



ders for Muhammad Anim that had been said to come by sea came now by way of Bagdad, carried by pilgrims returning from the holy places. I know that because I intercepted a letter and threw its bearer into Earth's Drink to save Muhammad Anim the trouble of asking questions."

"What were the terms of the German bargain?" King asked her. "What stipulations did they make?"

"With the tribes? None! They were too wise. A jihad was decided on in Germany's good time; and when that time should come ten rifles in the 'Hills' and a thousand cartridges

would mean not only a hundred dead Englishmen, but ten times that number busily engaged. Why bargain when there was no need? A rifle is what it is. The 'Hills' are the 'Hills'!"

"Tell me about your lamp oil, then," he said. "You burn enough oil in Khinjan Caves to light Bombay! That does not come by submarine. The sarkar knows how much of everything goes up the Khyber. I have seen the printed lists myself—a few hundred cans of kerosene—a few score gallons of vegetable oil, and all bound for farther north. There isn't enough oil pressed among the 'Hills' to keep these caves going for a day. Where does it all come from?"

She laughed, as a mother laughs at a child's questions, finding delicious enjoyment in instructing him.

"There are three villages, not two days' march from Khabul, where men have lived for centuries by pressing oil for Khinjan Caves," she said. "The Sleeper fetched his oil thence. There are the bones of a camel in a cave I did not show you, and beside the camel are the leather bags still in which the oil was carried. Nowadays it comes in second-hand cans and drums. The Sleeper left gold in here. Those who kept the Sleeper's secret paid for the oil in gold. No Afghan troubled why oil was needed, so long as gold paid for it, until Abdurrahman heard the story. He made a ten-year-long effort to learn the secret, but he failed. When he cut off the supply of oil for a time, there was a rebellion so close to Khabul gates that he thought better of it. Of gold and Abdurrahman, gold was the stronger. And I know where the Sleeper dug his gold!"

They sat in silence for a long while after that, she looking at the table, with its ink and pens and paper, and

he thinking, with hands clasped round one knee; for it is wiser to think than to talk, even when a woman is near who can read thoughts that are not guarded.

"Most disillusionments come simply," King said at last. "D'you know, Princess, what has kept the sarkar from really believing in Khinjan Caves?"

SHE shook her head. "The gods!" she said. "The gods can blindfold governments and whole peoples as easily as they can make us see!"

"It was the fact that they knew what provisions and what oil and what necessities of life went up the Khyber and came down it. They knew a place such as this was said to be could not be. They knew it! They could prove it!"

Yasmini nodded.

"Let it be a lesson to you, Princess!"

She stared, and her fiery-opal eyes began to change and glow. She began to twist her golden hair round the dagger hilt again. But always her feet were still on the footstool of the throne, as if she knew—knew—knew that she stood on firm foundations. No sarkar ever doubted less than she, and the suggestions in King's little homily did not please her. She looked toward the table again—then again into his eyes.

"Athelstan!" she said. "It sounds like a king's name! What was the Sleeper's name? I have often wondered! I found no name in all the books about Rome that seemed to fit him. None of the names I mouthed could make me dream as the sight of him could. But, Athelstan! That is a name like a king's! It seems to fit him, too! Was there such a name in Rome?"

"No, he said.

"What does it mean?" she asked him.

"Slow of resolution!"

She clapped her hands.

"Another sign!" she laughed. "The gods love me! There always is a sign when I need one! Slow of resolution, art thou? I will speed thy resolution, Well-beloved! You were quick to change from King, of the Khyber Rifle Regiment, to Kurram Khan. Change now into my warrior—my dear lord—my King again!"

She rose, with arms outstretched to him. All her dancer's art, her untamed poetry, her witchery, were expressed in a movement. Her eyes melted as they met his. And since he stood up, too, for manner's sake, they were eye to eye again—almost lip to lip. Her sweet breath was in his nostrils.

In another moment she was in his arms, clinging to him, kissing him. And if any man has felt on his lips the kiss of all the scented glamour of the East, let him tell what King's sensations were. Let Caesar, who was kissed by Cleopatra, come to life and talk of it!

King's arm is strong, and he did not stand like an idol. His head might swim, but she, too, tasted the delirium of human passion loosed and given for a mad swift minute. If his heart swelled to bursting, so must hers have done.

"I have needed you!" she whispered. "I have been all alone! I have needed you!"

Then her lips sought his again, and neither spoke.

Neither knew how long it was before she began to understand that he, not she, was winning. The human answer to her appeal was full. He gave her all she asked of admiration, kiss for kiss. And then—her arms did not cling so tightly, although his strong right arm was like a stanchion. Because he knew that he, not she, was winning, he picked her up in his arms and kissed her as if she were a child. And then, because he knew he had won, he set her on her feet on the footstool of the throne, and even pitied her.

SHE felt the pity. As she tossed the hair back over her shoulder her eyes glowed with another meaning—dangerous—like a tiger's glare.

"You pity me? You think because I love you, you can feed my love on a plate to the Indian government? You think my love is a weapon to use against me? Your love for me may wait for a better time? You are not so wise as I thought you, Athelstan!"

But he knew he had won. His heart was singing down inside him as it had not sung since he left India behind. But he stood quite humbly before her, for had he not kissed her?

"You think a kiss is the bond between us? You mistake! You forget! The kiss, my Athelstan, was the fruit, not the seed! The seed came first! If I loosed you—if I set you free—you would never dare go back to India!"

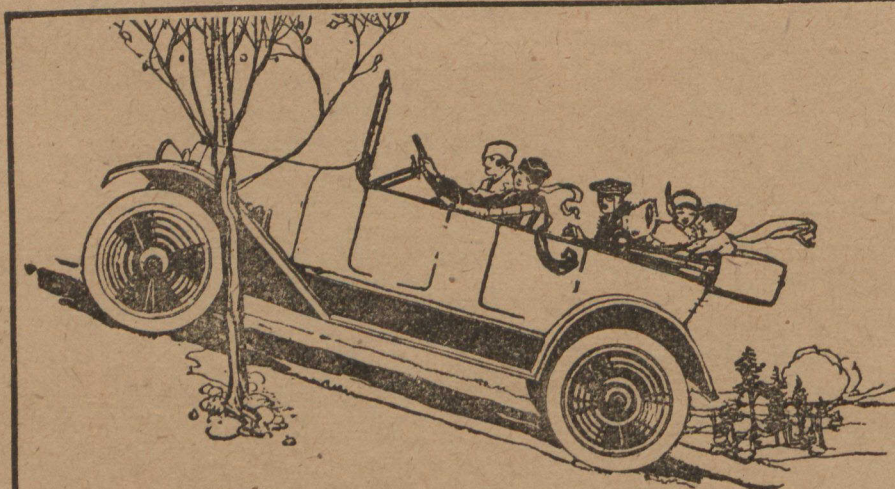
He scarcely heard her. He knew he had won. His heart was like a bird, fluttering wildly. He knew that the next step would be shown him, and for the present he had time and grace to pity her, knowing how he would have felt if she had won. Besides, he had kissed her, and he had not lied. Each kiss had been a tribute of admiration, for was she not splendid—amazing—more to be desired than wine? He stood with bowed head, lest

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