

Winds of the World

Talbot Mundy

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THE WINDS OF THE WORLD

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By TALBOT MUNDY

THE WINDS OF THE WORLD

Ever the Winds of the World fare forth
 (Oh, listen ye! Ah, listen ye!),
East and West, and South and North,
Shuttles weaving back and forth
 Amid the warp! (Oh, listen ye!)
Can sightless touch--can vision keen
Hunt where the Winds of the World have been
And searching, learn what rumors mean?
 (Nay, ye who are wise! Nay, listen ye!)
When tracks are crossed and scent is stale,
'Tis fools who shout--the fast who fail!
 But wise men harken-Listen ye!

YASMINI'S SONG.

CHAPTER I

A watery July sun was hurrying toward a Punjab sky-line, as if weary of squandering his strength on men who did not mind, and resentful of the unexplainable--a rainy-weather field-day. The cold steel and khaki of native Indian cavalry at attention gleamed motionless between British infantry and two batteries of horse artillery. The only noticeable sound was the voice of a general officer, that rose and fell explaining and asserting pride in his command, but saying nothing as to the why of exercises in the mud. Nor did he mention why the censorship was in full force. He did not say a word of Germany, or Belgium.

In front of the third squadron from the right, Risaldar-Major Ranjoor Singh sat his charger like a big bronze statue. He would have stooped to see his right spur better, that shone in spite of mud, for though he has been a man these five-and-twenty years, Ranjoor Singh has neither lost his boyhood love of such things, nor intends to; he has been accused of wearing solid silver spurs in bed. But it hurt him to bend much, after a day's hard exercise on a horse such as he rode.

Once--in a rock-strewn gully where the whistling Himalayan wind was Acting Antiseptic-of-the-Day--a young surgeon had taken hurried stitches over Ranjoor Singh's ribs without probing deep enough for an Afghan bullet; that bullet burned after a long day in the saddle. And Bagh was--as the big brute's name implied--a tiger of a horse, unweakened even by monsoon weather, and his habit was to spring with terrific suddenness when his rider moved on him.

So Ranjoor Singh sat still. He was willing to eat agony at any time

for the squadron's sake--for a squadron of Outram's Own is a unity to marvel at, or envy; and its leader a man to be forgiven spurs a half-inch longer than the regulation. As a soldier, however, he was careful of himself when occasion offered.

Sikh-soldier-wise, he preferred Bagh to all other horses in the world, because it had needed persuasion, much stroking of a black beard--to hide anxiety--and many a secret night-ride--to sweat the brute's savagery--before the colonel-sahib could be made to see his virtues as a charger and accept him into the regiment. Sikh-wise, he loved all things that expressed in any way his own unconquerable fire. Most of all, however, he loved the squadron; there was no woman, nor anything between him and D Squadron; but Bagh came next.

Spurs were not needed when the general ceased speaking, and the British colonel of Outram's Own shouted an order. Bagh, brute energy beneath hand-polished hair and plastered dirt, sprang like a loosed Hell-tantrum, and his rider's lips drew tight over clenched teeth as he mastered self, agony and horse in one man's effort. Fight how he would, heel, tooth and eye all flashing, Bagh was forced to hold his rightful place in front of the squadron, precisely the right distance behind the last supernumerary of the squadron next in front.

Line after rippling line, all Sikhs of the true Sikh baptism except for the eight of their officers who were European, Outram's Own swept down a living avenue of British troops; and neither gunners nor infantry could see one flaw in them, although picking flaws in native regiments is almost part of the British army officer's religion.

To the blare of military music, through a bog of their own mixing, the Sikhs trotted for a mile, then drew into a walk, to bring the horses into barracks cool enough for watering.

They reached stables as the sun dipped under the near-by acacia trees, and while the black-bearded troopers scraped and rubbed the mud from weary horses, Banjoor Singh went through a task whose form at least was part of his very life. He could imagine nothing less than death or active service that could keep him from inspecting every horse in the squadron before he ate or drank, or as much as washed himself.

But, although the day had been a hard one and the strain on the horses more than ordinary, his examination now was so perfunctory that the squadron gaped; the troopers signaled with their eyes as he passed, little more than glancing at each horse. Almost before his back had vanished at the stable entrance, wonderment burst into words.

"For the third time he does thus!"

"See! My beast overreached, and he passed without detecting it! Does the sun set the same way still?"

"I have noticed that he does thus each time after a field-day. What is the connection? A field-day in the rains--a general officer talking to us afterward about the Salt, as if a Sikh does not understand the Salt better than a British general knows English--and our risaldar-major neglecting the horses--is there a connection?"

"Aye. What is all this? We worked no harder in the war against the

Chitralis. There is something in my bones that speaks of war, when I listen for a while!"

"War! Hear him, brothers! Talk is talk, but there will be no war until India grows too fat to breathe--unless the past be remembered and we make one for ourselves!"

* * * * *

There was silence for a while, if a change of sounds is silence. The Delhi mud sticks as tight as any, and the kneading of it from out of horsehair taxes most of a trooper's energy and full attention. Then, the East being the East in all things, a solitary; trooper picked up the scent and gave tongue, as a true hound guides the pack.

"Who is _she_?" he wondered, loud enough for fifty men to hear.

From out of a cloud of horse-dust, where a stable helper on probation combed a tangled tail, came one word of swift enlightenment.

"Yasmini!"

"Ah-h-h-h!" In a second the whole squadron was by the ears, and the stable-helper was the center of an interest he had not bargained for.

"Nay, sahibs, I but followed him, and how should I know? Nay, then I did not follow him! It so happened. I took that road, and he stepped out of a _tikka-gharri_ at her door. Am I blind? Do I not know her door? Does not everybody know it? Who am I that I should know why he goes again? But--does a moth fly only once to the lamp-flame? Does a drunkard drink but once? By the Guru, nay! May my tongue parch in my throat if I said he is a drunkard! I said--I meant to say--seeing she is Yasmini, and he having been to see her once--and being again in a great hurry--whither goes he?"

So the squadron chose a sub-committee of inquiry, seven strong, that being a lucky number the wide world over, and the movements of the risaldar-major were reported one by one to the squadron with the infinite exactness of small detail that seems so useless to all save Easterns.

Fifteen minutes after he had left his quarters, no longer in khaki uniform, but dressed as a Sikh gentleman, the whole squadron knew the color of his undershirt, also that he had hired a _tikka-gharri_, and that his only weapon was the ornamental dagger that a true Sikh wears twisted in his hair. One after one, five other men reported him nearly all the way through Delhi, through the Chandni Chowk--where the last man but one nearly lost him in the evening crowd--to the narrow place where, with a bend in the street to either hand, is Yasmini's.

The last man watched him through Yasmini's outer door and up the lower stairs before hurrying back to the squadron. And a little later on, being almost as inquisitive as they were careful for their major, the squadron delegated other men, in mufti, to watch for him at the foot of Yasmini's stairs, or as near to the foot as might be, and see him safely home again if they had to fight all Asia on the way.

These men had some money with them, and weapons hidden underneath their clothes; for, having betted largely on the quail-fight at

Abdul's stables, the squadron was in funds.

"In case of trouble one can bribe the police," counseled Nanak Singh, and he surely ought to know, for he was the oldest trooper, and trouble everlasting had preserved him from promotion. "But weapons are good, when policemen are not looking," he added, and the squadron agreed with him.

It was Tej Singh, not given to talking as is rule, who voiced the general opinion.

"Now we are on the track of things. Now, perhaps, we shall know the meaning of field exercises during the monsoon, with our horses up to the belly in blue mud! The winds of all the world blow into Yasmini's and out again. Our risaldar-major knows nothing at all of women--and that is the danger. But he can listen to the wind; and, what he hears, sooner or later we shall know, too. I smell happenings!"

Those three words comprised the whole of it. The squadron spent most of the night whispering, dissecting, analyzing, subdividing, weighing, guessing at that smell of happenings, while its risaldar-major, thinking his secret all his own, investigated nearer to its source.

Have you heard the dry earth shrug herself
For a storm that tore the trees?

Have you watched loot-hungry Faithful
Praising Allah on their knees?

Have you felt the short hairs rising
When the moon slipped out of sight,

And the chink of steel on rock explained
That footfall in the night?

Have you seen a gray boar sniff up-wind
In the mauve of waking day?

Have you heard a mad crowd pause and think?
Have you seen all Hell to pay?

CHAPTER II

Yasmini bears a reputation that includes her gift for dancing and her skill in song, but is not bounded thereby, Her stairs illustrated it--the two flights of steep winding stairs that lead to her bewildering reception-floor; they seem to have been designed to take men's breath away, and to deliver them at the top defenseless.

But Risaldar-Major Ranjoor Singh mounted them with scarcely an effort, as a man who could master Bagh well might, and at the top his middle-aged back was straight and his eye clear. The cunning, curtained lights did not distract him; so he did not make the usual mistake of thinking that the Loveliness who met him was Yasmini.

Yasmini likes to make her first impression of the evening on a man just as he comes from making an idiot of himself; so the maid who curtsies in the stair-head maze of mirrored lights has been trained to imitate 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; and if she can dance as Yasmini does--though only the Russian ballet can do that--she has the secret of perpetual youth to help her defy the years. No doubt the soft light favored her, but she might have been Ranjoor Singh's granddaughter as she barred his way and looked him up and down impudently through languorous brown eyes.

"Salaam, O plowman!" she mocked. She was not actually still an instant, for the light played incessantly on her gauzy silken trousers and jeweled slippers, but she made no move to admit him. "My honor grows! Twice--nay, three times in a little while!"

She spoke in the Jat tongue fluently; but that was not remarkable, because Yasmini is mistress of so many languages that men say one can not speak in her hearing and not be understood.

"I am a soldier," answered Ranjoor Singh more than a little stiffly.

"'I am a statesman,' said the viceroy's babu! A Sikh is a Jat farmer with a lion's tail and the manners of a buffalo! Age or gallantry will bend a man's back. What keeps it straight--the smell of the farmyard on his shoes?"

Ranjoor Singh did not answer, nor did he bow low as she intended. She forgot, perhaps, that on a previous occasion he had seen her snatch a man's turban from his head and run with it into the room, to the man's sweating shame. He kicked his shoes off calmly and waited as a man waits on parade, looking straight into her eyes that were like dark jewels, only no jewels in the world ever glowed so wonderfully; he thought he could read anger in them, but that ruffled him no more than her mockery.

"Enter, then, O farmer!" she said, turning lithely as a snake, to beckon him and lead the way.

Now he had only a back view of her, but the contour of her neck and chin and her shoulders mocked him just as surely as her lips were

making signals that he could not see. One answer to the signals was the tittering of twenty maids, who sat together by the great deep window, ready to make music.

"They laugh to see a farmer strayed from his manure-pile!" purred Yasmini over her shoulder; but Ranjoor Singh followed her unperturbed.

He was finding time to study the long room, its divans and deep cushions around the walls; and it did not escape his notice that many people were expected. He guessed there was room for thirty or forty to sit at ease.

Like a pale blue will-o'-the-wisp, a glitter in the cunning lights, she led him to a far end of the room where many cushions were, There she turned on him with a snake-like suddenness that was one of her surest tricks.

"I shall have great guests to-night--I shall be busy."

"That is thy affair," said Ranjoor Singh, aware that her eyes were seeking to read his soul. The dropped lids did not deceive him.

"Then, what do you want here?"

That question was sheer impudence. It is very well understood in Delhi that any native gentleman of rank may call on Yasmini between midday and midnight without offering a reason for his visit; otherwise it would be impossible to hold a salon and be a power in politics, in a land where politics run deep, but where men do not admit openly to which party they belong. But Yasmini represents the spirit of the Old East, sweeter than a rose and twice as tempting--with a poisoned thorn inside. And here was the New East, in the shape of a middle-aged Sikh officer taught by Young England.

He annoyed her.

Ranjoor Singh's answer was to seat himself, with a dignity the West has yet to learn, on a long divan against the wall that gave him a good view of the entrance and all the rest of the room, window included. Instantly Yasmini flung herself on the other end of it, and lay face downward, with her chin resting on both hands.

She studied his face intently for sixty seconds, and it very seldom takes her that long to read a man's character, guess at his past, and make arrangements for his future, if she thinks him worth her while.

"Why are you here?" she asked again at the end of her scrutiny.

Ranjoor Singh seemed not to hear her; he was watching other men who entered, and listening to the sound of yet others on the stairs. No other Sikh came in, nor more than one of any other caste or tribe; yet he counted thirty men in half as many minutes.

"I think you are a buffalo!" she said at last; but if Ranjoor Singh was interested in her thoughts he forgot to admit it.

A dozen more men entered, and the air, already heavy, grew thick with tobacco smoke mingling with the smoke of sandal-wood that floated back and forth in layers as the punkahs swung lazily.

Outside, the rain swished and chilled the night air; but the hot air from inside hurried out to meet the cool, and none of the cool came in. The noise of rain became depressing until Yasmini made a signal to her maids and they started to make music.

Then Yasmini caught a new sound on the stairs, and swiftly, instantly, instead of glancing to the entrance, her eyes sought Ranjor Singh's; and she saw that he had heard it too. So she sat up as if enlightenment had come and had brought disillusion in its wake.

The glass-bead curtain jingled, and a maid backed through it giggling, followed in a hurry by a European, dressed in a white duck apology for evening clothes. He seemed a little the worse for drink, but not too drunk to recognize the real Yasmini when he saw her and to blush crimson for having acted like an idiot.

"Queen of the Night!" he said in Hindustani that was peculiarly mispronounced.

"_Box-wallah!_" she answered under her breath; but she smiled at him, and aloud she said, "Will the sahib honor us all by being seated?"

A maid took charge of the man at once, and led him to a seat not far from the middle of the room. Yasmini, whose eyes were on Ranjor Singh every other second, noticed that the Sikh, having summed up the European, had already lost all interest.

But there, were other footsteps. The curtain parted again to admit a second European, a somewhat older man, who glanced back over his shoulder deferentially and, to Yasmini's unerring eye, tried to carry off prudish timidity with an air of knowingness.

"Who is he?" demanded Ranjor Singh; and Yasmini rattled the bracelets on her ankles loud enough to hide a whisper.

"An agent," she answered. "He has an office here in Delhi. The first man is his clerk, who is supposed to be the leader into mischief; they have made him a little drunk lest he understand too much. I have sent a maid to him that he may understand even less."

The second man was closely followed by a third, and Yasmini smothered a squeal of excitement, for she saw that Ranjor Singh's eyes were ablaze at last and that he had sat bolt upright without knowing it. The third man was dressed like the other two in white duck, but he wore his clothes not as they did. He was tall and straight. One could easily enough imagine him dressed better.

His quick, intelligent gray eyes swept over the whole room while he took two steps, and at once picked out Yasmini as the mistress of the place; but he waited to bow to her until the first man pointed her out. Then it seemed to Ranjor Singh--who was watching as minutely as Yasmini in turn watched him--that, when he bowed, this tall, confident-looking individual almost clicked his heels together, but remembered not to do so just in time. The eyes of the East miss no small details. Yasmini, letting her jeweled ankles jingle again, chuckled to Ranjor Singh.

"And they say he comes from Europe selling goods," she whispered.

"The fat man who is frightened claims to be a customer for bales of blankets. Since when has the customer been humble while the seller calls the tune? Look!"

The second arrival and the third sat down together as she spoke; and while the second sat like a merchant, nursing fat hands on a consequential paunch, the third sat straight-backed, kicking a little sidewise with his left leg. Ranjoor Singh saw, too, that he kept his heels a little more than a spur's length off from the divan's drapery.

"Listen!" hissed Ranjoor Singh.

Yasmini wriggled closer, and pretended to be watching her maids over by the window.

"That man who came last," said the risaldar-major, "has been told that thou art like a spider, watching from the middle of the web of India."

"Then for once they have told the truth!" she chuckled.

"In the bazaar he asked to be shown men of all the tribes, that he might study their commercial needs. He was told to come here and meet them; and these were sent for from the caravanserais. Is it not so?"

"Art thou thyself for the Raj?" asked Yasmini.

"I lead a squadron of Sikh cavalry," said Ranjoor Singh, "and you ask me am I for the Raj?"

"The buffalo that carries water for the office lawn is for the Raj!" said Yasmini.

"Then he and I are brothers."

"And he, yonder--what of him?" She was growing impatient, for the tune was nearly at an end, and it would be time presently for her to take up the burden of entertainment.

"He will ask, perhaps, to speak with a Sikh of influence."

"Sahib, 'to hear is to obey,'" she mocked, rising to her feet.

"Listen yet!" commanded Ranjoor Singh. "Serve me in this matter, and there will be great reward. I, who am only one, might die by a dagger, or a rope in the dark, or ground glass in my bread; but then there would be a squadron, and perhaps a regiment, to ask questions."

"Perhaps?"

"Perhaps. Who knows?"

He spoke from modesty, sure of the squadron that he loved so much better than his life, but not caring to magnify his own importance by claiming the regard of the other squadrons, too. But Yasmini, who never in her life went straight from point to point of an idea and never could believe that anybody else did, supposed he meant that one squadron was in his confidence, whereas the rest had not yet been sounded.

"So speaks one who is for the Raj!" she grinned.

Playing for profit and amusement, she never, never let anybody know which side she had taken in any game. Therefore she despised a man who showed his hand to her, as she believed Ranjoor Singh had done. But she only showed contempt when it suited her, and by no means always when she felt it.

The minor music ceased and all eyes in the room were turned to her. She rose to her feet as a hooded cobra comes toward its prey, sparing a sidewise surreptitious smile of confidence for Ranjoor Singh that no eye caught save his; yet as she turned from him and swayed in the first few steps of a dance devised that minute, his quick ear caught the truth of her opinion:

"Buffalo!" she murmured.

The flutes in the window wailed about mystery. The lights, and the sandal-smoke, and the expectant silence emphasized it. Step by step, as if the spirit of all dancing had its home in her, she told a wordless tale, using her feet and every sinuous muscle as no other woman in all India ever did.

Men say that Yasmini is partly Russian, and that may be true, for she speaks Russian fluently. Russian or not, the members of the Russian ballet are the only others in the world who share her art. Certainly, she keeps in touch with Russia, and knows more even than the Indian government about what goes on beyond India's northern frontier. She makes and magnifies the whole into a mystery; and her dance that night expressed the fascination mystery has for her.

And then she sang. It is her added gift of song that makes Yasmini unique, for she can sing in any of a dozen languages, and besides the love-songs that come southward from the hills, she knows all the interminable ballads of the South and the Central Provinces. But when, as that evening, she is at her best, mixing magic under the eyes of the inquisitive, she sings songs of her own making and only very rarely the same song twice. She sang that night of the winds of the world which, she claims, carry the news to her; although others say her sources of information speak more distinctly.

It seemed that the thread of an idea ran through song and dance alike, and that the hillmen and beyond-the-hills-men, who sat back-to-the-wall and watched, could follow the meaning of it. They began to crowd closer, to squat cross-legged on the floor, in circles one outside the other, until the European three became the center of three rings of men who stared at them with owls' solemnity.

Then Yasmini ceased dancing. Then one of the Europeans drew his watch out; and he had to show it to the other two before he could convince them that they had sat for two hours without wanting to do anything but watch and listen.

"So _wass!_" said one of them--the drunken.

"Du lieber Gott--schon halb zwolf!" said the second.

The third man made no remark at all. He was watching Ranjoor Singh.

The risaldar--major had left the divan by the end wall and walked--all grim straight lines in contrast to Yasmini's curves--to a spot directly facing the three Europeans; and it seemed there sat a hillman on the piece of floor he coveted.

"Get up!" he commanded. "Make room!"

The hillman did not budge, for an Afridi pretends to feel for a Sikh the scorn that a Sikh feels truly for Afridis. The flat of Ranjoor Singh's foot came to his assistance, and the hillman budged. In an instant he was on his feet, with a lightning right hand reaching for his knife.

But Yasmini allows no butcher's work on her premises, and her words within those walls are law, since no man knows who is on whose side. Yasmini beckoned him, and the Afridi slouched toward her sullenly. She whispered something, and he started for the stairs at once, without any further protest.

Then there vanished all doubt as to which of the three Europeans was most important. The man who had come in first had accepted sherbet from the maid who sat beside him; he went suddenly from drowsiness to slumber, and the woman spurned his bullet-head away from her shoulder, letting him fall like a log among the cushions. The stout second man looked frightened and sat nursing helpless hands. But the third man sat forward, and tense silence fell on the assembly as the eyes of every man sought his.

Only Yasmini, hovering in the background, had time to watch anything other than those gray European eyes; she saw that they were interested most in Ranjoor Singh, and the maids who noticed her expression of sweet innocence knew that she was thinking fast.

"You are a Sikh?" said the gray-eyed man; and the crowd drew in its breath, for he spoke Hindustani with an accent that very few achieve, even with long practise.

"Then you are of a brave nation--you will understand me. The Sikhs are a martial race. Their theory of politics is based on the military spirit--is it not so?"

Ranjoor Singh, who understood and tried to live the Sikh religion with all his gentlemanly might, was there to acquire information, not to impart it. He grunted gravely.

"All martial nations expand eventually. They tell me--I have heard--some of you Sikhs have tried Canada?"

Ranjoor Singh did not wince, though his back stiffened when the men around him grinned; it is a sore point with the Sikhs that Canada does not accept their emigrants.

"Sikhs are admitted into all the German colonies," said the man with the gray eyes. "They are welcome."

"Do many go?" asked Ranjoor Singh.

"That is the point. The Sikhs want a place in the sun from which

they are barred at present--eh? Now, Germany--"

"Germany? Where is Germany?" asked Yasmini. She understands the last trick in the art of getting a story on its way. "To the west is England. Farther west, Ameliki. To the north lies Russia. To the south the _kali pani_-ocean. Where is Germany?"

The man with the gray eyes took her literally, since his nation are not slow at seizing opportunity. He launched without a word more of preliminary into a lecture on Germany that lasted hours and held his audience spellbound. It was colorful, complete, and it did not seem to have been memorized. But that was art.

He had no word of blame for England. He even had praise, when praise made German virtue seem by that much greater; and the inference from first to last was of German super-virtue.

Some one in the crowd--who bore a bullet-mark in proof he did not jest--suggested to him that the British army was the biggest and fiercest in the world. So he told them of a German army, millions strong, that marched in league--long columns--an army that guarded by the prosperous hundred thousand factory chimneys that smoked until the central European sky was black.

Long, long after midnight, in a final burst of imagination, he likened Germany to a bee--hive from which a swarm must soon emerge for lack of room inside. And he proved, then, that he knew he had made an impression on them, for he dismissed them with an impudence that would have set them laughing at him when he first began to speak.

"Ye have my leave to go!" he said, as if he owned the place; and they all went except one.

"That is a lot of talk," said Ranjoor Singh, when the last man had started for the stairs. "What does it amount to? When will the bees swarm?"

The German eyed him keenly, but the Sikh's eyes did not flinch.

"What is your rank?" the German asked.

"Squadron leader!"

"Oh!"

The two stood up, and now there was no mistake about the German's heels; they clicked. The two were almost of a height, although the Sikh's head--dress made him seem the taller. They were both unusually fine--looking men, and limb for limb they matched.

"If war were in Europe you would be taken there to fight," said the German.

Ranjoor Singh showed no surprise.

"Whether you wanted to fight or not."

There was no hint of laughter in the Sikh's brown eyes.

"Germany has no quarrel with the Sikhs."

"I have heard of none," said Ranjoor Singh.

"Wherever the German flag should fly, after a war, the Sikhs would have free footing."

Ranjoor Singh looked interested, even pleased.

"Who is not against Germany is for her."

"Let us have plain words" said Ranjoor Singh, leading the way to a corner in which he judged they could not be overheard; there he turned suddenly, borrowing a trick from Yasmini.

"I am a Sikh--a patriot. What are you offering?"

"The freedom of the earth!" the German answered. "Self--government! The right to emigrate. Liberty!"

"On what condition? For a bargain has two sides."

"That the Sikhs fail England!"

"When?"

"When the time comes! What is the answer?"

"I will answer when the time comes," answered Ranjoor Singh, saluting stiffly before turning on his heel.

Then he stalked out of the room, with a slight bow to Yasmini as he passed.

"Buffalo!" she murmured after him. "Jat buffalo!"

Then the Germans went away, after some heavy compliments that seemed to amuse Yasmini prodigiously, helping along the man who had drunk sherbet and who now seemed inclined to weep. They dragged him down the stairs between them, backward. Yasmini waited at the stair--head until she heard them pull him into a _gharri_ and drive away. Then she turned to her favorite maid.

"Them--those cattle--I understand!" she said. "But it does not suit me that a Sikh, a Jat, a buffalo, should come here making mysteries of his own without consulting me! And what does not suit me I do not tolerate! Go, get that Afridi whom the soldier kicked--I told him to wait outside in the street until I sent for him."

The Afridi came, nearly as helpless as the man who had drunk sherbet, though less tearful and almost infinitely more resentful. What clothing had not been torn from him was soaked in blood, and there was no inch of him that was not bruised.

"Krishna!" said Yasmini impiously.

"Allah!" swore the Afridi.

"Who did it? What has happened?"

"Outside in the street I said to some men who waited that Ranjoor Singh the Sikh is a bastard. From then until now they beat me, only leaving off to follow him hence when he came out through the door!"

Yasmini laughed, peal upon peal of silver laughter--of sheer merriment.

"The gods love Yasmini!" she chuckled. "Aye, the gods love me! The Jat spoke of a squadron; it is evident that he spoke truth. So his squadron watched him here! Go, _jungli_! Go, wash the blood away. Thou shalt have revenge! Come again to--morrow. Nay, go now, I would sleep when I have finished laughing. Aye--the gods love Yasmini!"

The West Wind blows through the Ajmere Gate
And whispers low (Oh, listen ye!),

"The fed wolf curls by his drowsy mate
In a tight--trodden earth; but the lean wolves wait,
And the hunger gnaws!" (Oh, listen ye!)

"Can fed wolves fight? But yestere'en
Their eyes were bright, their fangs were clean;
They viewed, they took but yestere'en,"

(Oh, listen, wise heads, listen ye!)
"Because they fed, is blood less red,
Or fangs less sharp, or hunger dead?"
(Look well to the loot, and listen ye!)

YASMINI'S SONG

CHAPTER III

The colonel of Outram's Own dropped into a club where he was only one, and not the greatest, of many men entitled to respect. There were three men talking by a window, their voices drowned by the din of rain on the veranda roof, each of whom nodded to him. He chose, however, a solitary chair, for, though subalterns do not believe it, a colonel has exactly that diffidence about approaching senior civilians which a subaltern ought to feel.

In a moment all that was visible of him from the door was a pair of brown riding-boots, very much fore-shortened, resting on the long arm of a cane chair, and two sets of wonderfully modeled fingers that held up a newspaper. From the window where the three men talked he could be seen in profile.

"Wears well--doesn't he?" said one of them.

"Swears well, too, confound him!"

"Hah! Been trying to pump him, eh?"

"Yes. He's like a big bird catching flies--picks off your questions

one at a time, with one eye on you and the other one cocked for the next question. Get nothing out of him but yes or no. Good fellow, though, when you're not drawing him."

"You mean trying to draw him. He's the best that come. Wish they were all like Kirby."

The man who had not spoken yet--he looked younger, was some years older, and watched the faces of the other two while seeming to listen to something in the distance--looked at a cheap watch nervously.

"Wish the Sikhs were all like Kirby!" he said. "If this business comes to a head, we're going to wish we had a million Kirbys. What did he say? Temper of his men excellent, I suppose?"

"Used that one word." "Um-m-m! No suspicions, eh?" "Said, 'No, no suspicions!'" "Uh! I'll have a word with him." He waddled off, shaking his drab silk suit into shape and twisting a leather watch-guard around his finger.

"Believe it will come to anything?" asked one of the two men he had left behind.

"Dunno. Hope not. Awful business if it does."

"Remember how we were promised a world-war two years ago, just before the Balkans took fire?"

"Yes. That was a near thing, too. But they weren't quite ready then. Now they are ready, and they think we're not. If I were asked, I'd say we ought to let them know we're ready for 'em. They want to fight because they think they can catch us napping; they'd think twice if they knew they couldn't do it."

"Are they blind and deaf? Can't they see and hear?"

"_Quern deus vult perdere, prius dementat_, Ponsonby, my boy."

The man in drab silk slipped into a chair next to Kirby's as a wolf slips into his lair, very circumspectly, and without noise; then he ratched the chair sidewise toward Kirby with about as much noise as a company of infantry would make.

"Had a drink?" he asked, as Kirby looked up from his paper. "Have one?"

"Ginger ale, please," said Kirby, putting the paper down.

A turbaned waiter brought long glasses in which ice tinkled, and the two sipped slowly, not looking at each other.

"Know Yasmini?" asked the man in drab silk suddenly.

"Heard of her, of course."

"Ever see her?"

"No."

"Ah! Most extraordinary woman. Wonderful!"

Kirby looked puzzled, and held his peace.

"Any of your officers ever visit her?"

"Not when they're supposed to be on duty."

"But at other times?"

"None of my affair if they do. Don't know, I'm sure."

"Um-m-m!"

"Yes," said Kirby, without vehemence.

"Look at his beak!" said one of the two men by the window. "Never see a big bird act that way? Look at his bright eye!"

"Wish mine were as bright, and my beak as aquiline; means directness --soldierly directness, that does!"

"Who is your best native officer, supposing you've any choice?" asked the man in the drab silk suit, speaking to the ceiling apparently.

"Ranjoor Singh," said Kirby promptly.

It was quite clear there was no doubt in his mind.

"How is he best? In what way?"

"Best man I've got. Fit to command the regiment."

"Um-m-m!"

"Yes," said Kirby.

The man in drab sat sidewise and caught Kirby's eye, which was not difficult. There was nothing furtive about him.

"With a censorship that isn't admitted, but which has been rather obvious for more than a month; with all forces undergoing field training during the worst of the rains--it's fair to suppose your men smell something?"

"They've been sweating, certainly."

"Do they smell a rat?"

"Yes."

"Ask questions?"

"Yes."

"What do you tell them?"

"That I don't know, and they must wait until I do."

"Any recent efforts been made to tamper with them?"

"Not more than I reported. You know, of course, of the translations from Canadian papers, discussing the rejection of Sikh immigrants? Each man received a copy through the mail."

"Yes. We caught the crowd who printed that. Couldn't discover, though, how it got into the regiment's mail bags without being postmarked. Let's see--wasn't Ranjoor Singh officer-of-the-day?"

"Yes."

"Um-m-m! Would it surprise you to know that Ranjoor Singh visits Yasmini?"

"Wouldn't interest me."

"What follows is in strict confidence, please."

"I'm listening."

"I want you to hear reason. India, the whole of India, mind, has its ear to the ground. All up and down the length of the land--in every bazaar--in the ranks of every native regiment--it's known that people representing some other European Power are trying to sow discontent with our rule; and it's obvious to any native that we're on the watch for something big that we expect to break any minute. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"Our strongest card is the loyalty of the native troops."

"Yes."

"Everybody knows that. Also, this thing we're looking for is most damnably real--might burst to-day, to-morrow--any time. So, even with the censorship in working order, it wouldn't be wise to arrest a native officer merely on suspicion."

"I'd arrest one of mine," said Kirby, "if I had any reason to suspect him for a second."

"Wouldn't be wise! You mustn't!" The man in drab silk shook his head. "Now, suppose you were to arrest Ranjoor Singh--"

Kirby laughed outright.

"Suppose the Chandni Chowk were Regent Street!" he jeered.

"Last night," said the man in drab silk, "Risaldar-Major Ranjoor Singh visited Yasmini, leaving six or more of the men of his squadron waiting for him in the street outside. In Yasmini's room he listened for hours to a lecture on Germany, delivered by a German who has British naturalization papers, whether forged or not is not yet clear.

"After the lecture he had a private conversation lasting some minutes with the German who says he is an Englishman, and who, by the way, speaks Hindustani like a native. And, before he started home,

his men who waited in the street thrashed an Afridi within an inch of his life for threatening to report Ranjoor Singh's presence at the lecture to the authorities."

"Who told you this?" asked Colonel Kirby.

"The Afridi, Yasmini, and three hillmen who were there by invitation. I spoke with them all less than an hour ago. They all agree. But if Ranjoor Singh were asked about it, he would lie himself out of it in any of a dozen ways, and would be on his guard in future. If he were arrested, it would bring to a head what may prove to be a passing trifle; it would make the men angry, and the news would spread, whatever we might do to prevent it."

"What am I to understand that you want, then?" asked Kirby.

"Watch him closely, without letting him suspect it."

"Before I'd seriously consider orders to do that, they'd have to come through military channels in the regular way," said Kirby, without emotion.

"I could arrange that, of course. I'll mention it to Todhunter."

"And if the order reached me in the regular way, I'd resign rather than carry it out."

"Um-m-m!" said the man in drab silk.

"Yes," said Kirby.

"You seem to forget that I, too, represent a government department, and have the country's interests at heart. Do you imagine I have a grudge against Ranjoor Singh?"

"I forget nothing of the kind," said Kirby, "and imagination doesn't enter into it. I know Ranjoor Singh, and that's enough. If he's a traitor, so am I. If he's not a loyal gallant officer, then I'm not either. I'll stand or fall by his honor, for I know the man and you don't."

"Uh!" said the man in drab silk.

"Yes," said Colonel Kirby.

"Look!" said one of the two men at the window. "Direct as a hornet's sting--isn't a kink in him! Look at the angle of his chin!"

"You can tell his Sikh officers; they imitate him."

"Do I understand you to refuse me point--blank?" asked the man in the drab suit, still fidgeting with his watch--guard. Perhaps he guessed that two men in the window were discussing him.

"Yes," said Kirby.

"I shall have to go over your head."

"Understand me, then. If an order of that kind reaches me, I shall

arrest Ranjoor Singh at once, so that he may stand trial and be cleared like a gentleman. I'll have nothing done to one of my officers that would be intolerable if done to me, so long as I command the regiment!"

"What alternative do you suggest?" asked the man in gray, with a wry face.

"Ask Ranjoor Singh about it."

"Who? You or I?"

"He wouldn't answer you."

"Then ask him yourself. But I shall remember, Colonel Kirby, that you did not oblige me in the matter."

"Very well," said Kirby,

"Another drink?"

"No, thanks."

"Who won?" asked one of the two men in the window.

"Kirby!"

"I don't think so. I've been watching his face. He's the least bit rattled. It's somebody else who has won; he's been fighting another man's battle. But it's obvious who lost--look at that watch-chain going! Come away."

 If a man has a price at all, his price is neither high nor low, but just that price that you will pay him.

NATIVE PROVERB.

CHAPTER IV

Of course an Afridi can be depended on to overdo anything. The particular Afridi whom Ranjoor Singh had kicked was able to see very little virtue in Yasmin's method of attack. Suckled in a mountain-range where vengeance is believed as real and worthy as love must be transitory, his very bowels ached for physical retaliation, just as his skin and bones smarted from the beating the risaldar-major's men had given him.

He was scoffed at by small boys as he slunk through byways of the big bazaar. A woman who had smiled at him but a day ago now emptied unseemly things on him from an upper story when he went to moan beneath her window. He decided to include that woman in his vengeance, too, if possible, but not to miss Ranjoor Singh on her account; there was not room for him and Ranjoor Singh on one rain-pelted earth, but, if needs must, the woman might wait a while.

As nearly all humans do when their mood is similar to his, he slunk into dark places, growling like a dog and believing all the world his enemy. He came very near to the summit of exasperation when, on making application at a free dispensary, his sores were dressed for him by a Hindu assistant apothecary who lectured him on brotherly love with interlarded excerpts from Carlyle done into Hindustani. But the climax came when a native policeman poked him in the ribs with a truncheon and ordered him out of sight.

With a snarl that would have done credit to a panther driven off its prey, he slunk up a byway to shelter himself and think of new obscenities; and as he stood beneath a cloth awning to await the passing of a more than usually heavy downpour, the rotten fibers burst at last and let ten gallons of filthy rain down on him.

From that minute he could see only red; so it was in a red haze that two of the troopers from Ranjoor Singh's squadron passed the end of the lane. He felt himself clutching at a red knife, breathing red air through distended nostrils. He forgot his sores; forgot to feel them.

As he hunted the two troopers through the maze of streets, he recognized them for two of the men who had thrashed him; so he drew closer, for fear they might escape him in the crowd. Now that he no longer wandered objectless, but looked ahead and walked with a will and a purpose, street-corner "constabeels" ceased to trouble him; there were too many people in those thronged, kaleidoscopic streets for any but the loafers to be noticed. He drew nearer and nearer to the troopers, all unsuspected.

But the pace was fast, and they approached their barracks, where his chance of ramming a knife into them and getting away unseen would be increasingly more remote; and he had no desire to die until he had killed the other four men, Ranjoor Singh himself, and the woman who had spurned his love. He must kill these two, he decided, while yet safe from barrack hue and cry.

He crept yet closer, and--now that his plan was forming in his mind--began to see less red. In a minute more he recognized a house at a street corner, whose lower story once had been a shop, but that now was boarded up and showed from outside little sign of occupation. But he saw that the door at the end of an alley by the building was ajar, and through a chink between the shutters of an upper story his keen northern eyes detected lamp-light. That was enough. He set his teeth and drew his long clean knife.

Wounds, bruises, pain, all mean nothing to a hillman when there is murder in his eye, unless they be spurs that goad him to greater frenzy and more speed. The troopers swaggered at a drilled man's marching pace; the Afridi came like a wind--devil, ripping down a gully from the northern hills, all frenzy.

Had he not seen red again, had only a little brain--work mingled in his rage, he would have scored a clean victory and have been free to wreak red vengeance on the rest. As it was, rage mastered him, and he yelled as he drove the long knife home between the shoulders of one of the troopers in front of him.

That yell was a mistake, for he was dealing with picked, drilled men

of birth and a certain education. The struck man sank to his knees, but the other turned in time to guard the next blow with his forearm; he seized a good fistful of the Afridi's bandages and landed hard on his naked foot with the heel of an ammunition boot. The Afridi screamed like a wild beast as he wrenched himself away, leaving the bandages in the trooper's hand; and for an instant the trooper half turned to succor his comrade.

"Nay, after him!" urged the wounded man in the Jat tongue; and, seeing a crowd come running from four directions, the Sikh let him lie, to race after the Afridi.

He caught little more than a glimpse of torn clothes disappearing through the little door at the end of the alley by the boarded shop, and a second after he had started in pursuit he saw the door shut with a slam and thought he heard a bolt snick home.

The door, though small, looked stout, and, thinking as he charged to the assault, the Sikh put all the advantage he had of weight, and steel-shod boots, and strength, and speed into the effort. A yard from the door he took off, as a man does at the broad jump in the inter-regimental sports, landing against the lower panel with his heels two feet from the bottom.

The door went inward as if struck by a blast of dynamite, and the Sikh's head struck a flagstone. Long strong arms seized him by the feet and dragged him inside. Then the door closed again, and this time a bolt really did shoot home, to be followed by two others and a bar that fitted vertically into the beam above and the floor beneath.

Outside, thirty feet from the street corner, the crowd came together as a tide-race meets amid the rocks, roaring, shouting, surging, swaying back and forth, nine-tenths questioning at the limit of its lungs, and one-tenth yelling information that was false before they had it. Those at the back believed already that there were ten men down. In the next street there was supposed to be a riot. And the shrill repeated whistle of the nearest policeman summoning help confirmed the crowd in its belief, besides convincing it of new atrocities as yet unguessed.

Only one man in the crowd had wit enough to carry the tale to barracks where it might be expected to produce action. He was a Bengali babu, bare of leg and fat of paunch, who had enough imagination to conceive of a regiment in receipt of the news, and the mental picture so appealed to him that he held his protruding stomach in both hands while he ran down-street like a landslide, his mouth agape and his eyes all but popping from his head.

He reached the barrack gate speechless and breathless, just as Ranjoor Singh rode up on Bagh, mud-plastered after an afternoon's work teaching scouts. He clung to the risaldar-major's stirrup, and was dragged ten feet, slobbering and bubbling incoherencies, before the savage charger could be reined in and made to stand.

"What is it, oh, _babuji?_" laughed Ranjoor Singh. "Are the Moslems out after your temple gods?"

"Aha! Run! Gallop! Bring all the guns!" This in English, all of it. "Blood in the gutter--blood like water--twenty policemen are already

dead, and your men have done it! Gallop quicklee. _Jaldee, jaldee!_"

"Go and get twenty more policemen to wipe away the blood!" advised Ranjoor Singh, sitting back in the saddle to get a better look at him, and reining back the impatient Bagh. "I am not a constabeel; I am a soldier."

"Aha! Yes. You better hurry. All your men are underneath--what-you-call-it?--bottom dog. You better hurry like slippery! One Afridi is beginning things, and where is one Afridi with a long knife are many more kinds of trouble!"

The babu was recovering his breath, and with it his yearning to behold a regiment careering through the barrack gate to the rescue. He still clung to the stirrup, and since he would not let go, Ranjoor Singh proceeded to tow him, with a cautious, booted right leg ready to spur Bagh away to the left should the brute commence to kick.

"You are hard-hearted person, and your fate is forever sealed if you refuse to listen!" wailed the babu. "The blood of your men lies in street calling aloud for vengeance!" A university education works wonders for babu vocabulary. "I tell you it is a riot, and most extremelee serious affair!"

That was the wrong appeal to make, as the babu himself would have known had he been less excited. In time of riot the place for a Sikh officer would be at the regiment's headquarters, in readiness for the order from a civil magistrate without which interference would cost him his commission. But the babu was beside himself, what with breathlessness and disappointment. He decided it was expedient to strengthen his appeal, and his imagination was still working.

"There will be two regiments of Tommees--drunken Tommees, presentlee. They will take your men to jail. The Tommees are already on the way. Should they get there first your men will be everlastinglee disgraced as well as muled. You should hurry."

Ranjoor Singh ceased from frowning and looked satisfied. If there were trouble enough in the bazaar to call for the despatch of British soldiers to the scene, then nothing in the world was more certain than that any men of his who happened to be in danger would be rescued with neatness and speed. If there was no trouble yet, there would very likely be some swearing when the soldiers got there. In the meantime he was wet through, both with rain and perspiration. The thought of a bath and dry clothes urged him like the voice of a siren calling; and he had shown the babu all the courtesy his Sikh creed and profession demanded.

So he clucked to Bagh, and the big brute plunged into a canter, just as eager for his sais and gram as his master was for clean dry clothes. For two strides the babu clung to the stirrup, wrenching it free from the risaldar-major's foot; then the horse grew savage at the unaccustomed extra weight, and lashed out hard behind him, missing the babu twice in quick succession, but filling him full to the stuttering teeth with fear. Ranjoor Singh touched the horse with his right spur, and in a second the babu lay along on his stomach in the mud.

He lay for a minute, believing himself dead. Then he cried aloud, since he knew he must be broken into pieces. Then he felt himself. At last he rose, and after a speechless glance at the back of the risaldar-major, started slowly along the street toward where the "riot" was.

"It is enough," he said in English, since he was a "failed B.A.," "to try the patience of Job's comforter. This militaree business has corrupted even Sikh cavalry until they no longer are dependable. Yes. It is time! It is time indeed that German influence be felt, in order that British yoke may be cast off for good and all. Now I take it a German soldier would have arrested everybodee, and I would have received much kudos in addition to cash reward paid for information. In meantime, it is to be seen whether or not--yes, precisely--a pencil is mightier than a sword, which means that a babu is superior in wit and general attainments. Let us see!"

He began to run again, at a truly astonishing pace, considering his paunch and all-round ungainliness, getting over the ground faster than many a thin man could have done. As he ran his lips worked, for though he had no breath to spare for speech, his brain was forming words that crowded for expression.

"The Sikhs!" he screamed, as he came within earshot of the milling crowd, through which four small policemen were trying to force a path. "The Sikhs! They ride to the rescue!"

"The Sikhs!" yelled somebody on the edge of the crowd, who had more breath but not enough imagination to ask questions. "The Sikhs are coming! Run!"

"The Sikhs! The Sikhs!"

The crowd took it up. And since it was a crowd, and there was nothing else to do; and since it had had protection but no violence at Sikh hands ever since '57; and since the babu really did look frightened, it shouted that the Sikhs were coming until it believed the news and had made itself thoroughly afraid.

"Run, brothers!" shouted some man in the middle who owned a voice like a bull-buffalo's. And that being a new idea and just as good as any, the whole crowd took to its heels, leaving the four policemen staring at the body of a dead Sikh, and the fat babu complacently regarding all of them.

Presently a European police officer trotted up on a white pony, examined the body, asked a dozen questions of the four policemen, wrote in his memorandum book, and ordered the body to be taken to the morgue.

"Come here, you!" he called to the babu.

So the babu waddled to him, judging his salaam shrewdly so that it suggested deference while leaving no doubt as to the intended insult.

"What do you know about this?"

"As peaceful citizen in pursuance of daily bread and other perquisites, I claim protection of police! While proceeding on way

was thrown to ground violently by galloping horse whose rider urged same in opposite direction. Observe my deshhabille. Regard this mud on my person. I insist on full rigor of the law for which I am taxed inordinately."

"What sort of a horse? Who rode it? How long ago?"

"Am losing all count of time since being overwhelmed. Should say verree recently, however. The horse was ridden by a person who urged it vehemently. It was a brown horse, I think."

"Which way did he go?"

"How should I know? He went away, knocking me over in transit and causing me great distress."

"Was he armed?"

"Two arms. With one he steered the animal. With the other he urged him, thus."

The babu described in pantomime an imaginary human riding for his life, whom not even the adroitest police officer could recognize as Ranjoor Singh, even had he been acquainted with the risaldar-major.

"Had he a weapon of any kind?"

"Not knowing, would prefer to say nothing about that. It was with the horse--with the rump of the animal that he hit me, and not with a sword of any kind."

"Well, you had better come with me to the office, and there we'll take down your deposition."

"Am I arrested?"

"No. You're a witness."

"On the contrary, I am prosecutor! I demand as stated formerly full rigor of the law. I demand capture and arrest, together with fine and imprisonment of party assaulting me, failing which I shall address complaint to government!"

"Come along. We'll talk about that at the office."

So the babu was escorted to the stuffy little police office, where he was made to sit on a bench beside ten native witnesses of other crimes; and presently he was called to a desk at which a native clerk presided. There he was made to recite his story again, and since he had had time in which to think, he told a most amazing, disconnected yarn that looked even more untruthful by the time the clerk had written his own version of it on a sheet. To this version the babu was required to swear, and he did so without a blink.

Then there was more delay, while somebody was found who knew him and could certify to his address, and it was nearly evening by the time he was allowed to go.

* * * * *

It was also nearly evening when a messenger arrived at the barracks to report the death of a Sikh trooper by murder in the bazaar. The man's name and regimental number proved him to have been one of D Squadron's men, and since its commander, Ranjoor Singh, was then in quarters, the news was brought to him at once.

"Killed where?" he demanded; so they told him.

"Exactly when?"

It became evident to Ranjoor Singh that there had been some truth after all in the babu's tale. The verbal precis of the only witness, given from memory, about a man who galloped away on horseback, threw no light at all on the case; so, because he could think of nothing better to do at the moment, the risaldar-major sent for a _tikka-gharri_ and drove down to the morgue to identify the body.

On the way back from the morgue he looked in at the police station, but the babu had been gone some ten minutes when he arrived.

The police could tell him nothing. It was explained that the crowd directly after the murder had been too great to allow any but those nearest to see anything; and it was admitted that the crowd had been suddenly panic-stricken and had scattered before the police could secure witnesses. So he drove away, wondering, and ordered the driver to follow the road taken by the murdered trooper.

It was just on the edge of evening, when the lighted street-lamps were yet too pale to show distinctly, that he passed the disused boarded shop and saw, on the side of the street opposite, the babu who had brought him the story of riot that afternoon. He stopped his carriage and stepped out. On second thought he ordered the carriage away, for he was in plain clothes and not likely to attract notice; and he had a suspicion in his mind that he might care to investigate a little on his own account. He walked straight to the babu, and that gentleman eyed him with obvious distrust.

"Did you see my trooper murdered?" he demanded; for he had learned directness under Colonel Kirby, and applied it to every difficulty that confronted him.

Natives understand directness from an Englishman, and can parry it; but from another native it bewilders them, just as a left-handed swordsman is bewildered by another left-hander. The babu blinked.

"How much had you seen when you ran to warn me this afternoon?"

The babu looked pitiful. His fat defenseless body was an absolute contrast to the Sikh's tall manly figure. His eye was furtive, glancing ever sidewise; but the Sikh looked straight and spoke abruptly though with a note of kindness in his voice.

"There is no need to fear me," he said, since the babu would not answer. "Speak! How much do you know?"

So the babu took heart of grace, producing a voice from somewhere down in his enormous stomach and saying, of course, the very last

thing expected of him.

"Grief chokes me!" he asserted.

"Take care that I choke thee not, _babuji_! I have asked a question. I am no lawyer to maneuver for my answer. Did you see that trooper killed?"

The babu nodded; but his nod was not much more than tentative. He could have denied it next minute without calling much on his imagination.

"Oh! Which way went the murderer?"

"Grief overwhelms me!" said the babu.

"Grief for what?"

"For my money--my good money--my emoluments!"

Direct as an arrow though he was in all his dealings, Ranjoor Singh had not forgotten how the Old East thinks. He recognized the preliminaries of a bargain, and searched his mind to recall how much money he had with him; to have searched his pocket would have been too puerile.

"What of them?"

"Lost!"

"Where? How?"

"While standing here, observing movements of him whom I suspected to be murderer, a person unknown--possibly a Sikh--perhaps not--removed money surreptitiously from my person."

"How much money?"

"Rupees twenty-five, annas eight," said the babu unwinking. He neither blushed nor hesitated.

"I will take compassion on your loss and replace five rupees of it," said Ranjoor Singh, "when you have told me which way the murderer went."

"My eyes are too dim, and my heart too full with grief," said the babu. "No man's memory works under such conditions. Now, that money--"

"I will give you ten rupees," said Ranjoor Singh.

This was too easy! The babu was prepared to bargain for an hour, fighting for rupee after rupee until his wit assured him he had reached the limit. Now he began to believe he had set the limit far too low.

"I do not remember," he said slowly but with great conviction, scratching at his stomach as if he kept his recollections stored there.

"You said twenty-five rupees, eight annas? Well, I will pay the half

of it, and no more," said Ranjoor Singh in a new voice that seemed to suggest unutterable things. "Moreover, I will pay it when I have proved thy memory true. Now, scratch that belly of thine and let the thoughts come forth!"

"Nay, sahib, I forget."

Ranjoor Singh drew out his purse and counted twelve rupees and three quarters into the palm of his hand.

"Which way?" he demanded.

"Twenty-five rupees, eight annas of earned emolument--gone while I watched the movements of a murderer! It is not easy to keep brave heart and remember things!"

"See here, thou bellyful of memories! Remember and tell me, or I return this money to my purse and march thee by the nape of thy fat neck to the police station, where they will put thee in a cell for the night and jog thy memory in ways the police are said to understand! Speak! Here, take the money!"

The babu reached out a fat hand and the silver changed owners.

"There!" said the babu, jerking a thumb over his right shoulder. "Through that door!"

"That narrow teak door, down the passage?"

But the babu was gone, hurrying as if goaded by fear of hell and all its angels.

Ranjoor Singh strode across the street in a bee-line and entered the dark passage. He had seen the yellow light of a lamp-flame through a chink in an upper shutter, and he intended to try directness on the problem once again. It was ten full paces down the passage to the door; he counted them, finishing the last one with a kick against the panel that would have driven it in had it been less than teak.

There came no answer, so he kicked again. Then he beat on the door with his clenched fists. Presently he turned his back to the door and kept up a steady thunder on it with his heels. And then, after about five minutes, he heard movement within.

He congratulated himself then that the noise he had made had called the attention of passers-by and of all the neighbors, and though he had had no fear and no other intention than to enter the house at all costs, he certainly had that much less compunction now.

He heard three different bolts drawn back, and then there was a pause. He thought he heard whispering, so he resumed his thunder. Almost at once there followed the unmistakable squeak of a big beam turning on its pivot, and the door opened about an inch.

He pushed, but some one inside pushed harder, and the door closed again. So Ranjoor Singh leaned all his weight and strength against the door, drawing in his breath and shoving with all his might. Resistance ceased. The door flew inward, as it had done once before that day, and closed with a bang behind him.

Long were the days and oh! wicked the weather--
Endless and thankless the round--
Grinding God's Grit into rookies together;
I was the upper stone, he was the nether,
And Gad, sir, they groaned as we ground!
Bitter the blame (but he helped me to bear it),
Grim the despair that we ate!
But hell's loose! The dam's down, and none can repair it!
'Tis our turn! Go, summon my brother to share it!
His squadron's at arms, and we wait!

CHAPTER V

A regiment is more exacting of its colonel than ever was lady of her lord; the more truly he commands, the better it loves him, until at last the regiment swallows him and he becomes part of it, in thought and word and deed. Distractions such as polo, pig-sticking, tiger-shooting are tolerable insofar as they steady his nerve and train his hand and eye; to that extent they, too, subserve the regiment. But a woman is a rival. So it is counted no sin against a cavalry colonel should he be a bachelor.

There remained no virtue, then, in the eyes of Outram's Own for Colonel Kirby to acquire; he had all that they could imagine, besides at least a dozen they had not imagined before he came to them. There was not one black-bearded gentleman who couched a lance behind him but believed Colonel Kirby some sort of super-man; and, in return, Colonel Kirby found the regiment so satisfying that there was not even a lady on the sky-line who could look forward to encroaching on the regiment's preserves.

His heart, his honor, and his rare ability were all the regiment's, and the regiment knew it; so he was studied as is the lot of few. His servant knew which shoes he would wear on a Thursday morning, and would have them ready; the mess-cook spiced the curry so exactly to his taste that more than one cook-book claimed it to be a species apart and labeled it with his name. If he frowned, the troopers knew somebody had tried to flatter him; if he smiled, the regiment grinned; and when his face lacked all expression, though his eyes were more than usually quick, officer, non-commissioned officer and man alike would sit tight in the saddle, so to speak, and gather up their reins.

His mood was recognized that afternoon as he drove back from the club while he was yet four hundred yards away, although twilight was closing down. The waler mare--sixteen three and a half, with one white stocking and a blaze that could be seen from the sky-line--brought his big dog-cart through the street mud at a speed which would have insured the arrest of the driver of a motor; but that, if anything, was a sign of ordinary health.

Nor was the way he took the corner by the barrack gate, on one wheel, any criterion; he always did it, just as he never failed to

acknowledge the sentry's salute by raising his whip. It needed the observant eyes of Outram's Own to detect the rather strained calmness and the almost inhumanly active eye.

"Beware!" called the sentry, while he was yet three hundred yards away. "Be awake!"

"Be awake! Be awake! Beware!"

The warning went from lip to lip, troop to troop, from squadron stables on to squadron stables, until six hundred men were ready for all contingencies. A civilian might not have recognized the difference, but Kirby's soldier servant awakened from his nap on the colonel's door-mat and straightened his turban in a hurry, perfectly well aware that there was something in the wind.

It was too early to dress for dinner yet; too late to dress for games of any kind. The servant was nonplussed. He stood in silence, awaiting orders that under ordinary circumstances, or at an ordinary hour, would have been unnecessary. But for a while no orders came. The only sound in those extremely unmarried quarters was the steady drip of water into a flat tin bath that the servant had put beneath a spot where the roof leaked; the rain had ceased but the ceiling cloth still drooped and drooled.

Suddenly Kirby threw himself backward into a long chair, and the servant made ready for swift action.

"Present my compliments to Risaldar-Major Ranjoor Singh sahib, and ask him to be good enough to see me here."

The servant saluted and was gone. Kirby relapsed again into the depth of the chair, staring at the wall in front of him, letting his eye travel from one to another of the accurately spaced-out pictures, pieces of furniture and trophies that proclaimed him unmarried. There was nothing whatever in his quarters to decoy him from his love. There were polo sticks in a corner where a woman would have placed a standard lamp, and where the flowers should have stood was a chest to hold horse-medicines. There was a vague smell about the place of varnish, polish and good leather.

The servant was back again, stiff at the salute, within five minutes.

"_Ne hai_."

"Not there? Not where? Not in his quarters? Then go and find him. Ask where he is. Hurry!"

So, since the regiment was keyed to watchfulness, it took about five minutes more before it was known that Ranjoor Singh was not in barracks. The servant returned to report that he had been seen driving toward the bazaar in a _tikka-gharri_.

Then entered Warrington, the adjutant, and the servant was dismissed at once.

"Bad business," said Warrington, looking thoroughly cheerful.

"What now?"

"One of Squadron D's men murdered in the bazaar this afternoon. Body's in the morgue in charge of the police. 'Nother man who was with him apparently missing. No explanation, and the p'lice say there aren't any clues."

He twisted at a little black mustache and began to hum.

"Know where Ranjoor Singh is by any chance?" asked Kirby.

"Give me three guesses--no, two. One--he's raising hell with all the police in Delhi. Two--he's at the scene of the murder, doing detective work on his own. I heard he'd driven away--and, anyhow, it's his squadron. Man's probably his second cousin, twenty or thirty times removed."

"Send somebody to find him!" ordered Kirby.

"Say you want to have a word with him?"

Kirby nodded, and Warrington swaggered out, humming to himself exactly as he hoped to be humming when his last grim call should come, the incarnation of efficiency, awake and very glad. A certain number of seconds after he had gone two mounted troopers clattered out toward the bazaar. Ten minutes later Warrington returned.

"D Squadron's squattin' on its hunkers in rings an' lookin' gloomy," he said, as if he were announcing some good news that had a touch of humor in it. "By the look of 'em you'd say they'd been passed over for active service and were mediatin' matrimony."

"By gad, Warrington! You don't know how near that guess is to the truth!"

Kirby's lips were smiling, but his voice was hard. Warrington glanced quickly at him once and then looked serious.

"You mean--"

"Yes," said Kirby.

"Has it broken yet?"

"No."

"Is it goin' to break?"

"Looks like it. Looks to me as if it's all been prearranged. Our crowd are sparring for time, and the Prussians are all in a hurry. Looks that way to me."

"And you mean--there's a chance--even a chance of us--of Outram's Own bein' out of it? Beg your pardon, sir, but are you serious?"

"Yes," said Kirby, and Warrington's jaw fell.

"Any details that are not too confidential for me to know?" asked Warrington.

"Tell you all about it after I've had a word with Ranjoor Singh."

"Hadn't I better go and help look for him?"

"Yes, if you like."

So, within another certain number of split seconds, Captain Charlie Warrington rode, as the French say, belly-to-the-earth, and the fact that the monsoon chose that instant to let pour another Noah's deluge seemed to make no difference at all to his ardor or the pace to which he spurred his horse.

An angry police officer grumbled that night at the club about the arrogance of all cavalymen, but of one Warrington in particular.

"Wanted to know, by the Big Blue Bull of Bashan, whether I knew when a case was serious or not! Yes, he did! Seemed to think the murder of one sowar was the only criminal case in all Delhi, and had the nerve to invite me to set every constable in what he termed my parish on the one job. What did I say? Told him to call to-morrow, of course--said I'd see. Gad! You should have heard him swear then--thought his eyes 'ud burn holes in my tunic. Went careering out of the office as if war had been declared."

"Talking of war," said somebody, nursing a long drink under the swinging punkah, "do you suppose--"

So the manners of India's pet cavalry were forgotten at once in the vortex of the only topic that had interest for any one in clubdom, and it was not noticed whether Warrington or his colonel, or any other officer of native cavalry looked in at the club that night.

* * * * *

Warrington rode into the rain at the same speed at which he had galloped to the police station, overhauled one of the mounted troopers whom he himself had sent in search of Ranjoor Singh, rated him soundly in Punjabi for loafing on the way, and galloped on with the troop-horse laboring in his wake. He reined in abreast of the second trooper, who had halted by a cross-street and was trying to appear to enjoy the deluge.

"Any word?" asked Warrington.

"I spoke with two who said he entered by that door-that small door down the passage, sahib, where there is no light. It is a teak door, bolted and with no keyhole on the outside."

"Good for you," said Warrington, glancing quickly up and down the wet street, where the lamps gleamed deceptively in pools of running water. There seemed nobody in sight; but that is a bold guess in Delhi, where the shadows all have eyes.

He gave a quiet order, and trooper number one passed his reins to number two.

"Go and try that door. Kick it in if you can--but be quick, and try not to be noisy!"

The trooper swung out of the saddle and obeyed, while Warrington and the other man faced back to back, watching each way against surprise. In India, as in lands less "civilized," the cavalry are not allowed to usurp the functions of police, and the officer or man who tries it does so at his own risk. There came a sound of sudden thundering on teak that ceased after two minutes.

"The door is stout. There is no answer from within," said the trooper.

"Then wait here on foot," commanded Warrington. "Get under cover and watch. Stay here until you're relieved, unless something particularly worth reporting happens; in that case, hurry and report. For instance"--he hesitated, trying to imagine something out of the unimaginable--"suppose the risaldar-major were to come out, then give him the message and come home with him. But--oh, suppose the place takes fire, or there's a riot, or you hear a fight going on inside--then hurry to barracks--understand?"

The wet trooper nodded and saluted.

"Get into a shadow, then, and keep as dry as you can," ordered Warrington. "Come on!" he called to the other man.

And a second later he was charging through the street as if he rode with despatches through a zone of rifle fire. Behind him clattered a rain-soaked trooper and two horses.

Colonel Kirby stepped out of his bathroom just as Warrington arrived, and arranged his white dress-tie before the sitting-room mirror.

"Looks fishy to me, sir," said Warrington, hurrying in and standing where the rain from his wet clothes would do least harm.

There was a space on the floor between two tiger-skins where the matting was a little threadbare. Messengers, orderlies or servants always stood on that spot. After a moment, however, Kirby's servant brought Warrington a bathroom mat.

"How d'ye mean?"

Warrington explained.

"What did the police say?"

"Said they were busy."

"Now, I could go to the club," mused Kirby, "and see Hetherington, and have a talk with him, and get him to sign a search-warrant. Armed with that, we could--"

"Perhaps persuade a police officer to send two constables with it to-morrow morning!" said Warrington, with a grin.

"Yes," said Kirby.

"And if we do much on our own account we'll fall foul of the Indian Penal Code, which altereth every week," said Warrington.

"If it weren't for the fact that I particularly want a word with him," said Kirby, giving a last tweak to his tie and reaching out for his mess-jacket that the servant had laid on a chair, "there'd not be much ground that I can see for action of any kind. He has a right to go where he likes."

That point of view did not seem to have occurred to Warrington before; nor did he quite like it, for he frowned.

"On the other hand," said Kirby, diving into his mess-jacket and shrugging his neat shoulders until they fitted into it as a charger fits into his skin, "under the circumstances--and taking into consideration certain private information that has reached me--if I were supposed to be behind a bolted door in the bazaar, I'd rather appreciate it if Ranjoor Singh, for instance, were to--ah--take action of some kind."

"Exactly, sir."

"Hallo--what's that?"

* * * * *

A motor-car, driven at racing speed, thundered up the lane between the old stacked cannon and came to a panting standstill by the colonel's outer door. A gruff question was answered gruffly, and a man's step sounded on the veranda. Then the servant flung the door wide, and a British soldier stepped smartly into the room, saluted and held out a telegram.

Kirby tore it open. His eyes blazed, but his hands were steady. The soldier held out a receipt book and a pencil, and Kirby took time to scribble his initials in the proper place. Warrington, humming to himself, began to squeeze the rain out of his tunic to hide impatience. The soldier saluted, faced about and hurried to the waiting car. Then Kirby read the telegram. He nodded to Warrington. Warrington, his finger-ends pressed tight into his palms and his forearms quivering, raised one eyebrow.

"Yes," said Kirby.

"War, sir?"

"War."

"We're under orders?"

"Not yet. It says, 'War likely to be general. Be ready.' Here, read it for yourself."

"They wouldn't have sent us that if--"

"Addressed to O.C. troops. They had those ready written out and sent one to every O.C. on the list the second they knew."

"Well, sir?"

"Leave the room, Lal Singh!"

The servant, who was screwing up his courage to edge nearer, did as he was told.

Kirby stood still, facing the mirror, with both arms behind him.

"They're certain to send native Indian troops to Europe," he said.

"We're ready, sir! We're ready to a shoe-string! We'll go first!"

"We'll be last, Warrington, supposing we go at all, unless we find Ranjoor Singh! They'll send us to do police work in Bengal, or to guard the Bombay docks and watch the other fellows go. I'm going to the club. You'd better come with me. Hurry into dry clothes." He glanced at the clock. "We'll just have time to drive past the house where you say he's supposed to be, if you hurry."

The last three words were lost, for Captain Warrington had turned into a thunderbolt and disappeared; the noise of his going was as when a sudden windstorm slams all the doors at once. A moment later he could be heard shouting from outside his quarters to his servant to be ready for him.

He certainly bathed, for the noise of the tub overturning when he was done with it was unmistakable. And eight minutes after his departure he was back again, dressed, cloaked and ready.

"Got your pistol, sir?"

"Yes," said Kirby.

"Thought I'd bring mine along. You never know, you know."

Together they climbed into the colonel's dog-cart, well smothered under waterproofs. Kirby touched up another of his road-devouring walers, the sais grabbed at the back seat and jumped for his life, and they shot out of the compound, down the line of useless cannon and out into the street, taking the corner as the honor of the regiment required. Then the two big side-lamps sent their shafts of light straight down the metaled, muddy road, and the horse settled down between them to do his equine "demdest"; there was a touch on the reins he recognized.

* * * * *

They reached the edge of the bazaar to find the crowd stirring, although strangely mute.

"They'll have got the news in an hour from now," said Kirby. "They can smell it already."

"Wonder how much truth there is in all this talk about German merchants and propaganda."

"_H-rrrrr-ummm_!" said Kirby.

"Steady, sir! Lookout!"

The near wheel missed a native woman by a fraction of an inch, and her shrill scream followed them. But Kirby kept his eyes ahead, and

the shadows continued to flash by them in a swift procession until Warrington leaned forward, and then Kirby leaned back against the reins.

"There he is, sir!"

They reined to a halt, and a drenched trooper jumped up behind to kneel on the back seat and speak in whispers.

"No sign of him at all?" asked Kirby.

"No, sahib. But there has been a light behind a shutter above there. It comes and goes. They light it and extinguish it."

"Has anybody come out of that door?"

"No, sahib."

"None gone in?"

"None."

"Any other door to the place?"

"There may be a dozen, sahib. That is an old house, and it backs up against six others."

"What we suffer from in this country is information," said Warrington, beginning to hum to himself.

But Kirby signed to the trooper, and the man began to scramble out of the cart.

"Between now and our return, report to the club if anything happens," called Warrington.

The whip swished, the horse shot forward, and they were off again as if they would catch up with the hurrying seconds. People scattered to the right and left in front of them; a constable at a street crossing blew his whistle frantically; once the horse slipped in a deep puddle, and all but came to earth; but they reached the club without mishap and drove up the winding drive at a speed more in keeping with convention.

"Oh, hallo, Kirby! Glad you've come!" said a voice.

"Evening, sir!"

Kirby descended, almost into the arms of a general in evening dress. They walked into the club together, leaving the adjutant wondering what to do. He decided to follow them at a decent distance, still humming and looking happy enough for six men.

"You'll be among the first," said the general. "Are you ready, Kirby --absolutely ready?"

"Yes,"

"The wires are working to the limit. It isn't settled yet whether

troops go from here via Canada or the Red Sea--probably won't be until the Navy's had a chance to clear the road. All that's known--yet--is that Belgium's invaded, and that every living man Jack who can be hurried to the front in time to keep the Germans out of Paris will be sent. Hold yourself ready to entrain any minute, Kirby."

"Is martial law proclaimed yet?" asked Kirby in a voice that the general seemed to think was strained, for he looked around sharply.

"Not yet. Why?"

"Information, sir. Anything else?"

"No. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Kirby nearly ran into Warrington as he hurried back toward the door.

"Find a police officer!" he ordered.

"They all passed you a minute ago, sir," answered Warrington. "They're headed for police headquarters. Heard one of 'em say so."

Kirby pulled himself together. A stranger would not have noticed that he needed it, but Warrington at his elbow saw the effort and was glad.

"Go to police headquarters, then," he ordered. "Try to get them to bring a dozen men and search that house; but don't say that Ranjoor Singh's in there."

"Where'll I find you, sir?"

"Barracks. Oh, by the way, we're a sure thing for the front."

"I knew there was some reason why I kept feelin' cheerful!" said Warrington. "The risaldar-major looks like gettin' left."

"Unless," said Kirby, "you can get the police to act to-night--or unless martial law's proclaimed at once, and I can think of an excuse to search the house with a hundred men myself. Find somebody to give you a lift. So long."

Kirby swung into his dog-cart, the sais did an acrobatic turn behind, and again the horse proceeded to lower records. Zigzag-wise, through streets that were growing more and yet more thronged instead of silent, they tore barrackward, missing men by a miracle every twelve yards. Kirby's eyes were on a red blotch, now, that danced and glowed above the bazaar a mile ahead. It reminded him of pain.

Presently the horse sniffed smoke, and notified as much before settling down into his stride again. The din of hoarse excitement reached Kirby's ears, and in a moment more a khaki figure leaped out of a shadow and a panting trooper snatched at the back seat, was grabbed by the sais, and swung up in the rear.

"Sahib--"

"All right. I know," said Kirby, though he did not know how he knew.

They raced through another dozen streets until the glare grew blinding and the smoke nearly choked him. Then they were stopped entirely by the crowd, and Colonel Kirby sat motionless; for he had a nearly perfect view of a holocaust. The house in which Ranjoor Singh was supposed to be was so far burned that little more than the walls was standing.

The North Wind hails from the Northern snows,
(His voice is loud--oh, listen ye!)
He cried of death--the death he knows--
Of the mountain death. (Oh, listen ye!)
Who looks to the North for love looks long!
Who goes to the North for gain goes wrong!
Men's hearts are hard, and the goods belong
To the strong in the North! (Oh, listen ye!)
Whose lot is fair--who loves his life--
Walks wide, stays wide of the Northern knife!
(Ye men o' the world, oh, listen ye!)

YASMINI'S SONG.

CHAPTER VI

There were police and to spare now, nor any doubt of it. Even the breath of war's beginning could not keep them elsewhere when a fire had charge in the densest quarters of the danger zone. The din of ancient Delhi roared skyward, and the Delhi crowd surged and fought to be nearer to the flame; but the police already had a cordon around the building, and another detachment was forcing the swarms of men and women into eddying movement in which something like a system developed presently, for there began to be a clear space in which the fire brigade could work.

"Any bodies recovered?" asked Colonel Kirby, leaning from the seat of his high dogcart to speak to the English fireman who stood sentry over the water-plug.

"No, sir. The fire had too much headway before the alarm went in. When we got here the whole lower part was red-hot."

"Any means of escape from the building from the rear?"

"As many as from a rat-run, sir. That house is as old as Delhi--about; and there are as any galleries up above connecting with houses at the rear as there are run-holes from cellar to cellar."

"Any chance for anybody down in the cellar?"

"Doubt it, sir. The fire started there; the water'll do what the fire left undone. Pretty bad trap, sir, I should say, if you asked me."

"No reports of escape or rescue?"

"None that I've heard tell of."

"And the house seems doomed, eh? Be some days before they can sort the debris over?"

"Lucky if we save the ten houses nearest it! Look, sir! There she goes!"

The roof fell in, sending five separate volumes of red sparks up into the cloudy night as floor after floor collapsed beneath the weight. The thunder of it was almost drowned in a roar of delight, for the crowd, sensing the new spirit of its masters, was in a mood for the terrible. Then silence fell, as if that had been an overture.

Out of the silence and through the sea of hot humanity, the white of his dress-shirt showing through the unbuttoned front of a military cloak, Warrington rode a borrowed Arab pony, the pony's owner's sais running beside him to help clear a passage. Warrington was still humming to himself as he dismissed both sais and pony and climbed up beside Kirby in the dog-cart.

"If Ranjoor Singh's in that house, he's in a predicament," he said cheerfully. "I went to police headquarters, and the first officer I spoke to told me to go to hell. So I went into the next office, where all the big panjandrums hide--and some of the little ones--and they told me what you know, sir, that the house is in flames and every policeman who can be spared is on the job, so I came to see. If Ranjoor Singh's in there--but I don't believe he is!"

"Why don't you?"

"I don't believe the Lord 'ud send us active service--not a real red war against a real enemy--and play a low-down trick on Ranjoor Singh. Ranjoor Singh's a gentleman. It wouldn't be sportsmanlike to let him die before the game begins."

For a minute or two they watched the sparks go up and the crowd striking at the rats that still seemed to find some place of exit.

"There's a place below there that isn't red--hot yet," said Kirby. "Those rats are not cooked through. Did you tell the police that you wanted a search warrant?"

"Yes. Might as well argue with an ant-heap. All of 'em too busy tryin' for commissions in the Volunteers to listen. They've got it all cut an' dried--somebody in the basement upset a lamp, according to them--nobody up-stairs--nobody to turn in the alarm until the fire had complete charge! They offer to prove it when the fire's out and they can sort the ashes."

"Um-m-m! Tell 'em a trooper of ours saw a light there?"

"Yes."

"What did they say?"

"'Doubtless the lamp that was kicked over!'"

Colonel Kirby clucked to his horse and worked a way out to the edge of the crowd with the skill of one whose business is to handle men in quantity. Then he shot like a dart up side streets and made for barracks by a detour.

"Gad!" said Warrington suddenly.

"Who's told 'em d'you suppose?"

"Dunno, sir. News leaks in Delhi like water from a lump of ice."

In the darkness of the barrack wall there were more than a thousand men, women and children, many of them Sikhs, who clamored to be told things, and by the gate was a guard of twenty men drawn up to keep the crowd at bay. The shrill voices of the women drowned the answers of the native officer as well as the noise of the approaching wheels, and the guard had to advance into the road to clear a way for its colonel.

The native officer saluted and grinned.

"Is it true, sahib?" he shouted, and Kirby raised his whip in the affirmative. From that instant the guard began to make more noise than the crowd beyond the wall.

Kirby whipped his horse and took the drive that led to his quarters at a speed there was no overhauling. He wanted to be alone. But his senior major had forestalled him and was waiting by his outer door.

"Oh, hallo, Brammle. Yes, come in."

"Is it peace, Jehu?" asked Brammle.

"War. We'll be the first to go. No, no route yet--likely to get it any minute."

"I'll bet, then. Bet you it's Bombay--a P. and O.--Red Sea and Marseilles! Oh, who wouldn't be light cavalry? First-class all the way, first aboard, and first crack at 'em! Any orders, sir?"

"Yes. Take charge. I'm going out, and Warrington's going with me. Don't know how long we'll be gone. If anybody asks for me, tell him I'll be back soon. Tell the men."

"Somebody's told 'em--listen!"

"Tell 'em that whoever misbehaves from now forward will be left behind. Give 'em my definite promise on that point!"

"Anything else, sir?"

"No."

"Then see you later."

"See you later."

The major went away, and Kirby turned to his adjutant.

"Go and order the closed shay, Warrington. Pick a driver who won't talk. Have some grub sent in here to me, and join me at it in half an hour; say fifteen minutes later. I've some things to see to."

Kirby wanted very much to be alone. The less actual contact a colonel has with his men, and the more he has with his officers, the better--as a rule; but it does not pay to think in the presence of either. Officers and men alike should know him as a man-who-has-thought, a man in whose voice is neither doubt nor hesitation.

Thirty minutes later Warrington found him just emerging from a brown study.

"India's all roots-in-the-air an' dancin'!" he remarked cheerfully. "There was a babu sittin' by the barrack gate who offers to eat a German a day, as long as we'll catch 'em for him. He's the same man that was tryin' for a job as clerk the other day."

"Fat man?"

"Very."

"Uh-h-h! No credentials--bad hat! Send him packing?"

"The guard did."

Food was laid on a small table by a silent servant who had eyes in the back of his head and ears that would have caught and analyzed the lightest whisper; but the colonel and his adjutant ate hurriedly in silence, and the only thing remarkable that the servant was able to report to the regiment afterward was that both drank only water. Since all Sikhs are supposed to be abstainers from strong drink, that was accepted as a favorable omen.

The shay arrived on time to the second. It was the only closed carriage the regiment owned--a heavy C-sprung landau thing, taken over from the previous mess. The colonel peered through outer darkness at the box seat, but the driver did not look toward him; all he could see was that there was only one man on the box.

"Where to?" asked Warrington.

"The club."

Warrington jumped in after him, and the driver sent his pair straining at the traces as if they had a gun behind them. Three hundred yards beyond the barrack wall Colonel Kirby knelt on the front seat and poked the driver from behind.

"Oh! You?" he remarked, as he recognized a native risaldar of D Squadron. Until the novelty wears off it would disconcert any man to discover suddenly that his coachman is a troop commander.

"D'you know a person named Yasmini?" he asked.

"Who does not, sahib?"

"Drive us to her house--in a hurry!"

The immediate answer was a plunge as the whip descended on both horses and the heavy carriage began to sway like a boat in a beam-sea swell. They tore through streets that were living streams of human beings--streams that split apart to let them through and closed like water again behind them. With his spurred heels on the front seat, Warrington hummed softly to himself as ever, happy, so long as there were only action.

"I've heard India spoken of as dead," he remarked after a while. "Gad! Look at that color against the darkness!"

"If Ranjoor Singh is dead, I'm going to know it!" said Colonel Kirby. "And if he isn't dead, I'm going to dig him out or know the reason why. There's been foul play, Warrington. I happen to know that Ranjoor Singh has been suspected in a certain quarter. Incidentally, I staked my own reputation on his honesty this afternoon. And besides, we can't afford to lose a wing commander such as he is on the eve of the real thing. We've got to find him!"

Once or twice as they flashed by a street-lamp they were recognized as British officers, and then natives, who would have gone to some trouble to seem insolent a few hours before, stopped to half-turn and salaam to them.

"Wonder how they'd like German rule for a change?" mused Warrington.

"India doesn't often wear her heart on her sleeve," said Kirby.

"It's there to-night!" said Warrington. "India's awake, if this is Delhi and not a nightmare! India's makin' love to the British soldier-man!"

They tore through a city that is polychromatic in the daytime and by night a dream of phantom silhouettes. But, that night, day and night were blended in one uproar, and the Chandni Chowk was at floodtide, wave on wave of excited human beings pouring into it from a hundred bystreets and none pouring out again.

So the risaldar drove across the Chandni Chowk, fighting his way with the aid of whip and voice, and made a wide circuit through dark lanes where groups of people argued at the corners, and sometimes a would-be holy man preached that the end of the world had come.

* * * * *

They reached Yasmini's from the corner farthest from the Chandni Chowk, and sprang out of the carriage the instant that the risaldar drew rein.

"Wait within call!" commanded Kirby, and the risaldar raised his whip.

Then, with his adjutant at his heels, Colonel Kirby dived through the gloomy opening in a wall that Yasmini devised to look as little like an approach to her--or heaven--as possible.

"Wonder if he's brought us to the right place?" he whispered, sniffing into the moldy darkness.

"Dunno, sir. There're stairs to your left."

They caught the sound of faint flute music on an upper floor, and as Kirby felt cautiously for his footing on the lower step Warrington began to whistle softly to himself. Next to war, an adventure of this kind was the nearest he could imagine to sheer bliss, and it was all he could do to contrive to keep from singing.

The heavy teak stairs creaked under their joint weight, and though their eyes could not penetrate the upper blackness, yet they both suspected rather than sensed some one waiting for them at the top,

Kirby's right hand instinctively sought a pocket in his cloak. Warrington felt for his pistol, too.

For thirty or more seconds--say, three steps--they went up like conspirators, trying to move silently and holding to the rail; then the absurdity of the situation appealed to both, and without a word said each stepped forward like a man, so that the staircase resounded.

They stumbled on a little landing after twenty steps, and wasted about a minute knocking on what felt like the panels of a door; but then Warrington peered into the gloom higher up and saw dim light.

So they essayed a second flight of stairs, in single file as before, and presently--when they had climbed some ten steps and had turned to negotiate ten more that ascended at an angle--a curtain moved a little, and the dim light changed to a sudden shaft that nearly blinded them.

Then a heavy black curtain was drawn back on rings, and a hundred lights, reflected in a dozen mirrors, twinkled and flashed before them so that they could not tell which way to turn. Somewhere there was a glassbead curtain, but there were so many mirrors that they could not tell which was the curtain and which were its reflections.

The curtains all parted, and from the midst of each there stepped a little nutbrown maid, who seemed too lovely to be Indian. Even then they could not tell which was maid and which reflections until she spoke.

"Will the sahibs give their names?" she asked in Hindustani; and her voice suggested flutes.

She smiled, and her teeth were whiter than a pipe-clayed sword-belt; there is nothing on earth whiter than her teeth were.

"Colonel Kirby and Captain Warrington" said Kirby.

"Will the sahibs state their business?"

"No!"

"Then whom do the sahibs seek to see?"

"Does a lady live here named Yasmini?"

"Surely, sahib."

"I wish to talk with her."

A dozen little maids seemed to step back through a dozen swaying curtains, and a second later for the life of them they could neither of them tell through which it was that the music came and the smell of musk and sandal-smoke. But she came back and beckoned to them, laughing over her shoulder and holding the middle curtain apart for them to follow.

So, one after the other, they followed her, Kirby--as became a seriously-minded colonel on the eve of war--feeling out of place and foolish, but Warrington, possessed by such a feeling of curiosity as he had never before tasted.

The heat inside the room they entered was oppressive, in spite of a great open window at which sat a dozen maids, and of the punkahs swinging overhead, so Kirby undid his cloak and walked revealed, a soldier in mess dress.

"Look at innocence aware of itself!" whispered Warrington.

"Shut up!" commanded Kirby, striding forward.

A dozen--perhaps more--hillmen, of three or four different tribes, had sat back against one wall and looked suspicious when they entered, but at sight of Kirby's military clothes they had looked alarmed and moved as if a whip had been cracked not far away. The Northern adventurer does not care to be seen at his amusements, nor does he love to be looked in on by men in uniform.

But the little maid beckoned them on, still showing her teeth and tripping in front of them as if a gust of wind were blowing her. Her motion was that of a dance reduced to a walk for the sake of decorum.

Through another glass-bead curtain at the farther end of the long room she led them to a second room, all hung about with silks and furnished with deep-cushioned divans. There were mirrors in this room, too, so that Kirby laughed aloud to see how incongruous and completely out of place he and his adjutant looked. His gruff laugh came so suddenly that the maid nearly jumped out of her skin.

"Will the sahibs be seated?" she asked almost in a whisper, as if they had half-frightened the life out of her, and then she ran out of the room so quickly that they were only aware of the jingling curtain.

So they sat down, Kirby trying the cushions with his foot until he found some firm enough to allow him to retain his dignity. Cavalry dress-trousers are not built to sprawl on cushions in; a man should sit reasonably upright or else stand.

"I'll say this for myself," he grunted, as he settled into place, "it's the first time in my life I was ever inside a native woman's premises."

Warrington did not commit himself to speech.

They sat for five minutes looking about them, Warrington beginning to be bored, but Kirby honestly interested by the splendor of the hangings and the general atmosphere of Eastern luxury. It was Warrington who grew uneasy first.

"Feel as if any one was lookin' at you, sir?" he asked out of one side of his mouth. And then Kirby noticed it, and felt his collar awkwardly.

In all the world there is nothing so well calculated to sap a man's prepossession as the feeling that he is secretly observed. There was no sound, no movement, no sign of any one, and Warrington looked in the mirrors keenly while he pretended to be interested in his little mustache. Yet the sweat began to run down Colonel Kirby's temples, and he felt at his collar again to make sure that it stood upright.

"Yes," he said, "I do. I'm going to get up and walk about."

He paced the length of the long room twice, turning quickly at each end, but detecting no movement and no eyes. Then he sat down again beside Warrington; but the feeling still persisted.

Suddenly a low laugh startled them, a delicious laugh, full of camaraderie, that would have disarmed the suspicion of a wolf. Just as unexpectedly a curtain less than a yard away from Kirby moved, and she stood before them--Yasmini. She could only be Yasmini. Besides, she had jasmine flowers worked into her hair.

Like a pair of bull buffaloes startled from their sleep, the colonel and his adjutant shot to their feet and faced her, and to their credit let it be recorded that they dropped their eyes, both of them. They felt like bounders. They hated themselves for breaking in on such loveliness.

"Will the sahibs not be seated again?" she asked them in a velvet voice; and, sweating in the neck, they each sat down.

Now that the first feeling of impropriety had given way to curiosity, neither had eyes for anything but her. Neither had ever seen anything so beautiful, so fascinating, so impudently lovely. She was laughing at them; each knew it, yet neither felt resentful.

"Well?" she asked in Hindustani, and arched her eyebrows questioning.

And Colonel Kirby stammered because she had made him think of his mother, and the tender prelude to a curtain lecture. Yet this woman was not old enough to have been his wife!

"I-I-I came to ask about a friend of mine--by name Risaldar--Major Ranjoor Singh. I understand you know him?"

She nodded, and Kirby fought with a desire to let his mind wander. The subtle hypnotism that the East knows how to stage and use was creeping over him. She stood so close! She seemed so like the warm soft spirit of all womanhood that only the measured rising and falling of her bosom, under the gauzy drapery, made her seem human and not a spirit. Subtly, ever so cunningly, she had contrived to touch a chord in Colonel Kirby's heart that he did not know lived any more. Warrington was speechless; he could not have trusted himself to speak. She had touched another chord in him.

"He came here more than once, or so I've been given to understand," said Kirby, and his own voice startled him, for it seemed harsh. "He

is said to have listened to a lecture here--I was told the lecture was delivered by a German--and there was some sort of a fracas outside in the street afterward. I'm told some of his squadron were near, and they thrashed a man. Now, Ranjoor Singh is missing."

"So?" said Yasmini, arching her whole lithe body into a setting for the prettiest yawn that Kirby had ever seen. "So the Jat is missing! Yes, he came here, sahib. He was never invited, but he came. He sat here saying nothing until it suited him to sit where another man was; then he struck the other man--so, with the sole of his foot--and took the man's place, and heard what he came to hear. Later, outside in the street, he and his men set on the Afridi whom he had struck with his foot and beat him."

"I have heard a variation of that," said Kirby.

"Have you ever heard, sahib, that he who strikes the wearer of a Northern knife is like to feel that knife? So Ranjoor Singh, the Jat, is missing?"

"Yes," said Kirby, frowning, for he was not pleased to hear Ranjoor Singh spoken of slightly. A Jat may be a good enough man, and usually is, but a Sikh is a Jat who is better.

"And if he is missing, what has that to do with me?" asked Yasmini.

"I have heard--men say--"

"Yes?" she said, laughing, for it amused her almost more than any other thing to see dignity disarmed.

"Men say that you know most of what goes on in Delhi--"

"And--?" She was impudence arrayed in gossamer.

Colonel Kirby pulled himself together; after all, it was not for long that anything less than an army corps could make him feel unequal to a situation. This woman was the loveliest thing he had ever seen, but....

"I've come to find out whether Ranjoor Singh's alive or dead," he said sternly, "and, if he's alive, to take him away with me."

She smiled as graciously as evening smiles on the seeded plains, and sank on to a divan with the grace it needs a life of dancing to bestow.

"Sahib," she said, with a suddenly assumed air of candidness, "they have told the truth. There is little that goes on in Delhi--in the world--that I can not hear of if I will. The winds of the world flow in and out of these four walls."

"Then where is Ranjoor Singh?" asked Colonel Kirby.

She did not hesitate an instant. He was watching her amazing eyes that surely would have betrayed her had she been at a moment's loss; they did not change nor darken for a second.

"How much, does the sahib know already?" she asked calmly, as if she wished to spare him an unnecessary repetition of mere beginnings.

"A trooper of D Squadron--that's Ranjoor Singh's squadron--was murdered in the bazaar this afternoon. The risaldar-major went to the morgue to identify the body--drove through the bazaar, and possibly discovered some clue to the murderer. At all events, he is known to have entered a house in the bazaar, and that house is now in flames."

"The sahib knows that much? And am I to quell the flames?" asked Yasmini.

She neither sat nor lay on the divan. She was curled on it, leaning on an elbow, like an imp from another world.

"Who owns that house?" asked Kirby, since he could think of nothing else to ask.

"That is the House-of-the-Eight-Half--brothers," said Yasmini. "He who built it had eight wives, and a son by each. That was ages ago, and the descendants of the eight half-brothers are all at law about the ownership. There are many stories told about that house."

Suddenly she broke into laughter, leaning on her hand and mocking them as Puck mocked mortals. A man could not doubt her. Colonel and adjutant, both men who had seen grim service and both self-possessed as a rule, knew that she could read clean through them, and that from the bottom of her deep, wise soul she was amused.

"I am from the North," she said, "and the North is cold; there is little mercy in the hills, and I was weaned amid them. Yet--would the sahib not better beg of me?"

"How d'ye mean?" asked Kirby, surprised into speaking English.

"_Three days_ ago there came a wind that told _me_ of war--of a world-war, surely not this time stillborn. Two years ago the same wind brought me news of its conception, though the talk of the world was then of universal peace and of horror at a war that was. Now, to-night, this greatest war is loose, born and grown big within three days, but conceived two years ago--Russia, Germany, Austria, France are fighting--is it not so? Am I wrong?"

"I came to ask about Ranjoor Singh," said Colonel Kirby, twisting at his closely cropped mustache.

There was a hint of iron in his voice, and he was obviously not the man to threaten and not fulfil. But she laughed in his face.

"All in good time!" she answered him. "You shall beg for your Ranjoor Singh, and then perhaps he shall step forth from the burning house! But first you shall know why you _must_ beg."

She clapped her hands, and a maid appeared. She gave an order, and the maid brought sherbet that Kirby sniffed suspiciously before tasting. Again she laughed deliciously.

"Does the sahib think that he could escape alive from this room did I will otherwise?" she asked. "Would I need to drug--I who have so many means?"

Now, it is a maxim of light cavalry that the best means of defense lies in attack; a threat of force should be met by a show of force, and force by something quicker. Kirby's eyes and his adjutant's met. Each felt for his hidden pistol. But she laughed at them with mirth that was so evidently unassumed that they blushed to their ears.

"Look!" she said; and they looked.

Two great gray cobras, male and female, swayed behind them less than a yard away, balanced for the strike, hoods raised. The awful, ugly black eyes gleamed with malice. And a swaying cobra's head is not an easy thing to hit with an automatic-pistol bullet, supposing, for wild imagination's sake, that the hooded devil does not strike first.

"It is not wise to move!" purred Yasmini.

They did not see her make any sign, though she must have made one, for their eyes were fixed on the swaying snakes, and their brains were active with the problem of whether to try to shoot or not. It seemed to them that the snakes reached a resolution first, and struck. And in the same instant as each drew his pistol the hooded messengers of death were jerked out of sight by hands that snatched at horsehair from behind the hangings.

"I have many such!" smiled Yasmini, and they turned to meet her eyes again, hoping she could not read the fear in theirs. "But that is not why the sahib shall beg of me." Kirby was not too overcome to notice the future tense. "That is only a reason why the sahibs should forget their Western manners. But--if the pistols please the sahibs--"

They stowed their pistols away again and sat as if the very cushions might be stuffed with snakes, both of them aware that she had produced a mental effect which was more to her advantage than the pistols would have been had they made her a present of them. She gave a sudden shrill cry that startled them and made them look wildly for the door; but she had done no more than command a punkah-wallah, and the heavy-beamed punkah began to swing rhythmically overhead, adding, if that were possible, to the mesmeric spell.

"Now," she said, "I will tell a little of the why of things." And Colonel Kirby hoped it was the punkah, and not funk, that made the sweat stream down his neck until his collar was a mere uncomfortable mess. "For more than a year there has been much talk in India. The winds have brought it all to me. There was talk--and the government has known it, for I am one of those who told the government--of a ripe time for a blow for independence.

"There have been agents of another Power, pretending to be merchants, who have sown their seed carefully in the bazaars. And then there went natives in the pay of the merchants who had word with native sowars, saying that it is not well to be carried over sea to fight another's quarrels. All this the government knew, though, of course, thou art not the government, but only a soldier with a ready pistol and a dull wit."

"What bearing has this on Ranjoor Singh?" asked Kirby. It was so long since he had been spoken to so bluntly that he could not sit still under it.

"I am explaining why the colonel sahib shall beg for his Ranjoor Singh," she smiled. "Does the fire burn yet, I wonder?"

She struck a gong, and a maid appeared in the door like an instant echo.

"Does the fire still burn?" she asked.

The maid disappeared, and was gone five minutes, during which Kirby and Warrington sat in silent wonder. They wondered chiefly what the regiment would say if it knew--and whether the regiment would ever know. Then the maid came back.

"It burns," she said. "I can see flame from the roof, though not so much flame."

"So," said Yasmini. "Listen, sahibs."

It is doubtful if a trumpet could have summoned them away, for she had them bound in her spells, and each in a different spell, as her way is. She had little need to order them to listen.

"The talk in the bazaars did little harm, for the fat _bunnias_ know well whose rule has given them their pickings. They talk for the love of words, but they trade for the love of money, and the government protects their money. Nay, it was not the _bunnias_ who mattered.

"But there came a day when the rings of talk had reached the hills, and hillmen came to Delhi to hear more, as they ever have come since India was India. And it was clear then to the government that proof of disloyalty among the native regiments would set the hillmen screaming for a holy war--for the hills are cold, sahibs, and the hillmen have cold hearts and are quick to take advantage, even as I am, of others' embarrassment. Hillmen have no mercy, Colonel sahib. I was weaned amid the hills."

It seemed to Kirby and Warrington both--for not all their wits were stupefied--that she was sparring for time. And then Warrington saw a face reflected in one of the mirrors and nudged Kirby, and Kirby saw it too. They both saw that she was watching it. It was a fat face, and it looked terrified, but the lips did not move and only the eyes had expression. In a moment a curtain seemed to be drawn in front of it, and Yasmini took up her tale.

"And then, sahibs, as I have told already, there came a wind that whistled about war; and it pleased the government to know which, if any, of the native regiments had been affected by the talk. So a closer watch was set, then a net was drawn, and Ranjoor Singh ran into the net."

"An antelope might blunder into a net set for a tiger," said Kirby. "I am here to cut him out again."

Yasmini laughed.

"With pistols to shoot the cobras and sweat to put out flame? Nay, what is there to cut but the dark that closes up again? Sahib, thou shalt _beg_ for Ranjoor Singh, who struck a hillman in my house,

he was so eager to hear treason!"

"Ranjoor Singh's honor and mine are one!" said Colonel Kirby, using a native phrase that admits of no double meaning, and for a second Yasmini stared at him in doubt.

She had heard that phrase used often to express native regard for a native, or for an Englishman, but never before by an Englishman for a native.

"Then beg for him!" she grinned mischievously. "Aye, I know the tale! It is the eve of war, and he commands a squadron, and there is need of him. Is it not so? Yet the house that he entered burns. And the hillman's knife is long and keen, sahib! Beg for him!"

Kirby had risen to his feet, and Warrington followed suit. Kirby's self-possession was returning and she must have known it; perhaps she even intended that it should. But she lay curled on the divan, laughing up at him, and perfectly unimpressed by his recovered dignity.

"If he's alive, and you know where he is," said Kirby, "I will pay you your price. Name it!"

"Beg for him! There is no other price. The House-of-the-Eight-Half-brothers burns! Beg for him!"

Now, the colonel of a regiment of light cavalry is so little given to beg for things that the word beg has almost lapsed out of his vocabulary from desuetude.

"I beg you to tell me where he is," he said stiffly, and she clapped her hands and laughed with such delight that he blushed to his ears again.

"I have had a prince on his knees to me, and many a priest," she chuckled, "aye, and many a soldier--but never yet a British colonel sahib. Kneel and beg!"

"Why--what--what d'ye mean?" demanded Kirby.

"Is his honor not your honor? I have heard it said. Then beg, Colonel sahib, on your knees--on those stiff British knees--beg for the honor of Ranjoor Singh!"

"D'you mean--d'you mean--?"

"Beg for his honor, and beg for his life, on your knees, Colonel sahib!"

"I could look the other way, sir," whispered Warrington, for the regiment's need was very real.

"Nay, both of you! Ye shall both beg!" said Yasmini, "or Ranjoor Singh shall taste a hillman's mercy. He shall die so dishonored that the regiment shall hang its head in shame."

"Impossible!" said Kirby. "His honor is as good as mine!"

"Then beg for his and thine--on your knees, Colonel sahib!"

Then it seemed to Colonel Kirby that the room began to swim, for what with the heat and what with an unconquerable dread of snakes, he was not in shape to play his will against this woman's.

"What if I kneel?" he asked.

"I will promise you Ranjoor Singh, alive and clean!"

"When?"

"In time!"

"In time for what?"

"Against the regiment's need!"

"No use. I want him at once!" said Colonel Kirby.

"Then go, sahib! Put out the fire with the sweat that streams from thee! Nay, go, both of you--ye have my leave to go! And what is a Sikh risaldar more or less? Nay, go, and let the Jat die!"

It is not to be written lightly that the British colonel of Outram's Own and his adjutant both knelt to a native woman--if she is a native--in a top back-room of a Delhi bazaar. But it has to be recorded that for the sake of Ranjoor Singh they did.

They knelt and placed their foreheads where she bade them, against the divan at her feet, and she poured enough musk in their hair, for the love of mischief, to remind them of what they had done until in the course of slowly moving nature the smell should die away. And then in a second the lights went out, each blown by a fan from behind the silken hangings.

They heard her silvery laugh, and they heard her spring to the floor. In cold, creeping sweat they listened to footsteps, and a little voice whispered in Hindustani:

"This way, sahibs!"

They followed, since there was nothing else to do and their pride was all

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