

led the way down the cliffside without hesitation, striding like a mountaineer. His men followed him noisily, holding hands to make human chains at the difficult places and shouting a great deal; but not quite naturally now. They were too impressed by the seriousness of what they undertook, and in their hearts too much afraid. The noise was bravado.

It was a weary, long wait, watching from the crevices until the last man's back departed down the cliff, and the procession—Pied Piper of Hamelin and rats (but no music!)—wound across the valley. At last Khinjan Gate opened and the mullah led in. The gate did not shut after the last man, King noted that.

"Let us go now!" shouted fifty voices, and every man of King's party showed himself and stretched. "Let us go! Why wait?"

But King would not go. Nor would he explain why he would not go. Nor could he tell himself what held him, gazing at Khinjan, except that he

thought of Yasmini and ached to know what she was doing.

It was thirty minutes after the last of the mullah's men had vanished through the gate, and his own men in dozens and twenties were scattered along the cliff-top arguing against delay with growing rancor, when a lone horseman galloped out of Khinjan Gate and started across the valley. He rode recklessly. He was either panic-stricken or else bolder than the devil.

In a minute King had recognized the mare, and so had the eyes of fifty men around him. No man with half an eye for a horse could have failed to recognize that black mare, having ever seen her once. She came like a goat among the rocks, just as she had once dived into darkness in the Khyber with King following. In another two minutes King had recognized the Rangar's silken turban. And now there was no need to restrain the men; they all stood and watched, to

know what new turn affairs were taking.

Most of them were staring downward at the Rangar's head as he urged the mare up the cliff path, when the explanation of Yasmini's message came. It was only King, urged by some intuition, who had his eyes fixed on Khinjan.

There came a shock that actually swayed the hill they stood on. The mare on the path below missed her footing and fell a dozen feet, only to get up again and scramble as if a thousand devils were behind her, the Rangar riding her grimly, like a jockey in a race. Three more shocks followed. A great slice of Khinjan suddenly caved in with a roar, and smoke and dust burst upward through the tumbling crust.

There was a pause after that, as if the waiting elements were gathering strength. For ten minutes they watched and scarcely breathed. Rewa Gunga gained the summit and, dismounting, stood by King with the

reins over his arm. The mare was too blown to do anything but stand and tremble. And King was too enthralled to do anything but stare.

"That is what a woman can do for a man!" said Rewa Gunga, grimly. "She set a fuse and exploded all the dynamite. There were tons of it! The galleries must have fallen in, one on the other! A thousand men digging for a thousand years could never get into Khinjan now, and the only way out is down Earth's Drink! She bade me come and bid you good-bye, sahib. I would have stayed in there, but she commanded me. She said, 'Tell King sahib my love was true. Tell him I give him India and all Asia that were at my mercy!'"

WHILE the Rangar spoke there came three more earth tremors in swift succession, and a thunder out of Khinjan as if the very "Hills" were coming to an end. The mare grew frantic and the Rangar summoned six men to hold her.

Suddenly, right over the top of Khinjan's upper rim, where only the eagles ever perched, there burst a column of water, immeasurable, huge, that for a moment blotted out the sun. It rose sheer upward, curved on itself, and fell in a million-ton deluge on to Khinjan and into Khinjan valley, hissing and roaring and thundering.

Earth's Drink had been blocked by the explosion and had found a new way over the barrier before plunging down again into the bowels of the world. The one sky-flung leap it made as its weight burst down a mountain wall was enough to blot out Khinjan forever, and what had been a dry mile-wide moat was a shallow lake with death's rack and rubbish floating on the surface.

The earth rocked. The Hillmen prayed, and King stared, trying to memorize all that had been. Suddenly it flashed across his mind that the Rangar, who had striven like a fiend to stab him only a matter of hours ago, was now standing behind him, within a yard.

He was up on his feet in a second and faced about. The Rangar laughed.

"So ends the 'Heart of the Hills!'" he said. "Think kindly of her, sahib. She thought well enough of you!"

He laughed again and sprang on the black mare, and before King could speak or raise a hand to stop him he was off, hell-bent-for-leather along the precipice in the direction of the Khyber Pass and India. Two of the men who had come out of Khinjan mounted and spurred after him.

King collected his men and the women and children. It was easy, for they were numb from what they had witnessed and dazed by fear. In half an hour he had them mustered and marching.

"Let us go back and loot the mullah's camp and take the women!" urged a dozen men at least.

"Go then!" said King. "Go back! But I go on!"

"He is afraid! The hakim is afraid of what he saw!"

KING let them think so. He let them think anything they chose, knowing well that what had unnerved him had at least rendered them amenable to leading. They would have no more dared go back without him, and without at least a hundred others, than they would have dared go and hunt in the ruins of Khinjan.

Even Ismail clung to his stirrup and would not leave him, looking like a fledgling with his beard all new-sprouted on his jaw, and eyes wider than any bird's.

"Why art thou here?" King asked

It's the pretty house at the top of the hill



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