

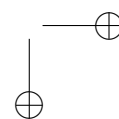
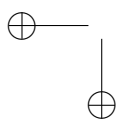
ULUG BEG

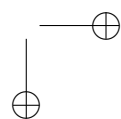
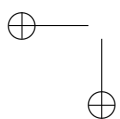
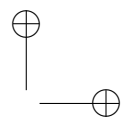
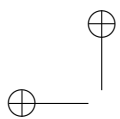
AN EPIC POEM, COMIC IN INTENTION

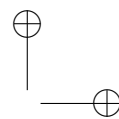
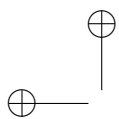
IN VII CANTOS

BEING THE HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN, PROGRESS

AND EXPLOSION OF A SUPERSTITION







ULUG BEG

AN EPIC POEM, COMIC IN INTENTION

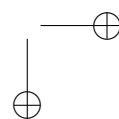
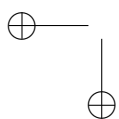
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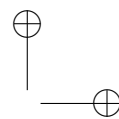
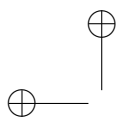
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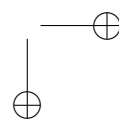
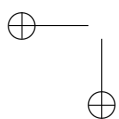
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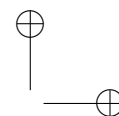
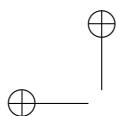
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First Published, 1923





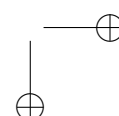
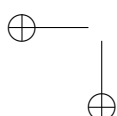
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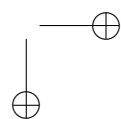
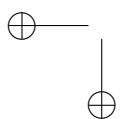
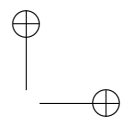
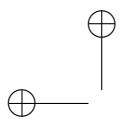
To Rudyard Kipling do I dedicate
This work, although I have not his permission,
Loving the man, however I may hate
Some of his notions as a politician,
Which he from time to time will propagate,
Without the faintest symptom of contrition,
Though fatal years and Peace and War insist
On the gross failure of the Imperialist.

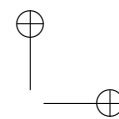
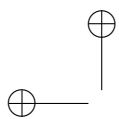
Have I forgot wolves baying in the wild,
While I sat breathless by the yellow lamp,
Lost in the epic of the jungle-child,
Or fierce tales of the barrack and the camp?
Have I forgot the green Atlantic piled
Alp-like above the blunt-bowed deep-sea tramp?
McPhee, Mulvaney, Brugglesmith? Forgot?
While I have breath, I rather fancy not.

Pardon with customary magnanimity
(That is to say, I hope it's customary)
This frontless pressing into your proximity,
Cheapest of all devices literary.
Let me pay tribute, which my anonymity
Assures you is in no way mercenary.
Would that I knew you. But 'tis better thus.
I am, Sir, your obliged

AUTOLYCUS

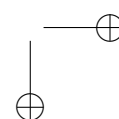
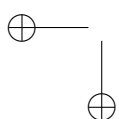


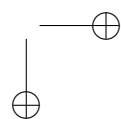
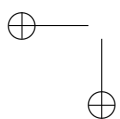
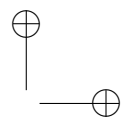
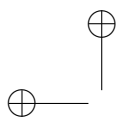


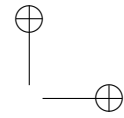
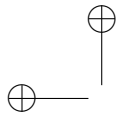


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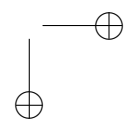
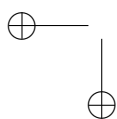


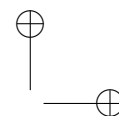
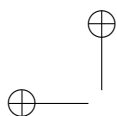
INTRODUCTION

Here is my Epic. Epic, Macaulay said,
Is a product of the childhood of the race,
Of a simplicity and truth that fled
Long since. I think not, but in any case
I should be glad to know what reason led
A clear mind to express that commonplace.
For it is clear to the most casual eye
That the race's infancy has not gone by.

The Eighteenth Century (God save the mark)
Thought it was polished. So neolithic men
Thought of themselves, as the hammer drew the spark
From the edged flint in the Campignian den,
Forgotten children of the primal dark.
What curious picture we shall offer when
Experts shall place us far, far down Time's gradient
As the late Iron or the Palaeoradiant!

Epic will be, so long as dreams decay,
Or brave ideals perish with the copy,
While insubstantial pageants fade away,
Yielding the bard a chance for being sloppy,
And time to harvest sentimental hay.
Oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy.
And I, for one, am heartily inclined
To think it well oblivion is blind.





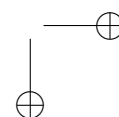
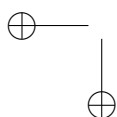
INTRODUCTION

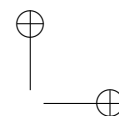
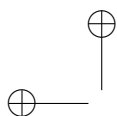
This book is written, because I heard a laugh
Once in my soul, and in a lonely place –
A curious sound I did not more than half
Enjoy. For I was conscious of a face
That seemed to think I was a photograph
Of nothing in the centre of all space –
Only that lonely thing, and nothing, and after
I seemed the echo of eternal laughter;

And all the boyish things on which I brood,
Like Art, and Faith, and Life, and Death, and Birth,
Seemed in an instant, as it were, endued
With a quality of not unmeaning mirth.
So I thought merrily in solitude,
Full of that master-passion of the earth,
Up to the limit set on my ability,
To make an epic out of a futility.

And doubtless I have failed. Aye, doubtless failed!
Lost in my devious thought's queer interchange,
Whatever little peak it was I scaled,
I missed the vast main-shoulder of the range,
Vapor-veiled, glacier-barred, and unassailed.
But yet that spiritual laughter strange,
Though my incompetence may well entail your
Pity, still lets me laugh at you and failure

Still lets me laugh, because before the Sphinx,
On iridescent wing, the poised Chimaera
Hovers for the kiss. The eye that never blinks
Gazes at the strange lover drawing nearer,
Compelled by that odd law of life that links
The sad, the glad, the darker and the clearer.
They near! They near! Diverse Infinities
Craving – what is imagined, and what is.





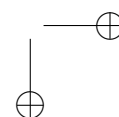
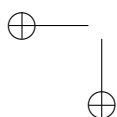
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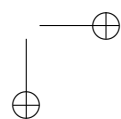
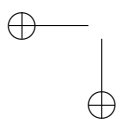
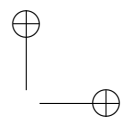
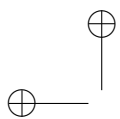
One thing remains. I think that it is best
To own my obligations to the mob
Of pilgrims whom I pillaged on my quest.
It's true I did not hesitate to rob,
And murdered half a dozen for a jest,
And in all instances enjoyed the job.
Thus I illustrate that absurd belief
That every poet is at heart a thief.

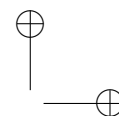
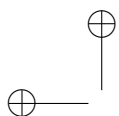
Jewels I have stolen five and ten-words long
That on the stretched forefinger of all time
Sparkle for ever. I put 'em in my song
And take a sacred pleasure in the crime.
I do not care how much their diamonds wrong
My paste. The sovereign, gleaming by my dime,
Thrills me because at least I did my bit,
Howe'er immoral, in purloining it.

And Oh! How many a treasure-house I sacked,
Swooping, like the Arab on his dromedary,
Out of my wastes to palaces gold-packed,
Whence I snatched tinsel, ere the guard unwary
Roused up. Those treasures are yet intact,
And Burton, Morier, Holdich, and Vambery
Had smiled perhaps, seeing a feebler soul
Steal from their bullion-store his tiny toll.

Go forth, my book, and take whatever pounding
The heavy-fisted destinies prepare.
I know you are not anything astounding,
And, to be quite sincere, I don't much care.
Get off your overcoat. The gong is sounding.
The enemy has risen from his chair.
He doesn't look so overwhelming, but
His arm is long. Watch for an upper-cut.







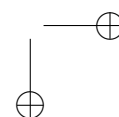
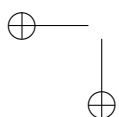
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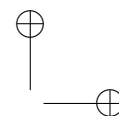
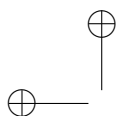
ZULEIKA

This is the history of Ulug Beg,
A sorry Epic of our sorry time,
A maimed adventure, halting on one leg
Halfway between absurdity and crime.
I have endeavored to screw up the peg
Within a semitone of the sublime,
An altitude of the emotions which
Appears to me about the proper pitch.

The story is no novelty, perhaps.
It has no intellectual underpinning.
It's pieced together out of rags and scraps,
Of cowardice and poverty and sinning,
As also melodramatic thunder-claps,
And furthermore, begins at the beginning.
We have the authority of experts for
The statement that this method is a bore.

But from Lord Byron and from Laurence Sterne,
At a long interval, I take my cue.
Considering that priceless pair, we learn
Much about art that Horace never knew.
We'll take birth, sin, and death, each in its turn;
And if the prospect has no charm for you,
It's my opinion you would be absurd
To go beyond this cautionary word.





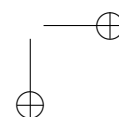
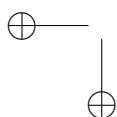
ZULEIKA

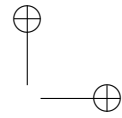
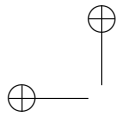
In the late “eighties,” when the world was young
And stabler than at present in all seeming,
When Oscar Wilde and Austin Dobson sung,
And Pittsburgh first with millionaires was teeming,
And the well-balanced world on hinges hung,
And Emperors and socialists were dreaming
Of various sad tricks to play on man,
A small event took place in Turkestan.

A half-oasis, three-days’ march away
From Samarcand, – a mere palm-grove and pool
Of brackish water, all one night and day
Was hideous with shrieks such as a ghoul
Might utter, bloody-lipped, above her prey,
In the best style of the Arabian school.
There were no passers-by, who might have found
A dark-veiled woman twisting on the ground

With ghastly motion. A bored dromedary,
A joke of the creator on creation,
Couched close beside her, dun, obscene, and hairy,
With topaz eyes of stupid contemplation,
That, save for blinking, never seemed to vary,
And without purpose viewed the situation,
While black battalions of unnumbered flies
Buzzed furious round his flank and folded thighs,

Rank with dry sweat. The woman’s shriek and scream
Rhythmically faltered to a sob forlorn
Like a child’s, waking from some beastly dream,
And rose again, as if her soul were torn
Into two pieces by the devil’s team
Springing apart. Her knuckle joints were worn
Red-raw and bloody on both weary hands
From beating up and down on the sharp sands.





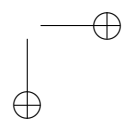
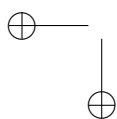
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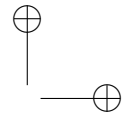
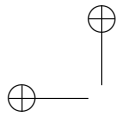
The sun was setting. A broad streak of light
Lay on the blank sand like a belt of blood,
And all the hollows filled with purple night,
And the black shadows of the little wood
Stretched East and South, where yet the milky height
Of Zarafshan, like cloud rose-tinctured, stood
Out in the after-glow. The camel dropped
His silly head to browse. The shrieking stopped

As if the woman had been choked. Upright
Suddenly she sat, fumbling with desperate hands
At some vague task, the horror of the night
Hid as he leaped over the sombre sands;
Effort in every bone of her, that quite
O'er-taxed her with unutterable demands.
You've naturally gathered that the ruction
Could be no other than the introduction

Into existence of what proved a son,
Whose first cry made more desolate the tract
Of wide sands darkling. Now that her task was done
And her poor loins no longer labor-racked
The woman slid into oblivion.
But the child seemed to recognize the fact
That, though it was a novel situation,
The Cosmos owed him some consideration.

Dawn came. Beneath a castellated cloud
Broke half the sun, shaped like the scarlet dome
Of a Jinn's palace. The mother moaned aloud
And woke. The child, grimacing like a gnome,
Whimpered and writhed. She gave her breast and bowed
Over the babe, who made himself at home,
Bringing content until her sombre eye
Softened, but not for long. Against the sky,





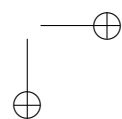
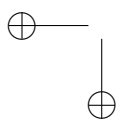
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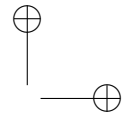
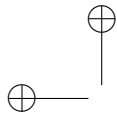
Fiery and baleful, with vast cloud-turmoil vexed,
Something rose up, stark black against the flame,
Small as the letters of an Arab text,
And fully as mysterious as the same.
Inquiry filled her sombre eye, perplexed,
As greater grew the portent and became
A troop of camel-riders, lazy-gaited,
Whose near approach she fearfully awaited.

She turned her eyes away. It would appear
As though she were afraid that she might see
Something foreboded. Nearer – she could hear
The voices of that nameless company.
She looked again. And the black cloud of fear
Lifted, or changed into an ecstasy
Of hope. Her pale cheek showed a hint of red.
“He is not there! He is not there!” she said.

Mahmoud the Usbeg, riding a few paces
Before his tag-rag-bobtail retinue
Of wives and feudal cutthroats and scapegraces,
Was wondering what more mischief he might do
The Russians, when on the edge of the oasis
The woman and her babe came into view,
Desolate together, lying in the dust.
He checked his camel, murmuring, “God is just,”

While she crawled to him, clutching to her breast
The babe that lifted up a dolorous cry,
By which the Usbeg was no whit impressed,
Observing rather that the mother’s eye
Was large and lickerish – and for the rest
She might do well. He never would pass by
A chance or amorous or military.
Hence he descended from the dromedary,





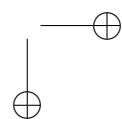
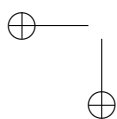
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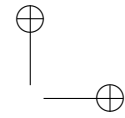
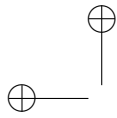
And without ceremony raised the veil
That hid her countenance. She took the cue,
And, lifting up her face weary and pale,
Smiled on him with a meaning that pierced through
His understanding. – The effort did not fail.
After all, in her place what would you do,
My sisters, if environment and chance
Had plunged you into such a circumstance?

Mahmoud reflected. Then he called aloud,
“Ali” – A ruffian darted from the throng –
“Bring the ‘Pearl’ hither.” Back into the crowd
Sprang Ali, and returned leading along
A fine male camel double-humped and proud,
And – for a camel – beautiful and strong.
Upon whose swaying vertebrae did swag
A cross between a wigwam and a bag.

Thence came a woman’s voice, with fretful sound
Carping at large, till Mahmoud with a grin,
Pointed to the new-made mother on the ground,
When Ali took the situation in.
Down knelt the camel, while the troops around
Pushed snickering to see the fun begin,
For the disciplining of a favorite wife
Adds in the Orient a zest to life.

Out Ali haled her, and along with her
A little naked and pot-bellied maid
Some six years old – who bit the officer
That on her his ungentle hand had laid,
Then calm amid the bustle and the stir
Stood with her small eyes flashing unafraid,
While Ali, in conclusion of the scene,
Put the new mother in the palanqueen,





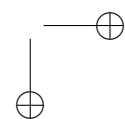
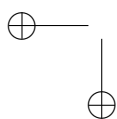
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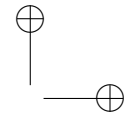
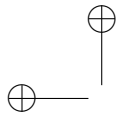
Or howdah, or whatever you may choose
To call the thing. The favorite cast aside
Saw suddenly that it was not any use
To struggle longer. Glancing scorn and pride,
She quenched the springs of picturesque abuse.
Some natural tears she shed that soon were dried,
For she foresaw that if she would but wait
Her rival would endure an equal fate.

Meanwhile, still uttering protesting cries
The babe lay wriggling. No one seemed to care
Much about him. His mother's rapid rise
Would not apparently prove his affair.
She gazed down on him, tears in her timid eyes,
With the look of one that would, but does not dare.
Mahmoud in short was not disposed to add
To what responsibilities he had

Of the same order, which were numerous –
Stray-gotten sons and daughters ta'en on trust,
By many a savage maid fortuitous.
The handmaid or the victim of his lust
Fully expected to be treated thus –
That is to say, be used, abused, outthrust.
They therefore with aplomb his humor viewed,
Thinking him rather commonplace than lewd.

The little maid mentioned before by me
Had thus obtained this intellectual being,
These thoughts that wander through Eternity.
And, as for one I cannot help agreeing
That there is something in heredity
Which has a lot to do with the decreeing
Of destiny. In spite of his intention,
Mahmoud possessed some parts deserving mention.





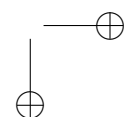
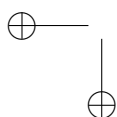
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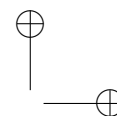
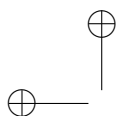
Of these was courage, which had been transmitted
To that small damsel – a clear flaming jewel
For man or maid – whereby the nimble-witted
Are put to shame, when he who takes his gruel
Comes back for more, with black brow double-knitted,
And his soul full of unextinguished fuel,
Resolved upon damnation and perdition,
Or utterly to consume all opposition.

Her childish mind had taken in the fact
Her sire would leave that baby there to die.
And, though she had no taste for the abstract,
Still the proceeding failed to satisfy
Her infant notions. She was quick to act.
Forward she leaped with a small, furious cry,
And, snatching up the by-blow from the sands,
Like a shot thrust him in his mother's hands.

And still stood all while men might count a score.
But she her father resolutely faced,
In miniature defiance, as for war
Or peace prepared, for either outcome braced.
On his part from exploding he forbore.
Perhaps he thought explosions were bad taste.
Perhaps by some vague pity he was smitten.
Anyhow he said merely, "It is written,"

And waved his hand. On moved the caravan
From nowhere bound apparently nowhither.
The skies blazed down contemptuous of man.
The heat beat back to make your eyelids wither.
Hung the mirage, and the dust-devil ran,
And the foul-smelling brutes, with slump and slither,
Followed their noses o'er the hot, white vastness
Until by chance they came to Mahmoud's fastness,





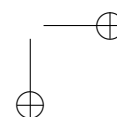
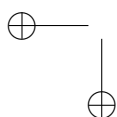
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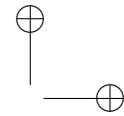
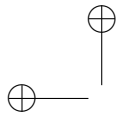
In the mid-desert between rift and dune
Hidden away. There was a Russian Colonel
In Samarcand, who would have gladly hewn
His right hand off to find that fort infernal.
He had no luck, and therefore hummed a tune
As he bent o'er his office work diurnal,
While his brow darkened with a cloud of doubts
Respecting Mahmoud's aims and whereabouts.

Gólubyov was his name. He had some parts,
Likewise some knowledge of the Asiatic,
Some little understanding of their hearts,
Which, after all, are not so enigmatic,
As one perhaps might gather from their arts
And customs. Though these last appear erratic,
Nevertheless I think it manifest,
That there are parallels in East and West.

So, having thus expelled these commonplaces
Out of the inner temple of the mind,
I shall observe Gólubyov on this basis
Had been endeavoring a long while to find
Where Mahmoud hid in his unknown oasis.
And Fortune hitherto had proved unkind.
Still Gólubyov, despite a sorry showing,
Kept on, being of the kind that keeps things going,

And hopefully encouraged dubious spies,
Beggars and pedlars, Usbegs, Sarts, and Persians,
Who fed his zeal with Oriental lies
Concerning the alarums and excursions
Of Mahmoud. With impenetrable eyes
The Colonel read the tales of their exertions
And filed away the cock and bull report.
Peter and Paul! Could he but find that fort –





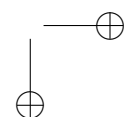
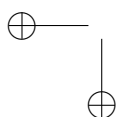
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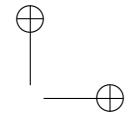
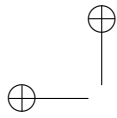
Then, – and his eye would light, his pulse come faster.
It was for him what something is for you,
What it would be for me, God knows, to master
This English verse, to feel life crashing through
The mighty words – full charged with all disaster,
All mirth, of what men are and what they do.
But I must write instead what I am taught
By inexperience and penurious thought.

Garrison days are long, and unsuccess
A weary thing. Time a slow river poured
On past the Colonel. But hope, none the less,
Was in him like the flicker of a sword
Drawn by the desperate when men oppress,
Not to be sheathed. However, he was bored
By failure, and haply had his disposition
Been known to Mahmoud, he might have made submission.

He left his office as the sunset glare
Incarnadined the heights of Zarafshan,
And irritably loitered through the square,
Sickened of thought that without order ran,
Scarce seeing how mosque and minaret were fair
In the wild light. But I am not the man
To blame him, lost in perilous conjecture,
For not appreciating architecture.

For every man there are two Samarcands –
One a white mystery that dreams defile
Touching its splendor – never built with hands,
And rather in the Oriental style.
The other a vast slum of huckster-stands,
Dirt walls, and greasy mud and broken tile,
Where swindlers cheat and hadjis smoke seraphic,
Men work, and children grow, and harlots traffic.





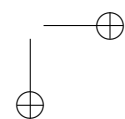
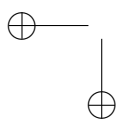
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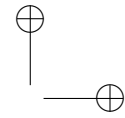
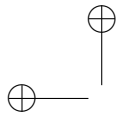
Gólubyov cursed that second Samarcand,
Striding through the square. His first, lost long ago,
Concerned him not. His thought was at a stand,
And he was not so happy as to know
That that strange popular life, close at his hand,
Was lovely as the fairest flowers that blow.
For, to my thinking, the beauty of the real
Can knock the stuffing out of the ideal.

In proof of which half-truth, his random eye,
Falling where with particolored sweep and swirl
The thickest rush of traffickers went by,
Beheld a woman, and a little girl
Pot-bellied, naked, that undauntedly
Gazed at the market's motley eddy and whirl.
The child's face struck his fancy, as suggesting
The mother might not prove uninteresting.

A black veil hid her face below the eyes,
But there was preternatural intention
In their fierce glance, rather to his surprise,
Being little apt to amorous invention,
Though now and then – A word unto the wise
Suffices – And the Colonel's comprehension
Suddenly shook off Mahmoud like a load,
Seeing the beginning of an episode.

He made a signal common in the East,
Unnecessary to describe to you,
And moved away, as if not in the least
Concerned about the movements of those two.
It's my belief he acted like a beast
On this occasion, for it's time you knew
Madame Gólubyov, who never could have viewed
This last démarche without solicitude.





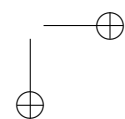
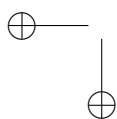
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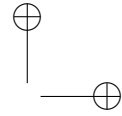
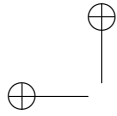
But she was far away in Transcaucasia,
Possibly flirting with some officer
Apt to flirt back. And, lost in Central Asia,
Gólubov dropped the rein and gave the spur.
So just about the time his Anastasia
Perhaps forgot him, he ceased to think of her
For a mad hour, and tragical to state,
Let the strange woman enter at his gate.

She proved a gorgeous thing just past the crest
Of desert youth. In a year she would be old,
But still magnificence of brow and breast
Was hers, superb to touch or to behold.
She was not over-clean, it is confessed,
But her dark eyes, fierce, humorless, and cold,
Darted contagious fire in all directions,
And quite burnt up the frivolous objections

Of sensitive refinement. By the way,
It's not my purpose at this point to paint
A picture of erotic naiveté.
That sort of thing has lost for us the quaint
Attraction it once had – has had its day.
It's obvious Gólubov was not a saint,
And that the woman, who thus came a votive
Offering to Cytherea, had a motive,

Which certainly was not desire of cash,
The first infirmity of feeble mind.
And Gólubov was puzzled, after the flash
Of his initial interest, to find
That her endearments had a subtle dash
Of the alluring and romantic kind.
For the odd fact, incredible to state, is
That all her favors came to him free gratis.





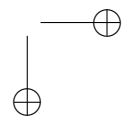
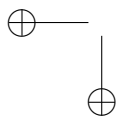
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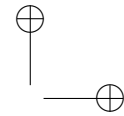
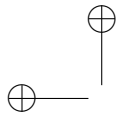
This on his side produced a strange reaction –
Namely, that she became a thing mysterious,
No mere gross instrument of satisfaction,
But a personality with rights imperious,
That ruled in some degree his course of action.
He vaguely felt that it was getting serious,
Deciding, Shaw-like, it was necessary
To drop her since she was not mercenary.

It would not do. Month after month went by.
Somehow or other the ending of the day
Found him in crooked alleys, silently
Stealing to a darkling house, hidden away
Behind a mosque against the flaring sky,
Wearied of lust, yet maddened by delay,
Haunted and harried by the vision of
The mysteries and secrecies of love.

His soul was sliding. As one who hesitates,
Hanging in despair over a steep declivity,
He fought with feeble hands against the fates,
Striving for freedom in renewed activity.
His office understrappers and his mates
Deplored this inconvenient proclivity,
Because it kept them late and brought them early.
No wonder if the bureaucrats were surly.

Blindly he turned to old things for relief.
Mahmoud appeared to him in a new light,
An object tangible against the grief
Of sensuality that day and night
Rode him red-spurred. The vagrant desert-chief
At least was something that a man could fight
Interminably, and keep his honor whole,
And not a low obsession of the soul.





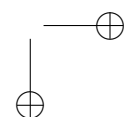
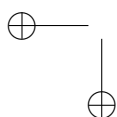
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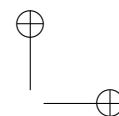
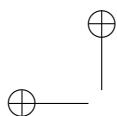
One of his favorite spies just at this point
In his affairs came with a plausible tale
That really held together joint by joint,
Tight and impervious as a coat of mail.
That yarn was oil of gladness to anoint
Gólubyov's face that weakness had made pale.
Almost he felt the first flare of ambition
As he began to plan an expedition

Eastward from Samarcand into the waste
Where no man travels, saving who for cause,
Reasonable or otherwise, have lost their taste
For habitations where men live by laws.
And thither throng the rejected and disgraced,
Whom solitude draws as a whirlpool draws.
And there according to the spy's report,
Lay Mahmoud in his irritating fort.

Gólubyov set the telegraphic tickers
Trembling all night 'twixt Merv and Samarcand –
A circumstance which started sundry flickers
Of mild excitement through the desert land,
And furthermore begot ecstatic snickers
Among some hangers-on of Mahmoud's band,
Who, loving a jest as dearly as a crime,
Wondered where the Colonel would strike wrong this time.

All was prepared. Tomorrow he would march
Horse, foot, and guns, a dainty expedition.
He would not go to her. His soul would parch
In Hell first. Action was the best contrition –
Yet somehow his footsteps echoed under the arch
Of the strange woman's house. An inhibition
Of will compelled him thither. Her painted eyes
And perfumed bosom were like the agonies





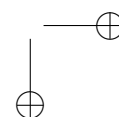
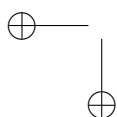
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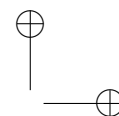
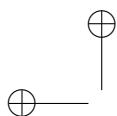
They know who suffer to create and fail,
Delicious heart-break intolerable and rending.
Her crucifying beauty, nail by nail,
Pierced him with cruelty uncomprehending.
And yet tonight it seemed as if a veil
Fell from her, and a passion beyond pretending,
Ruled her as his ruled him. In the dark bed
Lying beside him, suddenly she said:

“Why do you look for Mahmoud to the East?”
Gólubov started as a man must start
If one lay hand when he expects it least
Upon a matter secret in his heart.
An unseen furrow in the darkness creased
His brows. His lips luxurious fell apart,
Wondering. She laughed: “No child in the bazaar
But knows where Mahmoud and his army are.”

Recovering, he gasped: “How did you know?
One other knows the plan of war, and I.”
She laughed, “The very winds blow to and fro
What horse, what foot, and what artillery
Upon the wild-goose venture are to go.
And as for him, your doubly-trusted spy,
To the sure knowledge of half Turkestan
From his youth up he has been Mahmoud’s man,

“As I was Mahmoud’s once. But he lies snug
And safe, while you —” sourly she laughed again —
“Go to burn vermin in another rug,
And milk the bull-calf of the Eastern Plain,
While lousy Mahmoud, at the Camel’s Dug,
Makes mirth at me and you and your campaign,
And there is not a feeble-minded child
But laughs to see the governor beguiled.”





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Gólubyov snorted: "Easy to be found
Is the familiar house to them who know.
Lightly the jackal leaves at fault the hound
In a strange country questing to and fro,
But Mahmoud, though he understand the ground,
May well remember that he has a foe."

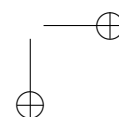
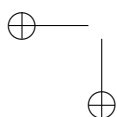
"Aye," she made answer, and her voice was grim
In the soft darkness, "It were well for him."

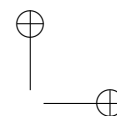
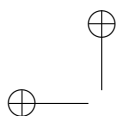
.

Came the dull morning. To a throbbing drum
Out marched the column eastward, a grey sky
Lowering above them. Every alley and slum
Poured forth uproarious as they marched by.
Some cursed, and some were gabbling jests, and some
Looked curiously at Gólubyov's pet spy,
Faizullah, a Persian dandy amorous-eyed,
On a white camel at the Colonel's side.

Faizullah liked excitement. Furthermore,
He loved his rôle of exquisite deceiver.
It thrilled his twisted nature to the core
To fool the uncircumcized unbeliever,
And in the dull web of guerilla war
It pleased him well enough to play the weaver.
Though it is my opinion when the shuttle
Flies through that warp, it's better far to scuttle.

Anyhow, the column, with due military
Precision, issued from the Eastern Gate,
In search of the elusive adversary.
The miles flowed by. The sands lay desolate.
They paused at noon, cursing the commissary,
Mahmoud, the Colonel, deserts, dust, and Fate,
Devoured their rations and marched on anew,
When like the trump of doom the bugle blew





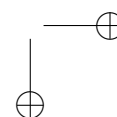
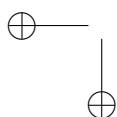
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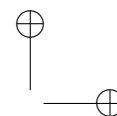
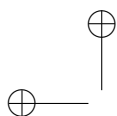
A piercing halt. Gólubyov, with an eye
Like a hawk stooping, along the column rode.
Suddenly his voice rang loud and harsh and high.
Out to him from the ranks a corporal strode.
Faizullah, the impenetrable spy,
Looked sharply once at Gólubyov, but showed
No other interest. At the Colonel's nod,
Saluting, the Corporal ordered up his squad,

And without further ceremony hauled
Faizullah the impenetrable spy,
Down from his beast with a vigor that appalled
That worthy. His face paled. His throat went dry.
Quicker than winking, in the dust he sprawled,
And looking up, beheld the Colonel's eye
Heavy as Fate, fixed on him full, and fraught
With dreadful sense. A cataract of thought

Drove and went crashing through Faizullah's brain.
Gólubyov said, as one who cracks a jest
Obvious, but yet not altogether plain:
"Faizullah. We are going to march Northwest.
I have decided you are to remain
Behind." The clicking gun-bolts drowned the rest.
Together like one piece the rifles pealed.
An order rang. Northwest the column wheeled,

While from the purple skies the buzzard headed,
Down plunging, sable-plumed, with raucous whistle
And gratulation and the fly-swarm eddied
Exultant o'er raw bones and clean-picked gristle.
Red beak and talon pierced and tore and shredded
The unfeeling flesh. Here endeth the epistle.
Faizullah was in an eye's twinkling time
All changed – to sun-scorched residues of lime.





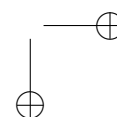
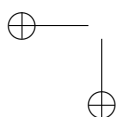
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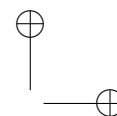
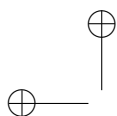
But for the column: it marched, or rather raced
On, on, and on, through the hot latter hours.
Night fell. The moon quicksilvered all the waste.
Góлубyov rode them like the evil powers.
He seemed the soul of diabolic haste.
Their feet were blistered, the sweat fell in showers,
And the wild landscape swam, ridge, rock, and dune,
Till suddenly, lit by the tremendous moon,

Towered up before, a shrouded figure, high
On a vast knock-kneed camel, still, alone,
A silver silhouette against a sky
Black azure, with fierce constellations sown,
Motionless, imperturbable. More nigh
They drew. Still stood the figure like a stone,
Part of the solitude, aloof, inhuman.
A voice cracked in the van, "By Christ! A woman!"

Of course it was our friend, once Mahmoud's wife,
Now Colonel Góлубyov's maitresse-en-titre.
A lady whose chief interest in life
Was to pay back whoever might mistreat her.
So it was war on Mahmoud to the knife.
Henceforth we'll call her, for the sake of meter,
Zuleika, which, for better or for worse,
Fits smoothly into an heroic verse.

She watched them. Her rich mouth under her veil
Writhed silently as for despite. She gnawed
Her nether lip. Passion had made her pale.
Her state of mind was one I can't applaud.
But moral precepts have a flavor stale.
When a woman's ready to be thief or bawd,
Traitor, or murderess, murder or else treason,
Or theft or bawdry will occur in season.





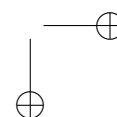
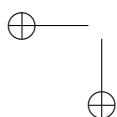
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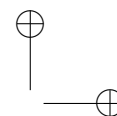
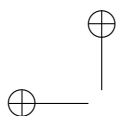
Clanging the column halted. Down they lay,
Each in his place, dead beaten and leg-weary,
In deep sonorous sleep. But long ere day,
The bugle clamored desolate and eerie.
Up they rose, snorting curses, and away
Staggered beneath the false dawn, numb and bleary,
Fed up, distinctly, with guerilla war.
Zuleika, on her camel rode before,

Silent, veiled, enigmatical. They followed
Trustful across motionless waves of sand,
Interminable crest and trough wind-hollowed.
Dawn came, and a ferocious heat that tanned
Their very entrails. On and on they wallowed
Snake-like, with interest by the vultures scanned,
Who, passing and repassing in the abyss,
Knew this was something much too good to miss.

The Colonel presently came to her side.
Doubt travailed in him and he wished to sound her.
Was it quite wise to follow such a guide?
But such a gloom and agony hung round her,
And her beauty was so feverishly up-dried,
That he wondered how the devil he had found her
Worth the twice-looking on. Still he could see
That he had wagered upon certainty.

There were three days and nights of it. They slept
On noon-hot sands by casual water-holes,
Or in white expanses where the whirlwinds swept
The cutting dust into their very souls.
Here and there stragglers faltered out, and crept
Aside to die, and the black-pinioned shoals
Of carrion birds, with whirr and clanging cry,
Plunged from the purple caldron of the sky.





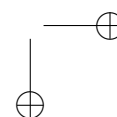
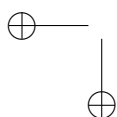
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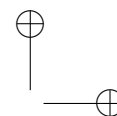
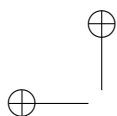
At length the land changed. Blocks of dull-red stone
Diversified a stretch of orange sand.
It was a desert that they had not known.
The crags that seemed hewn by a human hand,
Were a huge travesty, making more alone
The solitude. Perpetual whirlwinds fanned
The cliff-front with vast, breathing drifts of heat,
And the naked sandstone scorched their hammering feet.

Noon struck them with a blast of flaming air;
Thirst drained their strength like a narcotic drug.
Sudden Zuleika pointed northward, where
Towered far off a steep volcanic plug,
Shaking in the horizon's quiver and glare.
"The Camel's Dug!" she cried, "The Camel's Dug!"
Staring against the baleful light they stood,
While sudden thrills ran pulsing in their blood.

They halted. Night came dawdling on. At last
One after one the little stars came shivering.
The heat was tempered, though a furnace blast
Out of the red-hot cañon mouth struck quivering.
Silent, and braced for battle they marched past
The sombre Colonel, where he stood delivering
His last commands unto the carabineer
Who was to take Friend Mahmoud in the rear.

The column split. The flanking party rode
Swiftly into the darkness. But the rest
Headed for the black pinnacle that showed
Against the argent edge of the Northwest.
Góлубyov's heart was leaping, for a load
Was lifted from him. And there was a zest
In the black business, the nameless gusto thrilling
That ordinarily precedes a killing.





ZULEIKA

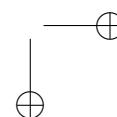
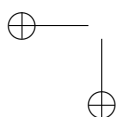
Nearer the peak showed, higher and more high.
West of it lay a palm grove at its feet.
And west of that, sands white as ivory
Stretched out beneath the moon in a vast sheet.
Across those dunes nor horse nor man could fly.
On the other hand the sheer rock barred retreat.
The reader, without looking at the map,
May see that Mahmoud's fort was Mahmoud's trap.

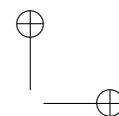
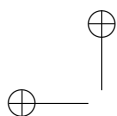
Nearer – they saw the glow of fallen coals
And the thin wisps of drifting, moon-shot smoke.
Grunting, they stumbled amid coney-holes,
With muffled slip and thud, but no man spoke
As they debouched. With palpitating souls
They loosed the camel-cannons from the yoke,
Trained them, and lay down, each man in his lair
Waiting for the rocket in the North to flare.

.

Mahmoud the Usbeg in his palm-leaf hut,
Slept not. His liquid, meditative eyes,
Roving uneasily, were fain to shut
And could not. The Bear, circling round the skies
Hung opposite the crazy doorway, but
Mahmoud was thinking of his enemies,
And, for the first time in his life, was wondering
Where in the fiend's name Góľubyov was blundering.

For the first time, I say, for heretofore,
He had always known the Colonel's whereabouts,
A thing of real utility in war.
But now Faizullah and his other scouts
Had sent no message for four days and more,
And he was troubled by perplexing doubts.
He tossed upon his mat, and said, "Bismullah!
Why should I worry for that fool, Faizullah?





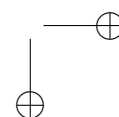
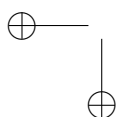
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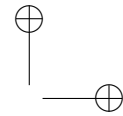
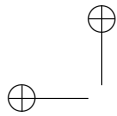
“Zuleika will send news tomorrow. She
Has been the best of all. Prophet of God!
They started three days back – Hm – let me see,
Three days – three days – three days – due eastward. – Odd
Faizullah sent no other news to me.
Well, it is time to pickle a new rod
For the unbeliever. If tidings come to hand
Tomorrow, by God, we’ll raid Samarcand.”

His mind grew blank – agreeable sensation –
When a stream of fire went ripping through the gloom,
Hissing half across the solemn constellation,
Where the red rocket dropped a purple plume.
Mahmoud came broad awake in consternation.
Southward the silence shattered, boom – boom – boom.
And right above his head crashed fierce concussions.
Yelling he rose: “Prophet of God! The Russians!”

There was no time to think, no time to act,
Only shells bursting and the firefly-flashing
Of musketry. Another rocket tracked
The northern skies, with violet fireballs splashing
The pallid stars. And a hissing cataract
Of bullets through the silent palms came slashing.
Horses plunged. Wounded camels lashed and bit,
And fear-crazed women screamed as if the Pit

Vomited devils. There was no time at all, –
Only the eternity of desperation,
In which you set your back against the wall,
While some one else commands the situation.
Mahmoud did what he could, though that was small
As a woman’s fan against an inundation.
But he was game – a thing which we admire
In saints, or men, or devils in Hell-fire.





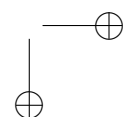
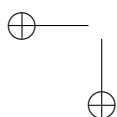
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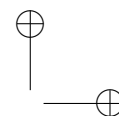
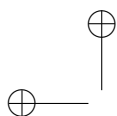
However, soldiers state emphatically
That men who are shot at from the front and rear,
Are difficult whether to hold or rally,
And men roused up from sleep are prone to fear.
This ruined Mahmoud, as Bunthorne says, to-tally.
In twenty dreadful minutes it was clear
That Charles Twelfth and Napoleon rolled in one,
Could do no more than Gólybyov had done.

That worthy held his men back till the dawn
Sowed all the Orient with pearl and gold.
He knew he had the enemy in pawn
And that he could not wriggle from the hold.
But when the curtains of the East were drawn,
Forward in an exultant wave they rolled,
Impelled by lust for plunder and for slaughter,
And, further, great desire for drinking water.

Right on them at the grove's edge, eager to die,
Came Mahmoud. On the bayonets he came,
Brandishing his scimeter to the bloody sky,
Leaping upon them, bellowing the name
Of Allah, clear and resonant and high,
They could destroy him, but they could not tame.
Zuleika, following swift behind the line,
Saw the scimeter flicker, saw the wild eyes shine,

And then five bayonets with one motion thrust
Into neck, shoulder, breast, abdomen, groin,
Holding him upright for an instant, just
Long enough for one lashing, desperate foin,
Not bloodless, for it altogether mused
One soldier's face and slashed another's loin.
He staggered. Out they jerked the bayonets dribbling,
Over him they rushed. Zuleika, fiercely nibbling





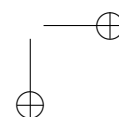
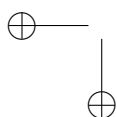
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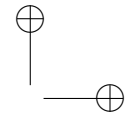
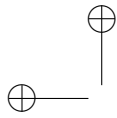
Her lower lip, stood by him, brooding, dark,
He was dead so soon, he hardly knew what hit him.
Why did he perish so, ere he could hark
Her tale, how she had managed to outwit him?
There is no triumph when the dead lie stark.
She wished him living, to have torn or bit him,
To have plagued his spirit with device remorseless.
Now he was dead, and all her vengeance forceless.

She whipped a knife out (This is getting horrid)
And swiftly carved a sickle-shapen cut
On Mahmoud's bloody breast and battered forehead.
It was the custom of her people, but
When the blind Fury with the shears abhorred
Comes after me, I hope no Tartar slut
Will have a chance, however she may hate me,
In such a grewsome style to decorate me.

She turned. Gone was the line. But shots were ringing
In the palm-grove, and bestial yell and shriek
Echoed in the Camel's Dug. Erect upspringing,
She hastened thither. Something yet to seek
Showed in her eyes. She ran. The red knife swinging
In her blood-dabbled hand seemed to bespeak
A further matter heavy on her heart,
Which I shall not immediately impart.

The fight was over. At the water-holes
The soldiers soused themselves, slaking their thirst
Some had plunged into it to wallow and roll
And drink and drink till they were like to burst.
Gólubyov leaned against the shattered bole
Of a wrecked palm, in various thought immersed,
For even the confident are more or less
Sobered after the moment of success.





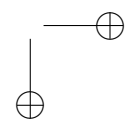
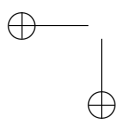
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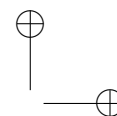
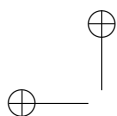
Licking his heat-cracked lips, he strolled away,
Musing at random and sniffing moodily,
For slovenly, unhandsome corpses lay
Between the wind and his nobility;
And chancing toward the towering crag to stray,
He saw a hut tucked in behind a tree,
Whence issued sounds denoting female woe,
Mingled oddly with a child's delighted crow.

Something was doing there. Gólubov beat
The flimsy barrier down, and went inside.
He saw a woman's face, white as this sheet,
Staring with great eyes, popping, terrified,
Upon Zuleika, who, removed some feet,
Stood glaring, scornful, silent, cobra-eyed,
While, at the other end of the abode,
A fat boy-baby kicked and cooed and crowed.

Zuleika saw him not, or else, dissembling,
Bore her intense glance on her victim full.
Her gait had lost the feminine, resembling
The stiff-legged motion of a lecherous bull.
He saw the stranger's naked bosom trembling.
He saw Zuleika quick as lightning pull
A red knife out. He saw it flashing – falling –
Gólubov gave one leap and sent her sprawling,

Staggering himself with the vigor of his spring.
She was up and stabbing at him ere he knew.
Under his guard she dived ere he could fling
Her fury off. She bit a finger through.
One arm clung round him as a fiend's might cling,
A crazy thrust half cut his ear in two.
They whirled around the hut in a wild reel
Poignant with grunts and flashes of red steel –





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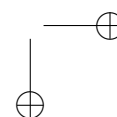
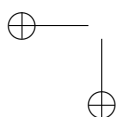
She was at his throat. It was her life or his.
He yelled. Far off he heard an answering shout.
The knife glanced on his brow and just did miss
His eye, but the fierce blood forth in a spout
Burst, blinding him. Must put an end to this!
Despairingly he wrenched his pistol out.
“Let go!” he gasped. She thrust with triple vigor.
He pushed it in her face and pulled the trigger.

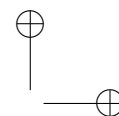
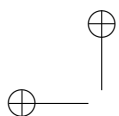
Half-blind from blood and the close pistol-reek,
He staggered. Down she dropped without a sound.
He cleared his eyes and mopped his bloody cheek,
And looked upon her huddled on the ground,
Her face all powder-scorched. His knees went weak
Then braced again. He fancied she had found
Her heart’s desire. Gólubyov’s first reaction
Was a keen sense of genuine satisfaction

That she was dead, and ended all her rule
To which he had so pitifully bowed.
Here was peace now, a kind of shady, cool
Interposition, as a summer’s cloud.
Never again would he so play the fool. –
Well, she was dead, and it must be allowed
Had served him well. She had been too exciting.
He turned. The other woman looked inviting.

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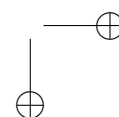
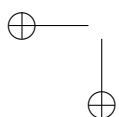
Seven days later the column, marching slow,
Beheld the many-colored domes that stain
The turquoise sky, and peaks of Eastern snow,
Where Zarafshan towers over the dry plain.
Before them limped the remnants of the foe,
Men, women, children, a miserable train,
Covered with wounds and rags, wild-eyed and sore.
And beside Gólubyov, a sergeant bore

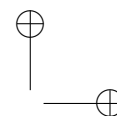
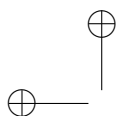




ZULEIKA

On a pole, tottering against a sky
Of peacock-blue, Mahmoud the Usbeg's head,
Lid-shrivelled, cheeks sunk in, and eyeballs dry,
The forehead marked with a sickle-cut of red.
At the tail-end of the long company,
A woman on a camel rode. She fed
Her baby, stroking him with gentle hand.
So Ulug Beg came first to Samarcand.





Cest un grand tort à notre nation que de ne pas resister a la moquerie.

La haine et la perversité, dans une femme, sont au-dessous de l'art; il se dégrade en les peignant.

Dans la fiction comme dans le vrai, c'est peut-etre à la même source que l'on puise la melancholie et la gaieté.

Madame de Staël

I will be proud, I will read politic authors.

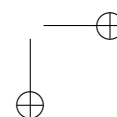
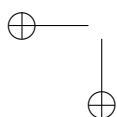
Twelfth Night

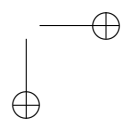
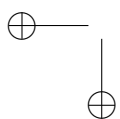
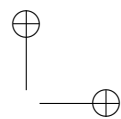
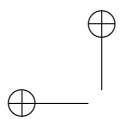
Well, I don't know that they have a right to be impatient of starvation; but still there does seem to be an insolence of riches and prosperity, which one day or another will have a downfall. And this will be a pity, too.

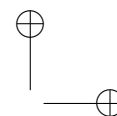
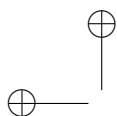
Nathaniel Hawthorne

The vile person shall not be called liberal.

Isaiah







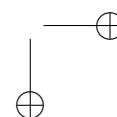
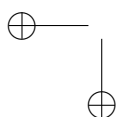
CANTO II

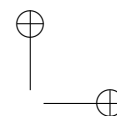
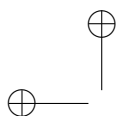
GRACHEV

A naked four-year-old in the white court
Sat meditating upon mysteries
Which puzzle thinkers of the subtler sort.
He had discovered that his leg was his,
And was perplexed by what this might import.
There were vague stirrings in his small abyss
Of personality, uncanny, new.
Who am I? What am I? Who the devil are you?

He watched himself as if from far away
He spied on some strange animal, unknown,
Incalculable. His own soul was the prey
And the mysterious hunter was his own
New enigmatic I. As in a play,
He saw his little figure on a stone
Seated, considering with a touch of awe
Whatever the strange thing might be that saw.

Kipling has some fine thoughts on this in “Kim,”
Pages two-ninety-three, two-ninety-four.
Borrow, however, antedated him
In his “Lavengro.” Milton, furthermore,
With spiritual eyes into that dim
Ununderstandable gazed long before.
And my mind swims in fearful unreality
Whenever I recall that dread duality;





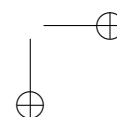
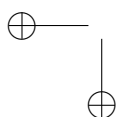
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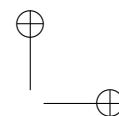
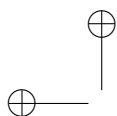
And the half of me that loves a risqué story,
Plays golf, gives lectures, signs cheques, likes to quaff
Forbidden liquors, feels the transitory
Overwhelming presence of the other half
Before it, a swift momentary glory
Of comprehension, which knows that wheat is chaff,
And, with a strange and terrible persistence,
Affirms the incoherence of existence.

Greater, as the child thought, the wonder grew,
Pressing on his small shoulders like a weight.
And with the effort his tiny eyebrows drew
Together, as he fluttered at the gate
Of understanding what none ever knew.
Happily, a rooster, strutting and sedate,
Crowing, cut short the meditative mood,
Which Freud could no more solve than Achmet could.

His dark eyes burned as he beheld the fowl,
Red-combed, with plumes of ebony and snow,
And straightway, with a predatory howl,
He hurled himself in fury on the foe,
Who, having game-blood, pecked him cheek and jowl.
Achmet wailed shrill and let the great bird go,
Retaining, for form's sake or souvenir,
A plume once eminent on the victim's rear.

Out of the house came swiftly a small maid,
With all authority upon her brow,
Who showed a disposition to upbraid
The assailant. He was weeping loudly now.
She caught him up, administering first aid,
Petting him, while with sobs he told her how
Mischance befell, between sharp gusts of woe.
She seemed half-sorry that he had let go,





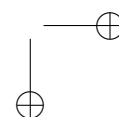
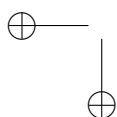
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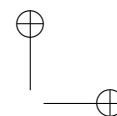
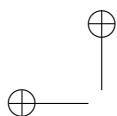
Rating him rather for his ill success
Than for his somewhat criminal attack.
She wiped his eyes with a corner of her dress,
Straightened him out, and slapped him on the back,
Till he regained composure, more or less.
Her eye showed somehow a flicker of that black
Determination that four years ago
Had shielded Achmet in a world of woe.

Little Zuleika never quite understood
The sudden disappearance of her mother.
After a week or two of solitude,
Her place had been preempted by another,
A large, soft thing, tender-eyed and subdued,
Easy to wheedle. The damsel did not bother
Her head about the problem any more
Than about Gólubyov, who, as before,

Came to the hidden house at dewy eve,
That is to say, for the first month or two,
After his raid. His interest, I believe,
Waned rapidly, as a man's is apt to do
When a fool's in the case. He asked for leave,
Got it, and for some seasons dropped from view,
And when he did return to Turkestan,
He was a general, and much-married man.

Zuleika, as I mentioned, found the Colonel
And Achmet's mother not worth consideration,
But felt a lively interest maternal
In Achmet's discipline and education.
A dozen times a day from the infernal
Shades and immediate annihilation,
She dragged him by the leg or by the hair.
Hers was no policy of laissez faire.





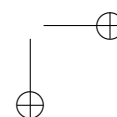
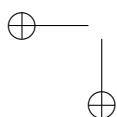
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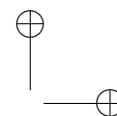
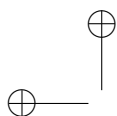
Yet there was something in him that displeased her,
Something of the whining softness of his mother,
Complaining vaguely when Zuleika teased her,
Which roused in her contempt she could not smother.
But then the charm of his brown limbs appeased her,
Who was like unto him? Where was such another?
And yet if he had been true desert stock,
Would he not have murdered that vainglorious cock?

A voice called from the bed-room, where unseen,
Unseeing, Achmet's mother lay reclined,
Who for rhyme's sake henceforth shall be Yasmeen.
Zuleika entered. Achmet tagged behind,
Meditating the disaster that had been.
Zuleika called. He hastened. For he opined
That, though one might make light of kin and kith,
That damsel was not to be trifled with.

Zuleika found Yasmeen as all folk found her,
Relaxed in endless dolce far niente,
With minor articles of luxury round her,
Mirrors, and toilet instruments aplenty,
As years before when youth and beauty crowned her.
Now, though she had no cavalier sirvente,
Being, so to say, retired upon a pension,
She practised the old ritual with attention,

Combing her hair and curling it all day,
Rubbing her face with unguents and with oils,
And then reclining in loose disarray,
As fancying that a victim in her toils
Were taken. In her eyes a far-away
Desire would glow, and toying with the coils
Of her abundant and majestic hair,
Endlessly she told herself, "Yet am I fair."





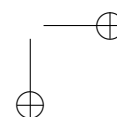
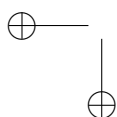
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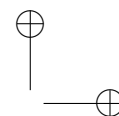
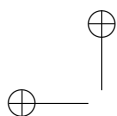
You never knew such idleness as she
Lay sunk in, qualified with a soft regret
For days departed of mild lechery,
For which she felt quite competent as yet.
Sometimes she was aware of her ennui
And then was apt to whine a bit and fret.
Zuleika, though she could not bear her simpering,
Hated her frankly when she fell to whimpering,

Which oft befell since her last lover failed,
A stout knave whom perhaps you recollect.
He was that Ali who aforetime haled
The two Zuleikas with such scant respect
From their luxurious ease, while Achmet wailed
Not vainly. Ali was the architect
Of his own fortunes, and when Mahmoud's race
Was run, accepted mercy with some grace.

After such shows of courage as become
Defeated men, and a due interval
As prisoner, which he found wearisome,
He had changed sides at last, nor was that all.
Yasmeen into his lap like a large plum,
Having bored Gólubov, contrived to fall.
She bored him too, till such time as he went
To be a carpet merchant in Tashkent.

There he grew fat on Gólubov's subvention,
Paid him in his capacity as spy.
Often he journeyed south, where the attention
Of India's sovereigns was attracted by
His enterprises. For I grieve to mention
Gun-running was his real industry.
How did they know? Why, it was clear enough.
Their own gun-runners caught him with the stuff.





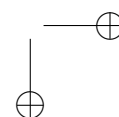
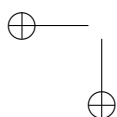
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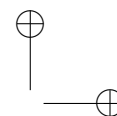
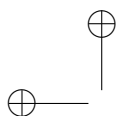
So much for Ali. No other Amurath
Succeeded to the kingdom of the heart
Of the Fair One when he left; so fits of wrath
And pettishness ruled that important part.
She lived in an erotic Turkish bath
Of balked desires, which she had not the art
Or will to hide, moping the dull days through.
Zuleika's hatred grew like a bamboo,

And her small, baleful eyes would fill Yasmeen
With a cold, inexplicable sense of fear,
For then she was reminded of a scene
Four years before, that somehow yet was clear
As a bolt of lightning, crashing violet-green,
Through her dull intellectual atmosphere.
And her vast breasts with sudden qualms would quiver,
While the slow juices curdled in her liver.

Tritely I note, how strange is personality
When one is born to serve, and one to dominate;
A law of most surprising generality
Which as a democrat I should abominate.
Zuleika had the grit and the mentality
To rule the roost howe'er Yasmeen might comminate.
The younger o'er the elder swayed, though why,
Psychologists may tell you, but not I.

Left to herself, Yasmeen had chased Zuleika
Into the streets to starve or beg her bread.
But of course Gólubyov, who was no piker,
Might have asked awkward questions on that head.
Long ago he had seen the child was like her
Mother. He felt he owed it to the dead,
And had been moved to pay a small subvention
For her support – from his ex-mistress' pension.





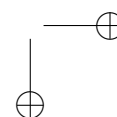
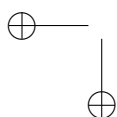
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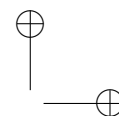
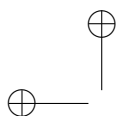
Yasmeen today was feeling rather low,
When in Zuleika came with Achmet trailing
Slow at her heel, disconsolate, and so
She took her evil humor out in railing
Against Zuleika, on whose cheek a glow
Burnt sullen, fed by inward fires unfailing,
Her eyes were furious, but she stood there quiet,
Like a small genius of incipient riot.

Yet she would murder that fat female lump.
Almost she smiled in glad anticipation,
When at the outer door was heard a thump.
Yasmeen looked up in pleased interrogation.
Suddenly she came up sitting with a jump.
Perhaps – she felt a heightened circulation,
While with slow step Zuleika to the gate
Went dawdling, with design to irritate.

Through the grille she saw only the pimpled face
Of Grachev, a lean Russian stripling, half
Gólubov's agent in his act of grace,
And half a servant of the Telegraph.
Not one to please Yasmeen in any case.
Back the child came with a discordant laugh
To tell Yasmeen, who veiled herself and went
Grumbling to the grille to know the lad's intent.

Grachev had been there many times before,
Since Gólubov, first wearying of Yasmeen,
Had sent him monthly to her grated door
To act as his financial go-between.
Grachev had speculated, but forbore
To search too closely what the thing might mean.
He wondered, as he waited at the grate,
Why in the deuce the general paid the freight





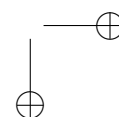
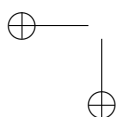
GRACHEV

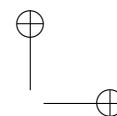
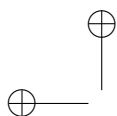
With such a conscientious regularity,
Which really might occasion some surprise.
Was it a blackmail-charge or was it charity?
He really did not in the least surmise
The origin of this peculiarity.
Yasmeen at this point, veiled to her dark eyes,
An Eastern fashion which I don't mind stating
Became her, came to meet him at the grating.

He pushed the rubles to her through the grille,
Having performed a suitable subtraction.
It was odd that he had never noticed till
Now her plump fingers with such satisfaction.
His cheek flushed with the shadow of a thrill.
Yasmeen observed with pleasure the reaction.
Her dark eyes o'er the veil looked large and gentle.
Grachev felt suddenly quite sentimental.

Haltingly in a bastard dialect,
Two-thirds bad Persian and a quarter Turki,
He stammered something whose meaning and effect
Yasmeen found altogether dark and murky;
But she was in no humor to dissect
His sentiments, although his style was jerky.
Her eyes smiled, though she understood no word,
Because her heart was sick of hope deferred –

A phrase of biblical provenience swiped
For the occasion from the slumbering past,
Which, though it be a trifle stereotyped,
Accurately delineates Yasmeen's pale cast
Of thought malodorous, which having ripened
Early and hung long, now was rotting fast.
Sad is the false bloom of that latter Spring.
But then Yasmeen was such a fool – poor thing!





GRACHEV

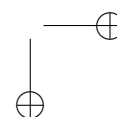
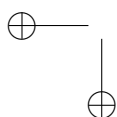
Nought came of the encounter at the time.
Grachev departed to his work, traversing
The foul streets bright with iridescent slime,
While poor Yasmeen, for disappointment cursing,
Tossed on her cushions till a dream sublime
Out of the horn gate issued soft, immersing
Her soul. In sleep she smiled. Her breasts luxurious
Heaved. What she dreamed I cannot tell the curious.

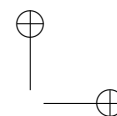
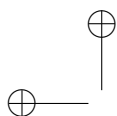
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Grachev meanwhile despatched official wires
Mechanically all day with such precision
As a well-drilled bureaucracy requires.
Out of his mind the momentary vision
Of the grating drifted, as a cloud retires.
He even viewed himself with some derision
For having been in the least degree affected
By any eyes however well directed.

Night came. He lit his pipe and went his way
Gingerly through the streets lightless and smelly,
To supper in a nondescript café,
Whence, having stilled the clamor of the belly,
He sought the lonely chamber, where his day
Began, as was the case with Machiavelli,
Who, having spent the light with louts impure,
Devoted the night-hours to literature.

There, having lit the lamp and locked the door,
From hidden nooks and coigns his books he drew.
Bakunine issued from a bureau-drawer,
Karl Marx came blackened from the chimney-flue,
While from beneath a loose board in the floor
Lassalle, and Chernichov's "What shall we do?"
Emerged again into the upper air,
All of them very much the worse for wear,





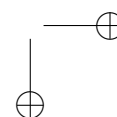
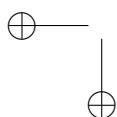
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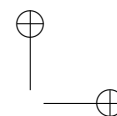
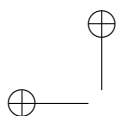
He piled them up before him on the desk,
While blue tobacco-smoke in widening rings
Drifted from his lips. He felt it picturesque
To trifle nightly with forbidden things.
His efforts to peruse them were grotesque.
Such books are dull, unless the mind has wings,
And Grachev missed innumerable tricks,
Being intellectually an apteryx.

The Proletariat en Redingote
As a type with a sad interest is rife.
They are so willing – eager to devote
All that they have, and all they have is life,
To the great cause. They have cut many a throat,
And will cut more before they sheathe the knife
For ever, out of sheer sublime devotion
To this or that miscomprehended notion,

Derived, as Grachev, our poor friend, derived
Political inspiration, from some phrase
Laboriously picked up. The word survived
And the spirit perished in a dreadful maze
Where no goal was where any man arrived,
But only words, words, words – a hideous haze
Blown from the cave of Error to becloud
At once the individual and the crowd;

So that the strong man will abhor the weak,
And the weak in the balance weigh the strong
And find him wanting, while the vile grow sleek
And fatten on the strife. Oh Lord, how long!
And the wise never act, but write or speak,
And the disciples take the meaning wrong,
And twist and torture it till Hell breaks loose,
And the whole fat's in the fire. What's the use?





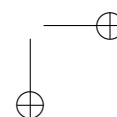
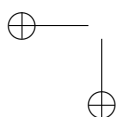
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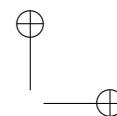
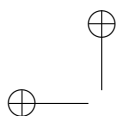
Grachev was in the twisting, torturing stages.
He was not reading to get information,
But to find terms like “the iron law of wages,”
“Bourgeois,” “economical interpretation.”
These thrilled him, as he turned the thumb-marked pages,
With a sense of spiritual exaltation.
He had never heard the mot of Mirabeau,
That words are things. Unhappily 'tis so.

Words can be terrible things. They overthrow
Their maker, trapped in the net of his own fallacies.
They overwhelm the high and crush the low.
They burn the tenement and gut the palaces.
They check the rapid and they speed the slow.
They quicken thought, or smite it with paralysis,
And they have viper fangs and vampire wings.
A rhymester knows. Words can be terrible things.

Sometimes when they have leagued themselves with fact,
They mean necessity and eternal fate.
But when with mere ideas they strike the pact,
They shrivel down to tattered drivel, and prate
Unmeaning, uninforming, inexact.
And this has been so much the case of late,
That hunger and ferocious hatred rip
The very warp of human fellowship.

Therefore I hate the conversation flingers,
The Utopiasters, formulary-swallowers,
The paper supermen and slogan-singers,
The imbecile leaders and the idiot followers,
The clock-reversers, the millennium-bringers,
And all the low-grade morons who are wallowers
In the slough of theoretic inebriety,
And style themselves the saviors of society.





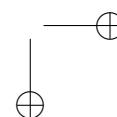
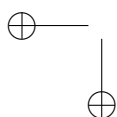
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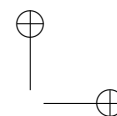
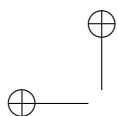
Each party gives me the same sort of pain,
Whether it be the radical or conservative,
Because, in both, the fluids of the brain
Run mainly undertaker's ripe preservative.
They swop and chop and lie and lie again,
And each has a programme that a mule would swerve at if
It were displayed before him where he browses.
Programme! Dear Christ! A plague on both your houses!

I beg your pardon. Now for many a stanza
My story has lain broadside on the shoal
Of wild digression. But the extravaganza
Shall now go forward. Grachev, heart and soul,
Plunged in Karl Marx, stumbled on a bonanza
Of a fine phrase with the sonorous roll
Imperial of a triumphal chariot.
It was "Dictatorship of the Proletariat."

Now this expression means a thing or two.
Marx had a theory, when he minted it,
That civilization as a whole goes through
Economic processes, which bit by bit
Change, till a whole new system comes in view,
More liberal, more enlightened and more fit.
Though the main difference 'twixt the old and new
Is that the many rob us, not the few.

For first the Proletariat must bear sway,
Which will be fine, if one's a proletarian.
I think I'll join those unclean birds one day
And gorge myself on capitalistic carrion.
My red right hand shall hack and maim and slay,
And I will blow the bolshevistic clarion,
Exhorting the chevalier d'industrie
To share his bulging bank accounts with me.





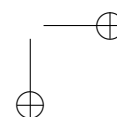
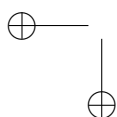
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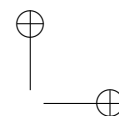
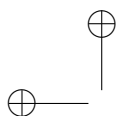
Dictatorship of the Proletariat – fine!
And yet I question if they're a majority
In vulgar numbers, and if they were, opine
That wouldn't constitute superiority
Against an energetic firing-line.
For force in most things has its due priority.
And in an issue of this sort, of course,
The final reason of mankind is force.

I have had visions of myself at last
Somehow important, a figure dominating –
Dominating anything – Those joys are past.
You have doubtless had the same, I don't mind stating.
Dictation's pleasant for a man or caste,
Providing he or they do the dictating.
But I confess I'm not at all inclined
To knuckle to the proletarian kind

Which Grachev favored. His eyes gleamed with elation,
He ran his fingers through his fallow hair.
In an ecstasy of mispronunciation
He mouthed the syllables. He did not care
What the phrase meant – but it gave him a sensation
Of breathing livelier, more liberal air.
Whate'er it was, he loved it. That was flat.
I have known poets who were just like that.

So what Marx, laboring to comprehend
The mystery of History, with pain,
Renunciation, and reading without end,
Crystallized in an expression not too plain,
Tickled the ear of my young Russian friend,
Nor made the least impression on his brain.
But it made him feel like a man dedicated
To something – anyhow something consecrated,





GRACHEV

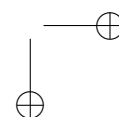
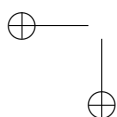
He almost looked intelligent, though the gleam
Left his eyes looking blanker than before.
It was as if the pilot of a dream
Had showed him far off a mysterious shore
Beyond his intellectual ocean stream.
His head dropped. Presently a gentle snore
Echoed in the lamplit room. Their fate, whose barks
Are launched in the back-water of Karl Marx.

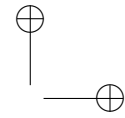
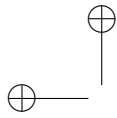
Midnight came on. Black clouds of vapor drifted
From the lamp-chimney. Cats yowled. Grachev woke
Suddenly, to find the greasy soot thick-sifted
Over his book, and the room full of smoke.
Uneasily a tingling arm he lifted,
And a sense of miserable disquiet broke
Into his soul. The loneliness, the hour
Oppressed him with a melancholy power.

He blew the lamp out. Into his bed he crawled.
But his mouth tasted as if his soul were stale.
An amorous tom-cat at the window squalled
Like a thirsty vampire in the Magyar tale.
His mind roved till of a sudden it recalled
Soft sombre eyes glimpsed over a dark veil –
Soft – soft – so soft – A warmth – a languor crept,
Feeling or thought he did not know – he slept.

.

In a day or two the large Yasmeen was gratified
To find her Achmet playing in the court
With a tin sword. Maternal care beatified
Her countenance. Things were looking up, in short.
Her good opinion of her charms was ratified.
She felt a new thrill of the ancient sort.
Henceforth a sharp watch at the door she kept,
And saw from time to time the nympholept,





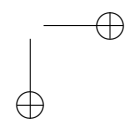
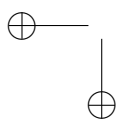
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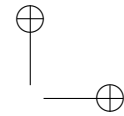
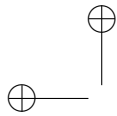
Who was, according to her point of view
And training, preternaturally shy.
A dozen times up to the door he drew,
A dozen times he hurriedly passed by,
Like one who has important work to do.
She waited quiet and he presently
Paused at the door. Yasmeen, close hidden, heard
Him giggle. The inevitable occurred.

Grachev was really happy all that year,
Despite what puritans and prudes may say.
Yasmeen created quite an atmosphere
Of Oriental passion in her way.
He found her favor came a trifle dear,
But even though it went beyond his pay,
He did not care. He knew the ways and means
Of small officialdom behind the scenes.

He ceased to be a lonely bachelor.
After a month, baggage and bag he moved
To the hidden house. Secretively he bore
Thither those literary bombs he loved,
His treasury of economic lore,
And underneath Yasmeen's best bedstead shoved,
Where they were suitably concealed from view.
Thus where his treasure was, his heart was too.

I may observe that his Athenian nights
With the phrase-making priests of politics
Were broken by material delights,
Whose history I shall not intermix
In my staid chronicle, for he who writes
Too much at large of Venus Genetrix,
Of Bacchic and of Aphrodisiac revel
Presently comes down – to his reader's level.





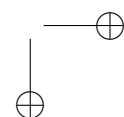
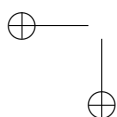
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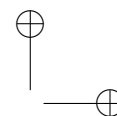
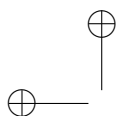
And a poet, when his singing robes are on,
Though they be Harlequin's pied rags and tatters,
Can't be too careful not to dwell upon
The cosmic urge and other vicious matters,
The muse's man-trap, when all's said and done.
His rôle is more consistent when he scatters
Rose-petals on the weary road men go.
Isn't it? Well, perhaps not. I don't know.

At least the relation satisfied a craving
In Grachev. Good or bad, he loved Yasmeen,
And liked the children. His dull daily slaving
Was but the interval that came between
His pleasures, which on the whole were not depraving.
'Twould have been hard to find a merrier scene
Than that which waited him at eventide.
A lonely boy is lightly satisfied.

Ere the wild sun was set, he loved to wander
With Achmet and Zuleika hand in hand,
Open-mouthed like the children, hither and yonder,
Up and down the queer streets of Samarcand,
Full of a charm he never stopped to ponder.
It goes when one begins to understand.
Perhaps you may have noticed that my friend
Was constituted not to comprehend.

And therefore he was happy, simply feeling
His simple pleasure as the pageant ran
On the street before him, bickering and dealing,
Sart and Bokhariot, Usbeg, Turkoman,
Mingled in one vast color-scheme appealing,
White turbans, fezzes, caps of Astrakhan,
With the flame-riven turquoise height above it.
Had you been there, you could not choose but love it.





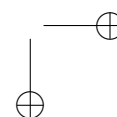
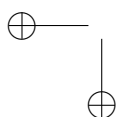
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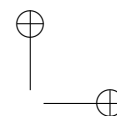
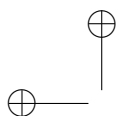
But most he loved to tarry where the pile,
The mosque, so-called, of Ulug Beg, rose high, –
A miracle of many-colored tile,
Drinking new beauty out of the red sky.
There they would linger for a little while,
Breathless before imperial symmetry.
And the blind fortune-teller of Khokand,
Scrawling in the white dust with his shrunken hand,

Would babble tales of the star-gazing man
That reared it for his spiritual ease,
Centuries ago, long wont the skies to scan
Gauging the influence of the Pleiades,
Arcturus' sons and red Aldebaran.
The blind face quivered, dreaming of the seas
Star-patterned, but his voice would leap again,
Mumbling the glories o'er of Tamerlane

That rode in triumph through Persepolis,
While Sogdiana and Atropatene
Trembled at the rumor of his victories,
And all the ancient lands that lie between
Euphrates and the Tigris flood were his,
From the pearl-spawning gulf north to Cashbeen.
Tamerlane! Tamerlane! Till you fancied him,
His foot upon the neck of Yilderim,

And the world before him, crouched, as the elephant
Crouches before a man at a durbar,
Waiting whatever mercy he might grant,
His dreadful peace, his yet more dreadful war.
Popes, khans, and kings and Caesars of Byzant
Sent embassies and trembled, while afar,
Behind Himalaya, India's thousand lords
Woke in their silken bowers, and gripped the swords





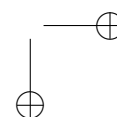
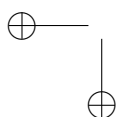
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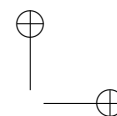
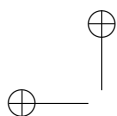
That were to fail them. The vast enterprise
Grew real as the dry voice quavered on.
And the dull glare out of the shrunken eyes
Looked past them in the teeth of the red sun,
Back into the depth of five lost centuries,
To Delhi's storming, and a huge deed done,
Hot from a man's brain, on a scale gigantic.
I fear the fortune-teller was romantic,

For wavering forward, as a blind man must,
He touched the brow of Achmet with his hand,
Crying aloud: "So Tamerlane was just
Another such, yet had kings at command.
He was a babe once, playing in the dust,
And yet was Emperor of Samarcand."
Then, as it were, remembering his trade,
He stroked him, saying: "So is an Emperor made," –

A platitude he had employed before.
It was a stock expression of his patter,
Part of the sad old charlatan's blind lore,
With which he peppered his amorphous chatter,
Mumbling prophetic phrases o'er and o'er.
Zuleika smiled superior to the matter;
Achmet was dumb. And Grachev, unimpressed,
Turned and beheld against the flaming West

Gólubov mounted on a big blue roan,
In silent meditation, cantering by.
Four years had changed him. His full cheek had grown
Thinner, and he sat his horse more heavily
Than on the wild march through the desert lone,
When at the last the "Camel's Dug" was dry.
He pulled the horse in, and his countenance
Showed sternly. With a monitory glance,





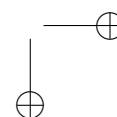
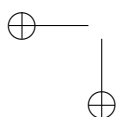
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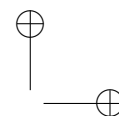
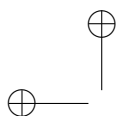
“Grachev,” he said, “A word unto the wise.
Be good to native children if you will.
I have no quarrel with your charities.
Your nature is a kindly one. But still
You’re an official. That way madness lies.
A hint’s a hint, and if improved with skill
Leads on to greatness and to revenue.
Asia is lots of fun, but she won’t do.”

He gave the horse the rein and cantered off,
While Grachev glowered after, too dumbfounded
By condescension, even to himself to scoff
At the position the general had propounded.
Meanwhile as stars came peeping, Gólubyov
Drew up before a fair white house surrounded
By cypresses. A lamp shone. From within
Came the strained melody of a violin,

Playing leisurely a soft improvisation
On one of Rimsky-Korsakov’s queer themes,
Where blank despair commingles with elation
In a mad carnival of opposed extremes.
One after one, fairer for hesitation,
Quavered the chords. The melodies in dreams
Far off and fugitive, turning, melting, shifting,
No softer on the sleeping sense come drifting.

He stole within, while yet the soft strain sprinkled
His heart with drops of music, and stood tingling
With pleasure that was pain, as the notes twinkled
And changed together, weaving and intermingling.
He shifted. His spur, tangling in the wrinkled
Fold of a Persian rug, with its small jingling
Sudden and sharp, mechanical and clear,
Betrayed his presence to the player’s ear,





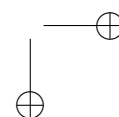
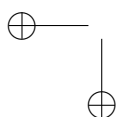
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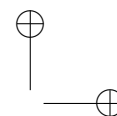
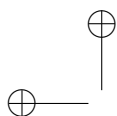
A black-browed woman with a skin like milk,
Who turned upon him with a startling cry
Of perfect pleasure. Her gown of sable silk
Flashed witchery. She laid her fiddle by,
Which, or as Byron and the Scotch say, whilk
Had so discoursed enchanting melody.
Her pale cheek reddened, and her welcoming eyes
Suggested things surpassing melodies.

In the first canto, as you may recall,
I hinted at a trait of Anastasia's,
Whence you inferred, if you inferred at all,
That the lady was a little bit flirtatious.
She was, when with her humor whimsical
It sorted. But she was chaste and she was gracious,
Gentle and dainty, eccentric as an elf.
I'm more than half in love with her myself.

The love that many waters cannot quench
(Vieux jeu, but good) was hers. Somehow she knew
His spiritual paths, and did not blench
Pardoning a minor lapse from grace or two,
A trait not common in her sex. The French
Have a trite saying: Chacun à son gout.
It was by Anastasia's intervention
That the gross-souled Yasmeen obtained her pension.

Gólubov kissed her hand. Soft and intent
Her eyes surveyed him with solicitude,
"Half way maternal" to explore the bent
And inclination of his various mood,
Preoccupied with what his humor meant,
But gauging it with penetration shrewd.
A multitude of women, as it were,
Seemed ready to leap out to him from her,





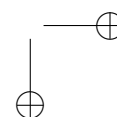
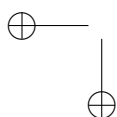
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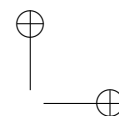
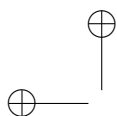
To play the nurse unto his weariness,
And lap him soft when overplied and faint,
To overwhelm with passionate caress,
To tickle him to good humor with her quaint
Eloquent banter that had power to bless,
To play the Cytherean or the saint –
In any case to seize whatever rôle
Might for the time come nearest to his soul.

Gólubyov had a soul, – odd, but a fact –
Despite his major-general's commission,
And whatsoever else he may have lacked,
His was devotion wholly without condition.
Yet he had not the spiritual tact,
Sense of proportion, penetration, vision,
Critical intelligence, or mother-wit
To gauge her homage. He accepted it

As you accept your dinner and the love
You don't deserve, and get because you don't.
This is a mystery which the powers above
May ravel out, though I believe they won't.
Because they are a sentimental drove,
And like old maids, keep up a gallant front, –
But yet by hints allow us to infer
What interesting persons once they were.

Oh, Joseph Conrad, it is all your fault
That my tale's at a stand while in analysis
Of character I plunge. I will not halt
Longer amid your psychologic fallacies,
I do not like the mental somersault
Because it ends in narrative paralysis.
Come, reader, I am full of other cares.
Our married lovers have just gone upstairs.





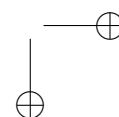
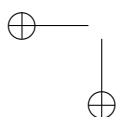
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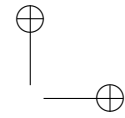
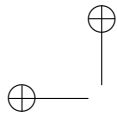
Softly a while, under the shaded light,
Pulsing together, half embraced they stood
Beside the bed, whose coverlets milk-white
Shone shadowy. The warmth was in their blood
Of being one in ultimate delight,
One in motherhood and one in fatherhood,
And one in an emotion much too deep
For even my narration to make cheap,

Because their little girl slept soft, not dreaming
More than a lily when her petals fold,
Warm, exquisite, and still, beyond all deeming
Beautiful to them, with a favor that caught hold
Upon their souls. They stood together, seeming
Holy to each other, in pleasure single-souled.
Meanwhile, far off from this idyllic scene,
Grachev had his first quarrel with Yasmeen.

He had come home rather uncomfortable.
Gólubyov's enigmatical remark
Troubled his soul with broodings vague and sable
Or something lurking somewhere in the dark.
He tried to perk up, but he was not able.
The gloom of adolescence lacks the spark
Of humor that permits our later years
To thumb the nose – at adolescent fears.

Yasmeen, when all her blandishments proved vain,
At first suspected that the boy had met
Superior charms. But when he had made plain
That he was really very much upset
By Gólubyov's rebuke, in her dull brain
Rose up the spectre of obtuse regret,
And she too fell into a humor glum,
Remembering how the general had come,





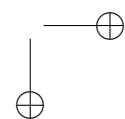
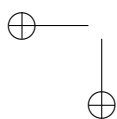
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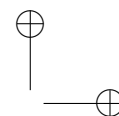
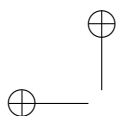
A gorgeous being from another sphere,
To be her savior, lover, master, fetish.
In her large eye a sentimental tear
Welled, and her flat voice took a timbre pettish,
As she thought upon the snows of yester year.
Large women's eyes which from such cause get wettish
Are very apt to exasperate the male
Who thinks himself the hero of the tale.

Grachev, beside, was just a trifle queasy
On the subject of a minor speculation
Which he had managed. It had been too easy,
And added to his other tribulation.
Prisons, more terrible than Piranesi
E'er drew, loomed dark in his imagination.
All told, the atmosphere was full of thunder.
Presently a wrangle started, and no wonder,

For he kept cool, which could not but provoke her,
And then grew wrathful, which provoked her worse.
Suddenly a cup full of the juice of Mocha
She hurled right at his visage with a curse.
And he rushed at her with intent to choke her,
Sputtering forth Russian epithets my verse
Dodges, with a discretion not to be
Expected always in a bard like me.

Followed an awkward reconciliation.
She was impressed by the quiet matter-of-fact
Zeal he exhibited for strangulation,
And yielded with a fine display of tact.
Tears flowed in floods. But after lamentation
Came peace and a renewal of their pact.
Zuleika was displeased, for it provoked her
That he had not hit Yasmeen as well as choked her.





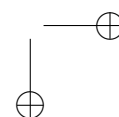
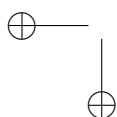
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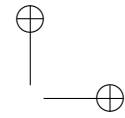
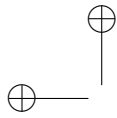
But still she took her blessings as they came.
Something was gained. Life was not all a void.
The evening, though, somehow was not the same
As those that they had previously enjoyed.
This Grachev, whom Yasmeen at first thought tame,
Was obviously dangerous when annoyed.
Zuleika felt the situation's pulse,
And rightly thought that there would be results.

Grachev's first thought when he awoke next day
Was of the row. His next a calculation
How many months of his exiguous pay
Were needed to make good his peculation.
Frowning he turned. Yasmeen beside him lay
Breathing aloud. Her clamorous exhalation
Displeased the youth, who rose up heavy-hearted,
Shaved, scrambled on his clothing, and departed.

Down at the telegraphic office he
Got out the accounts he had manipulated,
And there, in semi-public secrecy,
Ran his eyes down the columns tabulated.
He felt the apprehensive agony
Which is the punishment predestinated
Of those who are not properly inured
Unto the practice of the unjust steward.

He started as the street door with a slam
Swung to, looking up with an official glare.
Before him stood a votary of Islam,
With a rug beneath his arm, and a bland air,
Who wished, it seemed, to send a telegram
On something, unto somebody, somewhere.
Grachev filled in the blank at his dictation,
By no means hiding his preoccupation.





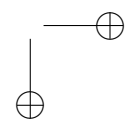
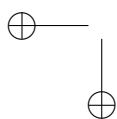
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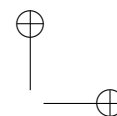
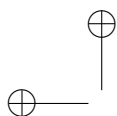
The man was rather irritating, too,
And Grachev, who could make nor head nor tail
Of the message, which for the most part had to do
With carpets by the yard and by the bale,
Suddenly wearied of it all, and blew
Up in a passionate, hysteric gale,
A spiritual, Slavic water-spout,
And *sans phrase*, chased the astonished Moslem out.

Then he felt better, though I can't say why.
He thought a burden had been taken off
His shoulders. A light flickered in his eye.
"By God," he said, "I will tell Gólubov
About my troubles. He will pass 'em by.
He's a good chap." Let not the cynic scoff
At his decision. There's a close connection
Between repentance and danger of detection.

He snatched his cap and ran across the square,
Resolved to blurt out the whole turpitude.
The orderly outside the General's lair
Jested upon his haste with humor rude,
But went within, returning with an air
Of much importance. Captain Barsov would
See him, if necessary to his content,
But the General had just started for Tashkent,

And would be back on such and such a day.
Grachev flinched at it, for the conscience-stricken,
When they have nerved themselves to march one way,
And another is marked out, are apt to sicken
At the whole business. No, he would delay.
Besides, the very thought made his blood thicken
And curdle. No, he never could do that.
You don't confess to a small bureaucrat.





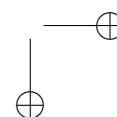
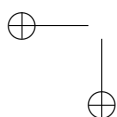
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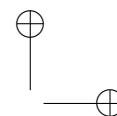
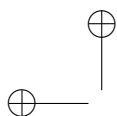
And Barsov even on the bureaucratic scale
Was small – the incarnation of red tape,
The sort of man designed to open mail,
And keep his desk in tolerable shape.
He loved to write endorsements on the nail,
And was from birth predestined to escape
Passion and greatness of whatever kind,
Freedom of soul or magnitude of mind.

Poor Grachev left headquarters, more upset
Than when he came. What on earth should he do?
In the corridor by the main door he met
The Moslem of his morning interview
Coming from an office. A feeling of regret
For his late insolent conduct flickered through
His troubled soul in its perplexity.
Perhaps the fellow might be somebody.

Doubtful, he watched the stranger disappearing
Down the alley he himself was wont to tread
On the way home, which set his wild thoughts veering
Around the fat Yasmeen, snoring in bed,
Pouting, or primping, or amorously leering,
Or heaving cups of coffee at his head.
He half-sobbed, overcome by mixed sensations,
And turned to his fallacious calculations.

They were done at last, and were at last transferred
To the official books. He breathed more lightly.
After all, his obsessions were absurd.
A fig for fears. He looked up almost brightly.
He was sorry defalcation had occurred,
But the job was done, moreover done so tightly,
None could discover. The thought made him throb,
For after all it was a dirty job.





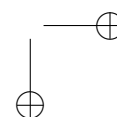
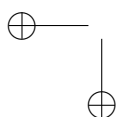
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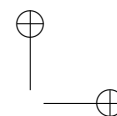
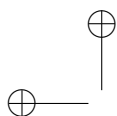
He sought Yasmeen in a complacent mood;
She seemed determined to forget the scene
Of the night before, mourning her solitude
And the long loneliness that lay between
Morning and night. Her kisses were endued
With aromatic odors, and her mien,
Though not too amorously provocative,
Promised what satisfaction she could give.

On that fat bosom was oblivion;
Beside the lady in her rôle of peri
Left nothing that was possible undone
To excite the sensuous and cheer the weary.
Grachev forgot his sorrows till the sun
Of the fog-shotten dawn came dull and dreary,
Revealing on the floor in the dull room
A little carpet of Bokhara's loom,

Which gave a touch of color to the scene,
Being a web of many mingled dyes,
Amethyst, pigeon-blood and emerald-green,
Woven into chromatic harmonies
Which pleased him. He demanded of Yasmeen
Whence it had come. With laughter in her eyes
She leered reply, as she slipped on her shift,
That she had got it for him for a gift.

He grunted and departed. As he went,
A stone's throw from the office, quite at ease,
He saw the figure of a man, who bent
Suddenly in a bow like a grandee's,
With a gesture sweeping and magnificent,
And a fine flourishing of draperies.
He said, when he had finished the salaam,
"Sir, I desire to send a telegram."





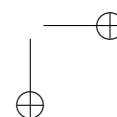
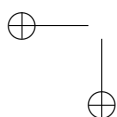
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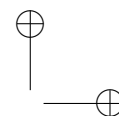
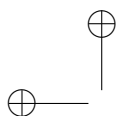
It was the carpet-merchant. Grachev took
The fairly written blank which he extended.
The message had an enigmatic look
Like code, he thought, but, least said, soonest mended.
He felt the man's eyes as above the book
He bent, but what was to be apprehended
From carpet-merchants, Grachev hardly knew.
He sent the wire. Smiling, the man withdrew,

Salaaming to the ground. And once again
The ticker ticked, and Grachev in his chair
Idled and smoked, while the subdued refrain
Of many voices from the outer air
Lifted and fell. Pigeons flew past the pane
With skirtlike sounds. Presently in the square,
Barsov appeared with two Cossacks behind.
His hatchet countenance served to remind

Grachev of his abortive interview.
He turned aside, drumming upon the lid
Of the ticker-case, an idle thing to do,
But something he occasionally did,
And strove to turn imagination to
Matters more pleasant to recall, poor kid.
Feet clumped without. And turning in his chair
As the door opened, he saw Barsov there,

Who, with a stately military mien,
Great as a first lieutenant's or yet greater,
Glowered at him like the God from the machine,
Downing the villain in a cheap theayter.
Grachev was unprepared for such a scene.
Barsov growled: "I arrest you, operator.
Bring out your books," and when they had forthcome,
Sat down to study them with haw and hum.





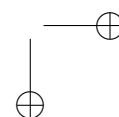
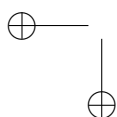
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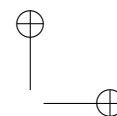
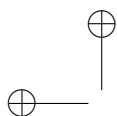
He sat down, pawing over the ruled pages.
His knitted brow and meditative eye
Bent over the dull sheets, while years and ages
Passed over Grachev dumbly standing by.
For forty minutes he endured all stages
Of desperation and uncertainty,
Wondering – wondering if his outward bluff
Of innocence were innocent enough.

Presently Barsov ceased, and, ceasing, grunted.
His countenance took on a questioning air.
'Twas evident, whate'er it was he hunted,
That up to date he had not found it there.
He looked up like a man who is affronted,
Glaring at Grachev with a dreadful glare,
Meant to intimidate, but which in truth
Gave some degree of comfort to the youth.

For glares mean little, but investigations
Are agonizing to the investigated,
However innocent their operations.
And Grachev's heart no longer palpitated,
For he was sure that his manipulations
Were Barsov-proof. Accordingly he waited
With steadfast eyes and brow of triple brass,
For the tempest of the captain's wrath to pass.

Barsov leaned back and lit a cigarette,
And seeing Grachev flinched not, eyed the ceiling
With the air of one who says, "I'm not done yet."
The little rings of azure smoke went wheeling
Up from his lips. But he was in a pet.
No small official ever likes the feeling
That he has started what he cannot finish,
Because it makes his dignity diminish.





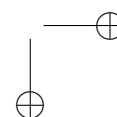
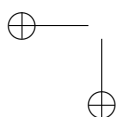
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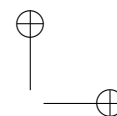
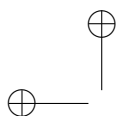
Presently into the room a sergeant trotted,
Followed by a lone man-at-arms who bore,
Wrapped in a rug, at the four corners knotted,
Lower-side out, some burden. On the floor
He dropped it, panting. Grachev gazed, besotted
In wonderment thereon. He knew no more
What the odd parcel might contain, than you,
My gentle reader, at this moment do.

“No papers, Sergeant.” Captain Barsov’s eye
Showed disappointment, as the sergeant, bending,
Fussed with the knots. At the window passing by,
Grachev beheld with eyes uncomprehending,
The carpet-merchant, who paused curiously
To look within. Grachev turned. With a rending
Gasp, he beheld the package’s interior,
To wit, a one-way ticket to Siberia –

Lassalle, Marx, Bakunine, forbidden fruit
Of the Tree of Knowledge of social good and ill,
Piled on the very rug on which his foot
Had stood at dawn. The room grew very still.
The sergeant stirred Bakunine with his boot.
Poor Grachev’s brain roared like a stamping-mill.
And the blood, beating in his temple; played
Rhythms on the word Betrayed, Betrayed, Betrayed.

Gólubyov, two weeks later in Tashkent,
Coming down the steps of the imperial club,
Beheld there, by the merest accident,
A prison-column, marching rub-a-dub,
Northward along. And as he gazed intent
With half-ironic pity, saw the snub
And pimply face of Grachev, fixed and blank,
Gazing upon him from the foremost rank.



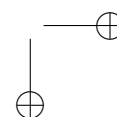
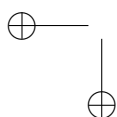


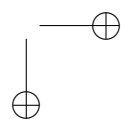
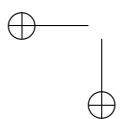
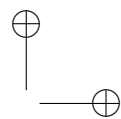
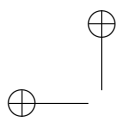
GRACHEV

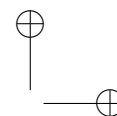
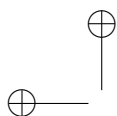
He had the column halted. Grachev stared
At the tall, kindly figure, but his dead,
Impersonal glance emphatically declared
His state of mind. The poor boy shook his head
Lightly, as if he neither knew nor cared
What had befallen, or what the General said,
Which wasn't much. After what had occurred,
He could not find much balm in a kind word.

On went the column. Grachev kept the pace,
His mind like a sick stomach turning, spewing
His whole life over, all his sorry case
From his youth upward, unto his undoing.
The more he thought, the duller grew his face.
Within him rose the torment, still renewing
Episodes etched in fire, and darkness-blotted
Kisses, and pranks, and carpet-bundles knotted,

Full of Karl Marx and each phrase-fabricator,
Whose words had hovered round him in a haze.
Why did they persecute him? Sooner or later
He would go mad – Yasmeen – what cheerful days! –
Or rather nights! – Christ! She had played the traitor.
His wounded mind fell back upon a phrase
As treacherous as that feminine Iscariot.
A phrase – Dictatorship of the Proletariat!







Sans doute il faut presque toujours une grande intrépidité d'esprit pour prendre la vie humaine en plaisanterie, et la force comique suppose un caractère au moins insouciant; mais on aurait tort de pousser cette force jusqu'à braver la pitié; l'art même en souffrirait sans parler de la délicatesse.

Madame de Staël

L'on a des principes fort sévères dans ce bas monde.

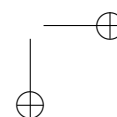
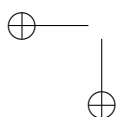
Charles James Fox
(Perhaps quoting somebody)

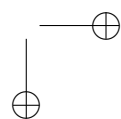
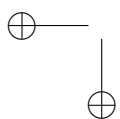
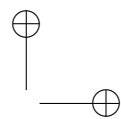
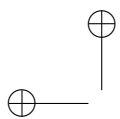
The vice of the whole school (Stendhal's) is cynicism, contempt for man, whom they degrade to the level of a brute; it is the worship of strength, disregard of the soul, a want of generosity, of reverence, of nobility, which shows itself in spite of all protestations to the contrary; in a word it is inhumanity

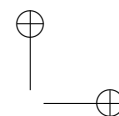
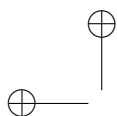
Amiel's Journal

Cucullus non facit monachum: that's as much as to say, I wear not motley in my brain.

Twelfth Night





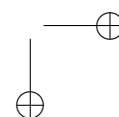
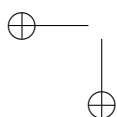


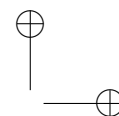
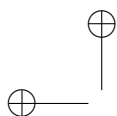
CANTO III SHAD-I-MULK

Some imbecile, no doubt a catechumen
Of Eros, has observed, and I agree,
That the proper study of mankind is woman;
For, after all is said and done, to me
Nothing whatever's alien that is human,
And Woman is as human as can be,
In spite of doing everything she can
To play the rôle of the inferior man.

Therefore I'll study women for a while,
Though dubious how far investigation
May profit, and entirely without guile
Make to the reader solemn declaration
That the subject shall be handled in a style
Answerable in some respects to expectation,
And furthermore frankly admit, of course,
That the new heroine's a mere stalking-horse,

Or stalking-mare, to draw forth trait by trait
My Achmet, now a lad of seventeen,
A gangling, shiftless, lazy reprobate,
With soft eyes, and a self-effacing mien,
And red lips, and the awkward shambling gait
Of the young actor on the ancient scene,
A perfect Central Asiatic bumpkin,
Half an Adonis, half a Tony Lumpkin.





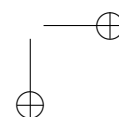
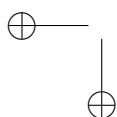
SHAD-I-MULK

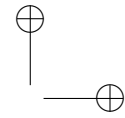
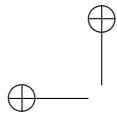
O Samarcand! O Omaha! Your Streets!
Why they are so alike is not a riddle.
Humanity's still, sad music beats and beats
In both to the throb of the same fateful fiddle.
And clown with saint, and knave with hero meets,
And men die on both sides and in the middle.
And offspring spring, and offspring, such as sprang
Ten years back and are boys, become a gang.

For seven years now Achmet had been ganging
With thorough-going irresponsibility,
Having a talent of a sort for hanging
To the skirts of anybody of ability,
And for yelling when a leader was haranguing,
And a taste for mischief mingled with docility,
Which makes the perfect gangster. In the city
He was not least among the boy banditti,

Who made life picturesque for melon-sellers,
Rag-merchants, pedlar-men, gendarmes great-coated,
Paper-makers, copper-smiths, and fortune-tellers,
Whose attitude towards Achmet's gang denoted
Supreme distrust and apprehension jealous.
Daily in their prayers to Eblis they devoted
The Enemy, but watched with triple care,
Knowing the insufficiency of prayer.

The Captain of these outlaws was a lad
Younger than Achmet, but pure Usbeg blood;
Pure for an Usbeg I should say. He had
Spirit, intelligence and hardihood.
He ruled the gang by methods good or bad,
And robbed the unbeliever when he could,
And when he could not compass it, why then,
He compromised by robbing mussulmen.





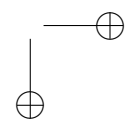
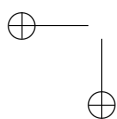
SHAD-I-MULK

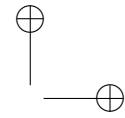
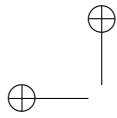
Yolbars his name was, which interpreted
Is lion. He had beaten Achmet twice
For disobedience, and in the latter's head
Instilled a wholesome horror of this vice;
For Achmet viewed him with unquestioned dread,
And shrank before his eyes of dull-brown ice
When Yolbars looked, whatever the connection,
A little casually in his direction.

In the bazaar they called him Yolbars Khan
In memory of the Khivite conqueror
That led the serried hosts Khorasmian
To wage with Nadir Shah an equal war,
Famine behind and rapine in the van.
Screams, curses, and a general uproar
Attended his incursions, nor would peace
Return without a sergeant of police,

When some poor yokel, who had been procured
For the sole purpose, would be promptly ta'en
By outraged justice, and presently immured,
Lamenting his disastrous fate in vain.
Yolbars, who was sagacious, had insured
Success. A fixed percentage of his gain
Went to policemen, who, knowing well their trade,
Ignored the organizers of the raid.

Achmet was in a way the Grand Vizier
Of Yolbars, kept the bag, and marked the prey,
And bullied minor henchmen without fear,
Provided Yolbars was not in the way.
He licked the hero's boots when he was near,
And was chief flatterer and prop and stay,
Except in time of trial, when he was liable
To weakness palpable and undeniable –





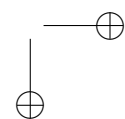
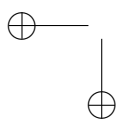
SHAD-I-MULK

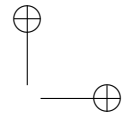
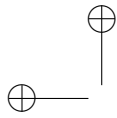
Though not to hesitate in time of flight
By Asiatics is esteemed a test
Of understanding. And they may be right,
Although we don't admit it in the West.
It all depends. You stay and win the fight,
Why then it's obvious that to stay was best.
If on the other hand you stay and lose,
That is a very different pair of shoes.

For some weeks past there had been nothing stirring
For Achmet and his chieftain Yolbars Khan.
One raid had failed, for the heretofore unerring
Achmet had pitched upon a Turkoman
For plunder, while the samovars were purring
In the soft evening on the Righistan.
In the struggle the victim had borne off the wreath,
And Yolbars Khan had lost a brace of teeth,

His temper and prestige. So for some days
Achmet had shunned him, liking not his mood,
And had been haunting unfrequented ways
By the Bokhara gate – a neighborhood
Semi-respectable. With casual gaze
The possibilities about he viewed,
Noting what walls were high and what were scalable
And what were relatively unassailable.

Most unassailable of all appeared
One with a loggia above the gate,
Whence tinkled feminine laughter as he neared.
He looked away, for it is tempting fate
To notice things too closely, but he leered
Sidelong as he passed, as if to intimate
That he was one of those who understood
The eccentricities of womanhood,





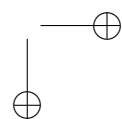
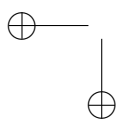
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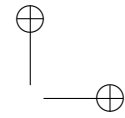
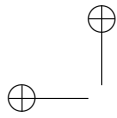
Which he understood no more than you or I,
Or Thomas Hardy, or George Meredith.
The principles women are governed by
Are things that poets should not monkey with.
I have found only one which will apply
Generally speaking – a precept of some pith
Whence inference may issue now and then,
Thus: Women are remarkably like men.

Achmet saw nothing but a floating veil
And a flash of blue-striped robe. He drifted past
But he felt much like Ulysses in the tale
Hearing the Sirens' song, lashed to the mast.
Imagination bellied like a sail
Before a highly favorable blast.
Boys will continue to be boys until
Dust comes unto the dust that knows no thrill.

I wish I had their Art rolled into one
Viz: Henry James, Voltaire, De Musset, Kipling,
Anatole France, Burns, R. L. Stevenson,
And Heine. Then I might portray my stripling
And feel the task was tolerably done,
Nerve in the line and vigor in the stippling,
And all demands of composition met.
Which of course cannot be, and yet – and yet

I'm glad that I'm a common-place American,
No European intellectual swaggerer,
Whose ark might founder, while perhaps my wherry can
Ride over all the whirlpools of Niagara.
What my poor powers pictorial-literary can
I'll undertake, although the job's a staggerer;
Namely by direct methods to reveal
What a dull youth of seventeen may feel,





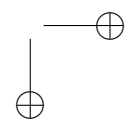
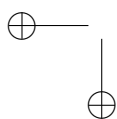
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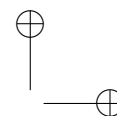
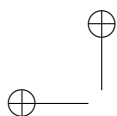
When a lady makes an obvious approach.
My masculine reader has experienced this;
My feminine, though I hesitate to broach
The theme, has viewed the eccentricities
Of the young male, when she begins to poach
On his preserves; his awkwardness and bliss,
Though visible and funny, don't provide
A view of what is going on inside.

He's awkward. Would you not be awkward too
If every tenderest fibre of your frame
Were tense to the point of failure? If you knew
Strange painful pulses, new and without name
Throbbing all up and down you, thrilling through
Your entrails like a manometric flame,
And all your nature drunk with the quintessence
Of the strange poppy-flower of adolescence.

The skirts that flash! the arms that gleam! the eyes
That glitter through the half-mask for the soul
Of Pierrot-Caliban! Oh you are wise,
But did you never play that double rôle?
You never did? Mankind is given to lies,
Or else you have unusual self-control,
Which for the present I prefer to doubt,
As something which I don't know much about.

All this to-do about the cheap emotion
Of what Mid-Asiastics call a "Tadjik"!
But I'm imbued with a bromidic notion.
I think that when his youth is mixed with magic
Every man, whether Olympian or Boeotian,
Whether the effect be comical or tragic,
And whatever be the environment and scenery,
Goes through the same adjustment of machinery.





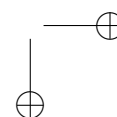
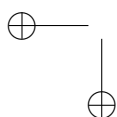
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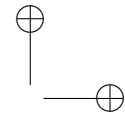
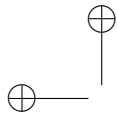
The episode, to call it episode,
Left Achmet in the throes of that adjusting,
With lips that quivered and a cheek that glowed,
And mind half-confident and half-mistrusting.
Immersed in thought he sought his own abode,
As being on the whole the least disgusting
Region of quiet that he knew. He wanted
He knew not what, and drifted home enchanted.

He turned the corner. The familiar place
Was bathed in the late sunlight, bright yet tender.
In the very doorway he came face to face
With one apparently a sweetmeat-vendor,
Who started off again with quickened pace,
Then paused. He was a youth well-built and slender,
Hook-nosed, with carmine lips and large brown eyes,
And the bearing of a monarch in disguise.

Under his arm he bore a brazen tray
Of comfits, cakes, and fruits with sugared icing,
Which he carried in a manner *dégagé*.
Achmet looked at him. It was too enticing.
He followed the unknown across the way
With some intentions in his mind of pricing
The wares, but the vendor tossed him in a flash
A mighty sweetmeat flavored with pistache,

In which friend Achmet sank his teeth much gratified,
Smiling upon the donor, who meanwhile
Eyed him askance. Achmet bit something stratified
'Neath the sweet crust. The momentary smile
No longer his smooth countenance beatified.
He felt a disposition to revile
The sweetmeat man, who all the while stood dumb.
He turned. Between the vendor's finger and thumb





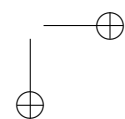
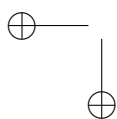
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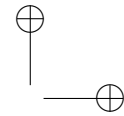
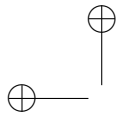
He saw a piece, a Persian piece of gold
With arabesque design which seemed to say –
I shall be yours whether to have or hold,
But please do not cry out or run away.
Achmet thrilled seeing it. His heart grew bold.
He reached out for the coin without delay.
The vendor without shadow of demur,
Touching his lips, said, “Give what’s there to her,”

And drifted like a shadow down the street,
While Achmet, with the goldpiece in his fist,
Stood wondering. From his lips he twitched the sweet
And drew a parchment forth, which proved a list
Of all the virtues feminine complete,
By one who was not a misogynist,
Which to Zuleika’s praises all concurred.
So Achmet justifiably inferred.

The style was passionate and metaphorical,
With a picturesqueness that appeals to some.
Zuleika, it appeared was beauty’s oracle,
A rose of Shiraz, a Bokhariot plum,
A nest of virtue, a phoenix allegorical,
Without a peer, past, present and to come,
A moon-faced houri made of musk and myrrh.
Upon the whole he complimented her.

Achmet in a dazed manner stood perusing
The document. At last he went inside.
He found its contents thoroughly amusing,
And thought Zuleika might be edified.
But he was full of various thought confusing,
And new emotions tacitly allied
To the strange letter’s sentiments. A deep
Languor was over him. He fell asleep.





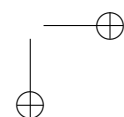
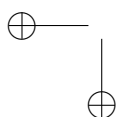
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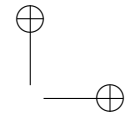
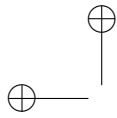
He woke to find Zuleika at his side,
A tall, fierce girl, veiled to all men but him.
Big-bosomed, scarlet-lipped and falcon-eyed,
Swift in her motion, grace in every limb,
With an expression of sardonic pride
Her nubile softness only made more grim, –
A lady thoroughly worth fighting for,
Though Achmet thought her something of a bore.

For she was always bothering him. Her lips
Were rich in words unpleasing to his ear,
Words as unmerciful as black-snake whips
In the hand of the successful muleteer.
She knew about his lapses and his slips,
And had a way of making her point clear.
So Achmet, fearing a prolonged address
On his defects, feigned sleep with some success.

Zuleika paused a moment, looking down
Upon the boy stretched out on the divan.
Her splendid bosom heaved beneath her gown.
Her cheek flushed as she saw the peach-bloom tan
Of his young throat. Her black brows in a frown
Met as she murmured: “If he were a man
Then —” and she leaned noiselessly o’er his head.
Her full lips touched his forehead – and she fled.

Achmet by no means felt that he was flattered
By the attention. He took it in good part.
That she was in good humor was what mattered,
And indisposed to cast a verbal dart.
But the rustle of her garments, as she pattered
Away, suggested something to his heart,
And he determined at an early date
To reconnoitre the Bokhara Gate.





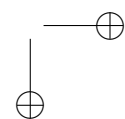
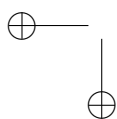
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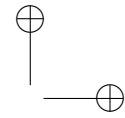
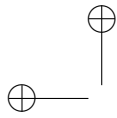
Supper time came. Yasmeen his mother, grown
Into mere greasy corpulence, and ailing,
Put on a sloppy meal, with many a moan
Asthmatic. Zuleika, with a calm unailing
And a grace infinite, picked a chicken bone.
Her snake-bright eyes, that set Yasmeen a-quailing,
Roamed restless over the domestic scene,
Full of languor and a wisdom serpentine.

She liked dominion and she exercised it.
Within those walls her slightest wish was law.
To rule was her possession and she prized it,
Holding all other things not worth a straw.
Had wealth been hers, the girl would have despised it;
But it was fun to strike a dreadful awe
To the very bottom of Yasmeen's dull soul.
Zuleika thoroughly enjoyed the rôle.

It never was her way to utter threat,
But her cold eyes somehow contrived to say
When with Yasmeen's much-harried glance they met,
"I have a score to settle some fine day.
My dagger is not rightly sharpened yet.
You filthy hag, you lump of idiot clay,
You rotten refuse, dregs of the bazaar,
Do you feel my nails tearing your wind-pipe? Gaaarh!"

If in the night Yasmeen had waked to find
The girl beside her standing with the knife
Whetted in hand, her overburdened mind
Would have welcomed the conclusion of this strife.
But to inspire a terror undefined
Was the chief pleasure of Zuleika's life,
And softly rolling an eye thunder-charged,
She fed her spleen, till it perforce enlarged,





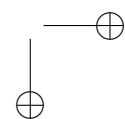
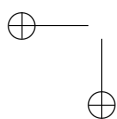
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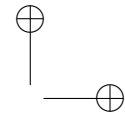
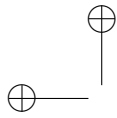
The more for Achmet's sake, because in him
Yasmeen's dull imperfections reappeared,
A rambling mind, governed but by the whim
The moment bore, unpurposeful, that veered,
A softness in the soul that could not dim
His beauty, and a cowardice she feared
More than the devil, if she feared at all
That vague abstraction metaphysical.

Achmet enjoyed their ill-concealed dissension,
Not that he bore either of the two ill-will,
But to be source of this domestic tension,
Afforded him an egotistic thrill.
Good feeling was beyond his comprehension,
So he would urge the conflict onward, till
Some luckless faux pas set Yasmeen a-wailing,
Or the fierce maiden like a tempest railing

At his soft, luxury-loving, feminine weakness,
His greediness, his shifty-eyed evasions,
His paltering, his fumbling mind, the meekness
With which he answered her recriminations,
His eyes soft as gazelles', and his plump sleekness,
His hesitations and procrastinations.
She could not help it. His qualities but served
To make her love him with a love that nerved

Her inner soul with fire to play the man for him,
To drive him to the mark where he fell short,
To spur the laggard forward, plot and plan for him,
Whether in evil or in good report,
The crag to scale, the utmost deep to span for him,
If so she might refashion in some sort
His aimless, listless, spiritless nonentity
Into something having personal identity.





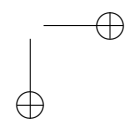
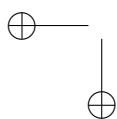
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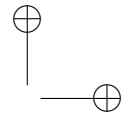
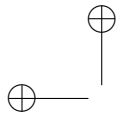
Therefore her serpent tongue was wont to wag,
Therefore her eyes grew fierce with bitter pride,
Therefore she nagged him as a wife may nag
Or chid him as his mother dared not chide –
Till the loose corners of his mouth would sag
And his eyes waver, while the demon-eyed
Damsel described his failings with effective
Touches of highly picturesque invective.

“It was her way of wooing.” A vague hope
Was in her, could she but flick him on the raw!
Stir up an anger in him that could cope
With her imperiousness, inflame him, draw
His wrath like a tiger on the antelope
Upon herself. In vain. Imbecile awe
Possessed him. ’Twould be long before he dared.
She felt Yasmeen saw through her. Much she cared!

The meal was o’er. Zuleika lay reclined
At peace. She liked the process of digestion,
But presently a cloud rose in her mind.
She turned to Achmet with a sudden question.
The lad, nibbling a pickled melon-rind,
Showed of attention not the least suggestion.
“Achmet,” she said in a sharp voice and clear,
And, leaning forward, tweaked his cameo ear.

“Who is the sweetmeat-seller?” A quick passion
Was in her voice. And Achmet with a grin
Looked up; then groping in a clumsy fashion
Under his mantle, brought something from within,
Namely the billet-doux, whence odors cassian,
Olibanal, issued. With uplifted chin
She read the scented missive through and through,
Then with a half snarl rent the thing in two.





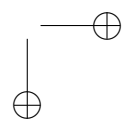
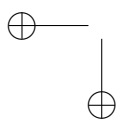
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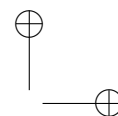
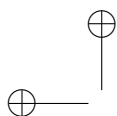
Her eyes grew baleful with a fine disdain:
“I find the sentiments of this young man
Distasteful.” Her eyes blazed, and Achmet’s brain
Tingled with premonition sharper than
Usual. “If he should venture here again
I think you and your gang had better tan
His Persian hide.” Achmet knew what that meant,
And hoped that there would be no accident.

He knew the house would be a piece of Hell
Till it was done, and to the Queen’s taste too.
Alarm rose in him. He did not like to dwell
On the exploit. It would be hard to do.
Pondering upon expedients, he fell
Asleep. The redshot dawn came drifting through
The lattice. It was time to play the man.
He went forth groaning to find Yolbars Khan.

He found that hero at a rendez-vous,
With divers henchmen whom he most affected,
In a bad humor with his retinue,
Who all seemed correspondingly dejected.
And Achmet, after salutation due,
The attention of the robber-chief directed
To the project that was foremost in his mind.
Yolbars looked doubtful. He was not inclined

To depredations in an empty street.
He liked to work amid a multitude,
Into whose throngs a bandit could retreat
When more was bitten off than could be chewed.
Moreover, since his Turkoman defeat,
Achmet’s suggestions with distrust he viewed.
Still, he was game for any shiverree.
Leaders who hold their jobs down have to be.





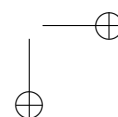
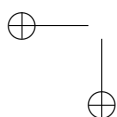
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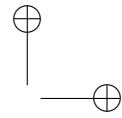
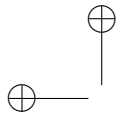
They went about the razzia with some care.
The whole attack was skilfully combined,
Lest stray policemen lurking, unaware
Should smite the derring-doers from behind.
At last with a factitious, virtuous air,
Ten strong, the hooligans marched forth to find
The enemy by Achmet's gate afar.
Unwonted calm brooded o'er the bazaar.

They marked him down as men mark down a deer,
Before the house. With palpitating heart
Achmet approached the prey, and with a leer
Addressed him, playing his predestined part
Of go-between, while on him from the rear
Stole the practitioners of the noble art
Of rough stuff. With much Oriental flattery
He played a prelude to assault and battery.

Achmet was grey with dread, the stranger white
With interest. His lips worked, and toward the lad
He leaned. His eyes were full of a strange light,
And seemed to pierce through Achmet like a brad.
Yolbars drew nearer to him. Left and right
Closed in the boy-battalion bold and bad,
Holding their breath, knitting their nerves of steel,
When a cobble-stone turned under Yolbars' heel,

Whether by chance or stern decree of fate.
The stranger wheeled one breath before the attack.
He saw the assailants, and just not too late
Took in the situation. He drew back
One step, and careless of his precious freight,
Swept high his brazen tray, and with a crack
Tremendous smote the foremost of his foes
Viz, Yolbars Khan, upon his Usbeg nose.





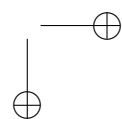
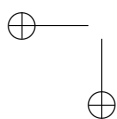
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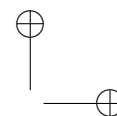
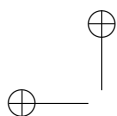
The sweetmeats flew in arcs. The red blood ran.
Loud rose the yell! 'Twas a hit manifest.
But none had ever smitten Yolbars Khan
Without repayment with good interest.
Tigerlike in he closed to nail his man,
Followed with circumspection by the rest,
Delighted that their leader ran the risk
And left them larger liberty to frisk

The victim, who, after one piercing yell
And a deep-drawn Persian oath, stood yet the gaff
With a fierceness that became his manhood well.
He hit. He bit. He kicked, though he was half
Drowned in a wave of boys. He rocked. He fell.
Down from the house-top drifted a girl's laugh.
Zuleika with a connoisseur's delight
Was following all the fortune of the fight.

Suddenly up the street a whistle blew.
The roaring tread of Occidental feet
Echoed. The rumor of the hullabaloo
Had reached a passing gendarme on his beat.
And maddened Yolbars working his arm free drew
A knife from somewhere, careless of retreat,
Determined on a desperate deed of woe.
Besides the victim would not let him go.

The knife gleamed free. "Achmet, take hold," he yelled.
"The other arm, you fool!" A tremor ran
Through Achmet's frame, a second's pause that spelled
Disaster to the tenacious Yolbars Khan.
Though the steel flickered out, and the blood welled,
It did not terminate the Persian's span.
He caught the knife-blade in his hand like Zal,
Rustum, Kai Khosru, Nurshirvan et al.





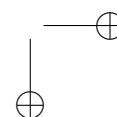
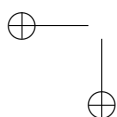
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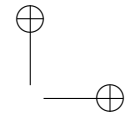
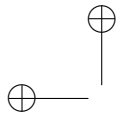
The gang displayed no fatal hesitation.
They left their leader, who was quite entangled
With the Persian by his own determination,
And now was getting rather sadly mangled.
The gendarme bore down on the situation
And seized on both the heroes as they wrangled,
While Achmet, in the face of that defeat,
Led with precipitation the retreat.

He ran. He ran, thrilling with pure blind panic.
Did you ever feel it? It is well worth knowing.
When the whole universe, with one titanic
Motion, leaps forward to your overthrowing,
Soulless, and inconceivably tyrannic,
If you run then, by George! you will keep going.
And parenthetically I'll add that you
Will break some records of long standing, too.

Fear's a strange passion. Men in aéroplanes
Are scared pea-green and opalescent blue,
When small disasters paralyze their brains,
But the hand upon the joy-stick jerks them through.
And men are scared by heights, and railway trains,
And by not knowing the right thing to do;
Or what is worse, by seeing what they should
Achieve, but what they wouldn't if they could.

A good fright is a tonic to the system,
And a fine test of character beside.
When all your nerves are slack, a fright will twist 'em
Back into concert pitch, although your pride
May suffer. Certain heroes – I could list 'em –
Though they appear so stern and dignified –
A fact which gives no cause for pessimism –
Have been, by George! scared – into heroism.





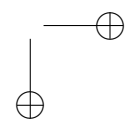
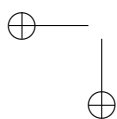
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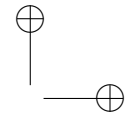
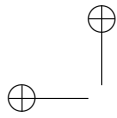
Achmet was not. Into the Righistan
Between the booths, athwart the humming crowd
Mindful of destiny and Yolbars Khan
And all despair, his desperate way he plowed,
Followed by the disastrous gang who ran
Like jackals, raising lamentation loud.
Once in the crowd most of them slacked their stride,
But Achmet by no means was satisfied.

Fear gave him speed. His speed prolonged his fear.
Thus it was, gaining an unfrequented street,
He dashed, more rapid than the hunted deer,
Under a horse's nose. On his hind feet
The outraged charger towered upward sheer,
And Gólubyov, the rider, kept his seat
And dignity apparently because
Of the abrogation of some natural laws.

His daughter's horse behind him started too,
And getting the two beasts in hand again
Prevented his intention to pursue
The culprit, whom he surely would have slain,
And whose fear-stricken face, it seemed, he knew
In some forgotten corner of his brain.
The face was like – like someone he had seen.
Who could it be? Peter and Paul! Yasmeen!

So he rode home in meditative mood,
Chatting with his slim Sasha, while alone,
Headlong, the hopeless hoodlum, unpursued
Raced desperately on till he was blown.
At last he slacked speed in a neighborhood
Vaguely familiar. He stopped. A building stone,
Fallen by the way, appeared to him a fit
Throne, where a worn-out fugitive might sit.





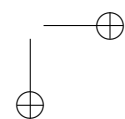
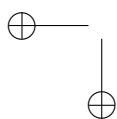
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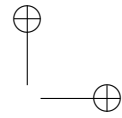
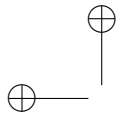
He wiped the bright sweat from his streaming face,
And wondered what the devil was to do.
His heart yet hammered after his wild race.
Yet images of horror flickered through
His consciousness. His was a sorry case.
He did not dare go home again. He knew
Zuleika's temperamental inability
To see much virtue in his volatility.

A shadow on his shoulder fell. He leaped
Fearful. Behind him stood an ancient crone,
Hideous, from whose one eye a humor seeped
Upon her dirty veil. In doubtful tone
And a voice that sometimes cackled, sometimes cheeped,
Midway between a chuckle and a moan,
She said, "Oh fortunate! Oh happy-starred!
Listen to me, and do not breathe so hard.

"Knowest thou this house?" Achmet looked up. Before
Rose up a blind wall, plastered white and crowned
With a vine-grown loggia. His mind turned o'er
The matter, recollecting with a bound
A blue-striped dress. "Rap thrice upon the door
Tonight," cackled the hag, and without sound
Slipped limping off. Achmet too slunk away,
Praying for the end of that too perfect day.

Evening came slowly on. Scarlet and green
Smouldered the cloudless opalescent West.
One planet hung, a flake of fire between
The belts of color. The amethystine crest
Of mountain darkened. The soft air grew keen,
And Achmet shivered, where he lay at rest,
Hungry, exhausted, not disposed for more
Adventure, yet resolved to rap that door.





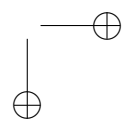
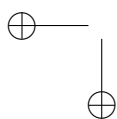
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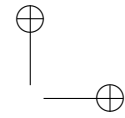
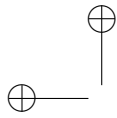
Full darkness came. His masculine inside
Felt a fierce hunger, clawing like a crab.
He smote the door. The hollow arch replied.
The hinges creaked aloud. An oblong slab
Of solid darkness showed, as the door swung wide,
Against the wall's crepuscular drab.
The skinny fingers of a bony fist
Suddenly clamped themselves about his wrist,

And drew him in. Behind the door swung to
A bolt shot with a clank. A chuckling cackle
Echoed. He felt each several hair that grew
On his scalp, rising like a cock-bird's hackle.
What thing unthinkable was here to do?
He wished he had not had the nerve to tackle
The black unknown. He shuddered in the clutch
Of the unseen hag and darkness one could touch.

They reached a stone-flagged stair, gritty and crumbling,
Which rasped the soles of Achmet's naked feet.
Under her breath the hidden hag kept mumbling
Shreds of old love-songs I shall not repeat,
Of obvious purport, while Achmet followed stumbling,
Devoured by fear and vast desire to eat.
The harridan at the summit of the flight
A curtain drew. The dubious half-light

Revealed to Achmet a majestic room
Full of a thousand hues subdued and dim,
Strewn with the webs of the Carmanian's loom.
A smoking brazier made the soft air swim
With odorous blue haze in the rich gloom.
And on a vast divan, staring at him,
Reclined a lady, to her jet-black eyes
Hidden in veils and flowing draperies.





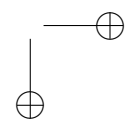
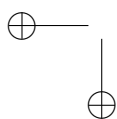
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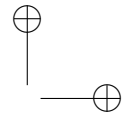
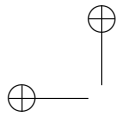
Achmet was disconcerted by her stare.
He found it altogether too direct.
Uneasily his eyes roamed here and there,
While calmly she continued to inspect
The youth who strove with an embarrassed air
A non-committal nonchalance to affect,
Which no sane woman could help seeing through.
And Shad-i-Mulk was quite as sane as you,

Dear feminine reader – and quite as mysterious –
At least unto a simple male like me.
I say it openly and I'm quite serious.
Her motives are a perfect mystery.
What hidden power, what balked desire imperious,
What inner urge, what freak of destiny
Compelled her, is beyond my cognizance.
But she stared Achmet out of countenance.

His cheek flushed, and an idiotic smile
Played round his lip. He felt a subtle power
Working upon him, and he lacked the guile
To fight it. As vainly the expanding flower
Might labor to resist a little while
The natural influence of sun and shower.
As men grow up, the foremost sign of change
Is the feeling that the other sex is strange.

Women know too much. Out of their wombs we come
From nowhere in particular, and go –
Whither? – The best authorities are dumb
Upon this question since they do not know,
Though there are various theories venturesome.
See Palladini, Oliver Lodge and Co.
But whether death await us or survival,
Women have lots to do with our arrival.





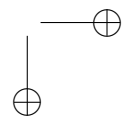
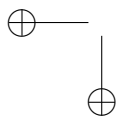
SHAD-I-MULK

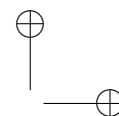
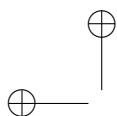
And this I think impresses all mankind,
Whether they keep their women in subjection,
Or, having other matters in the mind,
Submit implicitly to their direction.
The latter method on the whole I find
Suits with my disposition to perfection.
To put it in a nutshell: Every man
Knows women know more than he ever can.

Achmet was thus impressed. He felt that veiled
Impassive figure with fierce, curious eyes
Studying his soul. Accordingly he quailed
For he was not equipped to rationalize
The situation, and so to have prevailed.
It never struck the boy that he likewise –
Something that it was easy to infer –
Might prove mysterious in his way to her.

It's obvious that Shad-i-Muik can't stare
For ever, nor can he continue casting
Highly embarrassed glances here and there.
You may remember that he had been fasting,
And stood in need of some nutritious fare.
He broke the silence that seemed everlasting,
With a question that was simple and complete.
“Madam,” he said, “Is there anything to eat?”

The eyes above the dark veil grew less tense,
Wrinkling at the corners. Her ring-laden hand
Quivered. A laugh troubled her calm immense.
In a shaking voice she issued a command.
The hag with a harsh croak went hobbling thence,
Presently returning with a coffee stand.
The dame, while waiting for her minister,
Beckoned Achmet up to the divan by her.





SHAD-I-MULK

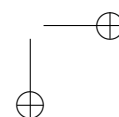
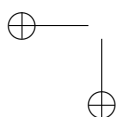
They set before him fish and flesh and bird
In the best culinary manner done,
And jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon.
And “in defiance of the prophet’s word,”
Tawny wine burning as a tropic sun,
Of Frangistan, which had come overland,
Via Lebanon, to silken Samarcand.

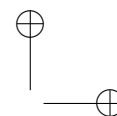
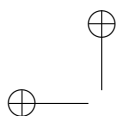
Cinnamon syrups and the soothest jelly
And dainty meats are innocent enough,
But alcohol upon an empty belly,
Even when you’re used to it, is perilous stuff.
It turns a man’s brain into vermicelli.
His powers are no longer up to snuff.
And Achmet rapidly reached a condition
Between sheer bliss and utter inanition.

The lights swam hazily. In peace he lay,
Impervious to hopes or doubts or fears.
The lady hovered o’er him. Far away –
Was that her voice – that echoed in his ears?
Her veil had dropped. But when he could not say.
Why were her painted cheeks streaked so with tears?
He smiled up at her faintly, softly. She
No longer seemed to him a mystery.

.

Gólubyov at his office the next day,
Was interested in his morning mail.
To find a brief official résumé
Of something with a bearing on this tale –
Things were to be got ready right away,
Facilities of all sorts without fail,
Transport, artillery, and commissary,
To move troops rapidly if necessary,





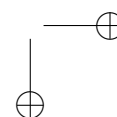
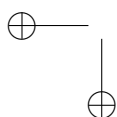
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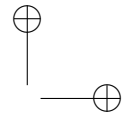
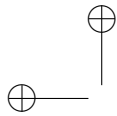
Eastward – Siberia. Gólubyov’s eyebrows drew
Together. He was nonplussed as you would be,
If Uncle Sam should move a corps or two
To guard an island in the Arctic Sea,
Something that he is very apt to do,
And which differs not in kind but in degree
From the lunacy – or so it did appear
To Gólubyov, – of stripping his frontier.

For like most Russians he gazed southward – at
What? At the Afghan March and Khorasan,
At the blue gulf, and the city of Herat,
Mistrusting the nomadic Turkoman.
He thought the English were waxing much too fat
And kicking in the plains of Hindustan.
He felt beside that the new stroke of state
Would take prestige from his proconsulate.

Only he knew the stage was being set
Far off. He wished he knew who pulled the wires
That made him skip, unwilling marionette,
Against his proper impulse and desires,
Just as a plan of his, unripe as yet,
Had taken shape too. Now he must bank his fires
And wait – He sighed, reached for the bell, and rang.
A clerk came in: “Send for Ghomang Lobzang.”

Presently a nose in the antechamber snuffled,
Presently the possessor of the same
Entered, a yellow man in drab robes muffled.
“His eyes were slanting pits of sombre flame,”
The strangest diplomat that ever shuffled
The nicked cards of the immemorial game.
Or with address, in order to deceive,
Conveyed them up his Oriental sleeve.





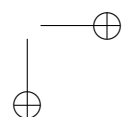
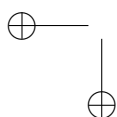
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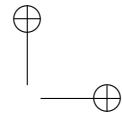
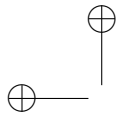
Ghomang Lobzang unknown to Western story,
The Buriat Lama, Dorjiev sometimes called,
By a strange freak of history transitory,
From the tenth century into the twentieth hauled,
Careless of Western progress and vainglory,
To face impatient empires unappalled,
Pour oil on flame, and poison in the well,
And, briefly, to raise international Hell.

Ghomang Lobzang! How well your projects fitted
Into the complications of the time!
How well you over-reached the nimble-witted!
How you led virtue in the yoke of crime!
How you reticulated, knotted, knitted
All Asia in your purposes sublime,
States, prejudices, persons great and small,
Is what I cannot comprehend at all.

The fact remains you did. Unto what end
By what desires impelled is yet half-mystery.
Religious zealotry, I apprehend,
Perhaps some little pride in making history,
With which a natural contempt might blend
For the barbarians of the West, quite blistery.
You made a good go of it, I must say,
And empires were the pieces in your play.

I know no more of you than that you loved
That city of the heaven-touching plain,
A thousand imperturbable years unmoved,
Inviolable, solemn, destined to remain
Sacred, by innovation unreprieved,
Echoing for ever the perennial refrain
Om Mane padme Om of priests that mutter
Prayers to the Buddhas and the lamps of butter,





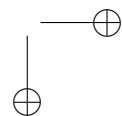
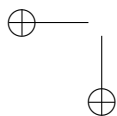
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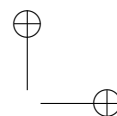
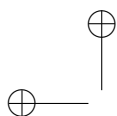
What strange imaginings were there behind
That, to us inexplicable, contexture
Of the extravagating Tartar mind,
Beyond the furthest flight of our conjecture,
A vague but earnest picture, dim and blind,
Half outlined intellectual architecture –
Lhasa with principalities and powers
Ruling the spiritual world and ours.

And yet there was a trouble in your brain,
That faith and priestly logic could not bar.
You did not like to think about the train
That erewhile bore you to behold the Tsar,
Where lionlike lies Russia rich in grain.
Somehow you dreaded lest the fire-fed car
Might prove a fearful adversary yet
For a religious statesman of Tibet.

Góлубyov welcomed the impassive priest
With little courtesies such as one offers
To persons of religion in the East,
Where gentlemen of sense are seldom scoffers.
Courtesy's a virtue at the very least,
And blesses him who takes and him who proffers.
So, after suitable preliminary,
Góлубyov emphasized the military

Aspects of the orders that had come that day
Unto Ghomang Lobzang. No poker-player,
Beginning fitfully and far away,
E'er heard a bid with enigmatic air
So sphinx-like. Not the devil himself could say
What work the Lama made of the affair,
Although behind that visage unperturbed
The mind was doubtless dreadfully disturbed.





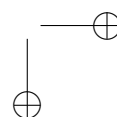
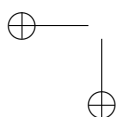
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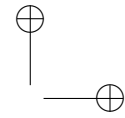
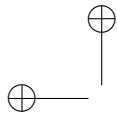
Said Gólubyov: "I do not understand
What it may mean, but probably Japan.
Something is out of sight and underhand,
Some tortuous plot, perplexity or plan."
Ghomang Lobzang maintained an aspect bland.
His countenance of wrinkled yellow tan
Lent force to Gólubyov's erroneous notion
That the Lama was a stranger to emotion,

Though all his furious Tartar blood was beating:
"They have been frightened. We have been betrayed.
The English bluffed them and they are retreating.
Why did we ever look to them for aid?"
But he said nothing that was worth repeating.
Only as he looked at Gólubyov, he played
With the jade jewel, pendent from his ear,
His eyes devoid of wrath, or hope, or fear.

Gólubyov watched him, but Ghomang Lobzang
Gazed from the window with incurious eye,
Where Samarcand, feeling the first soft tang
Of the desert Spring, went colorfully by.
Color at that moment wasn't worth a hang,
But the general, glancing half mechanically,
Beheld a figure splendid as the sun,
In robes of emerald and vermillion,

Strutting and preening, viewing the sweep and fall
Of his much-rustling, many-hued attire,
Or eying with a mien majestic
The common herd, lest they should splash the mire
Upon his raiment. The spectacle warmed all
Gólubyov's cockles with a latent fire
Of humor, for, for all those pomps and shows,
He knew the youth who 'neath his horse's nose





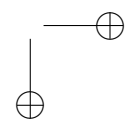
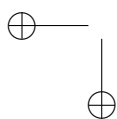
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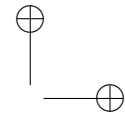
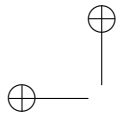
Had dived yestreen. His splendor did not jibe
Well with the pallid ecstasy of fear
Which I erewhile endeavored to describe.
Gólubov, gazing, grinned from ear to ear.
And trod unknowing on the moral kibe
Of the Lama, who took the expression for a sneer,
And, being quite unused to Western mirth,
Valued it at much more than it was worth.

At this auspicious moment Barsov came,
Full of importance, and, saluting, said:
“We’ve caught some ruffians, sir, and one whose name
Is Jami, but I can’t make tail or head
Of what he says. Some woman’s in the game.
And a trifling quantity of blood’s been shed.
A regular rough and tumble brawl. Shall I
Bring ’em to you for judgment bye and bye?”

Tellers of tales are sadly given to playing
Tricks on their readers, which I reprobate
But practise – namely by half-way betraying
What is to come. As through a wicket gate
They show the victim whither they are straying,
But slam it shut before he gets it straight.
I fancy this accounts for a surprising
Amount of literary moralizing.

Had Gólubov dealt then with the event,
And judged, as was his wont, his fellow-man,
This story would have been quite different.
He had done justice upon Yolbars Khan.
But he was troubled, and his thoughts were bent
On the reconstitution of his plan.
“You manage it,” he said. Barsov withdrew
Clanking, and came unto those luckless two,





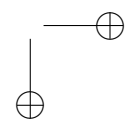
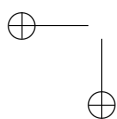
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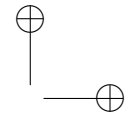
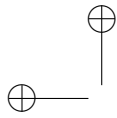
Whom swiftly, in a tongue unknown to them,
He first insulted with elaboration,
And then proceeded blithely to condemn
To a period of prolonged incarceration
In Khiva that the lonely deserts hem,
To hammer there the stones of desolation.
Justice, to Barsov, I need hardly state,
Was what you do to the unfortunate.

The grey guard marched them off. Jami, protesting,
Troubled deaf Heaven with his bootless cries,
While an expression not uninteresting
Appeared in Yolbars Khan's malicious eyes.
It pleased him, since the unequal fates were jesting,
That they prepared this thorough-paced surprise,
And with completeness had contrived to strike
The victim and the criminal alike.

But even such pleasures cannot long endure.
As they came marching to the Bokhara Gate,
Appeared a gorgeous creature, whose allure
(As the French say) combined majestic state
With easy nonchalance. He smiled secure
Upon them. Yolbars' teeth began to grate.
Jami turned white, muttering a Persian oath.
The silk-robed darling beamed upon them both.

And turned down a short side-street, at whose end
Stood a white house with a green loggia crowned.
Yolbars stopped dead. His eyes seemed to distend.
And his chains clanked with an unpleasant sound.
"Hup!" said the Sergeant. "Come along, my friend."
His rifle-butt struck partly on the ground,
Partly upon the toes of Yolbars Khan.
No more delays held up the caravan.





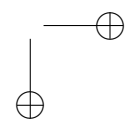
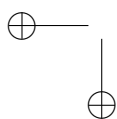
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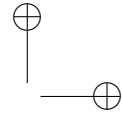
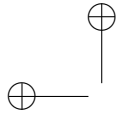
At this point I am fated to portray
A passion, or perhaps I should say two,
Something which many poets in their day
Have tried with varying success to do.
I do not like the prospect, I must say,
And without prejudice suggest to you
That, if you're squeamish or New England bred,
You'd better skip the stanzas next ahead.

Achmet turned in where he was quite expected.
The world had changed for him in twenty-four
Diversified hours. The hooligan dejected
Had vanished with the raiment that he wore.
Now a vast calm of manner unaffected,
Like the weight of all the skies that Atlas bore,
Sate on him. His eyes were soft with satisfaction.
In short, his was the natural reaction

That youth must have when after being booted
About life's variegated thoroughfare,
He comes into possession undisputed
Of all the joys to which the flesh is heir,
And drinks his cup of pleasure, undiluted
By the pale liquor of harsh thought or care.
Achmet, enlarged by Shad-i-Mulk's new favor,
Found in his cup an extra pleasant flavor.

And as for her: The springs that she was moved by
Are hard to gauge. Consider in yourself.
She felt queer thrills hardly to be approved by
The strict. She had lifted downward from the shelf
Her spiritual vessel worn and grooved by
Wearisome custom. The inferior delf
Of Achmet's soul, crude, ill-designed, and crass,
Had an attraction for her battered brass.





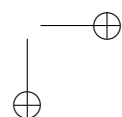
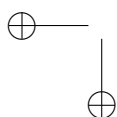
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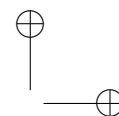
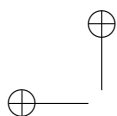
She liked the brownish down upon his cheek,
And the way the eyes were set in his dull head,
She liked his smile effeminate and weak,
And his curled lips' brilliant, luxurious red.
She liked his mien obsequious and meek.
She even liked the sort of thing he said,
Pinchbeck affectionate metaphor outworn,
That brought back times before her sons were born,

And her brief passionate spring blasted and killed.
She poured upon her Achmet all the dear,
Romantic, idiotic, thrice-distilled
Attar of the roses gone of yesteryear.
Besides, he did precisely as she willed,
And when she spoke – well, he inclined his ear.
Most women that my various roads have crossed
Like two things, viz: to boss and to be bossed,

Each in its proper season. Achmet had
Parts suited to the first specification.
He took the lady's orders good or bad
In the best spirit of subordination.
She for her part caressed the astonished lad
In the first flush of her intoxication,
Kissed, petted, and in general adored him
To such a point, she very nearly bored him.

As cats love darkness, she loved mystery.
Their converse was accompanied by rites,
And ceremonies, tricks of secrecy,
Designed to heighten all their hid delights.
Intrigue she loved for the mere roguery,
And the mind's disquiet which intrigue excites.
I think I may state all the case in short:
She wanted Achmet, for she wanted sport.





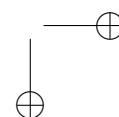
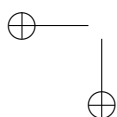
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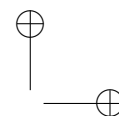
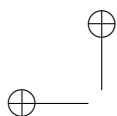
She had a hundred unforeseen devices
To bring about the appropriate interview,
Elaborate manoeuvres and disguises,
And half a dozen points of rendezvous
Where they could lurk contemptuous of surprises,
And dedicate an amorous hour or two
To sultry wooing and soft conversation,
Without a stain upon her reputation,

Which she regarded justly with some pride.
There was none better in all Samarcand.
It had flourished greatly since her lord had died,
And like a flower lay now in Achmet's hand,
Plucked, though none knew. But she was satisfied.
Enough for her to have at her command
An intrigant so absolutely docile,
And to give a loose to all the passion fossil

That troubled her lank bosom. Her devotion
Had a high voltage, but the flow was small.
Resistance in the circuit of emotion
Might make it negligible or none at all.
Ohm's law applied to love is a new notion,
Perhaps a bit too metaphysical,
And is inadequate, I don't mind stating,
If either party gets to alternating.

Of all things that men twist their souls about,
Lust is most inescapable and most dull.
It drives life forward, but it smudges out
Outlines desirable and beautiful.
It changes the white samite to a clout,
And mixes bastard shoddy with the wool,
Because of laws, conventions, and tabus,
And such like preachments as the gentiles use.





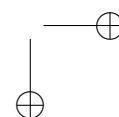
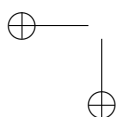
SHAD-I-MULK

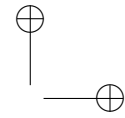
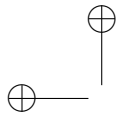
Why have we lost the nymph's breast in the brake,
And vigorous gust in what we are and do,
And must do? Of two ways we always take
The most thoroughly offensive of the two.
Beastly libidos like the beasts we slake,
Or sham a purity that makes one spew.
I fancy the alternative's unpleasant.
It states the case of literature at present.

Dear reader, if you find this moralizing
Long-winded and too uniform in tone,
I must agree the fact is not surprising.
Since it began, two amorous months have flown,
And Shad-i-Mulk now found less appetizing
The odor of the rose which was half-blown.
Henceforth the story shall be less pedestrian.
Pegasus shall know what manner of equestrian

Shakes the bright bridle of Bellerophon –
Steady, you brute! That silly beast will shy!
Achmet had fancied that he palled upon
The dame, and in his slow mind wondered why.
Something had troubled their communion,
And a tear trickled from his luminous eye.
Like many and many a stripling beautiful,
He did not know his company was dull.

Shad-i-Mulk had prepared a triple case
Against him. Jealousy was the first item,
Something which very often finds a place
In women when their loves no more excite 'em.
By merest chance she had seen Zuleika's face
And other charms unveiled, and though despite 'em,
Achmet came faithful as the evening star,
The occurrence in some measure served to jar





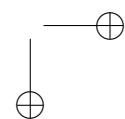
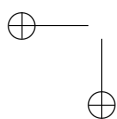
SHAD-I-MULK

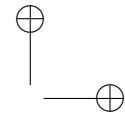
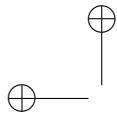
Complacence. Hence she instantly displayed
A forgotten interest in the moral law,
In the fair repute of which I lately made
Mention, and the family she never saw.
She informed Achmet that he had betrayed
Her innocence, and with a pious awe
Spoke of her sons, who, if they ever came,
Would know how to avenge their mother's shame.

But the last cause and the true cause of all
Her change of front was simply this. She knew
To the last tittle when he came to call,
What he would say and what desire and do.
Such certainty would make Adonis pall
On Venus. Shad-i-Mulk had quite run through
Her stock of lust – She sickened of the diet.
What she required now was rest and quiet.

She had wanted a reaction, had reacted,
And wanted it no more, the normal course
Of such imbroglios, which, when long protracted,
Lose of necessity their initial force.
It was rough on Achmet, who was quite distracted
With grief. But Shad-i-Mulk felt no remorse.
Couched on her cushions, she launched a diatribe
Which must be expurgated by the scribe.

She showed how he had failed to satisfy her,
In a manner quite surprisingly explicit.
Since she now pulsed no longer with desire,
She pointed out his passion was illicit.
Henceforth he was forbidden to come nigh her.
He must consider this his final visit.
The catastrophe was not of her designing.
She hoped he'd take the hint; she hated whining.





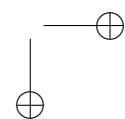
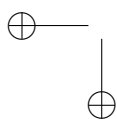
SHAD-I-MULK

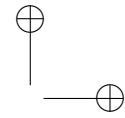
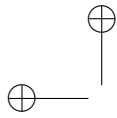
He left the vine-crowned loggia, blind with tears,
Feeling, as anybody might have felt,
Oppressed by a burden far beyond his years.
No more his languid brain with pleasure dwelt
On his gay raiment that rustled to his ears,
And on the damascened dagger at his belt.
There was not in all Samarcand that day
A more disconsolate-looking popinjay.

He crossed the Righistan that hummed aloud,
As though the Universe was still intact.
Before the booths the many-colored crowd
The comedies of trade contrived to act.
His sorrow made him feel lonely and proud –
A not uncommon sentimental fact –
Until his sad reflections atrabiliar
Were broken by a quality familiar

In the stride of one who walked before – a stride
Achmet had known amid a regiment.
The very step was full of a fierce pride,
The footprints in the dust were insolent.
As the man walked he glanced from side to side
Uneasily. A silvery shiver went
Up and down Achmet's back-bone with a jerk,
As when a dentist steadies to his work.

Suddenly a gendarme hove in view, caressing
With much affection a superb mustache.
This on the stranger had effects distressing.
He darted sidewise in one desperate dash,
Upsetting a vendor who did not bawl a blessing
As his melon-stand went over with a crash.
Achmet saw his fierce profile as he ran,
And blanched. The fugitive was Yolbars Khan.





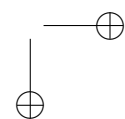
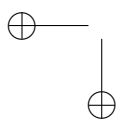
SHAD-I-MULK

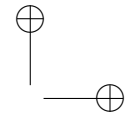
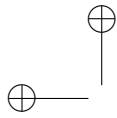
Achmet slunk home, by fear and love devoured –
Passions that have a trick of neutralizing
Each other. His emotions overpowered
The youth. The day had proved demoralizing.
Zuleika, too, on his arrival lowered
Upon him with vindictiveness surprising.
With much acumen she had accounted for
Achmet's behavior for two months and more.

His obvious grief now pleased her, for she knew
That henceforth he would sometimes be at home.
Meanwhile she would teach the youth a thing or two
That he had not yet studied in the tome
Of nature. She rather liked the rôle of shrew,
And there was not a maid in heathendom
Could play it better. Shad-i-Mulk's tirade
Was music to the tune Zuleika played.

In short, his home proved now a combination
In equal parts of desperate ennui
Mingled with outbursts of vituperation
Which fell like lightning down, whenever he
Came under the young lady's observation.
He would have fled away, but dared not flee.
The streets were dangerous. He was not the man
To run the risk of meeting Yolbars Khan.

All kinds of idiot schemes formed in his head.
He would see Shad-i-Mulk; she might forgive.
Yolbars — The very name filled him with dread –
He might give tidings of that fugitive
To the police. But after all was said
His thoughts were like sand falling through a sieve,
Vague policies as baseless as a dream.
He was too rattled to conceive a scheme.





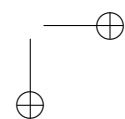
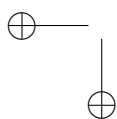
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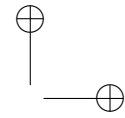
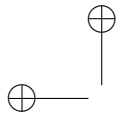
Supper-time came – a miserable meal.
He cowered o'er his sodden mutton-stew,
Feeling Zuleika's eyes of embrowned steel
Piercing his mental vitals through and through.
Yasmeen's maternal eyes saw the appeal
In his dull glances; but what could she do
To cherish, or to comfort, or give aid
Against the intention of the desert jade?

However, when the meal was cleared away,
Zuleika for some moments left the scene,
And Achmet managed somehow to convey
His present situation to Yasmeen.
Her eyes gleamed as she listened – strange to say –
Outworn herself, her interest yet was keen
In an intrigue for its own sake. She smiled
Or leered, and said, "Leave it to me, my child."

Next morning while Zuleika on the roof
Lazed sultrily, Yasmeen discreetly drew
Achmet aside, and gave him signal proof
That she was equal to a ruse or two.
Zuleika heard her chuckle far aloof,
And fancying that some mischief was abrew,
Looked idly from the wall, and in the nick
Heard the great bolt of the grilled doorway click.

Thence issued a tall figure feminine,
Veiled in the mystery of all the East,
By which, by the way, no one who cares a pin
For fact will be affected in the least,
For most of them are uglier than sin.
As the veil goes, and knowledge is increased,
Monogamists must certainly be struck,
Seeing their own incomparable luck.





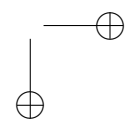
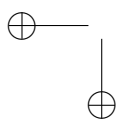
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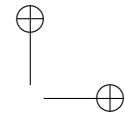
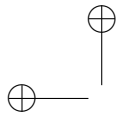
Zuleika idly viewed the stranger, but
Suddenly she sat straight up, for she had seen
Something that seemed familiar in the cut
Of that jib feminine. That red and green
Shawl, and the veil? Where had she seen the slut?
What a hulking gait she had? Tall as Yasmeen,
But slender! Gawky, like a horse run to bone.
The veil – the shawl – why, they were both her own!

She whipped down the steep stairway like a lash.
Yasmeen was there before her, bolting the grille.
But where was Achmet? Zuleika in a flash
Saw what was toward; and with sadistic will
Leaped on Yasmeen, who tumbled with a crash.
The wild girl cuffed and scratched the hag until
Breath failed her. Snatching the victim's hood and veil,
She started furious upon Achmet's trail.

What she intended, herself she did not know.
She saw the embroidered shawl bob far ahead.
Somehow it made her ill to see him so
Effeminized. She had rather he were dead.
Well, she was going to see out this show,
And follow to the end where'er he led.
He crossed the Righistan and headed straight
Down a side street toward the Bokhara Gate.

He reached a door which opened, and with a bang
Shut on Zuleika, as she came panting by.
Nothing was left for her to do but hang
About to spy whatever she could spy.
But in her head great bells of anger rang,
And her lips beneath her veil were white and dry,
As her imagination lingered o'er
What scenes were taking place beyond the door.





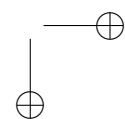
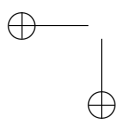
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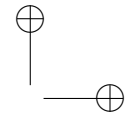
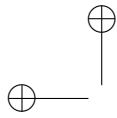
A half hour passed. Up the deserted street
A man came swiftly. His manner, though, was sneaking;
His face hid in a cowl. Loudly he beat
The door, which opened slowly, hollow creaking.
He slithered in. Loud rose a female bleat,
Blandishments, chuckling, and a sort of shrieking,
Rustlings, protestings, silence – the door stood wide.
Zuleika, without hurry, slipped inside,

And silently went up a ruinous stair
Which led her to a huge and sombre room,
Just as a woman's shriek curdled the air.
She looked within. There Achmet stood, on whom
Had come a look of uttermost despair.
Cowards will look so on the day of doom.
His feminine gear awry, his visage wan,
He stared at the dread face of Yolbars Khan,

While Shad-i-Mulk upraised shriek upon shriek,
Diversified by something like a laugh,
But in which the element of mirth was weak.
The affair had grown too much for her by half.
“My son,” she sobbed – But Yolbars did not speak,
Glaring at Achmet as a tiger on a calf.
I do not blame him. Achmet, on the whole,
Had outraged every instinct of his soul.

The sweat stood out on Achmet's brow. It plastered
The curls upon his temples. He could not stir.
For Yolbars' eye intolerable overmastered
His soul. He closed his eyes. “You gutter cur!”
Quoth Yolbars Khan – “You filthy Tadjik bastard,
I'm going to do you slowly – As for her —”
He half glanced at his mother with a bleak
Fury – “I'll —” Shad-i-Mulk fell with a shriek.





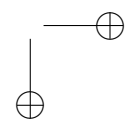
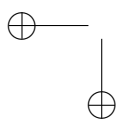
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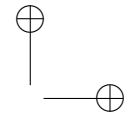
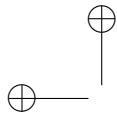
Forward he strode. Zuleika without sound
Darted from the stair upon him from behind.
With one swift motion she swept her mantle round
His head, and her leg between his knees entwined;
She bit his thumb; his knife clinked on the ground.
Achmet's astonished eyes opened to find
Yolbars involved in darkness and in strife.
"Achmet!" Zuleika shrieked – "The knife! The knife!"

One scrambling snatch and lunge. Down came all three
In one tremendous whirl of legs and arms
Flying cross-woven and thudding horribly
Plump upon Shad-i-Mulk's prostrated charms.
Zuleika with a laugh dragged herself free,
As quiet fell sudden on those alarms.
She rose upright and with her finger-tips
Wiped half caressingly her bloody lips.

Achmet got shuddering up. The episode
Seemed one involving what the French call suites.
He rather fancied that the criminal code
Had interests in that object at his feet.
But Zuleika no least disposition showed
Toward beating a disorderly retreat.
She made him fetch basin and ewer, and they
Washed all the stains of blood and dust away.

Then with much amorous humor she adjusted
Her costume and his borrowed female gear,
Calling him a sad girl not to be trusted,
Eying his charms with many a sidelong leer.
Her humorous strain I fear would have disgusted
Most puritans who viewed the ruddy smear
Where Yolbars lay, a hacked and lifeless hulk,
Across the unconscious form of Shad-i-Mulk.



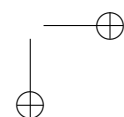
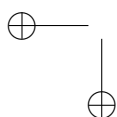


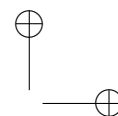
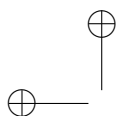
SHAD-I-MULK

Zuleika thought it might be well to quench
That lady's vital forces where she lay.
But the point raised, Achmet began to blench.
She felt that he had done enough that day.
She laughed it off – "Come, then, you green-sick wench,
We little murderesses must steal away,
Before the bad policemen catch us dreaming."
Home they slipped, innocent damsels in all seeming.

They gained their door. Listlessly in the street
A man loafed, whose eyes, passionate and tender,
Surveyed the pair. Zuleika tittered sweet
And nudged dumb Achmet. It was the sweet-meat vendor,
Jami, whose face flushed up with a strange heat.
Youth does not like it when a maiden slender
Titters too obviously at his expense.
The door clanged on Zuleika's insolence.

Meanwhile in Shad-i-Mulk's room rose the drone
Of the fly-swarm, circling with crescendo buzz.
And the dame herself grew conscious, with a groan,
Of a vast weight, and wondered what it was.
Then from an alcove, trembling, that old crone,
Shad-i-Mulk's go-between, appeared, who does
Not matter in this tale, though with some fitness
She played the part of the State's banner witness.





Sir, a man might write such stuff for ever, if he would abandon his mind to it.

Doctor Johnson

Il exercoit extrêmement bien sa charge quand il n'avait rien à faire.

Madame de Lafayette

I have struck a medal upon myself: the device is thus O, and the motto *Nibilissimo*, which I take in the most concise manner to contain a full account of my person, sentiments, occupations, and late glorious successes.

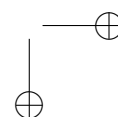
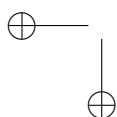
Horace Walpole

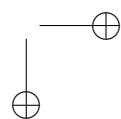
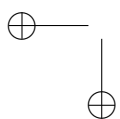
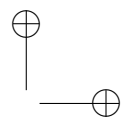
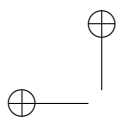
Well, 'gad, there is nothing in nothing.

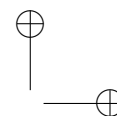
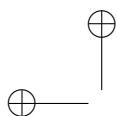
S. . .

One truth discovered, one pang of regret at not being able to express it, is better than all the fluency and flippancy in the world.

Hazlitt





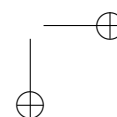
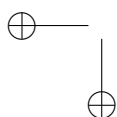


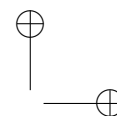
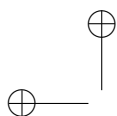
CANTO IV GHOMANG LOBZANG

Oh Blood and Thunder! Thunder, likewise blood!
So swore the great Lord Byron, whom I plunder.
When the brains are out, then what receipt's so good
As equal quantities of blood and thunder?
I take the potion, be it understood,
Whene'er I feel I am about to blunder
Into the realm of ratiocination.
And I must say I like the combination

Better than any moral "half an' half,"
Which in weak moments I am apt to drain,
Or the sour intellectual shandygaff
Dear to some poets — But I will refrain
From public insult. Reader, let us laugh
A little at this offspring of my brain,
This half-baked, slipshod story, blood imbued,
So clanking in its motion, and so crude.

I know my characters are marionettes,
I know my situations are mechanical,
I know that publishers will place no bets
On him who wears ottava rima's manacle,
Or whoso pays to rhyme his lawful debts,
Obedient to natural laws tyrannical.
I know that that way lies nor power nor glory,
And yet somehow I like to tell my story





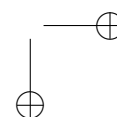
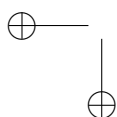
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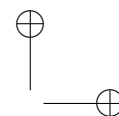
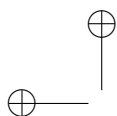
In my own simple, unassuming way,
Mixing in the best colors that I can,
Remembering that I am but common clay,
Like you, dear reader, though I'm not the man
To blame you, if you've been content to stray
Along with my Egyptian caravan.
As Shakespeare says, "To read my work is tough
But only think, I had to write the stuff."

Which brings four stanzas of extravagation
To a natural close. I wish I could explain
Why Gólubyov gave slight consideration
To a murder that had got on Barsov's brain.
He mocked his underling's preoccupation,
Having for that worthy's gifts a fine disdain,
Though in his heart there was a vague subliminal
Interest in the identity of the criminal.

Gólubyov in the last few years had grown
To loathe some aspects of his office which
Wore down his spirit to the very bone.
It sickened him when Piotr Karpovich
Had to be sent to Khiva to crack stone –
Not that his sentimental vein was rich.
It wasn't. But such matters more and more
Took on the appearance of a dirty bore,

Which interfered, moreover, with the schemes
That interested him. Hence he devolved
Such stuff on Barsov, who was not given to dreams
Of Empire, and saw no riddles to be solved
In routine. That which is, and that which seems
Are one to Barsovs. The adjutant revolved
In an orbit of unfailing periodicity,
Diversified by one quaint eccentricity –





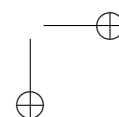
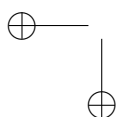
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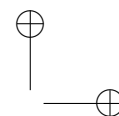
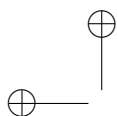
Normally in abeyance. If his mind
Took hold of anything (it rarely did)
A curiousness, as of the squirrel kind,
Devoured him, till he brought forth what was hid.
He would poke his nose behind your window-blind,
Rifle your mail, snoop under any lid,
Sneak, or prevaricate, or play the thief
To give his curiosity relief.

His attention had been drawn to the affair
So late that it was now a mystery
Of a sort he liked, just as he had a flair
For chequer-problems, which he solved with glee
Nightly at his club, plucking at his back hair
As king took king, and staring hungrily
Upon the board in geometric bliss.
He worked, of course, on an hypothesis,

Which on the whole was quite grotesquely wrong,
Wholly divorced from reason and from rhyme.
Barsov's imagination was not strong.
He favored a premeditated crime.
He naturally smelled a "liaysong,"
(As the French say), which inference sublime
Gave him a necessary pied-à-terre,
Though that was all he made of the affair.

But even a false theory, now and then,
May lead to truth in a surprising way,
To the astonishment of Gods and men.
For instance Adams and Le Verrier,
When a new planet swam into their ken.
Their two mistakes cancelled themselves, and they
Are great, because, with Providence their guide,
They trusted to an algebra that lied,





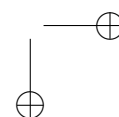
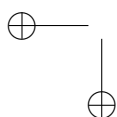
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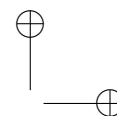
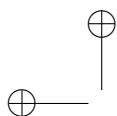
And yet kept some coherence with the fact.
Had Shad-i-Mulk been able to give aid,
The culprits had been seized fresh from the act.
But fate on her one last bad jest had played.
Her mind, unused to such a cataract
Of fury, epileptically decayed.
She was never celebrated for her wits,
Which now proved just the vehicle for fits.

So Barsov's only standby was the crone,
Who but knew Achmet as a passing flame
Of Shad-i-Mulk's, and thought if that were known
It would not add to that poor lady's fame.
She spun a cock and bull tale of her own,
She said the murderess had shrieked the name
Of the murderer at the moment when they slew
Their victim – a statement absolutely true.

Beyond this she was very vague. The fact is,
The hag was most uncomfortably aware
That giving evidence's a dangerous practice
In the Orient, and, I may add, elsewhere.
I think upon the whole a hag of tact is
Wise, if she clears her skirts of an affair
So parlous. She could not see what was to come
And so her statements were the minimum,

The merest stain, a watery residue
Of dubiously combined misinformation,
The shadow of the shade of what she knew
Concerning the dramatic termination
Of Yolbars Khan's belle carrière. She drew
Red herrings o'er the trail, her inclination
From her youth up having led to an unerring
Precision in the use of the red herring.





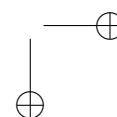
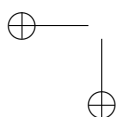
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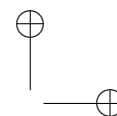
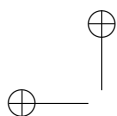
Thus our friend Barsov, at perpetual fault,
Barked sullen up the wrong tree every time.
He took the old wife's statements without salt,
And picked a perpetrator for the crime.
The motive for a time brought him to halt,
But at last he stumbled on one in its prime.
Yolbars was the type of scoundrel who is slain
For vengeance rather than for vulgar gain.

Now, to find men whom Yolbars Khan had wronged
Was easy. All told, his record had been bad.
But, out of all his host of dupes who thronged
Samarcand, Barsov picked the Persian lad,
Jami, who, after a session less prolonged
At Khiva than the law demanded, had
Departed without leaving an address,
To the prison commandant's profound distress.

Everything hung together in a way
Apt to convince the crass official mind.
Yolbars had fled on the preceding day.
"Bad blood," thought Barsov, "Gólubyov is blind.
The motive's clear. I'd bet my season's pay
That Jami did it. Now if we can find
Our friend the Persian, I should like to wager
That in a year's time I shall be a major."

Barsov's promotion had been long a-coming.
His talents were so fitted to routine
As to exert an influence benumbing
On his advance. Soldiers know what I mean.
Accordingly he was for ever drumming
Up projects to accelerate the "Machine,"
And vaguely wished, as he bent o'er his desk,
That he had been a bit more picturesque.





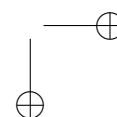
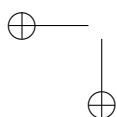
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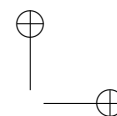
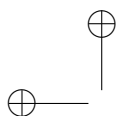
Out of his drawer, a dog-eared, paper-bound
Volume he drew, and dived in it enthralled.
For in the work in question he had found
The picturesque in plenty. Barsov called
The volume “Shairlock Golmes.” Enchanted ground
It was to him, although the style was bald
As Barsov’s cranium. He forgot his toil,
Enraptured by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

It did him good to fancy Gólubyov
In Doctor “Watson’s” much astonished rôle,
While his deductive miracles came off
To the dismay of his superior’s soul.
Perhaps his chief would be less apt to scoff,
When Barsov should have ravelled out the whole
Dark mystery. Satisfied wrinkles scored
His brow that night over his chequer-board.

He had the dragnets out, but dragnets are
Notorious for letting men slip through,
Who are sincerely wanted at the bar
Of justice – so that Captain Barsov grew
A trifle pessimistic. Near or far
Nothing but mares’ nests were unearthed to view.
Gólubyov voted the whole quest a bore
Quite openly – and Barsov – Barsov swore,

As military men are wont to swear,
From sheer inferiority of mind,
In Flanders, Ashantee, or anywhere.
Gólubyov’s epigrams were less than kind,
And Barsov found them very hard to bear.
Jami, he found, was harder yet to find.
Needles in hay seem difficult to some.
They ought to look for convicts in a slum.





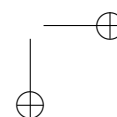
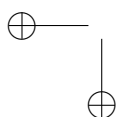
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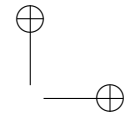
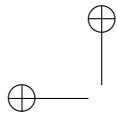
Gólubyov, for all his mockery, had a liking
For his subordinate – perhaps because
The adjutant afforded such a striking
Target for wit worthy his own applause.
Furthermore his official mind loved hiking
About the city. Power like the General's draws
A man of parts to study every hour
Whatever is the object of his power.

So he asked Barsov to walk home to dine.
The Captain looked up gratefully. He knew
Gólubyov would not mock him o'er the wine,
And pleasant ladies for an hour or two
Would make sweet melodies, such as incline
All Slavic hearts to peace whate'er they do.
Gólubyov had besides a fine liqueur.
'Twas not in Captain Barsov to demur.

They went forth point device. Their sabres trailing
Knocked on the cobbles. Down unfamiliar ways
They stalked where the populace with calm unfailing
Enjoyed the transient military blaze
Of splendor. Asia has a taste prevailing
For soldier pomp. Accordingly the gaze
Of citizens whose conscience was secure,
Viewed pleasantly the successors of Timur.

Presently to Barsov's wonder, Gólubyov
Looked up at a ram-shackle house that lay
Hard by. A cross between an oath and cough
Issued from his lips. He did not like to stray
Too near Yasmeen's demesne. It put him off
His poise. Mean recollections have a way
Of damning places in our sight, although
The mean thing happened ne'er so long ago.





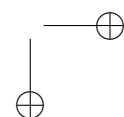
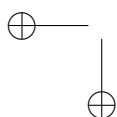
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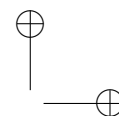
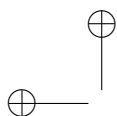
A muffled man was standing near the grille,
Who shrank a trifle as the pair passed by,
And Gólubyov, mindful of an ancient ill,
Glared at him with an introspective eye
Sardonic. The General hardly saw him till
He wheeled, slapping his pocket with a cry
Of irritation. "How a man forgets!
Damn it," he said, "I've left my cigarettes."

Which innocent remark in the strange man
Provoked a wholly unexpected show
Of fine activity. Deer-like he ran
Down the alley-way. You should have seen him go.
Young men on whom the law has laid the ban,
When a general speaks a tongue they do not know,
Are apt, if they are taken unawares,
To link his utterance with their own affairs.

So thought the youth and fled. The soldier pair
Gazed thunderstruck! Then upon instinct bounded
After in pursuit, as puppies chase a hare.
They felt the quarry's hegira must be founded
On a bad conscience. Down a thoroughfare
Bolted the three. But Barsov's whistle sounded
Once, twice, and thrice. Before, behind, ahead,
Swift came the grey police. They had him dead.

Barsov and Gólubyov, in the order named,
Panted up as the net closed on the fish.
They found a youth with sombre eyes that flamed
Out of a frightened visage yellowish,
Upon his stolid captors, unashamed.
Of a sudden Barsov cackled. To his wish,
Beyond his hope his game was going – "Damme,"
Said Barsov, turning. "General, it's Jami."





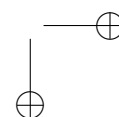
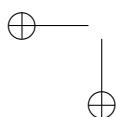
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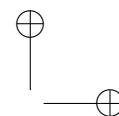
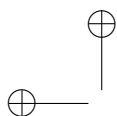
On general principles it seems to me
That it will be the better part to skip
The methods of the Russian third degree,
As practised by the gentle fellowship
Of the police. They lacked humanity.
But prison, bread and water, and the whip,
Together with prolonged interrogation,
Elicited but little information

From Jami. Barsov could not implicate
The victim deep enough, even for the ends
Of Russian justice, which, needless to state,
But little on the evidence depends.
Shad-i-Mulk's go-between seemed to hesitate,
Seeing him, for she feared he might have friends.
He didn't, but the doubt made her delay
Swearing the youth's unhappy life away.

Barsov, at his wits' end, which was not far,
Came to his chief to canvass the affair
Afresh. He saw through the baize-door ajar
Gólubyov rumpling all his steel-grey hair
And a wire before him. He cursed his evil star,
And like an echo heard the General swear,
"Now the fat's in the fire!" Explosive scraps
Of imprecations reached him. "Damn the Japs!"

It was too true. By the next morrow's dawn,
Who could go, should. Manchuria howled for men.
All frontier garrisons to be withdrawn
At the rate of seven out of every ten,
And Gólubyov himself left like a pawn.
Ghomang Lobzang would rage at Lhasa, when
He got these tidings in a month or two.
Only the Devil could say what he would do.





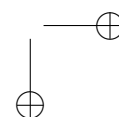
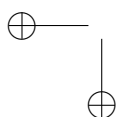
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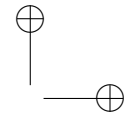
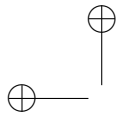
And the protectorate ready to declare!
And a Cossack troop all ready to declare it
Three days from Lhasa! The Japs had sprung the snare!
Christ! It was too much for a man to bear it.
Gólubyov fell back in his swivel-chair,
His chest heaved with a sob that seemed to tear it.
It is no joke, when in affairs of state
A statesman knows that he has been too late.

The ship, when the tornadoes overthrow it,
Is a sorrow to the skilful mariner.
(Not that he gives a damn where the winds blow it.
Who cares for that is nothing but a cur.)
The engineer, when the bridge falls, the poet,
When the smooth numbers feel no inward stir,
All men, as their spiritual galleons broach
On the lee-shoal, know the same self-reproach.

The third grief of that triple list I know
Too well, as you, keen reader, have perceived.
The lines may amble but they will not glow.
Delightful Art of Verse! How I have grieved
In vain, watching the imperfections grow
At the pencil's end, to triteness unrelieved,
To any purpose save to what they ought,
Metaphor shattered, and miscarried thought.

And so I feel for Gólubyov, who for
Say five black moments dallied with despair.
Happily his pride could not consent to more.
Out of his eyes died the disastrous glare.
Up he sat, gritting his white teeth, and swore
Suddenly aloud. A momentary flare
Of anger rose within him to disarm
All of the terrors of the dreadful charm





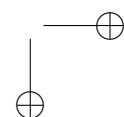
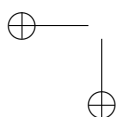
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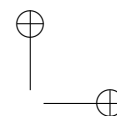
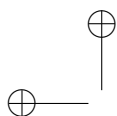
That quelled his spirit. As a pugilist,
Who has nearly got his quittance but not quite,
Rushes in close to his antagonist,
Ferociously jabbing him left and right,
And those who cheered the punch and those who hissed
Fall silent at the splendor of the sight
Of blood well up in a man who will not crawl,
So Gólubyov with no audience at all

Turned on his fate to beat it or to bide,
His mind as cool as ever was cucumber,
Determined nothing should be left untried,
And that he never would be a back number.
His plan was scrapped, destroyed, and cast aside,
A pile of rotting diplomatic lumber.
Strange times demand strange deeds. "Barsov," he blared.
The Captain entered. "Orders! War's declared!"

"Do thus and thus and thus! Get me a man,
The best we've got – Get Ali. He will do.
Some one must get to India if he can,
Thence to Thibet, if a fellow can sneak through.
Ghomang Lobzang has got to change his plan.
He'll have to wait another year or two.
He's got to know that we are still behind him.
Get Ali quick. He is the man to find him."

A month passed while remorselessly they gutted
The Frontier stations. Barsov and Gólubyov
Slaved 'neath the gas-jets while the field-guns ruttled
The Righistan, and the regiments clanked off
Tashkentward. And important majors strutted
About the offices, disposed to scoff
At the Japonskis. They had no idea
Of what was going forward in Korea,





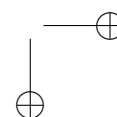
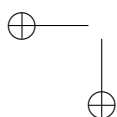
GHOMANG LOBZANG

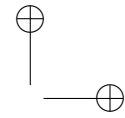
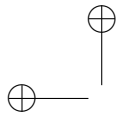
Though Gólubyov, as the importunate wire
Clucked in the night-time like an insane bird,
Wondered – Things were not as he could desire.
His orders left so much to be inferred.
No information such as chiefs require –
No news save now and then a barren word,
Implying, as the blabbing ticker prattled,
That the staff at Petrograd were badly rattled.

Ali came in at last – fresh from Tashkent,
With a strange budget of prodigious news.
Gólubyov's creased brow darkened as he bent
Over his desk. The tale did not amuse
The General, who knew damn well what it meant,
And had a province and career to lose.
Well, he could manage, if he could but hang
On to his Lama friend, Ghomang Lobzang.

But here a difficulty was presented
By Ali. It appeared that he was known
Too well in India, much as he lamented
The fact. He'd risk his neck or break a bone
For the cause, and most unwillingly dissented
From butting his bare head against a stone-
Wall, but the inescapable truth would out.
The English knew him well beyond a doubt.

And it would never, never, never do
For Ali to be caught by them again
Stirring their private diplomatic brew.
Ali's great day was over. That was plain.
One item of his news was hard to chew,
And roused a tempest in the General's brain:
The English, seeing Russia in the ret,
Were going on adventures in Thibet.





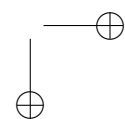
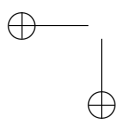
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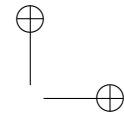
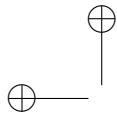
So Ali's correspondent Bairam Khan
Informed him in a letter which was loaded
With tips about the prices of Kerman
Rugs, but which told strange matters when decoded.
It was clear enough for him to read who ran.
Gólubyov felt as if they had exploded
A bomb inside him. But he would not falter.
When the foes' tactics change, then yours must alter.

So Gólubyov took up a new position.
He glanced at Ali. "Some one has got to go
To Lhasa with that blessed expedition,
So that our friend Ghomang Lobzang may know
Just where we stand, and come to a decision.
The English are not going to run this show
Just to their liking, or I'm not Gólubyov.
Get me a likely ruffian. Now be off!"

Ali went pensive down the office-stair
Where Barsov, meeting him, drew him aside.
He had some troubles of his own to air,
And knew that Ali was a useful guide
In any minor criminal affair.
His knowledge of the underworld was wide.
Hence with a certain pathos he retailed
How his detective faculties had failed.

"Hm!" said the Usbeg, as the tale unrolled,
Pulling uncertainly his caprine beard.
"Allah is great. His works are manifold.
Where did you take him? Even as I feared.
In that house dwells a youth, I have been told,
Who has perhaps been negligently reared.
If you should nab him, on the whole he might
Provide in darkness some degree of light."





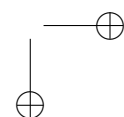
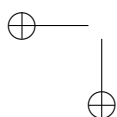
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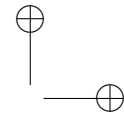
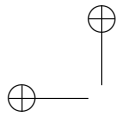
Gólubyov, in his office sitting late,
With aching eyes, kept signing, signing, signing
Stacks of important letters big with state,
A task a good deal duller than coal-mining,
When in burst Barsov, all his roseate pate
Flushed to the crown, and his mean features shining
With sweat and triumph. Behind him, dumb and pale,
Appeared the pseudo-hero of this tale,

Between two large gendarmes. The General stared
Hard at the prisoner, while with touching pride
Barsov related how the lad was snared.
This time his tale was not to be denied.
Shad-i-Mulk's harridan no longer dared
Falter, and zealously identified
Achmet as the hardened ruffian who had struck
The stroke. It was decidedly hard luck.

Gólubyov, gazing on him, felt a gust
Of sadness. Much too well that face he knew,
Slack-lipped, with dull gazelle eyes. That which must,
Must be. And after all, what could he do?
Murder was done, and justice will be just,
And it does not become officials to
Hamper her action in the least degree,
Especially when they're as blind as she.

He dropped his last endorsement in the tray,
And lit a cigarette. "Barsov," said he,
"Fine work! You send your underlings away
And leave your friend the murderer here with me.
I'll question him. Tell the corporal to stay.
You don't know Turki. Go and get some tea."
He turned to the offender with a frown
That froze the entrails as he said, "Sit down."





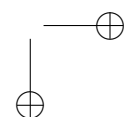
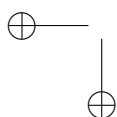
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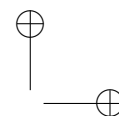
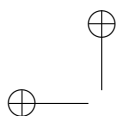
Achmet sank limp upon a lounge. The gas
Enhanced the pallor of his features fallow,
The very color of a man who has
O'erdoesed himself with calomel or aloe.
His pupils shrank – dark dots of infilmed glass,
And his throat quaked with a convulsive swallow,
Unpleasantly suggesting, I may say,
That traffic might come up the other way.

It horrified him, as the interrogation
Proceeded, that the General seemed to know
A vast amount about his life and station
In the scheme of things. Each question was a blow
Smash on the jawpoint of prevarication.
Achmet in misery wavered to and fro
In dreadful doubt whether 'twere best to blurt
The whole truth out, or lie to his own hurt.

Till for the first time, and almost the last,
Awed by the omniscient Gólubyov, the youth,
Knowing what he did, of his own volition, cast
Aside deceit, and told the naked truth
Of all things whatsoever that had passed
At Shad-i-Mulk's. To pull a wisdom tooth
Were easier – and more joyous furthermore.
But Gólubyov had done such things before.

So the whole jig was up. Tempestuous tears,
The effect of terror-magnified hysteria,
O'erflowed the culprit's cheeks in dusty smears,
While metronomic sobs shook his interior,
Till his diaphragm was level with his ears,
Or at some elevation e'en superior.
The General's face took on a saddened air,
Gazing at the boy's undignified despair –





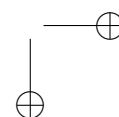
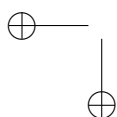
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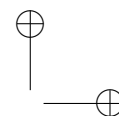
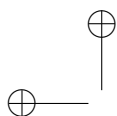
My knowledge of mankind is far from wide,
Yet I may indicate two marked varieties
Of man which may be easily described
Casually in all places and societies.
They may be readily identified –
Merciful and merciless. I don't know why it is,
But the troubles of our race are mainly due
To the opposing virtues of these two.

One loves a slackness, the other seeks rigidity,
When what we need is proper flexibility.
One leads to mushiness, one to aridity.
One is too soft, the other lacks ductility.
Feeling betrays the one into stupidity,
Logic the other into imbecility.
Beware of either, which is no other than
To say, Don't trust yourself or any man.

See nothing, if you can! and if you can't,
To the best of your abilities ignore
Unpleasant episodes. Play chess, or plant
Cabbages like the Emperor of yore –
Merciless in all conscience you must grant,
Who tried to thumb his nose at peace and war
And other human matters, though it's true,
It's hard to find a better thing to do.

And if you do not credit me, why then
How can you bear to watch an old man weeping,
Or the faces of a crowd of laboring men
At the day's end when weariness comes creeping,
Or an old woman's fallen countenance, when
The end is coming soon of her housekeeping,
Or list to an incompetent lamenting,
Or, what is worse, a man of parts repenting?





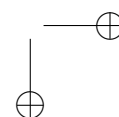
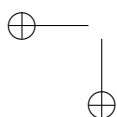
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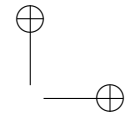
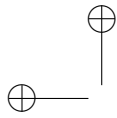
I know I'm shallow and I know you know it.
I'm not so sure, dear reader, whether you
In this have much advantage o'er the poet,
Save that his imperfections are on view.
Your weakness is as real though you don't show it,
But I might tell your grace a thing or two,
If with an itch for scribbling you were cursed
Or blessed, and our positions were reversed.

And yet I rather like you, if you read
This irritable outburst. If you won't,
I think your taste is very poor indeed.
Nor do I care a nickel if you don't,
Although my royalties aren't guaranteed.
Naught suits a poet like the brazen front
Of him who is at liberty to tell
Any individual to go to Hell.

This ineffectual effort to be witty
I give the intellectuals leave to spurn.
The source of this parenthesis was pity.
Accordingly to pity I return.
There was no man in the hard-hearted city
Of Samarcand, who felt more deep concern
Than Gólubov when such a holy show
Troubled his soul, as Achmet's gust of woe.

His face was wont to darken at such times,
And it was thunderous indeed as he
Thought of the genealogy of crimes,
How ancient sins made present tragedy.
The filth that stunts the mind, the vice that slimes
The soul, had brought the sordid thing to be.
"Oh bosh!" he thought, "Such sickly maundering leads
To folly. We pay the freight on our own deeds.





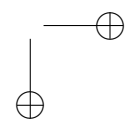
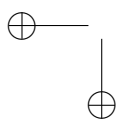
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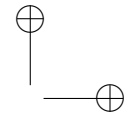
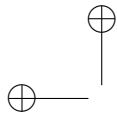
“But if the kid had luck – He had the nerve
To kill a man – and tell the truth.” His mind
Abandoned Achmet with a leap and swerve
Home to that project evermore behind,
And then pounced back. “How if the boy might serve
My hand a bit!” His heavy eye grew kind,
And the black cloud darkening his brow withdrew.
“Achmet,” said he, “There’s just one chance for you.

“Now listen, hard! Five or six months ago,
A stranger came. You may have seen the man –
A yellow giaour with eyes that slanted – so.
There was none like him on the Righistan.”
Achmet upraised a countenance of woe:
“He that was here the day that Yolbars Khan
Was seized? – I think I saw him.” “So you did,”
Said Gólubyov. “You’re an observant kid.

“He’s in Thibet, far – far beyond Khokand!
He will be hard to find, for there’ll be fighting.
The messenger who takes the job in hand
Will find the task by no means unexciting,
And will be forgiven much – you understand.
You carry him this little bit of writing.
You undertake it and report to me
Six months hence, and we’ll let your bygones be.

“The man’s name is Ghomang Lobzang, which means
Nothing at all as far as you’re concerned.
Lhasa’s his theatre – behind the scenes
Is the general region where his pay is earned,
And making ducks and drakes of Kings and Queens
Is his métier. And so, my lad, you’ve learned
What you’re to do and where – quite simple – Now
We come to the more tangled question – how?





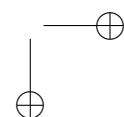
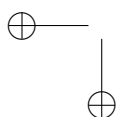
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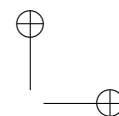
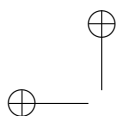
“These last three months an English Expedition
Has lain in Sikkim. In a month ’twill start –
Those fellows have by far too much ambition
To boss the show. You are to play the part
Of muleteer or one of like condition,
And help me to upset their apple cart
Of Empire. At Peshawur you’ll meet a man
Who will go with you. Ask for Bairam Khan

“At Mahbub Ali’s caravanserai.
A week from Lhasa, your hard job will come.
By hook or crook you’ve got to slip away
From that damned army, which is troublesome.
But you must manage to get lost or stray,
And then make tracks to Lhasa, but keep mum
Even to Bairam Khan on the affair.
Such things are not the better for fresh air.

“And let me mention for your information,
It would be very bad for you to fail,
Or to betray us. I have no hesitation
In pointing out that death is worse than jail.
And such a death as the imagination
Boggles at, naughty conduct would entail.
Russia has a long leg, and even in Sikkim,
If a man betrays her, she’ll make shift to kick him.”

Which last was only a prodigious bluff
That Gólubyov, at his wits’ end, was working.
He knew the enterprise was ultra-tough.
He saw all kinds of opposition lurking.
He knew that Achmet was not proper stuff,
But the trout that feels the silver doctor jerking
Can’t navigate according to his wish.
His case is much like Gólubyov’s – poor fish.





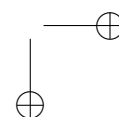
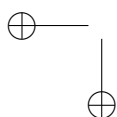
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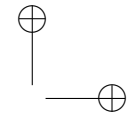
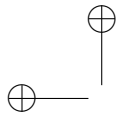
Tremulously Achmet gazed at the stern-eyed
Yet friendly General who appeared so strong,
For all the anxiety that buzzed inside,
Both of them on the devil's pitching-prong.
"Come," said the General, "Ali will be your guide.
Down to Peshawur. I can't wait all night long.
Oh, by the way. If they stop you in Thibet,
The word's 'Maitreya.' Mind you don't forget."

He snatched the telephone – twenty minutes later
Came Ali, who protestingly averred
That Achmet always was a selling-plater,
With a capacity for running third.
But Gólubyov said shortly, "True or traitor,
He's got to try. I've given him the word.
Get started. Barsov's interest in crime
Will have to wait a more propitious time."

Out they went in the dark. Gólubyov turned
The gas-jet low, and started forth alone.
By the office-door he suddenly discerned
The battered figure of the withered crone,
Who at his feet fawned, fearing to be spurned,
And piteously besought him with a moan
To send a soldier home with her. Some weird
Horror was on her. She knew *not* what she feared.

Her way was his. The General took her back
To the dumb house by the Bokhara Gate.
She pattered fast behind him – clack-clack-clack;
Her cane went rattling a prodigious rate.
They came to the dark door sightless and black.
He heard the greaseless bolt and hinges grate.
She moaned her gratitude. The door banged to.
He marched off whistling up the avenue.





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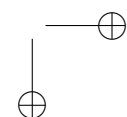
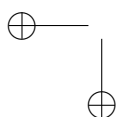
He came down late next morning. Barsov's face
Rather amused him, with its disgruntled air.
The Captain bore his failure with sad grace,
For it had been a promising affair.
But just at noontime, with a quickened pace,
Breathless, he burst into the General's lair.
"General," he shouted, while his scalp burned red
With fresh excitement. "The poor old woman's dead –

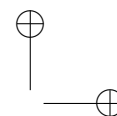
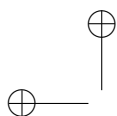
"Murdered" – while far away the noon-day light
At last aroused Zuleika, who rubbed the sleep
Out of her eyes. Being out late at night
Was a new experience – and she had slumbered deep
And long. She yawned a bit, and sat upright,
And threw the bed clothes from her in a heap.
There was a heaviness about her eyes,
And her wrists hurt from unwonted exercise.

Some time she sat, as one who is enjoying
A vacant future after sweet awaking,
Stretching her fingers slowly out, and toying
With a trinket, better to feel the curious aching
In her wrists, which raised a cloud of thoughts annoying.
"Achmet," the name stabbed through her bosom, making
Her face go pale. Yet when the boy was tried,
Perhaps he would not be identified.

.

Simla is a pleasant place of recreation,
About six thousand feet above sea level,
Where the chiefs of India's administration
And bureaucrats on leave are wont to revel.
Government, polo, tennis, golf, flirtation,
And opportunities to raise the devil
In the mild British way, not without grace,
Are the chief occupations of the place.





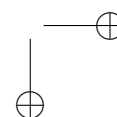
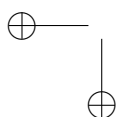
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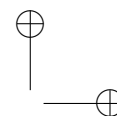
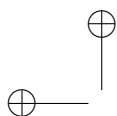
There is a hostelry that hight Pelitis,
Known to the natives and to Kiplingites,
Where fat commissioners with diabetes
Are wont to sate their morbid appetites,
And diplomats keep their hands in for treaties,
By blarneying ladies 'neath the candle-lights,
And the white shirtfronts and white bosoms gleam,
And skim-milk tries to masquerade as cream.

Thither I would transport you, to behold
A group of officers in the gorgeous dress
Of each his regiment, scarlet and black and gold,
Who sate to dine in a candle-lit recess.
They were three men of different rank and mould,
But they seemed upon the best terms none the less.
And though generals and viceroys supped near-by,
These three, I fancy, would have caught your eye.

There was something quite un-English in the group.
In the first place, they looked intelligent,
And as if they knew it, but cared not a whoop,
Even if their brains were ninety-nine per cent
All grey matter – the kind you cannot dupe
With an idea or a sentiment, –
Because it studies substance and appearance,
And loves distinction, order, and coherence.

The youngest was a Royal Engineer,
What in old time they called “a proper man,”
With the swift look of a greyhound or a deer,
And soft dark eyes that restless roved and ran
The whole room over, watching far and near
As a scout might in, say, Baluchistan –
A habit which I think it only fair
To say O'Hara had contracted there.





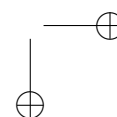
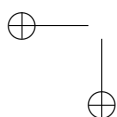
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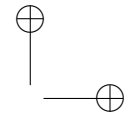
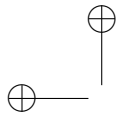
His neighbor, Colonel Creighton, F.R.S.,
Was arguing blithely with his vis-à-vis,
Concerning something you would never guess,
Namely, the virtues of autocracy,
Which virtues he inclined to value less
Than Colonel Arthur Corcoran, V.C.,
Who met his argument with jeer and scoff,
Saying, "You take for instance, Gólubyov.

"I knew him on the Persian Joint Commission.
He hasn't got your brains, but has a job
Like yours, and on the whole fills the position
Well, for he doesn't have to ask a mob,
Made up of every misborn politician,
For leave when there's a chicken roost to rob.
He does it without orders, for he's used
To the principles that rule the chicken-roost.

"He told some curious stories. I recall
How he ran down a Turkoman camel-thief.
Gólubyov was the Pooh-bah, managed all
The show, not only general-in-chief,
But plenipotentiary-imperial,
Treasurer, judge, committee of relief,
Chief engineer, and board of education,
In short the whole bally administration.

"I couldn't find the thing he couldn't do.
He only had to shift from one capacity,
Into another function, whereas you
Have to use up two-thirds of your sagacity,
Discovering the appropriate venue,
And, at vast waste of time and of loquacity,
Persuade the waster that, unless you get
Half what you need, he'll wreck the Empire yet.





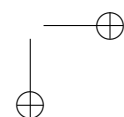
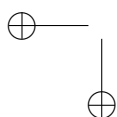
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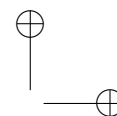
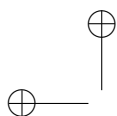
Creighton's grey head shook gently, and he grinned
Through the cigar smoke. "The true test's success,"
Said he, "And I myself have sometimes sinned.
We loiter, but we get there none the less.
I fancy that upon the whole we've skinned
Gólubov better than he would confess.
You ask O'Hara. He'll tell. He's the man
Who knows about the affairs of Bairam Khan."

"Later," said O'Hara, smiling, "Here he is." –
Two men in evening dress came down the aisle
Of dinner tables – "I seem to know the phiz
Of the other chap. Who is he?" Corcoran's smile
Grew broad: "Don't know him? India's mysteries
Baffle your uncle every little while.
Hello, Lurgan. Oh, I say, this is a poem!
Glad you brought Beetle. O'Hara wants to know him.

"Beetle, old thing – Hi, waiter! Whiskey, quick!
Beetle, get rid of that embarrassed grin.
This is Creighton! That's O'Hara! Don't look sick.
We've all forgiven you your ancient sin.
We know it's just your literary trick.
Don't care how many books you put us in.
O'Hara's got a new yarn – just your luck.
Fire away, O'Hara. Tell your story! Bukh."

O'Hara fired away, while Beetle peered,
Awestruck, almost, at the young engineer.
The situation was a trifle weird.
An author known in either hemisphere,
When his best known creation has appeared
In the very flesh, may feel a touch of fear,
Mingled with an interest much too hot to name.
The blood on Beetle's cheek-bones went and came,





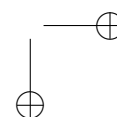
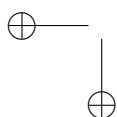
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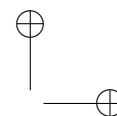
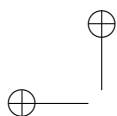
And the eyes behind the heavy lenses fluttered,
Narrowing to the corners in a curious way,
While clumsily his nervous fingers puttered
With the scalloped edge of the tobacco tray.
Lurgan from time to time beside him muttered.
Short explanations, but Beetle sat distraight
And yet attentive, caught in the moil and toil
Of his own intellectual recoil.

The story was not much. It was the fact
That paralysed him. In Baluchistan
O'Hara had by cunning (call it tact)
Managed to get the goods on Bairam Khan.
Now they had set the trap, and were in act
To spring it on a miserable young man
Whom they expected almost at that hour
At Mahbub Ali's rest-house in Peshawur.

Suddenly a voice piped, "Captain O'Hara, Sar!"
And a servant came with a profound salaam,
Bowing, and said, "Oh Captain-Sahib a tar."
O'Hara leaped, and snatched the telegram,
Plunging through it with a chuckle, "There you are!
Must go." It read, "The stray colt wants its dam."
Then with a laugh that made the heart-strings stir,
He turned to Beetle, "Glad to have met you, Sir."

"Good luck!" called Corcoran. Lurgan cocked an eye
At Beetle. "I can cure sick pearls," he said.
"That boy's my pearl. He's sick: I don't know why.
He's got some curious notion in his head."
His short white fingers trembled rhythmically.
"I cannot cure him. Wish I were sick instead.
It isn't women. I don't think engineers
Of his age should be troubled by ideas."





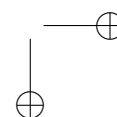
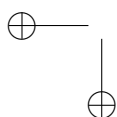
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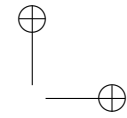
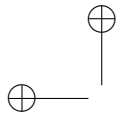
“I’ve noticed he had something on his mind,”
Said Corcoran. “Once I was that way too,
But that’s well over. A man has got to find
His own solution when he’s feeling blue.
Polo’s my cure-all. Something of the kind,
With a lot of pleasant imbeciles, would do
O’Hara good. – Too fond of playing solo.”
Said Creighton sharply: “No amount of polo

“Will cure O’Hara. When the point of view
Of Asia is a part of you, why then
It’s more than highly probable that you
Will cherish notions strange to Englishmen.
I always used to think that Lurgan knew
More about this than most of us, but when
He’s at a loss, I venture the suggestion
That Kim is nosing round the sort of question

“That men like us under no circumstance
Discuss. The subject doesn’t interest
The Briton. But tradition, training, chance,
And love have raised the question in his breast.
He knows some things of which our ignorance
Is vast. At the same time he’s cursed or blessed
With a pair of realistic Western eyes.
In that anomaly his trouble lies.

“Though Asia’s way of thought’s as realistic
In some fields as the Western point of view.
I sometimes think Kim’s queer old Lama mystic
The most hard-headed man I ever knew.
Nothing I know of’s more antagonistic
To Truth than thinking something isn’t true,
Because our dull minds and defective sense
Declare there’s no objective evidence.





GHOMANG LOBZANG

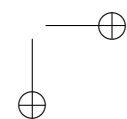
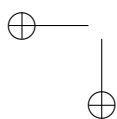
“And what’s more real to us after all
Than feeling and the strange things of the brain,
When the unguarded thought roams beyond call
Through depths we can’t make charts of or explain?
Kim sits upon an intellectual wall, –
Seeing on one side a neat country lane
And on the other, what we may never know –
He’s got to choose. But which? It’s touch and go.”

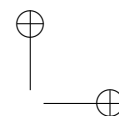
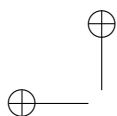
“Oh fiddlesticks!” said Corcoran, “Beetle dear,
Creighton is getting very much too serious.
I know where we can get some proper beer.
I find his metaphysics deleterious
To my inside. Let’s go away from here.
Lurgan and he can stay and be mysterious
If they desire. But I don’t like the tone.
There’s Mrs. Hauksbee! What a hag she’s grown!”

.

Meanwhile in the lamplit city of Peshawur,
At Mahbub Ali’s caravanserai,
Achmet, on questioning a Pathan sour,
Discovered Bairam Khan had left that day
For parts unknown, nor had he set the hour
For his return. Baffled, he turned away,
Glad to be baffled. At the street’s end a man
Said to him softly: “Seekest thou Bairam Khan?”

“Come and be silent.” Down a byway lone
He led the obedient Achmet, and explained
In broken Turki why Bairam Khan had flown
The coop. He had a prejudice engrained
Against some British minions, who had shown
An interest in him, not to be disdained,
Since it involved a most unpleasant doom.
He would look for Achmet at a town called Ghoom,





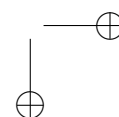
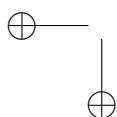
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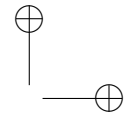
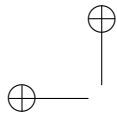
Where tourists come on picnics from Darjeeling,
And spies join expeditions to Thibet,
Beneath the peaks where lammergeiers wheeling
View man as just the article to whet
Their appetites, while he crawls weak and reeling
Along the precipices, much upset
By mountain sickness – and the strained heart fails,
And blood bursts from the ears and finger-nails.

There five days later, as the afterglow
Shed roseate colors of the grosbeak's breast,
On Gaurisanka's shield of ageless snow,
And Chumolhari's Matterhorn-like crest,
The East-bound mail, in the high air panting slow,
Dropped a bewildered traveller from the West,
Who, to judge by the expression of his face,
Observed no striking beauties in the place.

The night closed in. The air went chill. A man
Stepped soundless from behind a pile of freight.
"Brother," he murmured, "I am Bairam Khan.
Night-time is marching-time, and we are late."
The words of his own tongue were sweeter than
Honey to Achmet. Toward the mountain gate
The stranger led him, through the moon-shot hours,
Between black pines and rhododendron-flowers.

The dawn broke. Scarlet filaments of cloud
Flamed on the bulwarks of the knife-sharp heights,
Whence a wind plunged till the pines bucked and bowed,
And the rhododendron-petals drove in flights.
But Bairam and his victim upward plowed,
Mudstained and stonebruised, and with appetites
Like the Himalayan bear's that sniffed and grunted,
As he smelt the tainted dawn-wind where he hunted.





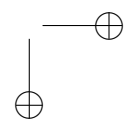
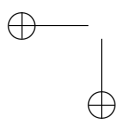
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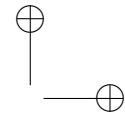
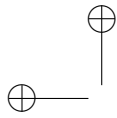
Two hundred stricken miles and fifty-three,
Young husband lay beyond them in the gap,
Shut up in the walled town of Gyan-Tsee,
While half Thibet was marching to the scrap,
With drums and war-conchs bellowing fearfully,
Eager to wipe the invader off the map.
They swarmed about him ten or twelve to one,
If you did not reckon on the Vickers' gun.

Bairam and Achmet, plodding through the mud,
Made ten long days of it to Gyan-Tsee.
They marched by night, for Bairam thought it good
To hide all day. Achmet's timidity
By Bairam's was a sort of fortitude.
The man seemed fearful to the last degree,
Yet he bore cold, and blisters, and starvation,
With resolution or with resignation.

He was upon the whole as queer a duck
As ever monkeyed with an operation
Of State. Their scant meal over, he would tuck
His feet in and lapse into contemplation,
While his lips moved, and his eyes looked passion-struck,
Or busied with some inner calculation,
Thought might produce that calm of bearing. Still
I rather think it was an opium pill.

Achmet had thought him a Mahometan
At least as good as he was, when they met.
But his form altered as the streams began.
Plunging north and by west down to Thibet.
Near Khambi-Jong, he changed his outer man
And Achmet's, donning dirty robes, which yet
Gave sanguinary proof that anchorites
In those parts think foul scorn of parasites.





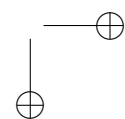
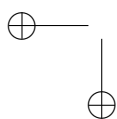
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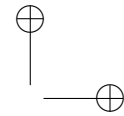
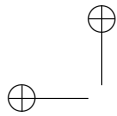
Also his mien grew more authoritative.
He said to Achmet: "Hark to me, my friend!
Thibetan genius reaches the creative
In torture. That's a fact I don't intend
To test. Preserve a silence meditative,
Or yours will be a nasty, sticky end.
If I were you, I think I should play dumb."
Achmet's scalp bristled and his throat went numb.

Obedient he donned the yellow cap
Bairam provided. The unsavory dress
Was heavy, and the fabric had a nap,
Which furnished many a suitable recess
In every filthy wrinkled fold and flap
For what till the late international mess
Was never mentioned. You know what I mean:
The louse, the louse, the louse, the louse unclean.

It was a new land that they came unto,
Beneath the snow-line, on the farther side
Of Kangra-la, a land where cold gales blew
And goblin fir-trees sickened, bent and wried.
Above the constant lammergeiers flew,
And the sun through the grey fogs stared bleary-eyed.
Only at night when the dull mists congealed,
The moon made all the earth a silver shield,

Glittering with a portentous, deathly light.
An eerie blueness in the argent glare
Struck the big boulders with a sickly blight,
And gave them a putrescent, fungoid air.
Foul odors drifted through the mountain night,
For all along that strange road everywhere,
The foot and mouth disease had got in whacks
Among the expeditionary yaks.





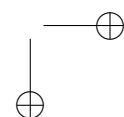
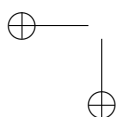
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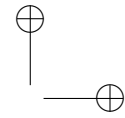
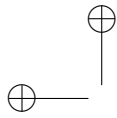
The ghastly road hung on by brace and bracket
To the loose eye-brows of the pendulous crag,
Whence the pebble fell so far they could not track it.
Vapor blew round them in grey weft and rag.
The avalanche slid under with a racket
That made the timbers of the platform sag
And wince. And where the smoked post-lanterns glowed,
They had to grit their teeth and leave the road,

And climb or crawl, while their hearts pitched and pumped,
Around the sleepy lion in the way,
Whether on the face of a precipice that jumped
Three thousand sheer from the crest of Himalay,
Or a stream-bed, where the crashing boulders thumped
Their knees, contriving handsomely to flay
What portions were already beaten numb.
They would remember all their lives to come

Those small detours. It would have satisfied
The height of Achmet's hope, if there and then
He could unhampered have lain down and died.
But Bairam Khan came of a breed of men
That can endure. Without contempt he eyed
The whimperer, though his voice was whip-sharp when
He spoke at last. "Brother, march on!" he said.
Achmet got up and stumbled on ahead.

At last the country bettered, and the valleys
Widened till they had what one might call a floor.
The weather too had spent its furious malice,
And the wind cut less keenly than before.
The sun reoccupied his empty palace,
With an air as if he meant to stay there more,
Three days perhaps, although he couldn't say.
Pressing affairs might summon him away.





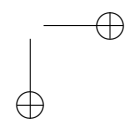
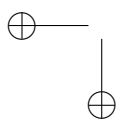
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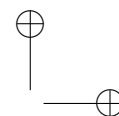
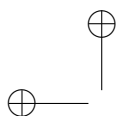
From a summit, the queer town of Gyan-Tsee
Rose suddenly, beyond a dappled plain
Of sown and desert, looking distantly
Like Orvieto – rocks of brownish stain,
Crowned with great bastions of red masonry,
And monasteries, and a cone-shaped fane.
Few travellers I think have more enjoyed a
First view of the barbaric Palkhor Choida

Than Achmet and his comrade. Anyhow,
Though they might die, it would not be of cold,
Whatever rod fate pickled for them now.
Achmet perked up a little. Bairam told
His beads. He looked back at the mountain brow
Whence they had come. A glitter manifold
Blazed on the height beneath the ice-armed peaks.
Bairam's eye darkened – “Look,” he said, “The Sikhs!

“We are just in time,” he muttered, “only just.”
And his thin lips framed themselves into a laugh.
“Now, my friend, hurry while we can. We must
Be wary now.” A blazing heliograph
Winked like a diamond on the height. He thrust
His beads away, and pointed with his staff
Towards Gyan-Tsee, where rose the answering flash
Of another flickering radiant dot-and-dash.

They kilted up their yellow robes and ran,
Straining their eyes for traces of the foe.
The town grew nearer now, and Bairam Khan
Suddenly drew up short, and huddled low
Behind a rock. Far off the rataplan
Resounded of a war drum growling slow.
It stopped. A new sound rose with a grim vigor
Dreadfully like a brazen giant's snigger.





GHOMANG LOBZANG

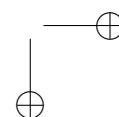
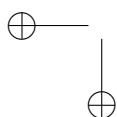
And like art magic all that naked space
Lived with small fleeing figures, robed in yellow,
Who scuttled by them at terrific pace,
With startled yelp and panic-stricken bellow.
Achmet shrank down between the rocks – his face
Was sickly green. Wistful he eyed his fellow.
New yells arose. The Sikhs upon the height
Were firing into that disordered flight.

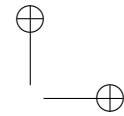
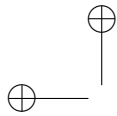
“Now,” Bairam hissed. Sidewise out of the jaws
Of that too scientific shiverree,
They slid or crawled or slunk. Nor did they pause
Till a sparse line of Ghurka infantry
Had panted past, outflanked. Not without cause
They blessed their stars. It is no joke to be
Caught between the pursuer and pursued,
Specially when the former’s out for blood.

.

That night they somehow reached the Lhasa road,
And left the Chumbi gorge amid the mob
Of terrified fliers from the siege, who showed
No disposition to take up their job.
In the dark the festive lammergeiers crowed,
And the boldest of the stragglers stopped to rob
The wounded, the exhausted, and the dead,
To the scandal of the vultures as they fed.

None questioned them. It was no time for questions.
In all that fleeting armament nocturnal
Was none but followed the intimate suggestions
Of his own fears, from the private to the colonel.
The Vickers’ gun lingered in their digestions
Unhappily. A panic more infernal,
Charged with more moral horror, never yet
Raged up a mountain saddle in Thibet.





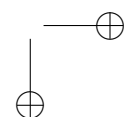
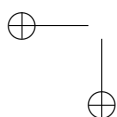
GHOMANG LOBZANG

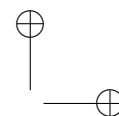
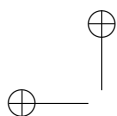
The last five days were like five years. The rain
Hammered incessant from the dirty skies.
Their bruised feet, covered with red welt and blain,
Wincd as they marched, and their night-weary eyes
Throbbd in their heads – and cold maddened the brain.
They saw too with a thrill of fierce surprise
That the inhabitants, as by a charm,
Had overcome their outburst of alarm.

And they themselves were getting badly fagged.
Overdrawn energies were running low.
Achmet, obedient to his nature, lagged
Behind, but Bairam kept him on the go
With a pertinacity that never flagged.
On they limped, grunting in their footsore woe,
When something rose between the drifts of rain,
Like an exhalation from the milky plain,

One vasty block of gold-roofed masonry,
White-based. A blood-red palace stood between
Pleasure-domes of sapphire and chalcedony,
Ivory, maroon, azure, and apple-green.
The slope walls in their slanting majesty,
Might bear the firmament if it should lean,
Star-weary, on their shoulders. The whole scheme
Suggested dignity and cheap ice-cream.

They pushed on wondering, forgetting blister,
And the bite of *bête d'amour*, and bruise and blain,
And the long climb in the valley of the Tista,
And the plunge down to the Brahmaputra plain.
Their eyes bugged at the splendor of that vista.
Imagination boggled, and the brain
Quivered to the fibre of the remotest cell
Before that palace without parallel.





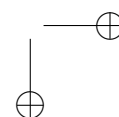
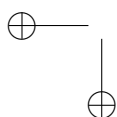
GHOMANG LOBZANG

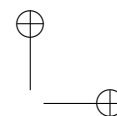
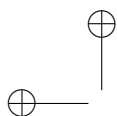
Over a bridge of turquoise tile they passed,
By huts of horn and palaces of stone,
While the yak-hair curtains bellied in the blast
Of the rain on those huge ramparts, and a moan
Of bells re-echoed. Bairam sobbed, "At last!"
Under his breath, though something in the tone
Struck Achmet queerly – as if Bairam had
A most peculiar cause for being glad –

A cause that Achmet could not understand,
And would not till the eternal deeps ran dry,
As if the end of a design, long planned
Over a waste of years, were drawing nigh,
And for a moment he had lost command
O'er his strange self. The tone seemed to imply
All that and more. Quite dull men, I may add,
Notice such little matters good or bad,

Though authors think that they monopolize
The universal art of observation,
And that the populace's oxlike eyes
Don't follow with sufficient concentration
Their neighbor's tricks, and that they don't surmise
From outer traits what sort of cerebration
Goes on inside. Those fellows on the shelves
In this and other matters fool themselves.

But this is altogether by the way.
We left our wanderers just inside of Lhasa.
A charmless situation, I must say,
For any hapless wanderer who has a
Nose. The gross odors smote them like dismay.
Non ragionam de lor mai fiuta e passa.
In all religious centers, more or less,
Smelliness follows close on godliness.





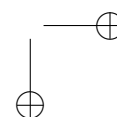
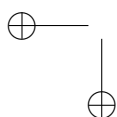
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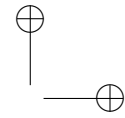
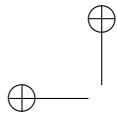
This was upon the whole their first impression
Of the general character of that strange town.
Their next was quite as bad. A long procession
Of soldiers passed. Their captain, with a frown
Suitable to his rank, and his profession,
From his gay-bridled pony bundled down,
And, with much gesticulation and grimacing,
Gave them the holy terror of a lacing.

Something in Achmet doubtless caught his eye.
Anyhow he gave them a ferocious rating,
Which in the East, I should state by the bye,
Is how they manage their interrogating.
Bairam returned the man a soft reply,
With a glance submiss and a manner hesitating.
The captain turned to Achmet, who stood mum,
While Bairam signaled to him to play dumb.

Achmet fell trembling, lost in dreadful wonder,
In imagination trying to make out
Whether he would be burned or sawn asunder,
And what the officer was wroth about,
Whose squeaking voice grated so harsh a thunder.
Bairam in vain, between the squeal and shout,
Urged that the quivering victim could not hear,
Being deafer than the most official ear.

The captain paused for breath before renewing
Denunciations so incomprehensible.
And Achmet, in the sweat of horror stewing,
And rattled terribly, since he was sensible
That the least false step might compass his undoing,
Utterly forgot his character ostensible.
His voice rose quivering, like a dreamer's scream,
Who dreams of death and finds it is no dream.





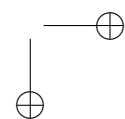
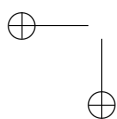
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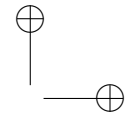
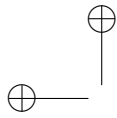
Three understandable syllables he uttered,
The rest was a mere pusillanimous wail,
“Maitreya.” Whereupon the captain stuttered
In his diatribe, and Bairam’s face went pale
Under its grease, as bread before it’s buttered.
The captain drew his horns in like a snail.
His yellow face took on a look of guile,
And he turned to Bairam with a beaming smile,

Jabbering his guttural jargon. Bairam’s face
Was a strange study of astonishment,
But he seized his new cue with a ready grace.
And the captain, who by this had quite unbent,
Escorted them politely from the place.
Through winding ways interminable they went.
They reached a courtyard neither clean nor great.
The captain entered by a wicket-gate,

Returning with a lama presently,
Who looked ’em over, doubtful till he beard
Achmet repeat in solemn privacy
Over again those syllables absurd.
He bade them tarry till the night should be
Wasted (to judge by the bear’s march) a third;
That hour arrived, he ordered them to bang
Upon the brazen gate of the Jo-Kang,

Whose unimpressive ramp appeared before,
A white-washed barrier of flints and clods,
Which none the less more worshippers adore
Than Rome or Mecca brag of by all odds.
Churches decay, and faiths wane more and more,
And devils flourish in the rooms of gods,
Though I opine that both types of devotion
Are allotropic forms of the same notion.





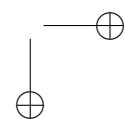
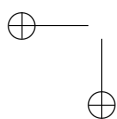
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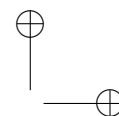
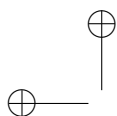
Whether at Lhasa or Jerusalem,
Or Mecca, – whether Buddha, Christ, Mahomet
We choose, at length we tum away from them,
As the dog returns once more unto his vomit.
De gustibus. However we condemn
The animal, he won't be parted from it.
Where'er we glance, the practice and the preaching
Are flat against the chosen prophet's teaching.

Thus the Jo-Kang is sacred to whatever
Gautama loathed. So Christ may hate St. Paul's,
As a fort, reared against his best endeavor
By a disciple who has played him false.
Ritual comes and truth returneth never,
And the gilt idols, ranked along the walls,
Together with congenial dust and grease,
Bring with them Faith's quietus, which is peace.

So Bairam might have reasoned, but did not.
Queer things were rife in his peculiar mind,
But at that juncture it did not help a lot,
Howe'er his intellect was unconfined.
For, as he viewed that sacramental spot,
His brain seemed to have suddenly grown blind,
And to be struggling with vast misty forms,
Goddesses and gods in overwhelming swarms,

Out of the womb of India crying and calling,
Disastrous, driven by some exorcism,
Over Time's white-lipped precipice, and falling
Headlong, down the twilit horror of the abysm.
He felt a nightmare thrill, dull but appalling,
That choked his thought. The fancied cataclysm,
Was it real? his soul trembled. How to know
The thing which is from what we think is so?





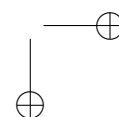
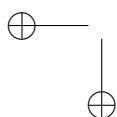
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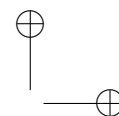
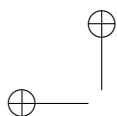
Lo, Sita topples. Ganesh the elephant-browed
Reels on the brink; his little eyes, red glaring,
Gaze wildly back, and Krishna shrieks aloud.
Brahm wakes upon a universe despairing.
Gautama, like a visionary cloud,
Vanishes into nothing, nothing caring.
Bairam thrust out his hand as if to touch
Achmet. "I've had one opium pill too much,"

He said, as fled the vision. Down to rest
They sat. Dull sunlight, playing on the pair,
Warmed them, and none came near 'em to molest.
Sleep stole on Achmet as they cowered there.
The sun-dogs in the orange-shotten West
Chased the Sun home again into his lair.
While Bairam, squatting in the failing light,
Took out a paper and began to write,

Slowly, with trembling fingers, stroke and dot,
Pausing from time to time, with interest viewing
Achmet, who slept sonorous, then like a shot
His composition feverishly renewing.
It did not look as if it meant a lot
To Western eyes. Whatever he was doing
Took little time. He closed his jeu d'esprit
With one big letter like a gallows-tree.

Then he gazed curiously at Achmet's belt,
And half-mechanically stretched out his hand
To touch him. Achmet stirred, scratching a welt
On his louse-bitten thigh. The night-chill and
Gross darkness nebulous that could be felt,
Descended spectrally o'er all the land,
And with that blackness, hail and a fine rain
Began to beat the slope roof of the fane.





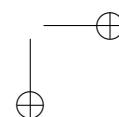
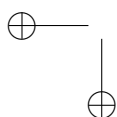
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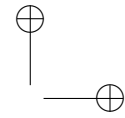
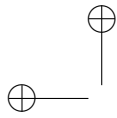
At length the hour came dawdling. In his throat
Achmet's heart trembled. To descend to slang,
The darkness and the silence got his goat.
Together they drew near to the Jo-Kang,
A mere blot in the blackness. Bairam smote
Upon the brazen portal with a bang.
Upon the darkness came a blacker square.
They entered. The gates clanged upon the pair.

All was not black when they were well within,
For tiny lamps were burning here and there
Before squat idols, greasier than sin,
That seemed to hover in the tremulous air,
Foul with thick smoke that made the lights look thin,
And, darkly shining in the feeble glare,
With the dull glint of obsidian or ice,
Winked the small eyeballs of ten thousand mice,

That with sharp, ghastly shrieks scampered and scattered
From the hard knees of assorted Bodhisats,
And all about them in the darkness pattered.
Our heroes, stumbling over prayer-mats
And ceremonial instruments that battered
Their shins, with their two hearts pounding their slats,
Came to a sort of apse or alcove where
Sat a dim Buddha, upright in a chair,

Not squatting like Gautama, whom men see
Smiling for ever in the lotus bloom.
Maitreya is the Godhead yet to be,
The Buddha of the Western men, to whom
The world shall be delivered up, and he
At last shall judge it and declare its doom.
I owe the friendly reader some apology
For this excursion into eschatology.





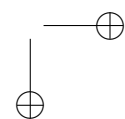
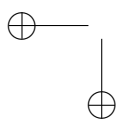
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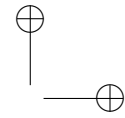
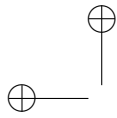
But that strange savior yet to come, conceived
Ages ago in some dark lamasery,
Is a force in this world, and has achieved
Peculiar things, moral and military.
Bairam before the figure half believed
All that prophetic rubbish millenary,
While in the darkness of the fane dim-litten,
He clutched the little screed that he had written.

Achmet stared at Maitreya, not suspecting
That the image, flickering in the smoky flares,
Stood for a policy of state, affecting
Decidedly his personal affairs,
Or that it was the architect, directing
The construction of a lot of nests for mares,
On one of which I have contrived to hang
My tale. Hence naturally Ghomang Lobzang

Had chosen that region of the edifice,
And that particular moment, to appear.
They heard the swish of heavy draperies,
And their noses told them that a priest was near.
A shadowy form swept out of the abyss
Of darkness in the nave. A voice austere
Addressed them. As the great man spoke, he played
Disdainful with a pendant carved of jade.

Statesmen at dubious junctures, I suppose,
Are bound to take themselves with seriousness.
They see one object just before their nose.
One feeling dominates them more or less.
Upon Ghomang Lobzang, a world of woes
Had in the last few days begun to press.
Defeat was looming. The guns at Gyan-Tsee
Were throbbing in his soul like agony.





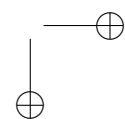
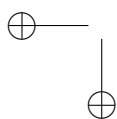
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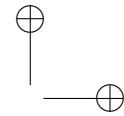
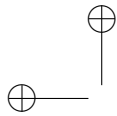
That tempest of emotion he controlled
With a hard nature's courage, but an ache
Was in his mind, howe'er his look was bold.
Their grief had laid its grip on him, who wake,
As a miserable dawn comes dull and cold,
To memories of weakness or mistake.
But he could not look more certain to prevail,
Had he had the solar system by the tail.

Contemptuously he glared upon the two,
Though his heart beat beyond its wonted pace,
For circumstance had told him that they knew
How his affairs were in a desperate case.
When men of parts are puzzled what to do,
To read the mind's construction in the face
Is hard, and in the half light of the fane,
Bairam read that cold countenance in vain.

It told him nothing. Ghomang Lobzang at once,
With the absolute minimum of conversation,
Consisting in the main of eloquent grunts,
Or of assent or of interrogation,
Went straight to his quarry as a greyhound hunts –
Namely, the Central Asian situation,
And begun pumping the dense Achmet dry,
Quelling the discursive Bairam with his eye.

The latter in a character unknown
Appeared to Achmet. With verve that did not fail,
He punctuated the drab monotone
Of Achmet's story. Custom could not stale
His bright variety. Touches of his own
He casually added to the tale,
In bad Thibetan and worse Turki, till
Ghomang Lobzang could stand no more. "Be still!"





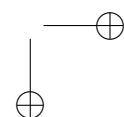
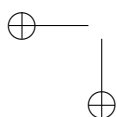
GHOMANG LOBZANG

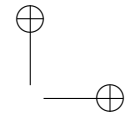
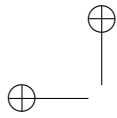
He bellowed. Bairam, as a man horrified,
Reeled against Achmet, and caught him by the girdle
To save himself from falling. Askance he eyed
The priest, while Achmet's blood began to curdle.
Why had he put his trust in such a guide?
He touched his belt, and his heart seemed to hurdle
An obstacle and halt – anew it beat.
A tiny paper roll lay at his feet,

Flung down, 'twould seem, in Bairam's lurch of fright.
Trembling, he stooped the treasure to regain,
While Bairam noted, in the smoky light
That stained the dragon darkness of the fane,
How man and paper gleamed unnatural white.
But such relief bubbled in Achmet's brain,
He was not in condition to detect
Peculiarities of light-effect.

Smiling he gave that sheet incendiary
Unto Ghomang Lobzang, who bending low
By a lamp, raced through it. The small luminary
Lit his strange features with a ghastly glow.
But his intense slant pupils did not vary.
His yellow cheek and firm lip gave no show,
Till he was done. Then raising the lamp high,
He looked upon them with an ominous eye,

And spake: "Say to the General that the game
Is lost at last. Others may play it better.
The wild bull of the mountains has grown tame.
The English know his measure to the letter.
Gólubyov and the Tsar have their own shame.
And as for mine – I am so much their debtor
That not for all the treasure of Thibet,
Would I run a second time into their debt.





GHOMANG LOBZANG

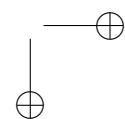
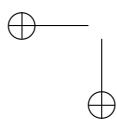
“Now go!” His voice rose passionately, “Go!
Before I —” Forth they slunk, while a shrill cheeping
Rose from the scared mice, scampering to and fro.
At the gateway Bairam turned a moment, peeping,
Back at the clumsy figure. He saw him throw
His arms high. A queer sound rose. Was it weeping?
The lamp flared up for a heart’s double-beat.
Ghomang Lobzang knelt at Maitreya’s feet.

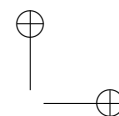
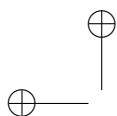
His deep voice in the dark – pathetic mumbling –
Reached Bairam. Lightly he could understand
The priest’s despair, as he himself fled, fumbling
The wad of paper clutched in his left hand.
He whispered Achmet, as they went forth stumbling:
“I don’t think I’d go back to Samarcand,
If I were you.” The black door opened wide,
And the two legates stood again outside.

.

They found at last an odoriferous shelter
In a cattle barn. When they awoke ’twas snowing,
And there were sounds of movement helter-skelter
In the streets about, drums beating and horns blowing.
The roads were jammed with a many-colored welter
Of litters, cavalry, and footmen, flowing
Northward apace, with many a backward cast
Glance that exclaimed, “The devil take the last.”

Under their very noses there appeared,
In a flaming litter tossing o’er the crowd,
A youth of twenty-two, without a beard,
His face as unintelligent and proud
As any idiot’s who is *not* revered
By half the world. The people shrieked aloud,
Seeing the face of the Incarnate One
Himself – the Dalai Lama – on the run.





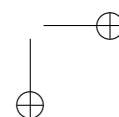
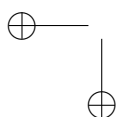
GHOMANG LOBZANG

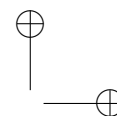
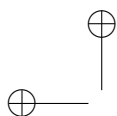
But a longer and a fiercer yell arose,
Of rage. A man came riding by alone,
On a frightened pony dancing on its toes.
His cheek had been cut open by a stone,
But his perilous eyes glowered upon his foes
That stood about. Ghomang Lobzang had grown
A cubit higher since the scene last night.
The fierce crowd split before him left and right,

Cursing but quailing, for that dangerous eye
Was not a thing lightly to look into.
And luckily for them they let him by,
For presently some Buriat horse plowed through
The thickest mob, their white spears flashing high.
Whereupon the crowd precipitate withdrew,
Knowing that the favorite pastime of those Tartars
Is wholesale manufacturing of martyrs.

As the crowd fled, the flicker insolent
Died in Ghomang Lobzang's dilated pupil.
The danger over, his proud head he bent
Sadly, and spurred the pony without scruple.
Now he was fleeing, his tormentors rent
The sky with ineffectual wrath centuple,
Pretending, since their prey was well ahead,
Great zeal to capture him alive or dead.

Achmet had watched the unbeliever flee,
With a strong sense of relief and exaltation.
But Bairam with a grim look squelched his glee.
It was no season for a demonstration.
Bairam's lips pursed together curiously,
And his eyes burned with a strange admiration
For the beaten man, who gave no satisfaction
To enemies by an unseemly action.





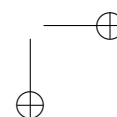
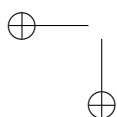
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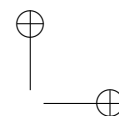
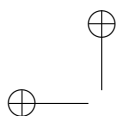
The flight was premature. Some ten days later,
Bairam and Achmet heard the rumor run,
And another panic in the streets, but greater,
Rose like a tide, and every mother's son
Ran crying on the Devil, their creator,
For a protection against Yunaiphun.
For it must be reported to their shame,
That they could not pronounce Younghusband's name.

They only knew that he was a Pe-ling,
Begot of a lion on a unicorn,
And that his theology was not the thing,
And that his guns had put their priests to scorn,
With wisdom sharper than a serpent's sting;
And that if he touched you, you would be reborn,
For your next six or seven lives or so,
A swine, or poet, or anything that's low.

So the pitch-painted women squealed the squeal,
Fleeing down the alleys with averted head,
As the regimental fifes struck up John Peel,
Whose view-halloo would raise the very dead.
And the cobbles grated under the hard wheel
Of the priest-taming guns. The chief who led
The first detachment, Colonel Corcoran,
Appeared to be too much for Bairam Khan,

Who with precipitation leaped aside,
Dragging the bewildered Achmet in wild flight,
Nor did he halt his progress terrified
Till the column and the guns were out of sight,
And the strange music in the distance died.
Out of the town they stole that very night,
Due west for the long Brahmaputra stream,
Under the misty moon's irresolute gleam.





GHOMANG LOBZANG

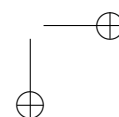
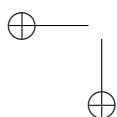
Forty days westward, through the waste boulder-strown,
They saw the brutal skies beetle and glower
Over the river, and heard the wild wind drone,
Till Nanda-Devi rose up like a tower,
Capped with a peak of alabaster stone,
O'er the twin waters of Manasarowar,
Where wild beasts and wild priests, with much propriety,
Indulge each other's craving for society.

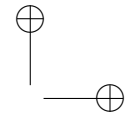
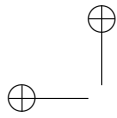
They left the Sutlej tossing its white foam
Up to the curved limbs of the deodars.
Over the saddle of a ridge they clomb,
Piled up by Gods in haste to storm the stars,
Where the huge Nanda-Devi led them home
To the World of postage-stamps and railroad-cars.
At Naini-Tal a battered Moslem pair
Managed somehow to pay their railway fare.

.

Beetle, at Simla, strolling on the Mall,
At the soft hour to every Briton dear,
When inner consciousness begins to call
For tea (The lower classes favor beer),
Saw Creighton, whom to the ceremonial
Feast he invited, being in hope to hear
Tidings of Corcoran, who lingered yet
Beyond the Sikkim passes in Thibet.

Unto Peliti's, Creighton not demurring,
They hastened, and the inner man regaled
Innocently beside the brazen kettle purring,
While the light on the far summits flushed and paled,
And evening came on musky pinions stirring.
Presently Creighton, as they smoked, retailed
His budget. A minion of his force had sent
A startling diplomatic document.





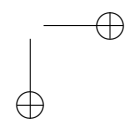
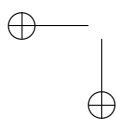
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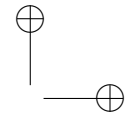
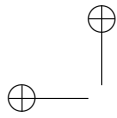
He spread it on the cloth, while the bright kettle
Ejaculated with small spurts of steam.
A sky the color of a wild-rose petal,
Lost by degrees its visionary gleam,
And a greyness far away began to settle,
While Creighton studied the queer missive's scheme –
A mere half-sheet of paper stained and creased,
Scrawled with strange hieroglyphics of the East,

All dots and arabesque flourishes. What caught
Beetle's eye was the signature. Said he,
"Why, that's a gamma!" Creighton, deep in thought,
Looked up and said, "No, it's a Russian G.
Gólubyov is too innocent. He ought
Not to express himself explicitly.
Now I should think that in a case of life or
Death they, of course, would use some sort of cipher,

"But Turki – childish! Can't see how the man
Could be so careless – must have been haste or fear.
But it was very sharp of Bairam Khan."
Beetle at the name cocked an expectant ear.
But just as Creighton's commentary began,
They saw O'Hara, the young engineer,
In brand new uniform, with boots aglow,
And a fair Anglo-Indian girl in tow.

Creighton called the pair, while Beetle choked a curse,
Then whispered: "Agnes – Agnes Strickland's daughter.
Hope that it means for better or for worse.
I thought the wind was blowing in that quarter."
"Sit down, my dear," he added, while, perverse,
Beetle sulked behind the kettle of hot water.
His chance was gone. There might not be another.
Creighton went on: "An old friend of your mother –





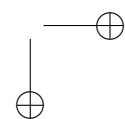
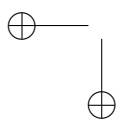
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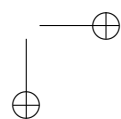
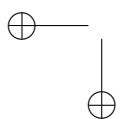
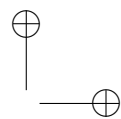
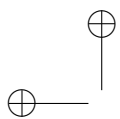
“Do sit with us a moment. We can’t stay
Long.” As she gave her greeting, Beetle noted
That her eyebrow rose, her mother’s very way,
Twenty years back, when Simla’s youth devoted
So large a portion of their leave and pay
To her affairs. Soft to himself he quoted,
“O Mater pulchrior,” after which inburst spiteful,
He suddenly grew thoroughly delightful –

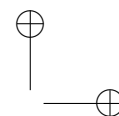
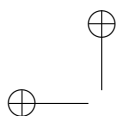
With biting anecdote and observation.
The writer of these lines would give an ear
Or two, or any like consideration,
If he might have the privilege to hear
A bit of Beetle’s better conversation.
But that’s beyond the realms of hope, I fear.
Anyhow, the damsel flushed with pleasure, while
Beetle did the entertaining up in style.

Out of the nearby shadows a form drifted,
A low-caste Moslem youth, it would appear,
Whose curious eye inquisitively shifted
To the gay little group as he drew near.
Only Beetle saw him. The lad’s eyebrow lifted
Suddenly, and his countenance looked queer.
Beetle saw the eye-white all around the lid.
Said he, “O’Hara, what has struck that kid?”

O’Hara turned. With a fascinated stare.
The boy gazed at him. For all Hindustan
He could not glance aside. A bull-calf blare
Exploded from his slack mouth: “Bairam Khan!”
His deer-soft eyes filled with a swift despair.
He wheeled. His brown feet flickered as he ran.
“Confound the luck! Thought he had gone,” said Kim.
And added idiomatically, “That’s him!”







La burlesque dont il faisait profession l'avalissait en le faisant aimer.

Voltaire

There never was a poem in rhyme that grew not tedious in a thousand lines.

Landor

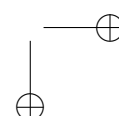
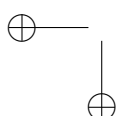
Though I can laugh at myself, I am tired of laughing long at the same thing.

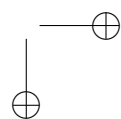
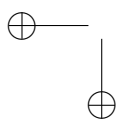
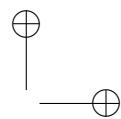
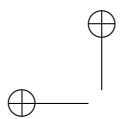
Nothing ever happens that is premeditated.

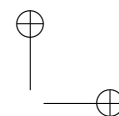
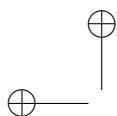
Walpole

Rien n'est si dangereux que la faiblesse, de quelque nature qu'elle soit.

Voltaire





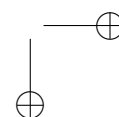
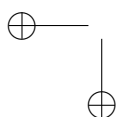


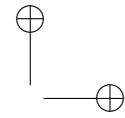
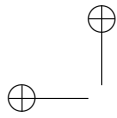
CANTO V
THE NEW FIRDAUSI

When our friend Beetle wishes to pass by
A period of years, which come to clog
His narrative's impetuosity,
He oft takes refuge in a catalogue
Of tales he might have told. Worse luck, say I,
He never told 'em. The story of Red Dog
Illustrates this device. In the same way
I purpose to leap o'er three years delay.

I am determined never to content your
Decadent craving for the lewd detail
Of Achmet's life of picaresque adventure
In India, whether in or out of jail.
It is not nominated in the debenture
I signed, dear Reader. My wits are not for sale.
And, if they were, I rather fancy you
Have not the price to give a man his due.

I shall not tell how Achmet robbed the till
In a pawnshop in Calcutta, or how he found
Relative contentment in a cotton-mill,
Where he was paid for watching wheels go round.
Or how he served the Parsee woman's will,
And how her angry master cast him bound
Into the Hooghly, where, by a stroke of fate,
The police boat picked him up – just not too late;





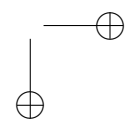
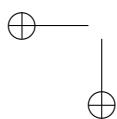
THE NEW FIRDAUSI

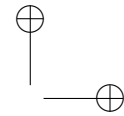
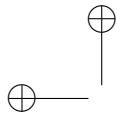
How he was rescued by a missionary
When he was very nearly dead of hunger,
And fattened on a Christian dietary,
When he forsook the friendly Bible-monger,
And went his own way eleemosynary,
Not being able to stand him any longer.
Who begs of men of God, of beggars begs.
It's better far to beg on your own legs.

It's hard to have no money in the bank,
Harder to live by begging and by thieving;
Hardest of all to face a future blank,
Without the faintest prospect of relieving
The march of dreary hours, rank after rank.
Leisure unlimited was his for grieving.
Leisure may be most terrible of fates
To intellectual invertebrates.

He was bored sick and stiff. Nostalgia grew
Upon him – earthly Hell of the resourceless.
Under the Lucknow arc-lights burning blue,
He fell a prey to memories remorseless.
Shad-i-Mulk, Yasmeen, Zuleika, trotted through
His mind all night. Listless he moped and forceless,
Consumed with yearning, as the dawn came wan,
To walk anew upon the Righistan.

That yearning came in time's due course to be
In all his thought an influence and power,
Like that, dear Reader, in no slight degree,
Which moves your subtlest impulse at this hour,
What this poor book on Achmet is to me.
If he had courage to get through Peshawur,
Then – then – It was a madness in his brain.
Oh to be home in Samarcand again!





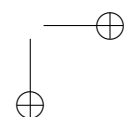
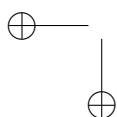
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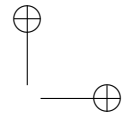
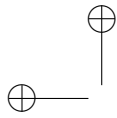
But Gólubyov – vague horror, hunger-born –
Troubled him, though he knew not what he feared.
His childish mind ran in a track well worn
As he sat idle, plucking his black beard.
And I, for one, am not disposed to scorn
Persons whose minds are not correctly geared.
Most of us have from time to time poked at us
Problems that tax our mental apparatus.

The most clear-witted of us are so blind.
The hardest things men buck against at all
Differ in degree alone, and not in kind,
From the easiest, and the degree is small.
The first-rate and the mediocre mind
Run in the end into the same stone wall.
We differ but in measure of the crude in us –
I'm sorry that I wax so platitudinous,

And here inform the outraged reader that
He need not feel more greatly outraged than
Ordinary, if the scene shifts to Herat,
On the west frontier of Afghanistan,
A stately town set in a river-flat,
Treeless but fertile. A small caravan
Halted a space – horse, foot, and dromedary –
On the slope of Khodja Abdallah Ansari.

And Achmet knew that the long journey home
Was well nigh over. He forgot a while
Small sorrows that he knew were wearisome,
Small pleasures that he did not know were vile,
And turned his thoughts to better days to come,
Planning to live in a superior style.
He would forget his griefs in Hindustan
As a child might – now that he was a man,





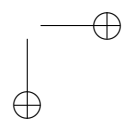
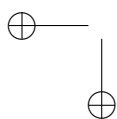
THE NEW FIRDAUSI

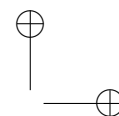
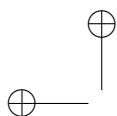
Physically he was certainly full grown,
And, spite of hardships, nobly thewed and knit.
His eye dark-flashing, his black beard thick sown
And curling, and his bearing just a bit
O'erbearing (not too greatly, be it known,
For Achmet, though not brilliant, had the wit
To understand his natural limitation,
And very rarely gave one provocation).

For a wonder, he had money in his purse,
A fact which he had managed to conceal
From his companions, who were knaves and worse,
And sucked in the idea of how to steal,
From the bosom of their mother or their nurse.
How Achmet came by cash I can't reveal,
Though I believe a woman at Peshawur
Dreams of a transient lover to this hour.

She had made his getaway a marked success,
Managing all the intricate detail
Of his escape with such resourcefulness
That a policeman, who was on his trail,
And happened to be honest, more or less,
Reported empty-handed at the Gaol,
And, being grilled by his superior,
Resolved not to be honest any more.

They had paused at "the dread city of Kabul
Set at the mountain's scarpéd feet." It's queer,
But they found that town unutterably dull,
Being so well policed by the Ameer
That thieving throve not. They made haste to pull
Their freight. It is not well to face the fear
Of God too long. And there were rumors that
God was less apprehended at Herat.





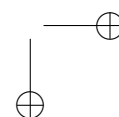
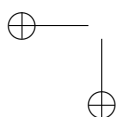
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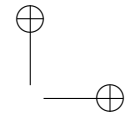
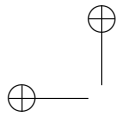
The leader of the motley cavalcade
Was a most unattractive nondescript,
Who once had been a waiter at Port Said,
Whence the chief rascals of the East are shipped.
He showed a vast extent of gums decayed,
Whene'er his foul mouth opened, carmine-lipped.
Swindling, plus burglary, was his occupation,
And pimping was his best-loved avocation.

Omar, they called him. He had ta'en Achmet under
His wing for reasons that do not appear,
Not guessing his sad tendency to blunder,
Or his yet greater tendency to fear.
The youth's good looks might help him to his plunder
Of hapless odalisk and bayadere.
I much regret to say that such a rôle
Warmed all the cockles of my hero's soul.

All of the gang gazed long, like famished kites,
Upon the city spread beneath their feet.
While their imaginations went on flights
That it would be improper to repeat,
Anticipating new Arabian nights,
And every form of violence and deceit.
Many a poor Tadjik ere the morrow morn
Was going to curse the day that he was born.

Then without comment they marched down the hill
Like honest men. The great earth walls loomed near.
On, those unsavory birds came, boding ill
To all within, while o'er them sparkled clear,
Tall, tile-wrought minars, and a smell of swill
Made them all choke. You will be glad to hear
That the whole gang of swindling reprobates
Was swindled by the guards that kept the gates.





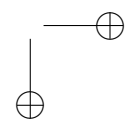
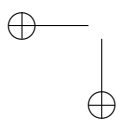
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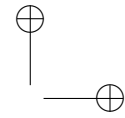
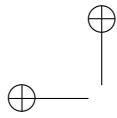
They pressed on to the market-place, expecting
A busy scene of buying and of selling,
But as they drew near found a crowd collecting,
Packed close and closer, bellowing and yelling.
Naturally they followed, naturally reflecting
That in a time of strife there was no telling
But a rascalion, who would take the trouble,
Might find his little earnings more than double.

Just as they reached the market, fell a hush,
Quick as a blow. The sea of heads ceased heaving.
But so close in the silence grew the crush,
They were estopped from any chance of thieving.
Then the whole crowd surged one way with a rush,
And one portentous yell beyond believing
Rent all their ear-drums. Achmet's startled eye
Beheld upon a parapet hard by

The solitary figure of a man,
To whom that crowd with clamorous acclaim
Pressed ever closer. All Afghanistan
Seemed in conspiracy to shout his name.
Thrice round the square the rolling thunder ran –
Anew the quick hush o'er the tumult came,
Broken but by garments rustling and rawhide creaking.
Suddenly Achmet heard the stranger speaking.

His style was passionate and metaphorical,
With a picturesqueness that appeals to some;
But all that crowd thought that he was Sir Oracle
And not a dog barked; and all men were dumb,
While in the mode hysterical-historical,
He told of Islam's wrongs. The wrath to come
He dwelt on also, as your poet tells,
Rather like an Asiatic H. G. Wells.





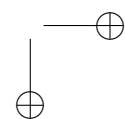
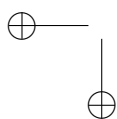
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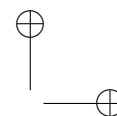
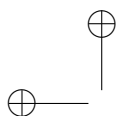
He was a new phenomenon in Asia,
Though Europe and the New World know him well.
He had every mental ailment but aphasia,
And he talked now fit to beat Billy Hell,
In colored trope and point and paronomasia.
The crowd hailed every sentence with a yell.
It was obvious that he did not like to pause
Even for the pleasant reason of applause.

The speech itself sounded like a rehash
Of the New Republic, casually strained through
An Eastern colander, for there was a dash
Of pepper in it, not attained unto
By the original, which is drab and brash
And colorless, save to the faithful few,
Hoist by the intellectual petard
Of Walter Lippmann or of William Hard.

He talked of liberty and sovranity,
He talked of Asia for the Asiatic.
He roasted European tyranny,
In language justifiably emphatic.
He told his hearers with due modesty
That he had all the virtues democratic,
And that they must get used to his new-fangled
Notions, or Islam shortly would be strangled.

He sang an ode to Mr. Morgan Shuster,
Who then was sawing wood in Ispahan,
And, in his eyes, burned with a lurid luster
The speaker likened him to Nurshirvan,
Khai Khosru, Siroes, and all the cluster
Of Persian heroes. With many a rhyme began
The lines as follows: “Amadand-u-kandand” –
But as you probably don’t understand





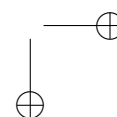
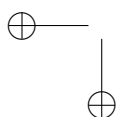
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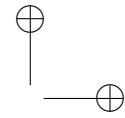
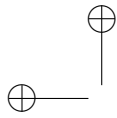
The stately Persian tongue, let me translate:
“They came and they uprooted,” and by they
He meant two of the powers that men call great
For various reasons. He raised up straightway
A thorough-going Persian hymn of hate
Against the peccant pair, who, I must say,
Whenever they are spoiling an Egyptian,
Are apt to follow Biblical prescription,

And do it thoroughly. “Oh Shiraz pear!
Oh plum tree of Bokhara! When again
Shall my glad eyes look on you glowing fair?
Oh for Firdausi’s battle-nurturing strain
That bred up banners, fluttering in the air
Of victories that were not won in vain!”
Followed yet more of the like idiot prattle
That poets use when they incite to battle.

The speaker’s eyes rolled. Bubbles of saliva
Formed on his red lips; and his thin cheeks whitened
With violent passion, such as the quill-driver
Is apt to yield to, till he has been frightened
By the effects of oratory. I’ve a
Contempt, which I consider most enlightened,
For speeches which are violent in tone,
And for all hyperbole except my own.

But Achmet and that unlicked multitude
Whooped, and exulted, and were quite enthralled,
And all their innumerable eyes were glued
Upon that rhetorician as he bawled
The platitudes, none of them understood.
But what was it about him that recalled
Memories to Achmet – half-lost recollections?
By Allah, that same seller of confections,





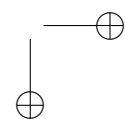
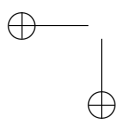
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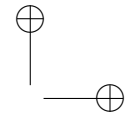
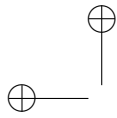
Jami, much wronged. What wonder if he railed
At European justice? He could air
Some personal experience, but he failed
To note respecting his late sad affair
In Samarcand, that where the Russians jailed,
An Eastern despot had not halted there,
But would have hanged the guiltless. I protest
The balance is in favor of the West.

Oh mighty principle of relativity,
Which scientists whose motto is lucidity
Have clothed in darkness with such great activity
That the public now accepts it with avidity!
If I but fathomed — But my sad proclivity
For missing tricks, which must be called stupidity,
Prevents my using methods so refined
In throwing light upon the human mind,

Which seems to me (forgive me if I err)
The region where they ought to be employed.
Would that co-ordinates, clocks, and yardsticks were
Available in that hollow solenoid,
The soul, where roam, as my sad wits aver,
Chimaeras bombinating in the void,
And time runs backward, and a spatial twist
Confounds the literary theorist.

The same events (are they indeed the same?)
Take on an altogether different slant
As they are viewed from Jami's reference-frame
Or Achmet's, if I may employ the cant
Of the new near-knowledge. A hate, born of the shame
Of his unjust detention, they implant
In one, and a fierce thirst for fame undying,
And a taste for rhetoric nothing signifying.





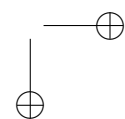
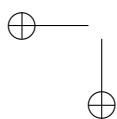
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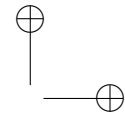
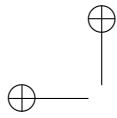
Whereas to Achmet they are but events,
The things that hap; why should one wonder why?
If they will come to pass, what matter whence
They come? And to be wroth – Insanity!
The brick made small appeal to Achmet's sense,
That hit the sweetmeat-seller in the eye.
Still, his speech had such virtue to attract,
That Achmet wriggled nearer through the packed

And breathless multitude, when there befell
An Oriental scene of crass brutality.
The powers that were thought Jami spoke too well
For the general peace of the municipality,
And so had taken measures to dispel
The gathering, whose democratic quality
Was not precisely such as to appeal
To the protectors of the common weal.

So, just as Jami reached his peroration,
On the outskirts of the audience burst the storm.
Rifle-butts thumped, and scream and execration
Rose suddenly. White gleamed a silver swarm
Of lances in the square. Great consternation
O'erwhelmed all those believers in reform,
Who fled with zeal. The speaker set the example,
Leaving the brutal soldiery to trample

Those not conveniently in exitu.
Of whom was Achmet, jammed against a wall.
His scared eyes glared on Jami, who withdrew
From the parapet, while fiercer waxed the brawl.
On relativity I call anew,
For Jami took no interest at all
In the wild hurl and jam, while Achmet chewed
The bitter cud of sad vicissitude.





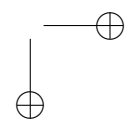
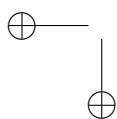
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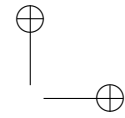
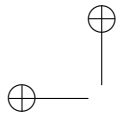
Luckily for him, from the house front a beam
Jutted out some eight feet above the street.
Could he but reach it and swing out of that stream
Of surging, frightened folk, he might retreat.
A woman pushed against him with a scream.
He found her somehow underneath his feet.
He reached – he gripped the beam with all his might.
The lady lent the necessary height.

Probably it was the last thing that she lent,
At least in this existence. A fierce tooting
Of bugles drove the crowd along. It went
Over her in a wave, shrieking and hooting,
While he swarmed over the roof-battlement.
Lucky for Achmet that there was no shooting,
For certainly his chances had been small,
Of missing being plugged against the wall.

He never quite knew how he got inside.
Anyhow, he found himself upon a ladder,
Down which, unthinking, he made haste to slide,
If not much wiser, yet a good deal sadder
Than ordinary. He was petrified
To find that words could make a people madder
Than strong drink even, be it ne'er so red.
Presently a noise startled him, overhead.

And looking up he saw the grinning face
Of Omar, who had come by the same route.
That worthy wiped his brow with a grimace,
And glanced about the room, as to compute
A rapid valuation of the place.
But there appeared little enough to loot.
Hence, they descended to the basement floor,
Designing to escape by the back door.





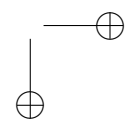
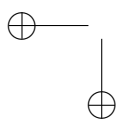
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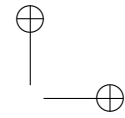
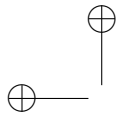
They found this last manoeuvre difficult,
For the door had been completely barricaded
With wool-bales to the jambs. As a result,
The fugitives now found themselves blockaded,
When Jami, from some lurking place occult,
Appeared. He had expected to be raided,
And had prepared himself with an emphatic
Argument – to wit, a Browning automatic.

He looked upon the twain with marked disfavor.
Demagogues seldom like their devotees,
And there was nothing that appeared to savor
Of a superior sanctity in these.
Achmet's voice cracked in a falsetto quaver,
As he sank panic-struck upon his knees.
His was indeed a difficult position.
Jami's dark eyes flashed bright with recognition.

"Omar!" he cried. The level pistol dropped.
He strode up to that stalwart knave, ignoring
Achmet, and kissed his visage ugly-chopped.
There was mutual complimentary outpouring,
Till Omar cut it short. "We will be copped,"
He said, "And, at the risk of being boring,
I think that all the arguments are strong,
That indicate that we should cut along."

The words were yet upon his lips — They heard
Feet thunder down the street, and bugles blare.
Their hearts stood still as death. But here occurred
A really rather singular affair.
For, by a military slip absurd,
While the infantry detachment in the square
Watched Jami's house, that in the street, perplexed
By a miscount, fiercely assailed the next.





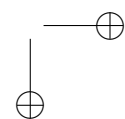
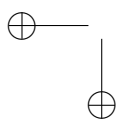
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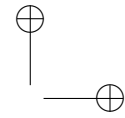
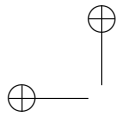
And, finding it was empty, they concluded
That the loud speechifying bird had flown,
Marching off grumbling thus to be eluded.
Soldiers the wide world over, we must own,
Are much alike. So once again peace brooded
Over Herat. And Jami, with a groan
Of pure relief, fetched forth both bread and wine,
And summoned his unbidden guests to dine.

Whereupon all three got amicably drunk,
Something Mahometans are apt to do,
Though in the Prophet's superstition sunk,
Who was the first to rail against home-brew.
All three were shortly full of wit and spunk,
And thick and fast the confidences flew.
In vino veritas, though I opine
That lies are quite compatible with wine.

Jami was but too obviously delighted,
Being a poet, to get an audience.
The party was yet young when he recited,
Without a bit of pressing or pretence
Of diffidence, large fragments disunited,
Of a poem which he told them was immense.
Jami, unhappily – such things will be –
Was working on an epic, just like me.

And, by a rare coincidence indeed,
His epic bore the title and the name
Of my less serious and less lengthy screed,
Viz – Ulug Beg. His hero's not the same
As mine, however – an emir of the seed
Of Tamerlane was Jami's, known to fame
By a sad list of tragi-comic wars,
And a scientific work on the fixed stars.





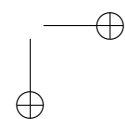
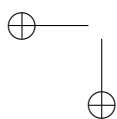
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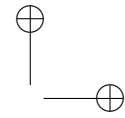
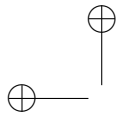
Him, Jami, as a piece of propaganda,
Designed to put new heart into young Asia,
Had raised up as a sort of Alexander,
A literary scheme by no means crazier
Than mine, though he perhaps might lack the candor
Or brass to say so. I, though I'm no brazier
Of course admit – it can't be helped, alas –
That I am given to merchandizing brass.

Jami used Ulug Beg to set forth notions
He hoped would get a foothold in the East,
And bring to pass political commotions,
By which his proper fame would be increased.
He had drunk of the most poisonous of potions,
The democratic draught, though not the least
Qualified to comprehend, or to digest,
Ideals of the visionary West.

He said, though the connection was not clear,
That Ulug Beg's exploits had paved the way
For the arrival of the millennial year,
When Jami and his friends would have their say.
All classes then will please incline their ear,
Finding that other conduct will not pay.
Historically, the tyrant and the mob
Are only shifts on the same dirty job.

And as between their virtues I stand neuter,
I think millennium will not come this chiliad.
Hence, littera digamma restituta,
I undertook my sanguinary Viliad.
The age of iron's gone, the age of pewter
Succeeds. I see damned little balm in Gilead –
Certainly not sufficient, it is plain,
To heal a tittle of the dumb world's pain.





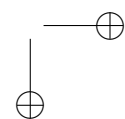
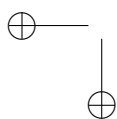
THE NEW FIRDAUSI

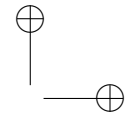
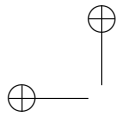
So, for dear Christ's sake, let us laugh at it,
At least roll back our aching lips and grin,
And play at horseplay, being short of wit,
Since we can't help the folly and the sin.
Moreover, lamentations aren't a bit
Appropriate to a work that Jami's in,
Who in his various nature had combined
All foibles of the literary mind.

What's in the brain that ink may character?
For Jami's I can answer. Less than naught –
Some frail impressions, light as gossamer,
And a few stillborn embryos of thought;
And foolish loves, and savage hates there were,
Mingled with an ambition overwrought,
Somewhere, somehow, to cut a figure, but
Careless what sort of a figure he should cut.

The Western poetasters err indeed –
And it is natural to them to have erred –
Whatever be their program or their creed,
Whether they be originally absurd,
Or keep convention in a noted weed –
In thinking – but that's much too strong a word –
That they monopolize with complete success
All the commodity of brainlessness.

At this point I have wasted two days, wondering
If it would be effective to insert
A passage upon literary blundering.
But to exhibit in her undershirt
The muse, I fancy would not be such thundering
Good taste; and therefore I will now revert
To Jami's book, which was, like mine, God knows,
A poetaster's paraphrase of prose.





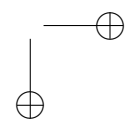
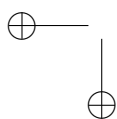
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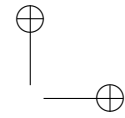
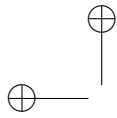
The excerpts from that work on Achmet's mind
Exercised influence soothing and narcotic.
Perhaps his intellect was not refined
Sufficiently for pleasures so exotic.
Presently, his soul to slumber sweet resigned,
While Jami sang democracy despotic,
And toothless Omar, who did not care a curse,
Guzzled much liquor and ignored the verse.

Presently Jami looked at Omar, thinking
That, since he was a guest, 'twas only right
That he should not confine himself to drinking.
Favorable comment would be more polite.
But Omar looked him in the eye, unblinking.
He had a most unusual appetite
For anything containing alcohol,
And song to him made no appeal at all.

He thought, however, something should be said
To fill an awkward silence that ensued,
And business, ever present in his head,
Suggested to him that it would be rude,
After consuming such a deal of red
Liquor, not to display his gratitude.
Hence he asked his host o'er a fresh cup of wine,
What article of commerce in his line

He stood in need of, offering to deduct
A large part of the price of flesh or blood.
Damsels he said he had like roses plucked,
Exquisite specimens of womanhood;
All Jami had to do was to instruct
His banker. He would find the bargain good.
The bard's eye flashed at the description, which
Upon the whole was certainly as rich





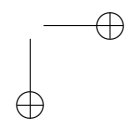
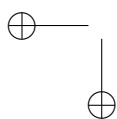
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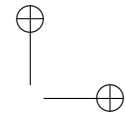
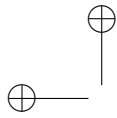
As any in his epic misbegotten.
Excitement purpled every tiny vein
Upon his cheek, and his eyes grew blood-shotten,
As though subjected to a violent strain.
Poor Jami's morals were a trifle rotten,
And a new project overtaxed his brain,
Which, some few stanzas back, I was at pains
To show was by no means the best of brains.

"Omar," he choked out in a tone made rough
And husky with excitement and desire,
"I am not interested in your stuff;
But there is something that I do require,
And in your line, too, but the job is tough.
Still I should make no bones about the hire."
Said Omar, looking up with approbation,
"That is the way to speed negotiation."

Jami went on: "The Kadi of Herat
Possesses a delightful concubine
For whom my heart consumes like burning fat,
For whom my eyes flow with perpetual brine —"
Omar burst in: "For God's sake, none of that.
Business first, please. What guerdon shall be mine?
Come, name your offer — put up real stuff."
"Three thousand dinars ought to be enough,"

Said Jami, nettled. "Not upon your life,"
Quoth Omar with contempt quite artificial —
He would have run the risk of rope or knife
For half of Jami's price of blood initial.
"What! steal a lady who is almost wife,
From a thoroughly respectable official —
And for three thousand measly dinars! Come,
You must be joking — Make it twice the sum."





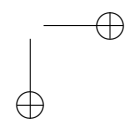
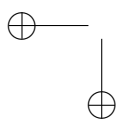
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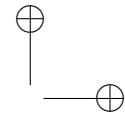
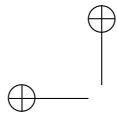
Forty-five hundred was the price at which
The poet and procurer closed the deal.
You may wonder what could make a bard so rich.
It was his interest in the commonweal.
He had contrived his waggonette to hitch
To the star of Persian freedom, whose appeal
Is wide outside of Persia. 'Twould have stunned
Some London dames, had they known how their fund

Was being managed. But their chance was slim
Of ever knowing. A hard-featured man
From Yorkshire used to look uncommon grim
When he cashed Jami's cheques at Teheran.
Fools would be fools, and it was naught to him.
Graft was in Persia since the world began.
It will take lifetimes to reform the East.
But he hated to see English women fleeced

By Jami and his soi-disant Committee
Of the Pan-Persian democratic group.
Meanwhile the lightless streets of Herat City
Were full of darkness blacker than bean soup,
And fuller yet of smells by no means pretty,
Which would have given a Westerner the croup,
But which, to Omar's and Achmet's hardened noses,
Might have been the odors of a bed of roses,

For all they cared. Achmet had waked to find
Himself a principal in an abduction.
He would have much preferred staying behind,
Having no taste for any kind of ruction.
Omar, he knew, was apt to be unkind
When his desires encountered an obstruction.
Omar was near, and danger at a distance,
And hence he went the way of least resistance.





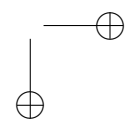
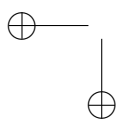
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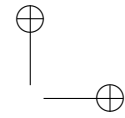
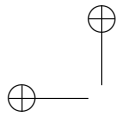
Oh reader, I've had such a narrow shave.
A work like this exerts a power imperious
On its begetter. Though my hero be a knave,
And the morals of the epic deleterious,
Custom had nearly managed to enslave
Me. I was at the point of getting serious.
Another instant I should have been too late.
But I drew back – and thumb my nose at fate.

All through the seventy-five preceding stanzas
Of this fifth, and, I fear, inferior canto,
Morality, like grasshoppers in Kansas,
Blighted my crop. Although I didn't want to,
I sneered, and surely in extravaganzas
Like this, to sneer is much too moral. Tanto
Nequior. The Latin language helps sometimes,
When the bard is up against it for his rhymes.

So much the worse for the preceding portion.
But let it stand, albeit a monument
Unto my weakness, ridiculous distortion
Of that whole general scheme of my intent.
If you have skipped that epical abortion,
You're to be praised for being provident.
And if you haven't, the ensuing action
I trust will offer solid satisfaction.

Omar and Achmet reached a building, reared
On that vast earthwork that engirds Herat,
Over whose wall they shortly engineered
An escalade as softly as a cat.
Omar dropped down within, and disappeared
Into gross darkness, blacker than my hat,
Leaving Achmet on the wall, a prey to fears,
And listening for results with all his ears.





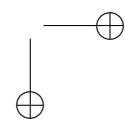
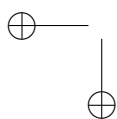
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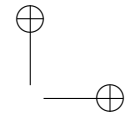
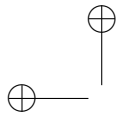
Not a sound broke the intolerable hush,
And in that darkness, tangible and black,
Achmet could feel the base blood throb and rush
In his cold temples. And his knees felt slack
And sinewless. The darkness seemed to crush
His very soul. But he dared not go back.
Omar's condign displeasure to incur
Was not a bit in Achmet's character.

Jami, meanwhile, in the barricaded room,
Paced up and down, grinning like a hyena,
Alternately a prey to glee and gloom,
But uniformly troubled in demeanor.
The seconds ticked away like strokes of doom.
Would they never come? He spat out oaths obscener
Than anything my realistic muse,
Considering her virtue, cares to use.

Pat on the stroke of two a muffled knock
Came on the door. Swiftly he doused the light,
While his heart pounded in him with a shock
That made his hands shake and his cheek go white,
As he strove the massive portal to unlock.
Omar's foul breath assailed his nose – "All right,"
Muttered the ruffian – "We have done the stunt."
Achmet came through the doorway with a grunt,

And shot his burden heavily to the floor.
Jami brought a lamp, whose yellow amber flare
Revealed of the girl's person rather more
Than was accustomed to the outer air.
Her mouth bled where the gag had made it sore,
And her eyes blazed up with a furious glare
At her three captors. Obviously she
Was a person of decided energy.





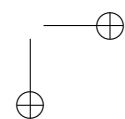
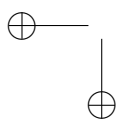
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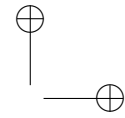
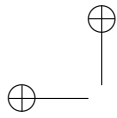
Jami, with fumbling hand, plucked at the thong
That cut her wrists. All her slim body shivered,
As he touched her white arm, with a shudder strong
As a woman's when about to be delivered.
Jami shrank back, as conscious of the wrong.
His dark eyes filled with tears, and his mouth quivered.
Omar laughed loud. With a contemptuous gesture
He snatched off all her bonds and half her vesture.

Her face, under the lamp, reddened and whitened
In fierce pulsation. From Omar's hand she sprang
With an elastic sudden grace that heightened
Her naked beauty with a tigerish tang,
Burning with almost virgin wrath that frightened
The dirty souls of that unpleasant gang.
Achmet gaped at her. Something seemed to strike a
Dart through his brain. The lady was Zuleika.

Omar burst into laughter deep and gross.
"By Allah, I shall have to break your mare,"
He grunted out to Jami, and drew close
To the girl, who with her eyes fiercely a-stare,
Stood like a dancer, poised upon her toes.
Achmet felt symptoms much like mal de mer,
And Jami hid his face and turned aside.
Neither of their rôles was really dignified.

Achmet saw the grinning maiden-trader clutch
At the victim. His eyes began to swim and melt.
Then a vast gasp came to his ear-drum, such
As a man makes when hit below the belt.
Zuleika, at the trader's bestial touch,
Had butted Omar where it would be felt.
His lewd head like a hammer hit the ground,
And his throat quavered forth a strangling sound.





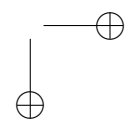
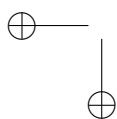
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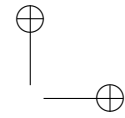
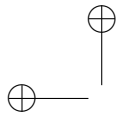
With infinite rapidity and grace
The girl snatched Omar's pistol – the affair
Of a split second, and hit him in the face
With the butt end, as he writhed gasping there.
That crack appropriately wound up his case.
Zuleika turned to the astonished pair.
“Achmet,” she said, with an impressive frown,
That made him quiver – “Knock the Persian down!”

Old habit is of all things most resistless.
Achmet, with a wild show of wrath, obeyed.
Poor Jami paled. He lifted not his listless
Hand, or the faintest opposition made –
Though he dreaded Achmet's hesitating fist less
Than the fierce laughter of the passionate jade,
Who, as the cords about his wrists they wove,
Discoursed sarcastically of hapless love.

“So,” quoth Zuleika, as he lay there trussed.
“So had I loved him, so I had not used him.
Achmet, come here a moment, for I must
Show my seducer what has been refused him.”
Her black eyes blazed with coquetry and just
A hint of true affection that bemused him,
As, with transcendent verve and without trace
Of shame, the girl caught him in an embrace

That made his heart leap, and the bound Jami's sicken.
The proud slut, with a passion brazen-faced,
On Achmet's lips rained kisses that would quicken
Hearts under death's ribs. I don't think her taste
Was good at all. Achmet was thunderstricken,
But felt her blandishments were not misplaced.
If a pretty woman ever kisses you,
You'll think that it is nothing but your due.





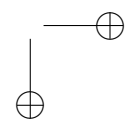
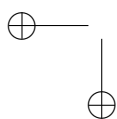
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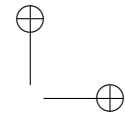
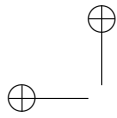
Presently Zuleika paused, her cheek all glowing,
Her mien, as Milton says, jocund and boon.
“Achmet,” she murmured, “We had best be going;
We cannot flit out of these haunts too soon.
Kadis have always had a way of showing
Resentment, and although we may impugn
His motives, his resentment is a fact
That requires handling with a certain tact.

“Therefore I say that when we two have looted
The treasure of this poetaster brute,
Whose eloquence is for the present muted,
Far, far away from Herat let us scoot.
Before our flight together has been bruited
Abroad, we shall be safe from all pursuit;
And you, O Poet, while we pick your purse,
May meditate more soporific verse.”

Lust of the flesh and lust of loot conjoin
Not rarely. Jami saw that guilty pair,
Itching for each other, yet eager to purloin,
Pry into every corner of his lair,
Until at last they stumbled on his coin.
Forthwith they soaked his knots, and left him there,
To ponder his felicity departed,
Like better poets, mute and broken-hearted.

Dawn came – and noon – and the bound Jami yet
Struggled close-pinioned. Omar, with a moan,
Gave signal proof he had not paid the debt
Of nature. The hacking, dismal monotone
Was pitiably like an infant’s fret;
The crushing of the maxillary bone,
Though painful, often puts a limitation
Upon an inappropriate conversation.





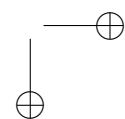
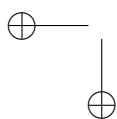
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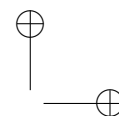
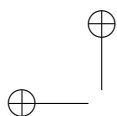
The shadows lengthened. Came a pounding at
The door, which after a fierce battery fell.
Entered in haste the Kadi of Herat,
Followed by his apparitors pell-mell.
That gentleman, though dignified and fat,
Moved fast, and did not have his temper well
In hand. A letter in the morning post
Had given him an apoplectic fit, almost,

Together with a most explicit clue,
Down to the names, condition, and address
Of those unfortunate scapegraces who
Had given him occasion for distress.
He cast a furious glance upon the two,
Kicked each with unction and with bitterness,
And, in a voice that for sheer fury failed,
Ordered that they be flayed and then impaled.

Jami at this juncture showed a true discretion,
As the ragged guardsman drove him gaolward, urging
Speed with the bayonet, he made no profession
Of innocence, although his soul was surging
With dread. He had a satisfactory session
With his cheque-book and the turnkey, whence emerging,
The latter sent, in the trapped bard's behalf,
Tidings to London by the telegraph.

And a parlor radical in Parliament
Raised threats to Heaven, of an interpellation,
While the Premier, with a blank look innocent,
Objected mildly to such objurgation;
But, to oblige his persecutor, sent
A tactful wire which eased the situation.
Needless to say, Afghanistan's Ameer
Thought all this interference very queer.





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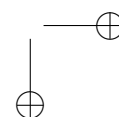
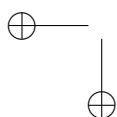
And in his smelly palace in Cabool
Said to a yellow-whiskered diplomat,
“Why does your emperor protect that fool
Who stole the Kadi’s woman in Herat?”
“Sire,” said the Legate, “You’re of the old school
Who think a crime’s a crime. A democrat
Knows otherwise. He’s ill-advised, sometimes,
But his actions never, never can be crimes.”

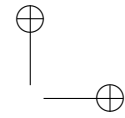
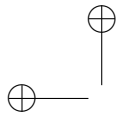
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Long ere the international situation,
Which Zuleika had unknowingly created,
Subsided, at the Kushk frontier station
Appeared that pair of wandering souls, mismated.
The lady, ’neath her veil, flushed with elation,
But Achmet’s transports were a bit abated.
When you are subject to another’s will,
Felicity absents herself – but still

One cannot wholly yield unto the blues,
With a fair woman sitting at one’s side,
Even though she be such as Zuleika, who’s
No pattern for a comfortable bride.
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.
For couples in the early throes of marriage
Naught’s like the continental railway carriage.

Reader, prepare anew for being bored.
Descriptive tremors run along my pencil
To such a pitch, I feel, I must accord
Relief to that long-suffering utensil.
We now return to wastes which we explored
In the first Canto. Quick, Muse! The desert-stencil –
And at the fountain of imagination,
Turn on the solitude and desolation.





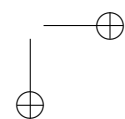
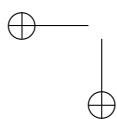
THE NEW FIRDAUSI

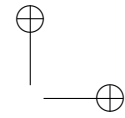
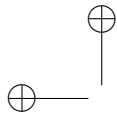
The train in which our fleeing lovers dallied,
Rolled down from Kushk toward the Transoxian plain,
Into whose dun expanse at length it sallied,
As the noon sun began to burn the brain.
Car-sickness, smoke, and heat had made them pallid,
The endless jolting added to the strain,
Which helps to prove the melancholy truth,
The course of true love never did run smooth.

Although my disposition is not sour,
Like Wordsworth I am irritably inclined,
Baffled and plagued by a mind that every hour
Turns recreant to the task that I designed.
It's all the worse that I have not his power,
Trances of thought and mountings of the mind.
Nothing's so sad in this sad world of ours
As to have ambition and not to have the powers

To undertake it. Nothing's so comic, either.
Oh frog of Aesop, that would be a bull,
Puff as you will, you will need many a breather
Before at last you get your bellyful.
Achilles' anxious mother thought to soothe her
Offspring in Styx. I dip my poems dull
Where, hard by in the region of lost souls,
Lethe, the river of oblivion, rolls.

Lost, lost, in the slow flood, forlorn, forgot –
My clumsy subtleties and ironies
Die as I write them. After all, why not?
I shall be dead one day, as Byron is.
Little care I! I have a heart as hot,
And though I lack that glorious verve of his,
My cantos are as long, my rhymes as agile,
And the goblet of my thought at least as fragile





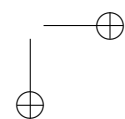
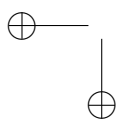
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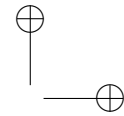
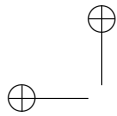
As his slight beaker of Italian glass,
On whose curve burns Pompeian opalescence
Of wit, forgotten as though it never was
Here upon earth in bright and bodily presence.
Who reads Don Juan? If such a beauty pass,
What will become of my inferior essence?
I do not know at all – but none the less,
I fancy I could hazard quite a guess.

I wrote this bit of comment to preserve
My story's sequence, which was getting jerky.
My heroine and hero are past Merv,
A Russian outpost, set like Albuquerque
In its oasis, where the railways swerve
Eastward. Once more they heard men talking Turki.
They had thrilled to hear, in the tongue of their own land,
“Change for Bokhara and for Samarcand!”

And they are past Bokhara, sacrosanct,
And halfway to the hamlet of Kerminee,
When the locomotive, needing to be tanked,
Stopped with a scream worthy of Tettrazini.
Evening, whose fires with piles of cloud were banked,
Shot light, the color of a dry martini,
Over the miscellaneous crowd that poured
From the carriages to stretch their legs outboard.

Zuleika, flower of Orient chastity,
Tagging after Achmet, with sotto voce hiss,
Commented on the pilgrims moodily,
When their deportment seemed to her amiss.
She was especially unfavorably.
Impressed by the shameless eccentricities
Of a Russian party. “Achmet,” she exclaimed,
“Why are those unveiled sluts thus unashamed?”





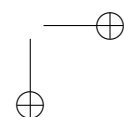
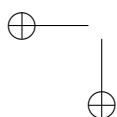
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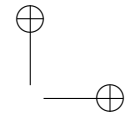
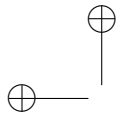
“And how insipid is the pink and white
That they with brazen confidence display.
If I were Russian and were such a sight,
I think I should turn Moslem right away.
Poor girl, perhaps it is a leprous blight
Has smitten her – a premature decay.”
Our Western freedom must of course annoy a
Lady whose face is part of τὰ αἰδοία

Achmet, obedient, turned his listless gaze
Upon the younger of that pretty pair,
And never Moslem yet in his born days
Saw sight at which 'twere easier to stare.
Masculine tastes are catholic. To praise
Such beauty's not a job for which I care,
Although, despite appearance, I insist
I am by no means a misogynist.

Men are we. When the worst emotions chivy us,
Unhappily the best of us fall off.
Poor Achmet felt a minor thrill lascivious.
How could he help it, nourished at the trough
Of infamy? Sudden he grew oblivious
Of Beauty. At the girl's side Gólubyov
Returned his thoroughly astonished stare,
With something of a speculative air.

Zuleika, between wonder and disgust,
Beheld her Achmet running like a hare
Amid the groups of startled travellers, just
As the locomotive gave a giant blare.
She followed. When the devil drives, needs must,
And found her lord recovering from his scare,
Where they enjoyed, across the dusty plain,
A splendid view of the receding train,





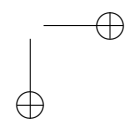
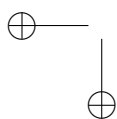
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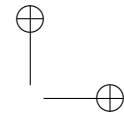
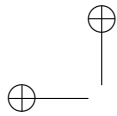
As also of a desolate dry trail
Which led, or so it would appear, to Khiva.
Zuleika asked him what the deuce could ail
Him, thus to flee before an unbeliever.
Achmet, half whimpering, told her all his tale,
Without the slightest effort to deceive her.
Zuleika made no other comment than
This slight remark, "Would God you were a man."

The two fell silent. Meditation bound them,
As the evening laid purple and red enamels
O'er the inhospitable sands around them,
Where crouched a group of travel-weary camels.
Those misanthropic, smelly creatures found them
A pair of most unprofitable mammals,
And, as their slow cuds rhythmically they chewed,
Emphasized a preference for solitude.

Their drivers, by the water-tank hard by,
Dozed by the fire after the evening meal,
While an enormous moon climbed up the sky.
Zuleika sat looking, with eyes of steel,
At Achmet while he slumbered heavily.
Suddenly she nudged the sleeper with her heel.
Achmet sat up. She laid her warning hand
Across his lips, "We'll forget Samarcand."

She whispered, "At Khiva we shall be unknown.
Do as I tell you." The hard, serpentine
Look in her eyes made every marrow bone
In his body quiver. "That is what I mean,"
She muttered in a hissing undertone,
Pointing at the same time to the pastoral scene
Before them, where the desert moonlight poured
O'er the two camel-drivers as they snored.





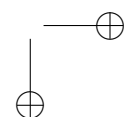
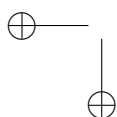
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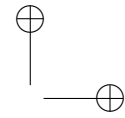
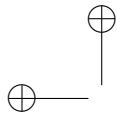
The alarm clock by the railway agent's head
Went off next morning at precisely nine,
Whereupon that worthy tumbled out of bed,
As the morning freight whistled far up the line.
He did not wash his face – but then he said
His prayers, which is upon the whole a sign
How divers customs rule in divers places.
We don't say prayers – but then, we wash our faces.

Presently the agent with vague wonder noted
A faint, unusual, and recurrent sound;
But the whistle of the nearing train, deep-throated,
Took his mind off. When it had passed, he found
The camel-drivers, who cannot be quoted.
For seven hours they had lain gagged and bound –
And their camels – well, their camels, I should say,
Could not be less than twenty miles away.

Daoud Beg and his son Ibrahim, forlorn,
Tore their long beards and looked exceeding grim,
Cursing the hapless day that they were born,
Swearing to rend the robbers limb from limb.
But lamentations, threats, and whiskers torn,
Comforted not Daoud Beg and Ibrahim.
Upon the whole, when you're completely stung,
It is the better part to hold your tongue.

Meanwhile, along the bone-fringed northern trail,
Under a soulless sky without a cloud,
In heat that seemed to smite them with a flail,
Zuleika with her luckless minion plowed.
That damsel had put off her hood and veil
For Ibrahim's cloak and turban. She avowed
Openly to Achmet that it was her due,
Seeing she was the best man of the two.





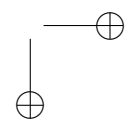
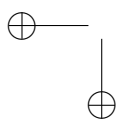
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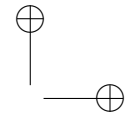
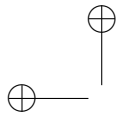
They reached a water-hole, by God his grace,
Upon the lighter edge of eventide.
Achmet leaped down and plunged his reeking face
In the foul pool and drank until his hide
Bulged drumlike, while Zuleika, in like case,
With a tin cup serenely satisfied
Her craving. By her manner none could tell
That she had spent the day in thirsty hell.

They were so fagged that when the gibbous moon
Rose-red in mist climbed o'er an eastern hill,
They marched not at the signal opportune,
But slept. The desert, silver-shot and still,
Lay vast about them, bone and boulder strewn.
Not a sound broke the abysmal quiet till
Zuleika, waking sharply, as was her wont,
Heard something like the shadow of a grunt

In the next county. The moonlight filled the space
Before that grove of palms, meagre and thin.
Not fifteen yards away appeared a face,
Expressionless and rigid, with the chin
Resting on the sand. A muscular grimace
Had stretched the lips in an unmeaning grin.
Zuleika, at the unexpected sight,
Started violently, as any lady might,

Leaping to her feet, while Achmet with a bray
Of horror that twittered down into a moan,
Sprang back from the phenomenon that lay
On the sandy silver, motionless and prone.
The eyes looked through the pair, far, far away,
Thirty yards on to the black shadow thrown
By the slim palms – a hell for every yard.
“Water,” he said, in a voice dry and charred.





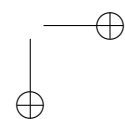
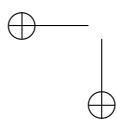
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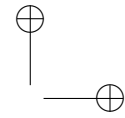
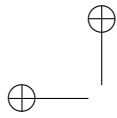
They gave him of the brackish alkaline
Slowly, till they saw the writhen jaws relax.
The anguished eyes filled suddenly with brine,
And drops of blood formed in the moistened cracks
Upon the lips. Achmet's responsive spine
Quivered no more than more heroic backs,
To see him now beginning to revive,
Howe'er he had trembled at the dead alive.

There came a wizard sunrise (done by Bakst
Apparently), golden and rose engrained,
On heights of chocolate-colored clouds that waxed
As a first hopeful burst of sunlight waned.
His sufferings seemed scarcely to have taxed
The stranger's strength. But he left unexplained
The status of his personal affairs,
As our travellers made no reference to theirs.

They set off north again under a cloud.
The stranger in his sheepskin rode ahead
On one of the camels, his hairy features bowed
For ever downward, as a man who said
That to himself he dared not speak aloud.
But he knew the desert as a book well read,
Whose secrets he from time to time disclosed
To those to whom he might be well disposed.

The brooding sky stooped lower, sultry and hot,
Though the dark cloud had quenched the brazen sun,
Save where great shafts and bars of white light shot
Through stray rifts in the vaporous barrier, dun
And sullen, till as it were an ebon clot
Of darkness from the East began to run,
Strangling all light, smoky, malign, and curling;
And little devils of white dust came whirling





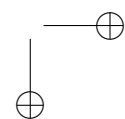
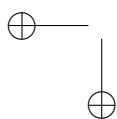
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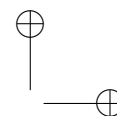
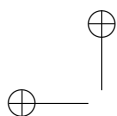
On them. Each grunting camel, with a sigh,
Lay down upon the track, hiding the head
Behind his hump. The stranger's moody eye
Filled with a look of speculative dread –
“Tebbad! Now duck, or you will surely die,”
Suiting the action to the word, he said.
Trembling they crouched behind the camels, while
The desert hurricane got up in style.

In half a jiff the air was black with sand,
And all sound mingled in one ghastly wail
That Jinns in hell, perhaps, may understand.
A cross between a sand-blast and a gale
Searched them to the bottom of their souls, and tanned
Their hides. They crouched against the camels, pale
With thirst and horror; agonized, aghast –
Swift as it came, the grey tornado passed.

Zuleika was the foremost to come to.
The land was altered. Where the trail had run,
A series featureless of sand-dunes new
Showed what the casual hurricane had done.
A string of far off mountains came in view,
Gloriously touched by a declining sun.
Zuleika no least perturbation showed,
But said to the stranger, “Where's the Khiva road?”

He turned upon her with a puzzled look.
“The road to Khiva?” “Aye,” said she, “The way
We were following when the whirlwind overtook.”
“Well, you're a pair of idiots, I must say.”
He laughed until his withered features shook;
But seeing green flecks of light begin to play
In the girl's eyes, replied in gentler tone:
“This is the road to the lands of the Red Stone,





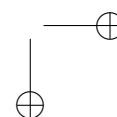
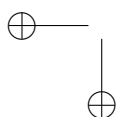
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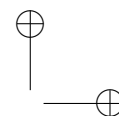
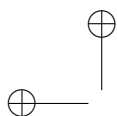
“The land where there is nothing, only peace;
The only land of all where such as I
Pass unmolested. There are no police
There, and we are at liberty to die
Or live. But such a pair of innocent geese,
How got you thus far? – though I can’t say why
It is amusing. At the risk of paining,
Forgive me if I find you entertaining.

“The road to Khiva is a hundred mile
March to the West, and not a drop to drink.
If you try that, the vultures will defile
Your bones before the second dawn can wink.
You’d better come along with me a while,
Unless perhaps (he pointed south) you think
It would be better for you to turn back
The way you came, on the Kerminee track.

“You have not lost it. But the road is lost.
See! I myself could scarcely find that trail,
Who know the whole damn desert to my cost.
And how could two poor tenderfeet prevail
In such a waste of aimless sand, uptost
About ’em by that thrice accursed gale?
I did not die last night because of you.
You stick with me, and I will pull you through.”

Three days he led them through red-hot ravines,
Or stretches of intolerable plain,
Where the mirage arrayed fantastic scenes
Of azure lakes palm-shaded, till the brain
Halfway believed the lying blues and greens.
They knew the whole extremity of pain.
On the fourth they reached a yellow waste, set thick
With little jagged crags the hue of brick.





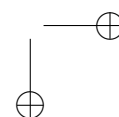
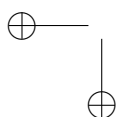
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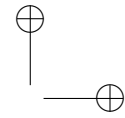
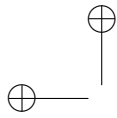
All three of them were fainting in the saddle
With the fierce heat; their eyes bloodshot and dull.
Achmet was worst. His brains began to addle
Together in his ineffective skull.
But the lumbering camels still contrived to paddle
Forward. By the virtue of one final pull
They skirted a red scarp of granite lowering,
And far away, Zuleika saw up-towering

A spike of stone, in the heat-torment shaking.
Some curious emotion seemed to tug
Her mind, as, between sleeping and awaking,
She put it from her thought with a half shrug.
But there it was again, past all mistaking –
“The Camel’s Dug!” she cried, “The Camel’s Dug!”
The stranger’s brows up in black half-moons twitched,
And his whole bearing said, “Well, I’ll be switched.”

Zuleika’s brain whirled. Cinematographic
Pictures of times foregone went flashing through
Her soul; and her whole intellectual traffic
Grew more congested with the returning view.
Achmet – she thought of his babyhood seraphic –
So helpless. Back imagination flew
To the tall, shambling figure, empty-eyed,
Babbling in heat delirium at her side –

Helpless as always. Well, he must be helped
Against the earth beneath or skies above him.
Helpless as when writhing on the sands, new whelped –
Helpless – so helpless. What a fate to love him!
Resentment at his weakness in her yelped,
As he reeled on the camel. She made shift to shove him
Once more back in the selle, an operation
Highly symbolic of their whole relation.





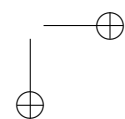
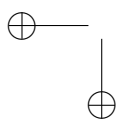
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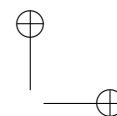
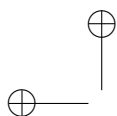
The sun's rim dipped behind the parapet
Of crags, 'mid shreds of cockatoo-rose flame.
A voice from the grove thundered out, "Well met,
Oh Abdul Kader, son of eternal shame."
Zuleika turned. The stranger's face was set.
A hopeless look into his burned eyes came.
She laughed: "We are a pair of innocent geese.
Is this your country of perpetual peace?"

Here's a peace-maker." In his hand she thrust
The unhappy Jami's Browning automatic.
He seized it and rode forward, casting just
One glance at her of gratitude ecstatic.
Three desert ruffians, in a cloud of dust,
Came with a haste that proved undiplomatic,
For Abdul Kader, raising the bright gun,
Shot 'em down circumspectly, one by one.

The last unhappy knave screamed his last scream.
The thirsty camels shambled to the pool.
Achmet, yet babbling in his feverish dream,
Lay moveless, while Zuleika sought to cool
His burning. Her own body, all one steam
Of sweat and drought, concerned her not. "Mad fool
That I am," she thought, while her poor gnawed lips bled,
"I should go mad indeed if he were dead."

He seemed a trifle better when an hour
Had run. Zuleika, after assiduous laving
With garments moistened in the fountain sour,
Began to think there was some hope of saving
His useless life, and worked with all her power,
Till presently intelligible raving
Succeeded gibberish. Though still deranged,
There was no question that his tone had changed.





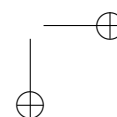
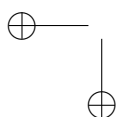
THE NEW FIRDAUSI

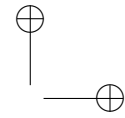
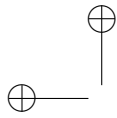
Though some might fancy it was for the worse,
For the invalid with much impressment spouted
In place of aimless prose, meaningless verse.
Firdausi's name and Ulug Beg's he shouted –
Briefly the situation to rehearse,
Jami's sham epic. It's greatly to be doubted
That any one, e'en with a sunstruck brain
Will ever quote that masterpiece again.

Nevertheless it had a strange effect
On Abdul Kader and Zuleika, where
They sat by Achmet, who, with lips foam-flecked,
Uttered a string of shibboleths doctrinaire.
The Orient views madness with respect.
Poets there also come in for their share.
They harked to Achmet's outburst nothing loath,
Since he combined the qualities of both.

So Abdul Kader gaped, as phrase on phrase
Passed utterly beyond all comprehension.
Zuleika's mind leaped back to other days,
And a circumstance I was at pains to mention
In Canto Two, when in their golden haze
Of childhood a blind seer, given to invention,
Had drawn analogies by no means plain
Between Zuleika's pet and Tamerlane.

Zuleika, to my thinking, had a head,
Though it worked differently from yours and mine.
She was less apt, I think it must be said,
To infer, and a great deal apter to divine.
Her own desires in what she heard she read,
And took poor Jami's balderdash for sign
That Achmet, her backboneless protégé
Might yet amount to something in his way,





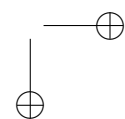
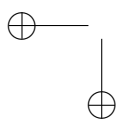
THE NEW FIRDAUSI

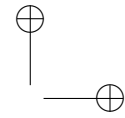
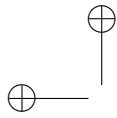
At any rate, her ripe imagination
Took fire. There was that in every regal name
The sick man chanted, that like a titillation
Thrilled her. He should set the desert yet aflame.
I may add that it would be a conflagration
That would make Tamerlane himself look tame,
However well that worthy did his bit,
If she had anything to do with it.

While Abdul Kader's less fantastic brain
Wandered to other dwellers in the waste,
Outcasts like himself or those whom he had slain,
Hopeless and homeless, leaderless, disgraced,
Till sleep had lulled his sorrows once again.
Yet even in sleep visions of union chased
Each other through the blankness of his mind.
Zuleika woke stiffly at dawn to find

Achmet weakly tossing and Abdul Kader gone.
Well, they were safe at least for the time being.
The light of lunacy no longer shone
In Achmet's eyes except for moments fleeing.
And though from time to time he babbled on
Strange objects that he had the air of seeing,
His glance had more of vacuous inanity,
Remarkably like what, for him, was sanity.

She piled a fire of dried palm leaves and dung,
As once again the desert evening fell,
And sat in silence, watching the crimson tongue
Of thick flame waver, held as by a spell.
A fierce fatigue at last somehow unstrung
Her steely nerves. Zuleika felt unwell,
And presently slow, trickling, helpless tears
Dabbled her vivid cheek with sodden smears.





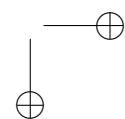
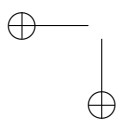
THE NEW FIRDAUSI

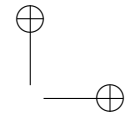
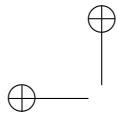
She dozed. To weep had given her the relief
Needed by natures in their nature stern.
She dreamed that Achmet was a desert-chief
With eighty wives, to each of whom in turn
He was a cause of preternatural grief,
Since none of them had wit enough to learn
The methods which were best to manage him.
The odd dream made her quiet face grow grim,

And presently, as the dream changed, yet grimmer.
The wives gave place to armed men in swarms.
The fire died down to an exhausted glimmer.
She woke. The wood seemed full of spectral forms.
Gasping, she sat upright, her brains a-simmer,
Gripping the pistol, prepared for any storms,
Fearless, yet thrilling, rubbing her eyes again.
There was no doubt. At least a dozen men

Stood round her. Howsoever it dismayed her,
Upright she sprang, with a sharp cry, "Stand back!"
A voice spoke soft. The face of Abdul Kader
Appeared by the dying fire, against the black
Shadow, and bowing to the earth he made her
Salaam. A dozen tongues began to clack
Much gibberish. She could make nothing of it
Till some one called, "Lady, show us the prophet."

"The prophet?" said Zuleika. Dumb amaze
Held her till in a burst she understood.
Poking the dying fire into a blaze,
She seized a brand of the now flaring wood,
Whirling it o'er Achmet, who, yet in a daze,
Woke stammering, as the torchlight, red as blood,
Troubled his sleep. Apparently he saw
None of the troop, who looked at him with awe.





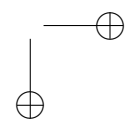
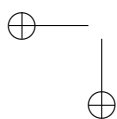
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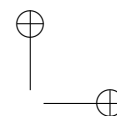
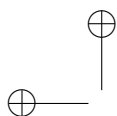
Said Abdul Kader: "Let him prophesy
Such strange things as he told us yester e'en,
That these unhappy may see I do not lie."
Achmet lay quite oblivious to the scene.
He did not hear, so how could he reply?
A prophet has upon the whole as mean,
A job as any. Some time he lay there dumb,
Whether on Kingdom gone or Kingdom come.

The audience lapsed into inattention,
Desiring action. With expectation
Some turned aside. There rose a fierce dissension,
For Abdul Kader, yet in expectation,
Made of these faithless most discourteous mention.
Fierce rose the bicker and recrimination,
When Achmet, lying dormant in the ring,
Obligingly did the expected thing,

Reciting a long catalogue raisonné
Of all of the Transoxian Tyranni,
From Saman and his sons in thick array
Down to the time of Baber and Sheibani.
That Jami ever found so much to say
About those worthies is a fact uncanny.
What's stranger yet, Achmet, who didn't want to
Recalled in his delirium half a canto.

And the hack-verse mysteriously impressed
Those desert-waifs around. "Said I not so?"
Quoth Abdul Kader, as with heaving breast
Achmet fell quiet, sudden as a blow.
Perhaps his wandering brain had lost the rest,
At any rate he paused, then calm and slow
Announced, with an irrelevance emphatic
And telling, "Asia for the Asiatic."





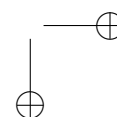
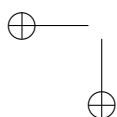
THE NEW FIRDAUSI

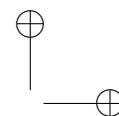
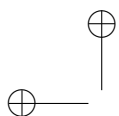
I'm sorry I lack talent to convey
The odd effect that the poor sufferer
Produced by this remark, which, by the way
'S not new. His eye démoniaque sans chaleur
Gave the phrase force. It had a marked succès,
Though Asiatics, or so one would infer,
Have every sort of reason and of rhyme
To have had enough of Asia by this time.

If I were one I should prefer Australia
Or even Europe. At least I think I should,
Though I can't penetrate the penetralia
Of their ideas of evil and of good,
Which seem to me mainly a saturnalia
Of fake religion and of lust and blood.
These last seem on the whole the taste and bent
Of that incult, decaying continent.

Asia has run the old bluff much too long,
Of the Orient at peace beneath a palm.
That whole conception of the East is wrong.
They are not peaceful. Neither are they calm.
Passion and prejudice are just as strong
With them as here. Nor do I feel a qualm,
Stating this axiom: Superstition sunk,
Like us, they, too, believe all kinds of bunk.

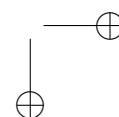
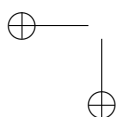
Hence all that troop, bedevilled and benighted,
Listened with the ears of asses and believed.
And presently were exceedingly excited,
To an extent hardly to be conceived;
And Abdul Kader was so much delighted,
After the first conviction was achieved,
That, not at all premeditating it,
His lips foamed, and he threw a fancy fit.

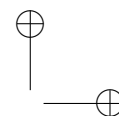
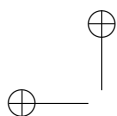




THE NEW FIRDAUSI

All night they watched the sick man, who lay quiet,
Exhausted by his babbling orgiastic,
Till dawn broke in a futuristic riot
Of bronze and mauve cloud, shattered and fantastic.
Achmet woke sane, cocking a fearful eye at
Strange men, who viewed him with respect dynastic.
He could not understand their enigmatic
Remarks on "Asia for the Asiatic."





He (Shelley) looked grave and said mournfully, "You laugh at everything! I am convinced that there can be no entire regeneration of mankind until laughter is put down!"

On that point at least we were agreed.

T. J. Hogg

I can lie and I can speak the truth, but to tell the truth I would rather lie than speak the truth.

The Jonny Cake Papers

How low an opinion of human wisdom and integrity had I, when I was truly informed of the springs and motives of great enterprises and revolutions in the world, and of the contemptible accidents to which they owed their success!

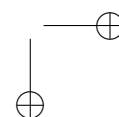
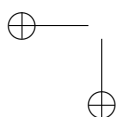
Jonathan Swift

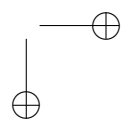
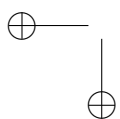
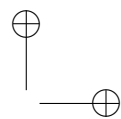
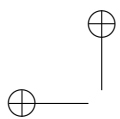
And there was never heard of such troublesome and distracted times as these five years have been, but especially for constables.

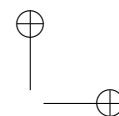
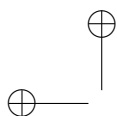
Antiquities of Furness

There is an enormous Pithecanthropus Literature. (Specimen of unconscious irony.)

H. F. Osborne







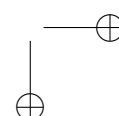
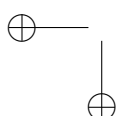
CANTO VI

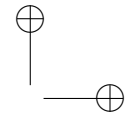
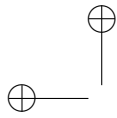
ALI

The year of the Hegira, thirteen thirty-two,
Conveys small meaning to the Western mind,
And was near over ere the Orient knew
The implications that lay hid behind
Those numerals, innocent enough to view,
And what the period meant to human kind,
Who have a disposition to ignore
The hand of fate knock-knocking at the door.

Merchants, who, at the heads of their accounts,
Wrote that date down in silken Samarcand,
Doubtless connected it with small amounts
Then due, and interest rates, and notes of hand;
With debtors upon whom they meant to pounce,
Or creditors whose claims they might withstand;
In short, with all that they had hitherto
Done, and with all that henceforth they would do.

Not knowing, as they wrote, that they wrote Done,
Accomplished, terminated, finished, through,
That a term was ended, and a course was run,
Such virtue was in thirteen thirty-two.
The General Gólubyov, who saw begun
His sixtieth year, expected nothing new,
Nor thought what thirteen thirty-two might mean,
Instead of which he wrote nineteen fourteen





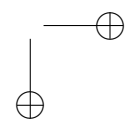
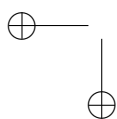
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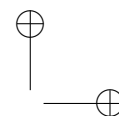
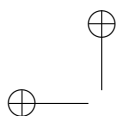
On the letter-head, acknowledging receipt
Of his half-pay. He did not like that small
Duty. His pulse would quicken half a beat,
If he thought upon the circumstance at all.
It brought to mind a vision of defeat.
Nothing is more unpleasant to recall
Than an impersonal official wire,
Ordering you, without rancor, to retire.

Góлубyov's mind would summon up the scene
And manner of his ten years' gone disgrace,
The office desk with a blotter yellow green,
The telegram spread on his writing-case,
And the coarse enigmatic look, between
Triumph and hope, written on Barsov's face,
Feelings the latter strove in vain to hide.
Góлубyov groaned and threw the sheet aside,

Seeking for solace in the morning's news,
In general an unpropitious place.
His troubled eyes, after a casual cruise
Down the dull page, cleared up, and all his face
Showed he had come on that which could amuse
His heavy heart. It was indeed the case.
"Barsov," he thought, "won't like that paragraph."
He read it thrice, and each time with a laugh.

At Omsk, Tomsk, or Tobolsk, some humorist,
Whose vein was not high-grade nor over rich,
Had written up with a provoking twist
The history of a desert-razzia, which
Slapped Góлубyov's successor on the wrist,
And carried insolence to such a pitch
As to point out the marked increase in crime
Among the tribesmen, since the general's time.





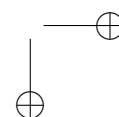
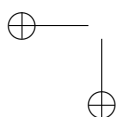
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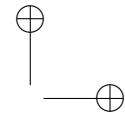
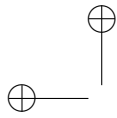
“The same gang,” wrote the friendly scribe, “pulled off
This job, that held a freight-train up last year.
Such things were rare when G-n-r-l G-l-by-v
Was governor. He always had his ear
Close to the ground. But now the bandits scoff
Openly at our measures, without fear,
And on a troupe of dancing-girls lay hand,
Consigned to officers at Samarcand.”

The sting lay there. One Omar, it appeared,
Coming from Bokhara with his human ware,
Had been attacked. And when the dust had cleared,
Had vanished with his troupe into thin air.
And several captains, who had engineered
The deal, looked rather blank on the affair.
They were indignant. No man thinks it funny
To lose at once his mistress and his money.

“One of the gang,” went on the scribe, “we know,
Namely the famous ruffian Abdul Kader,
Who, even so long as thirty years ago,
Was a terror to the farmer and the trader;
But he is not the thief-in-chief, although
He figures prominently as a raider.
He, it appears, is only a concomit-
Ant terror of a new tin-horn Mahomet,

“Who, unless quickly squelched, may prove no joke.
He should not be allowed to grow much older.
There is not much fire and very little smoke,
But in the East, if once they are let smoulder,
Such things are bad. It’s time officials woke.
The bandits every day are growing bolder.”
Gólubyov dropped the paper with a smile.
He quite admired the matter and the style.





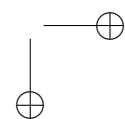
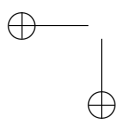
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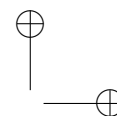
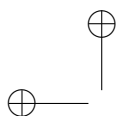
He hastened forth and found in the bazaar,
The carpet-merchant Ali, who, with bland
Courtesy ceremonial, from afar
Welcomed him in. Sharply the general scanned
The merchant's face, and then began to spar
For information of the private brand
That Ali dealt in, and with much ado
Elicited the little Ali knew.

Which was that the real leader of the gang
Was a woman who imposed her will imperious
Upon 'em. It appeared her power sprang
From a religious prejudice mysterious,
On which with high resolve and tact she rang
The changes. Ali thought the matter serious.
“And Colonel Barsov chews a camel's cud
Instead of nipping mischief in the bud,”

He added. The phrase showed that he resented
What Gólubyov forbore to pry into.
For some time Ali had been discontented,
A fact the general rather guessed than knew.
Barsov was enough to drive a man demented,
If he were boss. A quite sufficient clue
To Ali's state of mind. Men won't stand fools,
An odious dame, or a servant when he rules.

Nevertheless he was surprised next day
When Barsov called, which he had rarely done
Since he reached greatness. He appeared distraught,
And his red brow flashed like a copper sun
As he remarked, “Ali has slipped away.
I never like the Usbegs. He was one.
After all's done and said, you can't depend
Upon that kind of gentry in the end.





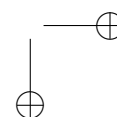
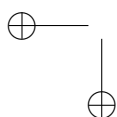
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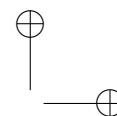
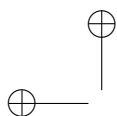
“He left this note for you.” He gave the scrawl
To Gólubyov. A brief examination
Convinced him that it would not do at all
To offer up a literal translation.
The figure Barsov cut in it was small,
But Ali had the gift of concentration,
And in a phrase or two, pointed and just,
Had vented the whole burden of disgust.

Gólubyov circumspectly gave the gist
To the governor. Between the lines he read,
Through a rhetorical veil of verbal mist,
Why Ali had incontinently fled.
His grievances formed a noteworthy list,
And his own people called him, so he said.
He prophesied a series of disasters,
And would no longer serve his Russian masters.

“Strange thing,” said Barsov, “how those chaps get hipped.
It’s something I could never understand.
He was sharp, too. I wonder where he’s skipped.”
He drummed upon the table with his hand.
Gólubyov in a reverie sat close-lipped.
Dreamlike he saw a waste of orange sand,
And crags brick-colored, quivering in the heat.
His day-dream died. A voice called from the street,

“Oh General!” Barsov rose. “I must be going,”
He said, and without more remarks withdrew,
As a youth entered, who is, I think, worth knowing,
And whom it is high time the reader knew.
The general went down, politely showing
The governor out. “Oh Boris, is it you?”
He said, “Come in, my boy, and have a smoke.
The Governor’s been calling. Such a joke!





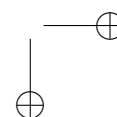
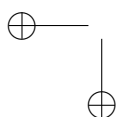
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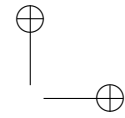
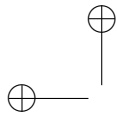
“Sasha will be here presently. Meanwhile,
You can play something for me. I need rest.”
Boris Oblonsky answered his keen smile
With one even keener. “Well, I will be blest.
The official mind seems to have changed its style.
You don’t appear o’erwhelmingly impressed
With the honor done you.” He began to strum
Stray themes on the piano, tum-ti-tum.

The general watched the strong bewildering hands
That, suddenly finding their chosen task,
Seemed to weave music in a thousand strands.
The gay face grew as quiet as a mask,
While the chords played in and out in sarabands,
Louder, clearer yet, a turbulent bourrasque
Of sound that failed a little – faltered – died.
Gólubov’s head sank on his breast. He sighed,

Another music, far off in his brain
Echoing, that erewhile he was wont to hear
In dreamy evenings. He would not hear again
That violin’s sweet utterance, silver-clear.
Beauty was in his spirit, and not pain,
As in his thought he leaped back many a year,
Communing with things vanished. At the keys
Boris let flutter forth new harmonies.

“Oh well done, Boris!” Softly Sasha came,
“Dear father, Ivan’s brought a telegram.”
Boris looked up as the girl spoke his name,
As though – as though he did not give a damn.
His hands along the keys began to flame
In febrile clinking and crescendo slam –
Thrilling with music, as if he had no inkling
Of aught save Glinka thundering and tinkling.





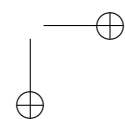
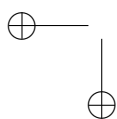
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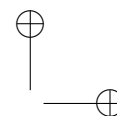
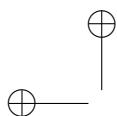
Góлубyov watched the girl, whose loveliness
Was patent to him, since he was her parent.
And I admit I like him none the less
For giving imagination loose to arrant
Sentimentality. I must confess
A liking for emotion without warrant.
Feelings that have a reason hid behind
Are cheap. I much prefer the causeless kind,

The kind, it was Góлубyov's trust and hope
Boris might have, too. Well, leave it to Boris.
A man has always his own way to grope
Among the principles of *Ars Amoris*.
Out of his hand slipped the drab envelope.
The telegram! A quizzing look came o'er his
Grey countenance. Mechanically he slit
The cover, and considered what lay writ.

"To General Góлубyov, Hoffman Chaussée,
Samarcand, Government of Samarcand,"
The summons ran, "Proceed without delay
To Merv" – the sheet shook in the general's hand –
"You are on active service from today.
At Merv they will appoint you your command."
The signature was simply "Sukhomlinov."
"Now what on earth has set the magazine off?"

Thought the bewildered general, unaware
That an unhappy, imbecile Croatian
That day had shot an archduke, an affair
Which chiefs of staff viewed without consternation,
As apt to hatch disturbance here and there,
Tending to justify their occupation,
Which, I, for one, can't see the use denying,
Needs an uncommon lot of justifying.





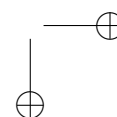
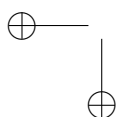
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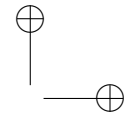
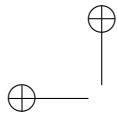
Coincidence's arm, I'm told, is long.
I'm a believer in coincidence,
And don't care how I stretch it in my song.
The true concatenation of events
Is complicated in a chain more strong
Than what the random wit develops. Hence,
Forgive me, if I spring a new conjunction
Of circumstance, without the least compunction.

For almost at that hour, across the waste,
Ali beheld with a profound distrust
A spectacle but little to his taste,
To wit, a steady column of white dust,
Approaching him with an indecent haste.
He uttered an expression of disgust,
And lay down promptly on the white, hot sand
Behind his beast, his gun cocked in his hand.

The approaching cavalcade, it was too plain
Were anything but traders. Who and what
They were was nowise clear to Ali's brain.
But they were obviously a dangerous lot.
Nearer they drew, galloping with loose rein.
But Ali was not anxious to be shot,
And, though the mark was all he could desire,
With Oriental tact reserved his fire.

They halted a long mid-iron shot away,
Debating as the Orient will debate,
Late in the afternoon of Judgment Day,
While Ali made his mind up to await
The issue. Presently the whole array
Bellowed: "In the name of the Compassionate,
Peace be with you, as he is our protection."
Said Ali, "I have not the least objection."





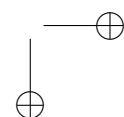
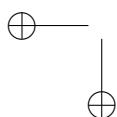
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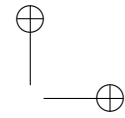
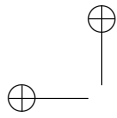
Forth rode the leader on a mettled roan,
'Neath whose small dancing hoofs the white dust flew.
But the man's eyes wavered off from his own,
Half-timorous, in a manner that he knew.
"Ho! Ho!" said Ali in a jovial tone,
"Achmet the hooligan! Well, Howdedo!"
Achmet glanced at him with a clouded brow:
"You mustn't talk so. I'm a prophet now,

"A fact that you had better recognize
By a becoming bearing of respect.
Your fate may be unpleasant otherwise,
Because the enthusiasm of the elect
Is hard to quell this side of Paradise.
Join us, or in an hour you will be pecked
By crows and buzzards." With subservience bland,
Ali crawled to him over the hot sand,

While the rags-and-tatters squadron raised a whoop,
At the conversion thus extemporized.
An ardent member of the faithful troop
Explained the risks if one apostatized.
Ali, who never yet had been the dupe
Of any man, was thoroughly surprised
By two things, both perplexing, I allow,
How they believed at all, and if so, how

They could believe in Achmet. What's belief?
Child of the unexpected and of habit,
Bastard of custom, foster-son of grief,
The soul's nepenthe when misfortunes stab it.
But when a guttersnipe and kennel-thief,
With the moral force appropriate to a rabbit,
Inspires this strange emotion, then, by thunder,
No wonder if tough men like Ali wonder.





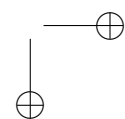
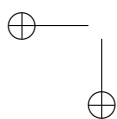
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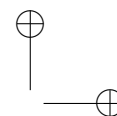
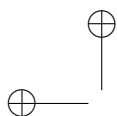
Perhaps there lay the clue. Wonder will grow
With wonder, wonder rising out of wonder.
Height over height – depth under depth below,
As the veils of every day are rent asunder.
Once let a man forget the outer show,
Once let him into his own being blunder,
Though custom stale him or though age may wither –
Now how in Satan’s name did we get hither?

And furthermore how are we to get hence?
Ali’s impromptu forced conversion done,
Away they went over the plain immense,
Heat-stricken, till, against the setting sun,
Upon the ridge of a sand-prominence,
They saw a horseman, who, at a dead run,
Came toward ’em down the slipping slope, hell-bent,
Shouting as he drew near ’em, “This she sent,

Oh Prophet.” Achmet snatched the Turki scrawl
From the breathless rider, saying, “What is hidden
Shall now be clear, if it be great or small.
Peace to thee, Abdul Kader, who hast ridden
So well.” He did not understand at all
The writing’s import, but did as he was bidden.
His eye prophetic for the nonce discerned
This much — It was high time that he returned.

And thus it was, as the next evening fell,
And a greenish moon shed a strange sickly glamour
O’er silvery crags, amid unearthly yell,
And rifle-shots that made the echoes hammer,
The prophet came to his monastic cell,
Where he was greeted with religious clamour,
Hoot, shriek, vociferation, scream, and cackle
Like Billy Sunday in his tabernacle.





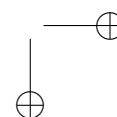
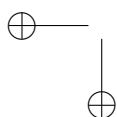
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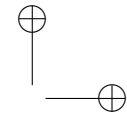
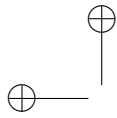
In some ways I approve that parallel.
It brings to mind vistas of empty faces,
Discourses meaningless of Heaven and Hell,
Exorbitance of speech and fierce grimaces,
The victim, the magician, and the spell,
And pitiful, violent, hysteric cases
Of those that feel the eloquent bombast scorch
Their silly souls like an acetylene-torch.

Midmost the mob rushed Achmet, ventre-à-terre,
And found Zuleika, veiled like the face of doom,
In a sea of cressets tossing everywhere,
And belching black smoke in the fiery gloom.
The crowd fell silent round about the pair,
Though far off drums kept up a droning boom,
A palpitating rumble, which the brain
Of Ali half resisted but in vain.

For, howso fain to laugh in his wide sleeve,
He could not. Passion and the dull drum-rolling
To him were but a bit of make-believe,
Keys to a power it were worth while controlling,
But uncontrollable. It made him grieve
To think that while mischief the mare was foaling,
He far away, to the occasion blind,
Kept fast in stall the stallion of his mind.

Sudden the sea of torches tossed more high.
Achmet had turned aside from the veiled dame,
And stood alone. The crowd let out a cry,
As if salvation hung upon his name.
“The prophet! Let the prophet prophesy!”
Silent, above the shouting and the flame,
He stood, and in a tone that carried more
Conviction than you may believe, cried, “War!”





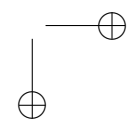
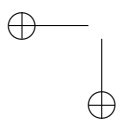
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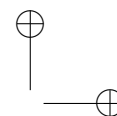
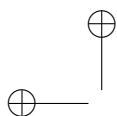
“Woe and the Pestilence, ere three months are done,
Unto the unbeliever!” Such a yell
Greeted this observation, as if one
Had uttered words to that effect in Hell,
And the devils were delighted, and the sun
Had his face blackened, and the daystar fell
Headlong from Heaven. Achmet, with some tact,
For once had based his prophecy on fact.

Zuleika’s forte had always been the actual.
The news which made Gólubov take the train
To Merv had for the Lady a hard factual
Significance. Her simple Eastern brain
Deduced, by means analogous to tactual
Manipulation, that reckoning for the slain
Archduke in the far West was on the tapis,
Upon the whole an inference much more happy

Than that of many a chancellor of state,
Whose mind, obsessed by bunk humanitarian,
Thought that the crisis would vanish in debate.
Sense is an attribute uncancellarian.
Zuleika’s intuition built on fate,
And, though she was an ignorant barbarian,
On the strength of her premonitory hunch,
She called home Achmet to exhort his bunch.

Then it was that Ali, as the iron lay hot
Upon the anvil, had his Napoleonic
Moment. He leaped up, Johnny on the spot.
His voice cracked a falsetto, the harmonic
Above the octave of the precious rot
Achmet was spouting, and his eyes sardonic
Blazed as he shrieked: “Oh Prophet! Ere we attack
The Russians, what of the Faithful that hang back?”





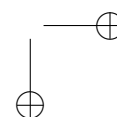
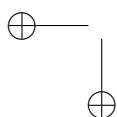
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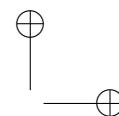
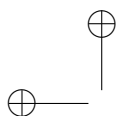
Prophets should always hark to sound advice,
And this was quite unusually sound.
Achmet, with half an eye, saw in a trice,
It had a marked appeal to those around.
Before the multitude's slow heart beat twice,
With a demagogue's address he changed his ground,
And 'gainst a hapless tribe began to thunder,
Who did not back him, and looked easy plunder.

Ali's advice was good, because he knew
That a raid against the Russians would abort
After a skirmish in the waste or two,
But if the prophet made a just report
And a big war in Europe was in view,
Then such a force as thronged the desert-fort
Might, if intact, in troubled months to come,
Make everything south of Syr Darya hum.

And so began the War of the Red Stone,
As needless and as brutal and as base
As that which 'ere two rolling moons were gone,
Plunged Europe through disaster to disgrace,
Because a monomaniac had grown
A bit too overbearing for the race
Of easygoing mortals to endure,
Who forthwith took the motto "Kill or cure."

O Germany, though doubtless you are not
So black as you are painted, none the less
Time never will be in all time to blot
Your madness out in kind forgetfulness.
What is the Lethe whereby shall be forgot
That once you had existence? I confess
I do not know, nor can, while I have breath.
No liquor heals that memory but death.





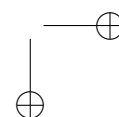
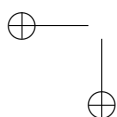
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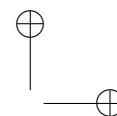
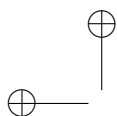
The General Gólubyov, up to his eyes,
Found himself with two several wars on hand.
For Barsov, to his own profound surprise,
Was hurried westward with a field command.
Great clouds of battle darkened in all skies.
Although anew Master of Samarcand,
Gólubyov was decidedly inclined
To find his duties little to his mind.

He had not men enough in the first place.
His garrison was but a corporal's guard
Of wastrels, without strength or will to face
Battle, with one or two old veterans scarred
And quite outworn. He had turned with a grimace
From a squad drilling in the palace yard.
With things like that – he felt a thrill of fear –
Peter! you couldn't keep the railway clear,

Let alone localize the Red Stone War,
Which, as the months dragged on, became a thing
That he devoutly thanked kind fortune for.
If but the tribes cut their own throats till spring
Flower-footed trod the desolate plains once more,
Why help might come. Thought had a hopeless ring,
Nor did it even mitigate his gloom
When Barsov was demoted at Erzurum.

Boris was gone to an aviation-school.
From him no music more. But Sasha played,
With softer touch, sweet airs that seemed to cool
The fever of anxiety that swayed
His blood. His own house was to him a pool
Of quiet, where, after the efforts made,
He sought what solace yet was left to him.
His eyes above his desperate desk would dim,





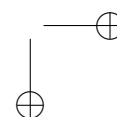
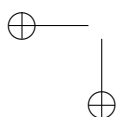
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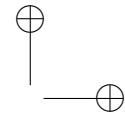
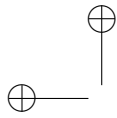
Thinking of the girl. But then he must not think.
Those sidetracked freight-trains must be hustled west.
Samarcand seemed to him the common sink
To which munition trains were mis-addressed.
Fifteen had been switched off ere you could wink,
Till Gólubyov at last became obsessed
With the notion that the railway staff were spies,
Who took this means of holding up supplies.

He shot one train-dispatcher at Tashkent,
To encourage other brothers of the beast,
Though very likely he was innocent.
Thereafter trains were sidetracked farther east,
Out of his province. And his name was sent
To a traitor general, who felt not the least
Shame, when he sent a stinging reprimand
To the too active chief at Samarcand.

But locomotives that could draw away
The miles of stuff that had accumulated,
Where could he get them? That thought lent a grey
Look to his face, for the armies evil-fated
That cried for shot were one thing. What of the day
When, as he had rightly anticipated,
Out of the waste should come the tribes, enticed
By all that wealth of war-stuff? Name of Christ!

The tidings of the War of the Red Stone
Came to him, intermingled with the vast
Epical interludes, as he sat alone
In his dull office. Warsaw lost at last,
Galicia won and lost, seemed less thick-sown
With dragon's teeth, as with sad eyes downcast
He reckoned feverishly the trivial cost,
As the Prophet or the Tribesmen won or lost.





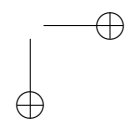
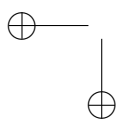
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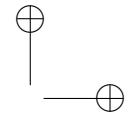
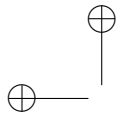
Sometimes he thought it all a madman's dream,
But as the war farther to northward rolled,
And beaten fugitives in a thin stream
Slid into Samarcand, his heart went cold.
He felt about him the accustomed scheme
Of all things shattering, and knew that he was old.
Not that he for an instant lost his pluck,
He only felt distinctly out of luck.

The spring of the black year nineteen seventeen
Is an epoch in man's story that entraps
Imagination. So vast a change of scene
As then ensued, such rolling up of maps
Needed no more, such pestilence and lean
Famine, such scraps, and such collapse, perhaps
Ne'er pestered poet with such fierce insistence,
Or drove him to his wit's end, no great distance,

As Walpole put it. Now my serpent song,
To prove it looks on obverse and reverse,
Shows Achmet and his compeers going strong.
They had put the Red Stone Tribesmen to the worse,
And had subdued them, whether right or wrong,
A point for which they did not give a curse.
Their fortune had a sanguinary hue,
And they desired fresh kingdoms to subdue.

One rift was in the lute, or in the loot.
The Khalif of the Prophet, Abdul Kader,
Found that his inclinations did not suit
With those of the aforetime carpet-trader.
One was a knave, the other was a brute.
And each looked on the other as invader
Of his especial province and dominion,
And each was justified in that opinion.





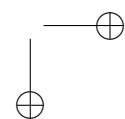
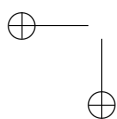
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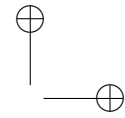
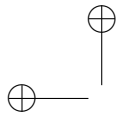
The prophet Achmet rather liked their jangling.
It served his dull, close, sensual life to vary,
For they agreed amid their fiercest wrangling
That he should cut no figure military.
Indeed he could not. And they kept him dangling,
Shut up with numerous ladies mercenary,
O'er whom Zuleika, the reader may be sure,
Presided, the pre-eminent Pompadour.

Ali, from nothing, in three years had grown
To be, if not the whole works, at least half.
He was the Wits of the War of the Red Stone,
As Abdul Kader was the Rod and Staff.
They quarreled as curs quarrel for a bone,
And their dissensions, which made Achmet laugh,
Were honey to Zuleika, who was in
The pay of each, and hated both like sin,

Though Ali had her suffrage most of all.
She rightly judged that more was to be had
From him than his rival, whose wild wits were small,
And who, moreover, was completely mad
About religion, if by that name we call
A stark enthusiasm, fierce and bad
And complicated by an envy sordid,
Despite his courage, of what Ali hoarded,

For Ali was the Lord High-Treasurer,
And master of the mint, and whatsoe'er
A Thief of Talent may administer,
As also Chief Justiciar in Eyre.
And when he dealt out justice, flew the fur.
As the French say, he made it his affair.
Nature, in short, framed him to be the wrecker
Of anything resembling an exchequer.





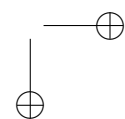
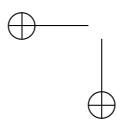
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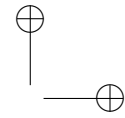
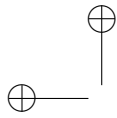
A dumb disquiet in Zuleika's breast
Had given place to hatred. She discerned
That Ali had in view some other quest,
That Achmet's fire sank low, as Ali's burned
Ever more bright. His object, as she guessed,
Was to take Achmet's place. She would have turned
To Abdul Kader, had that hierophant
Had wit enough to be her confidant.

As he had not, Zuleika held her tongue
And watched her step. Her dark, incurious eye
That yet saw everything, on Ali hung
With mute observance, till he wondered why.
Still to his party faithfully she clung.
And Ali was not wholly pleased thereby.
He knew she was the sort of girl whose weight
Counts heavy in the handicap of fate.

Furthermore, Ali loved not an ally
Of hers – to wit, that curst Port Said beach-comber,
Who was director-general of the supply
Of Achmet's pleasures, the egregious Omar.
Taken in a raid three years back, even as I
Remarked, the swine (though that is a misnomer,
For it is not a compliment to swine)
Pursued with pleasure his accustomed line.

Numberless small brown Achmets round the camp,
Showed that the business was a thriving one.
They were as like to him as postage-stamp
To postage-stamp. Zuleika had no son,
But did not let Fate's sad injustice damp
Her spirits in the least. While she could run
Achmet and the hareem and such affairs,
She rather liked his growing string of heirs.





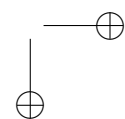
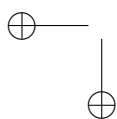
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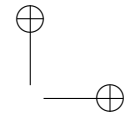
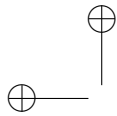
In this connection she had been much thrown
With Omar. And, though she viewed with satisfaction
The blue scar shrivelled to the very bone,
And his wrecked jaw's half-ludicrous contraction,
She bore no malice. His métier was well known.
What he had done was no unusual action.
He might prove yet, provided he obeyed her,
A thorn to Ali and to Abdul Kader.

Oh captious reader! Though you doubtless hold
That a situation should not be explained,
But gradual as a flower should unfold,
Before you scorn the poet feather-brained,
Whose figures come not perfect from the mould,
Consider this, if you should feel constrained
To blame him for an epic lapse or two,
How far perfection would be lost on you.

So much for that. Turn back to Samarcand,
Where Gólubyov, 'mid acres of munitions,
Sulked in his tents. He had enough on hand
To have equipped a hundred expeditions,
And not five hundred men in his command,
Which made him yield to morbid intuitions,
As rumor after rumor drifted in
Of the Prophet coming, and Jehads to begin.

Twice he beat back stray raiders from the line.
He knew that Ali led 'em, and the thought
Maddened him. It was easy to divine
That the desert-chiefs were drawing the noose taut,
But had not in intent to spring their mine
Till they were certain that the prey was caught.
There was a new deal coming and a raw one,
But Ali knew a gatling when he saw one,





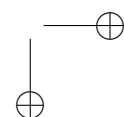
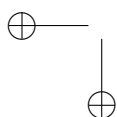
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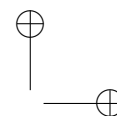
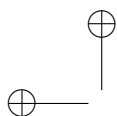
And took no chances yet. The General fumed,
When late one evening a Bokhara train
Into that city of pale forecast boomed
Most unexpectedly. The General's brain
Thrilled fifteen minutes later, when there loomed
Before him a man grown old by pain and strain,
But debonair as any that e'er clomb
The skies – Oblonsky invalided home.

And three nice wound-stripes, and the imperial order,
Named of St. Michael and St. George, he bore.
Fortune had temporarily restored her
Booty, and Sasha's face would glow once more;
And the shadow of a wrinkle that had scored her
White forehead, as her sweet hands flickered o'er
Her knitting, would for a little space depart.
Lightness unused was in the general's heart,

As the two went home together. I'll dodge the scene
That followed at the white house. Many a like
Took place in the wild year of seventeen.
Pathos is the devil of a note to strike –
When for an hour return things that have been,
And the emotions overflow the dike,
A silent flood, whose dangerous overplus
Makes all remarks of mine superfluous.

Theirs were three hours of peace under the lamp,
Hours in which nothing happened – best of all,
Hours, such as men, in barracks or the camp,
In danger or in loneliness, recall.
They ended like a shot. The heavy tramp
Of military footsteps in the hall
Clumping, awoke them to realities.
Gólubov rose, returning with such eyes





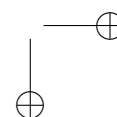
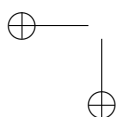
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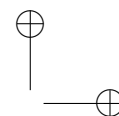
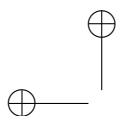
As theirs, who see the storm breaking at last,
A tattered bit of paper in his hand.
Down on the table the document he cast,
Wistfully he spoke: "Good-bye to Samarcand.
Nothing to do now, Boris, but stand fast,
And face the hurricane from the Red Sand.
Listen." He bowed his grey, much-troubled head
Over the tangled Turki-tracks, and read:

"By God his favor, ere three days are done,
The Emir Abdul Kader means to stable
His horses where the Zarafshan doth run,
And feed his camels at your council table.
He hath a dozen men where you have – one.
In your place I should leave, if I were able,
An amiable suggestion, which I make
Charitably for our old friendship's sake.

"In spite of the disaster that confronts
You now, it may divert your mind, if I
Tell you that our Prophet is that youth whom once
You sent down into India as a spy.
As he was then, so he is now a dunce.
But as a rule this world is governed by
Dunces. Beware the invader Abdul Kader.
May God preserve your life — The Carpet Trader."

"A hoax!" said Boris. The General's eye was duller
Than lead. He glanced at Sasha at his side,
With a twisting of the features, pitifuller
Than a smitten child's. "A hoax!" he almost cried,
"It's Ali's fist. There's too much local color."
A sudden thought his sad face glorified.
"Boris," he said, "One of my side-tracked trains,
Is full, by God! of fighting aéroplanes!"





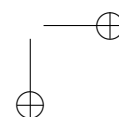
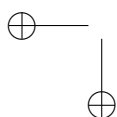
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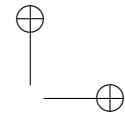
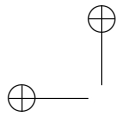
It's plain that Abdul Kader misconstrued
What motives had made Ali yield command,
Just at the time when highest raged their feud.
Motives were things he did not understand.
He was an active beast, but was not shrewd,
And the prospect of the sack of Samarcand
Was something that made definite appeal
To the only impulses that he could feel.

So he came down like a werewolf on the fold;
The cohorts that he led by no means gleaming
With purple, or a fortiori gold,
A gang of scoundrels with no trait redeeming,
Strong in their numbers, bad without being bold,
Fearless where no foe was, and only dreaming
Of a vast butcher-shop of easy meat,
The only sort that they were apt to eat.

At the third dawn, faithful to Ali's scrawl,
Gólubyov's scouts, far through the desert thrown,
Beheld what they did not enjoy at all,
Namely, the army called of the Red Stone,
Which raised the desert dust up in a pall,
And spoke its mind in no uncertain tone.
Brave men might well be troubled at the sight,
And Gólubyov's were brave men – well, not quite.

Noon found that host hard by the breastworks, drawn
Before the pallid town of Samarcand.
They were thirstier than they had been at dawn,
And their muskets had grown heavy in the hand.
But Abdul Kader viewed the Christian spawn
Before with nonchalance, and gave command
To drive 'em in. The desert vanguard uttered
One yell. The trench machine-guns briskly stuttered





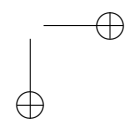
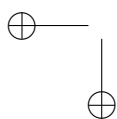
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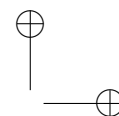
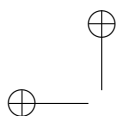
Their repartee, when, like disaster coming,
A strange sound rose over the hiss and boom,
A cross 'twixt sledges pounding and wires humming.
What was that flashing overhead – Zoom – Zoom?
A sound enlarging into thunder, numbing
Their souls, who, looking up, beheld bright doom
Plunging upon them like madness on the brain.
In a vast curve, dropped from the aéroplane

Something, small, dark, and Abdul Kader, wan
With wonder, saw as it were the desert stand
Upright, a sandy wave, or giant fan,
Against the painted towers of Samarcand,
Wiping out all the center of the van,
While 'neath his feet quivered the trampled sand
To a thud that paralyzes simile,
One of the finest points of T.N.T.

In thirty seconds the host of the Red Stone
Was running, as you run in a bad dream,
While the plane, hawk-like with crescendo drone,
Swooped, spitting forth an intermittent stream
Of shot into the fliers, who with groan,
Distracted oath, and panic-stricken scream,
Bolted in sheer blank horror anywhere
From it, whate'er it might be in the air.

Gólubyov, with a whoop, as victory flew
Down from the skies, sprang on the parapet.
One lonely man before him stood in view,
While the knaves ran, a man who never yet
Had run. “Ya– Illah– Illah– Allah-hu!”
He yelled, as he rushed forward. His glance met
Gólubyov's. With a white-eyed calm he braved
Large odds, because his eyebrows had been shaved,





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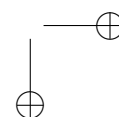
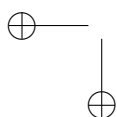
A sign to the unchastened infidel
That the fanatic meant to win or die.
“Throw down your gun,” yelled Gólubyov. “Like Hell!”
Or its equivalent, was the reply.
Gólubyov fired, and Abdul Kader fell
Headlong as he ran, and perilously nigh.
Well for the General, he was not disposed
To parley, and that his bullet was soft-nosed,

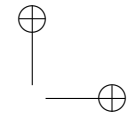
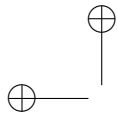
And stopped him, as the snubbed rope stops a steer,
With one sharp stumbling shock. Prone, coughing short,
Lay Abdul Kader, striving to uprear
His shattered frame — A melodrama sport
He was to the uttermost, dying with a jeer.
His last remark was something of this sort:
“Oh fool! your devil’s engine in the sky
Can do no more than teach a man to die.”

.

Some two hours later, fifty leagues away,
Ali and the prophet Achmet sat at chess.
Beside them Omar the procurer lay.
Though times were tense, attention none the less
Centered upon the ebb and flood of play,
Till an odd sound, new to the wilderness,
Troubled their quiet. Sudden above a palm
Appeared a portent, which they viewed with calm

Amazement, mixed with scientific doubt,
Like his, who, seeing the rhinoceros,
Denied that it existed. Once about
The camp in a vast circle ominous,
Bellowing, the plane swept, then o’er their heads cast out
A brilliant object light and luminous,
That, as the plane began its swift retreat,
Bounced in the grey dust at their very feet.





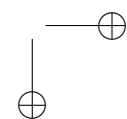
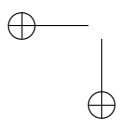
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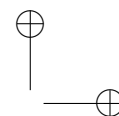
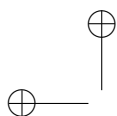
Ali, like Bob Acres, picked up gingerly
A paper paquet, whose superscription ran
Somewhat against the grain of Dignity:
“To the False Prophet and the Carpet Man.”
Ali, ignoring the discourtesy,
Ripped it, and found a missive which began:
“Góлубyov sends his thanks for Ali’s letter.
Never has the carpet-merchant served him better.

“He would have sent you Abdul Kader’s head,
But, since he was a brave man, and no traitor,
Thought better of an insult to the dead.
Your own he means to call for somewhat later.
Such of your army as yet live have fled.
The governor intends further to cater
To the taste of buzzards – now that he can fly
Himself. This, with his best regards. Good-bye.”

Ali read through the letter, stricken dumb.
Although his dearest hope was realized,
That Abdul Kader should be overcome,
He had been most unpleasantly surprised.
Hopes that come true too often make us glum.
Factors we overlooked are emphasized.
And Ali found the destruction of his rival
Had narrowed his own chances of survival,

Something which always irritates the fit,
Who have it in intention to survive.
Góлубyov’s jest struck him as not a bit
Good taste, but it was time to look alive.
The general meant to justify his wit
By the event. Behooved him to contrive
Devices. That damned engine of the air
Had thrown a new light over the affair.





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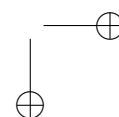
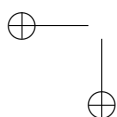
Suddenly a thought struck him, and he turned
To his companions with a devilish eye,
In which alternate fear and malice burned.
He said: "Oh prophet, when you prophesy,
Take care, though you by miracle have learned
How the fool Abdul Kader came to die.
And you, too, Omar, of the twisted jaws,
Pray silently that I may have no cause

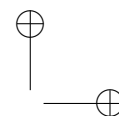
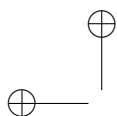
"To rearrange that countenance of yours,
According to a system better planned."
His eyes bored through those nincompoops like skewers.
Achmet's lip quivered, and his trembling hand
Shook as though fever, chills, and calentures
Were in his base blood. Over on the sand
He knocked the chessmen. Omar, with a glum
Spiritless look, said softly, "I am dumb."

Ali observed him with a biting, shrewd,
And meditative eye. His pale submission
Made him regret that he had been so rude,
But it was no time to brook opposition.
Presently his malevolent face unscrewed,
"Omar," he said, "You are a politician.
Go softly and you'll live. But don't try tricks,
Or you'll be sorry you played politics."

Ambush is the soul of desert-warfare. Aided
By his brazen vulture, the Russian general taught
His yet more numerous foes that being raided
Is not so pleasant as they may have thought.
The ambushers became the ambuscaded.
Their own feet in the pit they digged were caught.
Anguish at Ali's soul began to tug,
As the war drifted towards the Camel's Dug.

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ALI

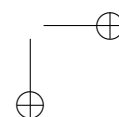
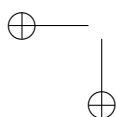
Boris each day high up the central blue
Climbed, roaring like an angel of destruction,
And dropped a small diurnal bomb or two,
Where they were apt to cause the greatest ruction.
And Ali's host withered away. They drew
A thoroughly unfavorable deduction
Concerning the campaign and its event.
They offered no apology. They went.

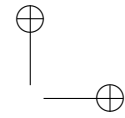
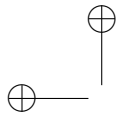
Odd thought held Boris, while he seemed to hang,
Motionless over the wide, orange plain.
His motor, bellowing with a resonant clang,
Was like a thunder breaking in his brain,
And the Aeolian scream of wires that sang
The overtone was symbol of all pain,
And all ridiculous passion, and despair,
That men outsoar not in the heights of air.

Lost in the loneliness of purple skies,
He did not moralize. He felt disgusted
By a life that could demand an enterprise
Like this. The universe was ill-adjusted,
That lay beneath so beauteous in his eyes.
Why had it so spontaneously combusted
In filthy strife? – A man must buck it, too.
Why? Boris knew no more than I or you.

Nearing, he saw the grey and ominous spike,
The Camel's Dug, where he had bombs to drop.
He saw beneath the desert legions like
Scared vermin, heard his bombs go plop-plop-plop
O'er the motor's clang. Góлубyov meant to strike
Soon. Well, the sooner all this muck would stop.
His dirty job was over. Must get on.
Now what the deuce ailed that left aileron?

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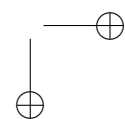
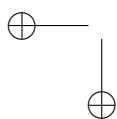
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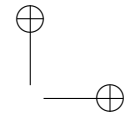
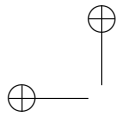
Gólubyov was very near to his desire.
Unbroken victory had changed the tone
Of his small army, whose dull hearts beat higher,
As a pillar of blue-grey volcanic stone
Grew up before them. Like a lammergeier
The plane had hung for hours, or else its drone
Had echoed in their ears, a pleasing sound,
Like music leading o'er enchanted ground.

Not that the ground was in the least enchanting.
White-hot it was, engendering thirst and sweat.
Beneath red walls of rock they tramped on, panting,
Praying for the overwhelming sun to set.
But he was going down mid golden slanting
Radii of light, that spread in a vast net,
Over the West, and, like a funeral pall,
Came shadow and dead silence over all.

The cañon widened. The column marched along
Hushed. In the shadow what was that strange thing?
Gólubyov, riding forward, felt a strong
Quiver go through him, like a hornet's sting.
It was — It was not — No, he must be wrong!
It could not be! Oh Christ! It was the wing!
Boris Oblonsky's plane to splinters dashed!
Boris? May God have mercy on the crashed!

There are a lot of sentimental things,
Proper for the general to have thought or said,
As he viewed that tangle of distorted wings.
He was a soldier, and his friend was dead.
But, ere he could give way to maunderings,
Events drove lamentation from his head,
And he was disagreeably aware
Of distant pops and swishings in the air.





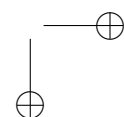
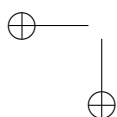
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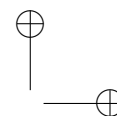
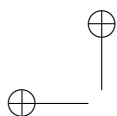
He looked up. All the cliff upon the right
Was palpitating, in the gathering gloom,
With fiery pulses. "Lie down! Battle-sight!
And fire at will!" he barked. A clattering boom
Replied, as the shots redoubled on the height.
His heart grew lighter, as a flaming plume
At the muzzles of the chuckling gatlings played.
Those devils up the cliff would be well sprayed.

Suddenly one machine-gun, with a cough,
Spluttered and stopped. A bellow of distress
Reached him. "The left flank men are sneaking off.
Save yourselves!" Panic dread, confusedness,
Despair had burst their dams. But Gólubov
Leaped to the widowed gatling. With address
In a spitting circle round he swept the gun,
Yelling, "You bastards, I'll teach you how to run!"

It taught 'em. Screams gave horror to the dark.
The episode made preternaturally clear,
That reason's promptings were the voice to hark.
"Somehow I've got to get 'em out of here,"
Thought Gólubov. "It's homicide and stark
Madness to stay. They'll simply die of fear."
He called a sergeant: "Get these blackguards back
Into the pass. I'll watch if they attack,

Here with the gun." Precipitate retreat
He heard behind him in the darkness grim,
The bullets from the cliff about him beat
The dust up, but no rush came o'er the dim
Sands. He rose, half-unwilling, to his feet
And broke the gun's lock. It was time for him
To go. But naught befell him worth remark,
As he fled lonely through the desert dark.





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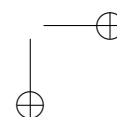
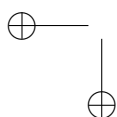
Thirsty, defeated, broken, five days later
Gólubyov's straggling troop reached Samarcand.
He had trusted fate, and fate had proved a traitor.
"Sasha?" he wondered, "would she understand?"
Perpetual thought only made grief the greater.
Boris – a shattered figure on the sand,
The fingers of one hand spread even so,
As once they had made music long ago.

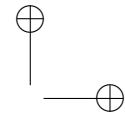
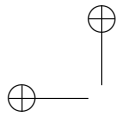
He must telegraph the news of his defeat
First, anyhow. The staff might listen now,
And send some other in his stead to beat
Achmet and Ali. It did him good, somehow,
To know that he had covered the retreat.
The operator met him with a bow,
And took his message, but politely said,
"General, the wires past Orenburg are dead."

"In the Tsar's name," said the General, "put it through!
Tell them to get those wires alive, or I
Will do for them, as I will do for you,
Something that I will be remembered by."
The operator like a shot withdrew,
But in ten minutes came back hastily,
And in a broken whisper palpitated
Lest others hear, "The Tsar has abdicated."

.

The battle had sent up Zuleika's stock.
She it was, who had seen the aéroplane
Fall ruining from heaven, while the shock
Of bursting bombs still echoed in the brain;
She it was, who, by force of curse and mock,
Had spurred the Prophet to prophesy again,
And this time, though both he and Ali quailed,
They had gone forth to battle and prevailed,





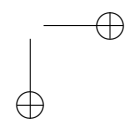
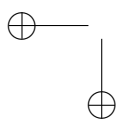
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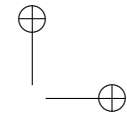
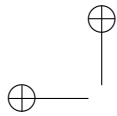
Though not by any virtue of their own.
They had gone forth to fight as gamblers go,
Blind, hopeless, and despairingly had thrown
Seven, eleven, two aces in a row.
But Zuleika's faith and valor now were known
Where'er the hot winds of the desert blow.
And Ali, whatsoever was his scheme,
Must reckon more and more with the hareem.

Zuleika, with the pimp colloquing when
Occasion offered, wondered what was doing.
Though in name shut off from the world of men,
Her finger stirred whatever pot was brewing.
And her thoughts turned to Ali now and then,
Perplexed by the queer course he was pursuing,
Which was precisely not what she desired,
Or what strategic exigence required.

Samarcand was literally between their paws,
Yet Ali would not strike at Samarcand.
He could not be afraid. There was no cause.
"Why," she asked Omar, "does he hold his hand?"
The pimp, with a champing of his twisted jaws,
Answered: "The tribesmen do not understand.
His own men say the prophet won't permit
Attack." He grinned, "But I don't credit it.

"For what are left of Abdul Kader's say
That he is up to a more devious game,
And in his raids is wasting them away.
His word would set all Turkestan aflame,
And yet the shifty beggar will delay,
Though now if ever is the time to tame
The Unbeliever. I don't comprehend
Unto what goal his policy may tend."





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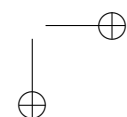
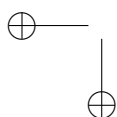
Zuleika never liked to be nonplussed,
And therefore dropped the subject. But she said,
With a natural expression of disgust:
“I will not wait until we all are dead.
Achmet is withering away in lust,”
Her eyes blazed, “It is lucky I’ve a head.
Achmet and I, I rather think, will lead
The next raid, or I’m very wrong indeed!”

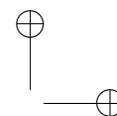
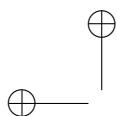
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Whate’er it was Ali excogitated,
To the mixed exasperation and relief
Of Gólubov, the blow anticipated
Fell not – but dull suspense was double grief
To his sad spirit, as he ruminated.
Festina lente is the leit-motiv
Of Eastern strategy, but he resented
Being the one who was festina lented.

In the first panic he had sent away
Sasha, in hope somehow to get her down
To India, for it was as clear as day
That Samarcand would hardly be a town
For women, when the Red Stone’s thick array
Should throng triumphant in to do it brown.
He had beside a job that must be done,
And further rather wished to see the fun.

Gone was his “army.” Like light snow it melted
After a March night’s desultory rain.
Thereafter Gólubov himself unbelted
The sword that he would never wear again.
He had no sort of taste for being pelted
In the streets by ruffians singing the refrain,
“Death to the Tsar! Death to the Bourgeoisie!
Hurrah for us!” (whoever we may be).





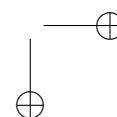
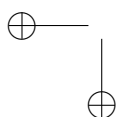
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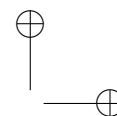
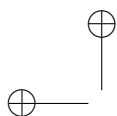
For Samarcand had somehow caught (by wire)
Moscow's disease. An intellectual slump,
Its dam injustice, absurdity its sire,
Possessed a people guiltless of the bump
Of sense political. Higher and yet higher
On the fever chart the curve went jump by jump,
Till chaos had o'errun the general scheme,
Ineptly enough called the old régime.

And that reminds me I must put on view
A scene in Moscow – merely a vignette,
Which in uncertain fashion has to do
With the figures in this history to be met.
Five hairy mongrels, Tartar crossed with Jew,
In solemn conclave at a board were set,
To modify, such modesty was theirs,
The progress of humanity's affairs.

Above their heads, from a bronze chandelier,
Swung, as the winds of doctrine blew, a sign
Of card-board, once a pad-back, lettered clear,
Listing their names on which I waste a line.
-vitches and -skis they were, although I fear
More accurately they were -sohn and -stein.
They called 'emselves with no false hesitation,
“Committee for Asiatic Liberation.”

Asia, I think, ought to be liberated.
“Freedom, like charity, begins at home.”
The reason that she has been subjugated
Is that her races lack collective “dome.”
She has her virtues duly celebrated,
And her vices are a smoking hecatomb.
She is cradle of the arts which I am afraid'll
Continue, as the Wit said, in the cradle,





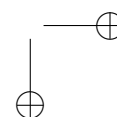
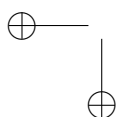
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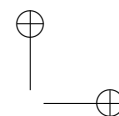
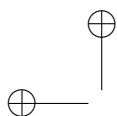
As far as she's concerned. It's not enough
To prove your strength. Asia, God knows, is strong.
Races must prove their brains are not a bluff.
And Asia can't maintain that very long,
Because she simply hasn't got the stuff.
If Europe were to end the ancient wrong,
And sign her unconditional release,
Do you believe that Asia would find peace?

Europe can't. The president of that committee
Was a lean proletarian disenchanted,
With suffering eyes expressive of self-pity,
Who never seemed to know quite what he wanted.
Dubiety and dread possessed him pretty
Much all the time, and by degrees implanted
One notion in him, which was simply: When in
Doubt, send a telegram to comrade Lenin.

Just then he was presiding o'er a storm,
And trying diligently to look wise,
So that his pallid countenance was warm,
And a pained look was in his bistre eyes.
It would not serve the purpose to inform
The reader what positions and replies
Worried him, for the whole discussion came
To this: They wanted to send Whatshisname

Instead of the distinguished Thingumbob
Down to Mid-Asia, as they verbosely said,
To organize the passions of the mob.
The president rubbed his flea-bitten head,
And named a third candidate for the job,
Who was the pattern of a faithful Red,
And who, moreover, having felt the pulse
Of Asia, might be trusted for results.





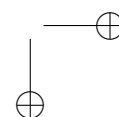
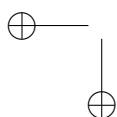
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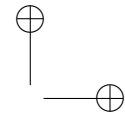
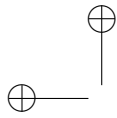
To his surprise, they presently agreed,
Though one half-Hebrew hirsute held the floor
For a brief space, objecting to a screed
That the candidate had writ before the war,
Praising some general. But they paid small heed.
There were other things they wished to talk of more,
That were simply clamouring to burst the dams.
The president dispatched his telegrams,

And a pimply individual at Perm
Stopped in his progress from Siberia west,
Throbbing with delight as he beheld the term
On the yellow envelope to him addressed.
It had in fact transformed him from a Worm
That all might tread on, to a manifest
And more or less effective Commissar.
And on its strength he got a private car.

Which he had shackled to a special train,
And, at a stately thirteen miles an hour,
Rolled down serenely toward the Transoxian plain,
Anticipating the sweet taste of power,
And fertilizing his exultant brain
With a full-flavored alcoholic shower
Of choice liqueurs. It cannot be denied
That the Commissar found it a pleasant ride

Up to a certain point, which point was just
Beyond Tashkent, where Fate, who loves surprise,
Prepared one. With a sudden heave and thrust
Of brakes the train stopped, and with startled eyes
In burst the trainmen, obviously nonplussed
By a rough and ready pyramid of ties,
Presenting an insuperable bar
To the further progress of the Commissar.





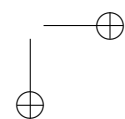
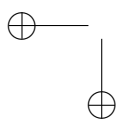
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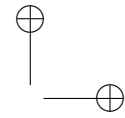
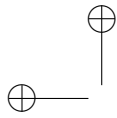
That person had small time to speculate
On the event. From every rock and dune
Men swarmed, like ants upon a greasy plate,
On either side in a big demilune.
They with a shout informed him God was great,
A sentiment completely out of tune
With the Commissar's opinions. Tremors queasy
Ran through his frame, and his eyes roved uneasy

Over that host, who, after duly yelling,
In an instant stormed the train with raucous hooting.
His sacred carriage filled with evil-smelling
Turkoman brutes, intent upon the looting.
He saw one savage in the act of felling
The screaming engineer. A burst of shooting
Up by the mail-car suddenly cracked and popped.
Then some one hit him in the face. He dropped,

Bleeding but conscious, felt his shoulder caught.
His eyes swam, and his ears began to hum.
Men dragged him out. He heard like a dim thought
Queer words – pure Turki for “Aw, plug the bum!”
They dropped him quickly – and his overfraught
Intelligence, from its mere agony dumb,
Suddenly awoke to an appalling sense
Of the ultimate in all its imminence.

Dying's hard work the Commissar was simply
Unfit for. He came to kill. And to be killed
Himself – unpleasing thought! He slumped down limply,
Wagging his hands. His eyes insipid filled
With bright tears of despair. His visage pimply
Twitched, while a dozen rifles badly drilled
Rose clanking up, when a tall man, in the nick,
Came bustling thither ere a bolt could click,





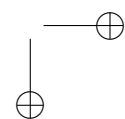
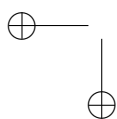
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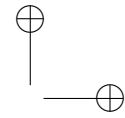
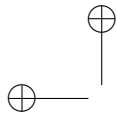
And beat the muzzles downward with a staff,
While the intended victim wiped the sweat
From his brow. The stranger's enigmatic laugh
Hinted that peril was not over yet.
For the Commissar, Rebellion had lost half
Its nameless charm. His stomach was upset
And tactless truth compels me to reveal
The fact that in his fear he lost his meal.

Presently when his fit of mal de mer
Subsided, and his entrails ceased to throb,
Feebly the Commissar became aware
Of dignity approaching through the mob,
Which parted to give passage to a pair,
A man and woman – the bosses of the job,
Apparently. His savior, anyhow,
Greeted the twain with a respectful bow.

Thereupon the tall man to the Commissar,
Pallid as yet from fright and from concussion,
And breathless, propped on the truck of his own car,
Put several questions couched in fluent Russian.
The latter's wits, yet quivering from their jar,
Were scarcely up to a prolonged discussion,
But, between intervals of inanition,
Contrived to give account of his commission.

Ali laughed shortly: "You're too late, my friend,
If, as you say, you come to overthrow
The Tsar's régime. These worthies put an end
To all that sort of thing some months ago,
A fact which very shortly we intend
To demonstrate is not an empty show."
He was going on, when the much shrouded dame
Said with impatience, "What is the giaour's name?"





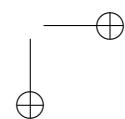
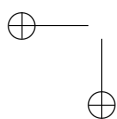
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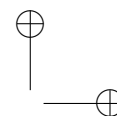
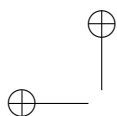
Ali, who made a point not to demur,
At least in public, to Zuleika's whim,
Since her late prowess, even if it were
Absurd, was just about to question him,
When the man in broken Turki said to her,
"My name is Grachev." Recollections dim
Cleared in Zuleika's mind, as with a laugh
She said: "Our friend that ran the telegraph.

"Why, every pimple on his nose, I know –
Just as he looked the night he choked Yasmeen.
Ali, I think we'll have to let him go
For old sake's sake. My virtue! What a scene
We had that night. Such fun it was! Although
The lady shortly squared accounts between
Herself and him." And all her veil and wimple
Quivered with mirth, "He hasn't changed a pimple."

A recognition thus Aristotelian
Might soften the most adamant heart.
But Ali's was as hard as a cornelian,
Or we may doubt that he possessed that part.
In his calm eyes a light Mephistophelian
Flared suddenly. Poor Grachev gave a start.
Even his scattered wits could scarcely miss
The expression of his former Nemesis.

He turned to Achmet – ringed in by wild faces,
Somehow he felt Moscow was far away,
Where a few democratic commonplaces
Were obviously the right card to play.
But here – how circumstances alter cases!
He must speak quick, and what was there to say?
He felt that bandits Tartar and Bokhariot
Would feel small interest in the Proletariat,





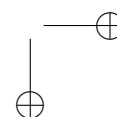
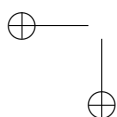
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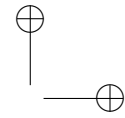
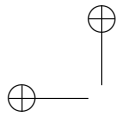
And would not give a damn for Mr. Marx,
For all his system's pomp and symmetry,
And cures for economic care that carks
Natural development of you and me.
In his harried brain intelligential sparks,
Struck by the steel of cruel destiny,
Flamed up in an expedient grotesque.
What these men wanted was the picturesque.

With a gasp he stammered: "Why tarry in the waste,
Robbing stray caravans and railway trains,
Sure indication of degraded taste,
If not of a deficiency of brains?
Efforts like this are energy misplaced.
Let us assist you. Join us. Much remains
To be accomplished, of which not the least
Part is the Liberation of the East.

"How was Timur the Tartar more than you,
That rode in triumph through Persepolis?"
Liberation and Timur, I think, are two
Notions that never mixed well before this.
But at the Tyrant's name the circle drew
Excited breaths. Poor Grachev did not miss
The effect. Timur in history or myth
Is yet a name that one can conjure with.

"Oh Ulug -Beg!" stammeringly on he went
(A complimentary phrase which I translate
Sovereign). "By the Russian people am I sent
To write your name large in the scroll of fate.
With new experience from this great event,
Go and be great as Tamerlane was great.
Samarcand is before you. Hindostan
And Persia still are theirs to take who can."





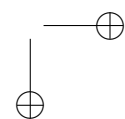
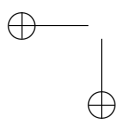
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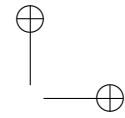
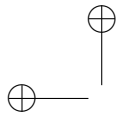
Achmet looked blank at this exordium,
And Ali's darkened brow grew yet more black.
Zuleika looked at Omar, but was dumb.
Grachev returned anew to the attack.
"In the Russian People's name," said he, "I come
With the offer of a throne, and you hang back?"
Sudden Zuleika stamped upon the sand,
Shrieking excitedly: "I understand.

"Achmet – no more, but Ulug Beg who must
Henceforward be. Here Fate puts out her hand.
O Babe, that once was playing in the dust!
O Emperor, that shall be of Samarcand!
The fortune teller of Khokand was just.
I understand, Russian, I understand
This forecast." Grachev understood no whit,
But was not of a mind to question it.

For at Zuleika's scream, a rumor ran,
Swelling in power and volume to a yell.
A kettledrum, with strenuous rataplan,
In time with the resonating bellow fell.
Ali looked round him blankly like a man
Who sees the best laid plans go straight to Hell,
While Achmet, better known as Ulug Beg,
Had all the expression of a soft-boiled egg.

Ali in an instant saw his rôle of Warwick,
Whatever King his plan was to have made,
Washed out by the raw methods sophomoric
Of the impassioned, half-inspired jade.
His skull felt very loose – Alas poor Yorick! –
As he saw at last the desperate game she played.
Too late he understood that giddy cunning.
Too late. The blow was falling, the noose running.





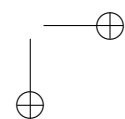
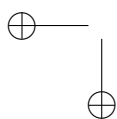
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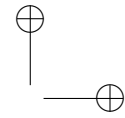
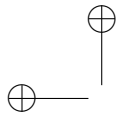
For the girl suddenly, with passionate hand,
Quivering with fury, tore away her veil.
Showing to that tumultuary band
A face, as Heralds say, per party pale,
Calm hate and fury. "March on Samarcand!"
She spat out, "And like Abdul Kader fail —"
Ali's cheek whitened. She shrieked on, "Betrayed
By this in the air-devil's ambushade."

Ali saw her point, saw the blue countenance
Of Omar grinning at him, bland and toothless.
Suddenly a burst of his old arrogance
Flared in his eyes, although he felt the ruthless,
Impersonal, fell clutch of circumstance.
Life is a cocktail ginless and vermouthless
To them who know that feeling – and the cup
Of death almost a cheering pick-me-up.

He heard Zuleika like a maenad scream,
"Look that we pay the blood of Abdul Kader!"
He saw the faces of a devil's dream
Round him, a lonely atom in the nadir
Of Hell, – saw 'em surge forward. Did he seem
To whip a pistol out, to have repaid her
In full ere he departed? If haply such
Was his design, it didn't matter much.

Achmet's whole intellectual man went numb
In the horrible eternized second, when
The stroke was struck. Why did they beat the drum?
Why were they slaying Ali, of all men?
Whence all this roaring pandemonium?
Who was this Ulug Beg? And who again
These bellowers? What thing maddened them, and why
To every question was there no reply?





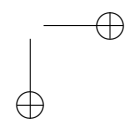
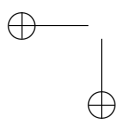
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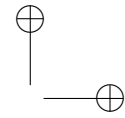
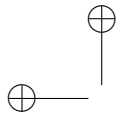
The chain of all experience unlinked
In his bewildered, inconclusive brain
At once. He stood oppressed by indistinct
Ideas, begot of horror upon pain.
Zuleika turned to him. Her voice succinct,
And sharper even than her usual strain,
Reached him. He knew the old tone of command:
“Oh Emperor! Bid ’em march on Samarcand!”

The town of Samarcand was full of rumor,
And wanted bread. The bustle and the go
Of the Righistan, that wont to please the humor
Of Gólubyov, was pulsing very low.
A casual crowd, which needed a perfumer
And a general bath, moved idly to and fro
Before abandoned stall and empty booth,
Trying to whet its predatory tooth

But lacking nerve to break even a pane
Of the Palace windows, whose every close-drawn shade
Said “Not at home,” an invitation plain
To hoodlums to begin their fusillade.
Close by the corner of the royal fane
Of Ulug Beg, as light began to fade,
Stood Gólubyov, looking half-starved and stern,
And carrying ’neath his arm a copper urn.

He was in mufti, half-way in disguise,
Watching and waiting. Presently a cry
Rose in the crowd expectant, then more cries,
As half a dozen horsemen cantered by,
Looking about them with contemptuous eyes.
Gólubyov viewed them unconcernedly.
“He is coming, He is coming,” yelled the crowd.
Gólubyov laughed a little laugh aloud.





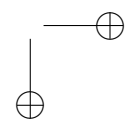
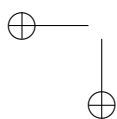
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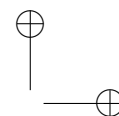
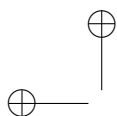
One of the horsemen slid down from his steed,
And against the brick-work of the temple nailed
A badly written, but appealing screed,
Whose humor Gólubyov by no means failed
To get. It was clear for him who ran to read:
“Ulug Beg, great above the great,” it hailed,
“By the Soviet Republic’s power august,
Emperor of Samarcand. Allah is just!”

Gólubyov, slowly down a dull by-street,
Strolled, like a man with little left to do,
Bearing his urn. Behind he heard swift feet,
And turned. A close-veiled woman met his view.
A Sart she seemed. But when she spoke, her sweet
Known utterance sent a sharp shiver through
His resolute heart. His voice rose in a crack
With quick excitement: “Oh why did you come back?”

“Christ! Sasha! This very day the Red Stone comes,
And I am on my way unto my last
Duty. Well, you must follow.” A storm of drums
Echoed from the Righistan. “Come, and come fast,”
He said. Together through the darkening slums
They slipped, and paused where a big warehouse cast
Its shadow over coal-dumps and piled shards
Of rusty engines in the railway yards.

He left her in that shade, and disappeared
Between long lines of freight-cars with his urn.
He was gone so long that presently she feared.
She bit her lip. Oh, when would he return?
Far down the yards a phosphorescence weird
Glowed soft a moment, then began to burn
Tossing up flame that like a tempest rose,
A trick of well nitrated cellulose.

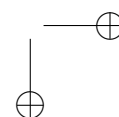
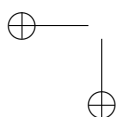


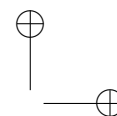
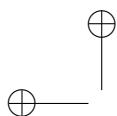


ALI

Eighty or ninety crated aéroplanes
Formed the first course of a swank conflagration,
Whose wings of fire wrapped the munitions-trains
Hard by. The ground shook to the detonation.
Vast rings of smoke stricken with scarlet stains
Enhanced the effect of the illumination.
Gólubov to Sasha, as peal followed peal,
Said, "I have put a spoke into the wheel

"Of Ulug Beg and the Red Stone." The glare
Of flame tossed over the pair solitary.
Far down an alley they saw, in the thronged square
Red-litten, a chief upon a dromedary,
And a woman by him. Beside them in the air
Rocked on a spear a man's head, not a very
Nice sight. The general gripped his daughter's hand.
So Ulug Beg came unto Samarcand.





In this melancholy story it is difficult to find anybody whom the reader can sympathize much with.

Sir Arthur Helps

Epic poetry is the art of being as long as possible in telling an uainteresting story; and an epic poem is a mixture of History without Truth and of Romance without Imagination.

Walpole

The worst of all is, that people who are very apt to laugh, are never imagined to be serious.

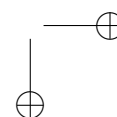
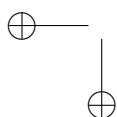
Gilly Williams

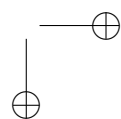
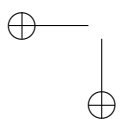
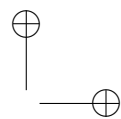
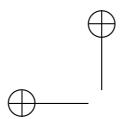
Toute cette guerre ne mérite d'être écrite qu'en vers burlesques.

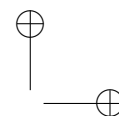
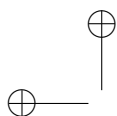
The Great Condé (on the Fronde)

Jeune, j'étais trop sage
Et voulais trop savoir:
Je ne veux en partage
Que badinage,
Et touche au dernier Age
Sans rien prévoir.

Not *Madame La Motte Guyon*, but
Fénélon, according to Voltaire





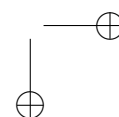
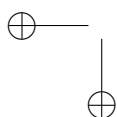


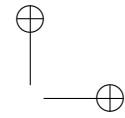
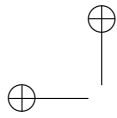
CANTO VII GÓLUBYOV

O curas hominum! O quantumst in
Rebus inane! I admit my scansion
Isn't classical, but I don't care a pin.
I seized that verse because of the expansion
Of thought beneath its hexametric skin,
Which stales philosophies pre- or post-Kantian.
Even a poet may be wise, who sings
The cares of men – the emptiness of things.

I wish I had a realizing sense
Of what's implied in that fine Roman strain,
For, though my lines still dallied with pretence,
And though my thought might not be less inane,
I then could laugh at my own impotence,
Nor look on failure with a sense of pain,
Because I'd understand that I was heir
To the emptiness of things – and human care.

Whereas, like others, I am much annoyed,
And break my heart upon the emptiness,
And run my hollow head against the void
Of fact, and suffer the prolonged distress,
Characteristic of the anthropoid,
Doomed to grow sick for hope deferred, unless
God lets him hear, for better or for worse,
The sacred laughter of the universe.





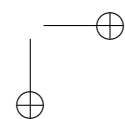
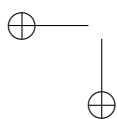
GÓLUBYOV

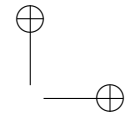
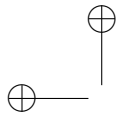
Gólubyov, a much better man than I,
Heard in some sort the chuckle of the spheres,
As ruin metagrobolized the sky,
And the empyrean crashed about his ears.
He saw society in pieces fly,
But was not moved to sentimental tears.
Rather the mad catastrophe he viewed
With quaint and humorous solicitude.

In the dark backward and abysm of time,
He saw in lightning-litten glimpses plainly,
Himself, part of a purpose without rhyme
Or reason, working out its fate inanely,
And taking shape at last in a sublime
Collapse, whence issued now the fact ungainly
Of Ulug Beg, unprofitable, flat.
Gólubyov saw that he was part of that.

Part of that! All that he had ever wrought
In thirty years of labor, heart and hand,
Had been transformed into strange shapes that brought
To pass absurd Empires of Samarcand.
The thing was like a nightmare in his thought,
A puzzle that he could not understand,
That hourly grew more dubious and stranger.
And there was Sasha – was there really danger?

Few like adventure though ne'er so resolute.
What we enjoy is talking of it after,
When leisurely our trials we transmute
Into their allotropic form of laughter.
False beauty to misfortune we impute.
And lying memory, having photographed her
Unpleasant features, every day we live,
Softens the hard lines in the negative.





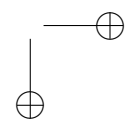
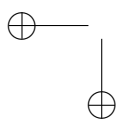
GÓLUBYOV

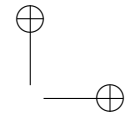
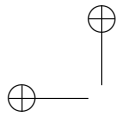
Well for the General he was trained to steel
His heart against adventure on the scale
Gigantic, for to get one daily meal
Became adventure with wings and with a tail
In Samarcand, where peril at your heel
Strode gibbering, with famine lean and pale
Tottering behind. When new stars climb the sky,
They're apt to interrupt the food supply.

Thus, though he had not the desire to draw
The state's attention unto their existence,
Sasha's pale face, and a craving in his craw
Argued with such intolerable insistence
That each successive darkening twilight saw
The General, struggling with a sharp persistence
Unostentatiously to beg or borrow
Diet for yesterday or for tomorrow.

He had come one evening, while upon the prowl,
To a sort of shop, where he had swapped a jewel
Of Sasha's for a venerable fowl,
Some cigarettes, and a pot of barley-gruel.
The price was ghastly, but he did not growl,
For food was food, and times were very cruel.
He seized his prize, but as he took his leave,
A bearded Moslem touched his ravelled sleeve,

And as they reached the lightless street without,
Said in the French of Stratford-atte-Bowe,
"You are the General Gólubyov, no doubt."
The French of Paris was to him unknowe.
But Gólubyov contrived to ferret out,
After a polyglot half hour or so,
Or by fine intuition to divine
That espionage was his companion's line.





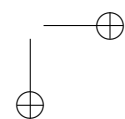
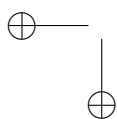
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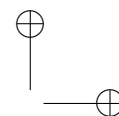
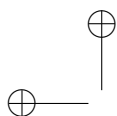
The man had a queer Turki accent too.
Moreover, his whole bearing was suspicious.
From time to time a wary glance he threw
About him, and his story looked factitious,
A cock and bull tale, whence the General drew
Deductions the reverse of the delicious,
Namely, that the stranger meant to pull his leg,
And was a hanger-on of Ulug Beg –

And not, as he maintained, an emissary
Of Britain, who, in Russia's darkest hour,
Was come in habit eleemosynary
To view the symptoms of that troubled power.
“In either case he is an adversary
Who has come seeking what he may devour,”
Thought Gólubyov, “Won't ask him home to dine.”
In the street behind, a lantern's sudden shine

Startled them, as before the General's door
They paused, revealing, as a flame reveals
King Satan's face in Hell, moody and sore,
Omar's bleary visage with its azure weals.
Men clanked behind him in the dark. Before
Gólubyov knew, as clean a pair of heels
The stranger showed, as ever yet were shown.
Gólubyov faced the Grand Vizier alone,

Who, for the nonce courtesy personified,
Suggested, with a stately inclination,
It would be well for them to go inside.
A form – a mere form – of interrogation.
Candor compelled – 'twould do no good to hide
That he who had fled with such precipitation,
Had acted in a most suspicious way,
And was perhaps a spy in England's pay.





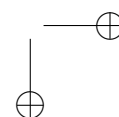
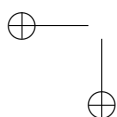
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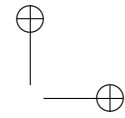
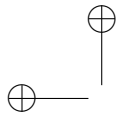
The two went in, where Sasha in her rags
Was waiting for her father, hunger-pale.
Her costume, which was mainly gunny-bags,
Roughly set off her exquisite and frail
Beauty. True realism often flags
When beauty's in the business. To detail
Hues in the cheek of hungry loveliness
Is harder than to sketch an ugly dress.

I do not like the moderns odd or even.
Between their failures, what is there to choose?
Van Gogh, who could not paint the sun in heaven!
Cézanne, who could not paint a pair of shoes!
Matisse, whose mite of genius cannot leaven
His sad waste of mismated greens and blues!
As for the ancients, I opine that they
Would dodge what I am trying to display –

A girl's glance at her father, overborne
With him in general ruin, but enduring
Misfortune with a sort of mirthful scorn,
And a look maternal-filial reassuring.
The nightingale that leans against the thorn,
Out of her pain the power of song procuring,
Impregnates nothing sweeter in her moan
Than the strange light in Sasha's eyes that shone,

Glimpsing their danger, as the monkey-face
Of the Vizier appeared in the mean room.
Omar saluted her with a grimace,
And from long habit eyed her, as a groom
Might eye a horse unknown before a race.
Then he turned back unto the General, whom
He questioned, and bade come to court next day
With Sasha – as a form – and went away.





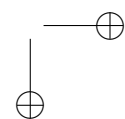
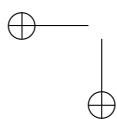
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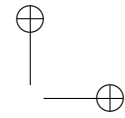
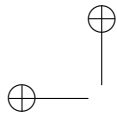
Now you and I might worry, I may state,
If thus we had been summoned out of hand
To the presence of the upstart potentate,
Then at the helm of things in Samarcand.
I fear the petty tyrant, not the great,
Who must have brains, and so may understand.
But Sasha and her father wanted bread,
And therefore did not worry much. Instead

They feasted on the General's spoil. A faint
Odor of mortality about it hung.
The barley-gruel had a grave-yard taint,
The fowl had died long since, and was not young.
Greedily they engorged without restraint.
Meal more delicious never poet sung.
They who have viewed too long an empty plate,
Know taste is not a matter for debate.

Of this forgetful, Ulug Beg meanwhile
Lay listless in a stately pleasure-dome.
A fountain in a court of colored tile
Spouted before him, as he blew the foam
O'er the cup's edge (A cellar stocked in style
Was Grachev's contribution to the home
Of the hareem, where Achmet wont to quaff
Amid fair girls his "royal shandy gaff").

Zuleika, couched by him on the divan,
Looked moodily upon a large display
Of feminine beauty, white and black and tan,
In every state of Eastern negligée.
At her feet a person, who was not a man,
And not a woman either, by the way,
Sat hunched, a black round creature, in some sort
Built like Sam Langford, corpulent and short,





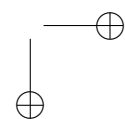
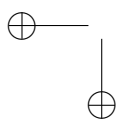
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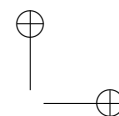
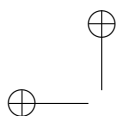
And by an Orient euphemism silly,
Much like our idiot Yankee jocularly,
Known to the Emperor's harem as the "Lily."
He ruled them with a mixture of barbarity
And blandishment, compelling willy-nilly
A soft obedience, a peculiarity
Which Achmet, by Zuleika's whims annoyed
And baffled, correspondingly enjoyed.

The usual cloud was on her brow at present.
Zuleika, as I long ago have hinted,
But seldom made a point of looking pleasant.
And a contempt perennial was imprinted,
Like sign and superscription on the bezant,
About her lips with hues factitious tinted.
As usual she was arguing with her lord
Under her breath. As usual he was bored.

What she desired, herself she hardly knew.
Some instinct told her that it was her fate
To keep things moving, which is hard to do,
Whether you work with little men or great.
Upon some vague ideal fund she drew
A blank cheque. Achmet at an early date
Must cash it, after filling in the blank,
With seven figures at Fortune's breaking bank,

India was snarled up somehow in her mind
With this performance. Omar, she vaguely felt,
Did not desire a project of this kind,
And hit it when he could beneath the belt.
A peril she detected undefined,
Seeing the harem grow, the army melt.
A mind less keen than hers might have suspected
That these events were causally connected.





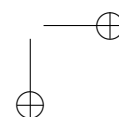
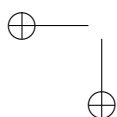
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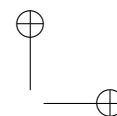
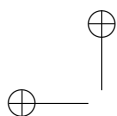
Hence it was that the irritable dame
Troubled poor Achmet's intellect chameleon,
By preaching policies of blood and flame,
With logicality Aristotelian.
He wanted rest. He did not want a name.
Eternal piling Ossa upon Pelion
Is a dull work, even when Fate is smiling,
And they fall not on his toes, who does the piling.

Beside the positive distaste he had
For sharp activity of any sort,
Zuleika's looks, though still by no means bad,
No longer gave her views the same support
They once obtained. And he was but too glad
To run to milder damsels of his court,
Whose faces gave no desolating sense
Of crowsfeet and ambitious insolence.

Reader, the decks are thus cleared for a row.
It's scheduled. I hope not as you suppose.
A man and woman don't fight as to how
A war shall rise against innumerable foes.
That subject may bring discord, I allow,
But is not apt to bring unnumbered woes.
A passing houri for the nonce beguiled
The glance of Achmet. He arose and smiled,

Leaving Zuleika, as the French would say,
Plantée là, not a pleasant situation.
Her cheek beneath its coat of rouge turned grey.
She gave a nasty little cachinnation.
The "Lily" looked up in a casual way,
While Achmet, deep in pleasant conversation,
Departed in the general direction
Of quiet, with the girl of his selection,





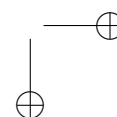
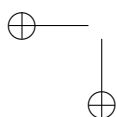
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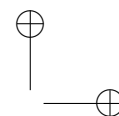
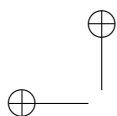
Who, of that polychromatic female mob
Had been a member but a week or two.
Zuleika's bosom heaved with a fierce throb.
Omar perhaps had moved the girl to do
Something like this. Well, it would be a job.
Turning to the "Lily," she demanded who
The houri was. He answered with a leer,
"A little present from the Grand Vizier –

"Fatma her name. She it was who invented
The nickname which the odalisks apply
To you, when, giggling on their cushions scented,
They whisper tales as you are passing by.
Personally I should be complimented."
"What is the name?" Zuleika asked. Her eye
Was clear but hard. Soft hissing in her ear,
"Young Madam Viper," said the semivir.

It is no fun to be a Pompadour,
When in a year your beauty will be dead.
Zuleika's cold eyes flamed up into pure
Fury – this Fatma planning in her stead
To reign! No, she would make herself secure,
In spite of lilies blown and roses fled.
"Achmet," she muttered, "Though I perish, still
My barren bones shall bend him to my will."

Next morning Ulug Beg to counsel sate
With Omar and the Russian Commissar,
Grachev. Round went the circular debate.
Their consultations never got 'em far.
However Grachev's plans were big with state,
Sooner or later he ran against a bar
Impassable. They did not like his plan
For freeing the oppressed in Hindostan.





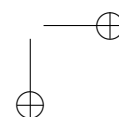
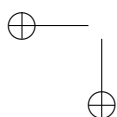
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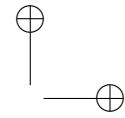
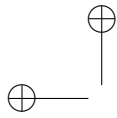
And Grachev had come lately more and more,
Their eleemosynary whine for cash,
In his peculiar fashion to abhor.
He had paid much and there had been no splash
To correspond, no ripple on the shore
Of Asian Calm. Nothing but balderdash
And flattery, and lies laid on so thick
As to disgust even a Bolshevik.

I wish that we might see the ingenuous draft,
Which Grachev drew in Commissariat style,
And early in the business telegraphed
To his Committee, who, without a smile,
Read that at which e'en Fontenelle had laughed.
One sentence may your wayward thought beguile,
Which to the root of the mad matter went,
"I have set up a popular government."

The rest was merely customary rot
About the time's being unready yet
For the Marxian régime. What time is not?
He wanted rapid-firing guns to whet
The commonwealth's approval of their lot,
And pointed out that bomb and bayonet
And similar appurtenances are
The things which make government popular.

His later telegrams were less bombastic.
The Orient's fighting spirit seemed decayed.
The new régime was not enthusiastic
About the prospects of the Indian Raid.
And though he represented them as plastic
In the potter's hand – provided they were paid –
The general upshot of his dot and dash
Was cash – and cash – and cash – and yet more cash.





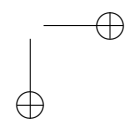
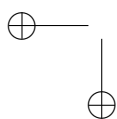
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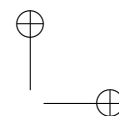
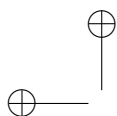
At first those Hebrews bit. But later on
Their wires in answer grew a trifle tart.
After three months and several millions gone,
“When,” they demanded, “was the show to start?”
Achmet’s hareem with guilty splendor shone.
Omar had obviously got his part,
And Grachev, who, I’ve hinted, wasn’t clever,
Thought the gang cared less for Karl Marx than ever.

He had been tactful, as he understood
That frequently misapprehended word,
But his tact didn’t do him any good,
For Omar voted his whole scheme absurd.
Achmet did not object to spilling blood,
Until it half instinctively occurred
To him that to spill blood, e’en on a throne,
Might quite conceivably involve his own.

So the attempt at politic syncretism,
’Twixt Lenin on the one hand and Timur
On the other (though there’s no antagonism
In the strange combination to be sure,
For absolutism is plain absolutism,
Whatever terms the issue may obscure)
Languished on in obnoxious desuetude,
In spite of all the rags that Grachev chewed.

Thus, in his daily moment of despair
Of getting anything whatever done,
Voices were heard, and curtains drawn, and there
Appeared before them, in the beam of sun
Let in thereby, that evil-fated pair,
Gólubyov and Sasha, and behind them one
With his arms pinioned. Achmet’s listless eye
Flickered as he beheld the British spy,





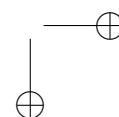
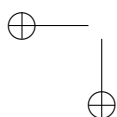
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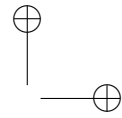
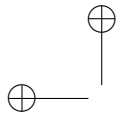
Nor would it meet the General's, but it ran
At large o'er Sasha. Omar with a smile
Asked Gólubyov what knowledge of the man
In bonds he had. The Commissar meanwhile
Studied the General from the divan.
Their last encounter was in different style.
His grey-smudged sallow eyebrows upward bent.
He thought of prison columns, through Tashkent

Marching north rub-a-dub, and men with rifles,
Chains, cold, an insufficient commissariat,
Forest-labor gangs, homesickness, all the trifles
That a self-pitying memory loves to tarry at,
And many a phrase political that stifles
The brain – “dictatorship of the proletariat.”
Well, here was one of the old tyrants waiting
For the proletarian to begin dictating.

Grachev felt queer! How ought one to behave
Under these circumstances? Things seemed wrong.
Beastly for that poor girl to have to brave
Ulug Beg's warm exploring eye so long.
Omar must be a miscreated knave.
Why was he working up a wrath so strong?
Why did the foolish General deny
Previous acquaintance with the British spy,

When he could lie the captive to the gallows,
And himself like as not into security?
One can gulp lies with a few practice swallows.
Doubtless the intellectual immaturity
Of the sentimental Bourgeoisie, which hallows
Fact, and can't bear to violate the purity
Of Truth, had moved him to pursue his path
Right in the broken teeth of Omar's wrath.





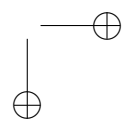
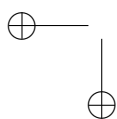
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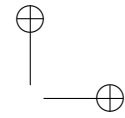
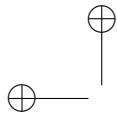
Omar's voice rose in an excited shriek,
Gólubyov's tone was level, tense, and low,
When suddenly the spy began to speak:
"What the General says is absolutely so.
I only came to Samarcand last week.
And I suggest you'd better let me go."
He grinned at Ulug Beg, "Achmet, my man,
You seem to have forgotten Bairam Khan.

"And you," he turned to the nonplussed Vizier,
"My friends are far away, but not so far
But that they could make shift to cuff your ear,
If you should venture on irregular
Proceedings. You're in lots of trouble here.
Your local stock is rather under par.
Why add to difficulty by inviting
A lot of quite unnecessary fighting?"

Grachev saw Achmet's loose jaw drop a yard.
The essence of astonishment distilled,
O'erspread the face of Omar azure-scarred,
As the victim he elected to be killed
Came to the bat so suddenly and hard.
And a mixed relief and comprehension filled
Gólubyov's eyes. He might not have the stuff
But the man was running an imperial bluff.

Omar perhaps might have pursued the theme,
Resentment in his eyes already gleaming,
But he was interrupted by a scream,
Then by a perfect hurricane of screaming.
Hastily, from the innermost hareem,
A swarm of odalisks with their hair streaming,
Careless of the presence of so many males,
Burst into the divan without their veils.





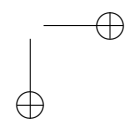
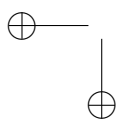
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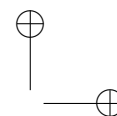
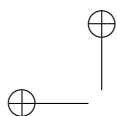
Behind them stalked Zuleika, and behind
That lady the swart “Lily” puffed and panted
Under a burden draped, that moaned and whined,
Which at the foot of the divan he planted.
Ulug Beg gazed at it, as if his mind
In more than usual blankness was enchanted.
Zuleika eyed the assemblage with an air,
Inviting them to canvass the affair,

Then cast a look chalybeate-ophidian
At Omar’s horrid visage azure-scarred.
Her countenance was harder than obsidian,
Or calculus, or anything that’s hard.
A beauty feverish, if postmeridian,
That years inexorable had scarcely marred,
Pulsed in her damask cheek in waves of rose,
As she glared at him down her chiselled nose,

And remarked crisply: “Did you hear her howl?
She was your tigress. I thought well to stripe her
Accordingly. But all these barnyard fowl
Set up their cackle when she paid the piper.
Lily, be kind enough to lift the towel
That now conceals the work of Madame Viper.”
She eyed the harem with profound dislike,
“Oh Toads, whom next shall Madame Viper strike?”

The ebony eunuch raised the cloth, revealing
The unhappy Fatma’s torso, to the waist
One mass of weals that would be long in healing,
And never, if she lived, would be erased.
Zuleika’s frigid eye round the room wheeling
Suddenly fell on Sasha, who, white-faced
And with slim fingers clenched and working, stood
Like pity watching over womanhood.





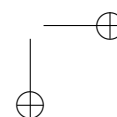
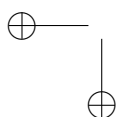
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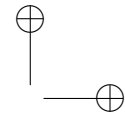
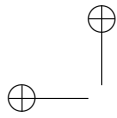
The raw flesh on the floor expressed a sob,
A mere convulsion of the diaphragm.
Sasha moved quickly through the female mob,
Who, being canaille, gave place to the grande dame.
Zuleika's heart gave a prodigious throb;
Her savage eyes in their wild sockets swam,
As Sasha, doing what sweet instinct taught her,
Raised Fatma's body, and said fiercely, "Water!"

It is a curious fact that common sense
Electrifies a group of people more
Than flights of the so-called intelligence.
The crowd about the wreck upon the floor
Quivered as she spoke. The "Lily" darted thence,
Swiftly returning. In its hands it bore
A ewer, whence Sasha washed red welt and weal.
As life ebbed back Fatma began to squeal,

While an emotional silence fell about.
For fifteen minutes, more like fifty years,
Sasha's white hands with an energy devout
Pursued their task, oblivious to the leers
On Achmet's face, or the queer fear and doubt
That in Zuleika's eyes gave place to tears
Silent, but swift, or malice understandable
That twitched the veins on Omar's battered mandible.

Zuleika wept. Her stroke theatrical
Had failed to work according to her theory.
She stood there like a presence funereal
Her bosom throbbing, and her fine eyes bleary.
Somehow this milksop girl had spoiled it all.
Her rage was dead. A weary, teary, smeary
Feeling oppressed her, of a will no longer gripping,
And a feminine sense of her complexion slipping.





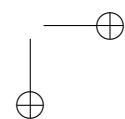
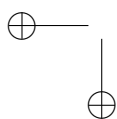
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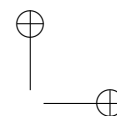
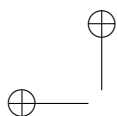
Her breath came in quick gasps, as if a cord
Were strangling her, the passionate distress
Of those who are not used to be ignored.
Sasha had ignored her with complete success.
The senseless Fatma's back and bosom, scored
With nasty whip-cuts that were hard to dress,
Preoccupied her. And she had an air
Of viewing Zuleika, as though she were not there.

Now states of mind like this are most contagious,
And the hareem, rustling and murmuring,
Shrank aside covertly, as they grew courageous,
Because the leopardess had missed her spring,
Eyeing her with effrontery outrageous.
She was outrageous after all, poor thing.
She turned to Achmet pitifully. He
Was studying Sasha with intensity,

And the vile Omar whispering in his ear,
And that hog Grachev she herself had saved,
To see her thus humiliated here.
Achmet! What terror that she had not braved
For him, the maudlin prey of lust and fear,
To be in the end like a street woman waved
Aside! Her gorge rose. Sudden as a cat,
She turned toward him electrically, and spat

Right in his face with some elaboration,
Then with a certain snaky grandeur ran.
Achmet did not expect expectoration,
And lost his dignity on the divan.
Backward he shrank with a sharp exclamation,
And yellow pallor overspread his tan.
Unto his feet sprang Omar with a yell.
Gólubyov thought, "I knew her mother well."





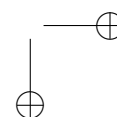
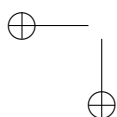
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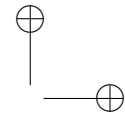
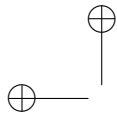
He spoke to Sasha sharply, "Time to go.
All you can do you've done." As Sasha rose,
The prophet was a spectacle of woe,
Wiping saliva from his beard and nose.
After all it had been a lovely show.
Unhindered from the palace of their foes
They passed. The sentries, as they gained the square,
Looked with astonishment upon the pair.

A short hour later, a fierce knock at their door
Startled them both. The General's sombre eye
Flared as he opened. In the street before,
Panting and breathless, stood the British spy.
"Let me in quick," he said, and bounded o'er
The threshold, "Hurry up! You've got to fly.
There's not a moment left to argue, Sir.
The Vizier's gang is coming here for her."

They were only just in time. As they withdrew
Down a back-alley, a vociferous troop
Of the Vizier's immoral retinue
Rode up to the white doorway with a whoop.
The three around a corner slipped from view.
"Frankly," the spy said, "We are in the soup.
We must think quickly, General Gólubyov,
If we are going to get your daughter off."

Sasha produced, from a torn carpet-bag,
The Sarti woman's veil that she had worn
Three months ago. A beauty or a hag
Are much alike, in such wise who adorn
Their countenances. It covered every rag
Of her impromptu burlap costume torn.
Said Gólubyov in a desponding tone,
"You'll have to leave me. I am too well known."





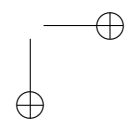
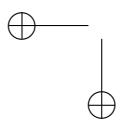
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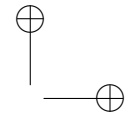
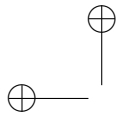
“Good stuff! I’ll get her through somehow,” said Kim.
They sped away. The General watched the two.
They turned a corner. And his eyes grew dim
With tears. There was no more for him to do.
Grief and a terror, new and strange to him,
Mixed in a dreadful spiritual brew
Within him. His hurt being felt as they,
Who, rising from the beauty of a play,

Go forth to noisy crowds, to nagging wives,
To dirty streets, business, and unpaid bills,
The barren occupation of their lives,
That with reality outrageous fills
Their hollow heads, so that no dream survives
Amid the pressing throng of countless ills.
O Dream of Calderon! O dreadful sense
Of the mind facing its own impotence!

Conscious of misery and himself he stood,
Pondering alone. Fear blackened like a blot
His soul. He felt the beat of his own blood
Trample in his grey temples, cold and hot
By starts. His lips went dry, but a chill flood
Of sweat made him feel dank. Sweet Jesus! What
A fate, of all fate’s brutal fantasies!
They must be well beyond the gates by this.

His mind reeled in him. Visions catastrophic
He dared not visualize pushed at the door
Of consciousness, no effort philosophic
Could bar against the danger, or ignore.
Voices rang dreadful changes antistrophic
On perils set behind her and before.
A thought like prayer out of his soul was shaken
That Kim might shoot her, if they should be taken.





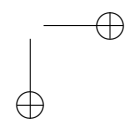
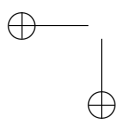
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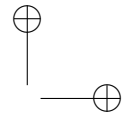
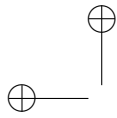
He had not long for solitary grief.
Far down the alley echoed an hullo.
He looked, and saw, with a feeling of relief,
Omar approaching with his retinue.
Up to him insolently rode the chief.
Gólubyov's look made his wrecked features screw
Themselves up tighter. A rascal with a thong
Tied up the General's hands. They marched along

Back to the palace, where he was immured.
Omar put questions with suggestion grim,
But Gólubyov in the brief session cured
His gaoler's hope of getting change from him.
In no uncertain language he assured
The pimp that they might tear him limb from limb,
But they would never get him to discover
His daughter's refuge before Hell froze over.

On the third day of his incarceration,
A shadow silently obscured the grating
Of his small cell. A fresh interrogation
He fancied, and sat dumbly ruminating
On fate and her malignant operation,
Till presently a whisper hesitating,
Roused him. He looked, and in the half-light saw
Grachev's pale pimpled nose and nerveless jaw,

Which, for a proletarian dictator,
Was singularly woe-begone and pallid.
Gólubyov eyed the phrase-manipulator.
Contempt for the sad-featured fellow rallied
His sad mind's forces, and pity even greater
Than he had felt long since when he had sallied
Unthinking from his club, to see that solemn,
Mean face in the front rank of a prison column.





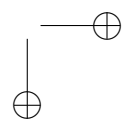
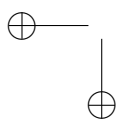
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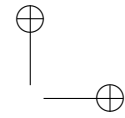
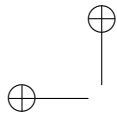
“General,” said the Commissar, “I want to talk.”
Said Gólubyov, “You always did! Go on.
I’m not so situated as to balk
Your predilections. Talk away, my son.”
But, as he saw the cheek the hue of chalk,
Down which slow, greasy tears began to run,
He changed the timbre of his jeering tone,
In tribute to a trouble like his own.

Grachev poured out his sorrow. Such a scare
Had been thrown into him by the blue-faced pimp,
That his pale eyes yet shone with a wild glare,
And his ineffective hands were damp and limp.
The wind was taken from his doctrinaire
Sails, and he felt helpless and weak, poor simp,
As may the poet of such verse as mine,
Enditing glumly his eight thousandth line.

Gólubyov gathered that a fierce upheaval
Was toward in the palace. Omar’s hour
Was come, and the Empress’s lost past retrieval
In that wild moment of abused power
When Sasha succored Fatma. Good or evil,
She was done for. “Omar’s men have gone to scour
The desert for your daughter. Achmet’s bent
On a white woman. If she won’t consent,

“That doesn’t matter much. But if she will,
Why then I dare say they may let you go.
I realize that it’s a bitter pill.
I think it’s one you’ve got to swallow, though.
I wish I’d never come here – I feel ill.”
Over his face raced whitish waves of woe.
He gulped, then mindful of his social sages,
Mumbled, “It’s all the iron law of wages.”





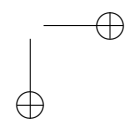
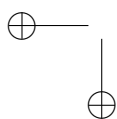
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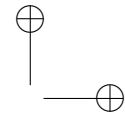
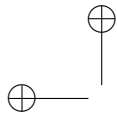
It's a law psychological that men
Who lend themselves to villainy make more fuss
Than the victims of the villainous measure, when
They have discovered the fact villainous.
Gólubyov, in Despair the Giant's den,
While Grachev grovelled, pusillanimous,
Drew his breath lightlier than he had done,
Since the iron bars had shut him from the sun,

Feeling his fate's strange orbit dip and curve,
Looping and turning Immelmans at random.
His soul shook in him, but not so his nerve.
Somehow he fell back on nil desperandum.
He had reached the stage of those men who observe
All things without attempt to understand 'em,
Far better off than their blind, brainless swerving,
Who try to understand without observing.

Gólubyov's brain in his skull did not reel,
His cheek adopted no unnatural hues;
His bearded jawbone did not set like steel;
His was no aspect of a hero who's
In trouble. His eyes conveyed no mute appeal.
Ah, no! He fell into a sort of muse.
Could this be happening to him? His brown study
Was a bit more than usually ruddy.

He did not even feel a touch of grief
For Sasha or himself. Something to face
Beyond despair, redemption, or relief,
Was here. And grief was much too commonplace
For this affair. To buck the devil-in-chief
With courage and with vigor and such grace
As might be given, and to take his gruel,
With calm, sufficed. And what if men were cruel?





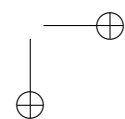
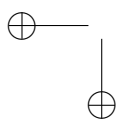
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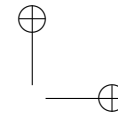
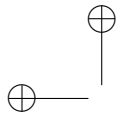
That was the logic of the episode.
But Gólubyov for once had too much wit
To think in frozen terms of a cold code.
He thought no logic. He enacted it.
Courage within him like a white arc glowed
Between the poles of horror, till it lit
The interior darkness of his stricken mind.
He spoke to Grachev. His voice was almost kind.

“No go!” he said. “You cannot terrify
Men on the precipice of desperation.
Sasha is resolute enough to die
Before she will accept the situation.
I’m an old man, and all this cruelty
Can only bring me to my destination
A trifle sooner. Achmet and Omar may
Like this or not. I have no more to say.”

Grachev withdrew, unusually limp.
Half an hour passed as prison half-hours go.
At the grille, Omar, grinning like the Imp
Of Eblis that he was, appeared. A slow
Triumph was on the features of the pimp.
He eyed the General, as men eye a foe
Contemptible. He spoke, and his tone bit,
“General, you’re free. The girl requested it.”

Gólubyov found himself, with wild eyes blank,
Staring at the palace’s Beaux Arts façade.
The worked-iron gates repelled him with a clank.
What had happened to him? Was he going mad?
Dread visualities stunned his heart. He slank
Blindly through streets that once he loved. They had
No mercy. What courage yet could bear the stings
Of human care – and emptiness of things.





GÓLUBYOV

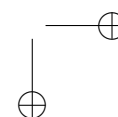
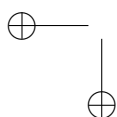
The Righistan buzzed with a murmur loud.
He did not hear it. In its carapace
Of grief, the mind withdrawn heeds not the crowd,
Nor the gross murmur of the commonplace.
He passed through shouting streets with his head bowed.
Tears tracked unheeded his bewildered face.
Half automatically he saw once more
His house. He entered through the battered door.

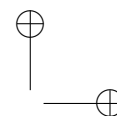
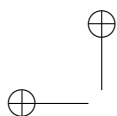
Out of the silence of the looted room,
A voice, with poignancy, accosted him,
As shocking as a whisper from the tomb.
He started. From behind a sofa, Kim
Emerged, his beard stained with dry horse's spume.
He was shaking from fatigue in every limb.
"We were almost clear," he said, "And then your daughter
Got tired. I went for horses. And they caught her.

"It was the devil's luck. I'll see you through."
He paused. His eyes clouded with weariness.
Gólubyov suddenly, as it were, came to.
His heavy face lost its expressionless
Pathos. He spoke, "Whatever I can do
I must do quickly. Circumstances press
Somewhat." Kim answered him: "Oh, by the way!
He rides to Timur's sepulchre today.

"That's why the city's celebrating so.
They scattered largesses this morning early.
Omar, I fancy, thought some sort of show
Might keep the populace from getting surly.
The bread supply's unusually low.
And so they've staged a pageant hurly-burly.
Regular King-stuff. Thought I'd tip you off."
"You'd better get some sleep," said Gólubyov.

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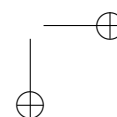
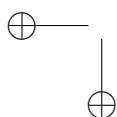
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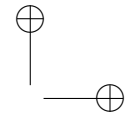
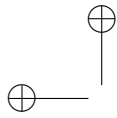
Achmet absorbed his "royal shandy gaff,"
Viz, sparkling Burgundy mixed with Champagne,
A combination too violent by half
For the hard head or the capacious brain.
From time to time he tittered. But his laugh
Had no conviction in it. It was plain
That alcohol had not as yet suppressed
Some trouble that was latent in his breast.

Presently with authority he grunted
Aloud an order, and clapped his hands together.
Presently a squat figure him confronted,
Female in dress. I am not certain whether
You'll be surprised, when, with politeness wanted,
Unveiling, it showed a face like patent leather,
And white teeth sparkling in the shining gloom.
It was the "Lily" in its street costume.

"How does she take it?" Dijon's grape and Mumm's
Were mounting swiftly to the imperial brain.
But he made that last effort which o'ercomes
Much alcohol, and managed to speak plain.
The Lily, idly twiddling its black thumbs,
And toying with its furbelows and train
With the air of a Transoxian grande dame,
Made deferential answer, "Like a lamb."

"I mean Zuleika," said the potentate,
"Don't bother about the Russian. That comes later.
Tell her to wear the jewels of her state
For the last time." The expression of a satyr
Came in his eyes. "My love is turned to hate.
This afternoon I shall expectorate her
Forth, as she spat on me, to the vile dust
That she was formed of first. Allah is just."





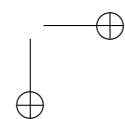
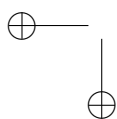
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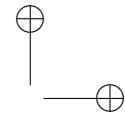
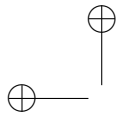
The eunuch twitched its feminine attire,
With such a gesture as a spent hag might
Employ, when harking tales of strained desire,
Of pretty damsel in an ugly plight,
Or matron's name spotted with social mire.
Its countenance was an unpleasant sight,
For, like all creatures of its craft and calling,
It liked a view of the unhappy falling.

Grinning, the thing adjusted its dark veil,
And minced away, a horrible illusion
Of womanhood, while Achmet to regale
Himself afresh began, till blank confusion
Fuddled his wits. He heard one startling wail
Ringing far off like a screech Lilliputian,
But it never made his pulses leap or lag,
Lost in his alcoholic Brobdignag.

Presently a voice said far away, "Wake up."
Water, cold water, poured upon him, dashing
Gigantic dreams born of the well-mixed cup
To pieces. Over him stood Omar splashing
His face and shoulders, and that Russian pup,
Grachev close by. Why were those two rogues gnashing
Their teeth so? How far off they seemed! How near!
How oddly indistinct! How burning clear!

They got him up. Omar snapped out, "He'll do."
Grachev said dubiously, "Hard to tell."
With ox-like eyes Achmet observed the two.
Upon him like two lady's maids they fell,
And over his soaked vesture swiftly threw
An iridescent silken miracle.
A plundered chandelier afforded gems
For the most precarious of diadems.





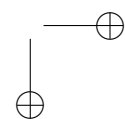
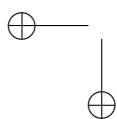
GÓLUBYOV

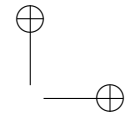
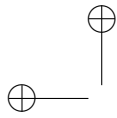
Presently giant dreams were coming true.
Slumping in the saddle on a blooded mare,
He was in the Righistan, how he scarce knew,
Listening, while the piebald army in the square
On conch and clarion and trumpet blew
A thoroughly cacophonous fanfare.
His bloodshot eye flashed for a second clear.
It should have given him a bloodshot ear.

Yelling arose, and a procession started.
Again he knew not how, but he was in it.
He relished it with gusto simple-hearted,
Like any other hero of the minute.
He looked behind him, as the loud crowd parted
To give him place. Hard by him on a ginnet
The feminized Lily rode, with a look demure,
As of a matron, rather fat but pure,

And close behind it, in the thick array
Close-muffled of his adequate hareem,
He saw Zuleika, and quite liked the way
Her chained hands quivered. Was this all a dream?
Late in life she was learning to obey,
And did not like the process, it would seem.
From the way her bowed head on her shoulders sagged,
He fancied she had been too tightly gagged,

Under her graceful flowing veil. The Lily
From time to time rode alongside of her,
Exhorting her in whispers piping shrilly.
She paid no heed to the strange officer,
But looked ahead. Her cold eyes sent a chilly
Shiver down Achmet's spine. The whisperer,
Black-shrouded at her side, chancing to spy
Achmet's reverted glance, winked its dark eye.





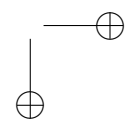
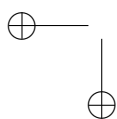
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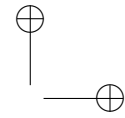
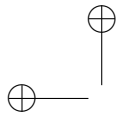
Achmet faced round. Hard by him in the crowd
Some hubbub rose. A guard rode briskly in,
Evoking curses not only deep but loud.
The flicker of a sword-blade hushed the din.
Achmet beheld two men, who with heads bowed
Squirmed through the rearmost and made off like sin.
He turned to find Zuleika's eyes of steel
Fixed on him, full of terrible appeal.

Nor hate, nor wrath, but only the maternal
Look of one bending o'er her sick child, fitter
To see than to recount. Her guard infernal
Wrinkled its brows, and its falsetto titter
Was almost audible. That glance supernal,
Selfless, burned out. Only a feverish glitter,
Painful, red-veined, constrained, emotion-drained,
Within those agonizing eyes remained.

Omar's voice roused him from his drunken study
Of poor Zuleika's storm of balked emotion.
He turned. The strong sun made his eyes grow bloody.
And the crowd roared with dubious devotion.
His intellectuals were more than muddy
After his heterogeneous morning potion,
But by subliminal processes obscure,
He recognized the three domes, where Timur

Sleeps underneath the dark green stone no better
Than all the thousands that he overthrew.
With swirling eyes, letter by swirling letter
As the text flickered in his drunken view,
Achmet read off the boast of the stone-setter
Above the lintel, white tile upon blue:
"This is the work of that unhappy man,
Abdullah, Mahmoud's son, of Ispahan."





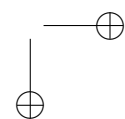
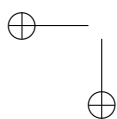
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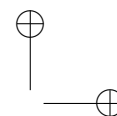
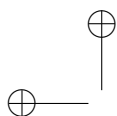
Timur, I fancy, did not know his tomb
Would be erected by a man who thought
Himself unhappy. Whence Abdullah's gloom
I know not. But I rather think he ought
To have rejoiced, since he was one to whom
An opportunity good men have sought
Had come, the fate, far better than renown,
Of nailing a damned tyrant's coffin down.

The Muckamucks entered the edifice.
Grachev the unbeliever bode without.
Shag troopers at the two extremities
Of the domed chapel halted. And the shout
Of the people died. Rustle of draperies
And a tense breathing sound went round about –
A crowd's queer silence. Five minutes grew to ten.
From the fane came the Muckamucks again.

Achmet was talking furious and loud
To an attendant priest who bent the head.
Grachev had never seen his mien so proud.
Champagne is white and Burgundy is red.
The twittering priest before him scraped and bowed.
“Sire, we are miserable men,” he said,
“The owl and rat defile this tomb divine.
We have no money to maintain the shrine.”

Achmet reeled round with a magnificent gesture
Intoxicated, to his train attendant.
Zuleika stood there. He caught her upper vesture,
And from her neck wrenched necklace and gemmed pendant.
“Take that,” he bellowed, “And never more protest your
Poverty to me.” He flung the gems resplendent
Upon the pavement. The priest bent in haste.
It takes an expert to distinguish paste.





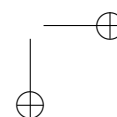
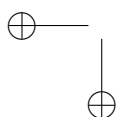
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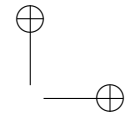
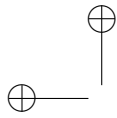
But Achmet was not done. Toward Grachev whirling
With what the books call drunken bonhommie,
He spoke. His red-veined eyes popped with good feeling.
“Grachev, you unbelieving dog,” said he,
“This woman here, it is no use concealing,
Has lost what charm she may have had for me.
You take her. There’s a good chap. She’ll convert you
Anyhow the experiment won’t hurt you.”

Grachev flinched visibly at this suggestion.
His pimpled face flushed up like break of day.
He saw the implications of the question,
And what was there appropriate to say?
He looked as if a fit of indigestion
Inopportunately had oppressed his clay.
Uncomfortably his eyes wandered off.
Some fifty yards away stood Gólubyov,

Idly regarding the whole burlesque scene,
Amid the idle mob, and close beside him
That English basilisk, who with a keen,
Calm, and uncompromising aspect eyed him.
Grachev felt somehow little and unclean,
As if that level glance had weighed and tried him
And found him wanting. With triumphant air
Ulug Beg sprang upon his white blood-mare,

While all his piebald suite began a-swarming
On mule or horseback, and the bugle-blare
Summoned the ranks of desert horsemen, forming
From the long straggling lines across the square,
And the mob’s ooh – ooh – ooh once more rose storming.
Grachev liked mobs. His load of present care
Fell from him, when with a gust of fear residual
Before the crowd he saw the individual





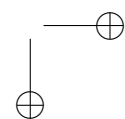
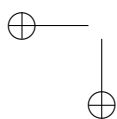
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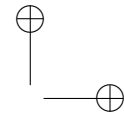
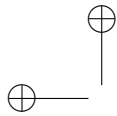
Gólubyov erect, confronting Ulug Beg.
As in a moving picture run through slow,
Grachev beheld the mare raise one white leg,
And her distended nostril snort and blow.
Achmet's voice hiccoughed roughly, "What the plague
Is this?" The hiccough ended in a crow
Of fright. The mare reared, as he jerked the bridle,
Back from that quiet figure homicidal.

For Gólubyov, against the holster-stock
Of the blued Mauser pistol, laid his cheek,
And fired. The whole square leaped at the sharp shock.
Grachev felt his flexor-muscles all grow weak.
Gólubyov stood like a form framed of rock.
Behind re-echoed a transpiercing shriek.
Zuleika, having wrenched away the gag,
Leaped forward from that semivirile hag,

As Achmet from the rearing mare pitched down
Headlong, and in the milky dust lay choking.
His countenance wore an astonished frown,
He tried to speak – a bubbling sort of croaking
That brought up blood, and smeared Zuleika's gown.
Gólubyov, with an unmoved calm provoking,
Pointed the pistol-muzzle low, and shot
His prostrate persecutor in the spot

That Aesculapius' votaries call glabella,
So that the bullet issued at the inion.
One must be more than leather and prunella
To stand that, I've good medical opinion
For saying. Like the Conqueror of Pella,
Achmet lay still, like all who love dominion,
Like you and me one day – the vulgar lot.
Gólubyov fired a third and useless shot.





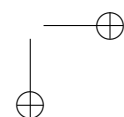
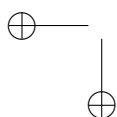
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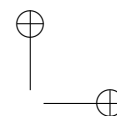
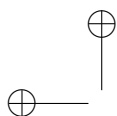
Needless to say, the multitude was vastly
Astonished. Omar with a jerk mechanic
Whipped out a pistol, but a horror ghastly
Suffused his features, the green blank of panic.
First he was scared, then horrified, and lastly
He saw a sight that shook his soul Satanic –
Kim covering him. With an expression coarse
He dug the spurs into his prancing horse,

That, whirling with its forefeet in the air,
Came down upon the Lily with a plunge,
And bolted through the hurly ventre-a-terre,
Crushing the eunuch as it were a sponge.
Its hideous flat shriek o'er the mad blare
Rose high. On every hand a shout and lunge
Began. Could Conrad's Muse, Procrastination,
Dwell any longer on assassination?

For every man there are two Samarcands,
That which we make and that we might have made.
Gólubyov was not one who reprimands
The fates, though he had reason to upbraid.
He dropped the pistol, and with empty hands,
Stood there to pay what price was to be paid,
For the hot blood on the white dust, that spirted,
And the Samarcand that he had reasserted.

Queer that there were no shots beside his own;
Mysteriously, no man hewed him down.
Only a frightened crowd's quick yelp and drone,
And Zuleika, wiping with her blood-smeared gown
The face with the red hole in the frontal bone.
He turned to Kim beside him, with a frown,
Pulling his grizzled beard. "I did not know
It would be easy," he muttered, "Let us go."





GÓLUBYOV

They wheeled. The Red Stone Army with a yell,
As at a signal, seemed to burst in half.
Headlong through the wild streets it rode pell-mell.
Gólubyov had disorganized its staff.
But had not had the foresight to foretell
The effect. Across the rocking square like chaff
That raw host blew, trampling the crowd and hooting,
Torn by two passions, fear and lust for looting.

There was a vision of wild horses rearing
And undulating like a cataract,
One glimpse of frightened faces disappearing,
As the troopers hit the mob in a compact
Wave of mad horseflesh, lashing out and smearing
Despairing forms that fell like firewood stacked.
There was a ghastly sound, crunching and squelching.
From the near houses black smoke began belching,

And from all quarters a universal scream,
A nightmare cry of exquisite anguish, burst;
A thousand women to the dreadful dream
Of fact awaking, as the host accurst
Of the Red Stone broke, a resistless stream,
Through every door, prepared to do its worst.
The tableau on the whole was of the sternest.
The sack of Samarcand was on in earnest.

.

Sasha and Gólubyov and Kim that night
Paused and looked back, from an argent-shotten dune,
At black domes outlined against bloody light,
And snaky smoke strangling a gibbous moon.
The faces of the three were fishy-white
From weariness. Nothing they said, but soon
O'er the zinc-colored sands, where white bones lay,
Toward India took their solitary way.

