

hooking up the bit and throwing off the blanket. And as he mounted into the native-made rough-hide saddle a shout went up from the fort and native officers and half the soldiery came out to watch the poetry of motion.

The mare was not the only one worth watching; her rider shared the praise. There was something unexpected, although not in the least ungainly, about the Rangar's seat in the saddle that was not the ordinary, graceful native balance and yet was full of grace. King ascribed the difference to the fact that the Rangar had seen no military service, and before the inadequacy of that explanation had asserted itself he had already forgotten to criticize in sheer admiration.

There was none of the spurring and back-reining that some native bloods of India mistake for horsemanship. The Rangar rode with sympathy and most consummate skill, and the result was that the mare behaved as if she were part of him, responding to his thoughts, putting a foot where he wished her to put it and showing her wildest turn of speed along a level stretch in instant response to his mood.

"Never saw anything better," King admitted ungrudgingly, as the mare came back at a walk to her picket rope.

"There is only one mare like this one," laughed the Rangar. "She has her."

"What'll you take for this one?" King asked him. "Name your price!"

"The mare is hers. You must ask her. Who knows? She is generous. There is nobody on earth more generous than she when she cares to be. See what you wear on your wrist!"

"That is a loan," said King, uncovering the bracelet. "I shall give it back to her when we meet."

"See what she says when you meet!" laughed the Rangar, taking a cigarette from his jeweled case with an air and smiling as he lighted it. "There is your tent, sahib."

He motioned with the cigarette toward a tent pitched quite a hundred yards away from the others and from the Rangar's own; with the Rangar's and the cluster of tents for the men it made an equilateral triangle, so that both he and the Rangar had privacy.

With a nod of dismissal, King walked over to inspect the bandobast, and finding it much more extravagant than he would have dreamed of providing for himself, he lit one of his black cheroots, and with hands clasped be-

hind him strolled over to the fort to interview Courtenay, the officer commanding.

It so happened that Courtenay had gone up the Pass that morning with his shotgun after quail. He came back into view, followed by his little ten-man escort just as King neared the fort, and King timed his approach so as to meet him. The men of the escort were heavily burdened; he could see that from a distance.

"Hello!" he said by the fort gate, cheerily, after he had saluted and the salute had been returned.

"Oh, hello, King! Glad to see you. Heard you were coming, of course. Anything I can do?"

"Tell me anything you know," said King, offering him a cheroot which the other accepted. As he bit off the end they stood facing each other, so that King could see the incoming escort and what it carried. Courtenay read his eyes.

"Two of my men!" he said. "Found 'em up the Pas. Gazi work I think. They were cut all to pieces. There's a big lashkar gathering somewhere in the 'Hills,' and it might have been done by their skirmishers, but I don't think so."

"A lashkar besides the crowd at Khinjan?"

"Yes."

"Who's supposed to be leading it?"

"Can't find out," said Courtenay. Then he stepped aside to give orders to the escort. They carried the dead bodies into the fort.

"Know anything of Yasmini?" King asked, when the major stood in front of him again.

"By reputation, of course, yes. Famous person — sings like a bulbul — dances like the devil — lives in Delhi — mean her?"

King nodded. "When did she start up the Pas?" he asked.

"How d'ye mean?" Courtenay demanded sharply.

"To-day or yesterday?"

"She didn't start! I know who goes up and who comes down. Would you care to glance over the list?"

"Know anything of Rewa Gunga?" King asked him.

"Not much. Tried to buy his mare. Seen the animal? Gad! I'd give a year's pay for that beast! He wouldn't sell and I don't blame him."

"He goes up the Khyber with me," said King. "He's what the Turks would call my youldash."

"And the Persians a hamrah, eh? There was an American here lately —

merry fellow — and I was learning his language. Side partner's the word in the States. I can imagine a worse side partner than that same man Rewa Gunga — much worse."

"He told me just now," said King, "that Yasmini went up the Pass unescorted, mounted on a mare the very dead spit of the black one you say you want to buy."

Courtenay whistled.

"I'm sorry, King. I'm sorry to say he lied."

"Will you come and listen while I have it out with him?"

"Certainly."

King threw away his less-than-half-consumed cheroot and they started to walk together toward King's camp. After a few minutes they arrived at a point from which they could see the prisoners lined up in a row facing Rewa Gunga. A less experienced eye than King's or Courtenay's could have recognized their attitude of reverent obedience.

"He'll make a good adjutant for you, that man," said Courtenay; but King only grunted.

At sight of them Ismail left the line and came hurrying toward them with long mountainman's strides.

"Tell Rewa Gunga sahib that I wish to speak to him!" King called, and Ismail hurried back again.

Within two minutes the Rangar stood facing them, looking more at ease than they.

"I was cautioning those savages!" he explained. "They're an escort, but they need a reminder of the fact, else they might jolly well imagine themselves mountain goats and scatter among the 'Hills!'"

HE drew out his wonderful cigarette case and offered it open to Courtenay, who hesitated, and then helped himself. King refused.

"Major Courtenay has just told me," said King, "that nobody resembling Yasmini has gone up the Pass recently. Can you explain?"

"You see, I've been watching the Pass," explained Courtenay.

The Rangar shook his head, blew smoke through his nose and laughed.

"And you did not see her go?" he said, as if he were very much amused.

"No," said Courtenay. "She didn't go."

"Can you explain?" asked King rather stiffly.

"Do you mean, can I explain why the major failed to see her? 'Pon my soul, King sahib, d'you want me to insult the man? Yasmini is too jolly

clever for me, or for any other man I ever met; and the major's a man, isn't he? He may pack the Khyber so full of men that there's only standing room and still she'll go up without his leave if she chooses! There is nobody like Yasmini in all the world!"

The Rangar was looking past them, facing the great gorge that lets the North of Asia trickle down into India and back again when weather and the tribes permit. His eyes had become interested in the distance. King wondered why — and looked — and saw. Courtenay saw, too.

"Hail that man and bring him here!" he ordered.

Ismail, keeping his distance with ears and eyes peeled, heard instantly and hurried off. He went like the wind and all three watched in silence for ten minutes while he headed off a man near the mouth of the Pass, stopped him, spoke to him and brought him along. Fifteen minutes later an Afridi stood scowling in front of them with a little letter in a cleft stick in his hand. He held it out and Courtenay took it and sniffed.

"Well — I'll be blessed! A note!" — sniff-sniff — "on scented paper!" Sniff-sniff! "Carried down the Khyber in a split stick! Take it, King — it's addressed to you."

King obeyed and sniffed too. It smelt of something far more subtle than musk. He recognized the same strange scent that had been wafted from behind Yasmini's silken hangings in her room in Delhi. As he unfolded the note — it was not sealed — he found time for a swift glance at Rewa Gunga's face. The Rangar seemed interested and amused.

"Dear Captain King," the note ran, in English. "Kindly be quick to follow me, because there is much talk of a lashkar getting ready for a raid. I shall wait for you in Khinjan, whither my messenger shall show the way. Please let him keep his rifle. Trust him, and Rewa Gunga and my thirty whom you brought with you. The messenger's name is Darya Khan."

"Your servant,"

"YASMINI."

He passed the note to Courtenay, who read it and passed it back.

"Are you the messenger who is to show this sahib the road to Khinjan?" he asked.

"Aye!"

"But you are one of three who left here and went up the Pass at dawn! I recognize you."

"Aye!" said the man. "She met me and gave me this letter and sent me back."

"How great is the lashkar that is forming?" asked Courtenay.

"Some say three thousand men. They speak the truth. They who say five thousand are liars. There is a lashkar."

"And she went up alone?" King murmured aloud in Pashtu.

"Is the moon alone in the sky?" the fellow asked, and King smiled at him.

"Let us hurry after her, sahib!" urged Rewa Gunga, and King looked straight into his eyes, that were like pools of fire, just as they had been that night in the room in Delhi. He nodded and the Rangar grinned.

"Better wait until dawn," advised Courtenay. "The Pass is supposed to be closed at dusk."

"I shall have to ask for special permission, sir."

"Granted, of course."

"Then, we'll start at eight to-night!" said King, glancing at his watch and snapping the gold case shut.

"Dine with me," said Courtenay.

"Yes, please. Got to pack first. Daren't trust anybody else."

"Very well. We'll dine in my tent at six-thirty," said Courtenay. "So long!"

"So long, sir," said King, and each went about his own business, King with the Rangar, and Ismail and all thirty prisoners at his heels, and Courtenay alone, but that much more determined.

"I'll find out," the major muttered, "how she got up the Pass without my knowing it. Somebody's tail shall be twisted for this!"

But he did not find out until King told him, and that was many days later, when a terrible cloud no longer threatened India from the North.

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