

and sat down, and the crowd began to roar applause at her. But she checked it with a regal gesture, and a glance of contempt at the mullah that was alone worth a journey across the "Hills" to see.

"Guards!" she said quietly. And the crowd's sigh then was like the night wind in a forest.

"Away with those three of Muhammad Anim's men!"

Twelve of the arena guards threw down their shields with a sudden clatter and seized the prisoners, four to each. The crowd shivered with delicious anticipation. The doomed men neither struggled nor cried, for fatalism is an anodyne as well as an explosive. King set his teeth. Yasmini, with both hands behind her head, continued to smile down on them all as sweetly as the stars shine on a battle-field.

She nodded once; and then all was over in a minute. With a ringing "Ho!" and a run, the guards lifted their victims shoulder high and bore them forward. At the river bank they paused for a second to swing them. Then, with another "Ho!" they threw them like dead rubbish into the swift black water.

There was only one wild scream that went echoing and re-echoing to the roof. There was scarcely a splash, and no extra ripple at all. No heads came up again to gasp. No fingers clutched at the surface. The fearful speed of the river sucked them under, to grind and churn and pound them through long caverns underground and hurl them at last over the great cataract toward the middle of the world.

"Ah-h-h-h!" sighed the crowd in ecstasy.

"Is there no other stranger?" asked Yasmini, searching for King again with her amazing eyes. The skin all down his back turned there and then into gooseflesh. And as her eyes met his she laughed like a bell at him. She knew! She knew who he was, how he had entered, and how he felt. Not a doubt of it!

#### CHAPTER XI.

"KURRAM KHAN!" the lashless mullah howled, like a lone wolf in the moonlight, and King stood up.

It is one of the laws of Cocker, who wrote the S. S. Code, that a man is alive until he is proved dead, and where there is life there is opportunity. In that grim minute King felt heretical; but a man's feelings are his own affair provided he can prove it, and he managed to seem about as much at ease as a native hakim ought to feel at such an initiation.

"Come forward!" the mullah howled, and he obeyed, treading gingerly between men who were at no pains to let him by, and silently blessing them, because he was not really in any hurry at all. Yasmini looked lovely from a distance, and life was sweet.

"Who are his witnesses?"

"Witnesses?" the roof hissed.

"I!" shouted Ismail, jumping up.

"I!" cracked the roof. "I!" So that for a second King almost believed he had a crowd of men to swear for him and did not hear Darya Khan at all, who rose from a place not very far behind where he had sat.

Ismail followed him in a hurry, like a man wading a river with loose clothes gathered in one arm and the other arm ready in case of falling. He took much less trouble than King not to tread on people, and oaths marked his wake.

Darya Khan did not go so fast. As he forced his way forward a man passed him up the wooden box that King had used to stand on; he seized it in both hands with a grin and a jest and went to stand behind King and Ismail, in line with the lashless mullah, facing

Yasmini. Yasmini smiled at them all as if they were actors in her comedy, and she well pleased with them.

"Look ye!" howled the mullah.

"Look ye and look well, for this is to be one of us!"

King felt ten thousand eyes burn holes in his back, but the one pair of eyes that mocked him from the bridge was more disconcerting.

"Turn, Kurram Khan! Turn that all may see!"

Feeling like a man on a spit, he revolved slowly. By the time he had turned once completely around, besides knowing positively that one of the two bracelets on her right arm was the one he had worn, or else its exact copy, he knew that he was not meant to die yet; for his eyes could work much more swiftly than the horn-rimmed spectacles made believe. He decided that Yasmini meant he should be frightened, but not much hurt just yet.

SO he ceased altogether to feel frightened and took care to look more scared than ever.

"Who paid the price of thy admission?" the mullah howled, and King cleared his throat, for he was not quite sure yet what that might mean.

"Speak, Kurram Khan!" Yasmini purred, smiling her loveliest. "Tell them whom you slew."

King turned and faced the crowd, raising himself on the balls of his feet to shout, like a man facing thousands of troops on parade. He nearly gave himself away, for habit had him unaware. A native hakim, given the stoutest lungs in all India, would not have shouted in that way.

"Cappitin Attleystan King!" he roared. And he nearly jumped out of his skin when his own voice came rattling back at him from the roof overhead.

"Cappitin Attleystan King!" it answered.

Yasmini chuckled as a little rill will sometimes chuckle among ferns. It was devilish. It seemed to say there were traps not far ahead.

"Where was he slain?" asked the mullah.

"In the Khyber Pass," said King.

"In the Khyber Pass!" the roof whispered hoarsely, as if aghast at such cold-bloodedness.

"Now give proof!" said the mullah. "Words at the gate—proof in the cavern! Without good proof, there is only one way out of here!"

"Proof!" the crowd thundered.

"Proof! Proof! Proof!" the roof echoed.

There was no need for Darya Khan to whisper. King's hands were behind him, and he had seen what he had seen and guessed what he had guessed while he was turning to let the crowd look at him. His fingers closed on human hair.

"Nay, it is short!" hissed Darya Khan. "Take the two ears, or hold it by the jawbone! Hold it high in both hands!"

King obeyed, without looking at the thing, and Ismail, turning to face the crowd, rose on tiptoe and filled his lungs for the effort of his life.

"The head of Cappitin Attleystan King—infidel—kaffir—British arrficer!" he howled.

"Good!" the crowd bellowed.

"Good! Throw it!"

The crowd's roar and the roof's echoes combined in pandemonium.

"Throw it to them, Kurram Khan!" Yasmini purred from the bridge end, speaking as softly and as sweetly as if she coaxed a child. Yet her voice carried.

He lowered the head, but instead of looking at it he looked up at her. He thought she was enjoying herself and

his predicament as he had never seen any one enjoy anything.

"Throw it to them, Kurram Khan!" she purred. "It is the custom!"

"Throw it! Throw it!" the crowd thundered.

He turned the ghastly thing until it lay face-upward in his hands, and so at last he saw it. He caught his breath, and only the horn-rimmed spectacles, that he had cursed twice that night, saved him from self-betrayal. The cavern seemed to sway, but he recovered, and his wits worked swiftly. If Yasmini detected his nervousness she gave no sign.

"Throw it! Throw it! Throw it!"

The crowd was growing impatient. Many men were standing, waving their arms to draw attention to themselves, and he wondered what the ultimate end of the head would be, if he obeyed and threw it to them. Watching Yasmini's eyes, he knew it had not entered her head that he might disobey.

He looked past her toward the river. There were no guards near enough to prevent what he intended; but he had to bear in mind that the guards had rifles, and if he acted too suddenly one of them might shoot at him unbidden. They were wondrous free with their cartridges, those guards, in a land where ammunition is worth its weight in silver coin.

Holding the head before him with both hands, he began to walk toward the river, edging all the while a little toward the crowd as if meaning to get nearer before he threw.

He was much more than half-way to the river's edge before Yasmini or anybody else divined his true intention. The mullah grew suspicious first and yelled. Then King hurried, for he did not believe Yasmini would need many seconds in which to regain command of any situation. But she saw fit to stand still and watch.

He reached the river and stood there. Now he was in no hurry at all, for it stood to reason that unless Yasmini very much desired him to be kept alive he would have been shot already. For a moment the crowd was so interested that it forgot to bark and snarl.

His next move was as deliberate as he could make it, although he was careful to avoid the least suggestion of mummery (for then the crowd would have suspected disloyalty to Islam, and the "Hills" are very, very

pious, and very suspicious of all foreign ritual).

He did a thoughtful simple thing that made every savage who watched him gasp because of its very unexpectedness. He held the head in both hands, threw it far out into the river and stood to watch it sink. Then, without visible emotion of any kind, he walked back stolidly to face Yasmini at the bridge end, with shoulders a little more stubborn now than they ought to be, and chin a shade too high, for there never was a man who could act quite perfectly.

"Thou fool!" Yasmini whispered through lips that did not move.

She betrayed a flash of temper like a trapped she-tiger's, but followed it instantly with her loveliest smile. Like to like, however, the crowd saw the flash of temper and took its cue from that.

"Slay him!" yelled a lone voice, that was greeted by an approving murmur.

"Slay him!" advised the roof in a whisper, in one of its phonetic tricks.

"This is a darbar!" Yasmini announced in a rising, ringing voice. "My darbar, for I summoned it! Did I invite any man to speak?"

There was silence, as a whipped unwilling pack is silent.

"Speak, thou, Kurram Khan!" she said. "Knowing the custom—having heard the order to throw that trophy to them—why act otherwise? Explain!"

NOTHING could be fairer! She left him to extricate himself from a mess of his own making! It was more than fair, for she went out of her way to offer him an opening to jump through. And she paid him the compliment of suggesting he must be clever enough to take it, for she seemed to expect a satisfying answer.

"Tell them why!" she said, smiling. No man could have guessed by the tone of her voice whether she was for him or against him, and the crowd, beginning again to whisper, watched to see which way the cat would jump.

He bowed low to her three times—very low indeed and very slowly, for he had to think. Then he turned his back and repeated the obeisance to the crowd. Still he could think of no excuse, except Cocker's Rule No. 1 for Tight Places, and all the world knows

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