

THE WINDS OF THE WORLD

tate her. But Ranjoor Singh flipped the girl a coin, and it jingled at her feet.

The maid ceased bowing, too insulted to retort. The piece of silver—she would have stooped for gold, just as surely as she would have recognized its ring—lay where it fell. Ranjoor Singh stepped forward toward a glass-bead curtain through which a soft light shone, and an unexpected low laugh greeted him. It was merry, mocking, musical—and something more. There was wisdom hidden in it—masquerading as frivolity; somewhere, too, there was villainy—villainy that she who laughed knew all about and found more interesting than a play.

Then suddenly the curtain parted, and Yasmini blocked the way, standing with arms spread wide to either door-post, smiling at him; and Ranjoor Singh had to stop and stare whether it suited him or not.

Yasmini is not old, nor nearly old, for all that India is full of tales about her, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. In a land where twelve is a marriageable age, a woman need not live to thirty to be talked about;