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Claire de Lune
by T.S. Weddell

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PARIS, 1928:

"God, how I hate these things!" Indiana Jones muttered to himself as he nervously balanced his glass of champagne in one hand and tried to figure out something graceful to do with the other one.

In town for an international seminar sponsored by the archaeological department of the Sorbonne, Indy had been unable to avoid the rounds of cock-tail parties and receptions that filled the evenings of the conference week. Nor would he have been wise to do so, for these were the affairs at which useful, that is to say influential and wealthy, connections were made. The era of the rugged independent adventurers such as Giovanni Belzoni was fading fast. These days, unless he was independently wealthy--and Jones certainly was not--would-be Carter needed his Caernarvon.

Still, Jones hated these glossy get-togethers with a passion. He felt awkward and out of place at them, more like the raw country boy from Aurora, Illinois, he had been ten years ago than Professor Indiana Jones, archaeologist, with initials of graduate degrees from Cornell and the University of Chicago after his name.

So Indy was doing what he usually did at these affairs: backing himself into a corner, holding his drink in front of him like a shield, and scanning the room for any familiar face. Marcus Brody, blast him, had disappeared into the crowd some twenty minutes before, leaving Indy stranded.

It so happened that Jones found a face he knew, although perhaps not one he would have wished. "Shit," he muttered to himself as he saw the elegant figure approaching.

"Good evening, Dr. Jones," said a suave French-accented voice which Indy would have recognized anywhere.

"Evening, Belloq," Indy replied, his fixed party-smile growing more strained. "Been enjoying the seminar, have you?"

"Mais oui." The dark Frenchman smiled in a particularly annoying way. "I sat in on your presentation this afternoon. I found it to be typical of your work ... most average."

Indy gritted his teeth. Normally, he wouldn't have let Belloq get to him, but three glasses of champagne had lowered his flashpoint. He smiled evenly. "Why thank you, Rene. And I'd like to compliment you on your article on comparative dating methods in last month's Archaeological Review. Very interesting, especially coming from a man with your creative ideas about what constitutes research." He bent his head confidentially. "Tell me ... who'd you copy it from?"

Belloq gave a peculiarly Gallic shrug. "Eh bien, mon ami. First you must tell me who read it to you." He flashed a smug smile and strolled off.

Typical, Indy thought disgustedly as he watched Belloq's retreating back; even Belloq's insults were stolen from somewhere else. That quip had come from Shaw or Oscar Wilde--Indy couldn't remember whom. He knew he'd come up with the perfect witty rejoinder to it--no doubt just as he was climbing into bed that night.

He set his now empty glass down on a nearby mantelpiece and stuffed his hands into his pockets--to hell with the fact that it would ruin the shape of his suit--trying to look even more inconspicuous than before, if such a thing were possible.

Directly to his left, an English archaeologist by the name of Whitby was loudly bemoaning his lack of success on a dig along the river Jordan to a middle-aged dowager Indy had heard being introduced as the Countess deSomethingorother.

"...digging for two years and all we have to show for it is a few potshards and bronze spearheads," he was saying.

"How very frustrating for you, but surely if you persist..." the Countess clucked sympathetically.

"I'm sure we'll discover something any day now, but, unfortunately, our funds..."

Indy grinned as the man droned on about the cost of supplies and diggers. The Countess de Whatever was being hit up by a real pro.

"The ironic thing," came a soft, well-modulated female voice from behind Jones' right shoulder, "is that the settlement he is looking for is several miles to the south, not far from where the river empties into the Dead Sea. He is digging in the wrong place." The voice held a hint of an accent Indy found difficult to place--Slavic or Russian was his best guess.

He turned in surprise. The speaker was a young woman who looked to be anywhere between the ages of twenty and thirty-five--Indy was a lousy judge of age. "Are you an archaeologist?" he asked. He couldn't remember having seen her before--and he felt sure he would have remembered!

"Oh no, merely an interested observer of humanity. Call it my ... woman's intuition." She smiled mysteriously and paused, seeming to wait for him to make the next move.

Remembering his manners, Indy said, "I'm sorry--I'm Jones ... Indiana Jones, from Marshall College in the States."

"Sarka Radecevic," she said, holding out her hand in a graceful palm-down gesture.

For a moment, Indy was tempted to kiss it, but only a born Frenchman like Belloq could make that maneuver without looking like a total ass. He settled for clasping it gently. Her palm was quite cool to the touch, despite the warmth of the room.

"Pleased to meet you," Indy said. It was not simply a polite phrase; he was very pleased to meet her indeed. Sarka Radecevic was one of the most attractive women Jones had ever met, if not the most. She was of medium height and slenderly built, with exquisite, finely chiselled features. In an age when women bobbed and lacquered theirs, Sarka's black hair was worn long and coiled at her neck in a glossy knot. Indy liked that. But her most striking feature was her eyes, which were the palest blue he had ever seen, almost the color of some clear glass marbles he'd had once, and her flawless complexion was alabaster pale to match. She was dressed with understated elegance in a simple black evening frock--Chanel, unless Indy missed his bet--and her only jewelry was a gold brooch set with a cloudy gray stone, which she wore on one shoulder.

"Pretty," Indy said, indicating the brooch. "An opal?" Even as he spoke, he knew the remark was lame, but he was no good at conversational openers, and he very much wanted to start a conversation with the fascinating woman.

Sarka smiled. "If you are indeed the Doctor Jones, expert in the occult, whom our hostess spoke to me of, then you must know that opals are reputed to be unlucky. This is a moonstone." She paused, as if the topic held little interest, and fanned the air in front of her face with her hand. "My, but it is stuffy in here, is it not?" She cocked an eyebrow expectantly.

Jones needed no further prompting. "Why don't we go outside?"

He followed her out onto the balcony and shut the large double French doors behind them, muffling the buzz of voices from inside. Clouds of cigarette smoke drifted against the panes of the glass doors, making the crowd appear hazy and indistinct.

"What a relief to be out in the fresh air," Sarka remarked from behind him. "Look at them in there. They look like so many goldfish in a smoky bowl, mouths opening and closing, so many words being spoken and not a one of them of any substance."

Indy laughed. "You can say that again. Sometimes I think hell must be one long cocktail party."

"One can be very alone in a crowd," Sarka observed cryptically. She gestured up at the night sky. "Sometimes the stars are all the company I need."

The moon that night was nearly full, bathing the tile rooftops of Paris with a cold white light that accentuated the pallor of Sarka's skin and eyes. A few stars were dimly visible against the brightness of the moon and the city lights.

"The moon is beautiful tonight, is it not?" Jones nodded his agreement.

"How insignificant human beings are compared with the majesty of the universe," Sarka continued. "And yet they say that one day men will walk upon the moon and journey even farther--to the stars themselves."

Indy snorted. "That Jules Verne stuff? It'll be a long time off...if it ever happens."

The corners of Sarka's mouth turned up faintly. "Oh, it will be sooner than you think. YOU May live to see it ... I certainly shall."

Before Indy could respond to this astounding assertion, something from inside caught the corner of his eye. It was Marcus, craning his neck over the crowd, obviously looking for him.

Damn, Indy thought. Can't find Marcus when you need him and then when you don't... His little tete-a-tete was about to be broken up.

Jones found himself powerfully attracted to this woman, but he was over-awed by her as well. She was no starry-eyed coed, painfully eager to spendtime 'after class' with the professor. It rather surprised Indy to realizehow rarely during the past few years he had been the active pursuer in his amorous relationships.

Marcus was heading toward the doors. It was now or never. Indy cleared his throat. "Mademoiselle Radecevic..." he began.

"Sarka ... please," she corrected him.

"All right, Sarka...I wonder if you'd like to have dinner with me tomorrow night?"

He'd only known the woman for fifteen minutes at the most, and he frankly wouldn't have been surprised if she had told him--in polite terms, of course--to get lost. But she smiled, and her voice positively purred.

"Doctor Jones, it would give me the greatest pleasure to take a meal with you."

"Indiana...please," he said. "What time should I pick you up?"

"I think it would be best if I met you there," she said smoothly. "Where will we be dining?"

Indy picked the name of the only decent restaurant in Paris he was familiar with. "Arnaud's, on the Ile de la Cite."

"I know the place. Eight o'clock?"

Jones nodded. Just at that moment, the French doors opened and Marcus Brody came out onto the balcony saying, "There you are, Indiana. I've been looking all over for--" He stopped short when he noticed Sarka. "Oh, I'm so sorry! I hope I'm not intruding."

"Don't worry about it, Marcus," Indy said, and proceeded to perform the necessary introductions.

"You are not interrupting, Doctor Brody," Sarka assured him. "I have already monopolized Doctor Jones enough for one evening." She turned to Indy. "Until tomorrow night?"

This time Jones kissed her hand in parting--to hell with how foolish it might make him look--and he was extremely gratified to see that Rene Belloq was on the other side of the doors, watching the exchange with ill-disguised envy. "Until tomorrow," he said, as Sarka left them.

"However do you manage it, Indy? They flock 'round you like bees to honey."

"I dunno, Marcus. Just lucky, I guess." He turned to his older friend. "Say ... you get to Paris pretty often. Do you know anything about her?"

"Sarka Radecevic?" Marcus shook his head. "Only what I've heard in passing. She arrived in Paris at the beginning of this year and began travelling in the intellectual circles soon afterward. No one seems to know very much about her background. I gather she's a Woman of Mystery." Marcus spoke the last phrase in implied capitals as only the British can do.

"But I'll tell you one thing, Indiana," Brody continued, looking his younger colleague in the eye. "There's not a man in this room...or in all of Paris for that matter, who wouldn't give his eyeteeth to trade places with you tomorrow night."

The following evening, Jones sat at his favorite table in Arnaud's restaurant. Not much seemed to have changed in the past ten years--oh, there were a few more laugh wrinkles on Madame Arnaud's face as she greeted her patrons from behind the ornate cash register, and there were a few more gray hairs in Monsieur Arnaud's trim beard--but everything else was the same as when he'd been there last. Indy ordered a bottle of red wine and then sat back and let the memories wash over him. He'd been so young then, so absurdly proud of his ugly khaki uniform and of the beautiful girl on his arm. Fleurette! Now there was nostalgia for you, Indy thought.

He'd met the buxom shopgirl in the autumn of 1918, when his unit was stationed in Paris during the interval between the Armistice and the time they were shipped home. And if she'd been a few years older than he was and not exactly in the first blush of innocence, what of it? That was the way such things had been done in La Belle France since time immemorial.

Fleurette had plucked the ripe flower of Indy's virginity--and probably saved his life in the bargain, during the early months of the Spanish Flu epidemic. He had come down with it while staying with her on a weekend pass, and she had nursed him tenderly and skillfully during the three weeks he been too sick to know who he was, much less stir from his bed. He'd finally stumbled back to the camp, pale, weak, and still looking like someone returned from the dead, fully expecting to be court-martialed for being AWOL. But after hearing the story, his commanding officer, who didn't look much better himself, had shrugged tiredly and said, "Glad you made it, Jones; a lot of your buddies didn't."

After that, Indy had been grateful to Fleurette--and more than a little in love with her. "I'll be back," held told her the night before he was shipped back to the States, and he still remembered what she'd said in reply: "Ah, cherie, never make a promise you cannot keep." He'd meant it at the time, but things had kept him from doing it. First, there was the news, waiting for him when he reached home, that his mother had died in the same Spanish Flu epidemic that had nearly gotten him. And then, after a decent period of mourning, there had been college, and graduate school, and working on his doctorate, and Marion--Indy hurried over that particular memory quickly--and then his job at Marshall ... one thing after another, all water under the bridge.

And here he was, back again. By now, Fleurette probably had six kids, a triple poitrine, and the beginnings of a mustache, but Indy would have liked to see her once more just for old times' sake. The only fly in the ointment--other than the fact that he hadn't the first clue as to where to find her--was that she also probably had a huge Orangutan of a husband with whom the concept of Auld Lang Syne would cut no ice whatsoever. Too bad, though. Indy leaned back in his chair and began to hum a little tune to himself: "How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm, After They've Seen Paree?"

He had drained his third glass of wine and had just checked his watch for the tenth time when a hush fell over the restaurant and male heads turned toward the door in unison. Sarka stood silhouetted against the big plate-glass window, lit from behind by the last bright rays of the setting midsummersun. She was dressed all in black again--this time her dress was of flowing chiffon--and she wore a wide-brimmed hat with a veil. She looked, Indy thought, entirely ravishing. Many admiring glances followed after her as Monsieur Arnaud showed her to their table.

Once seated, she drew back her veil and removed the hat entirely. "Such a bother in this heat," she said, "But I am sensitive to the sun. I am sorry

to be late. I hope you did not think that you had been ... how is it you Americans say... stood up."

"No, well ... yes, the thought had crossed my mind," Indy admitted. "To tell you the truth, I'm still wondering why you agreed to go out with me when you could have had your pick of any man in Paris."

She took his hand coquettishly. "But, Indiana--you are my pick in all of Paris." Her face briefly took on a soft, faraway look. "You remind me of someone I knew long ago. And I can never resist a man with honey-colored eyes."

Monsieur Arnaud arrived with the menus and took their orders, bringing another bottle of wine to augment the first, which was already half empty.

When he was gone, Sarka said, "And now, Indiana, while we wait, you must tell me about the occult. It is a subject that fascinates me endlessly."

And so they talked, then, and after their food had arrived. Sarka made it seem effortless, drawing him out with question after skillful question so that he never became self-conscious or let the conversation flag. Indy noticed that she ate and drank sparingly, although she seemed to enjoy what little she took, and she was always ready to fill his wine glass whenever it grew empty. It was a strange, rather masculine thing for a woman to do, Indy thought, until the effects of the wine and the distraction of her presence made him stop thinking about it at all.

They were finishing their dessert when one of the waiters passed their table carrying the specialty of the house, a platter of escargots in their shells, piled around a container of heavily herbed melted butter. He set it down at the next table.

Indy wrinkled his nose at the pungent odor. He knew snails were considered to be a great delicacy, but, personally, he'd be damned if he'd eat anything that had crawled under rocks. Just the sort of thing Belloq probably would enjoy!

His brow furrowed with concern as he saw Sarka put her hand to her mouth and turn even paler than normal. "Is anything wrong?"

She shook her head. "No. I am all right. It is just that I cannot abide the smell of garlic."

Indy leapt at the opportunity. "We could get out of here and go somewhere else," he said, in a tone of studied casualness. "A night club maybe, or ... my hotel."

She met his gaze evenly and said, "Your hotel."

All during the taxi ride over and as he fumbled with the key to his room, the little wheels and cogs in Indy's brain were spinning busily. Since Sarka had agreed to accompany him back to his hotel room, it seemed a foregone conclusion that she would end up in his bed, but how best, he wondered, to manage it gracefully? The game had to be played, after all. Perhaps he could begin by suggesting a drink...

At last he got the key into the lock, and the latch clicked open. Indy, more affected by the wine than he'd previously realized, swayed as the door swung abruptly inward. Laughing musically, Sarka moved to steady him, her supporting arm around his chest surprisingly strong for a woman her size.

Indy hadn't have worried. The moment the door shut behind them, she was in his arms, pulling him down into a torrid kiss, her tongue darting teasingly between his lips. Clearly Sarka was not a woman who liked to play coy games.

Soon she tore herself away and stepped back, reaching up behind her neck to unfasten her dress, which slid from her shoulders and fell around her feet with a whispering rustle of chiffon. They had not bothered to turn on the light, but the full moon shining in through the parted window draperies provided enough illumination for Indy to see plainly that she was wearing nothing underneath.

She came to him again, eagerly undoing the knot of his tie and helping him shrug out of his coat. No sooner had Indy kicked off his shoes, than she pressed him backward, and they fell onto the bed in a tangle of limbs. Together they made short work of the rest of his clothing.

They made love in a storm of passion. In spite of the urgency of his desire, Indy did his best to hold back, mindful of her pleasure as well as his own--Fleurette had taught him that if nothing else. And yet, Sarka puzzled him. True, she moaned and clawed his back at the appropriate moments, but Indy could sense a hint of detachment about her, as if the present activity were not of paramount importance to her, as if she were ... waiting. At last Indy could wait no longer, and he abandoned himself to the moment's sensation.

Afterward, he rolled onto his back with a relaxed sigh. Sarka snuggled in close to the hollow of his shoulder. "Yes ... that was so nice," she murmured softly, stroking his face. "And now for me..."

She began to nuzzle the side of his neck, her lips caressing him from ear-lobe to collarbone with the teasing hesitation of a hovering butterfly. Jones closed his eyes happily and felt his desire begin to stir again. Maybe in a little while...

He never finished the thought, for at that moment her sharp teeth closed on his neck.

At first it hurt, a brief, piercing pain that faded quickly. "Hey, that's kinky," Indy thought. Sophisticate though he considered himself, the country boy from Aurora lay close below the surface.

Before he could move or protest, the pain was replaced by a new sensation, an almost unbearable sweetness that began in the core of his being and spread throughout his entire body. In comparison, the pleasure of their recent love-making seemed paltry, no more than a sneeze. Indy didn't know what epicurean love-tricks Sarka might be using on him, and he no longer cared; he just lay back and enjoyed.

When she finally drew away from him, he didn't want it to end. "Don't stop," he muttered drowsily.

"But I must." She gently disengaged herself from his embrace and got to her feet, weaving slightly as she did so. "My goodness, Indiana, you have madame quite tipsy," she laughed. "I did not realize you had drunk so much wine tonight."

"Hey, don't go away," he protested, trying to rise and come after her. He fell back against the pillows, overcome by sudden dizziness. "We can do it again. Just give me a couple of minutes."

Sarka shook her head. "Oh no, Indiana, that is one thing we most definitely cannot do again. You will be of no possible further use to me tonight--or to any other woman for that matter. A problem of ... hydraulics, shall we say?"

She walked across the room and sat down in the open window, propping one leg up on the sill, totally unconcerned about her nudity. Her hair had come loose during their tussling, and it cascaded down her back in a long dark mass. The moonlight pouring in through the parted curtains bathed her naked body in a pallid white light, yet her skin no longer seemed at all

pale; rather it was pink and ruddy. Her lips seemed full and red, almost overblown, and there were two bright excited spots on her cheeks.

Her expression was distracted, as if she were mulling something over. "And yet, if you are disappointed, there is one final experience left to us," she began slowly. "It has been a long time since I had the ultimate pleasure of creating another of my kind. Would you like eternal life, Indiana Jones?"

She stared at him long and hard, then suddenly shook her head. "No. I think not. I have known you only a short time, Indiana, yet I have already sensed a streak of ruthlessness in you. It is well to have you for a one-time lover, but I would not want to have you as a...competitor."

Something in her words began to set off alarm bells even in Indy's benumbed mind. Puzzled, he put his hand to the still tingling spot on his neck where she had bitten him. Her fingers came away wet. Even in the color-leaching moonlight, it was plain to see what the dark fluid was. She had more than broken the skin, she had...

Jones looked from his bloodstained fingers to Sarka in dawning comprehension. She smiled the slow smile of a cat that has just ingested a dozen canaries. "My God," he whispered, "you're a..."

"Vrykolakas? Calcantzari? Undead ... vampire? Are those the words you are looking for?"

"You can't be! It isn't possible!"

"Why not? Because there are no such things as vampires? I can assure you, Indiana, there are."

"But I saw you eating and drinking--and walking around in daylight!"

She sighed patiently, as if imparting knowledge to a rather slow child. "I eat and drink for enjoyment, but that is the only benefit I gain from it. Blood is the only substance that can give me the nourishment I need to stay alive. As for the sun, it is true that I am very sensitive to it. A sunburn that would be a minor inconvenience to you might prove nearly fatal to me. For that reason I prefer the night, but if I shield my skin, I am safe enough during the day. I surely do not sleep from dawn to dusk in a coffin lined with my native earth." She laughed scornfully, as if the very idea were ludicrous.

"Listen to me, Indiana Jones, 'expert in the occult', and you may learn thing or two this night," she continued. "Forget about the old myths and foolish superstitions. The transformation that makes a new member of my kind is a simple metabolic change, bereft of magic. The body becomes endlessly self-renewing and virtually indestructible--only the burning of the body to ashes or the destruction of the brain and nervous system can kill us. All aging ceases, and strength is increased tenfold. And all that one needs to do to accomplish this is to take a small drop of the blood of one who has made the change--as I did the blood of my first lover so many, many years ago--and to live from then on on the blood of others."

The blood of others. As Sarka spoke the words, her moonlit face remained so chillingly dispassionate that Indy almost shuddered despite his state of unnatural lethargy. Eternal life; it sounded idyllic, and no doubt she believed it to be so, but Indy wondered. What must it be like to live forever unchanging, for millenia upon millenia, growing ever further apart from the human beings you fed upon? Already Indy could see traces of a creeping metamorphosis in Sarka's face, something cold and amoral about her pale eyes. She was no longer precisely...human.

How old was she, Jones asked himself, remembering her cryptic remark about Whitby's dig--not so very mysterious when he realized that she must have been alive to walk the streets of the city itself and drink the blood of inhabitants long since turned to dust.

We must be like mayflies to her ... or cattle, he thought. If this was eternal life, then she could have it.

"I know most humans believe my kind to be evil, soulless creatures," she went on, "and I suppose those men who would burn poor wretches at the stake for crossing themselves with the wrong hand would consider the Power I worship-- an ancient, universal force that encompasses both light and dark--to be malevolent. But I am no demon, I can assure you. Brandish a crucifix at me; I do not care." She paused to laugh again. "If we had the time, which we do not, I could, without the words turning to fire in my throat, recite for you the Pater Noster, Pharaoh Akhenaton's entire Hymn to the Sun, and several of the Rig Vedas. Indeed, I have done so in the past, whenever it was necessary to save my skin."

She hopped lightly down off the windowsill and came back across the room, her bare feet moving noiselessly on the thick carpet. "By now you must be wondering why I am willing to speak so freely tonight, to tell you so many of my secrets. True, the alcohol in your blood has loosened my tongue, but it is no matter--you will be no danger to me."

She sat down beside him, and as she leaned her face close to his, one thick lock of her black hair escaped from the rest and fell onto his chest in a heavy coil. It occurred to Indy that he should be afraid, very afraid, but as her pale eyes caught and held his gaze, he seemed to lose his power of will. She could kill him now, he realized, drain the rest of his blood and finish the job, and he would be unable to lift a finger to stop her. Part of his mind was cold with horror, but a part of him ached with a dark longing for her to do it, just so that he might again experience that indescribable pleasure as the last of his consciousness ebbed away. Paralyzed, he watched her lips descend...

And she kissed his forehead. "You have no need to fear me, Indiana," she said, as if she had sensed his thoughts. "I have never taken anyone against his will, nor have I taken more than I require to live. I do not kill." Her voice held a sad, almost pleading note, as if the reassurance were as much for her benefit as for his.

Quickly she composed herself and spoke on, stroking him as if she were calming a frightened animal. "I will look into your eyes, and you will forget what has passed between us." Again her pale eyes bored into him. "Forget, Indiana," she whispered.

Abruptly she bit her lip and sighed. "No. I can see that you cannot be counted among the weak-minded. You may remember, but it will seem as a dream to you. And it is to your benefit that it be so. If you should speak of this to anyone, you will be thought a madman, and madmen are locked away. Take my advice, Indiana Jones; tonight was a dream."

She rose from the bed and slipped quickly into her dress. She re-coiled her hair about her head and secured it, checking her appearance briefly in the mirror of the room's dressing table.

"And now, my dear," she said, "I must be on my way. How handy it would be if I could indeed transform myself into a bat and flap my way home over the rooftops, but, alas, I must content myself with a more prosaic form of transportation." She grinned almost impishly. "I think these Parisian taxi-cabs will be the true death of me if nothing else is!"

At the door, she turned to him one last time, with a smile that chilled him. "Good night, Indiana Jones. I will not say good-bye, but rather au revoir, for I will be back some day." With that, she was gone.

Shivering, Indy pulled the covers over his head and fell into a fitful sleep.

"My God, Indiana, you look like death warmed over! Late night of it?"

Indy almost smiled at the question in spite of his rotten mood. That was Marcus Brody for you. Even though he was no doubt dying to know, that was as close as Indy's well-bred friend would ever come to asking how the big date had gone. "I don't know, Marcus. I think I must've gotten drunk and missed it."

Indy wasn't holding out. He had wakened that morning with the granddaddy of all hangovers, the effects of which he was still suffering, and a strange blank where his memory of the previous evening ought to have been. In all of his years of drinking, that had never happened before, and it worried him.

He sincerely hoped he hadn't behaved too obnoxiously. Again, he searched over his recollection of the night before, trying to remember something, anything. It was no use. He remembered leaving the restaurant with Sarka, and then nothing at all until the bizarre, alcohol-induced nightmares that had plagued him all that night. They had been real whoppers and All of them about Sarka. Indy remembered one in particular in which her long hair had turned into hissing snakes that had coiled themselves on his chest. And another especially vivid one which was even more outlandish. It was so real, in fact, that he almost wondered if ...

No, it couldn't be. He didn't want it to be. And as for those strange marks on his neck, well, he had probably scratched himself with a cufflink or something while he was getting undressed in his drunken stupor. That had to be the explanation.

"Well, you should take better care of yourself," Marcus said, breaking into his thoughts. "You're pale as a ghost. You don't want to become ill away from home, you know."

Indy shook his head impatiently. "Quit acting like my mother. It's only a hangover."

"Sometimes, in a case like this, a little hair of the dog..."

Jones fought down his rising gorge and shook his head weakly. "This is all I'm having today," he said, holding up his glass of Vichy water. He'd been drinking the stuff all day, with an almost overpowering thirst.

At that moment, the two Americans became aware that the noise of the party surrounding them had subsided, as a couple made a late entrance. Indy

turned to see them first. It was Sarka Radecevic, looking rosy and radiant, on the arm of Rene Belloq. As they passed by on their way into the room, Sarka nodded cordially, while Belloq flashed Indy a smile of unabashed gloating.

For some inexplicable reason, the sight filled Indy with a savage glee.

He had just discovered that his passion for Sarka seemed to have burned itself out utterly; Belloq was welcome to her. A strange non sequitur of a thought popped unbidden into Indy's head: "Just wait 'til he gets her home!" He began to laugh out loud.

"Are you all right, Indiana?" Brody asked, in sudden concern.

"It's okay, Marcus. A thought just struck me funny, that's all," Indy said, still chuckling as if over a private joke. "I don't think I've ever seen two people more perfectly suited to each other."

With one final look at Belloq and the dark woman, Indiana Jones put a companionable arm around his friend's shoulder. "You're right, Marcus," he said. "I think I could use that drink after all."

End

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