

THE ADVENTURES OF KATHLYN

BY HAROLD MACGRATH.

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Kathlyn Hare, believing her father, Col. Hare, in peril, has summoned her, leaves her home in California to go to him in Allah, India. Umballah, pretender to the throne of the principality, has imprisoned the colonel, named by the late king as his heir, because he fears the American may insist on his royal rights. Upon her arrival in Allah, Kathlyn is informed by Umballah that her father being dead, she is to be queen, and must marry him forthwith. Because of her refusal she is sentenced to undergo two ordeals with wild beasts.

John Bruce, an American and fellow passenger on the boat which brought Kathlyn to Allah, saves her life. The elephant which carries her from the scene of her trial becomes frightened and runs away, separating her from Bruce and the rest of the party.

After a ride filled with peril she takes refuge in a ruined temple. The holy men and virgins, leaving her to be an ancient priestess, rise from the tomb, allow her to remain as the guardian of the sacred fire. But Kathlyn's haven is also the abode of a lion, and she is forced to flee from it, with the savage beast in pursuit. She escapes and finds a retreat in the jungle, only to fall into the hands of a band of slave traders, who bring her to Allah to the public mart. She is sold to Umballah, who, finding her still unsubmitive, throws her into the dungeon with her father.

Bruce and his friends effect the release of Kathlyn and the colonel. Umballah's attempt to recapture them is unsuccessful, and the fugitives are given shelter in the palace of King Khan.

Supplied with camels and servants by that hospitable prince, the party endeavors to reach the coast, but is overpowered by a band of brigands, and the encounter results in the colonel being delivered to Umballah. Kathlyn and Bruce escape from their captors and return to Allah, where Kathlyn leaves and she is forced to flee from it, with the savage beast in pursuit.

Umballah has crept back to the city, and with one of the women of the harem as an accomplice, murders the poor old king. It is arranged to have Pundita, a member of the royal house and wife to Ramabai, crowned queen. But Umballah secured the priesthood, the great power in Allah, as ally, comes back to the palace with absolute authority. His first official act is to imprison Kathlyn, Winnie, the Colonel, and Bruce.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THERE is an old saying in Rajput that woman and the winds were born at the same time, of the same mother; blew hot, blew cold, blaimly or tempestuously, from all points at once.

In the palace at the royal palace there was a woman, tall, lithe, with a skin of ivory and roses and eyes as brown as the husk of a chestnut. On her neck she wore a necklace of pearls and rubies and sapphires, and her arms were encircled with gold and silver bracelets of hammered gold, round her neck a row of pearls and emeralds and rubies and sapphires. And still she was not happy.

She paced the cool marble of her chamber with slow step, with fast step; or leaned against the wall, her face hidden in her arms; or pressed her hot cheeks against the cool marble of the lattice.

Human nature is made up of contraries. Why, when we have had the courage coolly to plan murder, or to aid or suggest it, why must we be troubled with remorse? More than this, why must we battle against the silly impulse to tell the first we meet what we have done? Remorse: what is it?

Now, this woman of the zennas believed not in the God of her fathers and mine. She was a pagan; her heaven and hell were ruled by a thousand gods, and her temples were filled with their images. Yet this thing, remorse, was stabbing her with its hot needles, till no torture devised by man could equal it.

She was the poor, foolish woman who loved Durga Ram; loved him as these wild Asiatic women love, from murder to the poisoned cup. Loved him, and knew that he loved her not, but used her for his own selfish ends. There you have it. Had he loved her, remorse never would have lifted his head or raised its voice. And again, had not Umballah sought the white woman, this butterfly of the harem might have died of old age without unbending her soul. Remorse is the result of a crime committed uselessly. Humanity is unchangeable, for all its variety of sins.

And here was this woman, wanting to tell some one!

Umballah had done a peculiar thing; he had not laid hands upon either Ramabai or Pundita. When asked the reason for this generosity toward a man who but recently put a price on his head, Umballah smiled and explained that Ramabai was not only broken politically but was a religious outcast. It was happiness for such a person to die, so he preferred that Ramabai should live.

Secretly, however, Ramabai's revolutionary friends were still back of him, though they pretended to bow to the yoke of the priests.

So upon this day matters stood thus: the Colonel, Kathlyn, Bruce, and Winnie were prisoners again; Ahmed was in hiding; and Ramabai and wife mocked by those who once had cheered them. The ingratitude of kings is as nothing when compared to the ingratitude of a people.

A most ridiculous country; to crown Kathlyn again (for the third time) and then to lock her up! Next to superstition as a barrier to progress there stands custom. Everything one did must be done as some one else had done it; the initiative was still chained up in the temple, it belonged to the bald priests only.

But Umballah had made two mistakes; he should have permitted the white woman to leave the country and given a silken cord to the chief eunuch, to apply as directed. There are no written laws among the dark peoples that forbid the disposal of that chattel known as a woman of the harem, or zennas

Allah to the ground, and crows and vultures and tigers and jackals shall make these temples their abiding places, and men will forget Allah as they now forget the mighty Chitor." She swung round toward the priests. "You have yourselves to thank. At a word from me, Balakhan enters or stops at the outer walls. I have tried to escape you by what means I had at my command. Now it shall be war! War, famine, plague!"

Her young voice rang out sharp and clear, sending terror to all cowardly hearts, not least among these being those beating in the breasts of the priests.

"Now," speaking to the soldiers, "go liberate my father, my sister, and my husband-to-be; and woo to any who disobey me! For while I stand here I shall be a queen indeed! Peace, or war, famine, and the plague. Summon the executioner. Arrest Durga Ram. Strip him before my eyes of his every insignia of rank. He is a murderer. He shall go to the treadmill, there to slave till death. I have said it!"

Far in the rear of the cowed assemblage, near the door, stood Ahmed, in his old guise of bhaiji, or water carrier. When he heard that beloved voice, he returned to the palace. She was rather dizzy over the success of her inspiration. A few days might pass without harm; but sooner or later they would discover that she had tricked them; and then, the end. But before that hour arrived they would doubtless find some way of leaving the city secretly.

"That it would be many days ere Pundita wore the crown—trust the priests to spread the meshes of red tape!"—Kathlyn was reasonably certain.

"My girl," said the Colonel, "you are a queen, if ever there was one. And that you should think of such a simple thing when we had all given up! They would not have touched Umballah. Kit, Kit, whatever will you do when you return to the humdrum life at home?"

"Thank God on my knees, dad!" she said fervently. "But we are not safe yet, by no means. We must form our plans quickly. We have perhaps three days' grace. After that, woe to all of us who are found here. Ah, I am tired, tired!"

"Kit," whispered Bruce, "I intend this night to seek Balakhan!"

"Yes, what the deuce is Allah to me? Ramabai must fight it out alone. But don't worry about me; I can take care of myself."

"But I don't want you to go. I need you."

"It is your life, Kit, I am certain. Everything depends upon their finding out that Balakhan will strike if you call upon him. At most, all he'll do will be to levy a tribute which Ramabai, once Pundita is on the throne, can very well pay. Those priests are devils incarnate. They will leave no stone unturned to do you injury, after today's work. You have humiliated and outplayed them."

"It is best he should go, Kit," her father declared. "We'll not tell Ramabai. He has been a man all the way through, but we must sacrifice our chances for the sake of a bit of sentiment. John must seek Balakhan's aid."

Kathlyn became resigned to the inevitable.

Umballah. He tried to bribe the soldiers. They laughed and taunted him. He took his rings from his fingers and offered them. The soldiers snatched them out of his palm and thrust him along the path which led to the mill. In Allah political malefactors and murderers were made to serve the state; not a bad law if it had always been a just one. But many a poor devil had died at the wheel before any other reason than that he had offended some high official, disturbed the serenity of some priest.

When the prisoners saw Umballah a shout went up. There were some there who had Umballah to thank for their miseries. They hailed him and cheered him and mocked him.

"Here is the gutter rat!"

"May his feet be tender!"

"Robber of the poor, where is my home, my wife and children?"

"He'll rot in the grave with a pig!"

"That ever been thirsty, highness?"

"Drink thy sweat, then!"

"Give the 'heaven-born' irons that are rusted!"

Before the high tribunal of priests, before the unhappy Kathlyn, before the astonished Umballah, appeared Ramabai and Pundita, between them the young woman of the zennas, now almost dead with terror.

"Hold!" cried Ramabai when the soldiers started toward him to eject him from the temple.

"What?" said Umballah; "will you recant?"

"No, Durga Ram. I stand here before you all, an accuser! I know the law. Will you, wise and venerable priests, you men of Allah, you soldiers, serve a murderer? Will you, with a wave of his hands toward the priests, 'stand sponsor to the man who deliberately planned and executed the miserable death of our king? Shall it be to the contrary, this news that Allah permits itself to be ruled and bullied by a common murderer; a man without family, a liar and a cheat? You, soldiers, you slew the king; you turned upon the hand that had fed, and clothed you and raised you to power. . . . Wait! Let this woman speak!"

A dramatic moment followed; a silence so tense that the fluttering wings of the doves in the high arches could be heard distinctly. Ramabai was a great politician. He had struck not only wisely, but swiftly before his public. Had he come before the priests and Umballah alone, he would have died on the spot. But there was no way of covering up this accusation so bold, direct; it would have to be investigated.

Upon her knees, her arms outstretched toward the scowling priests, she told her tale; how she had saved Umballah during the revolt; how she had secured him shelter with her sister, who was a dancer; how she had confided to her his plans; how she had seen him with her own eyes become one of the fake bearers of the palanquin.

"The woman lies because I spurned her!" roared Umballah.

"Away with her!" cried the chief priest, inwardly cursing Umballah for having permitted this woman to live when she knew so much. "Away with her!"

"The law!" the woman wailed. "The sanctity of the temple is mine!"

"Hold!" Kathlyn, standing up. In her halting Hindustani she spoke: "I have something to say to you all. This woman tells the truth. Let her go untried. You, have priests, have you with Umballah. Listen. Have you not learned by this time that I am not a weak woman but a strong one? You have harmed me and injured me and wronged me and set torture for me, but here I stand, unharmed. This day I will have my revenge. My servant Ahmed has departed for the walled city of Balakhan. He will return with Balakhan an army such as will flatten the city of Allah to the ground, and crows and vultures and tigers and jackals shall make these temples their abiding places, and men will forget Allah as they now forget the mighty Chitor." She swung round toward the priests. "You have yourselves to thank. At a word from me, Balakhan enters or stops at the outer walls. I have tried to escape you by what means I had at my command. Now it shall be war! War, famine, plague!"

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the way his eyes took fire at the contents of that letter. The filigree basket of gold and gems; the trinkets for which he had risked his own life, Kathlyn's, then Winnie's. In turn Bruce and Ramabai perused the letter, and to Ramabai came the inspiration.

"They would seek this treasure, but only he, Ramabai, and Pundita would return. Here lay their way to freedom without calling upon Balakhan for aid. The matter, however, had to be submitted to the priests, and those wily men in yellow robes agreed. They could very well promise Durga Ram his freedom again; pursue these treasure seekers and destroy them, that would be Durga Ram's ransom.

The return to the palace was joyous this time; but in her heart of hearts Kathlyn was skeptical. Till she trod the deck of a ship homeward bound she would always be doubting.

Bruce did not have to seek Balakhan. The night of Kathlyn's defiance Ahmed had acquainted them with his errand. He was now on his way to Balakhan. They need trouble themselves no longer regarding the future.

"All goes well," said Ramabai; "for, to reach this hiding place, we must pass the city of Balakhan. I know where this cape is. It is not large. It juts out into the sea, the Persian gulf, perhaps half a dozen miles. At high tide it becomes an island. None lives about except the simple fisherman. Still, the journey is hazardous. The truth is, it is a spot where there is much gun running; in fact, where we found our guns and ammunition. I understand that there are great secret stores of explosives hidden there."

"Any seaport near?" asked the Colonel.

"Perhaps seventy miles north is the very town we stopped at a few weeks ago."

The Colonel seized Kathlyn in his arms. She played at gayety for his sake, but her heart was heavy with foreboding.

"And the filigree basket shall be divided between you and Pundita, Kit."

"Give it all to her, father. I have begun to hate what men call precious stones."

"It shall be as you say; but we may all take a handful as a keepsake."

Two days later the expedition was ready to start. They intended to pick up Ahmed on the way. There was nothing but the bungalow itself at the camp. Umballah was thereupon secretly taken from the treadmill. He was given a camel and told what to do. He flung a curse at the minarets and towers and domes looming mistily in the moonlight. "Ransom!" he would destroy them with his hands, skulking about the camp at night, dropping behind in the morning, not above picking up bits of food left by the treasure seekers. Money and revenge; these would have kept him to the chase had he been dying!

Day after day he followed, tireless, indomitable, as steadfast upon the trail as a jackal after a wounded antelope, never coming within range, skulking about the camp at night, dropping behind in the morning, not above picking up bits of food left by the treasure seekers. Money and revenge; these would have kept him to the chase had he been dying!

As for Balakhan, he was at once glad and sorry to see his friends. Nothing would have pleased him more than to fall upon Allah like the thunderbolt he was. But he made Ramabai promise that if ever he had need of him, to send for him. And Ramabai promised, hoping that he could adjust and regulate his affairs without foreign assistance. They went on, this time with Ahmed.

Toward the end of the journey they would be compelled to cross a chasm on a rope and vine bridge. Umballah, knowing this, circled and reached this bridge before they did. He set about weakening the supports, so that the weight of passengers could cause the structure to break and fall into the torrent below. He could not otherwise reach the spot where the treasure lay waiting.

The elephants would be forced to ford the rapids below the bridge.

Kathlyn, who had by this time regained much of her old confidence and buoyancy, declared that she must be first to cross the bridge. She gained the middle, when she felt a sickening sag. She turned and shouted to the other to go back. She made a desperate effort to reach the far end; but the bridge gave way, and she was hurled into the whirling rapids. She was stunned for a moment; but the instant to live was strong. As she swung to and fro, whirled here, flung there, she managed to catch hold of a rock which projected above the flying foam. A moment, seeing her danger, urged his elephant toward her and reached her just as she was about to let go.

(Continued next Saturday.)



A most ridiculous country: to crown Kathlyn again (for the third time!)



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