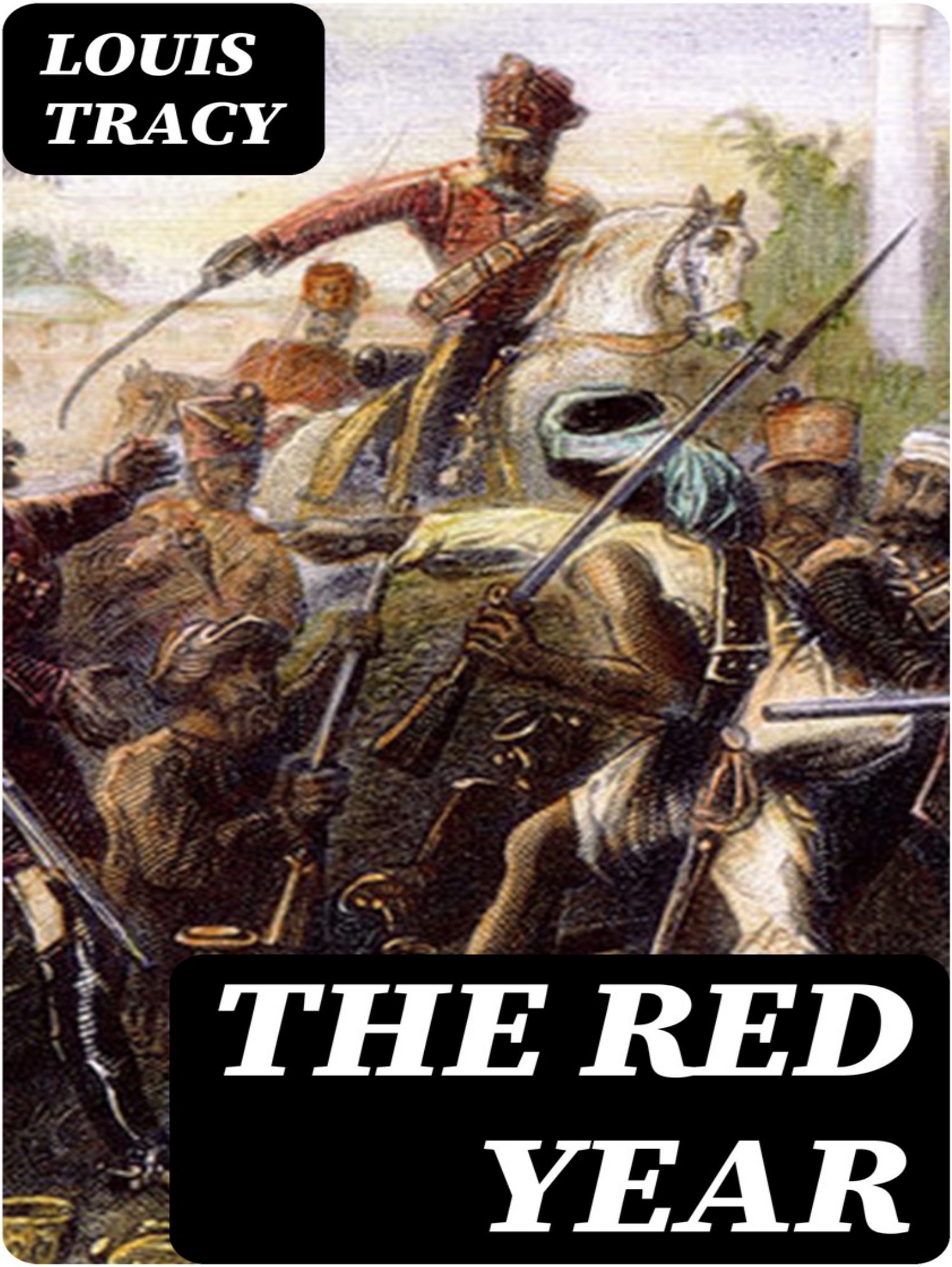
LOUIS TRACY



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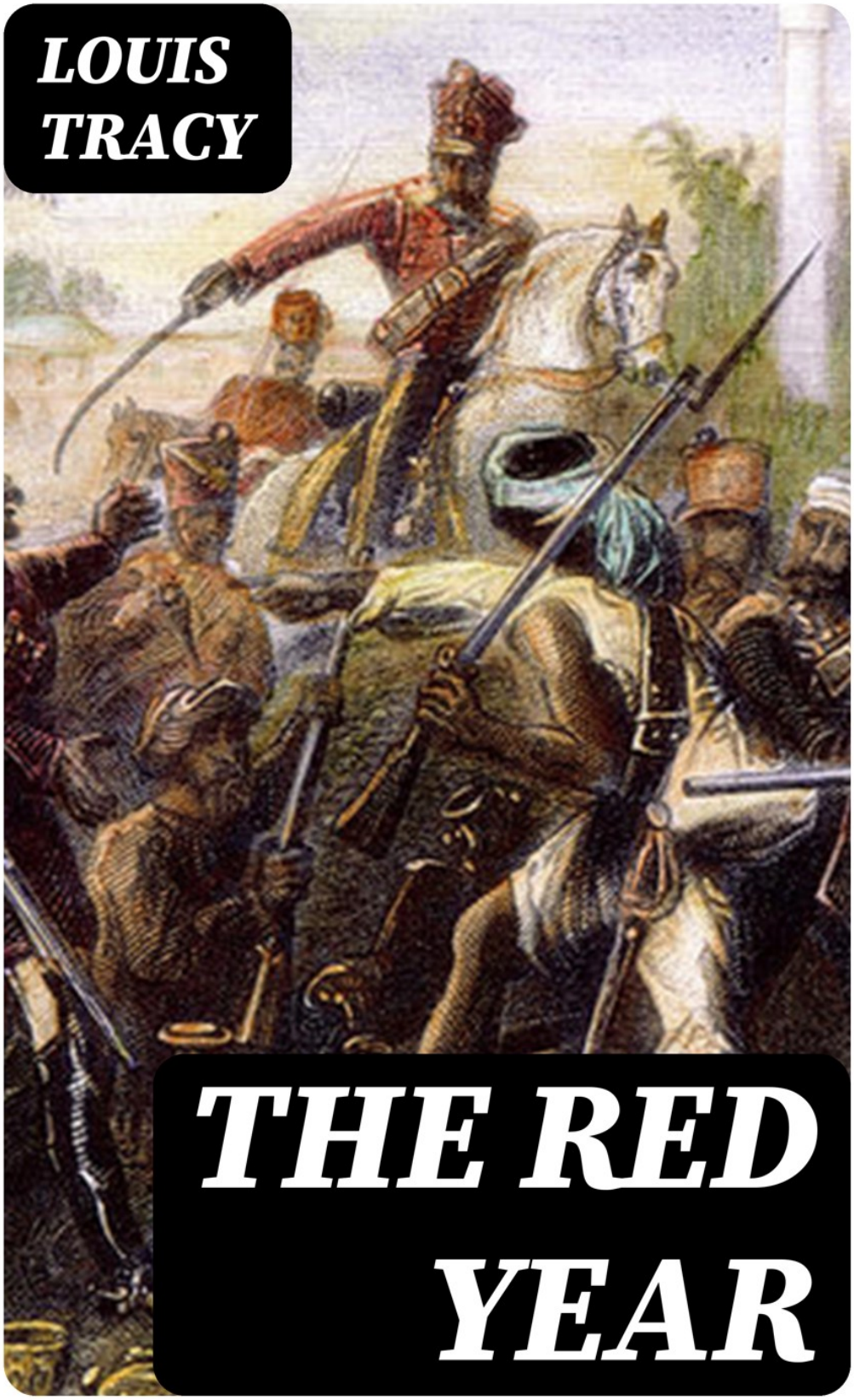

THE RED YEAR

Louis Tracy

The Red Year

A Story of the Indian Mutiny

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CHAPTER I

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THE MESHES OF THE NET

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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?”

“With the sepoys, 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

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A NIGHT IN MAY

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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 sowar[2] 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 preconcerted 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.

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