

and both horse and mare sensed excitement. The mare's steel shoes sent up a shower of sparks, and King turned to rebuke the Rangar. Yet he did not speak. Never, in all the years he had known India and the borderland beyond, had he seen eyes so suggestive of a tiger's in the dark! Yet they were not the same colour as a tiger's, nor the same size, nor the same shape!

"Look, sahib!"

"Look at what?"

"Look!"

After a second or two he caught a glimpse of bluish flame that flashed suddenly and died again, somewhere below to the right. Then all at once the flame burned brighter and steadier and began to move and to grow.

"Halt!" King thundered; and his voice was as sharp and unexpected as a pistol-crack. This was something tangible, that a man could tackle—a perfect antidote for nerves.

The blue light continued on a zig-zag course, as if a man were running among boulders with an unusual sort of torch; and as there was no answer King drew his pistol, took about thirty seconds' aim and fired. He fired straight at the blue light.

It vanished instantly, into measureless black silence.

"Now you're jolly well done it, haven't you!" the Rangar laughed in his ear. "That was her blue light—Yasmini's!"

It was a minute before King answered, for both animals were all but frantic with their sense of their riders' state of mind; it needed horsemanship to get them back under control.

"HOW do you know whose light it was?" King demanded, when the horse and mare were head to head again.

"It was prearranged. She promised me a signal at the point where I am to leave the track!"

"Where's that guide?" demanded King; and Darya Khan came forward

out of the night, with his rifle cocked and ready.

"Did she not say Khinjan is the destination?"

"Aye!" the fellow answered.

"I know the way to Khinjan. That is not it. Get down there and find out what that light was. Shout back what you find!"

The man obeyed instantly and sprang down into darkness. But King had hardly given the order when shame told him he had sent a native on an errand he had no liking for himself.

"Come back!" he shouted. "I'll go."

But the man had gone, slipping noiselessly in the dark from rock to rock.

So King drove both spurs home, and set his unwilling horse to scrambling downward at an angle he could not guess, into blackness he could feel, trusting the animal to find a footing where his own eyes could make out nothing.

To his disgust he heard the Rangar follow immediately. To his even greater disgust the black mare overtook him. And even then, with his own mount stumbling and nearly pitching him headforemost at each lurch, he was forced to admire the mare's goatlike agility, for she descended into the gorge in running leaps, never setting a wrong foot. When he and his horse reached the bottom at last he found the Rangar waiting for him.

"This way, sahib!"

The next he knew sparks from the black mare's heels were kicking up in front of him, and a wild ride had begun such as he had never yet dreamed of. There was no catching up, for the black mare could gallop two to his horse's one; but he set his teeth and followed into solid night, trusting ear, eye, guesswork, and the God of Secret Service men who loves the reckless.

Once in a minute or so he would see a spark, or a shower of them,

where the mare took a turn in a hurry. Once in every two or three minutes he caught sight for a second of the same blue siren light that had started the race. He suspected that there were many torches placed at intervals. It could not be one man running. More than once it occurred to him to draw and shoot, but that thought died into the darkness whence it came. Never once while he rode did he forget to admire the Rangar's courage or the black mare's speed.

His own horse developed a speed and stamina he had not suspected, and probably the Rangar did not dare extend the mare to her limit in the dark; at all events, for ten, perhaps fifteen, minutes of breathless galloping he almost made a race of it, keeping the Rangar either within sight or sound.

BUT then the mare swerved suddenly behind a boulder and was gone. He spurred round the same great rock a minute later, and was faced by a blank wall of shale that brought his horse up all standing. It led steep up for a thousand feet to the sky-line. There was not so much as a goat-track to show in which direction the mare had gone, nor a sound of any kind to guide him.

He dismounted and stumbled about on foot for about ten minutes with his eyes two feet from the earth, trying to find some trace of hoof. Then he listened, with his ear to the ground. There was no result.

He knew better than to shout, for that would sound like a cry of distress, and there is no mercy whatever in the "Hills" for lost wanderers, or for men who seem lost. He had not a doubt there were men with long jezails lurking not far away, to say nothing of those responsible for the blue torchlight.

After some thought he mounted and began to hunt the way back, remembering turns and twists with a gift for direction that natives might well have envied him. He found his way back to the foot of the road at a trot, where ninety-nine men out of almost any hundred would have been lost hopelessly; and close to the road he overtook Darya Khan, hugging his rifle and staring about like a scorpion at bay.

"Did you expect that blue light, and this galloping away?" he asked.

"Nay, sahib; I knew nothing of it! I was told to lead the way to Khinjan."

"Come on, then!"

He set his horse at the boulder-strewn slope and had to dismount to lead him at the end of half a minute. At the end of a minute both he and the messenger were hauling at the reins and the horse had grown frantic from fear of falling backward. He shouted for help, and Ismail and another man came leaping down, looking like the devils of the rocks, to lend their strength. Ismail tightened his long girdle and stung the other two with whiplash words, so that Darya Khan overcame prejudice to the point of stowing his rifle between some rocks and lending a hand. Then it took all four of them fifteen minutes to heave and haul the struggling animal to the level road above.

There, with eyes long grown used to the dark, King stared about him, recovering his breath and feeling in his pockets for a fresh cheroot and matches. He struck a match and watched it to be sure his hand did not shake before he spoke, because one of Cocker's rules is that a man must command himself before trying it on others.

"Where are the others?" he asked, when he was certain of himself.

"Gone!" boomed Ismail, still panting, for he had heaved and dragged more stoutly than had all the rest together.

King took a dozen pulls at the cheroot and stared about again. In the middle of the road stood his second horse, and three mules with his baggage, including the unmarked medicine chest. Close to them were three men, making the party now only six all told, including Darya Khan, himself and Ismail.

"Gone whither?" he asked.

"Whither?"

Ismail's voice was eloquent of shocked surprise.

"They followed! Was it then thy baggage on the other mules? Were they thy men? They led the mules and went!"

"Who ordered them?"

"Allah! Need the night be ordered to follow the day?"

"Who told them whither to go?"

"Who told the moon where the night was?" Ismail answered.

"And thou?"

"I am thy man! She bade me be thy man!"

"And these?"

"Try them!"

King bethought him of his wrist, that was heavy with the weight of gold on it. He drew back his sleeve and held it up.

"May God be with thee!" boomed all five men at once, and the Khyber night gave back their voices, like the echoing of a well.

King took his reins and mounted.

"What now?" asked Ismail, picking up the leather bag that he regarded as his own particular charge.

"Forward!" said King. "Come along!"

He began to set a fairly fast pace, Ismail leading the spare horse and the others towing the mules along. Except for King, who was modern and out of the picture, they looked like Old Testament patriarchs, hurrying out of Egypt, as depicted in the illustrated Bibles of a generation ago—all leaning forward—each man carrying a staff—and none looking to the right or left.

AFTER a time the moon rose and looked at them from over a distant ridge that was thousands of feet higher than the ragged fringe of Khyber wall. The little mangy jackals threw up their heads to howl at it; and after that there was pale light diffused along the track, and they could see so well that King set a faster pace, and they breathed hard in the effort to keep up. He did not draw rein until it was nearly time for the Pass to begin narrowing and humping upward to the narrow gut at Ali Masjid. But then he halted suddenly. The jackals had ceased howling, and the very spirit of the Khyber seemed to hold its breath and listen.

In that shuddersome ravine unusual sounds will rattle along sometimes from wall to wall and gully to gully, multiplying as they go, until night grows full of thunder. So it was now that they heard a staccato cannonade—not very loud yet, but so quick, so pulsating, so filling to the ears that he could judge nothing about the sound at all, except that whatever caused it must be round a corner out of sight.

At first, for a few minutes King suspected it was Rewa Gunga's mare, galloping over hard rock away ahead of him. Then he knew it was a horse approaching. After that he became nearly sure he was mistaken altogether and that the drums were being beaten at a village—until he remembered there was no village near enough and no drums in any case.

It was the behaviour of the horse he rode, and of the led one and the mules, that announced at last beyond all question that a horse was coming down the Khyber in a hurry. One of the mules brayed until the whole gorge echoed with the insult, and a man hit him hard on the nose to silence him.

King legged his horse into the shadow of a great rock. And after shepherding the men and mules into another shadow, Ismail came and held his stirrup, with the leather bag in the other hand. The bag fascinated him, because he did not know what was in it, and it was plain that he meant to cling to it until death or King should put an end to curiosity.

King drew his pistol. Ismail drew in his breath with a hissing sound, as if he and not King were the marksman. King notched the foresight against the corner of a crag, at a height that ought to be an inch or two above an oncoming horse's ears, and Ismail nodded sagely. Whoever

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