

want to know!" said Kirby, threateningly.

"Ah, sahib, I was jail clerk once—dismissed for minor offences but cumulative in effect. Being familiar with inside of jail, am able to make choice."

"Get on the box-seat with him!" commanded Kirby. "Let him show the driver where to turn. But watch him! Keep hold of him!"

So again the babu was propelled on an involuntary course, and Warrington proceeded to pinch certain of his fat parts to encourage him to mount the box with greater speed; but his helplessness became so obvious that Warrington turned friend and shoved him up at last, keeping hold of his loin-cloth when he wedged his own muscular anatomy into the small space left.

"To the right," said the babu, pointing. And the risaldar drove to the right.

"To the left," said the babu, and Warrington made note of the fact that they were not so very far away from the House-of-the-Eight-Half-brothers.

Soon the babu began to scratch his stomach.

"What's the matter?" demanded Warrington.

"They said they would cut my belly open, sahib. A belly is so sensitive!"

Warrington laughed sympathetically; for the fear was genuine and candidly expressed. The babu continued scratching.

"To the right," he said after a while, and the risaldar drove to the right, toward where a Hindu temple cast deep shadows, and a row of trees stood sentry in spasmodic moonlight. In front of the temple, seated on a mat, was a wandering fakir of the none-too-holy type. By his side was a flat covered basket.

"Look, sahib!" said the babu; and Warrington looked.

"My belly crawls!"

"What's the matter, man?"

"He is a fakir. There are snakes in that basket—cobras, sahib! Ow-ow-ow!"

WARRINGTON, swaying precariously over the edge, held tight by the loin-cloth, depending on it as a yacht in a tideway would to three hundred pounds of iron.

"Oh, cobras are so verree dreadful creatures!" wailed the babu, caressing his waist again. "Look, sahib! Look! Oh, look! Between devil and over-sea what should a man do? Ow!"

The carriage lurched at a mud-puddle. The babu's weight lurched with it, and Warrington's centre of gravity shifted. The babu seemed to shrug himself away from the snakes, but the effect was to shove Warrington the odd half-inch it needed to put him overside. He clung to the loin-cloth and pulled hard to haul himself back again, and the loin-cloth came away.

"Halt!" yelled Warrington; and the risaldar reined in.

But the horses took fright and plunged forward. Though the risaldar swore afterward that the babu did nothing to them; he supposed it must have been the fakir squatting in the shadows that scared them.

And whatever it may have been—snakes or not—that had scared the babu, it had scared all his helplessness away. Naked from shirt to socks, he rolled like a big ball backward over the carriage top, fell to earth behind the carriage, bumped into Warrington, who was struggling to his feet, knocking him down again, and departed for the temple shadows, screaming. The temple door slammed just as Warrington started after him.

By that time the risaldar had got the horses stopped, and Colonel Kirby realized what had happened.

"Come back, Warrington!" he ordered peremptorily.

Warrington obeyed, but without enthusiasm.

"I can run faster than that fat brute, sir!" he said. "And I saw him go into the temple. We won't find Ranjoor Singh now in a month of Sundays!"

He was trying to wipe the mud from himself with the aid of the loin-cloth.

"Anyhow, I've got the most important part of his costume," he said vindictively. "Gad, I'd like to get him on the run now through the public street!"

"Come along in!" commanded Kirby, opening the door. "There has been trouble enough already without a charge of temple breaking. Tell the risaldar to drive back to quarters. I'm going to get this musk out of my hair before dawn!"

Warrington sniffed as he climbed in. The outer night had given him at least a standard by which to judge things.

"I'd give something to listen to the first man who smells the inside of this shay!" he said cheerily.

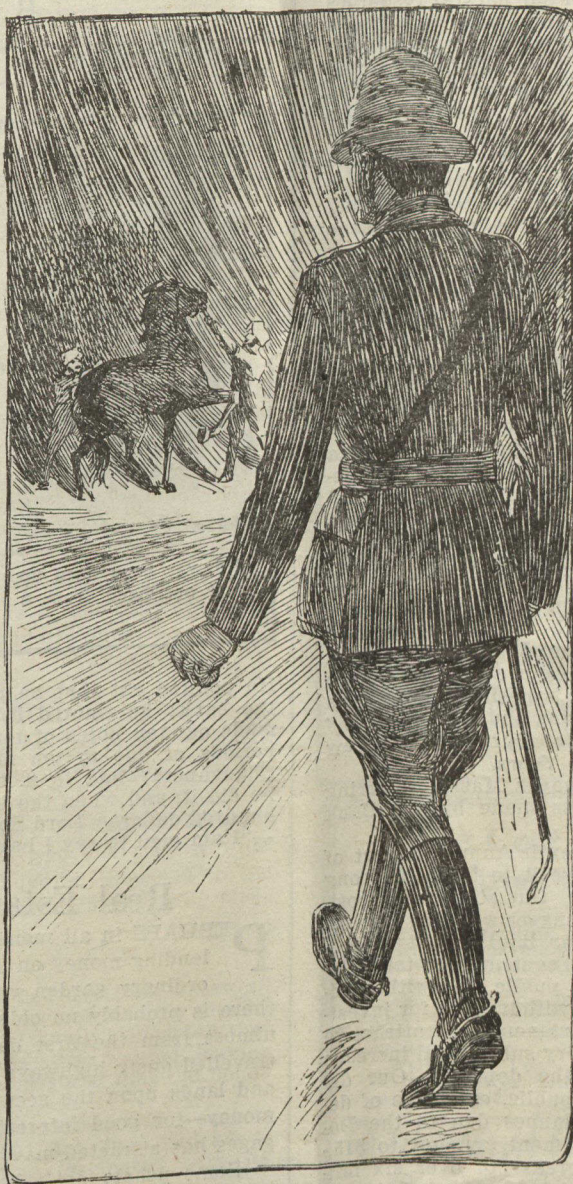
"D'you suppose we can blame it on the babu, sir?"

"We can try!" said Kirby. "Is that his loin-cloth you've got still?"

"Didn't propose to leave it in the road for him to come and find, sir! His present shame is about the only consolation prize we get out of the evening's sport. I wish it smelt of musk—but it doesn't; it smells of babu—straight babu, undiluted. Hello—what's this?"

HE began to untwist a corner of the cloth, holding it up to get a better view of it in the dim light that entered through the window. He produced a piece of paper that had to be untwisted, too.

"Got a match, sir?"



"—two men labored, and a big horse fiercely resented their unseasonable attentions—"

Kirby struck one.

"It's addressed to 'Colonel Kirby sahib!' Bet you it's from Ranjoor Singh! Now—d'you suppose that heathen meant to hold on to that until he could get his price for it?"

"Dunno," said Kirby with indifference, opening the note as fast as trembling fingers could unfold it. He would not have admitted what his fingers told so plainly—the extent of his regard for Ranjoor Singh.

The note was short, and Kirby read it aloud, since it was not marked private, and there was nothing in it that even the babu might not have read:

"To Colonel Kirby sahib, from his obedient servant, Risaldar-Major Ranjoor Singh—Leave of absence being out of question after declaration of war, will Colonel Kirby sahib please put in Order of the Day that Risaldar-Major Ranjoor Singh is assigned to special duty, or words to same effect?"

"Is that all?" asked Warrington.

"That's all," said Kirby.

"Suppose it's a forgery?"

"The ring rather proves it isn't, and I've another way of knowing."

"Oh!"

"Yes," said Kirby.

They sat in silence in the swaying shay until the smell of musk and the sense of being mystified be-

came too much for Warrington, and he began to hum to himself. Humming brought about a return to his usual wide-awakefulness, and he began to notice things.

"Shay rides like a gun," he said suddenly.

Kirby grunted.

"All the weight's behind and——" He put his head out of the window to investigate, but Kirby ordered him to sit still.

"Want to be recognized?" he demanded. "Keep your head inside, you young ass!"

So Warrington sat back against the cushions until the guard at the barrack gate turned out to present arms to the risaldar's raised whip. As if he understood the requirements of the occasion without being told, the risaldar sent the horses up the drive at a hard gallop. It was rather more than half-way up the drive that Warrington spoke again.

"Feel that, sir?" he asked.

"I ordered that place to be seen to yesterday!" growled Kirby.

"Why wasn't it done?"

"It was, sir."

"Why did we bump there, then?"

"Why aren't we running like a gun any longer?" wondered Warrington. "Felt to me as if we'd dropped a load."

"Well, here we are, thank God! What do you mean to do?"

"Rounds," said Warrington.

"Very well."

Kirby dived through his door, while Warrington went behind the shay to have a good look for causes. He could find none, although a black leather apron, usually rolled up behind in order to be strapped over baggage when required, was missing.

"Didn't see who took that apron, did you?" he asked the risaldar; but the risaldar had not known that it was gone.

"All right, then, and thank you!" said Warrington, walking off into the darkness bareheaded, to help the smell evaporate from his hair; and the shay rumbled away to its appointed place, with the babu's loin-cloth inside it on the front seat.

It need surprise nobody that Colonel Kirby found time first to go to his bathroom. His regiment was as ready for active service at any minute as a fire-engine should be—in that particular, India's speed is as three to Prussia's one. The moment orders to march should come, he would parade it in full marching order and lead it away. But there were no orders yet; he had merely had warning.

SO he sent for dog-soap and a brush, and proceeded to scour his head. After twenty minutes of it, and ten changes of water, when he felt that he dared face his own servant without blushing, he made that wondering Sikh take turns at shampooing him until he could endure the friction no longer.

"What does my head smell of now?" he demanded.

"Musk, sahib!"

"Not of dog-soap?"

"No, sahib!"

"Bring that carbolic disinfectant here!"

The servant obeyed, and Kirby mixed a lotion that would outsmell most things. He laved his head in it generously, and washed it off sparingly.

"Bring me brown paper?" he demanded then; and again the wide-eyed Sikh obeyed.

Kirby rolled the paper into torches, and giving the servant one, proceeded to fumigate the room and his own person until not even a bloodhound could have tracked him back to Yasmini's, and the reek of musk had been temporarily, at least, subdued into quiescence.

"Go and ask Major Brammle to come and see me," said Kirby then.

Brammle came in sniffing, and Kirby cursed him through tight lips with words that were no less fervent for lack of being heard.

"Hallo! Burning love-letters? The whole mess is doin' the same thing. Haven't had time to burn mine yet—was busy sorting things over when you called. Look here!"

He opened the front of his mess jacket and produced a little lace handkerchief, a glove and a powder-puff.

"Smell 'em!" he said. "Patchouli! Shame to burn 'em, what? S'pose I must, though."

"Anything happen while I was gone?" asked Kirby.

(Continued on page 26.)