

#THE HIDDEN CANVAS

A Forgotten Painting
Changed Everything
for Alma Greer

What had first seemed like a modest decorative item was now understood as a significant historical artwork. Eventually, the painting was sold for \$2.3 million



In a quiet home in Memphis, a chance discovery in an ordinary closet changed one family's understanding of value, history, and inheritance. Alma Greer was cleaning out her late father's belongings when she came across something unexpected, a rolled-up canvas tied with a piece of twine, hidden on a high shelf she had searched twice before.

Curious, she carefully unrolled it on her kitchen table. What she found was a moody, atmospheric landscape: a river cutting through dense trees under a muted sky. The painting carried no visible signature on the front, only the quiet presence of age and craftsmanship. At first glance, it seemed like a simple decorative piece, beautiful, but unremarkable.

Seeking clarity, Alma brought the painting to a local antique dealer in Memphis. The dealer barely studied it before dismissing it as a mid-20th-century decorative work, likely from the 1940s. He offered her \$200. Moments later, after a brief phone call, he raised his offer to \$800, smiling a little too confidently. Something about the sudden change made Alma uneasy. She declined and left with the painting.

Still uncertain but unwilling to sell quickly, she sought a second opinion. A professional conservator in Memphis examined the canvas more closely. This time, the assessment was entirely different. The painting was identified as an authentic American landscape associated with the tradition of the Hudson River School, a style known for its romantic portrayal of nature and detailed realism. Its composition and technique aligned with documented works that had passed through respected collections and auction houses over decades.

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An illustration from Singh's children's book 'Gift of the Forest.'

• Kshema Jatuhkarna

Reginald Lal Singh's most memorable screen appearance came at the very end of his acting career. In 1967, he played Captain Chandra in *Court Martial*, an episode of the original *Star Trek* series. It was a fittingly unusual final role for a man whose life had already seen adventures that rivalled the fictional worlds of Hollywood.

From the early 1950s onward, Singh appeared in a succession of Hollywood productions, usually in minor roles. He was also employed as a "technical" consultant whenever studios sought "authentic" information about the "Orient." Yet, acting was only one chapter in an eventful life that had taken him from the jungles of South America to the Indian freedom movement, from wartime rescue efforts in the Atlantic to political activism in the United States.

Much of Singh's remarkable story survives through his memoirs, preserved in the New York Public Library and through accounts written by his wife, Gwen, whose papers are held in the archives of the University of California, Los Angeles.

Childhood

Born in British Guiana (now Guyana) on August 8, 1905, Reginald Augustus Babulal Singh was usually known simply as Lal. His father, Baboolal, was from Kanpur and his mother, Lakshmi, was from Saharanpur. They had emigrated as indentured labourers to Demerara



Singh in Hitchcock's 'To Catch a Thief.'

in the 1890s to work on its sugar plantations.

Singh's father abandoned the family when he was still an infant. Years later, he learned that Baboolal had travelled to the United States and served with the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe during World War I.

Life on the plantations proved difficult for Lakshmi. She fled with her young son to Morawhanna, a port settlement in western British Guiana. There, in circumstances that would later become part of family lore, Singh was temporarily left with members of the indigenous Makushi community. According to Gwen's account, the group "spirited" him deep into the interior, up the Kaituma River and into the Amazonian rainforest.

In 1914, Lakshmi appealed to a Jesuit priest for help in finding her son. Accompanied by Arawak boatmen, the priest travelled into the jungle in search of the settlement where Singh was living.

Singh later described the encounter in vivid terms: "The priest entered the camp carrying a crucifix, a sign of peace. The Indian blowguns were pointed, at the priest's throat." Curious about the religious symbol, young Singh hurried forward, inadvertently preventing the Makushis from "taking the priest's life."

Reunited with his mother, he began his education at a mission school. Yet, the wider world exerted a powerful fascination. Ships arriving from Georgetown, stories of gold prospectors and his mother's memories of India all stirred his imagination.

A Savage Comes to Syracuse

In 1920, Baboolal wrote from Syracuse, New York, inviting Lakshmi and Singh to join him. Their arrival attracted considerable local attention from the local press. One newspaper greeted the teenager with the sensational headline "A Savage Comes to Syracuse."

An acquaintance of his father, Dr. Thomas Halstead, offered him room and board in exchange for odd jobs. The transition was difficult. Unaccustomed to snow and ice, Singh found the winters harsh and frequently arrived late to school after slipping on icy streets. Still, his hard work ensured that he passed his exams.

His parents soon separated once more. Feeling homesick, Lakshmi returned to Guyana. When Baboolal

The Freedom
Fighter Who
Became Captain
On 'Star Trek'

He joined the Indian National Congress and worked in Bengal, hoping to organise workers and rally the citizenry. But British authorities monitored his movements and, following his participation in anti-colonial protests, he was arrested and imprisoned in Madras jail for two years. The conditions in the prison were abysmal. He was confined in a cramped cell with several other prisoners and made to survive on meagre rations.

#STRANGE STORIES



died a few years later in the early 1920s, Singh found himself isolated in a foreign land.

He eventually enrolled in a medical programme at Syracuse University. The university's cosmopolitan club exposed him to students from around the world and to a wide range of political viewpoints. He wrote:

"The socialists were good bridge players; the pacifists smoked the best tobacco, and were good partners at tennis and dancing, the imperialists dressed in the best suits and were shrewd poker players. The propagandists always borrowed money, while the communists knew all the speakasies."

Of these groups, he joined the communists, whom he believed were genuinely committed to "fighting for freedom and justice." Around the same time, he began reading about India's struggle for independence and the growing influence of Mahatma Gandhi. The pull of his ancestral homeland was potent: he wanted to drop everything, including his studies, and travel to India.

During the Depression years, Singh found himself in Philadelphia. There, fortuitous circumstances led him to the president of a tannery firm trading in Indian goatskins. For a year, Singh "learnt the art of selecting skins, including a study of methods employed by Indian dealers in making bad skin look prime good skin." It was practical preparation for his "spiritual voyage" to India.

Madras was Singh's first stop in India. In the vibrant southern city, he encountered many more stories about Gandhi and the independence movement. One man who carried a photo of Gandhi in his shirt pocket, close to his heart, described how India was changing. For Singh, there was "something moving, something powerful" to hear everyone speak of a "great man in my people's country."

In a later account published in a Los Angeles newspaper, Singh added a more dramatic detail, claiming he had travelled to India carrying arms and ammunition, whose discovery might have resulted in his arrest and possible execution. He joined the Indian National Congress and worked in Bengal, hoping to organise workers and rally the citizenry. But British authorities monitored his movements and, following his participation in anti-colonial protests, he was arrested and imprisoned in Madras jail for two years. The conditions in the prison were abysmal. He was confined in a cramped cell with several other prisoners and made to survive on meagre rations.

After his release, Singh travelled home via London, where he sought out V. K. Krishna Menon. For the next four and a half years, he



worked closely with Menon's India India Welfare League and the former Ghadar movement, which he felt was no longer radical. Eventually, he relocated to San Francisco to continue his work.

Spiritual Voyage

During this time, he also completed a children's book, *Gift of the Forest*. Drawing on Indian family life and his experiences among the Makushi tribe in the Amazonian forest, the book evoked the cultures that had shaped his childhood. Published in New York in 1942 by Longmans, Green and Co., it was co-authored with Eloise Lowmshery and illustrated by Ann Vaughan.

Around the same time, Singh began corresponding with Georgia Lloyd, a feminist activist associated with the Campaign for World Government. Lloyd belonged to the family that owned and published the Chicago Tribune.

Rescue

While in London in 1939, Singh received an unexpected visitor: Joseph P. Kennedy Jr., eldest son of Joseph P. Kennedy, the American ambassador to Britain. Interested in India's freedom struggle, the younger Kennedy invited Singh to the embassy, where father and son encouraged him to continue his political work in the United States.

Soon afterwards, Singh embarked for America. As the ship carrying him set sail, it passed the British warship HMS Courageous that, shortly after, was struck by a



Celebrating National Dessert Day

National Dessert Day, celebrated every year on October 14, is a sweet reminder to indulge in life's delightful treats. From creamy cheesecakes and decadent chocolates to fruity tarts and warm pastries, desserts bring joy to every occasion. Beyond their irresistible taste, desserts often symbolize celebration, comfort, and togetherness, whether shared with family, friends, or savoured solo. On this day, bakers, chefs, and dessert lovers alike honour creativity and flavour, experimenting with classic recipes or trying innovative sweets. So go ahead, treat yourself to your favourite dessert, and savour the simple pleasures that make life a little sweeter.



Singh and Gwen in the city of Tyre while on a round-the-world trip.

Nazi U-boat, erupting in a tremendous explosion before sinking. Singh's ship, the Collingsworth, immediately turned around to rescue survivors. Hundreds of wounded and burned passengers were pulled from the sea. Eyewitnesses noted that Singh, using his medical training, worked tirelessly to resuscitate the rescued.

Upon returning to the US, Singh established the monthly newsletter *India News* in 1941 with financial backing from Lloyd. Operating from offices in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., the publication advocated for Indian independence.

Throughout the 1940s, Singh travelled extensively, lecturing on Gandhi, non-violence, India's role in the Second World War and the challenges facing an independent nation. He later recalled delivering as many as 11 speeches in a day.

Political organising among Indian communities in California was challenging for him. Most Indian-origin farmers in the state's Central Valley were Punjabi speakers, creating a linguistic block in his outreach. He also found it difficult to work with Mubarek Ali Khan's India Welfare League and the former Ghadar movement, which he felt was no longer radical. Eventually, he relocated to San Francisco to continue his work.

Hollywood Stint

As editor of the India News, he generally used the name R Lal Singh. In Hollywood, however, he was often credited as Reginald Lal Singh.

His screen career began with *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and continued with *Thunder in the East* and *Storm Over Tibet* (1952). Like many Cold War productions of the era, the latter films portrayed American protagonists saving the world from the ostensible evil of communism.

In Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief* (1955), Singh appeared briefly as a turbaned maharaja adorned with jewellery.

Other roles followed. He worked as a technical consultant, and appeared as an uncredited bearer in *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), and played a bartender in *Khyber Patrol* (1954) and a UN clerk in *The Bamboo Prison* (1954). His final roles were single-episode television appearances in *The Family Man* (1966) and *Star Trek*.

Following their marriage in October 1956, Singh and Gwen Mae Hobson established the India-America Society in Los Angeles. The organisation sponsored annual

India Week celebrations, drawing students, scholars and visitors interested in Indian culture. It also provided assistance to Indian students studying in California universities.

In 1964, the couple completed an ambitious journey through 29 countries. One newspaper described their lives as "an extended adventure that flows like the path of a long novel."

Their travels took them to the temples of Cambodia and the jungles of Indonesia. They were in India just as the war with China broke out. Gwen later recalled drifting on a houseboat in Kashmir and seeing the Taj Mahal on a full moon night.

Both viewed India as a nation of promise and progress. They acknowledged its challenges, particularly population pressures and uneven development, but remained optimistic about its future. They were also pleased by growing American interest in Indian clothing, music and culture. At the same time, they worried that Indian religion and philosophy were being misunderstood, particularly by the "many hippy youth."

The couple hoped to return to India, but it was not to be. Reginald Lal Singh died in 1970 at the age of 65.

His life defied easy categorisation. He was at various times a jungle child, medical student, political activist, prisoner, author, lecturer, editor, wartime rescuer, cultural ambassador and Hollywood actor. Few people travel so far, geographically or intellectually, in a single lifetime.



R. Lal Singh.

#CHILLI MANGO

The Long, Juicy
Mango with a
Tiny Seed

The fruit develops into a long, slender shape rather than the familiar broad mango form. This unusual appearance has made it particularly interesting

Mangoes come in an astonishing variety of shapes, sizes, colours, textures, and flavours. Among the more unusual varieties is the Chilli Mango, a mango that immediately catches the eye because of its distinctive elongated shape. Slender and curved, the fruit can resemble a large green or red chilli, hence its unusual name.

Unlike the traditional round or oval mango, the Chilli Mango is long and narrow, making it instantly recognisable. It is also known for its juicy flesh and remarkably small or thin seed, which means that a greater proportion of the fruit can be enjoyed as pulp. Some descriptions of the variety note its sweet and tangy flavour and aromatic flesh.

A Mango That Looks Like a Chilli

The most striking feature of this mango is its form.

The fruit develops into a long, slender shape rather than the familiar broad mango form. This unusual appearance has made it particularly interesting to mango collectors and growers looking for distinctive varieties. Indian plant sellers currently market chilli mango plants as a specialty variety suited to warm Indian conditions.

But the unusual appearance is only part of its appeal.

Cut open, the fruit reveals soft, juicy flesh, surrounding a very small, thin seed. This is particularly attractive to people who prefer mangoes with a high flesh-to-seed ratio. Descriptions of chilli mangoes from Asian sources similarly highlight their small seeds and abundant edible flesh.

Juicy, Sweet and Tangy

The flavour of chilli mango is another reason it stands apart. Although the name suggests



heat, the fruit itself is not necessarily spicy like a chilli. Rather, descriptions of the variety associate it with sweetness, juiciness and a pleasant tang or zestiness. Some growers and sellers describe the flavour as sweet with a mild chilli-like sharpness. This combination gives the fruit a refreshing character. It can be eaten fresh, enjoyed as a snack, or used in preparations where the natural sweetness and tang of mango are desirable.

From Asia to India

Chilli Mango is associated with Asian mango-growing regions, and varieties described by this name are now also being cultivated and sold in India.



There is some inconsistency in available descriptions about its precise origin: some Indian sources describe it as an Indian-developed or cultivated variety, while others identify it as an introduction from Thailand or associate similar chilli-shaped mangoes with China and other parts of Asia.

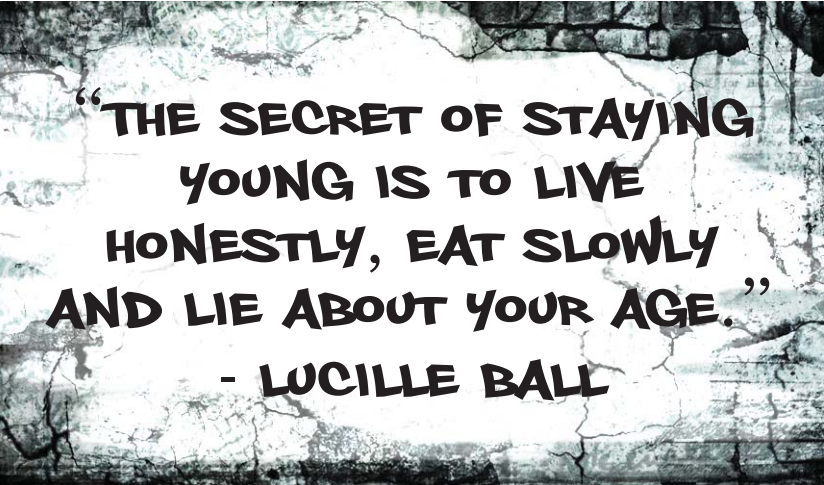
What is clear is that the fruit has found interest among Indian growers, particularly as a specialty mango variety. Plants are now offered for cultivation in India, with sellers highlighting their suitability for warm and tropical or semitropical climates.

A Curiosity for Mango Lovers

India already has an extraordinary collection of mango varieties, from Alphonso and Dasher to Langra, Kesar, Banganapalli and many lesser-known regional varieties. Chilli mango adds another fascinating shape to this diversity.

Its appeal is not necessarily that it replaces the classic mangoes. Instead, it offers something different: an unusual shape, juicy flesh, a tiny seed, and a distinctive sweet-tangy taste. It is a reminder that the world of mangoes is much larger than the familiar varieties found in ordinary fruit markets.

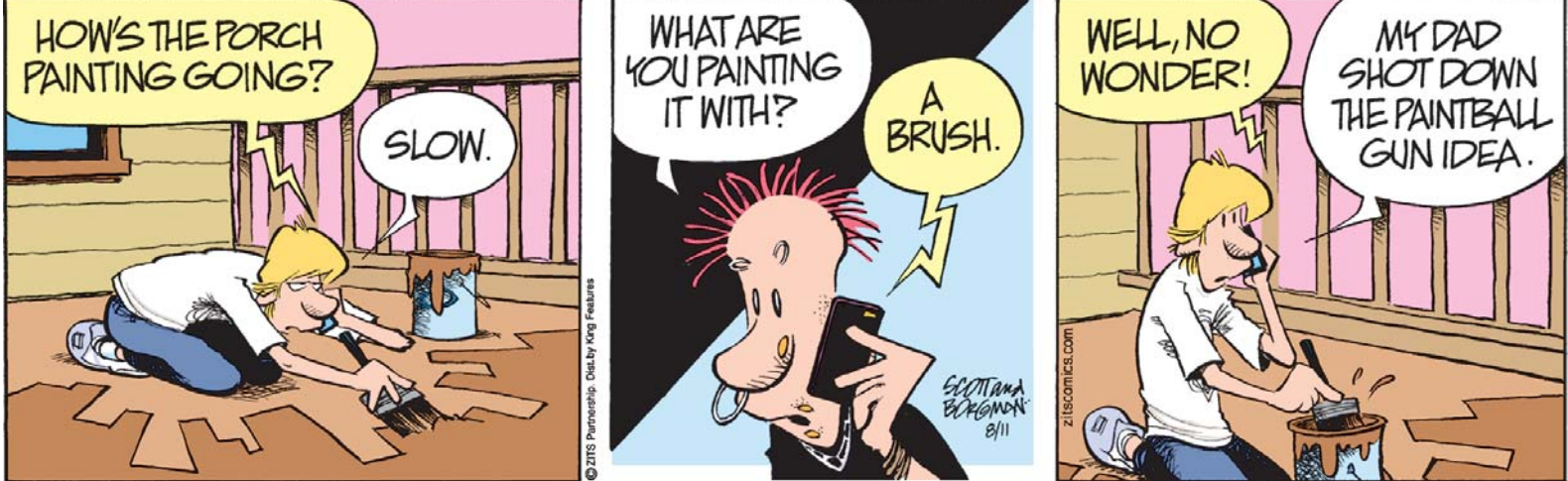
THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman