

trict we arranged to go, Hira Singh had decamped to another quarter. He is always forewarned, and meanwhile three districts are the laughing stock of the provinces. I'm not thin-skinned like Trevor and Grigson—I'm not so young as they are; but, by George! it's fifteen months since I showed my face at headquarters."

He rose to end the interview. MacIntyre stood up, too. He opened the door and threw back the shutters and a rush of choking heat swept into his face.

"Whew! It's hot!" he said. Then, his brows still knitted over the first subject: "The source of information! That is what must be traced. I don't like wild goose chases. There is a leakage somewhere."

"Well, find it," said Faulkner, laconically. He had relapsed into his chair, and his pen was already busy with notes and signatures. "The wit of Police-wallah MacIntyre against the principalities of evil! Good morning."

MacIntyre walked across the courtyard compound to where his horse waited in the shade of a tree.

The Hambragh district offices were badly situated, now that the population had expanded under imperial rule. The time had been when the block formed by the courts, the collector's office and the guardroom had enjoyed isolation; their thatched roofs and deep porches and deep verandas were cheek by jowl with the city now. The maidan had dwindled to a slip of sun-backed soil, upon which the offices backed, and the crazy native buildings of the bazaar encroached upon it, their tottering, flimsy upper stories bulging above the street. On three sides there was still breathing room; but the rear of the official quadrangle had become a lane, bordered by the office wall (blank except for a couple of high red-curtained windows) and by the shops, with their mysterious dwellings-rooms above. The government had refused to buy the space when it was unoccupied; and now it paid for its stupidity. The noise of the city, the smell of dust, the reek of dung fuel and wood smoke, the endless chatter and jingle of the bargaining natives, remained to the staff as a reminder of their predecessors' folly.

MacIntyre mounted, and the policeman turned out as he passed the guardroom and left the compound to fill the litigants and orderlies. He wheeled at the entrance and made for the lane.

The crowd, into which an officious policeman had plunged with an outcry, was thick and busy, and the funnel-like avenue was not easy to clear. MacIntyre waited for a minute and looked about him.

The sun beat upon the scene, and the terra-cotta petticoats, the yellow saris, the brown skirts and the clinking bangles blended into a picture. The vendors squatted upon their heels on the open thresholds; the passers-by surged up and down before them. The effect was dazzling, and MacIntyre lifted his eyes to the balconies for relief.

Here, at least, was peace. They were unoccupied and the windows were silent, showing a decorous exterior which, if rumor said true, was not altogether in keeping with the city's reputation. Only a woman's veil drooping upon a lattice, and a star flung across the boards below it, gave a touch of levity. Such was MacIntyre's first impression, and then it passed, as an open shutter flung him a glimpse of life within.

A hand had opened the blind, and it was the flash of diamonds that caught the policeman's eyes. He looked, and there found a woman's face and stayed there. A small, exquisitely poised head, well set upon a rounded neck, peered out at him. The woman laughed and pushed the shutter wide, as if she light pleased her. He saw a handsome face with heavy brows and reckless eyes; she leaned out with unabashed interest, and her teeth gleamed. For a few seconds they stared at each other without a movement. Then she flitted her hand with a gesture of salutation, of defiance, of admiration—it was each and all—the shutter clapped to and the window was dead again.

"H'm," reflected MacIntyre soberly, his Celtic blood a little stirred by the apparition. "Delliah, and a splendid creature. Who is Samson? Those jewels were bought by a long purse. Half caste, apparently. What is she doing in the noisiest, dirtiest quarter of Hambragh? There is an incongruity and it must be considered. Hoch, but the wits of Lauchlan MacIntyre have ample work before them!"

He gathered his reins and trotted up the lane.

The doctor threw down his racquet. The high walled court was stifling. The marker outlined in the gallery against an evening sky, had taken advantage of a pause to call to the players. He waved toward the compound that surrounded the ramshackle court bath and billiard room of the Hambragh Club, and they heard the thud of hoofs approaching.

"There they are, Instill!" The doctor wriggled into a Norfolk jacket. "Now, what'd you bet they caught him at Kandua?"

"Look at em!" said Instill, stooping under the door of the racquet court and emerging into the veranda.

"There's your answer."

Indeed, the limp and dejected attitudes of Faulkner and MacIntyre, as they climbed stiffly down from their ponies, wiped their faces and called for drinks, had no story of success to tell. They were white with dust and fatigue, and the ponies had sweated out of his pocket as he sat down and tossed it

viciously on to the floor. They drank their pegs with the haste of thirsty men.

"An!" said the doctor, sympathetically. "You didn't—"

"No, we didn't. Flown as usual from the scene of his triumph and left nothing behind him but a very frightened old banna, and—that was our contribution—thirty hot policemen. He caught the old man ambling along with his escort and his money bags early yesterday morning. The escort ran; and Hira Singh lightened their employer of all his ruses and every stitch of clothing. After that he marched to Kandua village, locked the village policeman and the elders into a godown, and spent the heat of the day fed and sheltered by their property. Of course, when our party arrived he had fled. What is it, MacIntyre?"

"If you'll excuse me," said MacIntyre, "I am going to run down to kacheri and look through my letters. I am not at the end of my tether yet, and I don't feel like resting. Lend me your hat to go down on, doctor, will you? Thanks." And he was gone.

"I would rather not be Hira Singh when MacIntyre catches him," said Faulkner. "He's raging—absolutely foaming. Well so am I. He shuts his mouth and stews in his own juice. Sorry for him; but we have all had our turn." He lay back luxuriously, cocked his feet on to an arm of the chair and began to recoup his energies by timely idleness.

The three pair of eyes saw the policeman settle into the doctor's saddle, with the thoughtful frown which Hira Singh's misdeeds had called forth stamped deep into his forehead. He trotted past the tennis ground into the avenue of tamarisks that led to the heat and haze of the city. The sails labored behind him in the rising dust.

"I wonder if Martineau's letter has come, and what news the inspector has for me?" His busy brain began to arrange his thoughts. "Wild goose chases are no good; I said it at first, and to-day's work proves me right. Let's put my conjectures into working order."

"Hira Singh has an informant in Hambragh; his knowledge invariably coincides with the extent of our plans. It is somebody who is cognizant, not merely of bazaar rumor, but of the consultations of the powers; which means there is a leakage, and the leakage is being tapped."

"There is a stranger woman who lived in the bazaar for no ostensible reason. It is very fortunate that she seems to take a friendly interest in my appearance; it is indiscreet of her, for it attracts my attention and it enables me to know when she is and is not at home; and I fancy the knowledge is worth something. To proceed. The lady, having taken an apparent fancy to me, never fails to look out when I pass and she is in her apartments. But she is away sometimes; and her disappearance dovetails between the conception of our plans and Hira Singh's actions to frustrate them. What better spy can be found than a woman? Then, arguing on that premise, whose official virtue has she undermined?"

"If—Well, we shall see. Here is the lane."

He walked the pony down down it. The sun was low behind the minarets and housetops; its rays slanted over the jostling crowd and its many colors, and it bathed the tall Highlander, white and comely as a god, in golden splendor. The people scattered before him; the salesmen stopped chaffering for a moment, and a woman looked from under a crazy eave and pushed the shutter wide. She started across the balcony, as she had done a dozen times before, with an undisguised admiration to which MacIntyre did not respond. His stolidity piqued her; evidently she was unaccustomed to contempt; her gesture betokened amazement that the Scotsman could treat her attention with indifference. MacIntyre kept his gaze between the pony's ears, but he felt the woman crane over as he passed, and he smelt musk through the reek of the bazaar.

"At home to-day." He turned into the kacheri compound and dismounted. "Tell the Inspector Sahib I want to see him," he said to the sentry, and passed on to his office. The room was next door to, and a facsimile of, the collector's office; it had the same delicate appearance, the same high, bare walls, the same square window on the lane side. A bundle of letters lay upon the table, and he tossed them over and tore open a sealed letter.

"Martineau? Yes, it's the Delhi postmark. Good man, Martineau. What news?" His eye ran over the letter.

Your description tallies with that of a young woman named Myra Pereira, a typical member of a Delhi family of long established respectability. I believe even her relations have discarded her now; she committed the unforgivable sin and disappeared with a high-cast native—some one without even the thirty second strain of British engine driver's blood to brighten his complexion. We don't want her back here, thank you; she's too greedy of jewels and soft raiment; it's not good for the probity of her friends. The last was a bank clerk, and he thought a forged check would help propitiate the goddess. So long."

MacIntyre patted the letter approvingly.

"That is very good. Hira Singh is a man of high caste; he is also active in acquiring other people's properties. There's the inspector—in a hurry, too!" He left the office door open and ran into the courtyard.

The inspector, a big, well groomed Mohammedan, in scarlet turban and

khaki uniform, advanced to meet him with some eagerness.

"Well, Inspector Sahib, what news?"

"I have had the woman watched, Sahib. She has kept within doors for two days; but half an hour ago a beggar approached her and delivered a message; and now—even now—she has left her house, veiled, riding upon a pony, and goes toward the city gate. She goes slowly, as if she waited for the night, or for men to join her. Very slowly, Sahib; easy to be kept in sight, as it being done, or to be overtaken."

"Yes; and the beggar?"

"He has been arrested. There is much dust upon him; he has travelled fast and far."

"Bahut accha (very good). It is all quite satisfactory. Now, Inspector Sahib, send a constable with me to search the woman's room; whence I go now; and do you dispatch twenty sowars by a circuitous route to tarry for orders under the city wall; also an orderly to wait for my message at the end of the lane. What instructions has the spy?"

"To keep the woman in sight, to report her direction as she passes the thana (police station), and to give swift warning if she quickens her pace."

Mackintyre and the policeman crossed the lane on foot, and dived through the gaping crowd into an alley that ran behind the shops. They pushed their way past the litter of the kennel, and found a rickety stairway that climbed to the upper floor against the outer wall. MacIntyre ran up it, creaked along the balcony, pushed aside a curtain quickly and advanced with boldness. It was the woman's room, a glance into the street below assured him of the fact; and the overhanging story projected so far above the shops that it seemed almost as if he could touch the government offices by leaning well over the balcony. The room was empty, and there was no tell tale relic to reward his acuteness; only a star, a native bed, a couple of clay water jars and a medley of discarded finery and broken trinkets. A woman's shoe lay beside the bed. The room was very hot and smelt of musk.

MacIntyre turned everything over and searched for evidence. There was nothing to tell that the cast off garments were stolen goods, or that the twisted bangles and scattered beads were the proceeds of Hira Singh's dacoity. The babble of the street droued through the window; the reek of hot bodies and greasy sweetmeats fought with the musk. It was all sordid and unprofitable.

He turned to go, and then stopped in amazement at the sound of a voice in his ears. For the second he thought somebody was in the balcony and was speaking into the room. A glance showed him that there was no one there, and he stood petrified, rooted to the spot by his astonishment; for the voice—and it rang with hollow distinctness—was that of his office peon, addressing in the curt accents of authority, some lesser light. He looked at the constable, whose gaping mouth and round eyes showed his bewilderment. The voice continued to rumble in their ears.

"Ah, son of the pig! Would you leave the Superintendent Sahib's room unswept? There are three—four scraps of paper lying even now on the matting. Sweep!" The sound of a blow followed.

"It—it is a spirit!" gasped the policeman.

"By George! no. It's the leakage!"

MacIntyre's face crimsoned with excitement; he poked his head through the window, twisted his neck and looked up into the bulging eave. He tapped the woodwork and listened, and his eyes travelled from the reeded windows of the offices to the balcony roof and back again.

"A perfect sounding board!" His knuckles called out a hollow knock. "A voice, either in my room or the collector's, would be thrown upon it and rebounded into the lady's ears with the greatest facility. No wonder Hira Singh's friends preferred her bazaar lodgings to better quarters! Well, there should be no conjecture. It is all plain sailing now."

"The sahib understands?" said the policeman in awe-struck tones.

"Yes, I understand. There is the explanation, ji"—and MacIntyre gave a brief lecture on acoustics. "Go now, swiftly, and give this chit to the orderly for the collector sahib." He scribbled a note upon the leaf of his pocket book. "Keep a still tongue in your head, as befits a policeman, and tell my peon, when you see him, that he has no authority to beat the sweeper log."

The policeman scuttled away with a grin, and MacIntyre followed him down the staircase. He went over to the court house, put a flask and roll of bandages into his pocket, buckled on a Sam Browne belt and inspected the chambers of his revolver. Then he sat upon the veranda steps to watch the evening sky flush to rose and gold and blood color, and to wait the coming of fresh horseflesh and Mr. Faulkner.

The spy threw himself down in the sand of the roadside and waited. In appearance he was a half naked, dust-powdered ruff, overcome with heat and exhaustion after a day's work at the water wheel; in reality he was a tough and rising policeman, keen and cautious, with a full knowledge of the responsibility of his task. But that was over now; he had done his work; and all that remained was for him to watch for the sahibs and their party, and to trust that some comrade would give him the tail of a horse to help him

to the finish. The night had shut down upon the hot earth; in the glimmer of starlight the road could be seen dwindling to right and left, and the groves of mangoes that dotted the plain loomed large and vague. Clumps of coarse grass studded the sandy stretch; here and there a cultivator's patch was marked by its clumsy well machinery, and by the machan, (bed platform) in the forks of a tree on which its owner would keep watch by night when crops were high. The cry of a quail and the yelp of pariahs at some distant village were all the sounds that broke the close, heat laden silence.

Half an hour passed. The spy laid his ear to the ground, listened, sat up, and finally sprang to his feet as a blur upon the road began to take shape, and he could hear the clink of bridles and the pad of hoofs. He stood to attention, and Faulkner and MacIntyre grew out of the dusk and reined in. Behind them a many-headed mass paused, too, in a scuff of dust.

"Ah, here's our man," said MacIntyre softly. "What khabbar, policeman?"

"Good news, huzur. Hira Singh and his men are making merry in Kandua village, not a mile from here. Their sentries are but blind men, for I crawled through them to the walls of the village and I saw. The woman is there, also."

"You followed her?"

"I followed her, huzur, when she left the gates of the city, where she was joined by two of the robbers—they are bold men—and rode away very quickly into the country. I took a pony from the thana, and I rode, too, following far behind and riding always under cover, where cover was to be had. I thought it would be a long way to go, huzur; but, lo! it is not so. They are close at hand."

"Doubled in his tracks. The impudence of the brute! And we were thinking he was in Trevor's district!" said Faulkner. "Who would have thought of looking for him in the scene of his last robbery? Go on, policeman."

"If the heaven-born will come now, and those behind also, gently," said the policeman. "I will lead them, for they are drunk and over-bold."

"Take my stirrup," said MacIntyre. He turned in his saddle and lifted his hand, and men and leaders jingled for ward.

"What is the plan of campaign?" said Faulkner. "There's no sounding board here, thank heaven!"

"My idea is to ride within a quarter of a mile of the village, then to dismount the men and let them surround the place, the inspector leading them upon the farther side. I go ahead with you and get as near to the huts as possible. The sentries must be surprised in silence, if it can be done. Then, when I give the signal, or the alarm is started, we close in, and you and I and such men as are near us make for the headquarters' staff. It's Hira Singh I want; the others can catch the rest of the gang if they like each man to pick his spot before he attacks, and work straight for it."

Faulkner nodded his approval and the cavalcade trotted on in silence. The signs of cultivation at the roadside grew more frequent, and presently, low upon the horizon, a spark of fire glimmered in a setting of huddled shadows.

MacIntyre drew rein and dropped his voice. "Kandua," he said. He turned to the men and addressed them briefly, and at the close of the exhortation the troop dropped from their saddles and hobbled each his own horse with rafter rope. Then they spread out of the road into the fields, the stealthy figures creeping farther and farther apart until they faded into the dusk, and only two luckless constables remained to keep eyes upon the horses. The two in authority stalked cautiously from the track and over the arra patches and the water channels, their faces turned to the glitter of flame.

The village grew plain to see. They could hear now the hum of voices, the thud of the tom-tom, and occasionally a drunken shout that beat through the night toward them. A red glow glistened between the walls of the huts, and the spy, who had been stealing in MacIntyre's footsteps, crouched to his elbow and touched his sleeve. He pointed in one direction.

"There is the house in which I saw Hira Singh," he said.

MacIntyre looked and saw the outline of a hut blocking the starlight some fifty yards away. It had a window, from which there spread a cone of light, and between the window and their goal an unsuspecting dacoit lolled upon his rifle with his face toward the earth. The spy looked at him and made a significant gesture with his hands. MacIntyre nodded, and the next instant the man had dropped upon his belly and was advancing like a snake through the waving crops.

Faulkner caught his breath, his attention riveted by the unconscious figure. The crawling policeman had been swallowed up in the growth, and the sentry continued to nod above his folded arms. A minute passed, and the watchers saw something rise behind him to the robber's level. There was a muttered clatter of the falling rifle, a groan that was stifled as soon as it was uttered, and the dacoit blundered to the ground with ten iron fingers gagging him.

MacIntyre did not speak; he waved only to the line and ran forward with stooping shoulders and with hardly a glance at the two men on the ground. The policeman was still clutching, twitching and heaving silently above his handwork. Faulkner felt a shudder of repulsion, but it was no time for scruples; he pressed on, too,

and hoped, doubtfully, that the man might survive the rough handling.

They pulled him under the very walls of the village; and so completely was the surprise that not even an exclamation of alarm was heard, and not a sentinel escaped to shout or fire. The dacoits continued to riot and drink in noise and fancied security. MacIntyre and Faulkner crept close to the window and looked in, so near that they could have almost touched the inner wall. The light came from a chhraj (native lamp) which was smoking on the floor. Beyond it, reclining at his ease in the doorway, a large bearded giant, clear skinned, light eyed and swarthy; sprawled upon a spring bedstead, a hookah at his lips; and beside him, the light flickering upon her beauty and her disguise, squatted Myra Pereira, arch-plover and renegade, with his hand upon her shoulder.

"So thou hast outwitted them again! Well, it is easily done, for the igs have little brains and no speed." The dacoit yawned. "Tomorrow we go to harry the soul of Grigson Sahib and loot that fat tehsildar of his."

"I am tired of playing eaves-dropper," said the woman, with a shrug. "When are we to go to Delhi and show how rich we are? Here one hoards I wish to spend."

"And I to rob," chuckled Hira Singh. "When, my pearl? Oh, when fighting loses its savor. When—"

He stopped and leapt off the bed with a clutch at his knife. The woman sprang to her feet and dashed a veil upon the lamp. She was too late. There was no time to scream, to fly, to put the knife to ribs. The doorway was choked with men, and MacIntyre's arms were around the struggling robber.

A tumult of fighting rose from the village. The place had become an inferno of wounded men, of bitter enemies, of groans and blows and exploding rifles. The dacoits had been thoroughly surprised, but they knew how to fight at odds. Their first instinct was to rally round their leader; and therefore it was that Faulkner, hurrying in to complete the capture, found himself furiously assaulted instead, and fell to battering at his assailant's face in the frenzied struggle for life and liberty.

MacIntyre and Hira Singh swayed and struggled and dashed each other from one side to the other of the hut into which they had tumbled. The dacoit's knife hand was held to his side by the grip that had plinted it at the first onslaught; but MacIntyre tossed him to and fro as a terrier tosses a rat, spitting with rage and his inability to shake himself free. The woman watched with a primitive curiosity; she exhibited no feminine alarm, and she followed the progress of the fight from the darkest corner of the hut, unwilling or careless of the chance of escape.

Weight told. Bit by bit MacIntyre lost his vantage ground; inch by inch his enemy captured his position, and reversed it. He slipped at last, gasping and clutching as he was driven downward, and in the next breath he was hurled and pinned to the ground, and Hira Singh above him was wrenching the knife free for the thrust of victory.

He twisted his wrist, once, twice, and tore it out of MacIntyre's fingers. The knife swung, and then the woman sprang upon him and snatched it from his hand. It spun through the window of the hut; and Hira Singh's unwitting pause swept the tide of fortune again to MacIntyre. He raised himself and caught the dacoit once more about the body, and they rolled across the floor. A minute later Faulkner and the inspector, panting from their own perils, dashed in, and found them thus; and Hira Singh succumbed to the superior numbers.

MacIntyre and Faulkner sat down upon the string bed, while the remnants of the fight ebbed and died about the village, and the policemen began to straggle in with their prisoners. The inspector knotted and reknotted Hira Singh's bonds, and a couple of constables mounted guard over him and the woman.

The dacoit did not speak for a long time. When he did his voice was hoarse with rage and exertion, and the tiger look he flashed at Myra Pereira made the onlookers think her well served by the turn affairs had taken.

"I have thee to thank for this," he said. "I shall not forget."

"Perhaps not, seeing that thou hast but short time before thee for remembrance," she said. She stared at him with indifference, and he scowled and dropped his eyes. Something in his attitude and in the woman's cold-blooded fickleness made a stir of pity in Faulkner's breast for the downfall of the man.

"Is he not your lover? Why did you do it?" he asked in English.

"Oh, he was a savage; I was tired of him," she answered carelessly. "He would have killed the tall young man, and I liked him; he is very good to look upon. If it had been a little ape like you, now, he might have struck and welcome."

"Oh," said Faulkner, dryly, "I see. You evidently pride yourself upon your candor—MacIntyre, do you hear? To your other laurels you must add the triumph of your beautiful appearance. It counts for much, you see, in the untutored nether world. We have cause to be grateful for the lady's favor. Not that something is not due to your quick wits also; I have to thank you for the jubilation in which I shall indulge when I communicate the news to Trevor and Grigson. There will

be much jealousy; I doubt that if you have captured one adversary you have raised up two more."

Hespecto in his usual whimsical way, but MacIntyre looked into his face and saw something that warmed his heart. He, too, was sufficiently thankful for the spruce that had saved his life, and he leaned back against the doorway and surveyed his prisoner with satisfaction and relief. He measured Hira Singh with a foe's appreciation; though he twinged, momentarily, like Faulkner, at the sight of even a rascel suffering the bitterness of desertion and defeat. Myra Pereira had turned her back upon the lost cause and was trying to acquiesce with the adamant inspector.

MacIntyre folded his arms and pictured the little mother in Scotland receiving the news of his success. The tingling exultation of the victor was stirring in his veins. — Chambers' Journal.

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