



She Couldn't Go; Her Corns Wouldn't Let Her

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his coat closer against the keen wind. The mullah mistook the shudder for one of another kind.

"Did she choose thee only for thy face?" he asked. "Did she not consider thy courage? Does she love thee well enough to ransom thee?"

Again King did not answer, but he watched the mullah's face keenly in the dark and missed nothing of its expression. He decided the man was in doubt—even racked by indecision.

"Should she not ransom thee, hakim, thou shalt have a chance to show my men how a man out of India can die! By and by I will lend thee a messenger to send to her. Better make the message clear and urgent! Thou shalt state my terms to her and plead thine own cause in the same letter. My camp lies yonder."

HE motioned with one sweep of his arm toward a valley that lay in shadow far below them. As far as the slope leading down to it was visible in the moonlight it was littered with what the "Hills" call "hell-stones," that will neither lie flat nor keep on rolling, and are dangerous to man and beast alike. Nothing else could be made out through the darkness but a few twisted tamarisk trees, that served to make the savagery yet more savage and the loneliness more desolate. The gloom below the trees was that of the very underdepths of hell itself.

The mullah pointed to a rock that rose like a shadow from the deeper blackness.

"Yes," said King, "I have seen." And the mullah stared at him. Then he shouted, and the top of the rock turned into a man, who gave them leave to advance, leaning on his rifle as one who had assured himself of their identity long minutes ago.

As they approached it the rock clove in two and became two great pillars, with a man on each. And between the pillars they looked down into a valley lit by fires that burned before a thousand hide tents, with shadows by the hundred flitting back and forth between them. A dull roar, like the voice of an army, rose out of the gorge.

"More than four thousand men!" said the mullah proudly.

"What are four thousand for a raid into India?" sneered King, greatly daring.

"Wait and see!" growled the mullah; but he seemed depressed.

He led the way downward, getting off his horse and giving the reins to a man. King copied him, and part-way sliding, part stumbling down they found their way along the dry bed of a water-course between two spurs of a hillside, until they stood at last in the midst of a cluster of a dozen sentries, close to a tamarisk to which a man's body hung spiked. That the man had been spiked to it alive was suggested by the body's attitude.

Without a word to the sentries the mullah led on down a lane through the midst of the camp, toward a great open cave at the far side, in which a bonfire cast fitful light and shadow. Watchers sitting by the thousand tents yawned at them, but took no particular notice.

The mouth of the cave was like a lion's, fringed with teeth. There were men in it, ten or eleven of them, all armed, squatting round the fire.

"Get out!" growled the mullah. But they did not obey. They sat and stared at him.

"Have ye tents?" the mullah asked, in a voice like thunder.

"Aye!" But they did not go yet.

One of the men, he nearest the mullah, got on his feet, but he had to step back a pace, for the mullah would not give ground and their breath was in each other's faces.

(To be continued.)

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