later, at about midnight, he had found himself in a well-lit, windowless room, completely naked and firmly bound to a large wooden table. Looking to his right, Kanth could see the room's entrance and, beyond that, a narrow hallway lit by a single torch in which two native guards kept their watch. To his left, he could see a small table littered with the paraphernalia of torture, similar to the tools of a barber-surgeon, most of which he recognized. There was a faint odor of vomit and urine that hung in the air as well, which Kanth did not find encouraging in the least. As a veteran pirate, Kanth was of course no stranger to torture. He had inflicted untold agonies on Karikalan's enemies over the years. Still, he had never before been on the receiving end of these terrible implements, and he feared very much what would happen next. Truth be told, however, it was not the physical pain he feared the most – it was the prospect of betraying Karikalan. If he was ever to do that, Kanth felt sure that the Pirate King would devise a fate for him, and likely for his family too, far worse than anything a European could imagine... In this case, though, Mr. Kanth's reverse bigotry was misplaced. Ryton-Park's skin may have been white, but his soul was by now as black as pitch, and his ruthlessness was not to be underestimated.

The native guards soon took note of Mr. Kanth's return to consciousness, and they even helped to facilitate it by pouring several buckets of water over his face. These same guards then sent a message to the two Colonels that Kanth was ready for questioning. Fuller and Ryton-Park had been waiting in the large, well-appointed living quarters that the commandant kept in the southernmost spire of the Fort when they received this happy news. Immediately they set aside their glasses half-full of sherry and began the long walk down several flights of stairs to the dungeon's third level. Ryton-Park sent orders for his staff physician, Dr. Clark, and his expert torturer, Mr. Faisal, to report for duty in the room where Mr. Kanth was being held.

Fuller had made this long trek to the torture chambers many times before, but he was never entirely comfortable doing it. He was of course aware that, given the stakes involved, he could not possibly forgo even the most extreme measures to obtain accurate information concerning her Ladyship's location. And yet, to break a man's will, to twist and contort his body and even his very soul, is not an undertaking that any gentleman can enjoy, no matter how hardened he may be to human suffering. Fuller consoled himself with the idea that he was only playing by the rules of the Orient as he had found them. Even this, however, was not much of a comfort.

Ryton-Park, on the other hand, was utterly untroubled by this part of his job. This was fortunate indeed, because the Raj had come to depend on his cruel arts for its very survival. Hastings, for example, found Ryton-Park abhorrent as an individual, but he still respected him as a technician, as a craftsman of sorts, who happened to work in the medium of pain. Governor Hastings' support for the commander of Fort William may have been

equivocal, therefore, but it was support nonetheless, and this was what counted.

Once in the chamber with Kanth, Fuller stepped to one side and leaned up against the wall in an obscure corner of the room. Ryton-Park at the same moment took up a position close to the pirate, only inches from his bound feet. Dr. Clark stood to the victim's right, blocking Kanth's view of the doorway, and Mr. Faisal, a tiny, black-eyed man in Persian dress, stood to his left, so as to access the implements on the smaller table with ease.

As each of these men took up their positions, Kanth stared unblinkingly at the ceiling, saying nothing. Finally, when everyone was clearly ready, Ryton-Park made a few brief remarks in an even and professional tone. "You are aware, Sir, of why you have been brought here. The abduction of Lady Emily is an outrage committed against the Government of this territory, and the law requires you to disclose any useful information that you may possess so that this evil deed may be punished and her Ladyship rescued. You are also aware, or at least you will be shortly, that any failure to comply with your lawful duty will produce unfortunate consequences. Since you are a pirate, and therefore a rogue, I trust that you have already understood my meaning."

Here Ryton-Park paused. It was his practice on occasions like these to demonstrate the sincerity of his threats even before the victim had been given an opportunity to confess what he knew. This method had proved, after long experience, to be the most efficient means of gaining full cooperation. Ryton-Park therefore nodded now to Mr. Faisal, indicating that the regular procedure should be followed.

With astonishing swiftness, Faisal took hold of one of the cruder instruments on his little table, a cleaver, and in a sweeping motion he cut downward through the air in the direction of Kanth's left hand. The impact of the knife was extremely precise, severing the pirate's left pinky finger right above the knuckles. The detached finger immediately flew off and landed somewhere on the floor. Kanth let out a short, sharp cry, but then he resumed his fixed gaze at the ceiling, giving no further indication of pain or even of concern, except for several large beads of sweat that appeared on his brow. Kanth clearly was a hard man. Ryton-Park was impressed, but, truth be told, he enjoyed a challenge.

After this physical demonstration of his power over Kanth, Colonel Ryton-Park resumed his interrogation. "Now tell us," he asked calmly, "what is the location and situation of Lady Emily? Do not omit any detail, or I promise you will suffer further agony." Everyone was now completely silent, waiting for some response from the pirate. Fuller and Ryton-Park both trained their eyes on Mr. Kanth's face, which by now was drenched in sweat.

When it became clear by his silence that Kanth had no intention of giving in this easily, Ryton-Park nodded to Dr. Clark, who then switched positions with Faisal. Kanth winced as the Doctor put his hand into his pocket to retrieve something, but it was only a roll of gauze, and within perhaps a minute Dr. Clark had effectively bandaged the wound on the pirate's left hand. When he was done, Faisal and Dr. Clark switched positions yet again.

Before Ryton-Park could order Faisal to resume his work, however, Colonel Fuller all of a sudden moved away from the wall and stood right next to Kanth's head. Fuller then bent down and began to speak

softly in the pirate's ear. Kanth, alarmed, momentarily looked Fuller directly in the eye. "Look," the Colonel said earnestly, "you've already proven to everyone here that you're very brave, so there's no reason to resist any further. No one will think any less of you if you give in now. For the love of God, tell us where she is and all this will be over, I promise you!"

After he had made this entreaty, Fuller remained crouched over Kanth for several seconds, waiting for some kind of reply. Ryton-Park wondered for a moment if this little speech was a ploy on Fuller's part to gain the victim's confidence. It did not matter, though, because Kanth soon trained his eyes once more on the ceiling. He still refused to acknowledge his captors. At last Fuller straightened up and walked back to his corner. He took a deep breath and shrugged, saying to Ryton-Park, "We don't have time to play games with this man. Do what you have to, but make it quick."

It was true that time was short. As Mr. Kanth was being interrogated, Lieutenants Faulk and Maxwell were overseeing the loading of two large ships with the provisions and supplies that the mission to Ceylon would require. Neelan, for his part, was searching everywhere in Calcutta for the best native warriors that money could buy. The rescue party would need to leave early the next morning in order to reach Lady Emily before Karikalan became aware that the ransom had not been paid.

Under these circumstances, Ryton-Park was forced to forgo any slow and steady escalation in the severity of the tortures he inflicted on Mr. Kanth. This was regrettable, at least in Ryton-Park's estimation, since the charm of the procedure usually consisted in its incremental nature. In any case, the commander of Fort William now took a long look at Kanth. He needed to gauge just what measures would be required to break the man's will to resist. He was, by now, uncommonly good at doing so. At long last, he turned towards Faisal and issued a brief command: "The mouth."

For an instant, Kanth looked away from the ceiling and directly at Ryton-Park. He was clearly afraid, but also confused. As a pirate, Kanth was quite familiar with most of the pressure points and loci of pain on the human body. Generally speaking, the extremities and the genitals bore the brunt of the torturer's attention, both because of the susceptibility of these areas to pain and because of their relative expendability. On the other hand, Kanth had never heard of the mouth being a focus for torture. It seemed absurd, since how could a man speak to reveal his secrets once his mouth was damaged or destroyed? But Kanth was an amateur, so it was no surprise that he would be unfamiliar with finer methods such as these, informed by the latest advances in European medical science. As far as Ryton-Park was concerned, the mouth was nothing less than the *pièce de resistance* of the torturer's art – the pot of gold at the end of every interrogation that guaranteed favorable results.

Ryton-Park now allowed Mr. Faisal to do his grizzly work on Kanth for some time before the pirate was given any additional opportunity to confess the information which Fuller sought. Kanth's shrieks and cries reverberated through every level of the dungeon for a full fifteen minutes, in fact, causing all the other prisoners to become greatly agitated. Eventually Faisal finished his work and withdrew himself to a discrete corner of the room, diagonally opposite from Colonel Fuller. By this time, several of Kanth's bloody teeth lay on the floor, and Faisal crunched them underfoot as he moved. Ryton-Park then ordered the two guards outside to enter the

chamber and untie Mr. Kanth. Once this was done, the guards were ordered to remain in the room in case the pirate tried to attack his interrogators, but actually Kanth was by now so physically and mentally exhausted that it never even occurred to him to resist. Ryton-Park had succeeded in one important respect: Kanth's fear of Karikalan was a distant memory. All the pirate wanted now was for the pain to stop.

At length the two guards managed to prop Kanth up on the table, where he assumed a cross-legged sitting position. The pirate was trying to control the bleeding from his lips and gums by applying pressure to about a dozen or so small wounds with his hands, but unfortunately his injuries were much too numerous and severe for this to work. It was only a few seconds after he had sat up that Kanth's whole neck and chest were covered in blood. Dr. Clark had received no signal from Colonel Ryton-Park, however, so medical assistance was not offered as yet.

For a moment, Kanth was allowed to sit in place, blubbering softly while his wounds slowly clotted and he regained some semblance of composure. After a while, his breathing became more regular and the tears ceased to flow down his fat cheeks. Colonel Fuller now stepped forward and stood beside Ryton-Park. From his coat pocket he pulled out several papers, one of which was a detailed map of the western area of Ceylon. He placed the map on the table directly in front of Kanth, taking care to avoid the pool of blood which had collected near the pirate's feet.

Fuller then decided to put Kanth's honesty to the test with his first question. He knew from his interrogation of the sailors hired by Kanth that their ship had left from the Ceylonese port of Jaffna, and so his first query, logically enough, was, "Point to where you embarked on your voyage with the sloop and its crew." Now the pirate answered right away. "Here," Kanth said, pointing with a shaky finger at the correct location, and recoiling when he realized that the map was now stained with his blood. "I see," replied Fuller, satisfied. "And in what part of the island does your clan of pirates make its home?" "Here," Kanth replied again, pointing this time to the location of an obscure mountain valley in western Ceylon. Colonel Fuller was pleased with this answer as well, so he now pulled out yet another map, which detailed the northwestern part of the island more closely. He then asked the pirate point blank, "Where will we find Lady Emily?"

For a moment Kanth hesitated, looking up forlornly at Fuller's face. The Colonel was staring right at him, intently focused on whatever he said next. Kanth then looked over at Ryton-Park, who was just as obviously hoping that he would refuse to answer, and that his pain could be savored for the rest of the evening.

Without further delay, Mr. Kanth immediately began a long speech that divulged the precise location of all the pirate encampments in the valley. He also gave his best guess as to which encampment would be chosen to hold Lady Emily. Although he was not positive, he seemed to incline to the view that she would be found in a jungle stockade located not far from the coast. Fuller was visibly relieved, because his worst fear all along had been that Lady Emily was already dead. That would have explained Karikalan's rather paltry ransom demand perfectly, but of course Fuller had not wanted to raise this possibility with Hastings. Now, to find out that the girl was alive and nominally well was a huge stroke of luck.

Fuller next asked about the western coast of the island, and about how one might traverse the thick

jungle which lay between the barren beaches and the pirate strongholds. Here Kanth could not enlighten him, however, because he had never taken that route, nor did he know of anyone who had. The easiest way to reach the valley was by the river that ran through it towards the sea, but Colonel Fuller was intent on learning of an alternative. Fuller was naturally aware that sailing straight up a well-traveled river into the heart of Karikalan's pirate empire would be suicide. Sadly, though, Kanth was in no position to oblige the Colonel with the information he sought.

Predictably, Kanth's ignorance was interpreted as defiance by Colonel Ryton-Park, and, because of the importance of the intelligence in question, Fuller regretfully agreed that Mr. Faisal should resume his work. Two hours later, it was clear that Kanth had been genuinely unaware of any alternate route to the valley where Karikalan's pirate empire lay. Unfortunately, by this time the pirate had bled to death, and the interrogation was therefore concluded.

Ryton-Park was most satisfied. That was one more native who had been cast into Hell, the Blackest Hole of them all…