

The Vishnu Emerald

by Jerry Severs Perry

Cliff stared while the red-faced man struck and struck again.



From New York to the pleasure-houses of Calcutta, Cliff Downey follows the lure of a mysterious girl and a glittering green gem.

STIFLING midday heat lay heavily upon Calcutta. It shimmered and danced upon the pavements like something tangible, almost as though it could be sliced with a knife.

A battered taxi swerved into fashionable Lower Circular Drive. It drew up before the ornate entrance to an apartment building. A barefoot, bearded Sikh chauffeur slipped from behind the wheel, his calloused soles seemingly impervious to the heat of the scorching sidewalk. He opened the auto's door.

"This is the address, sahib," he

announced. He opened the cab's door.

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Cliff Downey, ace operative of the Consolidated Detective Agency of Chicago, U. S. A., emerged from the taxi. He handed a five-rupee note to the turbaned chauffeur. Then he removed the pith helmet from his flaming red hair, mopped his forehead, and strode into the apartment-house.

The lower corridor was hot, silent, deserted. It was Calcutta's sweltering summer season, when most Europeans went up to Darjeeling in the cooler hill country, to escape

the stifling city heat. Hence most of the apartments in the building were temporarily vacant; the place seemed as lifeless as a tomb.

There was a broad, carpeted staircase at the far end of the hall. It led upward toward the second floor. Downey ascended. And as he reached the top of the stairs he heard the sound of a sudden, muffled shot.

It came from behind a closed door at his right. Downey hesitated. Then, instinctively, he sprang toward the door through which the sharp report had emanated. His eyes opened wide. On the door, lettered in embossed figures, were the numerals "205"—and Apartment 205 was the one Cliff Downey was seeking; the apartment of Roger Burnleigh-Jones!

In swift review, Downey's mind raced back over the events that had brought him here.

FOUR weeks before, his chief had summoned him into the Consolidated offices in Chicago and entrusted him with a mission. Old man Vandevort, the Chicago multimillionaire jewel-collector, had arranged to purchase a certain valuable emerald from a man named Roger Burnleigh-Jones in Calcutta. And because Cliff Downey had once recovered some jewels that had been stolen from Vandevort, the multi-millionaire placed implicit trust in the red-haired Consolidated operative; had commissioned Downey to journey to India, there to consummate purchase of the emerald.

In Cliff Downey's pocket now reposed Vandevort's check in payment for the jewel. He was find Burnleigh-Jones, hand him the check, take the emerald and convey it back to Chicago.

All this raced through Downey's mind in the twinkling of an eye as he leaped for the closed door of Apartment 205. His hand went to the knob. Then, from the other side of the

door came a woman's scream—shrill, startled, terrified. He slashed gratingly through the hardwood portal and impinged against Cliff Downey's eardrum like a rasp on rough steel.

The detective's hard right fist plunged beneath his coat, curled about the butt of an automatic in a shoulder-holster. His left hand grasped at the door-knob.

Abruptly, the door was jerked open from within. The unexpected suddenness of it sent Cliff Downey off-balance. The door opened. Someone ran blindly out of the apartment.

It was a woman—a girl. She collided with Cliff Downey. Her hard, thrusting breasts flattened against his chest through her light pink frock. He caught a brief glimpse of wide, horrified blue eyes in a white, agonized face. Then like a flash she was past him, racing toward the stairs.

He had had no chance to study her piquant features. For an instant she had been close to him—thrillingly close. He had felt the firmness of her breasts against his body; had smelled the faint perfume of her. Then she was gone. Her lithe legs carried her away from him desperately. Her slender, supple figure swayed as she ran. She gained the top of the staircase and went plunging down toward the lower floor.

For a split-second Downey contemplated pursuit. Then he shook his head. She had too much start on him. He turned and entered Apartment 205. He closed the door after him.

He found himself in a cool, luxurious living-room. Heavy drapes shut out the burning heat of the sun that beat against the windows. The room was clothed in somber shadows.

Cliff Downey tensed. "Good God!" he breathed.

There was a dead man on the thick carpet in the center of the room!

DOWNNEY'S eyes grew hard. He had come to effect a purchase—and instead, he had stumbled upon a murder!

He leaped toward the sprawled body on the floor. He knelt beside it. There was no need to feel for pulse or heart-beat. The man's eyes stared horribly, sightlessly at the ceiling, glassy and death-dimmed. In the middle of his forehead there was a blue hole from which trickled a thin red stream of blood.

Something glistened on the dead man's shirt beneath his pongee coat. Downey lifted the coat's lapel—and stared at the gold-and-silver badge of a detective-inspector of the British India Police!

The American's eyes glittered. He launched himself headlong at a heavily-draped window. He snatched the thick curtains aside; stared down upon the street below.

A car was just darting away from the curb. It was the ancient taxi in which Cliff Downey had come to the apartment-house. Downey saw the bearded Sikh chauffeur slam into high gear and lurch the vehicle forward. Inside the taxi, Downey caught a fleeting glimpse of a light pink frock—recognized it as the dress worn by the girl who had screamed and run past him out of Apartment 205!

There was no chance to intercept the cab. Downey's swiftly-accurate eyes focused on the car's license-plate. He scanned the dark-brown numerals, engraving them on his brain. He lowered the drape back over the windows.

He approached the closed front door of the apartment. No sound came from the outer corridor. Probably all the building's tenants were away for the summer; hence, no inquisitive neighbors had intruded at the sound of the muffled shot and the girl's high-pitched scream of terror.

Downey turned. He strode out of the living-room, into the adjoining chamber. It was empty. He went swiftly from room to

room. There was no other living person in the apartment. He went back toward the living-room, in which lay the body of the murdered man.

He reached the door. And then his hairy right fist plunged toward his automatic. *Someone was moving around in the room where Downey had left the body!*

The automatic flashed out of its shoulder-holster. The red-haired detective stepped silently into the living-room. "Okay—whoever you are! *Up with your hands!*

"You would commit a second murder, *sahib?*" a quiet voice spoke.

Downey stared at a middle-aged Hindu clad in a loosely-draped white *dhoti*. The man's eyes were calm, impassive. They met Downey's hard gaze without flinching.

"Who are you?" the American crackled. "Where did you come from! What are you doing here?"

The native bowed coolly. "I am Garnath Dhama, *sahib*. I came here to see my friend, *Sahib* Burnleigh-Jones. Instead of finding him here in his apartment, I discover you—a stranger—with an automatic in your hand and the body of a dead man on the floor!" His English was impeccable, without trace of accent; he spoke in the cultivated, cultured voice of the highly-educated Brahmin.

Cliff Downey's lips became a thin line, "Yes?" His tone became dangerously silky. "How do I know you haven't been hiding here in this apartment all the time! How do I know you didn't kill this man yourself!"

Garnath Dhama smiled quietly. "I am a Hindu of the Brahmin caste, *sahib*—a worshiper of Vishnu. My religion is one of passivity—not violence." He indicated the yellow caste-mark on his brown forehead. "It is against the tenets of my faith to take human life—or any other. You are evidently a stranger to India, or you would not even suspect me of this crime." He indicated the

body on the floor.

Downey flushed darkly. "In my business, one suspects everybody!"

"Your business, *sahib*?"

"I'm a detective—American. I came here to see Roger Burnleigh-Jones on important business. As I reached the door of this apartment I heard a shot. The door opened. A woman ran out. She got away in a taxi. I entered the apartment and found ... this!" He pointed to the dead man.



He caught a brief glance of horrified eyes; then like a flash she was past him.

GARNATH DHAMI betrayed no sign of emotion. His cool, brown eyes swept over the supine form and death-stiffened features of the man on the carpet. "Are you aware that this is a British policeman, *sahib*?" he queried quietly.

Downey nodded brusquely. "I found that out. There'll be hell to pay over this!"

"You are quite right. And you, *sahib*, may be the one to pay it"

"What do you mean?" Downey barked savagely.

"I mean that if the police discover you here, you will be suspected of the murder."

Downey stared at the Hindi "See here—do you think I killed this man?"

Garnath Dhama shook his head slowly. "No *sahib*, I do not. And because I believe you to be innocent, I suggest that you place yourself in my hands. Permit me to take you to a safe place, where you will not become involved in the investigation of this man's death. Later in the evening, perhaps I can find *Sahib* Burnleigh-Jones and bring him to you. Then you may transact your business with him and depart from Calcutta in peace."

Downey nodded. "Decent of you. Let's get going."

He followed the Brahmin out of the apartment. He closed the door behind him. The upper corridor was still deserted; there was nobody in evidence anywhere. Together the two men descended the stairs to the lower floor. They went out into the fierce, furnace-like sunshine.

Garnath Dhama turned to the American. "Let us proceed to the end of Lower Circular Drive, *sahib*. There we will get a taxi."

Downey grunted assent. They walked three blocks. A taxi rattled past them. The American whistled to the turbaned Sikh chauffeur. The cab screeched to a halt. Downey and the Hindu climbed inside. "675 Lal Bazaar, in the native section," Garnath Dhama spoke to the driver in Hindustani.

The Sikh nodded. The cab darted into the stream of traffic on Hastings Street, turned into Strand Road and headed for the pontoon bridge across the Hooghly River. It threaded its way past slow-moving ox-carts and *gharris*; brushed close to the teeming native pedestrians on the narrow sidewalks—water-carriers with goatskin bags over their bare

brown shoulders, pink-turbaned purveyors of greasy sweets, tall Tibetans in skull-caps, chattering *Bengali* with lips dyed red from the chewing of *betel*-nut.

At last the taxi swung into Lal Bazaar and drew up before a house that set back from the sidewalk. Downey and the Brahmin got out; the American handed the chauffeur a fistful of change.

Garnath Dhama opened the front door of his house. He bowed politely. "If you will enter my dwelling, *sahib*—?"

Cliff Downey entered.

The Hindu clapped his hands. A native servant appeared. He addressed the menial in Hindustani. Then he turned to Downey. "I have bidden my *khidmatgar* bring you *chota hazri*—a luncheon of tea and bananas. I trust you will make yourself comfortable in my house. You will forgive me if I leave you here?"

"Where are you going?" Downey's tone was suspicious.

The Brahmin smiled. "I go to seek *Sahib* Burnleigh-Jones for you."

Downey grunted. "I hope you find him."

Garnath Dhama departed smilingly.

SWIFT Indian dusk was falling. Cliff Downey paced the floor of the main room in Garnath Dhama's house. He had been waiting for hours.

Suddenly he heard a commotion at the front door. He tensed. The door burst open. A man entered—a white man, middle-aged, red faced, grim-jawed. Behind him he dragged a wide-eyed, frightened native girl.

Downey stared. The girl was young—not over seventeen or eighteen; and despite her dark skin she was arrestingly lovely. Her black hair was combed sleekly back from her high forehead. Her dark eyes were wide, terror-stricken. Her dress had been torn at the shoulder; it hung in tatters about her waist,

revealing one firm, jutting breast. She was panting, struggling to release herself from her captor's grasp.

The man dragged her inside the house, slammed the door. Then he flung the girl roughly into one corner. She collapsed in a heap on the floor, cowering.

Downey leaped forward. "Here, now—!" he barked. "What—?"

The red-faced man stared at him. His eyes narrowed. "Are you the American detective who was looking for me?" his voice was thin, rasping.

Cliff Downey stopped in his tracks. "Are you Burnleigh-Jones?"

"Yes."

"I'm Cliff Downey. I'm representing Vandevort of Chicago. I have his check in my pocket for the emerald you agreed to sell to him." Roger Burnleigh-Jones laughed shortly, mirthlessly. "Garnath Dhama told me I'd find you here. And you may as well know the truth. I haven't got the emerald."

"You—haven't got it? You mean you've sold it to someone else?"

Burnleigh-Jones' face reddened. "No. I mean it was stolen from me—today!"

"Stolen?"

"Yes, stolen—by my private secretary, a girl named Louise LeBaron! She not only stole the emerald—she murdered a man in my apartment and made her escape! And now the police are looking for me—to accuse me of the killing!" Burnleigh-Jones turned toward the native girl in the corner. "Get up!" he snarled savagely, bitterly.

Downey said, "Wait a minute. Who is this girl? What has she to do with it?"

"Plenty!" the red-faced man barked. "She's Louise LeBaron's personal servant. I think she knows where the LeBaron woman is hiding! And if she knows, I intend to get the information out of her!" He yanked the native girl to her feet. She stood before him, trembling.

“Where is your *memsahib*—where is Miss LeBaron?” Burnleigh-Jones’ voice was vindictive, savage.

“I—I do not know, *sahib*.”

The red-faced man raised his palm. He smacked it across the native girl’s cheek. His fingers left red weals on her dark skin. “You liar!” he shouted. “Tell me where she’s hiding! Tell me, or I’ll—” His hands went out, caught at her bare breast. His thick fingers raked across the swelling flesh of her bosom.

The girl moaned with pain. She swayed, beat at his hands, tried to get away. He raised his palm and smacked her again across the face. “Where is your mistress? Where is Louise LeBaron? Tell me, you brown-skinned pig, before I squeeze blood out of you!”

“I—I do not know, *sahib!*” The girl’s voice rose into a wail of pain and terror.

Burnleigh-Jones’s hands went from her bare breasts to her rounded throat. His fingers closed about her neck.

CLIFF DOWNEY’S hard hands clapped down on the man’s shoulders. He jerked backward. Burnleigh-Jones toppled off-balance. He whirled on the American. “Keep your dirty hands off me!” he snarled.

Downey grinned humorlessly. “Take it easy, my friend. Maybe this girl is lying; but you won’t get anything out of her that way.”

“Then I’ll kill the damn’ nigger!”

“No you won’t.” Downey drew Burnleigh-Jones to a far corner of the room. “Listen,” he whispered. “I think I may be able to find your secretary for you. After all, I’m a detective. My business is finding people.”

The man stared at him. “What do you mean!”

“I mean I think I’ve got a clue as to where she is. I was in the corridor of your apartment-house today when she ran out.”

“Yes? What of it?”

“I saw her get into a taxi. And I know the license-number of that cab. Perhaps I can persuade the driver to tell me where he took her. Then we can get the police on her trail—”

“No, no!” Burnleigh-Jones interposed hastily. “Not the police! Find her yourself! Find her—and there’ll be a nice fat piece of money for you, Downey!”

Cliff Downey grunted. “I don’t want your money. I came here to buy an emerald for a client of my employers. I intend to finish the transaction. For that reason—and that reason alone—I’ll find this Louise LeBaron! And if she’s got your emerald, I’ll get it!”

“And this girl—this servant?” Burnleigh-Jones glowered toward the native girl in the corner.

“Let her go.”

The red-faced man’s eyes narrowed. “Very well. I’m turning this whole thing over to you. See that you don’t fail!”

Downey walked over to the girl in the corner. Gently he raised the torn bodice of her cheap cotton dress, covering her shoulders. His hand brushed her bruised breast. Her liquid brown eyes looked at him appealingly. “Master—*Sahib*—what are you going to do with me?” she faltered.

“I’m going to let you go.” Downey took her to the door, opened it. The native girl ran out into the street.

Downey turned to Burnleigh-Jones. “Wait here for me. I’ll come back to this house when I get what I’m after.”

The red-faced man grunted. Cliff Downey went out.

He walked a long distance. Then he found a cab. He climbed into it, “Take me to the Howrah Station,” he told the driver.

The cab rattled and jounced over the cobbles of the native quarter. At last it entered upon the smoothly-paved roadway that led to the Howrah Station, Calcutta’s terminus for trains to and from western India. Swift gray

dusk had given way to star-studded night.

The cab drew up, finally, before the railroad station. Cliff Downey alighted, paid off his driver. There was a long string of cabs parked behind the terminal. He strolled along the nondescript line, scanning each license-plate.

He tensed. He stared at the last cab in the long line. It was the one he sought—the one whose license-number he had etched into his brain earlier that day, when he had watched it darting away from the curb in front of Burnleigh-Jones's apartment building! Its bearded Sikh chauffeur was dozing at the wheel.

Downey tapped the man on the shoulder. The native snapped to attention. "Yes, *sahib*?"

The American smiled. "Remember taking me to Lower Circular Drive at noon today?"

The Sikh looked at him. Then he nodded. "Yes, *Sahib*."

Remember taking a white *memsahib* away from that neighborhood after I left your cab?"

The bearded driver hesitated.

Downey produced a ten-rupee note. "Now do you remember?"

The Sikh reached for the bill. "Yes, *sahib*. I remember very clearly!"

Cliff Downey grinned. Taxi-drivers, he mused, were the same the world over! He fished in his pocket, withdrew another ten-rupee note. "If you will tell me where you took the *memsahib*, this, too, is yours."

The turbaned driver smiled through his bushy black beard. "I can take you to the house where I left her, *sahib*."

"Fine! Where is this house!"

"It is on Karaiya Road, *sahib*!" The Sikh winked waggishly. "Karaiya Road is a street of pleasure-houses, *sahib*."

"You mean—houses where women—?"

"Yes, *sahib*."

Downey thrust the folded money into the chauffeur's hand. "Take me there!" he commanded. He leaped into the cab.



Downey's hard hands clasped down on the man's shoulders. "Take it easy, my friend!" he gritted.

TEN minutes later the vehicle rattled to a stop before a house on a darkened, narrow street. Cliff Downey got out. "You're sure this is where you left her?" he queried the Sikh chauffeur.

"*Sahib*, she went into this very house."

Downey strode to the front door of the structure and punched the bell.

A slatternly Eurasian woman opened the door cautiously. She stared at Cliff Downey. "Well?" she demanded.

"You have—girls here?"

"Let's see your money!"

The red-haired detective thrust a note into her claw-like hand. The woman's scowl became a smile of welcome. "Come right in!" she whispered.

Downey followed her into a parlor. She looked at him. "You like young native girl—twelve, thirteen years old?"

He shook his head. "I want a white girl."

"Very nice white girls here. Blondes, brunettes—"

Downey thought swiftly. In his mind he pictured the girl who had rushed past him in the corridor of the apartment building on Lower Circular Drive. He had caught but a fleeting glimpse of her; but faintly he remembered that she had possessed fair, tawny hair. "Blonde!" he said sharply.

"Wait. I get 'em!" The Eurasian woman shuffled out of the parlor. In a moment she returned. Behind her appeared two women—blowsy, bleached-blonde, haggard creatures dull to every sense of decency. They were clad in frowsy chemises through which every detail of their unshapely bodies could be discerned ... both were the epitome of utter degradation.

Downey shook his head. "Bring in *all* your girls. I'll select the one I want."

The Eurasian woman grunted. She went into the dim, malodorous hallway and raised her voice in a shrill summons.

More girls began shambling into the parlor. There were tiny, virginal-looking native girls, melon-breasted and pathetically child-like. There were sodden white women, bleary with alcohol. There were dark-eyed half-castes, full-bosomed and flamboyant. All were clad in the scantiest of garb—hard-eyed, defiant, flaunting their femininity.

Downey's eyes scanned the group. Suddenly he tensed. Lurking in a corner, obviously attempting to evade his gaze—was the girl he sought!

Even through her make-up, He recognized her. He had had just a swift glimpse of her as she fled past him in the apartment on Lower Circular Drive; but somehow he would have known her anywhere, under any circumstances. Now her face was heavily rouged and powdered; her eyes dark with mascara, her lips thick with crimson paste.

He went toward her, pushing his way through the others. She shrank back from him, suddenly white-faced.

The American smiled into her wide blue eyes. "You're Louise LeBaron, aren't you?" he whispered. "You don't belong here!"

She gasped. Her firm breasts rose and fell swiftly behind her light chemise. "I—I don't know what you're talking about, I don't know any Louise LeBaron. Never heard of her!" The girl's voice strove to be harsh, coarse.

Downey grinned. "I see. Well, my mistake! Anyhow, let's go upstairs, eh?"

"I—I—" Suddenly her warmly-rounded shoulders sagged wearily. "Very well. Follow me," she muttered.

He followed her up a flight of creaking stairs, into a dimly-lighted and unutterably filthy bedroom. A cracked shade was pulled down over an open window. The air was hot, heavy, almost fetid.

DOWNEY closed the bedroom door. He faced the girl. "Listen, my dear. I think you're lying to me. I think you're Louise LeBaron. And I intend to find out."

"How?" she challenged him.

He smiled gravely. "If you are Louise LeBaron, you don't belong here. You won't like the idea of accepting the passion of the first man that comes along. If you're *not* Louise LeBaron, it won't make any difference to you!" And suddenly he leaped toward her, caught her in his arms.

She struggled faintly, uselessly. He picked her up, deposited her on the bed. His hands went to the low front of her chemise, ripped it from her cringing body. Her white, dome-like breasts swelled forward, naked and delectable. She cried out and tried to cover their crimson tips with her hands.

He pushed her arms away. His palm cupped her bosom, pressed it. He could feel the cherry-red apex thrusting into his hand. Suddenly a tingling thrill ran through his veins. His mouth descended toward her unwilling lips.

“Please—don’t!” she gasped faintly.

“Why not? I’ve paid for the privilege!” he gritted. He pressed her backward, forcing her red mouth open with his lips. His hand traveled downward along her thigh, past the hem of her chemise.

Abruptly the perfume of her hair assailed his nostrils. For the moment he forgot his purpose, his plan ... forgot everything except that the girl in his arms was the most delectable feminine creature he had seen in a long while. Her snowy breasts were taut against his chest; the warm skin of her thighs sent tingles running shock-like along his arms. His mouth descended from hers, wandered down the smooth, flawless white column of her throat, lingered there. He buried his face in the soft, resilient flesh....

She thrust him away from her. “Don’t!” she cried sharply, wailingly. “I—I can’t—let you ...”

He looked at her. “Why not?”

“B—because I’m not—not that—kind! I—I am Louise LeBaron!” As she cried out her confession, two things happened with startling, devastating suddenness. The cracked shade at the open window flew up. Downey leaped to his feet, whirled. And at the same instant, a closet-door flew open. A flashing, brown feminine figure threw itself into the little bedroom. Downey’s jaw dropped. It was the native girl—Louise LeBaron’s servant!

“*Memsahib—I*” the native girl cried frantically. Cliff Downey saw a dark, hooded face at the open window. Something glittering and metallic flashed through the air from outside. The little native girl threw herself into the path of its flashing trajectory—threw her body in front of the cringing form of Louise LeBaron. There was a sickening thud—a gasping cry—a gush of warm, wet blood...

Downey’s automatic leaped into his fist. He aimed at the light pulled the trigger. Then he fired four times at the face in the open window. As abrupt blackness descended over the little bedroom, Downey’s eye retained a last, camera-like picture of the scene before him—Louise LeBaron crouching on the bed; the dark, evil visage at the window, the flashing knife hurtling through the air—and a dagger buried hilt-deep in the bared breast of the little native servant girl!

He leaped for the bed. “Miss LeBaron—Louise!” he whispered tensely.

“Y—yes?”

“Get up! Get out of here! Quick!”

“But—but the girl—”

His hand went out. He touched warm, feminine flesh ... His hand encountered something wet, sticky...

“She got the knife straight through her heart!” he whispered savagely. “She’s dead. You can’t help her now. She gave her life to save yours! Come on—let’s get out of here!”

HE grabbed at Louise LeBaron’s bare arm in the darkness. He yanked her to her feet. She swayed against him. He felt her bare body quivering close to his; his arm encircled her waist, his palm touched her throbbing breast. From the alley below the open window he heard running footsteps...

He dragged the tawny-haired girl out of the bedroom, into the dark corridor, down the stairs. There was a girl in the parlor—a half-caste girl. She looked up curiously. She was wearing a yellow silken dress, whiskey-

stained and rumped. Downey's hand plunged into his pocket. He withdrew a fistful of silver. He flung it at the half-caste girl. "Off with that dress—quick!" he snarled.

The girl stared at him. Then she grinned. She whipped the yellow dress off over her head. Her ivory body was almost completely nude beneath it; her heavy breasts flaunted themselves arrogantly. But Cliff Downey had no eyes for them. He grabbed at the yellow dress. He thrust it at the trembling Louise LeBaron. "Put this on—quick!"

She slipped into it. He grasped her wrist. He went to the front door of the house, opened it cautiously. He looked out. His taxi was still parked at the curb; the Sikh chauffeur was nodding at the wheel. The street seemed deserted.

Downey leaped for the cab, the girl at his side. He thrust her into the machine, catapulted himself in after her. "Get going!" he roared at the native driver. The cab lurched ahead.

Cliff Downey turned to the girl beside him. "Did you kill that man in Burnleigh-Jones's apartment?" he barked. "Did you steal the emerald from Burnleigh-Jones!"

"No—no!" she wailed in sudden terror. "I didn't! I didn't! Burnleigh-Jones killed the man himself. The—the emerald was a stolen jewel. It was pried from the eye of a statue of Vishnu in one of the provincial Hindu temples. That's how Burnleigh-Jones got it. He was trying to sell it to some American. Then the British police authorities learned of the theft. Its loss might mean serious trouble among the natives—perhaps an up-rising. So the police were attempting to get it back.

"They traced it to Burnleigh-Jones—My employer. A detective-inspector came to Burnleigh-Jones' apartment today. He found the emerald—the emerald of Vishnu. He placed Burnleigh-Jones under arrest. And

then—Burnleigh-Jones shot him—before my eyes!"

The girl shuddered. Downey patted her shoulder gently; his hand crept downward toward her breast, "Yes! And then—?"

"Then—then Burnleigh-Jones turned the gun on me! I had witnessed the murder. He—he was going to kill me—to keep me from telling what I had seen. I—I screamed and ran out of the apartment. I got into a taxi. I came to—to the house on Karaiya Road. It was the only hiding-place I could think of. I thought nobody would ever look for a—a decent woman—in a place like ... that. I wanted to hide from Burnleigh-Jones. I—I was afraid he'd seek me out, kill me—"

Cliff Downey nodded his understanding. He leaned forward, addressed the Sikh chauffeur. "Drive to Government House!" he said tersely.

The cab lurched around a corner.

FIVE minutes later it drew up before an imposing, white marble structure. Downey opened the door of the car. He spoke rapidly, tensely to Louise LeBaron. "Go in—rouse an undersecretary. Tell your story. Then have 'em send some police to the house of Garnath Dhama, a Hindu who lives at 675 Lal Bazaar. He's a friend of Burnleigh-Jones. Sooner or later, Burnleigh-Jones will turn up at that address. When he does, they can grab him."

He grinned grimly. "He's probably got the Vishnu Emerald on him now—had it all the time he was talking to me earlier this evening! He told me you'd stolen it. That was his way of getting me to seek you and find you. He must have followed me to Karaiya Road—and when I found your hiding-place, he tried to kill you."

"And—and my little native servant—took the knife in her own breast—instead—"

Downey nodded. "That's about it. Now run along."

“But—but you? What are you going to do? Where are you going?”

“I’m going to 675 Lal Bazaar to find Garnath Dhama. There are some questions I want to ask him about his friend Burnleigh-Jones!”

The girl stared at him. “You—you’ll be careful? You won’t let them—hurt you?”

Cliff Downey’s jaw jutted. “I think I can take care of myself!” He climbed back into the cab barked an address at the Sikh driver. The taxi shot forward as Louise LeBaron ran up the steps of the Government House...

Cliff Downey alighted from the ramshackle cab a block away from Garnath Dhama’s residence on Lal Bazaar. He crept toward the darkened doorway of the house. He knocked.

The door opened. Garnath Dhama stared at him. His brown eyes widened slightly. “You—you have returned, *sahib!*”

Downey nodded brusquely. “Yes. I want to see Burnleigh-Jones. Is he here?”

“No, *sahib*. But I expect him to return shortly—” Abruptly the Brahmin tensed as a huge, hairy black spider dropped from a tenuous web-cord attached to the ceiling. He batted at the repulsive, wriggling thing, knocked its hairy body to the floor, stepped on it, crushed it with his sandaled foot. “Spiders—damn them—I hate them—!” he gritted.

Downey’s hand whipped beneath his coat, flashed out grasping the butt of his automatic. He trained its black muzzle against the other’s heart. “Stick ’em up, Garnath Dhama—or, to use your real name, *Roger Burnleigh-Jones!*”

“Wh—what—?”

“You heard me! You’re no Brahmin! Brahmins don’t kill any living thing—even spiders! I’m wise to you now, Burnleigh-Jones! You were in your apartment today when I broke in and found the body of the

man you’d killed. You hid in another room, slipped out of your clothes, donned grease-paint and a *dhoti*—then showed yourself and told me your name was Garnath Dhama! Pretty smooth, Burnleigh-Jones ... but not quite smooth enough. You’ll hang for killing that British detective-inspector!”

“Will I?” The man leaped forward. His fist crashed against Downey’s automatic, shoving it aside. There was a knife in his upraised hand. It flashed downward...

Downey saw the descending blade. He parried it. And then, from behind him, a shot barked—

A sudden red stain blotched the breast of Burnleigh-Jones’s white dhoti. The knife clattered from his hand. He clutched at the region of his heart; swayed, toppled, fell forward on his face. And from a secret pocket in his white, draped garment rolled a brilliant green stone, flashing with imprisoned, coruscating fire ... the Vishnu Emerald!

There was a hiss of steel, and the girl clasped her hand to her breast with a gasping cry.



CLIFF DOWNEY whirled—and stared into the grinning, pleasant features of a

pith-helmeted British police lieutenant, in whose hand was a smoking service revolver. Behind him were a squad of red-turbaned Indian policemen.

The police lieutenant spoke. "Nice work, Mr. Downey! And it would seem as though we just arrived in time, what? The young lady, Miss LeBaron, told her story at Government House—and we came on the double-quick." He looked down at the lifeless form of Roger Burnleigh-Jones, and smiled.

"Well, that saves a job for the hangman," he added casually.

Downey indicated the tremendous emerald on the floor. "What about that?"

The lieutenant picked up the flashing gem. "It goes back to the temple from which it was stolen."

Cliff Downey made a wry face. "I wonder," he mused, "what old man Vandevort will think of *that*?"