



NEA SERVICE, INC. 1923

BEGIN HERE TODAY

Sir Charles Abingdon engages Paul Harley, criminal investigator, to solve for him the mystery of constant surveillance. Sir Charles by now is unknown to him. While Harley is dining at the Abingdon home, Sir Charles falls from his chair and drops dead. His last words are "Nicol Brinn" and "Fire-Tongue."

"Please Nicol Brinn, to tell him the meaning of 'Fire-Tongue,'" but Brinn refuses to enlighten him.

"Prisoners are made prisoners in the home of Ormuz Khan. Brinn rescues them and goes to tell the story of Fire-Tongue to the police. He falls in love for Naida, a member of the Fire-Tongue cult."

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"Respecting the tests to which candidates were put, she spoke with more freedom. Those who, having reached the second grade, aspired to the first, were submitted to three very severe ones, to make trial of their courage, purity and humility. Failure in any of these trials resulted in instant death, and the final test, the trial by fire, which took place in a subterranean chamber of the great temple,

"Therefore I scarcely heeded her when she assured me that, should I ever be in danger because of what had happened, a message in the Times of India would reach her. I never intended to insert such a message, gentlemen. I knew that it would lose all my strength to close this door which I had opened."

CHAPTER XXXIV

Nicol Brinn's Story (Concluded)

"The incidents of the next seven years do not concern you, gentlemen. I had one aim in life—to forget. From the time that I left India until the moment when fate literally threw me in the way of the late Sir Charles Abingdon, I had heard nothing of the cult of Fire-Tongue."

"Then, lunching with the late Sir Charles after my accident in the Haymarket, he put to me a question which literally made me hold my breath.

"Do you know anything of the significance of the term Fire-Tongue?" he asked.

"I am not accustomed to any display of feeling in public, and I replied in what I think was an ordinary tone:

"In what connection, Sir Charles?"

"Well," said he, watching me oddly, "I know you have traveled in India, and I wondered if you had ever come in contact with the legend which prevails there, that a second Zoroaster has arisen, to preach the doctrine of eternal fire."

"I have heard it," I replied guardedly.

"I thought it possible," continued Sir Charles, "and I am tempted to tell you of a curious experience which once befell me during the time that I was a guest of my late friend, Colonel Banfield, in Delhi. My reputation as an oculist was not at that time as fully established as it later became, but I already had some reputation in this branch of surgery; and one evening a very identified Hindu gentleman sought an interview with me, saying that a distinguished native noble, who was a guest of his, had met with a serious accident, and offering me a fee equivalent to nearly £500 to perform an operation which he believed to be necessary.

"I assured him that my services were at his disposal, and blankly declined to accept so large a fee. He thereupon explained that the circumstances were peculiar. His friend belonged to a religious cult of extremely high order. He would lose caste if it became known that he had been attended by a Christian surgeon; therefore my visit must be a secret one.

"Accordingly I was driven in a car which was waiting to some house upon the outskirts of the city and conducted to a room where the patient had been carried. I saw him to be a singularly handsome young man, apparently about 22 years of age. But there was something abominable about him which repelled me, I cannot say in what way; nor did I approve of the presence of many bowls of hyacinths in the room.

"However, I performed the operation, which, although slight, demanded some skill, and with the nature of which I will not trouble you. Intense anxiety was manifested by the young man's attendants, and one of these, a strikingly beautiful woman, insisted on remaining while the operation was performed.

"She seemed more especially to concern herself with preserving in tact a lock of the young man's jet-black hair, which was brushed in rather an odd manner across his ivory forehead. Naturally enough, this circumstance excited my curiosity and, distracting the woman's attention for a moment—I asked her to bring me something from a table at the opposite side of the room—I lightly raised this wayward lock and immediately replaced it again.

"Do you know what it concealed, Mrs. Brinn?"

"I assured him that I did not."

"A mark, apparently natural, resembling a torch surmounted by a tongue of fire!"

"Strange though it must appear, at this time I failed to account for Sir Charles confiding this thing to me. Later, I realized that he must have seen the mark on my arm, although he never referred to it."

"I moved at once. I inserted in the Times the prearranged message, hardly daring to hope that it would come to the eye of Naida; but it did! She visited me. And I learned that not only Sir Charles Abingdon, but another, knew of the mark which I bore."

"I was summoned to appear before the Prophet of Fire!"

"Gentlemen, what I saw and how I succeeded in finding out the location of his abode are matters that can wait. The important things are these: First, I learned why Sir Charles Abingdon had been done to death!"

"The unwelcome attentions of the man known as Ormuz Khan led Sir

Charles to seek an interview with him. I may say here and now that Ormuz Khan is Fire-Tongue! Oh! it's a tough statement—but I can prove it. Sir Charles practically forced his way into this man's presence and immediately recognized his mysterious patient of years ago!

"He accused him of having set

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spies upon his daughter's movements—an accusation which was true—and forbade him to see her again. From that hour the organization to renew efforts, for it revealed that Sir Charles was sealed. What he knew, the world must never know. He had recorded, in a private paper, all that he had learned. This paper was stolen from his bureau—and its contents led to my being summoned to the house of Fire-Tongue! It also spurred the organization to renewed efforts, for it revealed that Sir Charles contemplated confiding the story to others.

"You will have observed, gentlemen, that I am somewhat damaged. However, it was worth it! That the organization of the Fire-Worshippers is destroyed I am not prepared to assert. But I made a discovery to day which until my hands. Hearing, I shall never know how, that Naida had had a secret interview with me, Fire-Tongue visited upon her the death penalty.

"I found her lying on a silken divan in the deserted house, her hands clasped over a little white flower, like an odontoglossum, which lay on her breast. It was the flower of death.

"My seven years' silence was ended.

The annual Wea Township, Tippecanoe County, fox drive will be held Jan. 12. Dinner will be served at noon, which will be followed by a trap shoot for both amateur and professionals.

"Gentlemen, at the angle where the high road from Upper Claybury joins the Dover Road is the Merton Cottage Hospital. Mr. Harley is awaiting us there. He is less damaged than I am. A native chauffeur whose name I don't know, is lying insensible in one of the beds—and in another is a dead man, unrecognized, except for a birthmark resembling a torch on his forehead, his head crushed and his neck broken.

"That dead man is Fire-Tongue. I should like, Mr. Commissioner, to sign the statement."

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