

"AMERICAN KING"

Episode 101

"THE WIDOW'S SON"

Written by

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In 1888, Rudyard Kipling published
"The Man Who Would Be King,"
a story that would become a classic.

Its protagonists were not a figment of imagination,
but based on a real man: Josiah Harlan,
an American adventurer who, in the 1830s,
ventured into the unforgiving landscape of Afghanistan
and crowned himself a king.

This is the untold story behind a literary legend.

FADE IN:

EXT. WALLED COMPOUND, LUDHIANA - EVENING

A pale moon. Cicadas trill.

Below this balmy evening sky, eucalyptus and banyan trees cast shadows across a pebbled walkway that leads to a walled compound. A pair of native soldiers man the arched gate, lit by flaming lanterns.

CAPTION: "LUDHIANA, BRITISH COLONIAL INDIA - 1826"

A silhouette steps into view; a man in Afghan robes and turban. He approaches cautiously, his eyes squint at the guards. They see him but ignore him.

A shrill whistle - like a birdsong. The trilling stops abruptly.

The man freezes. He watches the soldiers open the gate and melt away from their post.

The man listens, observes cautiously.

Then, as suddenly as it stopped, the cicadas resume their rhythmic mating call. The man resumes his approach.

AT THE ARCHED GATE

As he breaches the gate, an obese Afghan steps out of the shadows.

Dressed in lustrous robes, his long flowing silvery hair drapes his shoulders and is capped by a large turban. MULLAH SHAKUR is a powerful man within this secluded world. He speaks with a soft but high-pitched voice.

MULLAH SHAKUR
Mister Harlan.

It's our first good look at the visitor. Tall, fit, muscular, shrewd and confident, bordering on cocky, he is American JOSIAH HARLAN (27). He nods courteously.

HARLAN
I was told---

MULLAH SHAKUR
Shhh..

MULLAH SHAKUR raises his hand, then motions him to follow.

THE GARDENS

MULLAH SHAKUR leads HARLAN through paths lined with fruit trees, gurgling ornamental ponds and blooming flower beds.

They approach a large terrace walled with embroidered cloth. MULLAH SHAKUR motions HARLAN to stop and wait then disappears behind the cloth to the terrace.

HARLAN takes in the scenery, notices servants slipping through the shadows, glancing at him.

MULLAH SHAKUR reappears, invites HARLAN inside.

THE TERRACE

HARLAN enters to find an elevated banquette with an oversized armchair and a man around 50, stout and imposing with a long beard dyed jet black sitting comfortably in anticipation. He is the exiled Afghan king SHAH SHUJAH.

Dressed in a simple white tunic and dark silk pantaloons, he wears a large velvet cap adorned by a large diamond at the center. His stare is commanding and menacing, yet there's a sadness in his eyes.

MULLAH SHAKUR bows in deference.

MULLAH SHAKUR (CONT'D)

His majesty Padshah Sultan Shah
Shujah ul-Mulk of the Sadozai
dynasty. Leader of the faithful.
The one and only beloved Emir of
Afghanistan and supreme ruler of
Kabul.. Your Majesty, Mister
Harlan.

HARLAN straightens, offers a sturdy military salute.

HARLAN

Your Highness.

SHAH SHUJAH nods, grunts, unimpressed, drinks some wine.

SHAH SHUJAH

Salaam, Mister Harlan.

HARLAN
Peace to you, your Highness.

SHAH SHUJAH
Welcome to my home away from home.

HARLAN
It's my honor.

SHAH SHUJAH observes HARLAN carefully, then--

SHAH SHUJAH
I'm told you are from America.

HARLAN
I am.

SHAH SHUJAH
Yet you served with the British
East India Company, yes?

HARLAN
I did.

SHAH SHUJAH
And you fought for them in the war?

HARLAN
The Burmese war. Yes.

SHAH SHUJAH
You're no longer with the Company.

HARLAN
No, your Highness.

SHAH SHUJAH
My vizier informs me you have a
proposal I should consider.

HARLAN
Yes. You are the rightful king of
Afghanistan, your Highness. You
ruled for seven years until your
brother--

SHAH SHUJAH
Half-brother!

SHAH SHUJAH bounds to his feet, curdling at the thought. A short man, he paces, bitter thoughts rummaging through his head.

SHAH SHUJAH (CONT'D)

Mahmud Shah shares no blood with me. He stole my crown. I had to flee. Escape. Twice. And now, I am here in the hands of the British.

HARLAN

No rightful king should be exiled from his kingdom. That's why.. I want to put you back in the Bala Hisar. Back on the throne in Kabul.

SHAH SHUJAH chortles dismissively, then grunts, considers.

SHAH SHUJAH

You can do this? Give me back my kingdom?

HARLAN

I can.

SHAH SHUJAH

With British help, of course?

HARLAN

No, your highness. Without the British.

SHAH SHUJAH

It takes an army. Troops. Weapons. Munitions. Artillery. Canons. You have such an army?

HARLAN

No, your Highness. I have a better plan.

On HARLAN's determined and mischievous gaze--

CUT TO:

OPENING CREDITS:

EXT. PRIVATE GARDEN, GUANGZHOU - DAWN

An exotic garden with gurgling ponds, blooming flowers. The morning sun barely risen. A somber gathering of a half dozen men, some in military uniform.

CAPTION: "GUANGZHOU (CANTON), CHINA - TWO YEARS EARLIER"

HARLAN, two years younger, stares ahead, leaning slightly forward. He eyes LIEUTENANT ALEXANDER THOMPSON (31), a buff British East India Company officer with thick mutton chops, glaring back with a snarl.

A second EIC officer stands between them, drops a handkerchief.

The men raise their arms. THOMPSON fires--

The ball strikes HARLAN in the arm. He flinches.

THOMPSON

Blast!

HARLAN eyes THOMPSON. Pistol steady. He takes his time..

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

Well, come on then!

HARLAN's eyes squint, gauges his impatient adversary--

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

Shoot, ya bloody fool!

HARLAN bides his time as the Lieutenant grows agitated.

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

What are ya waiting for?

And as the Scot drops his arm, HARLAN shoots striking THOMPSON's hand, hurtling the pistol to the ground.

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

Fuck!

Blood gushes from his wrist. THOMPSON stares incredulously at HARLAN who calmly walks back to the table set up for the occasion as THOMPSON's SECOND and another man rush to the Lieutenant.

A third man, SAMUEL RUSSELL, an oafish American trader stares in disbelief, laughs.

RUSSELL

Holy shit! Did you..

HARLAN drops the pistol in the case.

HARLAN

I have to go..

HARLAN gathers his things as RUSSELL scurries after him.

THOMPSON is outraged.

THOMPSON
Running away, ya bloody coward?

As HARLAN hurries away with RUSSELL on his heels, he spins back.

HARLAN
You lost, Lieutenant! And I've a
ship to catch!

THOMPSON
If I ever lay eyes on you again,
God save you!

HARLAN smiles, waves and disappears with RUSSELL.

RUSSELL
Where the hell did you learn to
shoot like that?

EXT. THIRTEEN HONGS, GUANGZHOU - DAY

With a satchel and a wooden box underarm, HARLAN hurries through the expansive compound. RUSSELL tries to keep up. They dodge palanquins, Chinese sellers and Western traders congregating.

RUSSELL
Tell me you're coming back, Josiah.

HARLAN
Sam, I'm going home to get married.

RUSSELL
You said you wanted to be rich. A
captain of industry. This is the
place. This is the time.

HARLAN
I'm getting married.

RUSSELL grabs him by the arm, stopping to face him.

RUSSELL
Fine. Marry. Enjoy your time. Get
to.. you know.. And come back.

HARLAN
She's been waiting for me, Sam. Two
years. I can't do that to her.

He's off again.

They rush through the American Hong's Garden, past its oversized flag (1822).

HARLAN (CONT'D)

It's love, Sam. Love.. Maybe one day you'll experience it.

RUSSELL

Bullshit, Josiah. You're not a romantic.

EXT. DOCK, PEARL RIVER, THIRTEEN HONGS - DAY

They emerge at the river's edge. HARLAN hails a Chinese 'chop-boat' at the top of his lungs! RUSSELL presses him.

RUSSELL

I've got shipments coming in. From India. Premium "Bengal O"! We'll make a fortune. You'll be set for life! You can marry then.

HARLAN

I won't ferry opium up the Pearl river to Chinese smugglers in the dead of night.

RUSSELL

Who are you kidding, Josiah? You're a risk taker. Impulsive and drawn to danger. Look what you just did? A Duel! With a fucking--

HARLAN

I have to go..

The chop-boat approaches.

RUSSELL

Josiah--

HARLAN

Goodbye, Sam.

RUSSELL

I shouldn't be telling you this, but marriage is not for you!

HARLAN jumps on the boat, faces RUSSELL as the boat pulls away. He smiles. Broadly.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)
You'll be miserable! You're not the
type to be tied down.. Josiah! Jos--

But HARLAN is already too far out. He waves.

As it pulls away from shore, RUSSELL sighs heavily and waves back disappointed.

ON THE CHOP-BOAT

HARLAN gazes at the row of factories for the last time; the two-story limestone facades shine in the rising sun. There's an excitement in his manner. A giddy anticipation. A new chapter.

EXT. THE PEARL RIVER - DAY

From Guangzhou, we SOAR above the churning river. A few miles downstream is the island of Whampoa surrounded by a maze of masted European and American ships. Like hungry bees, Chinese chop-boats tend to them, loading and unloading cargo.

EXT. CHOP BOAT, PEARL RIVER - DAY

Squawking gulls above. HARLAN points to a sleek, three-masted American Clipper ship.

EXT. DECK, AMERICAN CLIPPER- DAY

CAPTAIN SMITHSFIELD (50s), a salty veteran, trim and proper, prepares to set sail as Harlan's chop-boat approaches.

SMITHSFIELD
LET GO THE HALYARD, SHEETS AND
BRACES!

The large, heavy sails unfurl. HARLAN runs up the ramp to the deck, clutching his wooden box.

SMITHSFIELD (CONT'D)
I was beginning to wonder if you'd
make it.

HARLAN
Wouldn't miss it for the world,
Captain.

HARLAN smiles. SMITHSFIELD grunts, pokes at a bloody hole in HARLAN's jacket, disapprovingly.

SMITHSFIELD
You're bleeding!

HARLAN smiles, then proudly--

HARLAN
An angry Scot with a chip on his
shoulder. And a quick trigger.

SMITHSFIELD
You keep pushing yourself, Josiah.
I swear you've a death wish.

HARLAN considers SMITHSFIELD's words.

SMITHSFIELD (CONT'D)
Your father would be--

HARLAN
Men will be men, eh Captain?

SMITHSFIELD
A man must know his limits. But you
won't be bound by them. It'll be
your undoing, Josiah.

HARLAN
My wild ways are coming to an end,
Captain. Once we get back..

SMITHSFIELD isn't convinced.

SMITHSFIELD
SHEET HOME THE SAIL! MAKE ALL!

As the command echoes down the deck, HARLAN watches the crew haul the ropes. The sails fill out.

HARLAN
To India. And then home!

SMITHSFIELD
We'll slip in and out of Calcutta
before the rains. If we're lucky!

EXT. HARBOR, CALCUTTA, INDIA - DAY

No such luck. Lightning, thunder and sheets of rain. British colonial Calcutta pounded by the monsoon. The American Clipper is anchored in the swollen muddy waters of the Hooghly River.

On the dock, HARLAN takes inventory of a shipment of wooden chests with HARI KUMAR TAGORE (22), an Indian trader. A dozen barefoot coolies stand by in blinding-white *dhotis* (loose pants) and *pagris* (turbans) against glistening pitch-black bodies.

TAGORE

I must warn you, Mister Harlan, the order is short. Only eighty chests.

HARLAN

That's less than half the order.

TAGORE

It's all I've got! The Company requisitioned the rest, you see. For the troops in Burma. Have you not heard? We are at war.

HARLAN

But this is Ramdulal's stock, not the Company's..?

TAGORE

The British East India Company does what the British East India Company wants, Mister Harlan. I'll make it up to you next time. If I can.

Disappointed, HARLAN corrects the paperwork.

HARLAN

There won't be a next time.

He signs, hands the paperwork to TAGORE.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

I'm getting married. Settling down.

TAGORE

Oh, wonderful news, Mister Harlan. I shall very much miss your visits.

TAGORE signs. HARLAN motions the coolies to load the chests.

TAGORE (CONT'D)

I'll be getting married myself. My parents tell me she is a most worthy young woman.

HARLAN

You haven't met her yet?

TAGORE

Not yet. She is from my village, you see. I'm a little nervous for they tell me she is as beautiful as a lotus blossom.

HARLAN

Then we're both lucky men!

TAGORE

Indeed, Mister Harlan. Indeed!

SMITHSFIELD emerges from nearby offices.

SMITHSFIELD

Mister Tagore..

TAGORE

Captain Smithsfield. Mister Harlan informs me of his most excellent news.

SMITHSFIELD

Oh, yes.. He'll be missed.

TAGORE

Sardar Ramdullal Dey extends his sincere apologies for not accommodating the entire shipment.

SMITHSFIELD

The war..

TAGORE

Oh, a most serious matter, Captain. Lord Amherst was so very distressed with the attacks on our Eastern border, he sent the entire Company army and navy to invade Burma.

HARLAN

Prices are bound to go up.

TAGORE

I am confident the British forces will dispatch the enemy in short order. And everything will return to how it was.

SMITHSFIELD

Difficult to imagine the Burmese can withstand the mighty British for long.

Awkward smiles all around.

TAGORE

I shall now bid you safe voyage, gentlemen. And congratulations again, Mister Harlan. I wish you a most happy and prosperous life.

HARLAN

God bless, Mister Tagore. And congratulations to you.

TAGORE nods happily then leaves, wobbling on a bad leg.

SMITHSFIELD

We set out as soon as there's a break in the rains.

HARLAN

Aye, aye, Captain.

The Captain retrieves a letter for HARLAN.

SMITHSFIELD

From your brother, I reckon.

SMITHSFIELD heads for the ship.

Concerned, HARLAN steps under a parapet, glances at the return address: 'Dr. R. Harlan, Philadelphia Almshouse'.

He rips it open, and as he absorbs the handwritten note, his expression drops.

A lightning strike. Thunder rumbles.

HARLAN straightens, the news is devastating. He crumples the letter, stares out into the void.

EXT. DECK, AMERICAN CLIPPER - DAY

Under the drizzling rain, coolies emerge from the ship's hold with HARLAN's baggage.

They trudge past HARLAN and SMITHSFIELD observing solemnly.

HARLAN

I'll never go back.

SMITHSFIELD

Never say never, Josiah. You've family there. How will you manage?

HARLAN

I've some money. I'll find work. There must be opportunities here.

SMITHSFIELD

Surely, Josiah, whatever happened can be remedied--

HARLAN

No.. No, it's unforgivable.

HARLAN retrieves a letter, hands it to SMITHSFIELD.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Give this to my father? These past four years you've taught me much, Captain. I'll be forever grateful.

SMITHSFIELD takes the letter. They shake hands.

SMITHSFIELD

Christ be with you.

HARLAN

And you.

HARLAN says his goodbyes to other crewmembers, including a SAILOR whose hand is bandaged.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

How's the hand?

SAILOR

Healing nicely. Thanks to you. Good luck to you, sir.

THE DOCK

HARLAN stands by his baggage, watches the ship's anchor rise. Standing alone in the misty rain, he wistfully eyes the American clipper he's called home slip away and vanish in the haze, SMITHSFIELD's bellowing commands fading as it does.

In the shadows nearby, a commonly dressed Scottish GRIFTER watches him intently, calmly.

Unsure of his next move, HARLAN turns to his small tower of luggage, topped by the Chinese wooden box. He glares at the box, grabs it and SMASHES it to the ground.

Amid the broken pieces, the inscription on the bottom of a vase partially visible: "To my beloved Eliz..."

The GRIFTER steps up, squats, picks up the piece.

GRIFTER

Ah.. Elizabeth, was it?

HARLAN glares back.

GRIFTER (CONT'D)

Yer fiancée, I reckon. She done break yer h'art, has she? Ye been gone for months, years. She got lonely, fell for the charms of another.

HARLAN

Fuck off!

The GRIFTER rises, shakes his head.

GRIFTER

Women..

He throws the piece in the river.

GRIFTER (CONT'D)

Ye can never trust 'em, eh? I seen it time after time, mate. Men, smart men, like you, work hard, doin' yer best, only to be betray'd in the end by the one ye love.

HARLAN's mood changes from anger to curiosity.

GRIFTER (CONT'D)
She needed a man closer to h'me.
Not some globe-trottin', seafarin'
adventurer..

He stares out at the water--

GRIFTER (CONT'D)
There. She's buried now. In the
muck and shit o' the mighty
Hooghly. Now you.. Ye get a new
life, eh, mate? No better place
than India. Ye have friends here,
have ya? Family?

HARLAN stares back, a subtle smirk escapes his lips. He knows
the game.

GRIFTER (CONT'D)
Yeah.. Tell ye what. I'll buy ye a
drink. We'll toast yer freedom.

HARLAN chortles.

GRIFTER (CONT'D)
Ye'll be lookin' for a place to
stay then, eh?

The GRIFTER reaches for HARLAN's luggage.

GRIFTER (CONT'D)
I'll give ye a hand..

HARLAN
Don't touch my things.

HARLAN steps up aggressively. The GRIFTER freezes.

GRIFTER
Mate. I'm offerin' ye a drink. I'll
get ye lodgings, food, beer.

HARLAN
I've seen your kind in every port.
You prey on the newly arrived. The
naïve. The vulnerable. Get them
drunk, take their money. I'm not
one of them, mate. So, fuck off!

HARLAN means business.

GRIFTER

You offend me, mate. I'm no *Rum-Johnny*. I sees a man whose hurtin', who needs help.

HARLAN

I don't want your help. Now, for the last time, fuck off.

Disappointed, the GRIFTER steps back with a smirk.

GRIFTER

Argh, a dagger to me heart. Ye're a cold, cold man. It's no wonder she left ya.

The GRIFTER walks away.

HARLAN stares at the departing man, contemplating his words. He then turns back to his baggage, spots a parked palanquin and bearers up the road.

HARLAN

HEY!

INT. PALANQUIN, STREETS OF CALCUTTA - DAY

HARLAN sits awkwardly in the narrow confines of the palanquin, jostled by the bearers movements. He excitedly watches the passing scenery of the Calcutta streets.

EXT. STREETS, CALCUTTA - DAY

A slight drizzle continues. The palanquin makes its way down the street, others carry the baggage.

INT. ROOM, CLIVE HOUSE, CALCUTTA - DAY

A boarding house room; small, cramped, but practical. A coolie stacks HARLAN's luggage in a corner.

HARLAN opens a window, fresh air blows in. The BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER, a middle-aged, slightly disheveled Brit with a raspy voice approaches.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER

Here's the key. If you need to retrieve any of your belongings in the godown, let me know.

HARLAN nods, takes the key.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER (CONT'D)
First time in Kolkotta, is it?

HARLAN
I usually stay aboard ship.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER
Ah..

HARLAN retrieves some coins, hesitates--

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER (CONT'D)
For the baggage handler, half a
Sicca Rupee. It's more than enough.
Uhm, eight Annas.

HARLAN hands coins to the coolie who bows and leaves. He then
hands the rest to the BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER (CONT'D)
Thank you, sir. It's not often
we've Americans stay with us.

HARLAN
I need to exchange money.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER
Course. There's the Bank of Bengal
off King's Bench and the Bank of
Hindoostan at Mission Row. Both
about a five minute walk. Might I
suggest though, sir, the Bank of
Hindoostan. Better rates.

HARLAN
Mission Row.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER
Yes, sir.. You'll be alright, then?

HARLAN shakes his head.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER (CONT'D)
Wouldn't keep that window open at
night, sir. It's not just the rain,
but come morning, mosquitoes.
They'll eat ya alive they will.

HARLAN
Right.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER
Welcome to India then.

The BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER leaves, closing the door behind him. HARLAN glances around the room. This is it. His new life.

He retrieves his brother's letter from a pocket, uncrumples it and reads it again. Smudged ink from drops of rain. He breathes heavily, then folds it neatly and stores it in his luggage.

A crack of thunder. Rain hits the window pane. HARLAN rushes over, shuts the window firmly! He glances at the street below, many white European men nattily dressed scurrying while dark-skinned locals go about their chores.

MINUTES LATER

HARLAN undresses, removes his shirt, revealing a toned physique. He unwraps the slightly bloody bandage from his arm, examines the healing wound from the duel. He's pleased with the progress.

EXT. FORT WILLIAM, CALCUTTA - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

A flash of lightning. Dark foreboding skies. The soaked expanse of the massive Fort William and Esplanade under incessant rains. Masted ships line up the Hooghly River, rising out of a heavy haze. Low rumbling thunder.

INT. TRADING OFFICES - DAY

A large open area with rows of desks. A feverishly active Banian trading agency.

HARLAN enters. The only white man and an object of curiosity with the bustling staff. He stops a clerk who points to TAGORE at a desk.

As HARLAN approaches, TAGORE beams at the sight of him and rises to meet him.

TAGORE
Mister Harlan! I thought I saw a
ghost, but no, it is you.

HARLAN
I decided to stay in India.

TAGORE is mystified.

TAGORE

Have you now. For how long?

HARLAN

As long as she'll have me.

TAGORE

Oh, Mister Harlan, it pleases me very much.. But your marriage.? She will come to join you?

HARLAN

No. No marriage. I broke it off.

TAGORE

But surely, Mister Harlan, you want to share your life with someone. Have children.

HARLAN

Maybe one day..

TAGORE

Perhaps.. Perhaps an Indian bride then, yes?

HARLAN smiles broadly.

HARLAN

Only God knows for sure, Mister Tagore. In the meantime.. I'm in need of work.

TAGORE

You left everything?

HARLAN

Everything.

TAGORE

How very brave.

HARLAN

Very brave or very foolish.

TAGORE

There are things we cannot explain that the universe knows for certain. You are guided, Mister Harlan, by a higher power. That I am sure of.

HARLAN
I believe that too.

TAGORE
But that is not a Christian belief.

HARLAN
No..

TAGORE
Then perhaps..you are a little like us.

HARLAN
Yes, perhaps.. I have a request. A favor really.

TAGORE
A favor? From me? Yes, of course, anything. But.. Please.. Let us speak in privacy.

TAGORE motions HARLAN to..

A SMALL OFFICE

Stacks of files and papers. Windows give out on the floor. They enter. TAGORE closes the door.

TAGORE (CONT'D)
So, tell me, what is this favor I may do for you?

HARLAN
I'd like an introduction to Ramdulal Dey.

The request hits TAGORE. Surprise and concern.

TAGORE
Sardar Ramdullal Dey? You.. You wish to work with us?

HARLAN
I do.

TAGORE calculates the ramifications of such an arrangement. It's not a good one. But he forces a smile, covering.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
The sooner, the better.

TAGORE

Of course.. But Ramdulal Dey, he's our master! The greatest of masters! He's like a king!

HARLAN

Might as well start at the top.

TAGORE

But are you not fearful of such a powerful man?

HARLAN

He's a man just like you and me.

TAGORE

Yes, of course, but..

HARLAN

It's not about the power he wields, Mister Tagore, I'm offering to help him expand his power.

TAGORE

Oh, Mister Harlan, you think like no other.

HARLAN

To be like powerful men, you must think like them.

TAGORE

Ah, so you want to be a powerful man. You can do such things in America?

HARLAN

It's expected of you. My father certainly expects it from me. And from all my brothers.

TAGORE

In India, for people like me, we have no such possibilities. We have very strict rules, you see. And they must be observed, quite judiciously.

HARLAN

The caste system.

TAGORE

I am but a lowly *Shoodra*, the lowest rank of Varna.

HARLAN

But you're smart and educated.

TAGORE

That is not the point, you see. My duty is to serve. I can never dream of such lofty ambitions. It is well beyond my station.

HARLAN

Wasn't Ramdullal himself a *Shoodra*?

TAGORE

Yes. But he was also very lucky. And me.. I am not so fortunate.

HARLAN nods, considers, then--

HARLAN

I was taught at a young age, that one has to make his own luck.

TAGORE

You are filled with much wisdom, Mister Harlan.. I will do my utmost to arrange a meeting for you with Sardar Dey.

HARLAN

I appreciate your friendship.

TAGORE

As I, yours.

HARLAN

I'm staying at the Clive House.

TAGORE

I will send message as soon as I hear back.

HARLAN

Thank you.

HARLAN leaves. TAGORE watches him, concerned.

TAGORE returns to his desk. A fellow INDIAN AGENT accosts him. They speak in Sanskrit.

INDIAN AGENT

You're making friends with whitey now?

TAGORE

He wants to meet Sardar Dey. Come and work here.

INDIAN AGENT

(concerned)

Here? With us? It cannot be. Sardar Dey will never break his oath.

TAGORE sighs, grabs his overcoat.

INDIAN AGENT (CONT'D)

What are you going to do?

TAGORE

I'll try to arrange it.

INDIAN AGENT

For this white man? What will you get for it, eh? I tell you, nothing but grief.

TAGORE

He is my friend.

INDIAN AGENT

These people are not our friends. They turn on us faster than a pye-dog.

TAGORE

I know him. He's different. He's a good man.

INDIAN AGENT

You're too naïve, Hari. I'm telling you, keep your distance.

TAGORE considers for a moment, then rushes out.

EXT. BEADON STREET, CALCUTTA - DAY

It's pouring. Street is partially flooded. TAGORE rounds a corner, stops. He stares at the row of brightly colored Indian-gothic buildings owned by wealthy Banians. He takes a deep breath, zeroes in on one painted red then darts across the street to the entrance.

INT. HARMONIC TAVERN - EVENING

Upscale British pub atmosphere; dark wood with an Indian twist. HARLAN sits at a table, alone. He peruses the local papers.

A British SERVER deposits his meal.

SERVER
Your kedgerree.

Then he pours some wine.

SERVER (CONT'D)
Anything else, sir?

HARLAN
Nothing for now, thank you.

HARLAN picks at the food, savors it. Different. Interesting. He digs in for more and returns to his newspapers, scans the headlines, mentions of the Burmese war.

Just then a small group enters; DOCTOR CLARKE ABEL (43), his dutiful wife MARTHA (41) and EMILY HOLMES (23), wicked smart, fresh, vibrant with an easy smile. They're in a good mood. EMILY laughs. A little too loudly.

HARLAN looks over. Their eyes meet. A moment. Something familiar. An immediate attraction. The SERVER leads the group to another part of the room. The easy smile gone, EMILY glances back at HARLAN as she follows.

HARLAN considers, suddenly uneasy. His mind reeling. He resumes his meal and the paper.

LATER

Meal finished. Table cleared. Papers folded and put aside. HARLAN rises, drops some coins on the table and heads for the door.

AT THE ENTRANCE

HARLAN peeks inside the other room. Sitting at a table, enjoying their meal, are CLARKE, MARTHA and EMILY. More humorous chit-chat.

HARLAN stops the SERVER passing by.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Say, who is that?

SERVER
Doctor Abel, sir. With his wife and
a guest.

EMILY notices HARLAN at the door. Their eyes meet. Embarrassed,
she turns away.

HARLAN
Doctor Abel..

SERVER
Yes, sir.

EMILY looks again. This time, they stare at each other intently.

HARLAN
And the guest?

SERVER
The guest? I'm afraid I'm not
familiar with the young lady, sir.

HARLAN
Thank you.

SERVER
'course. 'Evening, sir.

HARLAN watches her a another moment, then leaves.

At the table, MARTHA notices EMILY's gaze.

MARTHA
What are you staring at?

EMILY
Nothing. There was a..gentleman
there I thought I knew.

MARTHA
A gentleman? From Neemuch?

EMILY
No. I don't know really. It's quite
odd to feel like you know someone
when you've never met them.

MARTHA reaches for her wine.

MARTHA

India will do that to you, dear..
This Claret is quite nice. Wouldn't
you agree, Clarke?

ABEL

Yes. It'll go well with the mangoe
fish.

EMILY is deep in thought--

EXT. HARMONIC TAVERN - EVENING

HARLAN emerges. A misty drizzle. He stands for a moment, takes
it all in.

Palanquin bearers close in, offering their services with
"Sahib", "best comfort", "no leak" and cheapest prices. HARLAN
waves them off and walks away.

Thunder rumbles in the far distance. Warm and pleasant, if
humid.

EXT. CLIVE HOUSE - EVENING

HARLAN heads down the street toward Clive House, a boarding
house. Several young men congregate at the entrance, chatting,
smoking. They watch HARLAN walk past and enter. Some mentions
about "the American".

INT. RECEPTION, CLIVE HOUSE - EVENING

HARLAN approaches the desk. The BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER reaches
for his key and a note, hands them over.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER

Mister Harlan. Your key. And a
message for you. Was a sharp
lookin' Hindoo with a bum leg
dropped it off.

HARLAN

Thank you.

HARLAN opens the message, scans it and reads: "Sardar Ramdullal
Dey has agreed to meet. Tomorrow at 11".

Pleased, he bounds up the stairs.

The BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER steps to the entrance, addresses the men outside.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER
Kitchen closes in thirty.

Some of the young men enter begrudgingly--

YOUNG MAN
(sarcastic)
What's the speciality tonight then?
Week old mutton curry is it?

A cackle of laughs.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER
No one's forcing ya to eat it, eh?

YOUNG MAN
I'm bloody well paying for it,
ain't I?

Grunts and chuckles as they head inside.

INT. HARLAN'S ROOM, CLIVE HOUSE - EVENING

Harlan removes his overcoat, lights the lantern on the small desk. He removes papers from his satchel, a quill and ink, preps everything and sits.

He dips the quill in ink and on an empty page writes "June 12, 1824, Calcutta, India."

He ruminates a few moments, writes "Dear brother," then leans back, his mind churning--

HARLAN
Dear brother.. Dear brother..

He retrieves his brother's letter, smooths it out on the table and re-reads. The haunting words "regret to inform you", "confirmed my worst suspicions", "her marriage to".

Filled with sadness, he sighs, rises to pace in circles, his mind broiling.

He sits again, angrily takes a blank page writes "Dearest Elizabeth". He then reconsiders. Crumples the page and tosses it.

He grabs another blank page and writes "E" on a line, "L" directly below it, then "I", "Z", "A", "B", "E", "T", "H" one letter beneath the other along the left margin.

He stares at the page, contemplates, then on the first line writes "Erebus that blacken shroud"..

HARLAN writes furiously, dipping the quill in ink, scribbling, his mind racing.

The next line: "Looms low menacing inevitability"..

And the next: "Inviting the deepest fears"..

"Zephyring on the thinnest thread of light"..

"Apate released, her mischief unfolding"..

"By the hand of Pandora"..

He stops suddenly at an impasse.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Fuck..

He looks down at his right hand. It's trembling. He rises, moves to a trunk, opens it, amid a collection of books, several bottles of Sherry. He pulls one out, pours himself a glass, downs it. Then another.

Then sits, drinks. His labored breathing slowly settles. He pours himself another glass.

LATER - MORNING

A splash of light hits HARLAN's face, half dug into the sheets. There's a buzzing sound. An eye flutters open. Shirtless, the wound in his arm mostly healed. The muffled sound of men chatting outside the door. Morning sunlight beams in through billowing curtains amid a swarm of mosquitos.

He jumps to his feet. The empty bottle of Sherry drops to the floor as he slams the window shut!

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Shit!

He thrashes a small towel around trying to kill as many of the blood-sucking insects as he can.

As he spins, he blows off pages from the desk to the floor. He reaches for the papers only to realize he's written a letter to Elizabeth, several pages long of angry, vile sentiments.

He sighs tiredly, sits on the edge of the bed, rips the pages. Peppered with reddish bites, he scratches his arms, neck and face.

INT. RECEPTION, CLIVE HOUSE - DAY

Dressed dandily, HARLAN clammers down the stairs and to the desk. BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER takes his key, looks at his face.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER
Morning.. Ow! Banana peel!

HARLAN
Pardon?

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER
Banana peel's the best thing for
mosquito bites.

HARLAN nods, heads to the dining room.

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER (CONT'D)
Works wonders.

IN THE DINING ROOM

HARLAN enters. It's bustling with young EIC civil servants, eating breakfast, commiserating, some heading out to work.

HARLAN finds a table. The matronly KEEPER'S WIFE clears empty tables, steps over.

KEEPER'S WIFE
Eggs this morning, Mister 'arlan?

HARLAN
Three. Toast. Ham..

KEEPER'S WIFE
Coffee?

HARLAN
Please.

KEEPER'S WIFE

Me 'usband's got a banana peel
treatment he swears by. Never
worked for me. In any case,
we've'n't got any. Bananas, that is.

She moves off, clearing other tables and to the kitchen.

At a nearby table, YOUNG MAN is eating with others. He glances
at HARLAN.

YOUNG MAN

Harlan, you're from America?

HARLAN

Yes..

YOUNG MAN

Me granddad, he was there, fought
you in your revolutionary war. Lost
an arm for his efforts.

HARLAN

I'm sorry.

YOUNG MAN

He said you Yanks fought bravely.
Deserved your independence. Your
own country.

HARLAN listens, absorbing the comments. There's a condescending
tone to his words. Others in the room have quieted.

HARLAN

A true Federal Republic. By the
people. For the people.

YOUNG MAN

Yeah.. Course.. If it wasn't for
the French, things might've turned
different, eh?

He rises, glares at HARLAN on his way out.

KEEPER'S WIFE

T'was fifty years ago, Francis! Ask
yourself why Britain's always at
war.

At the door, YOUNG MAN angrily spins to her--

YOUNG MAN

Cause we got a bloody empire to defend, haven't we? And the French, and the Turks and the Russians are always trying to take it away from us. Are we going to let them take India too? Eh? Our "prized possession"?

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER appears at the door--

BOARDING HOUSE KEEPER

Alright. Ya made your point. Off to work ya go.

YOUNG MAN

Aw, me point.. Me point is lost on the likes of you.

YOUNG MAN sneers and leaves. The KEEPER'S WIFE serves HARLAN his coffee.

KEEPER'S WIFE

There's nothin' like politics and war to get men all worked up..

HARLAN

Man is by nature a political animal.

KEEPER'S WIFE

Oh, I like that. Who said that? Shakespeare?

HARLAN

Aristotle.

YOUNG MAN #2

Who's 'arry Stautel?

HARLAN

He was a German politician.

YOUNG MAN #2

Never heard of 'im.

KEEPER'S WIFE

He's pulling your leg. Aristotle was a Greek philosopher.

YOUNG MAN #2
Greek.? So, who's this German
fella then?

The room erupts in laughter.

EXT. BEADON STREET, CALCUTTA - DAY

HARLAN scampers across the partially flooded street, through the rain to the row of buildings owned by wealthy Banians. He darts to the entrance of the one painted red.

INT. FOYER, RAMDULAL DEY'S PALACE - DAY

HARLAN enters, shakes the rain off. TAGORE is waiting.

HARLAN
Mister Tagore..

TAGORE
Mister Harlan.

And as they meet, his expression drops.

TAGORE (CONT'D)
Oh, Mister Harlan. Your face..

HARLAN stares back, sheepishly. He's not happy about it.

TAGORE (CONT'D)
Did you apply turmeric paste?

HARLAN
Turmeric?

TAGORE
It's the best thing to soothe the
itch.

HARLAN
I was told banana peel..

TAGORE
Banana peel? Oh no..

A SERVANT approaches, invites them inside.

SERVANT
Sardar Dey will see you now.

As HARLAN removes his overcoat, he is taken by an odd sight: a large painting of George Washington looming over the entrance.

INT. RAMDULAL DEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Opulent yet simple, liberally decorated with American knick-knacks, including a 24 star American flag (1822). A large *punkah* (fan) sways above. A weary *Punkah-wallah* sits quietly in a corner pulling the ropes.

A painting of Ramdulal Dey takes center stage as the man himself, RAMDULAL DEY (72), self-made millionaire, examines it carefully with HARLAN and TAGORE at his side. Assistants hover anxiously.

Dressed in the traditional white Indian *dhoti*, *achkan* (tunic) and *pagri*, RAMDULAL is humble, kind, vibrant despite an obvious frailty.

RAMDULAL DEY

Wonderful.. What do you think,
Mister Harlan?

HARLAN

Beautiful. Well rendered and a
perfect likeness.

RAMDULAL DEY

A masterpiece, yes?
(to assistant)
Send it to Mister uhm.. In Boston..

ASSISTANT

Mister Bowditch?

RAMDULAL DEY

Bowditch. Yes.
(to Harlan)
Wonderful man. Smart as a whip as
you Americans say.

HARLAN

I'm sure he'll appreciate the gift,
Mister Dey.

RAMDULAL DEY

Please, if you allow me to call you
with your first name..

HARLAN

Josiah.

RAMDULAL DEY
Josiah. A biblical name, yes?

HARLAN
He was a king. Of Judea.

RAMDULAL DEY
A king. How very auspicious for
you! My friends call me 'Dulal'.

HARLAN
I'm honored.

TAGORE is impressed at the honor. An ASSISTANT approaches.

ASSISTANT
Sarkar, Ram Mohan has arrived.

RAMDULAL DEY
Very well.
(to Harlan and Tagore)
The Hindu College. They want my
support, but I don't always agree
with their plans. India is changing
to Western ways.

HARLAN
Surely, a sign of progress.

HARLAN and TAGORE escort RAMDULAL DEY to a door.

RAMDULAL DEY
To the West of course. But less so
to the Hindu.

HARLAN
Why's that?

RAMDULAL DEY
It is my belief that India must
plan for our future without the
West control.

HARLAN
And yet you're surrounded by
American culture.

RAMDULAL DEY
Gifts. From my American patrons.
But also a reminder that, we too
one day, will win our independence
from the British as you did.

It's a poignant comment for HARLAN.

RAMDULAL DEY (CONT'D)

Josiah, you come to me for a position, but I cannot hire an American. Or any foreigner. My people will not approve.

HARLAN

I don't understand how hiring the best man for the job is a betrayal?

RAMDULAL DEY

I come from nothing..

HARLAN

Your story is legendary in India.

RAMDULAL DEY

Then you know my success is because of Madanmohan Dutti. If he did not support me, I am not here. I must now give my support and trust to the young people of India. People like Mister Tagore.

RAMDULAL DEY touches TAGORE's shoulder in a sign of support. TAGORE swells with pride. HARLAN gets it.

RAMDULAL DEY (CONT'D)

Josiah, I am content you want to make India your home, but trade is difficult right now. And this war.. It does not help.

HARLAN

Trade is what I know best.

RAMDULAL DEY

Of course.

(a thought)

Have you met the American trade representative?

TAGORE turns to HARLAN inquisitively--

EXT. BEADON STREET, CALCUTTA - DAY

HARLAN and TAGORE emerge from Ramdulal Dey's home.

TAGORE

I'm sorry our meeting was not so fruitful for you. He's an old man. Stuck in his ways.

HARLAN

No. He wants the best for his people. And he likes you very much.

TAGORE

He has been most generous with me..

TAGORE becomes pensive.

TAGORE (CONT'D)

Mister Harlan.. We are friends now, yes?

HARLAN

Yes. Of course.

TAGORE

Then.. May I call you Josiah?

HARLAN

Please do.

TAGORE

And so, you may call me Hari.

HARLAN

Hari.

TAGORE nods, then turns serious.

TAGORE

Hari. Mister.. Josiah, I have a question. It is of a delicate nature.

HARLAN

Yes?

TAGORE

In a few weeks, I must go to my village to marry my bride. And I.. I would like it very much for you to come with me.

HARLAN

To your wedding?

TAGORE

To meet my wife and my family. It would be such an honor.

HARLAN

It would be my pleasure.

TAGORE

Oh, Mister Harlan, your friendship means much to me.

HARLAN

Josiah.

TAGORE

Josiah. Of course.. I must go to my office now. But you.. What will you do now?

HARLAN

Don't worry about me. Go. I have many things to do.

TAGORE

Should you be in need of anything, do not hesitate.

HARLAN

I know where to find you.

TAGORE

Punar milama. It means--

HARLAN

Till we meet again.

Surprised, TAGORE smiles, nods. HARLAN smiles back, watches TAGORE leave.

EXT. STREET, CALCUTTA - DAY

As he makes his way down the rain soaked street, dodging puddles, HARLAN passes by an apothecary shop. He slows, glances at the displays and enters.

INT. APOTHECARY SHOP - DAY

Rows of drawers, shelves of bottles and various medications. HARLAN steps to the counter where an Apothecary greets him.

HARLAN

Have you any turmeric paste?

The Apothecary smiles knowingly, nods.

EXT. ENTRANCE, INGRAHAM'S OFFICE, POTATO LANE - DAY

A small plaque reads "Duncan Ingraham - Agent". A strip of road between a pair of two-story brick buildings. HARLAN faces the unassuming entrance. He hesitates and enters.

INT. STAIRCASE, INGRAHAM'S OFFICE - DAY

HARLAN makes his way up the steep wooden staircase. His boots echo loudly. The door at the top bursts open: a large man fills the frame.

INGRAHAM

(in Bengali)

What is it?

Peering over spectacles, a cigar wedged between stained fingers, DUNCAN INGRAHAM (50) is a well-heeled expat from Boston, a bull of a man, unforgivingly brusque and unrefined.

HARLAN

Mister Ingraham? I'm Josiah Harlan.

INGRAHAM

Harlan. I got your note. Come!

IN INGRAHAM'S OFFICE

The walls are crowded with paintings of New England landscapes and forlorn women. INGRAHAM pours two glasses of bourbon, eyes HARLAN gazing at the artwork.

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)

I like to be surrounded by beautiful things. My wife's got an altogether different opinion. Sit. Sit.

He digs into a cigar box, stuffs one in his mouth--

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)

(barks)

Not there! That's my seat!

HARLAN rises out of his chosen seat and sits in the adjoining armchair. INGRAHAM offers HARLAN a glass.

HARLAN
I don't drink.

Ingraham is momentarily stumped.

INGRAHAM
On religious grounds?

HARLAN smiles weakly. INGRAHAM settles in the other armchair, lights his cigar, puffs furiously.

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)
So, whereabouts you hail from?

HARLAN
Philadelphia. Chester county more precisely.

INGRAHAM
City of 'Brotherly Love'. You're a Quaker.

HARLAN nods, aims to change subjects.

HARLAN
Ramdulal Dey suggested--

INGRAHAM
Americans are a novelty here. Only a handful of us. Me, my wife, my children, some mariners, some merchants, some missionaries, some lost souls and now you. You're not a mariner. You're not a merchant. You're not a lost soul, are you?

HARLAN
No.

INGRAHAM
No. So what brings you to India?

HARLAN
..Fate, I suppose.

INGRAHAM
(amused)
Oh, so God led you here.

HARLAN
You're very cynical.

INGRAHAM
I don't believe much in divine
intervention; God does not exist
for my sake.

INGRAHAM pumps his cigar, observes HARLAN.

HARLAN
What brought you to India?

A smirk escapes INGRAHAM's lips. He downs his glass, rises to
fetch himself another.

INGRAHAM
Work initially. Then.. My wife. She
was born here. Her mother was--is--
a native. Her father was with the
Company. Retired. They live in
Bankeepoor now, Utter Pradesh. To
the North. A land that time forgot.

He pours the amber liquid in his glass, twirls it, reflective.

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)
We got married in New York. My
father and brothers made it clear
they'd never accept a "half-breed"
in the family. Including my
children. So, we came back. Made a
life of it.

It's HARLAN's turn to observe the man settle back in his
armchair. INGRAHAM glances at HARLAN with an awkward smile.

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)
So, why India? There's so much
opportunity back home.

HARLAN
I think for me, it's the adventure.
The unknown. The challenge.

INGRAHAM
Well, there's plenty challenge
here. First, you need to speak the
languages. Sanskrit. Bengalese.
Persian.

HARLAN

Okay..

INGRAHAM

The sooner the better. They talk behind your back, pretend not to understand what you're saying. What are your plans for work?

HARLAN

I want to open a trading agency.

INGRAHAM

Trade? What kind of trade?

HARLAN

Start off with the usual; teas, spices, silk. And then--

INGRAHAM

For the American market?

HARLAN

Of course.

INGRAHAM

Jesus, boy, Ramdullal controls the market. There's no competition here. You haven't got a goddamn chance. What do you know about trade anyway?

HARLAN

I was supercargo with Grant and Stone for the past four years--

INGRAHAM

Supercargo? Trade isn't counting chests and signing off on them. It's knowing the markets in New York and London, the seasons for the commodities, the shipping routes and timelines, negotiating prices--

HARLAN

You're underestimating me.

INGRAHAM

Okay.. What's the going rate on cloves?

HARLAN is stumped.

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)
Three shillings per pound. Bengal
rice, hundred weight?

HARLAN
I don't know.

INGRAHAM
Ten to twelve shillings. Tea. You
want to sell tea. Bohea tea? Per
pound?

HARLAN
Two and a half shillings.

INGRAHAM
Is that a lucky guess?

HARLAN
My last shipment was Bohea tea.

INGRAHAM chuckles, downs his drink, rises to refill.

INGRAHAM
Well, you're clever, I'll give you
that.

HARLAN
I know I have a lot to learn. But
like I said, I'm a fast learner.
And more than capable.

INGRAHAM
I don't think trade is for you.

HARLAN
When I was in Guangzhou recently,
Sam Russell, of the Russell Comp--

INGRAHAM
Sam Russell?

HARLAN
He offered to make me partner.

INGRAHAM
Partner?..

INGRAHAM stares at HARLAN, his mind churning. He sneers.

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)

Well, that's damned funny. Not four months back, Sam Russell sat in that very chair and bought a hundred chests of my finest Bengal opium.

HARLAN

He bought that from you?

INGRAHAM

I'm the only one outside the company who sells "Bengal O"!

INGRAHAM refills and slams the decanter angrily, surprising HARLAN.

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)

And that little shit has yet to pay me a single fucking rupee!

INGRAHAM paces furiously, his mind, a mass of paranoid thoughts. HARLAN can only watch in stunned amazement.

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)

Oh, I see what you're doing! Russell wants to establish his own office here. And that fucking coward sent you--

HARLAN

No. Mister Ingra--

INGRAHAM

You waltz in here, playing the innocent when all along your plan's to take me out!

HARLAN rises--

HARLAN

No. I don't work for Russell!

INGRAHAM

Bullshit! I'm not going to let you and that pudgy cocksucker take away my best source of income! Get the fuck out of here!

HARLAN

Mister Ingr--

INGRAHAM

The Chinese don't "chase the dragon" on that Turkish shit he peddles!

HARLAN

I'm not here on his behalf.

INGRAHAM

I've got the unconditional support of Secretary of State John fucking Quincy Adams. A personal friend I might add! One word from me and he'll come down on both your fucking heads. Get the fuck out of here! ..GET OUT!

INGRAHAM grabs a heavy marble ashtray and whips it at HARLAN who calmly dodges it. HARLAN's demeanor shuts him up.

HARLAN

I'll leave. But I don't take kindly to threats. India's my home now. And I will make my fortune here. You can bet on it!

INGRAHAM

Not in the opium trade you won't!

HARLAN

Don't ever threaten me again!

HARLAN leaves. INGRAHAM rushes after him--

INGRAHAM

Tell Russell I want my money now! Now! That cocksucking.. He'll have to pay double from now on! In advance!

INGRAHAM reaches the door in time to see HARLAN vanish.

INGRAHAM (CONT'D)

Nobody fucks with me! You hear me, Harlan! You hear me?!

EXT. ENTRANCE, INGRAHAM'S OFFICE, POTATO LANE - DAY

HARLAN emerges, shaken but resolute. A rumbling of thunder.

EXT. TANK SQUARE, WRITERS' BUILDING - DAY

In the midst of the city, a massive water-filled reservoir surrounded by shrubbery and a wide pebbled roadway. On its northern flank looms the imposing three-story colonial Writers' Building with its distinctive Ionic columns. The hub of EIC administration.

British civil servants come and go as Hindu natives quietly watch, ready to provide services. Horse-drawn carriages, bullock drawn carts and four-men palanquins crisscross. Pariah dogs and *Argills* (large wading birds) poke and scratch at the drying ground dotted with puddles.

In this exotic scene, HARLAN emerges from a lofty reservoir gate, his mind still roiling, when--

EMILY (O.S.)
Stop it! Stop it! Stop!

The commotion catches his attention. He notices a woman charge at a middle-aged man berating and whipping a ten-year old Indian boy with a riding crop.

It's EMILY, the young woman from the Harmonic Tavern, outraged at the abuse. The CHILD BEATER raises his crop at her--

CHILD BEATER
Stand back, or you'll get the same!

HARLAN grabs his wrist, rips the crop from his hand.

HARLAN
How about you try that on me?

EMILY reacts to HARLAN, recognizing him.

CHILD BEATER
Hand that back, sir!

EMILY
You should be ashamed! Beating this poor child nearly half--

CHILD BEATER
He's my bloody servant and I'll bloody well treat him as I want!

EMILY
He's not a horse you whip and--

CHILD BEATER

They're animals! The lot of 'em.
They must be treated as such!

EMILY

He's a boy! A mere child. You're
the animal!

CHILD BEATER

Without us, these savages would be
starving.

EMILY

They are starving!

HARLAN

(to the child)
Are you hurt?

The frightened child lowers his eyes.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

He's too frightened to speak.

CHILD BEATER

They pretend not to hear. But they
understand fully. Don't you, boy?

EMILY

(to the boy, in Sanskrit)
Are you in pain?

The boy glances at her, shakes his head. HARLAN turns the boy
around. Whipping scars crisscross his back.

HARLAN

By God. Have you no mercy?

CHILD BEATER

The boy belongs to me. He must
learn to obey if he's to perform
domestic duties.

HARLAN

He's too young to do anything.

EMILY

Who are you? What is your name?

CHILD BEATER

Ha! You want to report me?

Just then, DR. ABEL arrives.

ABEL
What's going on here? Emily?

EMILY
Clarke!

CHILD BEATER
Doctor Abel, you know this woman?

ABEL
She's my cousin.

CHILD BEATER
Your cousin?! Well, she's the most uncouth, ill-mannered creature I've ever had the misfortune of encountering! Keep her on a tighter leash, will you?
(to Harlan)
My crop!

HARLAN
A leash? She's not a dog. Apologize to her.

CHILD BEATER
I shall do no such thing. My crop!

HARLAN approaches him threateningly.

HARLAN
Apologize.. Or I'll use it on you.

CHILD BEATER
What kind of man are you?

EMILY
The honorable kind!

The child watches his master squirm.

CHILD BEATER
You're asking for trouble, young man. Doctor Able, tell them who I am.

HARLAN
I don't care who you are. You insulted her. You owe her an apology. It's all I'm asking for.

EMILY
And to the boy.

CHILD BEATER
The boy?

EMILY
One to me and one to the boy.

The child looks at them curiously and perhaps with a hint of hope. Upset and facing a menacing HARLAN, the CHILD BEATER is unsure of his next move.

CHILD BEATER
Doctor Able, what say you?

ABEL
I'd say it's rather fitting.

The CHILD BEATER reconsiders and struggles with the sentiments.

CHILD BEATER
Let it be known that I am saying
this under duress.

EMILY
Duress?

CHILD BEATER
Yes. Duress. It's not my choice. So
then, my apologies, madam, if my
words were ill-chosen and offended
you.

EMILY
Your words? Your actions rather.
Now, the boy..

CHILD BEATER
No.. He's my property. I'll never.

EMILY
Then I shall report you.

CHILD BEATER
To whom? The authorities? Doctor
Abel, perhaps you should inform
this young woman who I am.

He grabs his riding crop from HARLAN, motions his servant away.

CHILD BEATER (CONT'D)
Fetch my horse, boy.

He glares hard at EMILY, HARLAN and ABLE.

CHILD BEATER (CONT'D)
We'll lose India because of people
like you! Weak. Forgiving. Liberal.

He leaves. HARLAN pivots to EMILY who is still shaken.

HARLAN
Are you alright?

She looks at him. They gaze into each other's eyes. That familiarity..

EMILY
..Yes..

She turns to ABEL.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Who is that vile man?

ABEL
Joseph Finch. One of India's most
prominent indigo planters.

EMILY
I couldn't sit idly by. He was
beating that poor child. If it
hadn't been for this gentleman, I
think I would have killed him. Or
he me.

HARLAN
Surely not.

EMILY
That kind of behavior just rankles
me to the core.

ABEL
Thank you, Mister?

HARLAN
Harlan. Josiah Harlan. Doctor Abel,
is it?

ABEL
Yes. And Miss Emily Holmes.

They shake hands. EMILY and HARLAN can't keep eyes off each other.

HARLAN
Your cousin..
(nods)
Miss Holmes.

EMILY
You're American, Mister Harlan?

HARLAN
From Philadelphia.

EMILY
I saw you the other night. At the Harmonic. I had a strange feeling we had met before. But, clearly, we haven't.

HARLAN
I would have remembered.

She smiles gently. ABEL suddenly feels uncomfortable.

ABEL
Well, we must get back. Emily, they'll be waiting for us.

EMILY
Of course.. Mister Harlan.

ABEL tips his hat to HARLAN, leads EMILY to a waiting carriage. She looks back at HARLAN with a longing as he watches her climb into the carriage. There's an undeniable attraction that excites and confuses them.

The carriage lurches forward. Troubled, HARLAN watches it drive away..

INT. HARMONIC TAVERN - NIGHT

His meal completed, HARLAN peruses the daily *Bengal Hurkaru*, but his mind is elsewhere.

The SERVER steps to the table, clears plates.

SERVER
Any desert for you tonight, sir?
We've a peaches and cream trifle.
Quite nice.

HARLAN
No. That'll be all.

The SERVER leaves. The door opens, a group steps in. HARLAN glances over expectantly. The SERVER welcomes the patrons, small talk about the break in the rains.

Disappointed, HARLAN rises, retrieves some money. Gazes down at it. Not much left. He drops some coins on the table and leaves.

EXT. HARMONIC TAVERN, TANK SQUARE - NIGHT

Twilight. HARLAN emerges and heads down the street. Waiting in the shadows, two men watch and follow.

As the crowds thin out, the men close in.

CARNAHAN
Oy.. Mister.

HARLAN turns. PEACHY CARNAHAN (27) is tall, blond, working class Londoner. DANIEL DRAVOT (28) is brawnier, a dark-haired Scot. A pair of restless soldiers in civilian clothes.

CARNAHAN (CONT'D)
We're not 'ere to hurt ya.

DRAVOT
Right. And, we're told, for your sake, it's best ya left India and never come back.

HARLAN
Is that a threat?

CARNAHAN
Well, yeah, course it's a threat!

HARLAN approaches them menacingly. The men stand their ground.

HARLAN
Who sent you? Ingraham? A fat man?
Smells of cigar and cheap liquor?

DRAVOT
Don't matter who sent us. You pack your things and take the next ship out.

HARLAN
And if I don't?

CARNAHAN

We don't advise ya do anything ya
might come to regret, now do we?

With that, HARLAN punches CARNAHAN who crumples to the ground,
hands to his face. HARLAN faces DRAVOT, assumes a boxing pose.

DRAVOT

A bloody pugilist.. We said we
didn't want to hurt ya!

Blood gushes in CARNAHAN's hands.

CARNAHAN

My nose.. I think it's broke.

DRAVOT

(to Harlan)

Now, see what you've done?

HARLAN and DRAVOT exchange looks. HARLAN relents.

HARLAN

Take your friend to the hospital.
Have him seen by a doctor. And if
you ever--

DRAVOT

There' no bloody doctors at the
hospital.

Harlan stares.

DRAVOT (CONT'D)

They're all gone, man. Burma!

INT. HARLAN'S ROOM, HOTEL - NIGHT

Nose bloodied, CARNAHAN downs a shot of sherry.

CARNAHAN

If it don't work, I won't hold it
against ya.

HARLAN

You'll be smelling the Jasmine
before you know it.

HARLAN cups his hands around CARNAHAN's nose. In the b.g.,
DRAVOT drinks some sherry, not bad. He curiously examines the
various trinkets and HARLAN's collection of books.

One quick move, HARLAN cracks CARNAHAN's nose back into place. CARNAHAN tempers the pain.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
It'll swell.

CARNAHAN
(sniffs)
No Jasmine, but I do get a whiff of
the sherry. Mind?

HARLAN
Help yourself..

CARNAHAN pours himself another glass.

DRAVOT
You're new to India.

HARLAN
As a resident, yes.

DRAVOT
So, what's your angle then?

HARLAN
My angle?

DRAVOT
Your angle. Peachy and me, we do
odd jobs as men for hire.

CARNAHAN
On the side, mind. On account of us
being honorable soldiers first.

DRAVOT
Aye. And if it hadn't been for
Moorcroft playing the diplomat--

HARLAN
Moorcroft?

CARNAHAN
William Moorcroft. Company vet.
Superintendent of Stud.

DRAVOT
Was on a quest to find the
sturdiest horse for the company.

CARNAHAN

Or so he says.

DRAVOT

For two years we accompanied him.
Across the most inhospitable
territories north of India.

CARNAHAN

And nary a bloody horse to his
liking.

DRAVOT

But when we reached Leh, what do
you think we found?

HARLAN

Not horses..

CARNAHAN & DRAVOT

Russians!

HARLAN

Russians..?

CARNAHAN

A handful of them. Spies mostly.

HARLAN

Russian spies?

DRAVOT

Their intentions were clear. They
even laughed about it when we
supped together. T'was Napoleon
gave 'em the idea. Twenty years
earlier.

CARNAHAN

Bloody Frenchman. Always trying to
conquer the world.

HARLAN considers their words, then realizes.

HARLAN

Are you saying the Russians want to
invade.. India?

CARNAHAN

When we least expect it.

HARLAN
Through Ladakh?

CARNAHAN
Ladakh. Afghanistan. Persia..

DRAVOT
If Moorcroft hadn't played
politics, we'd be with him in Kabul
right now chasing those bloody
spies right back to St-Petersburg.

HARLAN
Sounds like my kind of adventure.
So, what happened?

CARNAHAN
Territorial misunderstanding. The
company didn't appreciate Moorcroft
making treaties without their
consent, so they suspended his
mission and called us sods back to
headquarters.

DRAVOT
Now the poor bugger's on his way to
Turkmenistan with no protection.
He's as good as dead if ya ask me.

HARLAN
He can't find protection in
Afghanistan?

CARNAHAN
The problem with Afghanistan is
that it's filled with Afghans. They
have loyalty to no one. Brothers
kill brothers. Sons kill fathers.
Uncles kill nephews.

DRAVOT
And those are the rulers.

CARNAHAN
They all want to be king. But none
is clever enough to be king.

DRAVOT
The best of them are slippery and
ruthless. And the worst of them are
miserable, bloodthirsty vermin.

CARNAHAN

You have a better chance of becoming king in Afghanistan than any of those treacherous Barakzai brothers.

HARLAN

Me? A king in Afghanistan?

CARNAHAN

Alls it takes is a fearless man with a cunning mind and a well-trained army.

HARLAN

Can you train an army?

CARNAHAN and DRAVOT exchange uncomfortable glances.

CARNAHAN

We can. But we're headed to Rangoon..

DRAVOT

Once it's over. And we've won the war, we'll quit the service and become free men.

CARNAHAN

Burma will be ripe for the picking.

DRAVOT

There are rajas there sitting on piles of gold, silver, diamonds and rubies the size of your fist.

CARNAHAN

They'll need protection. And we'll be just the men to provide it.

DRAVOT

At a handsome price, mind. How's that for a plan?

HARLAN

It's ambitious.

DRAVOT

We're not small minded men. The East is big. Fat. Rich. Full of opportunities for men such as we.

The words capture HARLAN's imagination.

CARNAHAN

So, now you know our game. What's yours?

HARLAN

Well, I haven't got an army, so as tempting as it is, I can't become a king in Afghanistan. At least not yet.

Wry smiles all around.

CARNAHAN

No. Not yet. So, why are you 'ere?

HARLAN

You're the second person to ask me that today.

DRAVOT

What d'ya say to the first one?

HARLAN

Fate.

CARNAHAN

Fate? As in destiny?

DRAVOT

I believe in fate. Take tonight for example. We come to scare you off, but you break Peachy's nose and we become fast friends. Call it fate or destiny. No matter. What's meant to happen, happens. Isn't that right, Brother Carnahan?

CARNAHAN

Quite right, Brother Dravot!

HARLAN beams, pleasantly surprised.

HARLAN

You're freemasons?

CARNAHAN AND DRAVOT

Provincial Grand Lodge of Bengal.

HARLAN

Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.

CARNAHAN

Aw, bloody hell.

DRAVOT

Oh, Brother, we'd never've agreed to this if we'd known. Brother..?

HARLAN

Harlan. Josiah Harlan.

An enthusiastic shake of hands.

DRAVOT

Brother Harlan. Let me introduce you to Brother Peachey Carnahan, that's him. Daniel Dravot, that's me. Now, as upstanding members in the Craft, and the fact that you've offered us a drink and reset Brother Carnahan's nose at no charge, let us make amends.

CARNAHAN and DRAVOT raise their glasses.

CARNAHAN AND DRAVOT

For the widow's sake!

HARLAN breaks into a mischievous smile, then ponders a moment.

HARLAN

Alright. I have two requests. The first--

INT. STAIRCASE, INGRAHAM'S OFFICE - DAY

INGRAHAM's bulky figure lumbers up the stairs, a stream of cigar smoke twirls behind him.

At the top of the stairs, jangling keys, he finds the door ajar. He pushes it open--

IN INGRAHAM'S OFFICE

INGRAHAM enters, nonplussed. The paintings of forlorn women have been altered with black spectacles, mustaches or beards.

He begins to pant in outrage. He stomps to his desk. Opens the cigar box. Empty! Moves to the liquor cabinet. Empty!

A growl of thunder outside. He realizes.

INGRAHAM

Harlan!

INT. HARLAN'S ROOM, HOTEL (RESUME)

The three men are discussing HARLAN's requests. DRAVOT has lit a cigar.

DRAVOT

Your second request, Brother Harlan, is an easy one.

EXT. GATE, FORT WILLIAM, CALCUTTA - DAY

A misty drizzle falls over the city. A palanquin drops HARLAN off at the gate of the fort. EIC Army officers check him in.

DRAVOT (V.O.)

The man you wish to speak to is Lieutenant Colonel Vaughan. He's a gentle sort. Quiet. Studious. Some say he works in the shadows.

CARNAHAN (V.O.)

Intelligence, he means to say.

DRAVOT (V.O.)

Aye. But no one is more devoted to the Brotherhood than he.

EXT. FORT WILLIAM - DAY

EIC soldiers march in formation. An officer points HARLAN to a large building in the near distance.

INT. OFFICER'S CLUB, FORT WILLIAM - DAY

A breezy, comfortable country-club setting with leather chairs, paintings of past and present EIC leaders and battle scenes.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN VAUGHAN (35) sits with a group of officers (MAJOR GEORGE POLLOCK (38), LIEUTENANT COLONEL WOOD, CAPTAIN CALDWELL, CAPTAIN MALING), in serious conversation, drinking and smoking.

WOOD

The word is Singh's amassed eighty thousand troops along our border.

VAUGHAN

So I hear..

VAUGHAN (45) is Town and Fort Major, and the Bengal Lodge Grand Senior Deacon. A handsome man with sad eyes. Intelligent, reserved, thoughtful, occasionally manipulative, often flippant.

WOOD

This is serious stuff, Johnny.
Eighty thousand! Is he planning an
attack on the left while we teach
Burma a lesson on the right?

HARLAN enters, gets his bearings, and proceeds towards them--

POLLOCK

What does your man in Ludhiana say?
What's his name? Wade?

VAUGHAN

Lieutenant Wade.

WOOD

Yes, Wade. He's friendly with these
despots, isn't he? Singh. Shah
Shujah. The Afghans, whatever their
bloody names are: Mohammed Khan
this and Mohammed Khan that.

Vaughan stifles a laugh.

HARLAN approaches. The group quiets.

HARLAN

Lieutenant Colonel Vaughan?

VAUGHAN

Yes.?

HARLAN

Is there help for a "widow's son"?

The British officers react to the coded request.

On VAUGHAN gauging HARLAN. Muskets fire in the far distance..

END EPISODE