

Britain, Colonial India and Gothic Fiction

City of Ghosts, Extract 1: Assassination

Caxton Hall, Westminster, London

13 March 1940

Sir Michael O'Dwyer was a distinguished-looking gentleman with silvery-white hair and pale skin. Age had caught up with him and the skin around his jaw line had begun to sag. But his eyes retained the steely determination that had seen him through his time as Governor of the Punjab two decades earlier – or at least that's what he wanted the public to believe. He sat perfectly still, listening with interest to those around him. What a shame, thought Udham, that O'Dwyer hadn't listened to the voices of the people he'd governed all those years ago.

Lord Zetland brought the meeting to a close and the audience gave a small round of polite applause. As he heard the clapping, Udham found himself drifting back to that fateful afternoon in Amritsar in 1919; to the event that had set him on this path and given his life purpose. There he was, stumbling aimlessly through the smoke-filled darkness. . .

For twenty-one years Udham had bided his time, travelling to many countries and planning his revenge. Eventually he'd found himself in England, in the heart of the beast that had taken hold of his motherland. Now here he was, a revolver tucked into his waist-band, ready to satisfy the ghosts of Amritsar; to help those restless spirits find their peace.

'So many you kill,' he whispered, directing his remark at O'Dwyer. Not that anyone could hear him. People had begun to stand up, preparing to leave. This was his chance . . .

He pushed his way through the crowd, past chatting white men and women, until he was in front of the panel. His eyes hardened and his heart raced. He pulled out the gun, looking directly at O'Dwyer. The old man seemed unable to understand what was going on at first. The skin around his eyes began to crease however, when the truth dawned. His mouth opened and formed a perfect O.

Udham said a silent prayer, and fired.