King of the Khyber Rifles A Romance of Adventure

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THE MYSTERIOUS RANGAR DESERTS CAPT. KING AND HIS CUTTHROAT ESCORT IN A DANGEROUS PART OF KHY-BER PASS AND ADVENTURES COME RAPIDLY.

Synopsis .- At the beginning of the world war Capt. Athelstan King of the British Indian army and of its secret service, is ordered to Delhi to meet Yasmini, a dancer, and go with her to Khinjan to quiet the outlaws there who are said by spies to be preparing for a jihad or holy war. On his way to Delhi King quietly foils a plan to assassinate him and gets evidence that Yasmini is after him. He meets Rewa Gunga, Yasmini's man, who says she has already gone north, and at her town house witnesses queer dances. Ismail, an Afridi, becomes his body servant and protector. He rescues some of Yasmini's hillmen and takes them north with him, tricking the Rangar into going

CHAPTER VI-Continued.

It was not a long journey, nor a very interview Courtenay, the officer comslow one, for there was nothing to manding. block the way except occasional men some native officers. Frowning over see that from a distance.

Jamrud were the lean "Hills," peopled "Hello!" he said by the fort gate, by the fiercest fighting men on earth, and the clouds that hung over the Khyber's course were an accent to the sav-

But King smiled merrily as he jumped out of the train, and Rewa Gunga, who was there to meet him, advanced with outstretched hand and other accepted. As he bit off the end a smile that would have melted snow on the distant peaks if he had only looked the other way.

"Welcome, King sahib!" he laughed. with the air of a skilled fencer who admires another, better one. "I shall a comfortable journey?"

with him, and then turning away to unlock the carriage doors that held his prisoners in. They were baying now like wolves to be free, and they surged out, like wolves from a cage, to clamor round the Rangar, pawing him and struggling to be the first to ask him

"Nay, ye mountain people; nay!" he of him again. laughed. "I, too, am from What do I know of your families or mous person-sings like a bulbulpieces to make a meal?"

, At that Ismail interfered, with the aid of an ash pick handle, chance- up the pass?" he asked. found beside the track. Laughing as if the whole thing was the greatest up and who comes down." joke imaginable, Rewa Gunga fell into stride beside King and led him away in King asked him. the direction of some tents.

"She is up the pass ahead of us," he of a hurry, I can assure you. She wanted to wait and meet you, but matters were too jolly well urgent, and we shall have our bally work cut out to catch her, you can bet! But I have everything ready-tents and beds and stores-everything!"

King looked over his shoulder to make sure that Ismail was bringing the little leather bag along. "So have I," he said quietly.

"I have horses,' said Rewa Gunga, "and mules and-"

"How did she travel up the Khyber?" King asked him, and the Rangar

spared him a curious sidewise glance. "The 'Hills' are her escort, King sahib. She is mistress in the 'Hills.' There isn't a murdering ruffian who would not lie down and let her walk on him! She rode away alone on a thoroughbred mare and she jolly well left me the mare's double on which to follow her. Come and look."

Not far from where the tents had been pitched in a cluster a string of horses whinnied at a picket rope. King saw the two good horses ready for himself, and ten mules beside them that would have done credit to any outfit. But at the end of the line, pawing at the trampled grass, was a black mare that made his eyes open wide. Once in a hundred years or so a viceroy's cup or a Derby is won by an animal that can stand and look and move as that mare did.

"Never saw anything better," King admitted ungrudgingly.

"There is only one mare like this one," laughed the Rangar. "She has

"What'll you take for this one?" King asked him, "Name your price!" "The mare is hers. You must ask her. Who knows? She is generous. There is nobody on earth more generous than she when she cares to be.

See what you wear on your wrist?" "That is a loan," said King, uncovering the bracelet. "I shall give it back her when we meet."

"See what she says when you meet !" laughed the Rangar, taking a cigarette from his jeweled case with an air and Rangar stood facing them, looking smiling as he lighted it. "There is more at ease than they. your tent, sahib."

than he would have dreamed of provid- selves mountain goats and scatter that not the easiest. ing for himself, he lit one of his black among the "Hills!"

cheroots, and with hands clasped behind him strolled over to the fort to

It so happened that Courtenay had with flags, who guarded culverts and gone up the pass that morning with his little bridges. It was low tide under shotgun after quail. He came back the Himalayas. The flood that was into view, followed by his little tendraining India of her armed men had man escort just as King neared the left Jamrud high and dry with a little fort, and King timed his approach so nondescript force stranded there, as as to meet him. The men of the it were, under a British major and escort were heavily burdened; he could

cheerily, after he had saluted and the salute had been returned.

"Oh, hello, King! Glad to see you. Heard you were coming, of course. Anything I can do?"

"Tell me anything you know," said King, offering him a cheroot, which the they stood facing each other, so that King could see the oncoming escort in her room in Delhi. As he unfolded and what it carried. Courtenay read the note-it was not sealed-he found

"Two of my men!" he said. "Found 'em up the pass. Gazi work, I thak. know better another time and let you They were cut all to pieces. There's keep in front of me! I trust you had a big lashkar gathering somewhere in the 'Hills,' and it might have been done "Thanks," said King, shaking hands by their skirmishers, but I don't think

"Who's supposed to be leading it?" "Can't find out," said Courtenay. Then he stepped aside to give orders to the escort. They carried the dead bodies into the fort.

"Know anything of Yasmini?" King asked, when the major stood in front

"By reputation, of course, yes. Faof your friends? Am I to be torn to dances like the devil-lives in Delhimean her?"

King nodded. "When did she start "She didn't start! I know who goes

"Know anything of Rewa Gunga?"

"Not much. Tried to buy his mare. Seen the animal? Gad! I'd give a announced. "She was in the deuce year's pay for that beast! He wouldn't sell and I don't blame him."

"He told me just now," said King, "that Yasmini went up the pass unes-



He Recognized the Same Strange Scent That Had Been Wafted From Behind Yasmini's Silken Hangings in Her Room in Delhi.

corted, mounted on a mare the very dead spit of the black one you say you wanted to buy."-

Courtenay whistled. "I'm sorry, King. I'm sorry to say

King threw away his less than half consumed cheroot and they started to walk together toward King's camp. After a few minutes they arrived at a point from which they could see the prisoners lined up in a row facing Rewa Gunga. A less experienced exc than King's or Courtenay's could have recognized their attitude of reverent obedience. Within two minutes the

"I was cautioning those savages!" With a nod of dismissal, King he explained. "They're an escort, but walked over to inspect the bandobast, they need a reminder of the fact, else and finding it much more extravagant they might jolly well imagine them-

He drew out his wonderful cigarette case and offered it open to Courtenay, who hesitated, and then helped himself. King refused.

"Major Courtenay has just told me." said King, "that nobody resembling Yasmini has gone up the pass recently. Can you explain?"

"Do you mean, can I explain why the major failed to see her? 'Pon my soul, King sahib, d'you want me to clever for me, or for any other man I ever met; and the major's a man, isn't of men that there's only standing room and still she'll go up without his leave if she chooses! There is nobody like Yasmini in all the world!"

The Rangar was looking past him, facing the great gorge that lets the north of Asia trickle down into India and back again when weather and the tribes permit. His eyes had become interested in the distance. King wondered why-and looked-and saw. Courtenay saw, too.

"Hail that man and bring him here!" he ordered.

Ismail, keeping his distance with ears and eyes peeled, heard instantly and hurried off. Fifteen minutes later an Afridi stood scowling in front of them with a little letter in a cleft stick in his hand. He held it out and Courtenay took it and sniffed.

"Well-I'll be blessed! A note"sniff-sniff-"on scented paper!" Sniffsniff! "Carried down the Khyber in a split stick! Take it, King-it's addressed to you."

King obeyed and sniffed too. It smelt of something far more subtle than musk. He recognized the same strange scent that had been wafted from behind Yasmini's silken hangings. time for a swift glance at Rewa Gunga's face. The Rangar seemed interested and amused. The note, in Eng-

"Dear Captain King: Kindly be quick to follow me, because there is much talk of a lashkar getting ready for a raid. I shall wait for you in Khinjan, a raid. I shall wait for you in Khinjan, whither my messenger shall show the way. Please let him keep his rifle. Trust him, and Rewa Gunga and my thirty whom you brought with you. The messenger's name is Darya Kahn. Your servant. Yasmin!."

He passed the note to Courtenay, who read it and passed it back.

"I'll find out," the major mutte knowing it. Somebody's tail shall be twisted for this!"

told him, and that was many days later, when a terrible cloud no longer threatened India from the north.

CHAPTER VII.

"I think I envy you!" said Courte-

They were seated in Courtenay's ent, face to face across the low table, with guttering lights between and Is-

"You're about the first who has admitted it," said King.

Not far from them a herd of packevening meal. The evening breeze little crowd of traders who had come down with the camels three hours ago -sang a walling song about his ladylove. Overhead the sky was like black velvet, pierced with silver holes, "You see, you can't call our end of

Courtenay. "Two battalions of Khy- the black ravines. Then presently ber rifles, hired to hold the pass the shadow of the thousand-foot-high against their own relations. Against Khyber walls began to cover them. them a couple of hundred thousand tribesmen, very hungry for loot, armed out, and he threw it away. A little and watched it to be sure his hand with up-to-date rifles, thanks to Russia later Rewa Gunga threw away his yesterday and Germany today, and all perfectly well aware that a world war year-old among the Zakka Khels, trying it on others, is in progress. That's sport, you know watching sleepless over the rim of -not the 'image and likeness of war' that Jorrocks called it, but the real taken oath that the Khyber's unburred root. And you've got a mystery led dead were prowling in search of thrown in to give it piquaner. haven't found out yet how Yasmini canny silence was their best protecedge. I thought it was a trick, it after a time. Didn't believe she'd gone. Yet all my men swear they know she has gone, ing seen her go! What d'you think of that?"

For a while, as he ate Courtenay's broiled quail, King did not answer. But the merry smile had left his eyes and he seemed for once to be letting between us? Look! What is that?" his mind dwell on conditions as they concerned himself.

"How many men have you at the fort?" he asked at last.

"Two hundred-all natives."

"Like 'em?" "What's the use of talking?" answered Courtenay. "You know what it means when men of an alien race stand up to you and grin when they horse forward. The Rangar followed salute. They're my own."

King nodded. "Die with you, eh?" "To the last man," said Courtenay quietly with that conviction that can only be arrived at in one way, and

lonely in the 'Hills.' Got any more the flame burned brighter and stead-

And that was all he ever did say on that subject, then or at any other

"What shall you do first after you get up the pass? Call on your brother nt Ali Masjid? He's likely to know lot by the time you get there."

"Not sure," said King. "May and seen the old chap in a donkey's age. How is he?" "Well two days ago," said Courte-

"Here's wishing you luck!" said

King. "It's time to go, sir." He rose, and Courtenay walked with him to where his party waited in the his ear. "That was her blue lightdark, chilled by the cold wind whistling down the Khyber. Rewa Gunga sat, mounted, at their head, and close to him his personal servant rode another horse. Behind them were the ers' state of mind; it needed horsemules, and then in a cluster, each with a load of some sort on his head, trol. were the thirty prisoners, and Ismail took charge of them officiously. Darya Khan, the man who had insult the man? Yasmini is too jolly brought the letter down the pass, kept close to Ismail.

King mounted, and Courtenay shook he? He may pack the Khyber so full hands; then he went to Rewa Gunga's side and shook hands with him, too. "Forward! March!" King ordered,

and the little procession started. "Oh, men of the 'Hills,' ye look like ghosts - like graveyard ghosts!" jeered Courtenay, as they all filed past him. "Ye look like dead men, going to be judged!"

Nobody answered. They strode behind the horses, with the swift, sihome to the "Hills;" but even they,



He Fired Straight at the Blue

he did not speak until Courtenay was out of earshot. Then:

"Men of the 'Hills!" he called. kind to guide him. "Kuch dar nahin hai!" "Nahin hai! Hah!" shouted Ismail.

"So speaks a man! Hear that, ye mountain folk! He says, There is no such thing as fear!"" In his place in the lead, King whis-

tled softly to himself; but he drew an mail outside the tent handing plates automatic pistol from its place beand things to Courtenay's servant in- neath his armpit and transferred it to a readier position.

Fear or no fear, Khyber mouth is brought the smoke of dung fires down a mile or two farther south. It is one to them, and an Afghan-one of the of the few places in the world where Boulder, crag and loose rock at bay.

faded into gloom behind; in front on both hands ragged hillsides were beginning to close in; and the wind, this business war-it's sport," said whistled as it searched busily among After a while King's cheroot went cigarette. After that, the veriest fivesome stone watch tower, could have I empty graves. Probably their un-

"King sahib!" he called softly, repeating it louder and more loudly unand not one of them will own to hav- til King heard him. "Slowly! Not so fast! There are men among those boulders, and to go too fast is to make them think you are afraid! To seem defend ourselves, with three firearms

They were at the point where the road begins to lead uphill, westward. leaving the bed of a ravine and as- to follow the day?" cending to join the highway built by British engineers. Below, to left and right, was pit-mouth gloom, shadows thy mae!" amid shadows, full of eerie whisperings, and King felt the short hair on his neck begin to rise. He urged his him, close up, and both horse and mare sensed excitement.

"Look, sahib!" After a second or two he caught all five men at once, and the Khyber a glimpse of bluish flame that flashed night gave back their voices, like the suddenly and died again, somewhere choing of a well.

ier and began to move and to grow.

voice was sharp and unexpected as a pistol crack. This was something tan- along!" gible, that a man could tackfe-a perfect antidote for nerves.

The blue light continued on a zig- the others towing the mules along. zag course, as if a man were running Except for King, who was modern among bowlders with an unusual sort and out of the picture, they looked may not. I'd like to see him. Haven't of torch; and as there was no answer like Old Testament patriarchs, hur-King drew his pistol, took about thirty rying out of Egypt, as depicted in the seconds' aim and fired. He fired illustrated Bibles of a generation agostraight at the blue light.

It vanished instantly, into measure- ing a staff-and none looking to the less black silence. "Now you've jolly well done it,

Yasmini's !" swered, for both animals were all but faster! Beat the led horse!" frantic with their sense of their rid-

horse and mare were head to head again.

me a signal at the point where I am guessed he was not enjoying himself. to leave the track!"

set his unwilling horse to scrambling have known. He is a man, this one f downward at an angle he could not He will do unexpected things!" guess, into blackness he could feel, where his own eyes could make out ward, men of the 'Hills!'" nothing.

To his disgust he heard the Rangar immediately. To his even greater disgust the black mare overtook him. lent strides of men who are going And even then, with his own mount stumbling and nearly pitching him headforemost at each lurch, he was forced to admire the mare's goatlike agility, for she descended into the gorge in running leaps, never setting a wrong foot. When he and his horse reached the bottom at last he found the Rangar waiting for him.

"This way, sahib!" The next he knew sparks from the black mare's heels were kicking up in front of him, and a wild ride had dreamed of. There was no catching two to his horse's one; but he set his teeth and followed into solid night, trusting ear, eye, guesswork and the god of the secret service men, who loves the reckless.

Once in every two minutes he caught sight for a second of the same blue siren light that had started the race. He suspected that there were many torches placed at intervals.

His own horse developed a speed and stamina he had not suspected, and probably the Rangar did not dare extend the mare to her limit in the dark; at all events, for ten, perhaps fifteen, minutes of breathless galloping he almost made a race of it, keeping the Rangar either within sight or

But then the mare swerved suddenly behind a bowlder and was gone. mare had gone, nor a sound of any glittered in the meonlight,

He dismounted and stumbled about on foot for about ten minutes with another word he laid down his rife his eyes two feet from the earth, trying to find some trace of hoof. Then he listened, with his ear to the

ground. There was no result. He knew better than to shout. After some thought he mounted and began to hunt the way back, remembering turns and twists with a gift for direction that natives might well haunted after dark by the men whose have envied him. He found his way blood fends are too reeking raw to back to the foot of the road at a camels grunted and bubbled after the let them dare go home and for whom trot, where ninety-nine men out of althe British hangman very likely waits most any hundred would have been lost hopelessly; and close to the road he overtook Darya Khan, hugging his a pistol is better than a thick stick. rifle and staring about like a scorpion

"Did you expect that blue light, and this galloping away?" he asked. "Nay, sahib; I knew nothing of it! whose home is in Allah's refuse heap. I was told to lead the way to Khin-

"Come on, then!" On the level road above King stared about him and felt in his pockets for a fresh cheroot. He struck a match did not shake before he spoke. A man must command himself before

"Where are the others?" he asked, when he was certain of himself. "Gone!" boomed Ismail.

King took a dozen pulls at the cheroot and stared about again. In the middle of the road stood his secgot up the pass without my knowl- tion; but Rewa Gunga chose to break ond horse, and three mules with his baggage, including the unmarked medicine chest. Close to them were three men, making the party now only himself and Ismail.

> eloquent of shocked surprise. "They | mail growl: afraid is to invite attack! Can we followed! Was it then thy baggage on the other mules? Were they thy men? They led the mules and went!"

"Who ordered them?" "Allah! Need the night be ordered "And thou?"

"I am thy man! She bade the ba "And these !" "Try them!"

King bethought him of his wrist, that was heavy with the weight of gold on it. He drew back his sleeve and held it up.

"I'd die alone," said King. "It'll be below to the right. Then all at once | King took his reins and mounted.

"May God be with thee!" boomed

"What now?" asked Ismail, picking up the leather bag that he regarded "Halt!" King thundered; and his as his own particular charge. "Forward!" said King.

He began to set a fairly fast pace, Ismail leading the spare horse and

right or left. "Forward?" growled Ismail. "With haven't you!" the Rangar laughed in this man it is ever 'forward!" Is there neither rest nor fear? Has she bewitched him? Hai! Ye lazy ones! It was a minute before King an- Ho! Sons of sloth! Urge the mules

all leaning forward-each man carry-

So in weird, wan moonlight, King led them forward, straight up the manship to get them back under con- narrowing gorge, between cliffs that seemed to fray the very bosom of the "How do you know whose light it sky. He smoked a cigar and staked was?" King demanded, when the at the view, as if he were off to the mountains for a month's sport with dependable shikarris whom he knew. "It was prearranged. She promised Nobody could have looked at him and

"That man," mumbled Ismail be-King drove both spurs home, and hind him, "is not as other sahibs I

"Forward!" King called to them, trusting the animal to find a footing thinking they were grumbling. "For-

CHAPTER VIII.

After a time King urged his horse to a jog-trot, and they trotted forward until the bed of the Khyber began to grow very narrow, and Ali Masjid fort could not be much more than a mile away, at the widest guess. Then King drew rein and dismounted, for he would have been challenged had he ridden much farther. A challenge in the Khyber after dark consists invariably of a volley at short range, with the mere words afterward, and the

wise man takes precautions. "Off with the mules' packs!" he orbegun such as he had never yet dered, and the men stood round and up, for the black mare could gallop only rifle in the party, grinned like a stared. Darya Khan, leaning on the post-office letter box.

"Truly," growled Ismail/forgetting past expressions of a different opinion, "this man is as mad as all the other Englishmen."

"Were you ever bitten by one?" wondered King aloud. "God forbid!"

"Then off with the packs-and hurry!" Ismail began to obey. "Thou! Lord of the Rivers! (For

that is what Darya Khan means.) What is thy calling?" "Badragga" (guide), he answered. "Did she not send me back down the pass to be a guide? If she says I am badragga, shall any say she lies?"

"I say thou art unpacker of mules" burdens!" answered King. "Begin!" For answer the fellow gri He spurred round the same great rock ear to ear and thrust the rifle barrel "how she got up the pass without my born in the "Hills" and knowing them a minute later, and was faced by a forward insolently. King, with the as a wolf-pack knows its hunting blank wall of shale that brought his movement of determination that a man . ground, were awed by the gloom of horse up all standing. It led steep up makes when about to force conclu-But he did not find out until King Khyber mouth ahead. King's voice for a thousand feet to the skyline, slons, drew up his sleeves above the was the first to break the silence, and There was not so much as a goat- wrist. At that instant the moon shone track to show in which direction the through the mist and the gold bracelet

> "May God be with thee!" said "Lord of the Rivers" at once. And without and went to help off-load the mules.

King stepped aside and cursed softly. But for a vein of wisdom that underlay his pride he would have pock-



At That Instant the Moon Shone Through the Mist and the Gold Bracelet Glittered in the Moonlight. six all told, including Darya Khan, eted the bracelet there and then and have refused to wear it again. But as "Gone whither?" Istgail's voice was he sweated his pride he overheard Is-

"Good for thee! He had taught thee obedience in another bat of the eye!" "I obey her!" muttered Darya Khan, "I, too," said Ismail, "So shall he before the week dies! But now it is good to obey him. He is an ugly man

to disobey!" "I obey him until she sets me free, then," grumbled Darya Khan, "Better for thee!" said Ismail.

King meets his brother at All Masjid fort and they hold a memorable conference. The British captain disappears in the darkness and a strange native medicine man takes his place.

(TO BE CONTINUED)