

Tracy Louis

The Red Year: A Story of the Indian Mutiny



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Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER I | 5 |
| CHAPTER II | 12 |
| CHAPTER III | 19 |
| CHAPTER IV | 25 |
| CHAPTER V | 32 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 35 |

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CHAPTER I

THE MESHES OF THE NET

On a day in January, 1857, a sepoy was sitting by a well in the cantonment of Dum-Dum, near Calcutta. Though he wore the uniform of John Company, and his rank was the lowest in the native army, he carried on his forehead the caste-marks of the Brahmin. In a word, he was more than noble, being of sacred birth, and the Hindu officers of his regiment, if they were not heaven-born Brahmins, would grovel before him in secret, though he must obey their slightest order on parade or in the field.

To him approached a Lascar.

“Brother,” said the newcomer, “lend me your brass pot, so that I may drink, for I have walked far in the sun.”

The sepoy started as though a snake had stung him. Lascars, the sailor-men of India, were notoriously free-and-easy in their manners. Yet how came it that even a low-caste mongrel of a Lascar should offer such an overt insult to a Brahmin!

“Do you not know, swine-begotten, that your hog’s lips would contaminate my lotah?” asked he, putting the scorn of centuries into the words.

“Contaminate!” grinned the Lascar, neither frightened nor angered. “By holy Ganga, it is your lips that are contaminated, not mine. Are not the Government greasing your cartridges with cow’s fat? And can you load your rifle without biting the forbidden thing? Learn more about your own caste, brother, before you talk so proudly to others.”

Not a great matter, this squabble between a sepoy and a Lascar, yet it lit such a flame in India that rivers of blood must be shed ere it was quenched. The Brahmin’s mind reeled under the shock of the retort. It was true, then, what the agents of the dethroned King of Oudh were saying in the bazaar. The Government were bent on the destruction of Brahminical supremacy. He and his caste-fellows would lose all that made life worth living. But they would exact a bitter price for their fall from high estate.

“Kill!” he murmured in his frenzy, as he rushed away to tell his comrades the lie that made the Indian Mutiny possible. “Slay and spare not! Let us avenge our wrongs so fully that no accursed Feringhi shall dare again to come hither across the Black Water!”

The lie and the message flew through India with the inconceivable speed with which such ill tidings always travels in that country. Ever north went the news that the British Raj was doomed. Hindu fakirs, aglow with religious zeal, Mussalman zealots, as eager for dominance in this world as for a houri-tenanted Paradise in the next, carried the fiery torch of rebellion far and wide. And so the flame spread, and was fanned to red fury, though the eyes of few Englishmen could see it, while native intelligence was aghast at the supineness of their over-lords.

One evening in the month of April, a slim, straight-backed girl stood in the veranda of a bungalow at Meerut. Her slender figure, garbed in white muslin, was framed in a creeper-covered arch. The fierce ardor of an Indian spring had already kissed into life a profusion of red flowers amid the mass of greenery, and, if Winifred Mayne had sought an effective setting for her own fair picture, she could not have found one better fitted to its purpose.

But she was young enough and pretty enough to pay little heed to pose or background. In fact, so much of her smooth brow as could be seen under a broad-brimmed straw hat was wrinkled in a

decided frown. Happily, her bright brown eyes had a glint of humor in them, for Winifred's wrath was an evanescent thing, a pallid sprite, rarely seen, and ever ready to be banished by a smile.

"There!" she said, tugging at a refractory glove. "Did you hear it? It actually shrieked as it split. And this is the second pair. I shall never again believe a word Behari Lal says. Wait till I see him. I'll give him such a talking to."

"Then I have it in my heart to envy Behari Lal," said her companion, glancing up at her from the carriage-way that ran by the side of the few steps leading down from the veranda.

"Indeed! May I ask why?" she demanded.

"Because you yield him a privilege you deny to me."

"I was not aware you meant to call to-day. As it is, I am paying a strictly ceremonial visit. I wish I could speak Hindustani. Now, what would you say to Behari Lal in such a case?"

"I hardly know. When I buy gloves, I buy them of sufficient size. Of course, you have small hands –"

"Thank you. Please don't trouble to explain. And now, as you have been rude to me, I shall not take you to see Mrs. Meredith."

"But that is a kindness."

"Then you shall come, and be miserable."

"For your sake, Miss Mayne, I would face Medusa, let alone the excellent wife of our Commissary-General, but fate, in the shape of an uncommonly headstrong Arab, forbids. I have just secured a new charger, and he and I have to decide this evening whether I go where he wants to go, or he goes where I want to go. I wheedled him into your compound by sheer trickery. The really definite issue will be settled forthwith on the Grand Trunk Road."

"I hope you are not running any undue risk," said the girl, with a sudden note of anxiety in her voice that was sweetest music to Frank Malcolm's ears. For an instant he had a mad impulse to ask if she cared, but he crushed it ruthlessly, and his bantering reply gave no hint of the tumult in his breast. Yet he feared to meet her eyes, and was glad of a saluting sepoy who swaggered jauntily past the open gate.

"I don't expect to be deposited in the dust, if that is what you mean," he said. "But there is a fair chance that instead of carrying me back to Meerut my friend Nejdi will take me to Aligarh. You see, he is an Arab of mettle. If I am too rough with him, it will break his spirit; if too gentle, he will break my neck. He needs the *main de fer sous le gant de velours*. Please forgive me! I really didn't intend to mention gloves again."

"Oh, go away, you and your Arab. You are both horrid. You dine here to-morrow night, my uncle said?"

"Yes, if I don't send you a telegram from Aligarh. I may be brought there, you know, against my will."

Lifting his hat, he walked towards a huge pipal tree in the compound. Beneath its far-flung branches a syce was sitting in front of a finely-proportioned and unusually big Arab horse. Both animal and man seemed to be dozing, but they woke into activity when the sahib approached. The Arab pricked his ears, swished his long and arched tail viciously, and showed the whites of his eyes. A Bedouin of the desert, a true scion of the incomparable breed of Nejd, he was suspicious of civilization, and his new owner was a stranger, as yet.

"Ready for the fray, I see," murmured Malcolm with a smile. He wasted no time over preliminaries. Bidding the syce place his thumbs in the steel rings of the bridle, the young Englishman gathered the reins and a wisp of gray mane in his left hand. Seizing a favorable moment, when the struggling animal flinched from the touch of a low-lying branch on the off side, he vaulted into the saddle. Chunga, the syce, held on until his master's feet had found the stirrups. Then he was told to let go, and Miss Winifred Mayne, niece of a Commissioner of Oudh, quite the most eligible young lady

the Meerut district could produce that year, witnessed a display of cool, resourceful horsemanship as the enraged Arab plunged and curvetted through the main gate.

It left her rather flushed and breathless.

“I like Mr. Malcolm,” she confided to herself with a little laugh, “but his manner with women is distinctly brusque! I wonder why!”

The Grand Trunk Road ran to left and right. To the left it led to the bazaar, the cantonment, and the civil lines; to the right, after passing a few houses tenanted by Europeans, it entered the open country on a long stretch of over a thousand miles to Calcutta and the south. In 1857 no thoroughfare in the world equaled the Grand Trunk Road. Beginning at Peshawur, in the extreme north of India, it traversed the Punjab for six hundred miles as far as Aligarh. Here it broke into the Calcutta and Bombay branches, each nearly a thousand miles in length. Wide and straight, well made and tree-lined throughout, it supplied the two great arteries of Indian life. Malcolm had selected it as a training-ground that evening, because he meant to weary and subdue his too highly spirited charger. Whether the pace was fast or slow, Nejdi would be compelled to meet many varieties of traffic, from artillery elephants and snarling camels down to the humble bullock-cart of the ryot. Possibly, he would not shy at such monstrosities after twenty miles of a lathering ride.

The mad pace set by the Arab when he heard the clatter of his feet on the hard road chimed in with the turbulent mood of his rider. Frank Malcolm was a soldier by choice and instinct. When he joined the Indian army, and became a subaltern in a native cavalry regiment, he determined to devote himself to his profession. He gave his whole thought to it and to nothing else. His interests lay in his work. He regarded every undertaking from the point of view of its influence on his military education, so it may be conceded instantly that the arrival in Meerut of an Oudh Commissioner’s pretty niece should not have affected the peace of mind of this budding Napoleon.

But a nice young woman can find joints in the armor of the sternest-souled young man. Her attack is all the more deadly if it be unpremeditated, and Frank Malcolm had already reached the self-depreciatory stage wherein a comparatively impecunious subaltern asks himself the sad question whether it be possible for such a one to woo and wed a maid of high degree, or her Anglo-Indian equivalent, an heiress of much prospective wealth and present social importance.

But money and rank are artificial, the mere varnish of life, and the hot breath of reality can soon scorch them out of existence. Events were then shaping themselves in India that were destined to sweep aside convention for many a day. Had the young Englishman but known it, five miles from Meerut his Arab’s hoofs threw pebbles over a swarthy moullah, lank and travel-stained, who was hastening towards the Punjab on a dreadful errand. The man turned and cursed him as he passed, and vowed with bitter venom that when the time of reckoning came there would not be a Feringhi left in all the land. Malcolm, however, would have laughed had he heard. Affairs of state did not concern him. His only trouble was that Winifred Mayne stood on a pinnacle far removed from the beaten path of a cavalry subaltern. So, being in a rare fret and fume, he let the gray Arab gallop himself white, and, when the high-mettled Nejdi thought of easing the pace somewhat, he was urged onward with the slight but utterly unprecedented prick of a spur.

That was a degradation not to be borne. The Calcutta Brahmin did not resent the Lascar’s taunt more keenly. With a swerve that almost unseated Malcolm, the Arab dashed in front of a bullock-cart, swept between the trees on the west side of the road, leaped a broad ditch, and crashed into a field of millet. Another ditch, another field, breast high with tall castor-oil plants, a frantic race through a grove of mangoes – when Malcolm had to lie flat on Nejdi’s neck to avoid being swept off by the low branches – and horse and man dived headlong into deep water.

The splash, far more than the ducking, frightened the horse. Malcolm, in that instant of prior warning which the possessor of steady nerves learns to use so well, disengaged his feet from the stirrups. He was thrown clear, and, when he came to the surface, he saw that the Arab and himself were floundering in a moat. Not the pleasantest of bathing-places anywhere, in India such a sheet

of almost stagnant water has excessive peculiarities. Among other items, it breeds fever and harbors snakes, so Malcolm floundered rather than swam to the bank, where he had the negative satisfaction of catching Nejdi's bridle when that disconcerted steed scrambled out after him.

The two were coated with green slime. Being obviously unhurt, they probably had a forlornly comic aspect. At any rate, a woman's musical laugh came from the lofty wall which bounded the moat on the further side, and a woman's clear voice said:

"A bold leap, sahib! Did you mean to scale the fort on horseback? And why not have chosen a spot where the water was cleaner?"

Before he could see the speaker, so smothered was he in dripping moss and weeds, Malcolm knew that some lady of rank had watched his adventure. She used the pure Persian of the court, and her diction was refined. Luckily, he had studied Persian as well as its Indian off-shoot, Hindustani, and he understood the words. He pressed back his dank hair, squeezed the water and slime off his face, and looked up.

To his exceeding wonder, his eyes met those of a young Mohammedan woman, a woman richly garbed, and of remarkable appearance. She was unveiled, an amazing fact in itself, and her creamy skin, arched eyebrows, regular features, and raven-black hair proclaimed her aristocratic lineage. She was leaning forward in an embrasure of the battlemented wall. Behind her, two attendants, oval-faced, brown-skinned women of the people, peered shyly at the Englishman. When he glanced their way, they hurriedly adjusted their silk saris, or shawls, so as to hide their faces. Their mistress used no such bashful subterfuge. She leaned somewhat farther through the narrow embrasure, revealing by the action her bejeweled and exquisitely molded arms.

"Perhaps you do not speak my language," she said in Urdu, the tongue most frequently heard in Upper India. "If you will go round to the gate – that way –" and she waved a graceful hand to the left left – "my servants will render you some assistance."

By that time, Malcolm had regained his wits. A verse of a poem by Hafiz occurred to him.

"Princess," he said, "the radiance of your presence is as the full moon suddenly illumining the path of a weary traveler, who finds himself on the edge of a morass."

A flash of surprise and pleasure lit the fine eyes of the haughty beauty perched up there on the palace wall.

"'Tis well said," she vowed, smiling with all the rare effect of full red lips and white even teeth. "Nevertheless, this is no time for compliments. You need our help, and it shall be given willingly. Make for the gate, I pray you."

She turned, and gave an order to one of the attendants. With another encouraging smile to Malcolm, she disappeared.

Leading the Arab, who, with the fatalism of his race, was quiet as a sheep now that he had found a master, the young officer took the direction pointed out by the lady. Rounding an angle of the wall, he came to a causeway spanned by a small bridge, which was guarded by the machicolated towers of a strong gate. A ponderous door, studded with great bosses of iron fashioned to represent elephants' heads, swung open – half reluctantly it seemed – and he was admitted to a spacious inner courtyard.

The number of armed retainers gathered there was unexpectedly large. He was well acquainted with the Meerut district, yet he had no notion that such a fortress existed within an hour's fast ride of the station. The King of Delhi had a hunting-lodge somewhere in the locality, but he had never seen the place. If this were it, why should it be crammed with soldiers? Above all, why should they eye him with such ill-concealed displeasure? Duty had brought him once to Delhi – it was barely forty miles from Meerut – and the relations between the feeble old King, Bahadur Shah, and the British authorities were then most friendly, while the hangers-on at the Court mixed freely with the Europeans. His quick intelligence caught at the belief that these men resented his presence because he was brought among them by the command of the lady. He knew now that he must have seen and spoken to one of the royal princesses. None other would dare to show herself unveiled to a stranger,

and a white man at that. The manifest annoyance of her household was thus easily accounted for, but he marveled at the strength of her bodyguard.

He was given little time for observation. A distinguished-looking man, evidently vested with authority, bustled forward and addressed him, civilly enough. Servants came with water and towels, and cleaned his garments sufficiently to make him presentable, while other men groomed his horse. He was wet through, of course, but that was not a serious matter with the thermometer at seventy degrees in the shade, and, despite the ordinance of the Prophet, a glass of excellent red wine was handed to him.

But he saw no more of the Princess. He thought she would hardly dare to receive him openly, and her deputy gave no sign of admitting him to the interior of the palace, which loomed around the square of the courtyard like some great prison.

A chaprassi recovered his hat, which he had left floating in the moat. Nejdi allowed him to mount quietly; the stout door had closed on him, and he was picking his way across the fields towards the Meerut road, before he quite realized how curious were the circumstances which had befallen him since he parted from Winifred Mayne in the porch of her uncle's bungalow.

Then he bent forward in the saddle to stroke Nejdi's curved neck, and laughed cheerfully.

"You are wiser than I, good horse," said he. "When the game is up, you take things placidly. Here am I, your supposed superior in intellect, in danger of being bewitched by a woman's eyes. Whether brown or black, they play the deuce with a man if they shine in a woman's head. So ho, then, boy, let us home and eat, and forget these fairies in muslin and clinging silk."

Yet a month passed, and Frank Malcolm did not succeed in forgetting. Like any moth hovering round a lamp, the more he was singed the closer he fluttered, though the memory of the Indian princess's brilliant black eyes was soon lost in the sparkle of Winifred's brown ones.

As it happened, the young soldier was a prime favorite with the Commissioner, and it is possible that the course of true love might have run most smoothly if the red torch of war had not flashed over the land like the glare of some mighty volcano.

On Sunday evening, May 10th, Malcolm rode away from his own small bungalow, and took the Aligarh road. As in all up-country stations, the European residences in Meerut were scattered over an immense area. The cantonment was split into two sections by an irregular ravine, or nullah, running east and west. North of this ditch were many officers' bungalows, and the barracks of the European troops, tenanted by a regiment of dragoons, the 60th Rifles, and a strong force of artillery, both horse and foot. Between the infantry and cavalry barracks stood the soldiers' church. Fully two miles away, on the south side of the ravine, were the sepoy lines, and another group of isolated bungalows. The native town was in this quarter, while the space intervening between the British and Indian troops was partly covered with rambling bazaars.

Malcolm had been detained nearly half an hour by some difficulty which a subadar had experienced in arranging the details of the night's guard. Several men were absent without leave, and he attributed this unusual occurrence to the severe measures the colonel had taken when certain troopers refused to use the cartridges supplied for the new Enfield rifle. But, like every other officer in Meerut, he was confident that the nearness of the strongest European force in the North-West Provinces would certainly keep the malcontents quiet. Above all else, he was ready to stake his life on the loyalty of the great majority of the men of his own regiment, the 3d Native Cavalry.

In pushing Nejdi along at a fast canter, therefore, he had no weightier matter on his mind than the fear that he might have kept Winifred waiting. When he dashed into the compound, and saw that there was no dog-cart standing in the porch, he imagined that the girl had gone without him, or, horrible suspicion, with some other cavalier.

It was not so. Winifred herself appeared on the veranda as he dismounted.

"You are a laggard," she said severely.

“I could not help it. I was busy in the orderly-room. But why lose more time? If that fat pony of yours is rattled along we shall not be very much behindhand.”

“You must not speak disrespectfully of my pony. If he is fat, it is due to content, not laziness. And you are evidently not aware that Evensong is half an hour later to-day, owing to the heat. Of course, I expected you earlier, and, if necessary, I would have gone alone, but – ”

She hesitated, and looked over her shoulder into the immense drawing-room that occupied the center of the bungalow from front to rear.

“I don’t mind admitting,” she went on, laughing nervously, “that I am a wee bit afraid these days – there is so much talk of a native rising. Uncle gets so cross with me when I say anything of that kind that I keep my opinions to myself.”

“The country is unsettled,” said Frank, “and it would be folly to deny the fact. But, at any rate, you are safe enough in Meerut.”

“Are you sure? Only yesterday morning eighty-five men of your own regiment were sent to prison, were they not?”

“Yes, but they alone were disaffected. Every soldier knows he must obey, and these fellows refused point-blank to use their cartridges, though the Colonel said they might tear them instead of biting them. He could go no further – I wonder he met their stupid whims even thus far.”

“Well, perhaps you are right. Come in, for a minute or two. My uncle is in a rare temper. You must help to talk him out of it. By the way, where are all the servants? The dog-cart ought to be here. *Koi hai!*”¹

No one came in response to her call. Thinking that a syce or chaprassi would appear in a moment, Frank hung Nejdi’s bridle on a lamp-hook in the porch, and entered the bungalow.

He soon discovered that Mr. Mayne’s wrath was due to a statement in a Calcutta newspaper that a certain Colonel Wheler had been preaching to his sepoys.

“What between a psalm-singing Viceroy and commanding officers who hold conventicles, we are in for a nice hot weather,” growled the Commissioner, shoving a box of cheroots towards Malcolm when the latter found him stretched in a long cane chair on the back veranda. “Here is Lady Canning trying to convert native women, and a number of missionaries publishing manifestoes about the influence of railways and steamships in bringing about the spiritual union of the world! I tell you, Malcolm, India won’t stand it. We can do as we like with Hindu and Mussalman so long as we leave their respective religions untouched. The moment those are threatened we enter the danger zone. Confound it, why can’t we let the people worship God in their own way? If anything, they are far more religiously inclined than we ourselves. Where is the Englishman who will flop down in the middle of the road to say his prayers at sunset, or measure his length along two thousand miles of a river bank merely as a penance? Give me authority to pack a shipload of busy-bodies home to England, and I’ll soon have the country quiet enough – ”

An ominous sound interrupted the Commissioner’s outburst. Both men heard the crackle of distant musketry. At first, neither was willing to admit its significance.

“Where is Winifred?” demanded Mr. Mayne, suddenly.

“She is looking for a servant, I fancy. There was none in the front of the house, and I wanted a man to hold my horse.”

A far-off volley rumbled over the plain, and a few birds stirred uneasily among the trees.

“No servants to be seen – at this hour!”

They looked at each other in silence.

“We must find Winifred,” said the older man, rising from his chair.

“And I must hurry back to my regiment,” said Frank.

“You think, then, that there is trouble with the native troops?”

¹ The Anglo-Indian phrase for summoning a servant, meaning: “Is there any one there?”

“With the sepoy, yes. I have been told that the 11th and 20th are not wholly to be trusted. And those volleys are fired by infantry.”

A rapid step and the rustle of a dress warned them that the girl was approaching. She came, like a startled fawn.

“The servants’ quarters are deserted,” she cried. “Great columns of smoke are rising over the trees, and you hear the shooting! Oh, what does it mean?”

“It means, my dear, that the Dragoons and the 60th will have to teach these impudent rebels a much-needed lesson,” said her uncle. “There is no cause for alarm. Must you really go, Malcolm?”

“Go!” broke in Winifred with the shrill accents of terror. “Where are you going?”

“To my regiment, of course,” said Frank, smiling at her fears. “Probably we shall be able to put down this outbreak before the white troops arrive. Good-by. I shall either return, or send a trustworthy messenger, within an hour.”

And so, confident and eager, he was gone, and the first moments of the hour sped when, perhaps, a strong man in control at Meerut might have saved India.

CHAPTER II

A NIGHT IN MAY

Winifred, quite unconsciously, had stated the actual incident that led to the outbreak of the Mutiny. The hot weather was so trying for the white troops in Meerut, many of whom, under ordinary conditions, would then have been in the hills, that the General had ordered a Church Parade in the evening, and at an unusual hour.

All day long the troopers of the 3d Cavalry nursed their wrath at the fate of their comrades who had refused to handle the suspected cartridges. They had seen men whom they regarded as martyrs stripped of their uniforms and riveted in chains in front of the whole garrison on the morning of the 9th. Though fear of the British force in the cantonment kept them quiet, Hindu vied with Mussalman in muttered execrations of the dominant race. The fact that the day following the punishment parade was a Sunday brought about a certain relaxation from discipline. The men loafed in the bazaars, were taunted by courtesans with lack of courage, and either drowned their troubles in strong drink or drew together in knots to talk treason.

Suddenly a sepoy raced up to the cavalry lines with thrilling news.

"The Rifles and Artillery are coming to disarm all the native regiments!" he shouted.

He had watched the 60th falling in for the Church Parade, and, in view of the action taken at Barrackpore and Lucknow – sepoy battalions having been disbanded in both stations for mutinous conduct – he instantly jumped to the conclusion that the military authorities at Meerut meant to steal a march on the disaffected troops. His warning cry was as a torch laid to a gunpowder train.

The 3d Cavalry, Malcolm's own corps, swarmed out of bazaar and quarters like angry wasps. Nearly half the regiment ran to secure their picketed horses, armed themselves in hot haste, and galloped to the gaol. Smashing open the door, they freed the imprisoned troopers, struck off their fetters, and took no measures to prevent the escape of the general horde of convicts. Yet, even in that moment of frenzy, some of the men remained true to their colors. Captain Craigie and Lieutenant Melville Clarke, hearing the uproar, mounted their chargers, rode to the lines, and actually brought their troop to the parade ground in perfect discipline. Meanwhile, the alarm had spread to the sepoys. No one knew exactly what caused all the commotion. Wild rumors spread, but no man could speak definitely. The British officers of the 11th and 20th regiments were getting their men into something like order when a sowar² clattered up, and yelled to the infantry that the European troops were marching to disarm them.

At once, the 20th broke in confusion, seized their muskets, and procured ammunition. The 11th wavered, and were listening to the appeal of their beloved commanding officer, Colonel Finnis, when some of the 20th came back and fired at him. He fell, pierced with many bullets, the first victim of India's Red Year. His men hesitated no longer. Afire with religious fanaticism, they, too, armed themselves, and dispersed in search of loot and human prey. They acted on no preconceived plan. The trained troops simply formed the nucleus of an armed mob, its numbers ever swelling as the convicts from the gaol, the bad characters from the city, and even the native police, joined in the work of murder and destruction. They had no leader. Each man emulated his neighbor in ferocity. Like a pack of wolves on the trail, they followed the scent of blood.

The rapid spread of the revolt was not a whit less marvelous than its lack of method or cohesion. Many writers have put forward the theory that, by accident, the mutiny broke out half an hour too soon, and that the rebels meant to surprise the unarmed white garrison while in church.

² It should be explained that a sepoy (properly "sipahi") is an infantry soldier, and a sowar a mounted one. The English equivalents are "private" and "trooper."

In reality, nothing was further from their thoughts. If, in a nebulous way, a date was fixed for a combined rising of the native army, it was Sunday, May 31, three weeks later than the day of the outbreak. The soldiers, helped by the scum of the bazaar, after indulging in an orgy of bloodshed and plunder, dispersed and ran for their lives, fearing that the avenging British were hot on their heels. And that was all. There was no plan, no settled purpose. Hate and greed nerved men's hands, but head there was none.

Malcolm's ride towards the center of the station gave proof in plenty that the mutineers were a disorganized rabble, inspired only by unreasoning rancor against all Europeans, and, like every mob, eager for pillage. At first, he met but few native soldiers. The rioters were budmashes, the predatory class which any city in the world can produce in the twinkling of an eye when the strong arm of the law is paralyzed. Armed with swords and clubs, gangs of men rushed from house to house, murdering the helpless inmates, mostly women and children, seizing such valuables as they could find, and setting the buildings on fire. These ghouls practised the most unheard-of atrocities. They spared no one. Finding a woman lying ill in bed, they poured oil over the bed clothes, and thus started, with a human holocaust, the fire that destroyed the bungalow.

They were rank cowards, too. Another Englishwoman, also an invalid, was fortunate in possessing a devoted ayah. This faithful creature saved her mistress by her quick-witted shriek that the mem-sahib must be avoided at all costs, as she was suffering from smallpox! The destroyers fled in terror, not waiting even to fire the house.

It was not until later days that Malcolm knew the real nature of the scene through which he rode. He saw the flames, he heard the Mohammedan yell of "Ali! Ali!" and the Hindu shriek of "Jai! Jai!" but the quick fall of night, its growing dusk deepened by the spreading clouds of smoke, and his own desperate haste to reach the cavalry lines, prevented him from appreciating the full extent of the horrors surrounding his path.

Arrived at the parade ground, he met Craigie and Melville Clarke, with the one troop that remained of the regiment of which he was so proud. There were no other officers to be seen, so these three held a consultation. They were sure that the white troops would soon put an end to the prevalent disorder, and they decided to do what they could, within a limited area, to save life and property. Riding towards his own bungalow to obtain a sword and a couple of revolvers, Malcolm came upon a howling mob in the act of swarming into the compound of Craigie's house. Some score of troopers heard his fierce cry for help, and fell upon the would-be murderers, for Mrs. Craigie and her children were alone in the bungalow. The riff-raff were soon driven off, and Malcolm, not yet realizing the gravity of the *émeute*, told the men to safeguard the mem-sahib until they received further orders, while he went to rejoin his senior officer.

Incredible as it may seem, the tiny detachment obeyed him to the letter. They held the compound against repeated assaults, and lost several men in hand-to-hand fighting.

The history of that terrible hour is brightened by many such instances of native fealty. The Treasury Guard, composed of men of the 8th Irregular Cavalry, not only refused to join the rebels but defended their charge boldly. A week later, of their own free will, they escorted the treasure and records from Meerut to Agra, the transfer being made for greater safety, and beat off several attacks by insurgents on the way. They were well rewarded for their fidelity, yet, such was the power of fanaticism, within less than two months they deserted to a man!

The acting Commissioner of Meerut, Mr. Greathed, whose residence was in the center of the sacked area, took his wife to the flat roof of his house when he found that escape was impossible. A gang of ruffians ransacked every room, and, piling the furniture, set it alight, but a trustworthy servant, named Golab Khan, told them that he would reveal the hiding-place of the sahib and mem-sahib if they followed quickly. He thus decoyed them away, and the fortunate couple were enabled to reach the British lines under cover of the darkness.

And, while the sky flamed red over a thousand fires, and the blood of unhappy Europeans, either civilian families or the wives and children of military officers, was being spilt like water, where were the two regiments of white troops who, by prompt action, could have saved Meerut and prevented the siege of Delhi?

That obvious question must receive a strange answer. They were bivouacked on their parade-ground, doing nothing. The General in command of the station was a feeble old man, suffering from senile decay. His Brigadier, Archdale Wilson, issued orders that were foolish. He sent the Dragoons to guard the empty gaol! After a long delay in issuing ammunition to the Rifles, he marched them and the gunners to the deserted parade-ground of the native infantry. They found a few belated sowars of the 3d Cavalry, who took refuge in a wood, and the artillery opened fire at the trees! News came that the rebels were plundering the British quarters, and the infantry went there in hot haste. And then they halted, though the mutineers were crying, "Quick, brother, quick! The white men are coming!" and the scared suggestion went round: "To Delhi! That is our only chance!"

The moon rose on a terrified mob trudging or riding the forty miles of road between Meerut and the Mogul capital. All night long they expected to hear the roar of the pursuing guns, to find the sabers of the Dragoons flashing over their heads. But they were quite safe. Archdale Wilson had ordered his men to bivouac, and they obeyed, though it is within the bounds of probability that had the rank and file known what the morrow's sun would reveal, there might have been another Mutiny in Meerut that night, a Mutiny of Revenge and Reprisal.

It was not that wise and courageous counsel was lacking. Captain Rosser offered to cut off the flight of the rebels to Delhi if one squadron of his dragoons and a few guns were given to him. Lieutenant Möller, of the 11th Native Infantry, appealed to General Hewitt for permission to ride alone to Delhi, and warn the authorities there of the outbreak. Sanction was refused in both cases. The bivouac was evidently deemed a masterpiece of strategy.

That Möller would have saved Delhi cannot be doubted. Next day, finding that the wife of a brother officer had been killed, he sought and obtained evidence of the identity of the poor lady's murderer, traced the man, followed him, arrested him single-handed, and brought him before a drumhead court martial, by whose order he was hanged forthwith.

Craigie, Rosser, Möller, and a few other brave spirits showed what could have been done. But negligence and apathy were stronger that night than courage or self-reliance. For good or ill, the torrent of rebellion was suffered to break loose, and it soon engulfed a continent.

Malcolm failed to find Craigie, who had taken his troop in the direction of some heavy firing. Passing a bungalow that was blazing furiously, he saw in the compound the corpses of two women. A little farther on, he discovered the bodies of a man and four children in the center of the road, and he recognized, in the man, a well-known Scotch trader whose shop was the largest and best in Meerut.

Then, for the first time, he understood what this appalling thing meant. He thought of Winifred, and his blood went cold. She and her uncle were alone in that remote house, far away on the Aligarh Road, and completely cut off from the comparatively safe northerly side of the station.

Giving heed to nought save this new horror of his imagination, he wheeled Nejdi, and rode at top speed towards Mr. Mayne's bungalow. As he neared it, his worst fears were confirmed. One wing was on fire, but the flames had almost burnt themselves out. Charred beams and blackened walls showed stark and gaunt in the glow of a smoldering mass of wreckage. Twice he rode round the ruined house, calling he knew not what in his agony, and looking with the eyes of one on the verge of lunacy for some dread token of the fate that had overtaken the inmates.

He came across several bodies. They were all natives. One or two were servants, he fancied, but the rest were marauders from the city. Calming himself, with the coolness of utter despair, he dismounted, and examined the slain. Their injuries had been inflicted with some sharp, heavy instrument. None of them bore gunshot wounds. That was strange. If there was a fight, and Mayne, perhaps even Winifred, had taken part in the defense, they must have used the sporting rifles in the

house. And that suggested an examination of the dark interior. He dreaded the task, but it must not be shirked.

The porch was intact, and he hung Nejdi's bridle on the hook where he had placed it little more than an hour ago. The spacious drawing-room had been gutted. The doors (Indian bungalows have hardly any windows, each door being half glass) were open front and back. The room was empty, thank Heaven! He was about to enter and search the remaining apartments which had escaped the fire when a curiously cracked voice hailed him from the foot of the garden.

"Hallt! Who go dare?" it cried, in the queer jargon of the native regiments.

Malcolm saw a man hurrying toward him. He recognized him as a pensioner named Syed Mir Khan, an Afghan. The old man, a born fire-eater, insisted on speaking English to the *sahib-log*, unless, by rare chance, he encountered some person acquainted with Pushtu, his native language.

"I come quick, sahib," he shouted. "I know all things. I save sahib and miss-sahib. Yes, by dam, I slewed the cut-heads."

As he came nearer, he brandished a huge tulwar, and the split skulls and severed vertebræ of certain gentry lying in the garden became explicable. Delighted in having a sahib to listen, he went on:

"The mob appearing, I attacked them with great ferocity – yes, like terrible lion, by George. My fighting was immense. I had many actions with the pigs."

At last, he quieted down sufficiently to tell Malcolm what had happened. He, with others, thinking the miss-sahib had gone to church, was smoking the hookah of gossip in a neighboring compound. It was an instance of the amazing rapidity with which the rioters spread over the station that a number of them reached the Maynes' bungalow five minutes after the first alarm was given. It should be explained here that Mr. Mayne, being a Commissioner of Oudh, was only visiting Meerut in order to learn the details of a system of revenue collection which it was proposed to adopt on the sequestered estates of the Oudh taluqdars. He had rented one of the best houses in the place, the owner being in Simla, and Syed Mir Khan held a position akin to that of caretaker in a British household. The looters knew how valuable were the contents of such an important residence, and the earliest contingent thought they would have matters entirely their own way.

As soon as Malcolm left, however, Mr. Mayne loaded all his guns, while Winifred made more successful search for some of the servants. The Afghan was true to his salt, and their own retainers, who had come with them from Lucknow, remained steadfast at this crisis. Hence, the mob received a warm reception, but the fighting had taken place outside the bungalow, the defenders lining a wall at the edge of the compound. Indeed, a score of bodies lying there had not been seen by Malcolm during his first frenzied examination of the house.

Then an official of the Salt Department, driving past with his wife and child, shouted to Mr. Mayne that he must not lose an instant if he would save his niece and himself.

"The sepoys have risen," was the horrifying message he brought. "They have surprised and killed all the white troops. They are sacking the whole station. You see the fires there? That is their work. This road is clear, but the Delhi road is blocked."

Some distant yelling caused the man to flog his horse into a fast trot again; and he and his weeping companions vanished into the gloom.

Mayne could not choose but believe. Indeed, many days elapsed before a large part of India would credit the fact that the British regiments in Meerut had not been massacred. A carriage and pair were harnessed. Several servants were mounted on all the available horses and ponies, and Mr. Mayne and Winifred had gone down the Grand Trunk Road towards Bulandshahr and Aligarh.

"Going half an hour," said Syed Mir Khan, volubly. "I stand fast, slaying budmashes. They make rush in thousands, and I retreat with great glory. Then they put blazes in bungalow."

Now, Malcolm also might have accepted the sensational story of the Salt Department inspector, if, at that instant, the boom of a heavy gun had not come from the direction of the sepoy parade-ground. Another followed, and another, in the steady sequence of a trained battery. As he had just

ridden from that very spot, which was then almost deserted, he was sure that the British troops had come from their cantonment. The discovery that Winifred was yet living, and in comparative safety, cleared his brain as though he had partaken of some magic elixir. He knew that Meerut itself was now the safest refuge within a hundred miles. Probably the bulk of the mutineers would strive to reach Delhi, and, of course, the dragoons and artillery would cut them off during the night. But he had seen many squads of rebels, mounted and on foot, hastening along the Grand Trunk Road, and it was no secret that detachments of the 9th Native Infantry at Bulandshahr and Aligarh were seething with Brahminical hatred of the abhorred cartridges.

Each second he became more convinced that Winifred and her uncle were being carried into a peril far greater than that which they had escaped. Decision and action were the same thing where he was concerned. Bidding the Afghan endeavor to find Captain Craigie, who might be trusted to send a portion of his troop to scour the road for some miles, and assuring the man of a big reward for his services, Frank mounted and galloped south. He counted on overtaking the fugitives in an hour, and persuading them to return with him. He rode with drawn sword, lest he might be attacked on the way, but it was a remarkable tribute to Möller's wisdom in offering to ride to Delhi that no man molested him, and such sepoys as he passed skulked off into the fields where they saw the glint of his saber and recognized him as a British officer. They had no difficulty in that respect. A glorious full moon was flooding the peaceful plain with light. The trunks of the tall trees lining the road barred its white riband with black shadows, but Nejdi, good horse that he was, felt that this was no time for skittishness, and repressed the inclination to jump these impalpable obstacles.

And he made excellent progress. Eight miles from Meerut, in a tiny village of mud hovels which horse and rider had every reason to remember, they suddenly dashed into a large company of mounted men and a motley collection of vehicles. There were voices raised, too, in heated dispute, and a small crowd was gathered near a lumbering carriage, whose tawdry trappings and display of gold work betokened the state equipage of some native dignity.

Drawn up by its side was a European traveling barouche, empty, but Malcolm's keen eyes soon picked out the figures of Winifred and her uncle, standing in the midst of an excited crowd of natives. So great was the hubbub that he was not noticed until he pulled up.

"I have come to bring you back to Meerut, Mr. Mayne," he cried. "The mutiny has been quelled. Our troops are in command of the station and of all the main roads. You can return without the slightest risk, I assure you."

He spoke clearly and slowly, well knowing that some among the natives would understand him. His appearance, no less than his words, created a rare stir. The clamor of tongues was stilled. Men looked at him as though he had fallen from the sky. He could not be certain, but he guessed, that he had arrived at a critical moment. Indeed, the lives of his friends were actually in deadliest jeopardy, and there was no knowing what turn the events of the next minute might have taken. But a glance at Winifred's distraught face told him a good deal. He must be bold, with the careless boldness of the man who has the means of making his will respected.

"Stand aside, there!" he said in Hindustani. "And you had better clear the roadway. A troop of cavalry is riding fast behind."

He dismounted, drew Nejdi's bridle over his left arm, and went towards Winifred. The girl looked at him with a wistfulness that was pitiful. Hope was struggling in her soul against the fear of grim death.

"Oh, Frank!" she sighed, holding out both her hands. "Oh, Frank, I am so frightened. We had a dreadful time at the bungalow, and these men look so fierce and cruel! Have you really brought help?"

"Yes," he said confidently. "You need have no further anxiety. Please get into your carriage."

Mr. Mayne said something, but Malcolm never knew what it was, for Winifred fainted, and would have fallen had he not caught her.

"This Feringhi has a loud voice," a man near him growled. "He talks of cavalry. Where are they?"

"The Meerut road is empty," commented another.

"We have the Begum's order," said the first speaker, more loudly. "Let us obey, or it may be an evil thing for us."

"One of the daughters of Bahadur Shah is here," murmured Mayne rapidly. "She says we are to be taken to Delhi, and slain if we resist. Where are your men? My poor niece! To think that I should have brought her from England for this!"

Malcolm, still holding Winifred's unconscious form clasped to his breast, laughed loudly.

"Mayne-sahib tells me that you have all gone mad," he shouted in the vernacular. "Have you no ears? Did you not hear the British artillery firing on the rebels a little time since? Ere day breaks the road to Delhi will be held by the white troops. What foolish talk is this of taking Mayne-sahib thither as a prisoner?"

The door of the bedizened traveling-coach was flung open, and the Mohammedan lady who had befriended Frank when he fell into the moat appeared. She alighted, and her aggressive servants drew away somewhat.

"It is my order," she said imperiously. "Who are you that you should dispute it?"

"I regret the heat of my words, Princess," he replied, grasping the frail chance that presented itself of wriggling out of a desperate situation. "Nevertheless, it is true that the native regiments at Meerut have been dispersed, and you yourself may have heard the guns as they advanced along the Delhi road. Why should I be here otherwise? I came to escort my friends back to Meerut."

The Princess came nearer. In the brilliant moonlight she had an unearthly beauty – at once weird and Sybilline – but her animated features were chilled with disdain, and she pointed to the girl whose pallid face lay against Frank's shoulder.

"You are lying," she said. "You are not the first man who has lied for a woman's sake. That is why you are here."

"Princess, I have spoken nothing but the truth," he answered. "If you still doubt my word, let some of your men ride back with us. They will soon convince you. Perchance, the information may not be without its value to you also."

The thrust was daring, but she parried it adroitly.

"No matter what has happened in Meerut, the destined end is the same," she retorted. Then she fired into subdued passion. "The British Raj is doomed," she muttered, lowering her voice, and bringing her magnificent eyes close to his. "It is gone, like an evil dream. Listen, Malcolm-sahib. You are a young man, and ambitious. They say you are a good soldier. Come with me. I want some one I can trust. Though I am a king's daughter, there are difficulties in my path that call for a sword in the hands of a man not afraid to use it. Come! Let that weakling girl go where she lists – I care not. I offer you life, and wealth, and a career. She will lead you to death. What say you? Choose quickly. I am now going to Delhi, and to-morrow's sun shall see my father a king in reality as well as in name."

Malcolm's first impression was that the Princess had lost her senses. He had yet to learn how completely the supporters of the Mogul dynasty were convinced of the approaching downfall of British supremacy in India. But his active brain fastened on to two considerations of exceeding importance. By temporizing, by misleading this arrogant woman, if necessary, he might not only secure freedom for Winifred and Mayne, but gather most valuable information as to the immediate plans of the rebels.

"Your words are tempting to a soldier of fortune, Princess," he said.

"Malcolm – " broke in Mayne, who, of course, understood all that passed.

"For Heaven's sake do not interfere," said Frank in English. "Suffer my friends to depart, Princess," he went on in Persian. "It is better so. Then I shall await your instructions."

“Ah, you agree, then? That is good hearing. Yes, your white doll can go, and the gray-beard, too. Ere many days have passed there will be no place for them in all India.”

A commotion among the ring of soldiers and servants interrupted her. The stout, important-looking man whom Malcolm had seen in the hunting lodge on the occasion of his ducking, came towards them with hurried strides. The Princess seemed to be disconcerted by his arrival. Her expressive face betrayed her. Sullen anger, not unmixed with fear, robbed her of her good looks. Her whole aspect changed. She had the cowed appearance of one of her own serving-women.

“Remember!” she murmured. “You must obey me, none else. Come when I send for you!”

The man, who now carried on his forehead the insignia of a Brahmin, had no sooner reached the small space between the carriages than Mr. Mayne cried delightedly to Malcolm:

“Why, if this is not Nana Sahib! Here is a piece of good luck! I know him well. If he has any control over this mob, we are perfectly safe.”

Nana Sahib acknowledged the Commissioner’s greeting with smiling politeness. But first he held a whispered colloquy with the Princess, whom he entreated, or persuaded, to re-enter her gorgeous vehicle. She drove away without another glance at Malcolm. Perhaps she did not dare to show her favor in the newcomer’s presence.

Then Nana Sahib turned to the Europeans.

“Let the miss-sahib be placed in her carriage,” he said suavely. “She will soon revive in the air, and we march at once for Aligarh. Will you accept my escort thus far, Mayne-sahib, or farther south, if you wish it? I think you will be safer with me than in taking the Meerut road to-night.”

Mayne agreed gladly. The commanding influence of this highly-placed native nobleman, who, despite an adverse decision of the Government, was regarded by every Mahratta as Peishwa, the ruler of a vast territory in Western India, seemed to offer more stable support that night than the broken reed of British authority in Meerut. Moreover, the Commissioner wished to reach Lucknow without delay. If the country were in for a period of disturbance, his duty lay there, and he was planning already to send Winifred to Calcutta from Cawnpore, and thence to England until the time of political trouble had passed.

“I am sure I am doing right,” he said in answer to Frank’s remonstrances. “Don’t you understand, a native in Nana Sahib’s position must be well informed as to the exact position of affairs. By helping me he is safeguarding himself. I am only too thankful he was able to subdue that fiery harpy, the Begum. She threatened me in the most outrageous manner before you came. Of course, Winifred and I will be ever-lastingly grateful to you for coming to our assistance. You are alone, I suppose?”

“Yes, though some of our troopers may turn up any minute.”

“I fear not,” said the older man gravely. “This is a bad business, Malcolm. The Begum said too much. There are worse times in store for us. Do you really believe you can reach Meerut safely?”

“I rode here without hindrance.”

“Let me advise you, then, to slip away before we start. That woman meant mischief, or she would never have dared to suggest that a British officer should throw in his lot with hers. Waste no time, and don’t spare that good horse of yours. Be sure I shall tell Winifred all you have done for us. She is pulling round, I think, and it will be better that she should not see you again. Besides, the Nana’s escort are preparing to march.”

Frank’s latest memory of the girl he loved was a sad one. Her white face looked ethereal in the moonlight, and her bloodless lips were quivering with returning life. It was hard to leave her in such a plight, but it would only unnerve her again if he waited until she was conscious to bid her farewell.

So he rode back to Meerut, a solitary European on the eight miles of road, and no man challenged him till he reached the famous bivouac of the white garrison, the bivouac that made the Mutiny an accomplished fact.

CHAPTER III

HOW BAHADUR SHAH PROCLAIMED HIS EMPIRE

On the morning of the 11th, the sun that laid bare the horrors of Meerut shone brightly on the placid splendor of Delhi. This great city, the Rome of Asia, was also the Metz of Upper India, its old-fashioned though strong defenses having been modernized by the genius of a Napier. Resting on the Jumna, it might best be described as of half-moon shape, with the straight edge running north and south along the right bank of the river.

In the center of the river line stood the imposing red sandstone palace of Bahadur Shah, last of the Moguls. North of this citadel were the magazine, the Church, some European houses, and the cutcherry, or group of minor law courts, while the main thoroughfare leading in that direction passed through the Kashmir Gate. Southward from the fort stretched the European residential suburb known as Darya Gunj (or, as it would be called in England, the "Riverside District") out of which the Delhi Gate gave access to the open country and the road to Humayun's Tomb. Another gate, the Raj Ghât, opened toward the river between the palace and Darya Gunj. Thus, the walls of city and palace ran almost straight for two miles from the Kashmir Gate on the north to the Delhi Gate on the south, while the main road connecting the two passed the fort on the landward side.

The Lahore Gate of the palace, a magnificent structure, commanded the bazaar and its chief street, the superb Chandni Chowk, which extended due west for nearly two miles to the Lahore Gate of the city itself. Near the palace, in a very large garden, stood the spacious premises of the Delhi Bank. A little farther on, but on the opposite side of the Chowk, was the Kotwallee, or police station, and still farther, practically in the center of the dense bazaar, two stone elephants marked the entrance to the beautiful park now known as the Queen's Gardens.

The remainder of the space within the walls was packed with the houses and shops of well-to-do traders, and the lofty tenements or mud hovels in which dwelt a population of artisans noted not only for their artistic skill but for a spirit of lawlessness, a turbulent fanaticism, that had led to many scenes of violence in the city's earlier history.

The whole of Delhi, as well as the palace – which had its own separate fortifications – was surrounded by a wall seven miles long, twenty-four feet in height, well supplied with bastions, and containing ten huge gates, each a small fort in itself. The wall was protected by a dry fosse, or ditch, twenty-five feet wide and about twenty feet deep; this, in turn, was guarded by a counterscarp and glacis.

On the northwest side of Delhi, and about a mile distant from the river, an irregular, rock-strewn spine of land, called the Ridge, rose above the general level of the plain, and afforded a panoramic view of the city and palace. The rising ground began about half a mile from the Mori Gate – which was situated on what may be termed the landward side of the Kashmir Gate. It followed a course parallel with the river for two miles, and at its northerly extremity were situated the principal European bungalows and the military cantonment.

Delhi was the center of Mohammedan hopes; its palace held the lineal descendant of Aurangzebe, with his children and grandchildren; it was stored to repletion with munitions of war; yet, such was the inconceivable folly of the rulers of India at that time, the nearest British regiments were stationed in Meerut, while the place swarmed with native troops, horse, foot and artillery!

A May morning in the Punjab must not be confused with its prototype in Britain. Undimmed by cloud, unchecked by cooling breeze, the sun scorches the earth from the moment his glowing rays first peep over the horizon. Thus men who value their health and have work to be done rise at an hour when London's streets are emptiest. Merchants were busy in the bazaar, soldiers were on parade, judges were sitting in the courts of the cutcherry, and the European housewives of the station were

making their morning purchases of food for breakfast and dinner, when some of the loungers on the river-side wall saw groups of horsemen raising the dust on the Meerut road beyond the bridge of boats which spanned the Jumna.

The word went round that something unusual had happened. Already the idlers had noted the arrival of a dust-laden royal carriage, which crossed the pontoons at breakneck speed and entered by the Calcutta Gate. That incident, trivial in itself, became important when those hard-riding horsemen came in sight. The political air was charged with electricity. None knew whether it would end in summer lightning or in a tornado, so there was much running to and fro, and gesticulations, and excited whisperings among those watchers on the walls.

Vague murmurs of doubt and surprise reached the ears of two of the British magistrates. They hurriedly adjourned the cases they were trying and sent for their horses. One rode hard to the cantonment and told Brigadier Graves what he had seen and heard; the other, knowing the immense importance of the chief magazine, went there to warn Lieutenant Willoughby, the officer in charge.

Here, then, in Delhi, were men of prompt decision, but the troops on whom they could have depended were forty miles away in Meerut, in that never-to-be-forgotten bivouac. Meanwhile, the vanguard of the Meerut rebels had arrived. Mostly troopers of Malcolm's regiment, with some few sepoy who had stolen ponies on the way, they crossed the Jumna, some going straight to the palace by way of the bridge of boats, while others forded the river to the south and made for the gaol, where, as usual, they released the prisoners. This trick of emptying the penitentiaries was more adroit than it seems at first sight. Not only were the mutineers sure of obtaining hearty assistance in their campaign of robbery and murder, but every gaol-bird headed direct for his native town as soon as he was gorged with plunder. There was no better means of disseminating the belief that the British power had crumbled to atoms. The convicts boasted that they had been set free by the rebels; they paraded their ill-gotten gains and incited ignorant villagers to emulate the example of the towns. Thus a skilful and damaging blow was struck at British prestige. Neither Mohammedan moullah nor Hindu fakir carried such conviction to ill-informed minds as the appearance of some known malefactor decked out in the jewels and trinkets of murdered Englishwomen.

The foremost of the mutineers reined in their weary horses beneath a balcony on which Bahadur Shah, a decrepit old man of eighty, awaited them.

By his side stood his youngest daughter, the Roshinara Begum. Her eyes were blazing with triumph, yet her lips curved with contempt at the attitude of her trembling father.

"You see!" she cried. "Have I not spoken truly? These are the men who sacked Meerut. Scarce a Feringhi lives there save those whom I have saved to good purpose. Admit your troops! Proclaim yourself their ruler. A moment's firmness will win back your empire."

The aged monarch, now that the hour was at hand that astrologers had predicted and his courtiers had promised for many a year, faltered his dread lest they were not all committing a great mistake.

"This is no woman's work," he protested. "Where are my sons? Where is the Shahzada, Mirza Mogul?"

She knew. The heir apparent and his brothers were cowering in fear, afraid to strike, yet hoping that others would strike for them. She almost dragged her father to the front of the balcony. The troopers recognized him with a fierce shout. A hundred sabers were waved frantically.

"Help us, O King!" they cried. "We pray your help in our fight for the faith!"

Captain Douglas, commandant of the palace guards, hearing the uproar ran to the King. He did not notice the girl Roshinara, who stood there like a caged tigress.

"How dare you intrude on the King's privacy?" he cried, striving to overawe the rebels by his cool demeanor. "You must lay down your arms if you wish His Majesty's clemency. He is here in person and that is his command."

A yell of defiance greeted his bold words. The Begum made a signal with her hand which was promptly understood. Away clattered the troopers towards the Raj Ghât Gate. There they were admitted without parley. The city hell hounds sprang to meet them and the slaughter of inoffensive Europeans began in Darya Gunj.

It was soon in full swing. The vile deeds of the night at Meerut were re-enacted in the vivid sunlight at Delhi. Leaving their willing allies to carry sword and torch through the small community in that quarter the sowars rode to the Lahore Gate of the palace. It was thrown open by the King's guards and dependents. Captain Douglas, and the Commissioner, Mr. Fraser, made vain appeals to men whose knees would have trembled at their frown a few minutes earlier. Thinking to escape and summon assistance from the cantonment, Douglas mounted the wall and leaped into the moat. He broke one, if not both, of his legs. Some scared coolies lifted him and carried him back to the interior of the palace. Fraser tried to protect him while he was being taken to his apartments over the Lahore Gate, but a jeweler from the bazaar stabbed the Commissioner and he was killed by the guards. Then the mob rushed up-stairs and massacred the collector, the chaplain, the chaplain's daughter, a lady who was their guest, and the injured Douglas.

Another dreadful scene was enacted in the Delhi Bank. The manager and his brave wife, assisted by a few friends who happened to be in the building at the moment, made a stubborn resistance, but they were all cut down. The masters in the Government colleges were surprised and murdered in their class-rooms. The missionaries, whether European or native, were slaughtered in their houses and schools. The editorial staff and compositors of the *Delhi Gazette*, having just produced a special edition of the paper announcing the crisis, were all stabbed or bludgeoned to death. In the telegraph office a young signaler was sending a thrilling message to Umballa, Lahore and the north.

"The sepoys have come in from Meerut," he announced with the slow tick of the earliest form of apparatus. "They are burning everything. Mr. Todd is dead, and, we hear, several Europeans. We must shut up."

That was his requiem. The startled operators at Umballa could obtain no further intelligence and the boy was slain at his post.³

The magistrate who galloped to the cantonment found no laggards there. Brigadier Graves sent Colonel Ripley with part of the 54th Native Infantry to occupy the Kashmir Gate. The remainder of the 54th escorted two guns under Captain de Teissier.

Ripley reached the main guard, just within the gate, when some troopers of the 3d rode up. The Colonel ordered his men to fire at them. The sepoys refused to obey, and the sowars, drawing their pistols, shot dead or severely wounded six British officers. Then the 54th bayoneted their Colonel, but, hearing the rumble of de Teissier's guns, fled into the city. The guard of the gate, composed of men of the 38th, went with them, but their officer, Captain Wallace, had ridden, fortunately for himself, to hurry the guns. He was sent on to the cantonment to ask for re-enforcements. Not a man of the 38th would follow him, but the 74th commanded by Major Abbott, proclaimed their loyalty and asked to be led against the mutineers.

Perforce their commander trusted them. He brought them to the Kashmir Gate with two more guns, while the Brigadier and his staff, wondering why they heard nothing of the pursuing British from Meerut, thought it advisable to gather the women and children and other helpless persons, both European and native, in the Flagstaff Tower, a small building situated on the northern extremity of the Ridge.

³ This statement is made on the authority of Holmes's "History of the Indian Mutiny," Cave-Browne's "The Punjab & Delhi," and "The Punjab Mutiny Report," though it is claimed that William Brendish, who is still living, was on duty at the Delhi Telegraph Office throughout the night of May 10th.

There for some hours a great company of frightened people endured all the discomforts of terrific heat, hunger, and thirst, while wives and mothers, striving to soothe their wailing little ones, were themselves consumed with anxiety as to the fate of husbands and sons.

At the main guard there was a deadlock. Major Abbott and his brother officers, trying to keep their men loyal, stood fast and listened to the distant turmoil in the city. Like the soldiers in Meerut, they never guessed a tithe of the horrors enacted there. They were sure that the white troops in Meerut would soon arrive and put an end to the prevalent anarchy. Yet the day sped and help came not.

Suddenly the sound of a tremendous explosion rent the air and a dense cloud of white smoke, succeeded by a pall of dust, rose between the gate and the palace. Willoughby had blown up the magazine! Why? Two artillery subalterns who had fought their way through a mob stricken with panic for the moment, soon arrived. Their story fills one of the great pages of history.

Lieutenant Willoughby, a boyish-looking subaltern of artillery, whose shy, refined manners hid a heroic soul, lost no time in making his dispositions for the defense of the magazine when he knew that a mutiny was imminent. He had with him eight Englishmen, Lieutenants Forrest and Raynor, Conductors Buckley, Shaw and Scully, Sub-Conductor Crow, and Sergeants Edwards and Stewart. The nine barricaded the outer gates and placed in the best positions guns loaded with grape. They laid a train from the powder store to a tree in the yard. Scully stood there. He promised to fire the powder when his young commander gave the signal.

Then they waited. A stormy episode was taking place inside the fort. Bahadur Shah held out against the vehement urging of his daughter aided now by the counsel of her brothers. Ever and anon he went to the river balcony which afforded a view of the Meerut road. At last he sent mounted men across the river. When these scouts returned and he was quite certain that none but rebel sepoys were streaming towards Delhi from Meerut, he yielded.

The surrender of the magazine was demanded in his name. His adherents tried to rush the gate and walls, and were shot down in scores. The attack grew more furious and sustained. The white men served their smoking cannon with a wild energy that, for a time, made the gallant nine equal to a thousand. Of course such a struggle could have only one end. Willoughby, in his turn, ran to the river bastion. Like the king, he looked towards Meerut. Like the king, he saw none but mutineers. Then, when the enemy were clambering over the walls and rushing into the little fort from all directions, he raised his sword and looked at Conductor Buckley. Buckley lifted his hat, the agreed signal, and Scully fired the train. Hundreds of rebels were blown to pieces, as they were already inside the magazine. Scully was killed where he stood. Willoughby leaped from the walls, crossed the river, and met his death while striving to reach Meerut. Lieutenants Forrest and Raynor, Conductors Buckley and Shaw, and Sergeant Stewart escaped, and were given the Victoria Cross.

Yet, so curiously constituted is the native mind, the blowing-up of the magazine was the final tocsin of revolt. It seemed to place beyond doubt that which all men were saying. The king was fighting the English. Islam was in the field against the Nazarene. The Mogul Empire was born again and the iron grip of British rule was relaxed. At once the sepoys at the Kashmir Gate fired a volley at the nearest officers, of whom three fell dead.

Two survivors rushed up the bastion and jumped into the ditch. Others, hearing the shrieks of some women in the guard room, poor creatures who had escaped from the city, ran through a hail of bullets and got them out. Fastening belts and handkerchiefs together, the men lowered the women into the fosse and, with extraordinary exertions, lifted them up the opposite side.

At the Flagstaff Tower the 74th and the remainder of the 38th suddenly told their officers that they would obey them no longer. When this last shred of hope was gone, the Brigadier reluctantly gave the order to retreat. The women and children were placed in carriages and a mournful procession began to straggle through the deserted cantonment along the Alipur Road.

Soon the fugitives saw their bungalows on fire. "Then," says that accurate and impartial historian of the Mutiny, Mr. T. R. E. Holmes, "began that piteous flight, the first of many such

incidents which hardened the hearts of the British to inflict a terrible revenge... Driven to hide in jungles or morasses from despicable vagrants – robbed, and scourged, and mocked by villagers who had entrapped them with promises of help – scorched by the blazing sun, blistered by burning winds, half-drowned in rivers which they had to ford or swim across, naked, weary and starving, they wandered on; while some fell dead by the wayside, and others, unable to move farther, were abandoned by their sorrowing friends to die on the road.”

In such wise did the British leave Imperial Delhi. They came back, later, but many things had to happen meanwhile.

The volcanic outburst in the Delhi district might have been paralleled farther north were not the Punjab fortunate in its rulers. Sir John Lawrence was Chief Commissioner at Lahore. When that fateful telegram from Delhi was received in the capital of the Punjab he was on his way to Murree, a charming and secluded hill station, for the benefit of his health. But, like most great men, Lawrence had the faculty of surrounding himself with able lieutenants.

His deputy, Robert Montgomery, whose singularly benevolent aspect concealed an iron will, saw at once that if the Punjab followed the lead of Meerut and Delhi, India would be lost. Lahore had a mixed population of a hundred thousand Sikhs and Mohammedans, born soldiers every man, and ready to take any side that promised to settle disputes by cold steel rather than legal codes. If these hot heads, with their millions of co-religionists in the land of the Five Rivers, were allowed to gain the upper hand, they would sweep through the country from the mountains to the sea.

The troops, British and native, were stationed in the cantonment of Mian-mir, some five miles from Lahore. There were one native cavalry regiment and three native infantry battalions whose loyalty might be measured by minutes as soon as they learnt that the standard of Bahadur Shah was floating over the palace at Delhi. To quell them the authorities had the 81st Foot and two batteries of horse artillery, or, proportionately, far less a force than that at Meerut, the Britons being outnumbered eight times by the natives.

Montgomery coolly drove to Mian-mir on the morning of the 12th, took counsel with the Brigadier, Stuart Corbett, and made his plans. A ball was fixed for that night. All society attended it, and men who knew that the morrow’s sun might set on a scene of bloodshed and desolation danced gaily with the ladies of Lahore. Surely those few who were in the secret of the scheme arranged by Montgomery and Corbett must have thought of a more famous ball at Brussels on a June night in 1815.

Next morning the garrison fell in for a general parade of all arms. The artillery and 81st were on the right of the line, the native infantry in the center, and the sowars on the left. A proclamation by Government announcing the disbandment of the 34th at Barrackpore was read, and may have given some inkling of coming events to the more thoughtful among the sepoys. But they had no time for secret murmurings. Maneuvers began instantly. In a few minutes the native troops found themselves confronted by the 81st and the two batteries of artillery.

Riding between the opposing lines, the Brigadier told the would-be mutineers that he meant to save them from temptation by disarming them.

“Pile arms!” came the resolute command.

They hesitated. The intervening space was small. By sheer weight of numbers they could have borne down the British.

“Eighty-first – load!” rang out the ominous order.

As the ears of the startled men caught the ring of the ramrods in the Enfield rifles, their eyes saw the lighted port fires of the gunners. They were trapped, and they knew it. They threw down their weapons with sullen obedience and the first great step towards the re-conquest of India was taken.

Inspired by Montgomery the district officers at Umritsar, Mooltan, Phillour, and many another European center in the midst of warlike and impetuous races, followed his example and precept. Brigadier Innes at Ferozapore hesitated. He tried half measures. He separated his two native regiments and thought to disarm them on the morrow. That night one of them endeavored to storm the magazine,

burnt and plundered the station, and marched off towards Delhi. But Innes then made amends. He pursued and dispersed them. Only scattered remnants of the corps reached the Mogul capital.

Thus Robert Montgomery, the even-tempered, suave, smooth-spoken Deputy Commissioner of Lahore! In the far north, at Peshawur, four other men of action gathered in conclave. The gay, imaginative, earnest-minded Herbert Edwardes, the hard-headed veteran, Sydney Cotton, the dashing soldier, Neville Chamberlain, and the lustrous-eyed, black-bearded, impetuous giant, John Nicholson – that genius who at thirty-five had already been deified by a brotherhood of Indian fakirs and placed by Mohammedans among the legendary heroes of their faith – these four sat in council and asked, “How best shall we serve England?”

They answered that question with their swords.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE WAY TO CAWNPORE

In Meerut reigned that blessed thing, Pax Britannica, otherwise known as the British bulldog. But the bulldog was kept on the chain and peace obtained only within his kennel. Malcolm, deprived of his regiment, gathered under his command a few young civilians who were eager to act as volunteer cavalry, and was given a grudging permission to ride out to the isolated bungalows of some indigo planters, on the chance that the occupants might have defended themselves successfully against the rioters.

In each case the tiny detachment discovered blackened walls and unburied corpses. The Meerut district abounded with Goojers, the hereditary thieves of India, and these untamed savages had lost none of their wild-beast ferocity under fifty years of British rule. They killed and robbed with an impartiality that was worthy of a better cause. When Europeans, native travelers and mails were swept out of existence they fought each other. Village boundaries which had been determined under Wellesley's strong government at the beginning of the century were re-arranged now with match-lock, spear and tulwar. Old feuds were settled in the old way and six inches of steel were more potent than the longest Order in Council. Yet these ghouls fled at the sight of the smallest white force, and Malcolm and his irregulars rode unopposed through a blood-stained and deserted land.

On the 21st of May, eleven days after the outbreak of the Mutiny, though never a dragoon or horse gunner had left Meerut cantonment since they marched back to their quarters from the ever-memorable bivouac, Malcolm led his light horsemen north, along the Grand Trunk Road in the direction of Mazuffernugger.

A native brought news that a collector and his wife were hiding in a swamp near the road. Happily, in this instance, the two were rescued, more dead than alive. The man, ruler of a territory as big as the North Riding of Yorkshire, his wife, a young and well-born Englishwoman, were in the last stage of misery. The unhappy lady, half demented, was nursing a dead baby. When the child was taken from her she fell unconscious and had to be carried to Meerut on a rough litter.

The little cavalcade was returning slowly to the station⁴ when one of the troopers caught the hoof beats of a galloping horse behind them. Malcolm reined up, and soon a British officer appeared round a bend in the road. Mounted on a hardy country-bred, and wearing the semi-native uniform of the Company's regiments, the aspect of the stranger was sufficiently remarkable to attract attention apart from the fact that he came absolutely alone from a quarter where it was courting death to travel without an escort. He was tall and spare of build, with reddish brown hair and beard, blue eyes that gleamed with the cold fire of steel, close-set lips, firm chin, and the slightly-hooked nose with thin nostrils that seems to be one of nature's tokens of the man born to command his fellows when the strong arm and clear brain are needed in the battle-field.

He rode easily, with a loose rein, and he waved his disengaged hand the instant he caught sight of the white faces.

"Are you from Meerut?" he asked, his voice and manner conveying a curious blend of brusqueness and gentility, as his tired horse willingly pulled up alongside Nejdî.

"Yes. And you?" said Malcolm, trying to conceal his amazement at this apparition.

"I am Lieutenant Hodson of the 1st Bengal Fusiliers. I have ridden from Kurnaul, where the Commander-in-Chief is waiting until communication is opened with Meerut. Where is General Hewitt?"

⁴ In India the word "station" denotes any European settlement outside the three Presidency towns. In 1857 there were few railways in the country.

“I will take you to him! From Kurnaul, did you say? When did you start?”

“About this hour yesterday.”

Malcolm knew then that this curt-spoken cavalier had ridden nearly a hundred miles through an enemy’s country in twenty-four hours.

“Is your horse equal to another hour’s canter?” he inquired.

“He ought to be. I took him from a bunniah when my own fell dead in a village about ten miles in the rear.”

Bidding a young bank manager take charge of the detachment, Frank led the newcomer rapidly to headquarters. Hodson asked a few questions and made his companion’s blood boil by the unveiled contempt he displayed on hearing of the inaction at Meerut.

“You want Nicholson here,” said he, laughing with grim mirth. “By all the gods, he would horse-whip your general into the saddle.”

“Hewitt is an old man, and cautious, therefore,” explained Frank, in loyal defense of his chief. “Perhaps he deems it right to await the orders you are now bringing.”

“An old man! You mean an old woman, perhaps? I come from one. I had to go on my knees almost before I could persuade Anson to let me start.”

“Well, you must admit that you have made a daring and lucky ride?”

“Nonsense! Why is one a soldier! I would cross the infernal regions if the need arose. If I had been in Meerut on that Sunday evening, no general that ever lived could have kept me out of Delhi before daybreak. The way to stop this mutiny was to capture that doddering old king and hold him as a hostage, and twenty determined men could have done it easily in the confusion.”

That was William Hodson’s way. Men who met him began by disliking his hectoring, supercilious bearing. They soon learnt to forget his gruffness and think only of his gallantry and good-comradeship.

At any rate his stirring advice and the dispatches he brought roused the military authorities at Meerut into activity. Carrying with him a letter to the Commander-in-Chief he quitted Meerut again that night, and dismounted outside Anson’s tent at Kurnaul at dawn on the second day!

On the 27th, Archdale Wilson led the garrison towards the rendezvous fixed on by the force hurriedly collected in the Punjab for the relief of Delhi. On the afternoon of the 30th, cavalry vedettes reported the presence of a strong body of mutineers on the right bank of the river Hindun, near the village of Ghazi-ud-din Nuggur and at a place where a high ridge commanded an iron suspension bridge. It was found afterwards that the rebels meant to fight the two British forces in detail before they could effect a junction. The generalship of the idea was good, but the sepoys did not count on the pent-up wrath of the British soldiers, who were burning to avenge their murdered countrymen and dishonored countrywomen, for it was now becoming known that many a fair English lady had met a fate worse than death ere sword or bullet stilled her anguish.

A company of the 60th Rifles dashed forward to seize the bridge, Lieutenant Light and his men took up the enemy’s challenge with their heavy eighteen-pounders, and Colonel Mackenzie and Major Tombs, at the head of two batteries of horse artillery, crossed the river and turned the left flank of the sepoy force. Then the Rifles extended and charged, the mutineers yielded, and Colonel Custance with his dragoons sabered them mercilessly for some miles.

Next morning, Whit-Sunday, while the chaplains were conducting the burial service over those who had fallen, the mutineers came out of Delhi again. A severe action began instantly. Tombs had two horses shot under him, and thirteen out of fifty men in his battery were killed or wounded. But the issue was never in doubt. After three hours’ hard fighting the rebels broke and fled. So those men in Meerut could give a good account of themselves when permitted! Actually, they won the two first battles of the campaign.

Exhausted by two days’ strenuous warfare in the burning sun, they could not take up the pursuit. The men were resting on the field when a battalion of Ghoorkahs, the little fighting men of Nepal,

arrived under the command of Colonel Reid. They had marched by way of Bulandshahr, and Malcolm heard to his dismay that the native infantry detachment stationed there, aided by the whole population of the district, had committed the wildest excesses.

Yet Winifred and her uncle had passed through that town on the road to Cawnpore. Aligarh, too, was in flames, said Reid, and there was no communication open with Agra, the seat of Government for the North-West Provinces. There was a bare possibility that the Maynes might have reached Agra, or that Nana Sahib had protected them for his own sake. Such slender hopes brought no comfort. Black despair sat in Malcolm's heart until the Brigadier sent for him and ordered him to take charge of the guard that would escort the records and treasure from Meerut to Agra. He hailed this dangerous mission with gloomy joy. Love had no place in a soldier's life, he told himself. Henceforth he must remember Winifred only when his sword was at the throat of some wretched mutineer appealing for mercy.

He went to his tent to supervise the packing of his few belongings. His bearer,⁵ a Punjabi Mohammedan, who cursed the sepoys fluently for disturbing the country during the hot weather, handed him a note which had been brought by a camp follower.

It was written in Persi-Arabic script, a sort of Arabic shorthand that demands the exercise of time and patience ere it can be deciphered by one not thoroughly acquainted with it. Thinking it was a request for employment which he could not offer, Malcolm stuffed it carelessly into a pocket. He rode to Meerut, placed himself at the head of the 8th Irregular Cavalry, a detachment whose extraordinary fidelity has already been narrated, and set forth next morning with his train of bullock carts and their escort.

He called the first halt in the village where he had parted from Winifred. The headman professed himself unable to give any information, but the application of a stirrup leather to his bare back while his wrists were tied to a cart wheel soon loosened his tongue.

The king's hunting lodge was empty, he whined; and the Roshinara Begum had gone to Delhi. Nana Sahib's cavalcade went south soon after the Begum's departure, and a moullah had told him, the headman, that the Nana had hastened through Aligarh on his way to Cawnpore, not turning aside to visit Agra, which was fifty miles down the Bombay branch of the Grand Trunk Road.

Malcolm drew a negative comfort from the moullah's tale. That night he encamped near a fair-sized village which was ominously denuded of men. Approaching a native hut to ask for a piece of charcoal wherewith to light a cigar, he happened to look inside. To his very great surprise he saw, standing in a corner, a complete suit of European armor, made of tin, it is true, but a sufficiently bewildering "find" in a Goojer hovel.

A woman came running from a neighbor's house. While giving him the charcoal she hastily closed the rude door. She pretended not to understand him when he sought an explanation of the armor, whereupon he seized her, and led her, shrieking, among his own men. The commotion brought other villagers on the scene, as he guessed it would. A few fierce threats, backed by a liberal display of naked steel, quickly evoked the curious fact that nearly all the able-bodied inhabitants "had gone to see the sahib-log⁶ dance."

Even Malcolm's native troops were puzzled by this story, but a further string of terrifying words and more saber flourishing led to a direct statement that the white people who were to "dance" had been captured near the village quite a week earlier and imprisoned in a ruined tomb about a mile from the road. It was risky work to leave the valuable convoy for an instant, but Malcolm felt that he must probe this mystery. Taking half a dozen men with him, and compelling the woman to act as guide, he went to the tomb in the dark.

⁵ A personal servant, often valet and waiter combined.

⁶ A generic term for Europeans.

The building, a mosque-like structure of considerable size, was situated in the midst of a grove of mango trees. A clear space in front of the tomb was lighted with oil lamps and bonfires. It was packed with uproarious natives, and Malcolm's astonished gaze rested on three European acrobats doing some feat of balancing. A clown was cracking jokes in French, some nuns were singing dolefully, and a trio of girls, wearing the conventional gauze and spangles of circus riders, were standing near a couple of piebald ponies.

He and his men dashed in among the audience and the Goojers ran for dear life when they caught sight of a sahib at the head of an armed party. The performers and the nuns nearly died of fright, believing that their last hour had surely come. But they soon recovered from their fear only to collapse more completely from joy. A French circus, it appeared, had camped near a party of nuns in the village on the main road, and were captured there when the news came that the English were swept out of existence. Most fortunately for themselves the nuns were regarded as part of the show, and the villagers, after robbing all of them, penned them in the mosque and made them give a nightly performance. There were five men and three women in the circus troupe, and among the four nuns was the grave reverend mother of a convent.

Malcolm brought them to the village and caused it to be made known that unless every article of value and every rupee in money stolen from these unfortunate people, together with a heavy fine, were brought to him by daybreak, he would not only fire each hut and destroy the standing crops, but he would also hang every adult male belonging to the place he could lay hands on.

These hereditary thieves could appreciate a man who spoke like that. They met him fairly and paid in full. When the convoy moved off, even that amazing suit of armor, which was used for the state entry of the circus into a town, was strapped on to the back of a trick pony.

The nuns, he ascertained, were coming from Fategarh to Umballa and they had met the great retinue of Nana Sahib below Aligarh. With him were two Europeans, a young lady and an elderly gentleman, but they were traveling so rapidly that it was impossible to learn who they were or whither they were going.

Here, then, was really good news. Like every other Englishman in India Malcolm believed that the Mutiny was confined to a very small area, of which his own station was the center. He thought that if Winifred and her uncle reached Cawnpore they would be quite safe.

He brightened up so thoroughly that he quite enjoyed a sharp fight next day when the budmashes of Bulandshahr regarded the straggling convoy as an easy prey.

There were three or four such affairs ere they reached Agra, and his Frenchmen proved themselves to be soldiers as well as acrobats. On the evening of the 2d of June he marched his cavalcade into the splendid fortress immortalized by its marble memorials of the great days of the Mogul empire.

The fact that a young subaltern had brought a convoy from Meerut was seized on by the weak and amiable John Colvin, Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Provinces, as a convincing proof of his theory that the bulk of the native army might be trusted, and that order would soon be restored. Each day he was sending serenely confident telegrams to Calcutta and receiving equally reassuring ones from a fatuous Viceroy. It was with the utmost difficulty that his wiser subordinates got him to disarm the sepoy regiments in Agra itself. He vehemently assured the Viceroy that the worst days of the outbreak were over and issued a proclamation offering forgiveness to all mutineers who gave up their arms, "except those who had instigated others to revolt, or taken part in the murder of Europeans."

Such a man was sure to regard Malcolm's bold journey from the wrong point of view. So delighted was he that he gave the sowars two months' pay, lauded Malcolm in the *Gazette*, and forthwith despatched him on a special mission to General Sir Hugh Wheeler at Cawnpore, to whom he recommended Frank for promotion and appointment as aide-de-camp.

This curious sequence of events led to Malcolm's following Winifred Mayne along the road she had taken exactly three weeks earlier. The route to Cawnpore lay through Etawah, a place where revolt had already broken out, but which had been evacuated by the mutineers, who, like those at Aligarh, Bulandshahr, Mainpuri, Meerut, and a score of other towns, ran off to Delhi after butchering all the Europeans within range.

With a small escort of six troopers, his servant, and two pack-horses, he traveled fast. As night was falling on June 4th, he re-entered the Grand Trunk Road some three miles north of Bithoor, where, all unknown to him, Nana Sahib's splendid palace stood on the banks of the Ganges.

It was his prudent habit to halt in small villages only. Towns might be traversed quickly without much risk, as even the tiniest display of force insured safety, but it was wise not to permit the size of his escort to be noted at leisure, when a surprise attack might be made in the darkness.

Therefore, expecting to arrive at Cawnpore early next day, he elected not to push on to Bithoor, and proposed to pass the night under the branches of a great pipal tree. Chumru, his Mohammedan bearer, was a good cook, in addition to his many other acquirements. Having purchased, or made his master pay for, which is not always the same thing in India, a small kid (by which please understand a young goat) in the village, he lit a fire, slew the kid, to the accompaniment of an appropriate verse from the Koran, and compounded an excellent stew.

A native woman brought some chupatties and milk, and Malcolm, being sharp set with hunger, ate as a man can only eat when he is young, and in splendid health, and has ridden hard all day.

He had a cigar left, too, and he was searching his pockets for a piece of paper to light it when he brought forth that Persi-Arabic letter which reached him at the close of the second battle of Ghazi-ud-din Nuggur.

He was on the point of rolling it into a spill, but some subtle influence stopped him. He rose, walked to Chumru's fire, and lit the cigar with a burning stick. Then summoning a smart young jemadar with whom he had talked a good deal during the journey, he asked him to read the chit. The woman who supplied the chupatties fetched a tiny lamp. She held it while the trooper bent over the strange scrawl, and ran his eyes along it to learn the context.

And this is what he read:

"To all whom it may concern – Be it known that Malcolm-sahib, late of the Company's 3d Regiment of Horse, is a friend of the heaven-born princess Roshinara Begum, and, provided he comes to the palace at Delhi within three days from the date hereof, he is to be given safe conduct by all who owe allegiance to the Light of the World, the renowned King of Kings and lord of all India, Bahadur Shah, Fuzl-Ilahi, Panah-i-din."

The trooper scowled. Those concluding words – "By the grace of God, Defender of the Faith" – perhaps touched a sore place, for he, too, was a true believer.

"You are a long way from Delhi, sahib, and the chit is a week old. I suppose you did not pay the expected visit to her Highness the Begum?" he said.

"If you are talking of the Begum Roshinara, daughter of the King of Delhi," put in the woman, who was ready enough to indulge in a gossip with these good-looking soldiers, "she passed through this place to-day."

"Surely you are telling some idle tale of the bazaar," said Malcolm.

"No, sahib. My brother is a grass-cutter in the Nana's stables. While I was at the well this morning a carriage came down the road. It was a rajah's carriage, and there were men riding before and behind. I asked my brother if he had seen it, and he said that it brought the Begum to Bithoor, where she is to wed the Nana."

"What! A Mohammedan princess marry a Brahmin!"

"It may be so, sahib. They say these great people do not consider such things when there is aught to be gained."

"But what good purpose can this marriage serve?"

The woman looked up at Malcolm under her long eyelashes.

"Where have you been, sahib, that you have not heard that the sepoys have proclaimed the Nana as King?" she asked timidly.

"King! Is he going to fight the Begum's father?"

"I know not, sahib, but Delhi is far off, and Cawnpore is near. Perchance they may both be kings."

A man's voice called from the darkness, and the woman hurried away. Malcolm, of course, was in a position to appraise the accuracy of her story. He knew that the Nana, a native dignitary with a grievance against the Government, was a guest of Bahadur Shah a month before the Mutiny broke out, and was at the Meerut hunting lodge on the very night of its inception. Judging by Princess Roshinara's words, her relations with the Brahmin leader were far from lover-like. What, then, did this sudden journey to Cawnpore portend? Was Sir Hugh Wheeler aware of the proposed marriage, with all the terrible consequences that it heralded? At any rate, his line of action was clear.

"Get the men together, Akhab Khan," he said to the jemadar. "We march at once."

Within five minutes they were on the road. There was no moon, and the trees bordering both sides of the way made the darkness intense. The still atmosphere, too, was almost overpowering. The dry earth, sun-baked to a depth of many feet, was giving off its store of heat accumulated during the day. The air seemed to be quivering as though it were laden with the fumes of a furnace. It was a night when men might die or go mad under the mere strain of existence. Its very languor was intoxicating. Nature seemed to brood over some wild revel. A fearsome thunderstorm or howling tornado of dust might reveal her fickleness of mood at any moment.

It was man, not the elements, that was destined to war that night. The small party of horsemen were riding through the scattered houses of Bithoor, and had passed a brilliantly lighted palace which Malcolm took to be the residence of Nana Sahib, when they were suddenly ordered to halt. Some native soldiers, not wearing the Company's uniform, formed a line across the road. Malcolm, drawing his sword, advanced towards them.

"Whose troops are you?" he shouted.

There was no direct answer, but a score of men, armed with muskets and bayonets, and carrying a number of lanterns, came nearer. It must be remembered that Malcolm, a subaltern of the 3d Cavalry, wore a turban and sash. He spoke Urdu exceedingly well, and it was difficult in the gloom to recognize him as a European.

"We have orders to stop and examine all wayfarers –" began some man in authority; but a lifted lantern revealed Frank's white face; instantly several guns were pointed at him.

"Follow me!" he cried to his escort.

A touch of the spurs sent Nejdi with a mighty bound into the midst of the rabble who held the road. Malcolm bent low in the saddle and a scattered volley revealed the tree-shrouded houses in a series of bright flashes. Fortunately, under such conditions, there is more room to miss than to hit. None of the bullets harmed horse or man, and the sowars were not quite near enough to be in the line of fire. After a quick sweep or two with his sword, Malcolm saw that his men were laying about them heartily. A pack-horse, however, had stumbled, bringing down the animal ridden by Chumru, the bearer. To save his faithful servant Frank wheeled Nejdi, and cut down a native who was lunging at Chumru with a bayonet.

More shots were fired and a sowar was wounded. He fell, shouting to his comrades for help. A general mêlée ensued. The troopers slashed at the men on foot and the sepoys fired indiscriminately at any one on horseback. The uproar was so great and the fighting so strenuous that Malcolm did not hear the approach of a body of cavalry until a loud voice bawled:

“Why should brothers slay brothers? Cease your quarreling, in the name of the faith! Are there not plenty of accursed Feringhis on whom to try your blades?”

Then the young officer saw, too late, that he was surrounded by a ring of steel. Yet he strove to rally his escort, got four of the men to obey his command, and, placing himself in front, led them at the vague forms that blocked the road to Cawnpore. In the confusion, he might have cut his way through had not Nejdi unfortunately jumped over a wounded man at the instant Frank was aiming a blow at a sowar. His sword swished harmlessly in the air, and his adversary, hitting out wildly, struck the Englishman’s head with the forte of his saber. The violent shock dazed Malcolm for a second, but all might yet have been well were it not for an unavoidable accident. A sepoy’s bayonet became entangled in the reins. In the effort to free his weapon the man gave such a tug to the bit on the near side that the Arab crossed his fore-legs and fell, throwing his rider violently. Frank landed fairly on his head. His turban saved his neck, but could not prevent a momentary concussion. For a while he lay as one dead.

When he came to his senses he found that his arms were tied behind his back, that he had been carried under a big tree, and that a tall native, in the uniform of a subadar of the 2d Bengal Cavalry, was holding a lantern close to his face.

“I am an officer of the 3d Cavalry,” he said, trying to rise. “Why do you, a man in my own service, suffer me to be bound?”

“You are no officer of mine, Feringhi,” was the scornful reply. “You are safely trussed because we thought it better sport to dangle you from a bough than to stab you where you dropped. Quick, there, with that heel-rope, Abdul Huq. We have occupation. Let us hang this crow here to show other Nazarenes what they may expect. And we have no time to lose. The Nana may appear at any moment.”

CHAPTER V

A WOMAN INTERVENES

That ominous order filled Malcolm's soul with a fierce rage. He was not afraid of death. The wine of life ran too strongly in his veins that craven fear should so suddenly quell the excitement of the combat that had ended thus disastrously. But his complete helplessness – the fact that he was to be hanged like some wretched felon by men wearing the uniform of which he had been so proud – these things stirred him to the verge of frenzy.

Oddly enough, in that moment of anguish he thought of Hodson, the man who rode alone from Kurnaul to Meerut. Why had Hodson succeeded? Would Hodson, knowing the exceeding importance of his mission, have turned to rescue a servant or raise a fallen horse? Would he not rather have dashed on like a thunderbolt, trusting to the superior speed of his charger to carry him clear of his assailants? And Nejdi! What had become of that trusted friend? Never before, Arab though he was, had he been guilty of a stumble. Perhaps he was shot, and sobbing out his gallant life on the road, almost at the foot of the tree which would be his master's gallows.

A doomed man indulges in strange reveries. Malcolm was almost as greatly concerned with Nejdi's imagined fate as with his own desperate plight when the trooper who answered to the name of Abdul Huq brought the heel-rope that was to serve as a halter.

The man was a Pathan, swarthy, lean, and sinewy, with the nose and eyes of a bird of prey. Though a hawk would show mercy to a fledgling sparrow sooner than this cut-throat to a captive, the robber instinct in him made him pause before he tied the fatal noose.

"Have you gone through the Nazarene's pockets, sirdar?" he asked.

"No," was the impatient answer. "Of what avail is it? These chota-sahibs⁷ have no money. And Cawnpore awaits us."

"Nevertheless, every rupee counts. And he may be carrying letters of value to the Maharajah. Once he is swinging up there he will be out of reach, and our caste does not permit us to defile our hands by touching a dead body."

While the callous ruffian was delivering himself of this curious blend of cynicism and dogma, his skilled fingers were rifling Malcolm's pockets. First he drew forth a sealed packet addressed to Sir Hugh Wheeler. He recognized the government envelope and, though neither of the pair could read English, Abdul Huq handed it to his leader with an "I-told-you-so" air.

It was in Frank's mind to revile the men, but, most happily, he composed himself sufficiently to resolve that he would die like an officer and a gentleman, while the last words on his lips would be a prayer.

The next document produced was the Persi-Arabic scrawl which purported to be a "safe-conduct" issued by Bahadur Shah, whom the rebels acclaimed as their ruler. Until that instant, the Englishman had given no thought to it. But when he saw the look of consternation that flitted across the face of the subadar when his eyes took in the meaning of the writing, despair yielded to hope, and he managed to say thickly:

"Perhaps you will understand now that you ought to have asked my business ere you proposed to hang me off hand."

His active brain devised a dozen expedients to account for his presence in Bithoor, but the native officer was far too shrewd to be beguiled into setting his prisoner at liberty. After re-reading the pass, to make sure of its significance, the rebel leader curtly told Abdul Huq and another sowar to bring the Feringhi into the presence of the Maharajah, by which title he evidently indicated Nana Sahib.

⁷ Junior Officers.

The order was, at least, a reprieve, and Malcolm breathed more easily. He even asked confidently about his horse and the members of his escort. He was given no reply save a muttered curse, a command to hold his tongue, and an angry tug at his tied arms.

It is hard to picture the degradation of such treatment of a British officer by a native trooper. The Calcutta Brahmin who was taunted by a Lascar – a warrior-priest insulted by a social leper – scarce flinched more keenly under the jibe than did Malcolm when he heard the tone of his captors. Truly the flag of Britain was trailing in the mire, or these men would not have dared to address him in that fashion. In that bitter moment he felt for the first time that the Mutiny was a real thing. Hitherto, in spite of the murders and incendiaryism of Meerut, the risings in other stations, the proclamation of Bahadur Shah as Emperor, and the actual conflicts with the Mogul's armed retainers on the battlefield of Ghazi-ud-din Nuggur, Malcolm was inclined to treat the outburst as a mere blaze of local fanaticism, a blaze that would soon be stamped under heel by the combined efforts of the East India Company's troops and the Queen's Forces. Now, at last, he saw the depth of hate with which British dominion was regarded in India. He heard Mohammedans alluding to a Brahmin as a leader – so might a wolf and a snake make common alliance against a watch dog. From that hour dated a new and sterner conception of the task that lay before him and every other Briton in the country. The Mutiny was no longer a welcome variant to the tedium of the hot weather. It was a life-and-death struggle between West and East, between civilization and barbarism, between the laws of Christianity and the lawlessness of Mahomet, supported by the cruel, inhuman, and nebulous doctrines of Hinduism.

Not that these thoughts took shape and coherence in Malcolm's brain as he was being hurried to the house of Nana Sahib. A man may note the deadly malice of a cobra's eye, but it is not when the poison fangs are ready to strike that he stops to consider the philosophy underlying the creature's malign hatred of mankind.

Events were in a rare fret and fume in the neighborhood of Cawnpore that night. As a matter of historical fact, while Malcolm was hearing from the villager that Roshinara Begum had come to Bithoor, the 1st Native Infantry and 2d Cavalry had risen at Cawnpore.

Nana Sahib was deep in intrigue with all the sepoy regiments stationed there, and his adherents ultimately managed to persuade these two corps to throw off their allegiance to the British Raj. Following the recognized routine they burst open the gaol, burnt the public offices, robbed the Treasury, and secured possession of the Magazine. Then, while the ever-swelling mob of criminals and loafers made pandemonium in the bazaar, the saner spirits among the mutineers hurried to Bithoor to ascertain the will of the man who, by common consent, was regarded as their leader.

He was expecting them, eagerly perhaps, but with a certain quaking that demanded the assistance of the "Raja's peg," a blend of champagne and brandy that is calculated to fire heart and brain to madness more speedily than any other intoxicant. He was conversing with his nephew, Rao Sahib, and his chief lieutenants, Tantia Topi and a Mohammedan named Azim-Ullah, when the native officers of the rebel regiments clattered into his presence.

"Maharajah," said their chief, "a kingdom is yours if you join us, but it is death if you side with the Nazarenes."

He laughed, with the fine air of one who sees approaching the fruition of long-cherished plans. He advanced a pace, confidently.

"What have I to do with the British?" he asked. "Are they not my enemies, too? I am altogether with you."

"Will you lead us to Delhi, Maharajah?"

"Why not? That is the natural rallying ground of all who wish the downfall of the present Government."

"Then behold, O honored one, we offer you our fealty."

They pressed near him, tendering the hilts of their swords. He touched each weapon, and placed his hands on the head of its owner, vowing that he would keep his word and be faithful to the trust they reposed in him.

“Our brothers of the 53d and 56th have not joined us yet,” said one.

“Then let us ride forth and win them to our side,” said the Nana grandiloquently. He went into the courtyard, mounted a gaily-caparisoned horse, and, surrounded by the rebel cohort, cantered off towards Cawnpore.

Thus it befell that the mob of horsemen pressed past Malcolm and his guards as they entered the palace. The subadar tried in vain to attract the Nana’s attention. Fearing lest he might be forgotten if he were not in the forefront of the conspiracy, this man bade his subordinates take their prisoner before the Begum, and ran off to secure his horse and race after the others. He counted on the despatches gaining him a hearing.

Abdul Huq, more crafty than his chief, smiled.

“Better serve a king’s daughter than these Shia dogs who are so ready to fawn on a Brahmin,” said he to his comrade, another Pathan, and a Sunni like himself, for Islam, united against Christendom, is divided into seventy-two warring sects. Hence the wavering loyalty of two sepoy battalions in Cawnpore carried Malcolm out of the Nana’s path, and led him straight to the presence of Princess Roshinara.

The lapse of three weeks had paled that lady’s glowing cheeks and deepened the luster of her eyes. Not only was she worn by anxiety, in addition to the physical fatigue of the long journey from Delhi, but the day’s happenings had not helped to lighten the load of care. Yet she was genuinely amazed at seeing Malcolm.

“How come you to be here?” she cried instantly, addressing him before Abdul Huq could open his mouth in explanation.

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