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THE ADVENTURES OF KATHLYN

By HAROLD MAC GRATH.



KATHLYN AND HER FATHER WERE FORCED TO WITNESS THE EVENT, DRESSED IN NATIVE COSTUME, THEIR FACES STAINED, AND THEIR HEARTS SWELLING WITH IMPOTENT ANGER AND DESPAIR.

UMBALLAH'S CAPTAIN OF GUARDS SEES WINNIE PASS THROUGH THE GATE TO THE CITY OF ALLAHA.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Kathlyn Hare, believing her father, Col. Hare, in peril, has summoned her, leaves her home in California to go to him in Allaha, India. Umballah, pretending to be the throne of that principality, has imprisoned the colonel, named by the late king as his heir, because he fears the American may insist on his royal rights. Upon her arrival in Allaha, Kathryn is informed by Umballah that her father being dead, she is to be queen, and must marry him forthwith. Because of her refusal she is sentenced to undergo two ordeals with wild beasts.

John Bruce, an American and fellow passenger on the boat which brought Kathryn to Allaha, saves her life. The elephant which carries her from the scene of her trials becomes frightened and runs away, separating her from Bruce and the rest of the party.

After a ride filled with peril she takes refuge in a ruined temple. The holy men and villagers, believing her to be an ancient priestess, raise from the tomb, allow her to remain as the guardian of the sacred fire. But Kathryn's haven is also the abode of a lion, and she is forced to flee from it, with the savage beast in pursuit. She escapes and finds a retreat in the jungle, only to fall into the hands of a band of slave traders, who bring her to Allaha to the public mart. She is sold to Umballah, who, finding her still unsubmitive, throws her into the dungeon with her father.

Bruce and his friends effect the release of Kathryn and the colonel. Umballah's attempt to recapture them is unsuccessful, and the fugitives are given shelter in the palace of Sala Khan. Supplied with camels and servants by that hospitable prince, the party endeavors to reach the coast, but, are overpowered by a band of brigands, and the encounter results in the colonel being delivered to Umballah. Kathryn and Bruce escape from their captors and return to Allaha, where Kathryn learns that her father, while nominally king, is in reality a prisoner. It is arranged to find a bride for him. Candidates come from near and far, and Kathryn gains access to the palace, by appearing disguised as one of them. During the ceremony of betrothal the leopard, which guard the treasury become free and enter the throne room, throwing the entire court into a wild panic. This makes it possible for Bruce and Ramabai to rescue Kathryn and her father, and the party steals away from Allaha.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE CORONATION OF WINNIE.

WITH the assistance of the shepherd Kathryn went down the rope agilely and safely. Once firmly on her feet, she turned to thank the wild-eyed hillman. But her best student (and she was able to speak and understand quite a little by now) fell on ears which heard but did not seem to hear. The man, mild and harmless enough, for all his wild eyes, shrunk back, for no woman of his kind had ever looked like this. Kathryn, with a deal of foreboding, repeated the phrase, and asked the way back to the hunter's rest house. He shook his head; he understood nothing. But there is one language which is universal the world over, and that is sign language. Kathryn quickly stooped and drew in the dust the shape of the rest house. Then she pointed in the direction from whence she had come. He smiled and nodded excitedly. He understood now. Next, being unarmed, she felt the need of some sort of weapon. So she drew the shape of a rifle in the dust, then produced four rupees, all she had. The shepherd gurgled delightedly, ran into the hut, and returned with a rifle of modern make and a belt of cartridges. With a gesture he signified that it was useless to him because he did not know how to use it.

He took the rupees and Kathryn took the rifle, vaguely wondering how she came into the possession of this poverty-stricken hillman. Of one thing she was certain; it had become his either through violence of his own or of others. She examined the breech and found a dead shell, which she cast out. The rifle carried six cartridges, and she loaded skillfully, much to the astonishment of the hillman. Then she swung the butt to her shoulder and fired up at the ledge where the panthers had last been seen.

The hillman cried out in alarm and scuttled away to his hut. When he peered forth again Kathryn made a friendly gesture, and he approached timidly. Once more she pointed to the dust, at the picture of the rest house; and then, by many stabs of his finger in the air, he succeeded in making the way back sufficiently clear to Kathryn, who smiled, shouldered the rifle, and strode confidently down the winding path; but also she was alert and watchful.

There was not a bit of rust on the rifle, and the fact that one bullet had sped smoothly convinced her that the weapon was serviceable. Some careful hunter had once possessed it, for it was abundantly oiled. To whom had it belonged? It was of German make; but that signified nothing. It might have belonged to an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a Russian; more likely the latter, since this was one of the localities where they crossed and recrossed with their note books to be utilized against that day when the Bear dropped down from the north and tackled the Lion.

Kathryn had to go down to the very bottom of the ravine. She must follow the goat path, no matter where it wound, for this ultimately would lead her to the rest house. As she started up the final incline, through the cedars and pines, she heard the bark of the wolf, the red wolf who hunted in packs of twenty or thirty, in reality far more menacing than a tiger or a panther, since no hunter could kill a whole pack.

To this wolf, when hunting his kill, the tiger gave wide berth; the bear took to his cave, and all fleet-footed things of the jungle fled in panic. Kathryn climbed as rapidly as she could. She dared not mount a tree, for the red wolf would outwit her. She must go on. The bark, or yelp, had been a signal; but now there came to her ears the long howl. She had heard it often in the great forests at home. It was the call of the pack that there was to be a kill. She might shoot half a dozen of them, and the living dead, but the main pack would follow on and overtake her.

She swung on upward, catching a sapling here, a limb there, pulling herself over hard bits of going. Once she turned and fired a chance shot just as the direction of the howling. Far away came the roar of one of the mountain lions; and the pack of red wolves became suddenly and magically silent. Kathryn made good use of this interval. But presently the pack raised its howl again, and she knew that the grim struggle was about to begin. She reached the door of the rest house just as the pack, a large one, came into view, heads down, tails streaming. Pundita, who was at the fire preparing the noon meal, seized Kathryn by the arm and hurried her into the house, barricading the door. The wolves, arriving, flung themselves against it savagely. But the door was stout, and only a battering ram in human hands could have made it yield.

Unfortunately, there was no knowing when the men folk would return from their chase of the horses, nor how long the wolves would lay siege. The two women tried shooting, though Pundita was the veriest tyro, being more frightened at the weapon in her hands, than at the howling animals outside. They did little or no damage to the wolves, for the available cracks were not at sufficiently good angles. An hour went by. Kathryn could hear the wolves as they crowded against the door, sniffing the sill.

The colonel, Bruce, Ramabai, and Ahmed had found the horses half a dozen miles away; and they had thrashed the thieving natives soundly and installed the right kind of fear in their breasts. At rifle point they had forced the natives back to the rest house. The crack of their rifles soon announced to Kathryn that the dread of wolves was a thing of the past. She wisely refrained from recounting her experiences. The men had worry enough.

After a hasty meal the journey toward the seaport began in earnest. Umballah's attack had thrown them far out of the regular track. They were now compelled to make a wide detour. Where the journey might have been made in three days, they would be lucky now if they reached the sea under five. The men took turns in standing watch whenever they made camp, and Kathryn nor Pundita had time for idleness. They had learned their lessons; no more carelessness, nothing but the sharpest vigilance from now on.

One day, as the pony caravan made a turn round a ragged promontory, they suddenly passed. Perhaps twenty miles to the west lay the emerald tinted Persian gulf. The colonel slipped off his horse,

dragged Kathryn from her, and began to execute a horripile. He was like a boy.

"The sea, Kiti, the sea! Home and Winnie! out of this devil's caldron! You will come along with us, Bruce?"

"I haven't anything else to do," Bruce smiled back.

Then he gazed at Kathryn, who found herself suddenly filled with strange embarrassment. In times of danger, shame and subterfuge have no place. Herefore she had met Bruce as a man, to whom a glance from her eyes had told her secret. Now that the door to civilization lay but a few miles away, the old conventions dropped their obscuring mantles over her, and she felt ashamed. And there was not a little doubt. Perhaps she had mistaken the look in his eyes, based there in the desert, back in the first day when they had fled together from the ordeals. And yet . . .

On his part, Bruce did not particularly welcome the sea. There might be another man somewhere. No woman so beautiful as Kathryn could possibly be without suitors. And when the journey down to the sea was resumed he became taciturn and moody, and Kathryn's heart correspondingly heavy. The colonel was quite oblivious to this change. He swung his legs free of the primitive stirrups and whistled the air which had been popular in America at the time of his departure.

There was no lightness in the expression of Ramabai and Pundita. They were about to lose these white people forever, and they had grown to love, nay, worship them. More, they must return to face their own kind.

As for Ahmed, he displayed his orientalism by appearing unconcerned. He had made up his mind not to return to America with his master. There was much to do in Allaha, and the spirit of intrigue had laid firm hold of him. He wanted to be near at hand when Ramabai struck his blow. He would break the news to the colonel Sahib before they sailed.

It was 4 o'clock when the caravan entered the little seaport town. A few tramp steamers lay anchored in the offing. A British flag drooped from the stern of one of them. This meant Bombay; and Bombay, in turn, meant Suez, the Mediterranean, and the broad Atlantic.

The air was still and hot, for the Indian summer was now beginning to lay its burning hand upon this great peninsula. The port, still, the white structure of the buildings, blinded the eyes.

They proceeded at once to the single hotel, where they found plenty of accommodation. Then the colonel hurried off to the cable office and wired Winnie. Next he ascertained that the British ship Simla would weigh anchor the following evening for Bombay; that there they could pick up the Delhi, bound for England. There was nothing further to do but wait for the answer to the colonel's cable to Winnie, which would arrive somewhere about noon of the next day.

And the answer struck the hearts of all of them with the coldness of death. Umballah had beaten them. Winnie had sailed weeks ago for Allaha, in search of father and sister.

Near he struck the hearts of all of them with the coldness of death. Umballah had beaten them. Winnie had sailed weeks ago for Allaha, in search of father and sister.

"Sahib, it is fate," he said. "We must return at once to Allaha. Truly, the curse of that old guru sticks like the blood leeches of the Bengal swamps. But as you have faith in your guru, I have faith in mine. Not a hair of our heads shall be harmed."

"I am a very miserable man, Ahmed! God has forsaken me!" The colonel spoke with stoic calm; he was more like the man Ahmed had formerly known.

"No, Allaha has not forsaken; he has forgotten us for a time." And Ahmed strode out to make the arrangements for the return.

"Bruce," said the colonel, "it is time for you to leave us. You are a man. You have stood by us through thick and thin. I cannot ask you to share any of the dangers which now confront us, perhaps more sinister than any we have yet known."

"Don't you want me?" asked Bruce quietly.

Kathryn had gone to her room to hide her tears. "Want you! But no!" The colonel wrung the young man's hand and turned to go back to Kathryn.

"Wait a moment, Colonel. Supposing I wanted to go, what then? Supposing I should say to you what I dare not yet say to your daughter, that I love her better than anything else in all this wide world; that it will be happiness to follow wherever she goes . . . even unto death?"

The colonel wheeled. "Bruce do you mean that?" "With all my heart, sir. But please say nothing to Kathryn till this affair ends, one way or the other. She might be stirred by a sense of gratitude, and later regret it. When we get out of this—and I rather believe in the prophecy of Ahmed's guru or fakir—then I'll speak. I have always been rather a lonely man. There's been no real good reason. I have always desired to be loved for my own

sake, and not for the money I have."

"Money?" repeated the colonel. Never had he in any way associated this healthy young hunter with money. Did he not make a business of trapping and selling wild animals, like himself? "Money! I did not know that you had any, Bruce."

"I am the son of Roger Bruce."

"What! The man who owned nearly all of Peru and half the railroads in South America?"

"Yes, you see, Colonel, we are something alike. We never ask questions. It would have been far better if I had. Because I did not question Kathryn when I first met her, I feel half to blame for her misfortunes. I should have told her all about Allaha and warned her to keep out of it. I should have advised her to send native investigators, she to remain in Peshawar till she learned the truth. But the name Hare suggested nothing to me, not till after I had left her at Singapore. So I shall go back with you. But please let Kathryn think of me as a man who earns his own living."

"God bless you, my boy! You have put a new backbone in me. It's hard not to have a white man to talk to, to plan with. Ahmed expects that we shall be ready for the return in the morning. He, however, intends to go back on a racing camel, to go straight to my bungalow, if it isn't destroyed by this time. Perhaps Winnie has not arrived there yet. I trust."

"So do I. I have known him for a long time—that is, I thought I did—and during the last few weeks he has been a revelation. Think of his being your headman all these years, and yet steadily working for his Raj, the British Raj!"

"They can keep secrets." "Well, we have this satisfaction; when Pundita rules it will be under the protecting hand of England. Now let us try to look at the cheerful side of the business. Think of what that girl has gone through with scarcely a scratch! Can't you read something in that? See how strong and self-reliant she has become under such misfortunes as would have driven mad any ordinary woman! Can't you see light in all this? I tell you, there is good and evil working for and against us, and that Ahmed's fair will in the end prove stronger than your badly old guru. When I am out of the orient I laugh at such things, but I can't laugh at them somehow when I'm in India."

"Nor I."

That night Kathryn signified that she wished to go down to the beach, beyond the harbor, where Bruce accompanied her. Often he caught her staring out at the twinkling lights on board the Simla. By and by they could hear the windlass creaking. A volume of black smoke suddenly poured out to sea.

"Why do you risk your life for us?" she asked suddenly.

"Adventure is meat and drink to me, Miss Hare."

The prefix sounded strange and unfamiliar in her ears. Formally, she had been wrong, then; only comradeship and the masculine sense of responsibility. Her heart was like lead.

"It is very kind and brave of you, Mr. Bruce; but I will not have it."

"Have what?" he asked, knowing full well what she meant.

"This going back with us. Why should you risk your life for people who are almost strangers?"

"Strangers?" He laughed softly. "Has it never occurred to you that the people we grow up with are never really our friends; that real friendship comes only with maturity of the mind? Why, the best man friend I have in this world is a young chap I met but three years ago. It is not the knowing people that make friendships. It is the sharing of dangers, of bread in the wilderness; of getting a glimpse of the soul which lies beneath the conventions of the social pact. Would you call me a stranger?"

"O, no!" she cried swiftly. "It is merely that I do not want you to risk your life any further for us. Is there no way I can dissuade you?"

"None that I can think of. I am going back with you. That's settled. Now let us talk of something else. Don't you really want me to go?"

"Ah, that isn't fair," looking out to sea again and following the lights aboard the Simla.

It was mighty hard for him not to sweep her into his arms then and there. But he would never be sure of her till she was free of this country, free of the sense of gratitude, free to weigh her sentiments carefully and unbiasedly. He sat down abruptly on the wreck of an ancient hull embedded in the sand. She sank down a little way from him.

He began to hear her some of his past exploits; the Amazon, the Orinoco, the Andes, Tibet and China; of the strange flotilla he had met in his travels. But she sensed only the sound of his voice and the desire to reach out her hand and touch his. Friend-ship! Bread in the wilderness!

Ahmed was lean and deceptive to the eye. Like many Hindus, he appeared ancient; and yet the burdens the man could put on his back and carry almost indefinitely would have killed many a white man who boasted of his strength. On half a loaf

of black bread and a soldier's canteen of water he could travel for two days. He could go without sleep for forty-eight hours, and when he slept he could sleep anywhere, on the moment.

Filling his saddle bags with three days' rations, two canteens of water, he set off on a hagin, or racing camel, for Allaha, 200 miles inland as the crow flies. It was his intention to ride straight down to the desert and across this to Col. Hare's camp, if such a thing now existed. A dromedary in good condition can make from sixty to eighty miles a day; and the beast Ahmed had engaged was of Arab blood. In four days he expected to reach the camp. If Winnie had not yet arrived, he would take the road, meet her, warn her of the dangers which she was about to face, and convey her to the seaport. If it was too late, he would send the camel back with a trusted messenger to the colonel, to advise him.

They watched him depart in a cloud of dust, and then played the most enervating game in existence—that of waiting; for they had decided to wait till they heard from Ahmed before they moved.

Four nights later, when Ahmed arrived at the bungalow, he found conditions as usual. For reasons best known to himself Umballah had not disturbed anything. In fact, he had always had the coming of the younger sister in mind and left the bungalow and camp untouched, so as not to alarm her.

She had not yet arrived. So Ahmed flung himself down upon his cotton rug, telling the keepers not to disturb him; he would be able to wait himself when the time came. But Ahmed had overrated his powers; he was getting along in years; and it was noon of the next day when a hand shook him by the shoulder and he awoke to witness the arrival of Winnie and her woman companion.

For the first time in many years Ahmed cursed his prophet. He that had told him to warn the child had slept like the sloth of Ceylon!

He went directly to the point. He told her briefly what had happened. He had not the least doubt that Umballah was already aware of her arrival. She must remain hidden in the godown of the bungalow; her maid also. That night, if Umballah or his men failed to appear, he would lead her off to safety. But there was no hope of stealing away in the daytime. In his heart, however, he entertained no hope; and like the good general he was, he despatched the messenger and came to the sea. The father and daughter were fated to retell.

Ahmed had reckoned shrewdly. Umballah appeared later in the day and demanded the daughter of Col. Hare. Backed as he was by numerous soldiers, Ahmed resigned himself to the inevitable. They found Winnie and her maid (whom later they sent to the frontier and abandoned) and took them to the palace.

There was no weeping or wailing or struggling. The dark, proud face of the young girl gave forth no sign of the terror and utter loneliness of her position. And Umballah, realizing that she was in the blood of these children to be brave and quiet. There was no mercy in his heart. He was power mad, and his enemies lived because he could reach neither of his desires over their dead bodies.

The rigmarole and mumery Winnie went through affected her exactly as it had affected her sister. It was all a hideous nightmare, and at any moment she expected to wake up in her cozy corner at Edeendale.

In the bazaars they began to laugh at Umballah and his coronations, or durbars. They began to jest at his futile efforts to crown some one through whom he could put his greedy hand into the treasury. Still, they found plenty of amusement and excitement. And so they filled the square in front of the platform when Umballah put the crown on Winnie's head. How long would this queen last?

And Kathryn, her father, and Bruce were forced to witness the event from behind the cordon of guards, dressed in native costume, their faces stained, and their hearts swelling with impotent anger and despair. For it was in such guise they had returned to Allaha.

During a lull in the ceremonies a resonant voice from out of the dense throng cried, "Give us a queen of our blood and race, thou black, gutter-born dog!" Ramabai started at the sound of that voice, but caught himself before he looked in the direction from whence it rose. It belonged to one Lal Singh. Umballah cowered, but gave no other sign that he heard. But a guard dove into the crowd; useless, however.

Kathryn touched Ramabai's arm.

"O, I must speak to her!"

"Be careful, Memshah!" he warned.

But even as she spoke she stepped past him, toward her beloved sister, and offered the flowers she held.

Winnie, not dreaming that this dark veiled creature was her sister, smelled the flowers and beheld a card which had written on it—English!

"Courage! Father and I have a plan for your escape, Kathryn."

(Continued next Saturday.)

SEE THE PICTURES THIS AFTERNOON AND EVENING AT THE IMPERIAL