

hand, every officer had one varlet in attendance, who had not forgotten the legitimate flask of brandy, wherewith a glass of good grog was severally brewed. Sugar there was no lack of; limes, odorous and acid, grow plentifully in the Kolhatar's garden; and our desert was composed of some delicious Carissa berries, ripe, black, subacid, and juicy—plucked in the jungle—with a bunch or two of good plantains. It was my first Christmas dinner in India. At that age enjoyment does not depend upon soups, and stews, and roasts, nor was there any one of us who did not merrily retire to our mats and *charpaees*—bedsteads—with a contented mind.

Next morning beheld us on our return to Chanda. We might have advanced half way thither, when some accident which happened to the litter in which Boodun-see and her double charge were being conveyed, compelled the bearers to set it down in order to repair it. I happened to be in charge of the rear guard, and rode back unattended to hasten the process. I found the task completed, and was on the point of turning my horse's head, when a wild and haggard man, half naked, turbanless, his long black hair waving dishevelled down his shoulders, sprang from the jungle that skirted the road; and, as the bearers drew back in alarm, rushed towards the litter, whence with a sudden grasp he seized the little foundling, and amidst the shrieks of the terrified Mussulwoman, was bearing it away, when I dashed my horse towards him, having no time to draw the useless sword, with which it pleased the Honorable Company at that period to supply its officers by way of defence. Fortunately for me my steed swerved as it reached the bush behind which the fellow lurked, by which chance a spear levelled at me missed its mark, leaving the leveller defenceless, as I imagined. I sprang from my charger, and picking up the spear pursued him through the low but thick brushwood, when, with a fearful yell, stooping to the ground, he picked up a huge stone and flung it with all his might at me. It hit me on the left shoulder with such force that I fell, but the next moment a section of the Nagapore troopers were with us; the child was forsaken as suddenly as it had been seized, and, dashing with the facility of a panther through the jungle, the man escaped. The wailing infant was conveyed once more to her protectress, who in the assailant recognized a stern and gloomy attendant of the robber chieftain's wife, who seemed to hold some inexplicable but important office amidst the band, which to a man obeyed his behests and shuddered at his frowns. Upon inspection my shoulder presented a very decided but ingloriously received wound. The sharp heavy stone had cut through my jacket and inflicted a deep ugly gash, which bled freely. I must frankly own that it caused more mirth than sympathy amongst my messmates.

II.

My story now takes a leap over sixteen years of many changes; but the monotonous routine of military life, apart from such duties as concluding in adventures that can be classed no otherwise than as oases in the desert, once more brought the regiment, in which I now bore the title of Captain, into the territories of the Rajah of Nagapore. We were stationed at Seetabuldee, under the command of Major Woolfe—the same officer who, then holding only a company, had directed the attack on Amceerkote. The orphan daughter of the Pindaree sirdar, for so we chose to suppose her, had grown

up to rare grace and beauty, under the fostering care of Boodun-see. That worthy dame, contrary to the usages of high caste women in those days, had formed a friendly alliance with Mrs. Wolfe, the kind wife of our commandant, who had thus frequent opportunities of judging of the disposition and character of the lovely Nargisi, whom she described as possessing the most endearing qualities, linked with a share of personal charms seldom equalled. The son of Yooet Khan, reared with her in that "behind the *parda*," or curtain, intimacy which befits brother and sister, had soon learnt to distinguish her by an ardent affection by no means fraternal, to which she happily responded; and the parents looked with pleasant eyes on a passion so pure and promising.

The youth himself, by name Hafez Khan, had recently been promoted to a Naigeshup in my company,—a rank which may be named "corporal" in English. He was, in truth, a fine young fellow, a great favorite of the regiment, to every member of which, since earliest boyhood, he had endeared himself by an earnest attention to his duties, a gallant conduct on several important occasions, and a bright cheerful manliness of disposition, which never deserted him. He was a handsome youth, too, with a strong dash of the poet and the musician in his nature, for he became celebrated in the ranks as the author of sundry *rekhtas* and *roubaees* (odes and sounds), that soon became popular, and which he sung in a clear musical tenor, to the accompaniment of his own *rina*. He spoke and wrote the English language with a fluency seldom attained by the better class sepoy, who are generally indisposed against any exhibition of an acquisition that is too frequently—or was, in those days—confined to low caste menials and Paria drummers. Indeed Hafez was of so superior an intellect that it was with no common interest we heard that finally the great festival of betrothment had been held, which affianced him to Nargisi, the foundling Amceerkote. His father, now far advanced in years, and some twenty summers the senior of his wife, had recently subsided on the pension list; and as about this time the regiment was ordered "down country," to Bangalore, old Yooet Khan—a native of that place—resolved to accompany us till fairly out of the Nizam's territories, where solitary travelling might subject his family to perils from which the Company's districts are free. Once beyond the boundaries, he determined to precede us, thus avoiding a dilatory march with troops, the fair *Doolhun*, or betrothed, forming of course part of his goods and chattels.

It so happened that a few weeks previous to our departure from Seetabuldee, a guard of honor was despatched from the battalion, to accompany General — to Secundabad, and in compliance with the formula of the roster Naigee Hafez Khan was detailed for this duty. It was not then his fortune to be with us when we marched, but as our route led through Secundabad, he would probably be detained there our arrival. What was still more unfortunate, however, was that his father was unable to fulfil his intention of starting with us, having been seized with a sudden illness, which rendered delay indispensable: it was not, therefore, until ten days after we left the cantonment that he was able to begin his journey, and consequently he had not the advantage of being accompanied by any guard; resolving, however, to make long stages that he might overtake us, which he could easily do, as a march-

ing regiment, in times of peace, is obliged to halt every fourth day, so that the baggage cattle, etc., may not be knocked up.

We had passed the Kistna river, and were now in the territories of the Nizam, within a march or two of Hyderabad, when one evening at a halt tidings reached us that Soobadar Yooet Khan had arrived at Balconda, the village we had left the morning before, in a pitiable condition. He had been attacked by *looties*, plundered, and his daughter slain! The tidings were conveyed to us by a messenger from the old native officer, who had made a statement of the case to the Potali, or Headman, of the village,—a very active native official, by whom it had been reported without delay to the nearest British authority capable of rendering assistance in the way of pursuit of the plunderers.

Colonel Wolfe could do no more than aid in helping forward the afflicted family, and as the village where they were now detained was but a dozen miles distant, several of the officers obtained leave to ride back and see how matters really were; for we all felt great concern to hear of the death of poor Nargisi. As to myself I had somehow got to consider her as more peculiarly belonging to me, seeing that I was, as it were, the first who set eyes upon her, when yet an infant she had never yet been beheld by a white man. As usual, however, on our arrival at Balconda, where we found the Soobadar and his wife in great sorrow, we discovered that report had magnified misfortunes which, in themselves, contained a sufficient amount of calamity to cause anguish to all concerned. Nargisi had been carried off, but no lives had been endangered, and the circumstances were as follows: On the solitary road leading to Balconda, where the battalion had been so recently encamped, the covered *garee* or wagon, which contained Boodun-see and her adopted child, with a young female attendant, was suddenly attacked by a body of ill-clad men, who paying no heed to the goods and baggage, which lay at their disposal, succeeded in forcibly carrying away Nargisi, after having gagged herself, her protectress, and the servant. The Soobadar who followed slowly on a tattoo (*pony*) came up just in time to hear the crushing leaves in the jungle beneath their departing footsteps. His efforts to follow them up for even a few paces were useless; they had disappeared as if by magic, in the deep fastnesses of the forest. From the waggoner and his son, who had crouched down amongst the bushes until the robbers had departed, he learned what had occurred; and on releasing the terrified females from the galling bonds with which they had been roughly manacled, hand and foot, Boodun-see assured him that Nargisi appeared to be the sole object of their cupidity.

"You remember," cried his wife to me, as I attempted to soothe her, "the wild-looking scoundrel who tried to force away Nargisi from us at the Pindarees' fort, and so nearly being the cause of your death. Well, Sahib, upon my head and eyes be it, he was the leader of the crew; I knew him at once, though he was disguised as a Fakker; wore the usual dress of that order of mendicants; and, of course, looked older and more haggard, for his hair is now white, and his skin smeared with paint and powder. Oh, I am sure that my child is in his power. He will not slay her, but she will die of despair, and what will become of my poor Hafez?"

What indeed could be done more than to represent the affair in the most terrible manner to the civil and military authorities at