

the open window came the splash of a fountain and the chattering of birds, and the branch of a feathery tree drooped near-by. It seemed that the long white wall below was that of Yasmini's garden.

"Be welcome!" laughed Rewa Gunga; "I am to do the honours, since she is not here. Be seated, sahib."

King chose a divan at the room's farthest end, near tall curtains that led into rooms beyond. He turned his back toward the reason for his choice. On a little ivory-inlaid ebony table about ten feet away lay a knife, that was almost the exact duplicate of the one inside his shirt. Bronze knives of ancient date, with golden handles carved to represent a woman dancing, are rare. The ability to seem not to notice incriminating evidence is rarer still—rarest of all when under the eyes of a native of India, for cats and hawks are dullards by comparison to them. But King saw the knife, yet did not seem to see it.

There was nothing there calculated to set an Englishman at ease. In spite of the Rangar's casual manner, Yasmini's reception room felt like the antechamber to another world, where mystery is atmosphere and ordinary air to breathe is not at all. He could sense hushed expectancy on every side—could feel the eyes of many women fixed on him—and began to draw on his guard as a fighting man draws on armour. There and then he deliberately set himself to resist mesmerism, which is the East's chief weapon.

Rewa Gunga, perfectly at home, sprawled leisurely along a cushioned couch with a grace that the West has not learned yet; but King did not make the mistake of trusting him any better for his easy manners, and his eyes sought swiftly for some unrhythmic, unplanned thing on which to rest, that he might save himself by a sort of mental leverage.

Glancing along the wall that faced the big window, he noticed for the first time a huge Afridi, who sat on a stool and leaned back against the silken hangings with arms folded.

"Who is that man?" he asked.

"He? Oh, he is a savage—just a big savage," said Rewa Gunga, looking vaguely annoyed.

"Why is he here?"

He did not dare let go of this chance side-issue. He knew that Rewa Gunga wished him to talk of Yasmini and to ask questions about her, and that if he succumbed to that temptation all his self-control would be cunningly sapped away from him until his secrets, and his very senses, belonged to some one else.

"What is he doing here?" he insisted.

"He? Oh, he does nothing. He waits," purred the Rangar. "He is to be your body-servant on your journey to the North. He is nothing—nobody at all!—except that he is to be trusted utterly because he loves Yasmini. He is Obedience! A big obedient fool! Let him be!"

"No," said King. "If he's to be my man I'll speak to him!"

HE felt himself winning. Already the spell of the room was lifting, and he no longer felt the cloud of sandalwood smoke like a veil across his brain.

"Won't you tell him to come to me?"

Rewa Gunga laughed, resting his silk turban against the wall hangings and clasping both hands about his knee. It was as a man might laugh who has been touched in a bout with foils.

"Oh!—Ismail!" he called, with a voice like a bell, that made King stare.

The Afridi seemed to come out of a deep sleep and looked bewildered, rubbing his eyes and feeling whether his turban was on straight. He combed his beard with nervous fingers as he gazed about him and caught Rewa Gunga's eye. Then he sprang to his feet.

"Come!" ordered Rewa Gunga.

The man obeyed.

"Did you see?" Rewa Gunga chuckled. "He rose from his place like a buffalo, rump first and then shoulder after shoulder! Such men are safe! Such men have no guile beyond what

will help them to obey! Such men think too slowly to invent deceit for its own sake!"

The Afridi came and towered above them, standing with gnarled hands knotted into clubs.

"What is thy name?" King asked him.

"Ismail!" he boomed.

"Thou art to be my servant?"

"Aye! So said she. I am her man. I obey!"

"When did she say so?" King asked him blandly, asking unexpected questions being half the art of Secret Service, although the other half is harder to achieve.

THE Hillman stroked his beard and stood considering the question.

One could imagine the click of slow machinery revolving in his mind, although King entertained a shrewd suspicion that he was not so stupid as he chose to seem. His eyes were too hawk-bright to be a stupid man's.

"Before she went away," he answered at last.

"When did she go away?"

He thought again, then "Yesterday," he said.

"Why did you wait before you answered?"

The Afridi's eyes furtively sought Rewa Gunga's and found no aid there. Watching the Rangar less furtively, but even less obviously, King was aware that his eyes were nearly closed, as if they were not interested. The fingers that clasped his knee drummed on it indifferently, seeing which King allowed himself to smile.

"Never mind," he told Ismail. "It is no matter. It is ever well to think twice before speaking once, for thus mistakes die stillborn. Only the monkey-folk thrive on quick answers—is it not so? Thou art a man of many inches—of thigh and sinew—Hey, but thou art a man! If the heart within those great ribs of thine is true as thine arms are strong I shall be fortunate to have thee for a servant!"

"Aye!" said the Afridi. "But what are words? She has said I am thy servant, and to hear her is to obey!"

"Then from now thou art my servant?"

"Nay, but from yesterday when she gave the order!"

"Good!" said King.

"Aye, good for thee! May Allah do more to me if I fail!"

"Then, take me a telegram!" said King.

He began to write at once on a half-sheet of paper that he tore from a letter he had in his pocket, setting down a row of figures at the top and transposing into cypher as he went along.

"Yasmini has gone North. Is there any reason at your end why I should not follow her at once?"

He addressed it in plain English to his friend the general at Peshawar, taking great care lest the Rangar read it through those sleepy, half-closed eyes of his. Then he tore the cypher from the top, struck a match and burned the strip of paper and handed the code telegram to Ismail, directing him carefully to a government office where the cypher signature would be recognized and the telegram given precedence.

Ismail stalked off with it, striding like Moses down from Sinai—hook-nose—hawk-eye—flowing beard—dignity and all, and King settled down to guard himself against the next attempt on his sovereign self-command.

Now he chose to notice the knife on the ebony table as if he had not seen it before. He got up and reached for it and brought it back, turning it over and over in his hand.

"A strange knife," he said.

"Yes,—from Khinjan," said Rewa Gunga, and King eyed him as one wolf eyes another.

"What makes you say it is from Khinjan?"

"She brought it from Khinjan Caves herself! There is another knife that matches it, but that is not here. That bracelet you now wear, sahib, is from Khinjan Caves too! She has the secret of the Caves!"

"I have heard that the 'Heart of the Hills' is there," King answered. "Is the 'Heart of the Hills' a treasure house?"

Rewa Gunga laughed.

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