

"Special service?"

"Special service," said the general. "How about Ranjoor Singh's charger?"

"I understand that he's been kept well groomed by Ranjoor Singh's orders, and my adjutant tells me he has the horse in care in his own stable."

The general made a note.

"Whose stable?" he asked.

"Warrington's."

"Warrington, of Outram's Own, eh? Captain Warrington?"

The general wrote that down, while Kirby watched him bewildered.

"Well now, Kirby, that'll be all right. Have the horse left there, will you? I hope you've been able to dispose of your own horses to advantage. Two chargers don't seem a large allowance for a commanding officer of a cavalry regiment, but that's all you can take with you. You'll have to leave the rest behind."

"Haven't given it a thought, sir! Too busy thinking about Ranjoor Singh. Worried about him."

"Shouldn't worry!" said the general. "Ranjoor Singh's all right."

"That's the first assurance I've had of it except by way of a mysterious note," said Kirby.

"By all right, I mean that he isn't in disgrace. But now about your horses and private effects. You've done nothing about them?"

"I'll have time to attend to that this afternoon, sir."

"Oh, no, you won't. That's why I'm glad you came! These"—he gave him a sealed envelope—"are supplementary orders, to be opened when you get back to barracks. I want you out of the way by noon if possible. We'll send a man down this morning to take charge of whatever any of you want kept, and you'd better tell him to sell the rest and pay the money to your bankers; he'll be a responsible officer. That's all. Good-by, Kirby, and good luck!"

The general held out his hand.

"One more minute, sir," said Kirby. "About Ranjoor Singh!"

"What about him?"

"Well, sir—what about him?"

"What have you heard?"

"That—I've heard a sort of promise that he'll be with his squadron, to lead it, before the blood runs."

"Won't that be time enough?" asked the general, smiling. He was looking at Kirby very closely.

"Not sick, are you?" he asked. "No? I thought your scalp looked rather redder than usual."

KIRBY flushed to the top of his collar instantly, and the general pretended to arrange a sheaf of papers on the table.

"One reason why you're being sent first, my boy," said the general, holding out his hand again, "is that you and your regiment are fittest to be sent. But you've taken into consideration, too, that I don't want you or your adjutant killed by a cobra in any event. And—snf—snf—the salt sea air gets rid of the smell of musk quicker than anything. Good-bye, Kirby, my boy, and God bless you!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

Kirby stammered the words, and almost ran down the steps to his waiting dog-cart. As all good men do, when undeserved ridicule or blame falls to their lot, he wondered what in the world he could have done wrong. He had no blame for anybody, only a fierce resentment of injustice—an almost savage sense of shame that any one should know about the adventure of the night before, and a rising sense of joy in his soldier's heart because he had orders in his pocket to be up and doing. So, and only so, could he forget it all.

He whipped up his horse and went down the general's drive at a pace that made the British sentry at the gate grin from ear to ear with whole-souled approval. He did not see a fat babu approach the general's bungalow from the direction of the bazaar. The babu salaamed profoundly, but Kirby's eyes were fixed on the road ahead, and his thoughts were already deep in the future. He saw nothing except the road, until he took the last corner into barracks on one wheel, and drew up a minute later in front of the bachelor quarters that had sheltered him for the past four years.

"Pack! Campaign kit! One trunk!" he ordered his servant. "Orderly!"

An orderly ran in from outside.

"Tell Major Brammle and Captain Warrington to come to me!"

It took ten minutes to find Warrington, since every job was his, and nearly every responsibility, until his colonel should take charge of a paraded, perfect regiment, and lead it away to its fate. He came at last, however, and on the run, and Brammle with him.

"Orders changed!"

said Kirby. "March at noon! Man'll be here this morning to take charge of officers' effects. Better have things ready for him and full instructions. One trunk allowed each officer. Two chargers."

"Destination, sir?"

asked Brammle.

"Not disclosed!"

"Where do we entrain?" asked Warrington.

"We march out of Delhi. Entrain later, at a place appointed on the road."

Warrington began to hum to himself and to be utterly, consciously happy.

"Then I'll get a move on!" he said, starting to hurry out. "Everything's ready, but—"

"Wait a minute!" commanded Kirby; and Warrington remained in the room after Brammle had left it.

"You haven't said anything to anybody, of course, about that incident last night?"

"No, sir."

"Then she has!"

Warrington whistled.

"Are you sure she has?"

"Quite. I've just had proof of it!"

"Makes a fellow reverence the sex!" swore Warrington.

"It'll be forgotten by the time we're back in India," said Kirby solemnly. "Remember to keep absolutely silent about it. The best way to help others forget it is to forget it yourself. Not one word now to anybody, even under provocation!"



He slipped through the opening like a tiger into a pit-trap.

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"Not a word, sir!"

"All right. Go and attend to business!"

What "attending to business" meant nobody can guess who has not been in at the breaking up of quarters at short notice. Everything was ready, as Warrington had boasted, but even an automobile may "stall" for a time in the hands of the best chauffeur, and a regiment contains as many separate human equations as it has men in its ranks.

The amount of personal possessions that had to be jettisoned, or left to the tender mercies of a perfunctory agent, would have wrung groans from any one but soldiers. The last minute details that seemed to be nobody's job, and that, therefore, all fell to Warrington because somebody had to see to them, were beyond the imagination of any but an adjutant, and not even Warrington's imagination proved quite equal to the task.

"We're ready, sir!" he reported at last to Kirby. "We're paraded and waiting. Brammle's inspected 'em, and I've done ditto. There are only thirteen thousand details left undone that I can't think of, and not one of 'em's important enough to keep us waitin'!"

SO Kirby rode out on parade and took the regiment's salute. There was nobody to see them off. There were not even women to wail by the barrack gate, for they marched away at dinner-time and official lies had been distributed where they would do most good.

Englishmen and Sikh alike rode untormented by the walls or waving farewells of their kindred; and there was only a civilian on a white pony, somewhere along ahead, who seemed to know that they were more than just parading. He led them toward the Ajmere Gate, and by the time that the regiment's luggage came along in wagons, with the little rear-guard last of all, it was too late to run and warn people. Outram's Own had gone at high noon, and nobody the wiser!

There was no music as they marched and no talking. Only the jingling bits and rattling hoofs proclaimed that India's best were riding on a sudden summons to fight for the "Salt." They marched in the direction least expected of them, three-quarters of a day before their scheduled time, and even "Guppy," the mess bull-terrier, who ran under the wagon with the officers' luggage, behaved as if all ends of the world were one to him. He waved his tail with dignity and trotted in content.

Hard by the Ajmere Gate they halted, for some bullock carts had claimed their centuries-long prerogative of getting in the way. While the bullocks, to much tail-twisting and oburgation, labored in the mud in every direction but the right one, Colonel Kirby sat his charger almost underneath the gate, waiting patiently. Then the advance-guard clattered off and he led along.

He never knew where it came from and he never tried to guess. He caught it instinctively, and kept it for the sake of chivalry, or perhaps because she had made him think for a moment of his mother. At all events, the bunch of jasmine flowers that fell into his lap found a warm berth under his buttoned tunic, and he rode on through the great gate with a kinder thought for Yasmini than probably she would guess.

With that resentment gone, he could ride now as suited him, with all his thoughts ahead, and there lacked then only one thing to complete his pleasure—he missed Ranjoor Singh.

It was not that the squadron would lack good leading. An English officer had taken Ranjoor Singh's place. It was the man he missed—the decent loyal gentleman who had worked untiringly to sweat a squadron into shape to Kirby's liking and never once presumed, nor had taken offence at criticism—the man who had been good enough to understand the ethics of an alien colonel, and to translate them for the benefit of his command. It is not easy for a Sikh to rise to the rank of major and lead a squadron for the Raj.

He counted Ranjoor Singh his friend, and he knew that Ranjoor Singh would have give all the rest of his life to ride away now for only one encounter on a foreign battle-field. Nothing, nothing less than the word of Ranjoor Singh himself, would ever convince him of the man's disloyalty. And he would have felt better if he could have shaken hands with Ranjoor Singh before going, since it seemed to be the order of the day that the Sikh should stay behind.

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