

King's eyes. "He has done well, and the road is clear!"

The man with boils offered no fight. He dropped his rifle and threw his hands up. In a moment the Orakzai Pathan was in command of two rifles, holding them in one hand and nodding and making signs to King from among the women, whom he seemed to regard as his plunder too. The women appeared supremely indifferent in any event. King nodded back to him. A friend is a friend in the "Hills," and rare is the man who spares his enemy. "Why send that message to me?" asked Muhammad Anim.

"Why not?" asked King. "If none know where the hakim is, how shall the hakim earn a living?"

"None comes to earn a living in the Hills," growled the mullah, swaying his head slowly and devouring King with cruel calculating eyes. "Why art thou here?"

"I slew a man," said King.

"Thou liest! It was my men who got the head that let thee in! Speak! Why art thou here?"

BUT King did not answer. The mullah resumed.

"He who brought me the message yesterday says he has it from another, who had it from a third, that thou art here because she plans a simultaneous rising in India, and thou art from the Punjab where the Sikhs all wait to rise. Is that true?"

"Thy man said it," answered King.

"What sayest thou?" the mullah asked.

"I say nothing," said King.

"Then hear me!" said the mullah.

"Listen, thou." But he did not begin to speak yet. He tried to see past King into the cave and to peer about into the shadows.

"Where is she?" he asked. "Her man Rewa Gunga went yesterday, with three men and a letter to carry down the Khyber. But where is she?"

So he had slept the clock round! King did not answer. He blocked the way into the cave and looked past the mullah at a sight that fascinated, as a serpent's eyes are said to fascinate a bird. But the mullah, who knew perfectly well what must be happening, did not trouble to turn his head.

The Orakzai Pathan crouched among the women, and the women grinned. The Mahsudi, having surrendered and considering himself therefore absolved from further responsibility at least for the present, spat over the precipice and fingered gingerly the sore place where his boils had been. He yawned and dropped both hands to his side; and it was at that instant that the Pathan sprang at him.

With arms like the jaws of a vise he pinned the Mahsudi's to his side, and lifted him from off his feet. The fellow screamed, and the Pathan shouted "Ho!" But he did no murder yet. He let his victim grow fully conscious of the fate in store for him, holding him so that his frantic kicks were squandered on thin air. He turned him slowly, until he was upside-down; and so, perpendicular, face-outward, he hove him forward like a dead log. He stood and watched his victim fall two or three thousand feet before troubling to turn and resume both rifles; and it was not until then, as if he had been mentally conscious of each move, that the mullah turned to look, and seeing only one man nodded.

"Good!" he grunted. "Shabash!" (Well done!)

Then he turned his head to stare into King's face, with the scrutiny of a trader appraising loot. Fire leaped up behind his calculating eyes. And without a word passing between them, King knew that this man as well as Yasmini was in possession of the

secret of the Sleeper. Perhaps he knew it first; perhaps she snatched the keeping of the secret from him. At all events he knew it and recognized King's likeness to the Sleeper, for his eyes betrayed him. He began to stroke his beard monotonously with one hand. The rifle, that he pretended to be holding, really leaned against his back and with the free hand he was making signals.

King knew well he was making signals. But he knew too that in Yasmini's power, her prisoner, he had no chance at all of interfering with her plans. Having grounded on the bottom of impotence, so to speak, any tide that would take him off must be a good tide. He pretended to be aware of nothing, and to be particularly unaware that the Pathan, with a rifle in each hand, was pretending to come casually up the path.

In a minute he was covered by a rifle. In another minute the mullah had lashed his hands. In five minutes more the women were loaded again with his belongings and they were all half-way down the track in single file, the mullah bringing up the rear, descending backward with rifle ready against surprise, as if he expected Yasmini and her men to pounce out any minute to the rescue.

They entered a tunnel and wound along it, stepping at short intervals over the bodies of three stabbed sentries. The Pathan spurned them with his heel as he passed. In the glare at the tunnel's mouth King tripped over the body of a fourth man and fell with his chin beyond the edge of a sheer precipice.

They were on a ledge above the waterfall again, having come through a projection on the cliff's side, for Khinjan is all rat-runs and projections, like a sponge or a hornet's nest on a titanic scale.

The Pathan laughed and came back to gather him like a sheaf of corn. The great smelly ruffian hugged him to himself as he set him on his feet.

"Ah! Thou hakim!" he grinned. "There is no pain in my shoulder at all! Ask of me another favour when the time comes! Hey, but I am sick of Khinjan!"

HE gave King a shove along the path in the general direction of the mullah. Then he seized the dead body by the legs, and hurled it like a slung shot, watching it with a grin as it fell in a wide parabola. After that he took the dead man's rifle, and those of the three other dead men, that he had hidden in a crevice in the rock, and loaded them all on a woman in addition to King's saddle that she carried already.

"Come!" he said. "Hurry, or Bull-with-a-beard yonder will remember us again. I love him best when he forgets!"

They soon reached another cave, at which the mullah stopped. It was a dark ill-smelling hole, but he ordered King into it and the Pathan after him on guard, after first seeing the women pile all their loads inside. Then he took the women away and went off muttering to himself, swaggering, swinging his right arm as he strode, in a way few natives do.

"Let us hope he has forgotten these!" the Pathan grinned, touching the pile of rifles. "Weight for weight in silver they will bring me a fine price! He may forget. He dreams. For a mullah he cares less, for meat and money than any I ever saw. He is mad, I think. It is my opinion Allah touched him."

"What is that, under thy shirt?" King asked.

The Pathan grinned, and undid the button. There was a second shirt underneath, and to that on the left breast were pinned two British medals.

"Oh, yes!" he laughed. "I served the raj! I was in the army eleven years."

"Why did you leave it?" King asked, remembering that this man loved to hear his own voice.

"Oh, I had furlough, and the bastard who stood next me in the ranks was the son of a dog with whom my father had a blood-feud. The blind fool did not know me. He received his furlough on the same day as I, I would not lay finger on him that side of the border, for we ate the same salt. I knifed him this side the border. It was no affair of the British. But I was seen, and I fled. And having slain a man, and having no doubt a report had gone back to the regiment, I entered this place. Except for a raid now and then to cool my blood I have been here ever since. It is a devil of a place."

NOW the art of ruling India consists not in treading barefooted on scorpions—not in virtuous indignation at men who know no better—but in seeking for and making much of the gold that lies ever amid the dross. There is gold in the character of any man who once passed the grilling tests before enlistment in a British-Indian regiment. It may need experience to lay a finger on it, but it is surely there.

"I heard," said King, "as I came toward the Khyber in great haste (for the police were at my heels)—"

"Ah, the police" the Pathan grinned pleasantly. The inference was that at some time or other he had left his mark on the police.

"I heard," said King, "that men are flocking back to their old regiments."

"Aye, but not men with a price on their heads, little hakim!"

"I could not say," said King. To seem to know too much is as bad as to drink too much. "But I heard say that the sarkar has offered pardons to all deserters who return."

"Hah! The sarkar must be afraid. The sarkar needs men!"

"For myself," said King, "a whole skin in the 'Hills' seems better than one full of bullet holes in India."

"Hah! But thou art a hakim, not a soldier!"

"True!" said King.

"Tell me that again! Free pardons? Free pardons for all deserters?"

"So I heard."

"Ah! But I was seen to slay a man of my own regiment."

"On this side the border or that?" asked King artfully.

"On this side."

"Ah, but you were seen."

"Ay! But that is no man's business. In India I earned my salt. I obeyed the law. There is no law here in the 'Hills.' I am minded to go back and seek that pardon! It would feel good to stand in the ranks again, with a stiff-backed sahib out in front of me, and the thunder of the gun-wheels going by. The salt was good! Come thou with me!"

"The pardon is for deserters," King objected, "not for political offenders."

"Haugh!" said the Pathan, bringing down his flat hand hard on the hakim's thigh. "I will attend to that for thee. I will obtain my pardon first. Then will I lead thee by the hand to the karnal sahib and lie to him and say, 'This is the one who persuaded me against my will to come back to the regiment!'"

"And he will believe? Nay, I would be afraid!" said King.

"Would a pardon not be good?" the Pathan asked him. "A pardon and leave to swagger through the bazaars again and make trouble with the daughters and wives of fat traders—a pardon—Allah! It would be good to salute the karnal sahib again and see him raise a finger, thus; and to have

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