King of the Khyber Rifles Talbot Mundy Copyright by the Bobba-Mertill Company

A Story That Combines the Thrill of Modern Detective Fiction With the Romance of Arabian Nights Tales

CHAPTER XVII-Continued.

__11__ Morning looks down into Khinjan King speak.

It was cold. She came and snuggled close to him, and it was so they his face.

"Of what are you thinking?" she asked him at last.

"Of India, princess." "What of India?" "She lies helpless."

"Ah! You love India?" "Yes."

"You shall love me better! You shall love me better than your life! Then, for love of me, you shall own the India you think you love! This letter shall go!" She tapped her bosom. "It is best to cut you off from India first. You shall lose that you may win!"

She got up and stood in the gap. smiling mockingly, framed in the darkness of the cave behind.

"I understand!" she said. "You think you are my enemy. Love and hate never lived side by side. You

Her hands slipped into his, soft and warm; her eyes fastened on his and held them. And as they did so King sank, like a sack half-empty and toppled over sidewise on the floor asleep.

He neither dreamed nor was conscious of anything, but slept like a dead man, having fought against her mesmerism harder than he knew. Statesmen, generals, outlaws, all

make their big mistakes and manage to recover. Very nearly always it is

mesmerized at last and utterly in her ing down the trail. power. Whereas in truth he was only Muhammad Anim came-like the long that he was not conscious of men's voices, nor of being carried, nor of time, nor of anxiety, nor of anything.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When King awoke he lay on a comlong he had slept. It did not matter. He had probed Khinjan cayes, and knew the whole purpose for which the lawless thousands had been gathering the road is clear!" and were gathering still. Remained, to thwart that purpose. He began at the beginning, where he stood.

Behind him in a corner at the back of the cave was a narrow fissure, hung with a leather curtain, that was doubtless the door into Khinjan's heart; but the only way to the outer air was along a ledge above a dizzying precipice, so high that the huge waterfall looked like a little stream below. He was in a very eagle's aerie; the upper rim of Khinjan's gorge seemed not more than a quarter of a mile above him.

Round the corner, ten feet from the entrance, stood a guard, armed to the thou here?" teeth, with a rifle, a sword, two pistols and a long curved Khyber knife stuck handy in his girdle. As he looked, a little procession of women, led by a man, came up the ledge. The man was armed, but the women were burdened with his own belongings-the medicine chest-his saddle and bridle-his unrifled mule-pack. They came past the dumb man on guard and laid them all at King's feet just inside the cave.

He smiled, with that genial, facetransforming smile of his that has so often melted a road for him through sullen crowds. But the man in charge of the women did not grin. He was suffering. He growled at the women. and they went away like obedient antmals, to sit half-way down the ledge the shadows. and await further orders. He himself made as if to follow them, and the dumb man on guard did not pay much attention: he let women and man pass beling him, stepping one pace forward toward the eage to make more room.

act in this world. With a suddenness that disarmed all

brute after his victim. The temptahours after the sun has risen, because tion always is to do the wrong thingthe precipices shut it out. But the to cap wrath with wrath, injustice with peaks on every side are very beacons vengeance. That way wars begin and dawn. In silence they watched day's into the cave, and bent over the chest eled fingers-she waiting as if she ex- light better for his purpose at the enmade him sit down on the box.

The business of lancing boils is not especially edifying in itself; but that watched the sparkle of dawn's jewels particular minor operation probably die and the peaks grow gray again, she saved India. But for hope of it the in each hand, was pretending to come with an arm on his shoulder and man with the boils would never have strands of her golden hair blown past stood two turns on guard hand running and let the relief sleep on; so he



Thou Liest! It was My Men Who Got the Head That Let Thee In! Else Why Are Thou Here?"

an apparently little mistake that does would not have been on duty when the most damage in the end, something message came to carry King's belongunnoticeable at the time, that grows ings to his new cave of residence. in geometrical proportion, minus in There would have been no object in killing the dumb man, and so there Yasmini made her little mistake that would have been an expert with a loadminute in believing King was utterly ed rifle to keep Muhammad Anim lurk-

weary. It may be that she gave him devil, to scotch King's faith. He had orders in his sleep, after the accepted followed the women with the loads. manner of mesmerists; but if she did. He stood now, like a big bear on a they never reached him; he was far mountain track, swaying his head from button. There was a second shirt untoo fast asleep. He slept so deep and side to side six feet away. King derneath, and to that on the left breast jumped, nearly driving the lance into a new place in his patient's neck.

"Let him go!" growled Muhammad Anim. "Go, thou! Stand guard over

the women until I come!" The mullah turned a rifle this way and that in his paws, like a great bear fortable bed in a cave be had never dancing. The very Orakzai Pathan yet seen, but there was no trace of Yas- who had sat next King in the Cavern fair of the British. But I was seen, mini, nor of the men who must have of Earth's Drink, was creeping up be- and I entered this place. It is a devil carried him to it. He had no idea how hind the women and already had his

rifle leveled at the man with boils. "Aye!" said the mullah, watching King's eyes. "He has done well, and

The man with boils offered no fight. for and making much of the gold that He dropped his rifle and threw his lies ever amid the dross. There is hands up. In a moment the Orakzai gold in the character of any man who Pathan was in command of two rifles. holding King from among the women. whom he seemed to regard as his plunder too. The women appeared supremely indifferent in any event. King nodded back to him. A friend is a friend in the "Hills," and rare is the man who spares his enemy.

"None comes to earn a living in the 'Hills,' " growled the mullah, swaying his head slowly and devouring King with cruel calculating eyes. "Why art "I slew a man," said King.

"Thou liest! It was my men who got the head that let thee in! Speak! Why art thou here?" But King did not answer. The mul-

lah resumed. "He who brought me the message yesterday says he has it from another. who had it from a third, that thou art

here because she plans a simultaneous rising in India, and thou art from the Punjab where the Sikhs ail wait to rise. Is that true?" "Thy man said it," answered King. "Then hear me!' said the mullah.

"Listen, thou." But he did not begin to speak yet. He tried to see past King into the cave and to peer about into

"Where is she?" he asked. "Her man Rewa Gunga went yesterday, with three men and a letter to carry down the Khyber. But where is she?"

King did not answer. He blocked the ment. It may need experience to lay a great. That was his just entirely voluntary way into the cave and looked must the finger on it, but it is surely there. mullah. The Orakzai Pathan crouched among the women, and the women ward the Khyber in great haste (for opposition the other humped himself grinned The multan stared into the police were at my heels)-" against the wan and bucked into the King's face, with the scruting of a dumb man's back, sending him, trader appraising loot. Fire leaped up pleasantly. The inference was that at dead with a knife wound in his back, weapons and all, hurtling over the behind his calculating eyes. And with some time or other he had left his and the mullah's men possessed themprecipice to the caverns into which the out a word passing between them. King mark on the police. water tumbled thousands of feet away. knew that this man as well as Yasther ruffian spat after him, and mini was in possession of the secret has offered pardons to all deserters then walked back to where King stood. of the Sleeper. Perhaps he knew it who return. "Now heal my my boils!" he said. first; perhaps she snatched the keepgrinning at last, doubtless from please ing of the secret from him. At an ure it the prospect. He was the same events he knew it and recognized man who had stood on guard at the King's likeness to the Sleeper. for his "guest-cave" when Ismail led King eyes betrayed him. He began to stroke the law. There is no law here in the tess mulleh. They bed bound and billside, until they stood at last in the

with the free hand he was making sig-

King knew well he was making sigof the range at the earliest peep of are never ended. King beckoned him nals. But he knew too that in Yas- thou with me!" mini's power, her prisoner, he had no herald touch the peaks with rosy jew- of medical supplies. Then, finding the chance at all of interfering with her plans. Having grounded on the botpected the marvel of it all to make trance, he called the man back and tom of impotence, so to speak, any tide that would take him off must be a good thigh. "I will attend to that for thee. Khinjan's outer ramparts. They tide. He pretended to be aware of I will obtain my pardon first. Then reached the outer gate without incinothing, and to be particularly un- will I lead thee by the hand to the dent and hurried into the great dry aware that the Pathan, with a rifle karnal sahib and lie to him and say, valley beyond it. As they rode across

> In a minute he was covered by a regiment!"" rifle. In another minute the mullah had lashed his hands. In five minutes more the women were loaded again with his belongings and they were all half-way down the track in single file, minute to the rescue.

They entered a tunnel and wound Come thou with me, little hakim!" along it, stepping at short intervals "Nay," said King. "I have another over the bodies of three stabbed sen- thought. You who were seen to slay tries. The Pathan spurned them with a man, and I who am a political offendhis heel as he passed. In the glare at er, do not win pardons so easily as the body of a fourth man and fell with came bearing gifts." his chin beyond the edge of a sheer precipice.

erfall again, having come through a am the dreamer, am I?" projection on the cliff's side, for Khinjan is all rat-runs and projections, like

They soon reached another cave, at pile all their loads inside. Then he the 'Hills.'" took the women away and went off King nodded. He himself had seen way'few natives do.

"Let us hope he has forgotten proudly. these!" the Pathan grinned, touching mad, I think. It is my opinion Allah touched him."

"What is that, under thy shirt?" King asked.

The Pathar grinned, and undid the were pinned two British medals.

"Oh, yes!" he laughed. "I served the raj! I was in the army eleven years." "Why did you leave it?" King asked, tion," King advised him, when he was terms!" remembering that this man loved to able to speak again. hear his own voice.

"Oh, I had furlough, I knifed a man this side of the border. It was no af- if she heard of it-" of a place."

Now the art of ruling India consists not in treading barefooted on scorpions -not in virtuous indignation at men who know no better-but in seeking



"What Is Under Thy Shirt?" Asked.

"I heard," said King, "as I came to-

"Ah, the police!" the Pathan grinned

"I heard," said King, "that the sirkar tridges, wiping off blood that had

"Hah! But thou art a hakim, not a soldier!"

The temptation was to fling the The rifle, that he pretended to be hold- seek that pardon! It would feel good mad Anim they loosed him; and at a close to a tamarisk to which a man's ing, really leaned against his back and to stand in the ranks again, with a threat the hairless one gave a signal body hung spiked. That the man had stiff-backed sahib out in front of me, that brought the great stone door slidand the thunder of the gun-wheels going by. The salt was good! Come

> objected, "not for political offenders." of the mosque floor, they sought outer down his flat hand hard on the hakim's the Street of the Dwellings toward Watchers sitting by the thousand tents 'This is the one who persuaded me the valley the mullah thumbed a long

"Thou art a dreamer!" said King. "Untie my hands; the thong cuts me."

The Pathon obeyed. "Dreamer, am 1? It is good to dream such dreams. By Allah, I've a mind can!" King rode all but last now and the mullah bringing up the rear, de- to see that dream come true! I never scending backward with rifle ready slew a man on Indian soil, only in against surprise, as if he expected Yas- these 'Hills.' I will go to them and a hint of honor or tenderness among mini and her men to pounce out any say, 'Here I am! I am a deserter, I the lot, man, woman or mullah. Yet seek that pardon!' Truly I will go! his heart sang within him as if he

the tunnel's mouth King tripped over that. They would hang us unless we

"Gifts? Has Allah touched thee? What gifts should we bring? A dozen They were on a ledge above the wa- stolen rifles? A bag of silver? And I

"Nay," said King. "I am the dreamer. There are others in these 'Hills'a sponge or a hornet's nest on a titanic others in Khinjan who wear British medals?"

The Pathan nodded. "Hundreds. which the mullah stopped. It was a Men fight first on one side, then on the dark ill-smelling hole, but he ordered other, being true to either side while King into it and the Pathan after him the contract lasts. In all there must be on guard, after first seeing the women the makings of many regiments among

muttering to himself, swaggering, the chieftains come to parley after the swinging his right arm as he strode, in Tirah war. Most of them had worn British medals and had worn them

"If we two," he said, speaking slowthe pile of rifles. "Weight for weight ly, "could speak with some of those in silver they will bring me a fine men and stir the spirit in them and in a cave. And it was gone. It was price! He may forget, He dreams. persuade them to feel as thou dost, all gone. And there was no proof of For a mullah he cares less for ment mentioning the pardon for deserters who had taken it! and money than any I ever saw. He is and the probability of bonuses to the time-expired for re-enlistment; if we Bull-with-a-beard is one of them-tha could march down the Khyber with a she is afraid and hides. hundred such, or even with fifty or with twenty-five or with a dozen menwe would receive our pardon for the sake of service rendered."

"Good!" The Pathan thumped him on the back so hard that his eyes watered.

"Aye! If Bull-with-a-beard got wind of it he would have us crucified. And

He was silent. Apparently there were no words in his tongue that could compass his dread of her revenge. He was silent for ten minutes, and King sat still beside him, letting memory of other days do its work-memory of the long, clean regimental lines, and of order and decency and of justice handed out to all and sundry by gentlemen who did not think themselves too good to wear a native regiment's uniform.

"In two days I could do the drill again as well as ever," he said at last. Then there was silence again for fifteen minutes more. "I could always shoot," he murmured; "I could always shoot."

When Muhammad Anim came back they had both forgotten to replace the one of another kind. ashing on King's wrists, but the mullah seemed not to notice it.

"Come!" he ordered, with a sidewise jerk of his great ugly head, and then stood muttering impatiently while they obeyed.

They marched downward through interminable tunnels and along ledges poised between earth and heaven, until they came at last to the tunnel leading to the one entrance into Khinjan caves. Just before they entered it two more of the mullah's men came up with them, leading horses. One horse was for the mullah, and they helped King mount the other, showing him more respect than is usually shown a prisoner in the "Hills."

Then the mullah led the way into the tunnel, and he seemed in deadly fear. The echo of the hoof-beats irritated him. He eyed each hole in the roof as If Yasmini might be expected to shoot down at him or drench him with bolling oil and hurried past each of them once passed the grilling tests before at a trot, only to draw rein immediate-So he had slept the clock round! enlistment in a British-Indian regi- ly afterward because the noise was too

It became evident that his men had been at work here too, for at intervals nlong the passage lay dead bodies. Yasmini must have posted the men there, but where was she? Each of them lay selves of rifles and knives and car-

scarcely coo'ed yet. When they came to the end of the tunnel it was to find the door into the mosque open in front of them, and

ing forward on its ofled bronze grooves. by the body's attitude.

Then, with a dozen jests thrown to the hairless one for consolation, and "The pardon is for deserters," King an utter indifference to the sacredness "Haugh!" said the Pathan, bringing air, and Muhammad Anim led them up against my will to come back to the string of beads. Unlike Yasmini, he was praying to one god; but he seemed to have many prayers. His back was a picture of determined treachery-the backs of his men were expressions of the creed that "he shall keep who had a good view of their unconsciously vaunted blackguardism. There was not were riding to his own marriage feast!

Last of all, close behind him, marched his friend, the Orakzai Pathan, and as they picked their way among the bowlders across the milewide moat the two contrived to fall a little to the rear. The Pathan began speaking in a whisper and King, riding with lowered head as if he were studying the dangerous track, listened.

"She sent her man Rewa Gunga toward the Khyber with a message," he whispered. "He took a few men with him, and he is to send them with the message when they reach the Khyber, out he is to come back. All he went for is to make sure the message is not intercepted, for Bull-with-a-beard is growing reckless these days. He knew what was doing and said at once that she is treating with the British, but there were few who believed that. There are more who wonder where she hides while the message is on its way. None has seen her. Men have swarmed into the Cavern of Earth's Drink and howled for her, but she did not come. Then the mullah went to look for his ammunition that he stored and sealed

"Hakim, there be some who say-and

"His men say he is desperate. His own are losing faith in him. He snatched thee to be a bait for her, having it in mind that a man whom she hides in her private part of Khinjan must be of great value to her. He has sworn to have thee skinned alive on a "We would have to use much cau- hot rock should she full to come to

CHAPTER XIX.

The march went on in single file until the sun died down in splendid fury. Then there began to be a wind that they had to lean against, but the wom en were allowed no rest.

At last at a place where the trail began to widen, the mullah beckoned King to ride beside him. It was not His own rifle lay on the ground behind that he wished to be communicative, him, and King kicked its stock clear but there were things King knew that of the fire. he did not know, and he had his own way of asking questions.

man! Poulticer! That is a sweeper's a burning of the bowels ye shall have! trade of thine! Thou shalt apply it at | What a sickness! What running of the my camp! I have some wounded and eyes! What sores! What boils! What some sick."

his coat closer against the keen wind. | pray to Allah!" The mullah mistook the shudder for

face?" he asked. "Did she not con- curse. He kicked them as they knelt sider thy courage? Does she love thee and drove them away again. Then, well enough to ransom thee?"

the dark and missed nothing of its ex- shoot. pression. He decided the man was in After five minutes of angry contemdoubt-even racked by indecision.

thou shalt have a chance to show my men how a man out of India can die! great pile in a corner. There was an By and by I will lend thee a messenger iron pot in the embers. He seized a to send to her. Better make the mes- stick and stirred the contents furioussage clear and urgent! Thou shalt ly, then set the pot between his knees state my terms to her and plead thine and ate like an animal. He passed the own cause in the same letter. My pot to King when he had finished, but camp lies yonder."

arm toward a valley that lay in shadow very thought of eating the mess made far below them. As they approached his gorge rise; so King thanked him it the rock clove in two and became and set the pot aside. two great pillars, with a man on each. roar, like the voice of an army, rose to sleep-for more than an hour to out of the gorge.

"More than four thousand men!" said the mullah proudly. "What are four thousand for a raid

into India?" reered King, greatly his beard. daring. "Wait and see!" growled the mullah;

but he seemed depressed. He led the way downward, getting information. off his horse and giving the reins to a twenty more of Muhammad Anim's found their way along the dry bed of and the two of you are to plunder "In India I carned my salt. I coeyed men standing guard over the eyelash- a water-course between two spurs of a India? Is that it?"

out to see the Cavern of Earth's Drink. his beard monotonously with one hand. 'Hills.' I am minded to go back and gagged him. At a word from Muham- midst of a cluster of a dozen sentries, been spiked to it alive was suggested

> Without a word to the sentries the mullah led on down a lane through the midst of the camp, toward a great open cave at the far side, in which a bonfire cast fitful light and shadow. yawned at them, but took no particular notice.

The mouth of the cave was like a ion's, fringed with teeth. There were men in it, ten or eleven of them, all armed, squatting round the fire.

"Get out!" growled the mullah. But they did not obey. They sat and stared

"Have ye tents?" the mullah asked, n a voice like thunder. "Aye!" But they did not go yet.

One of the men, he nearest the mu!inh, got on his feet, but he had to step back a pace, for the mullah would not give ground and their breath was in each other's faces.

"Where are the bombs? And the rifles? And the many cartridges?" he demanded. "We have waited long, Muhammad Anim. Where are they now?"

The others got up, to lend the first man encouragement. They leaned on rifles and surrounded the mullah, so that King could only get a glimpse of him between them. They seemed in no mood to be treated cavallerly-in no mood to be argued with. And the mullah did not argue.

"Ye dogs!" he growled at them, and he strode through them to the fire and chose himself a good, thick burning brand. "Ye sons of nameless mothers!"

Then he charged them suddenly, beating them over head and face and shoulders, driving them in front of him, utterly reckless of their rifles.



"So Thou Art to Ape the Sleeper in His Bronze Mail, Eh!"

"Oh, I chall pray for you this night!" Muhammad Anim snarled. "What a "D- hakim!" he growled, "Pill- curse I shall beg for you! Oh, what sleepless nights and faithless women King did not answer, but buttoned shall be yours! What a prayer I will

They scattered into outer gloom before his rage, and then came back to "Did she choose thee only for thy kneel to him and beg him withdraw his silhouetted in the cave mouth, with the Again King did not answer, but he glow of the fire before him, he stood vatched the mullah's face keenly in with folded arms and dared them

plation of the camp he turned on a "Should she not ransom thee, hakim, contemptuous heel and came back to the fire, throwing on more fuel from a fingers had passed too many times He motioned with one sweep of his through what was left in it and the

Then, "That is thy place!" Muham-And between the pillars they looked mad Anim growled, pointing over his down into a valley lit by fires that shoulder to a ledge of rock, like a shelf burned before a thousand hide tents, in the far wall. But though he was alwith shadows by the hundred flitting lowed to climb up and lie down, he was back and forth between them. A dull not allowed to sleep-nor did he want

The mullah came over from the fire again and stood beside him, glaring like a great animal and grumbling in

"Does she surely love thee?" he asked at last, and King nodded, because he knew he was on the trail of

"So thou art to ape the Sleeper in man. King copied him, and partway his bronze mail, eh? Thou art to come sliding, part stumbling down they to life, ng she was said to cores to life,

(TO BE COMPEREUEDA