

would be rather like stopping the wind—possibly easy enough, if one knew the way. Yet he knew no general would throw away a man like himself on a useless venture. He began to look happy.

The general clucked to the mare and the big beast sank an inch between the shafts. The sais behind set his feet against the drop-board and clung with both hands to the seat. One wheel ceased to touch the gravel as they whirled along a semicircular drive. Suddenly the mare drew up on her haunches, under the porch of a pretentious residence. Sentries saluted. The sais swung down. In less than sixty seconds King was following the general through a wide entrance into a crowded hall. The instant the general's fat figure darkened the doorway twenty men of higher rank than King, native and English, rose from lined-up chairs and pressed forward.

"Sorry—have to keep you all waiting—busy!" He waved them aside with a little apologetic gesture. "Come in here, King."

KING followed him through a door that slammed tight behind them on rubber jambs.

"Sit down!"

The general unlocked a steel drawer and began to rummage among the papers in it. In a minute he produced a package, bound in rubber bands, with a faded photograph face upward on the top.

"That's the woman! How d'you like the look of her?"

King took the package and for a minute stared hard at the likeness of a woman whose fame has traveled up and down India, until her witchery has become a proverb. She was dressed as a dancing woman, yet very few dancing women could afford to be dressed as she was.

King's service uses whom it may, and he had met and talked with many dancing women in the course of duty; but as he stared at Yasmini's likeness he did not think he had ever met one who so measured up to rumour. The nautch he knew for a delusion. Yet—!

The general watched his face with eyes that missed nothing.

"Remember—I said work with her!"

King looked up and nodded.

"They say she's three parts Russian," said the general. "To my own knowledge she speaks Russian like a native, and about twenty other tongues as well, including English. She speaks English as well as you or I. She was the girl-widow of a rascally Hill-rajah. There's a story I've heard, to the effect that Russia arranged her marriage in the days when India was Russia's objective—and that's how long ago?—seems like weeks, not years! I've heard she loved her rajah. And I've heard she didn't! There's another story that she poisoned him. I know she got away with his money—and that's proof enough of brains! Some say she's a she-devil. I think that's an exaggeration, but bear in mind she's dangerous!"

KING grinned. A man who trusts Eastern women over readily does not rise far in the Secret Service.

"If you've got nous enough to keep on her soft side and use her—not let her use you—you can keep the Hills' quiet and the Khyber safe! If you can contrive that—now—in this pinch—there's no limit for you! Commander-in-chief shall be your job before you're sixty!"

King pocketed the photograph and papers. "I'm well enough content, sir, as things are," he said, quietly.

"Well, remember she's ambitious, even if you're not! I'm not preaching ambition, mind—I'm warning you! Ambition's bad! Study those papers on your

way down to Delhi and see that I get them back."

The general paced once across the room and once back again, with hands behind him. Then he stopped in front of King.

"No man in India has a stiffer task than you have now! It may encourage you to know that I realize that! She's the key to the puzzle, and she happens to be in Delhi. Go to Delhi, then. A jihad launched from the Hills' would mean anarchy in the plains. That would entail sending back from France an army that can't be spared. There must be no jihad, King! There must—not—be—one! Keep that in your head!"

"What arrangements have been made with her, sir?"

"Practically none! She's watching the spies in Delhi, but they're likely to break for the Hills' any minute. Then they'll be arrested. When that happens the fate of India may be in your hands and hers! Get out of my way now, until tiffin-time!"

In a way that some men never learn, King proceeded to efface himself entirely among the crowd in the hall, contriving to say nothing of any account to anybody until the great gong boomed and the general led them all in to his long dining table. Yet

pleasantly that Hyde grew exasperated. Neither of them spoke. At the station Hyde lost his temper openly, and King left him abusing an unhappy native servant.

The station was crammed to suffocation by a crowd that roared and writhed and smelt to high heaven. At one end of the platform, in the midst of a human eddy, a frenzied horse resisted with his teeth and all four feet at once the efforts of six natives and a British sergeant to force him into a loose-box. At the back of the same platform the little dark-brown mules of a mountain battery twitched their flanks in line, jingling chains and stamping when the flies bit home.

FLIES buzzed everywhere. Fat native merchants vied with lean and timid ones in noisy effort to secure accommodation on a train already crowded to the limit. Twenty British officers hunted up and down for the places supposed to have been reserved for them, and sweating servants hurried after them with arms full of heterogeneous baggage, swearing at the crowd that swore back ungrudgingly. But the general himself had telephoned for King's reservation, so he took his time.

There were din and stink and dust beneath a savage sun, shaken into reverberations by the scream of an engine's safety valve. It was India in essence and awake!—India arising out of

lethargy!—India as she is more often nowadays—and it made King, for the time being of the Khyber Rifles, happier than some other men can be in ball-rooms.

Any one who watched him—and there was at least one man who did—must have noticed his strange ability, almost like that of water, to reach the point he aimed for, through, and not around, the crowd.

He neither shoved nor argued. Orders and blows would have been equally useless, for had it tried the crowd could not have obeyed, and it was in no mind to try. Without the least apparent effort he arrived—and there is no other word that quite describes it—he arrived, through the densest part of the sweating throng of humans, at the door of the luggage office.

There, though a bunnia's sharp elbow naged his ribs, and the bunnia's ser-

vant dropped a heavy package on his foot, he smiled so genially that he melted the wrath of the frantic luggage clerk. But not at once. Even the sun needs seconds to melt ice.

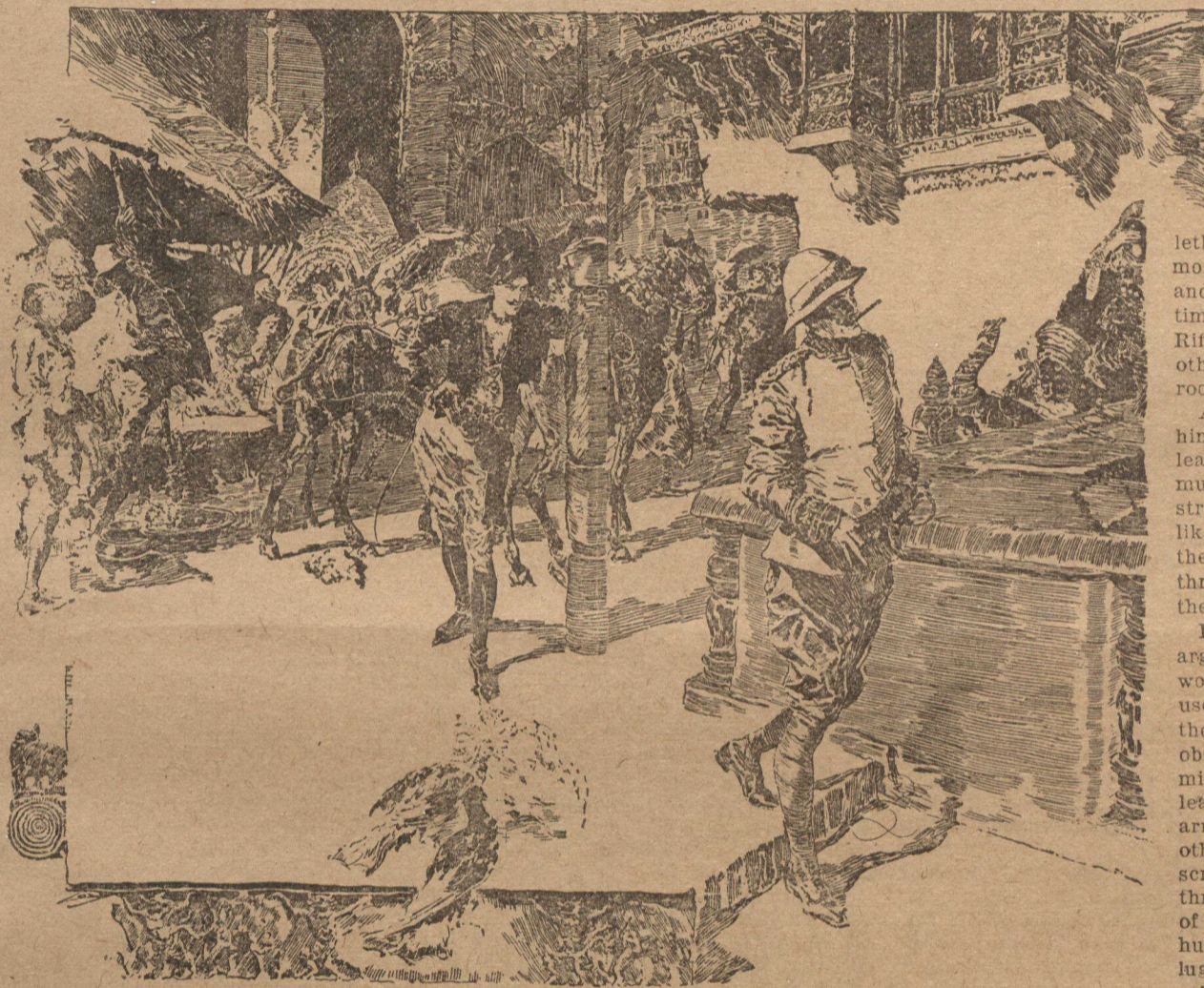
"Am I God?" the babu wailed. "Can I do all these things in all the world at once if not sooner?"

KING'S smile began to get its work in. The man ceased gesticulating to wipe sweat from his stubby jowl with the end of a Punjabi head-dress. He actually smiled back. Who was he, that he should suspect new outrage or guess he was about to be used in a game he did not understand? He would have stopped all work to beg for extra pay at the merest suggestion of such a thing; but as it was he raised both fists and lapsed into his own tongue to apostrophize the ruffian who dared jostle King. A Northerner, who did not seem to understand Punjabi almost cost King his balance as he thrust broad shoulders between him and the bunnia.

The bunnia chattered like an outraged ape; but King, the person most entitled to be angry, actually apologized! That being a miracle, the babu forthwith wrought another one, and within a minute King's one trunk was checked through to Delhi.

"Delhi is right, sahib?" he asked, to make doubly sure; for in India where the milk of human kindness is not hawked in the market-place, men will pay overmeasure for a smile.

"Yes. Delhi is right. Thank you, babuji."



The native who was following him drew closer.

he did not look furtive or secretive. Nobody noticed him, and he noticed everybody. There is nothing whatever secretive about that.

The fare was plain, and the meal a perfunctory affair. The general and his guests were there for no other reason than to eat food, and only the man who happened to seat himself next to King—a major by the name of Hyde—spoke to him at all.

"Why aren't you with your regiment?" he asked.

"Because the general asked me to lunch, sir!"

"I suppose you've been pestering him for an appointment!"

King, with his mouth full of curry, did not answer, but his eyes smiled.

"It's astonishing to me," said the major, "that a captain should leave his company when war has begun! When I was captain I'd have been driven out of the service if I'd asked for leave of absence at such a time!"

King made no comment, but his expression denoted belief.

"Are you bound for the front, sir?" he asked, presently. But Hyde did not answer. They finished the meal in silence.

After lunch he was closeted with the general again for twenty minutes. Then one of the general's carriages took him to the station; and it did not appear to trouble him at all that the other occupant of the carriage was the self-same Major Hyde who had sat next him at lunch. In fact, he smiled so