## King of the Khyber Rifles A Romance of Adventure

By TALBOT MUNDY Copyright by the Bobbs-Merrill Company

KING SEES YASMINI FOR THE FIRST TIME WHEN SHE COMES TO DANCE BEFORE THE THOUSANDS OF WARRIORS ASSEMBLED IN THE CAVERN

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 goes with her to Khinjan to meet 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 ahead. The Rangar deserts him at a dangerous time. He meets his brother at Ali Masjid fort. The disguise he assumes there fools even the sharp-eyed cutthroats composing his guard. He enters Khinjan caves, thanks to his lying guides, and at a clinic hears of an impending revolt led by Bull-With-a-Beard, and goes to a meeting in the cavern.

men wait for proof!"

banks.

The mullah in the arena, blinking

Christian priest blessing a congrega-

tion. The great cavern grew still, and

only the river could be heard sucking

hungrily between the smooth stone

"God is great!" the mullah howled.

The crowd thundered in echo to him;

and then the vault took up the echoes.

howled the mullah. Instantly they an-

his prophet-is his prophet!" said the

stalactites, in loud barks-then in mur-

That seemed to be all the religious

ritual Khinjan remembered or could

tolerate. Considering that the mullah.

too, must have killed his man in cold

blood before earning the right to be

suppressed a shudder-for what proof

had he of right to be there, beyond Is-

Would Ismail lie for him again? he

crowd, and a wretched-looking Baluchi

lashed to his sides and a pitiful look

of terror on his face. Two more Ba-

luchis were hustled along after him,

Once in the arena, the guards took

time. "Hear, and be warned!"

were. Yet they licked their lips.

held! Does any speak for them?"

"Speak for them?" said the roof.

a murmur of astonishment. Over op-

brought has been stolen! They had

The Pathan nudged King in the ribs

"Bull-with-a-beard speaks truth!" he

with an elbow like a club and tickled

his ear with hot breath.

King who shuddered.

the crowd.

any use?

as hopeless.

silence.

"There are strangers!"

murs-then in awe-struck whispers.

"And Muhammad is his prophet!"

## CHAPTER XII .- Continued.

"Aye! The liar says the Germans gave it to him. He swears they will a wolf does when he contemplates a send more. Who are the Germans? meal. Then, as an afterthought, as Who is a man who talks of a jihad that | though ashamed, "I love thee! Thou is to be, that he should have gold coin art a man after my own heart! But I given him by unbelievers? I saw a am her man! Wait and see!" German once, at Nuklao. He ate pigmeat and washed it down with wine. with his lashless eyes, held both arms Are such men sons of the Prophet? up for silence in the attitude of a Wait and watch, say I!"

"Money?" said King. "And should no more money come?"

This was courteous conversation and received as such-many a long league removed from curiosity.

"Who am I to foretell a man's kismet? I know what I know, and I think what I think! I know thee, hakim, for a gentle fellow, who hurt me almost not at all in the drawing of a bullet out of my flesh. What knowest thou about me?"

"That I will dress the wound for thee again!"

Artless statements are as useful in their way as artless questions. Let the guile lie deep, that is all.

"Nay, nay! For she said nay! Shall there, perhaps it was enough-too I fall foul of her, for the sake of a new bandage?"

The temptation was terrific to ask why she had given that order, but King the mullah, as a man might say, "I resisted it; and presently it occurred smell a rat!" But he did not look at to the Pathan that his own theories on anybody in particular; he blinked at the subject might be of interest.

"She will use thee for a reward," he said. "He who shall win and keep her



A Wretched-Looking Beluchi Was Thrust Forward at a Run, With Arms Lashed to His Sides.

favor may have his hurts dressed and his belly dosed. Her enemies may rot." | three enter!" "Does she call the mullah Muhammad Anim enemy?" King asked him. "Nay, she never mentions him by

CHAPTER XIII.

The dance went on for fifteen minotes yet, but then-quite unexpectedly -all the arena guards together fired a volley at the roof, and the dance seats and set the crowd surging again, Anim. leaving the arena empty of all but the guards.

of the crowd whom King recognized; as he spoke he swung his great head of contempt at the mullah that was echoes combined in pandemonium. and recognition brought no joy with it. between his shoulders, like a bear that alone worth a journey across the The mullah without hair or eyelashes, means to charge. "The proof they "Hills" to see, who had admitted him and his party through the mosque into the caves, good proof! I speak for them! The the crowd's sigh then was like the night if she coaxed a child. "It is the cus- thrust. Many men who had not laughed in all that din, but one could see whe strode out to the middle of the arena | men are mine!" all alone strutting and swaggering. He recalled the man's last words and drew no consolation from them, either.

"Many have entered! Some went out by a different road!"

at once Ismail's manner became uner- die, they three Baluchis!" couraging. He ceased to make a fuss over the dancer and began to eye King | no hair or eyelashes. sidewise, until at last he seemed unable to contain the malice that would | crowd.

ell forth.

The Pathan next King leaned over to to smile down on them all as sweetly "At the gate there were only words!" whisper to him again, but stiffened in as the stars shine on a battlafield.

the act. There was a great gasp the same instant, as the whole crowd caught its breath all together. The mullah in the middle froze into immobility. Bull-with-a-beard stood mumbling, swaying his great head from side to side, no longer suggestive of a hesitates.

The crowd was staring at the end of stood there, smiling on them all as the doubt of it! new moon smiles down on the Khyber! She had come among them like a spirit, all unheralded.

So much more beautiful than the one likeness King had seen of her that for a second he doubted who she was, she stood there, human and warm and real, who had begun to seem a myth, clad in gauzy silk transparent stuff that to feel at such an initiation. made no secret of sylphlike shapeliness and looking nearly light enough to the most marvelously molded things he whispered. "Here in this cavern He licked his teeth suggestively, as Not one part of her was still for a fraction of a second; yet the whole effect was of insolently lazy ease.

Her eyes blazed brighter than the little jewels stitched to her gossamer Anim seemed transfixed, like a great behind where he had sat. foolish animal.

swered him again. "His prophet-is him in the night, that he ran the risk and she well pleased with them. the distance was too great. He could be one of us!" not quite sec.

much. There were men not far from knew two things absolutely. He was was more disconcerting. to place him: for she picked him out all may see!" "Bring them!" he shouted, and King should make the gold glitter.

mail's verbal corroboration of a lie? had begun to whisper, and she wanted all attention, she raised both arms to wondered. And if so, would the lie be toss back the golden hair that came cascading nearly to her knees. And as Not far from where King sat there if the crowd knew that symptom well, was an immediate disturbance in the it drew its breath in sharply and grew very still. was thrust forward at a run, with arms

"Muhammad Anim!" she said, and she might have been wooing him. "That was a devil's trick!"

It was rather an astounding stateprotesting a little, but looking almost ment, coming from lovely lips in such a setting. It was rather suggestive of a driver's whiplash, flicked through the charge of all three of them and lined air for a beginning. Muhammad Anim them up facing the mullah, clubbing continued glaring and did not answer them with their rifle-butts to get quick- her, so in her own good time, when she er obedience. The crowd began to be had tossed her golden hair back once head. noisy again, but the mullah signed for or twice again, she developed her meaning.

"These are traitors!" he howled, and "We who are free of Khinjan caves his voice was like a wolf's at hunting do not send men out to bring recruits. We know better than to bid our men The crowd grew very still, but King tell lies for others at the gate. Nor, saw that some men licked their lips, seeking proof for our new recruit, do as if they well knew what was coming. we send men to hunt a head for him-"These three men came, and one was not even those of us who have a lasha new man!" the mullah howled. "The kar that we call our own, mullah Mu- ern! Without good proof, there is other two were his witnesses! All hammad Anim! Each of us earns his three swore that the first man came own way in!" from slaying an unbeliever in the teeth

The mullah Muhammad Anim began of written law. They said he ran from to stroke his beard, but he made no an-

the law. So, as the custom is, I let all swer. "And-mullah Muhammad Anim, "Good!" said the crowd. "Good!" thou wandering man of God-when and guessed what he had guessed while that lashkar has foolishly been sent he was turning to let the crowd look They might have been five thousand judges, judging in equity, so grave they and has failed, is it written in the Kala- at him. His fingers closed on human mullah saying we should pretend there hair. "But later, word came to me saying was a head, and that the head was they are liars. So-again as the custom is-I ordered them bound and Anim! Wandering perhaps is good, if by the jawbone! Hold it high in both in search of the way. Is it good to hands!" lose the way, and to lie, thou true fol-There was silence. Then there was lower of the Prophet?"

stopped as if every dancer had been posite to where King sat the mullah Her eyes challenged, her lips mocked lungs for the effort of his life. hit. Panting-foaming at the mouth, stood up, who the Pathan had said him and her chin scorned. The crowd lah muttered something in his beard, |cer!" he howled. "The men are mine!" he growled, and sat down, and the crowd began to His voice was like a bear's at bay; it | roar applause at her. But she checked | Throw It!" Now a man stood up near the edge was low, but it carried strangely. And it with a regal gesture, and a glance

"Guards!" she said quietly. And wind in a forest. "Away with those three of Muham-

mad Anim's men!" Twelve of the arena guards threw

She nodded once; and then all was over in a minute. With a ringing "Ho!" and a run, the guards lifted their vic- Many men were standing, waving their tims shoulder high and bore them forward. At the river bank they paused Catching Yasmini's eyes, he knew it blazing eyes searched the crowd swiftfor a second to swing them. Then, with had not entered her head that he might by. It was plain enough that there another "Ho!" they threw them like disobey. dead rubbish into the swift black wa-

and no extra ripple at all. No heads of them might shoot at him unbidden. hurl them at last over the great cata- river and stood there. ract toward the middle of the world. "Ah-h-h-h!" sighed the crowd in

ecstasy. bear about to charge, but of one who his back turned there and then into any kind, he walked back stolldly to the bridge. King stared, too, and knew! She knew who he was, how he than they ought to be, and chin a shade caught his own breath. For Yasmini had entered, and how he felt. Not a too high, for there never was a man

## CHAPTER XIV.

"Kurram Khan!" the lashless mullah howled, like a lone wolf in the moonlight, and King stood up. In that grim minute he managed to seem about as much at ease as a native hakim ought

"Come forward!" the mullah howled, and he obeyed, treading gingerly beblow away. Her feet-and they were tween men who were at no pains to let him by, and silently blessing them, behe had ever seen-were naked and cause he was not really in any hurry played restlessly on the naked stone. at all. Yasmini looked lovely from a distance, and life was sweet. "Who are his witnesses?"

"I!" shouted Ismail, jumping up. "I!" cracked the roof. "I! I!" So that for a second King almost believed dress, and when a man once looked at he had a crowd of men to swear for them he did not find it easy to look him and did not hear Darya Khan at away again. Even mullah Muhammad all, who rose from a place not very far

Ismail followed him in a hurry, like But King was staring very hard in- a man wading a river with loose deed at something else-mentally clothes gathered in one arm and the cursing the plain glass spectacles he other arm ready in case of falling. wore, that had begun to film over and Darya Khan did not go so fast. As he dim his vision. There were two brace- forced his way forward a man passed lets on her arm; both barbaric things him up the wooden box that King had of solid gold. The smaller of the two used to stand on; he seized it in both was on her wrist and the larger on her hands with a grin and a jest and went upper arm, but they were so alike, ex- to stand behind King and Ismail, in cept for size, and so exactly like the line with the lashless mullah, facing one Rewa Gunga had given him in her Yasmini. Yasmini smiled at them all name and that had been stolen from as if they were actors in her comedy,

of removing the glasses a moment to "Look ye!" howled the mullah. stare with unimpeded eyes. Even then "Look ye and look well, for this is to King felt ten thousand eyes burn

But her eyes began to search the holes in his back, but the one pair of crowd in his direction, and then he eyes that mocked him from the bridge sitting where she had ordered Ismail "Turn, Kurram Khan! Turn that

almost instantly, and laughed as if | Feeling like a man on a spit, he re- darbar, for I summoned it! Did I somebody had struck a silver bell. And volved slowly. By the time he had invite any man to speak?" one of those bracelets was the one that turned once completely around he had he had worn; for she flaunted it at decided that Yasmini meant be should willing pack is silent.

him, moving her arm so that the light be frightened, but not much hurt just "Speak, thou Kurram Khan! Tell yet. So he ceased altogether to feel them why!" she said, smiling. No man Then, perhaps because the crowd frightened and took care to look more could have guessed by the tone of her scared than ever.

purred, smiling her loveliest. "Tell again to whisper, watched to see which them whom you slew."

King turned and faced the crowd. raising himself on the balls of his feet very low indeed and very slowly, for he to shout, like a man facing thousands had to think. Then he turned his back of troops on parade. He nearly gave and repeated the obelsance to the himself away, for habit had him un- crowd. awares. A native hakim, given the stoutest lungs in all India, would not became that of a man whose advice have shouted in that way.

tling back at him from the roof over- proof. And I had proof. Ye saw! How

ometimes chuckle among ferns. It was devilish. It seemed to say there were traps not far ahead. "Where was he slain?" asked the mullab.

"In the Khyber pass," said King. . "Now give proof!" said the mullah. only one way out of here!" "Proof!" the crowd thundered.

'Proof!" the roof echoed. There was no need for Darya Khan to whisper. King's hands were behind him, and he had seen what he had seen

"Nay, it is short!" hissed Darya stolen? A lie is a lie, Muhammad Khan. "Take the two ears, or hold it

King obeyed, without looking at the thing, and Ismail, turning to face the She smiled, tossing her hair back, crowd, rose on tiptoe and filled his King shuddered.

some of them-the dancers ran to their was "Bull-with-a-beard"-Muhammad breathed hard and watched. The mul- King-infidel - kaffir - British arrfi- solence, "that none interrupt me while

"Good!" the crowd bellowed. "Good! The crowd's roar and the roof's

"Throw it to them, Kurram Khan!" Yasmini purred from the bridge end, with it!" speaking as softly and as sweetly as

thundered.

He turned the ghastly thing until it down their shields with a sudden clat- lay face-upward in his hands, and so grinned. "Truth and a lie together! ter and selzed the prisoners, four to at last he saw it. He caught his breath, Cold chills went down his back. All Good may it do him and them! They each. The crowd shivered with de- and only the horn-rimmed spectacles, licious anticipation. The doomed men that he had cursed twice that night, "Proof!" howled the mullah who had neither struggled nor cried, for fatal- saved him from self-betrayal. The ism is an anodyne as well as an explo- cavern seemed to sway as he looked chose), "to let this hakim live! He "Proof! Show us proof!" yelled the sive. King set his teety. Yasmini, with into the dead face of his brother shall meditate in his cave a while, and both hands behind her Lead, continued Charles.

If Yasmini detectad bis nervousness she gave in sigh

"Throw it! Throw it! Throw it!" The crowd was growing impatient. | may therefore live!" arms to draw attention to themselves.

He looked past her toward the river. There were no guards near enough to for fear of the others. There was only one wild scream that prevent what he intended; but he had went echoing and re-echoing to the to bear in mind that the guards had roof. There was scarcely a splash, rifles, and if he acted too suddenly one came up again to gasp. No fingers Holding the head before him with both clutched at the surface. The fearful hands, he began to walk toward the

His next move made every savage who watched him gasp because of its very unexpectedness. He held the "Is there no other stranger?" asked head in both hands, threw it far out Yasmini, searching for King again with into the rive and stood to watch it her amazing eyes. The skin all down gink. Then, without visible emotion of gooseflesh. And as her eyes met his face Yasmini at the bridge end, with she laughed like a bell at him. She shoulders a little more stubborn now who could act quite perfectly.

"Thou fool!" Yasmini whispered through lips that did not move. She



The Crowd Was Growing Impatient. "Throw It! Throw It!"

betrayed a flash of temper like a trapped she-tiger's, but followed it instantly with her loveliest smile.

"Slay him!" yelled a lone voice, that was greeted by an approving murmur. "This is a darbar!" Yasmini announced in a rising, ringing vol

There was silence, as a whipped un-

voice whether she was for him or "Speak, Kurram Khan!" Yasmini against him, and the crowd, beginning way the cat would jump.

He bowed low to her three times-

"My brothers," he said, and his voice has been asked, and who gives it free-"Cappitin Attleystan King!" he ly. "Ye saw this night how one man coared. And he nearly jumped out of entered here on the strength of an oath his skin when his own voice came rat- and a promise. All he lacked was easy would it not have been, had I Yasmini chuckled as a little rill will thrown that head to you, for a traitor to catch it and hide it in his clothes, and make away with it! He could have used it to admit to these caveswhy-even an Englishman, my brothers! If that had happened, ye would have blamed me!"

Yasmini smiled. Taking its cue from Words at the gate-proof in the cav- her, the crowd murmured, scarcely assent, but rather recognition of the hakim's adroitness. The game was not won; there lacked a touch to tip the scales in his favor, and Yasmini supplied it with ready genius. "The hakim speaks the truth!" she

> laughed. King turned about instantly to face

tossed into Earth's Drink after those other three." Muhammad Anim rose, stroking his to Yasmini's song.

beard and rocking where he stood. "It is the law!" he growled, and

"It is the law," Yasmini answered in "The head of Cappitin Attleystan a voice that rang with pride and in-I speak! For such ill-mannered ones Earth's Drink hungers! Will you test my authority, Muhammad Anim? Think ye! If that head had only fallen into Muhammad Anim's lap, the mullah might have smuggled in another man

A roar of laughter greeted that at the mullah's first discomfiture "Throw it! Throw it!" the crowd joined in now. Muhammad Anint sat ran back to the bridge and stood below and fidgeted, meeting nobody's eye and it, eyes agape. answering nothing.

"So it seems to me good," Yasmini said, in a voice that did not echo any more but rang very clear and true (she seemed to know the trick of the roof, and to use the echo or not as she perhaps he shall be beaten, lest he dare offend again. He can no more escape from Ehinjan caves than the

women who are prisoners here. He

There was utter silence. Men looked at one another and at her, and her were at least two parties there, and that none dared oppose Yasmini's will

"To thy seat, Kurram Khan!" she ordered, when she had waited a full

minute and no man spoke. He wasted no time. He hurried out of the arena as fast as he could walk, with Ismail and Darya Khan close at speed of the river sucked them under, river, edging all the while a little to- his heels. Ismail overtook him, selzed to grind and churn and pound them ward the crowd as if meaning to get him by the shoulders, hugged him, and through long caverns underground and nearer before he threw. He reached the dragged him to the empty seat next to the Orakzai Pathan. There he hugged him until his ribs cracked.

"Ready o' wit!" he crowed. "Ready o' tongue! Light o' life! Man after mine own heart! Hey, I love thee! Readily I would be thy man, but for being hers! Turned the joke on Muhammad Anim! Turned it against her enemy and raised a laugh against him from his own men! Ready o' wit! Shameless one! Lucky one! Allah was surely good to thee!"

"Have they taken Ali Masjid fort?"

King whispered. "Nay, how should I know? Ask her! She knows more than any man knows!" King turned to ask the same question of his friend the Orakzai Pathan: but the Pathan would have none of his questions, he was busy listening for whispers from the crowd, watching

with both eyes, and he shoved King aside. The crowd was very far from being satisfied. An angry murmur had begun to fill the cavern as a hive is filled with the song of bees at swarming time. But even so, surmise what one might, it was not easy to persuade the eye that Yasmini's careless smile and easy poise were assumed. If she recognized indignation and feared it, she disguised her fear amazingly. Leisurely, languidly, she raised both arms until she looked like an angel poised for flight. The little jewels stitched to her gauzy dress twinkled like fireflies as she moved. The crowd gasped sharply. She had it by the heart-strings.

She called, and four guards got under one shield, bowing their heads and resting the great rim on their shoulders. They carried it beneath her and stood still. With a low delicious laugh, sweet and true, she sprang on it, and the shield scarcely trembled; she seemed lighter than the silk her dress was woven from!

They carried her so, and in the midst of the arena before they had ceased moving she began to sing, with her head thrown back and bosom swelling

like a bird's. The East would ever rather draw its own conclusions from a hint let fall than he puzzled by what the West believes are facts. And parables are not good evidence in courts of law, which is always a consideration. So her song

took the form of a parable. And to say that she took hold of them and played rhapsodies of her own making on their heartstrings would be to undervalue what she did. They were dumb while she sang, but they rose at her. Not a force in the world could have kept them down, for she was deftly touching cords that stirred other forces-subtle, mysterious, mesmeric, which the old East understands -which Muhammad the prophet understood when he harnessed evil in the shafts with men and wrote rules for their driving in a book. They rose in silence and stood tense.

She sang of a wolf-pack gathering from the valleys in the winter snowa very hungry wolf-pack. Then of a stalled ox, grown very fat from being cared for. Of the "Heart of the Hills" that awoke in the worm of the "Hills," and that listened and watched.

"Now, is she the 'Heart of the Hills?" King wondered. The rumors men had heard and told again in India. about the "Heart of the Hills" in Khinjan seemed to have foundation. He thought of the strange knife.

wrapped in a handkerchief under his shirt, with its bronze blade and gold hilt in the shape of a woman dancing. The woman dancing was astonishingly like Yasmini, standing on the shield! She sang about the owners of the stalled ox, who were busy at bay, defending themselves and their ox from another wolf-pack in another direction "far beyond."

She urged them to wait a little while. The ox was big enough and fat enough to nourish all the wolves in the world for many seasons. Let them walt, her, but he salaamed so low that she then, until another, greater wolf-pack could not have seen his expression had joined them, that they might go hunting all together, overwhelm its pres-"If ye wish it, I will order him ent owners and devour the ox! So urged the "Heart of the Hills," speaking to the mountain wolves, according

The little cubs in the burrows know. Are ye grown wolves, who hurry so?

She paused, for effect; but they gave tongue then because they could not help it, and the cavern shook to their terrific worship.

"Allah! Allah!" They summoned God to come and see the height and depth and weight of their allegiance to her! And because for their thunder there was no more chance of being heard, she dropped from the shield like a blossom. No sound of falling could have been heard made no sound. The shield bearers

Disguised as he is,. King is placed on trial for his life. At a critical moment a human head is thrust into his hands. When he sees the face, the shock is terribis. The victim is-

(TO BE CONTINUED)