

The Adventures of Kathlyn

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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SYNOPSIS.

Kathlyn Hare, believing her father, Col. Hare, in peril, has summoned her, leaves her home in California to go to him in Allah, India. Umballa, pretender to the throne, has imprisoned the colonel, named by the late king as his heir. Arriving in Allah Kathlyn is informed by Umballa that her father being dead she is to be queen, and must marry him. She refuses and is informed by the priests that no woman can rule unmarried. She is given seven days to think it over.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

Pundita's narrative was rather long but not uninteresting. She had learned English from the old white priest who had died during the last plague. She was of high caste, and far back in the days of the Great Mogul in Delhi her forebears had ruled here; but strife and rebellion had driven them forth. In order that her immediate forebears might return to their native state and dwell in peace they had waived all possible rights of accession. They had found her husband standing over a dead man in the bazaars. He was innocent.

Umballa smoothed his chin. Pundita had not told her queen how he, Umballa, had made the accusation, after having been refused money by Ramabai. He secretly admired the diplomacy of the young woman. She did not at this moment care to push his enmity too far. As a matter of fact, he no longer cared about her; at least, not since his arrival at the Hare wild animal farm in California.

"Where is this man Ramabai confined?" demanded Kathlyn.

"In the murderers' pit in the elephant arena."

"Send and bring him here. I am certain that he is innocent."

So they brought in Ramabai in chains. Behind him came a Nauch girl, at whom Umballa gazed, puzzled. What part had she in this affair? He soon found out.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Lalla Ghori, and I live over the shoe-maker, Lal Singh, in the Kashmir Gate bazaar. I dance."

"And why are you here?"

"I saw the murder. Ramabai is innocent. He came upon the scene only after the murderer had fled. They were fighting about me," naively. "I was afraid to tell till now."

"Knock off those chains," said Kathlyn. Of Pundita she asked: "Does he, too, speak English?"

"Yes, heaven born."

"Then for the present he shall become my bodyguard. You shall both remain here in the palace."

"Ah, your majesty!" interposed Umballa. Pundita he did not mind, but he objected to Ramabai, secretly knowing him to be a revolutionist, extremely popular with the people and the near-by ryots (farmers), to whom he loaned money upon reasonable terms.

"If I am queen, I will it," said Kathlyn firmly. "If I am only a prisoner, end the farce at once."

"Your majesty's word is law," and Umballa bowed, hiding as best he could his irritation.

The next afternoon he began to enact the subtle plans he had formed

things. We shall make it to morrow. It's but two hours' ride, but there's no hurry; and besides there's a herd of elephants behind us somewhere. They've come up far for this time of year."

"Yes, sahib."

"All news worth while?"

"Made a gesture; it signified a great many things."

"Believe what?" said Bruce, emptying his pipe against his heel.

"There is a white queen in the city."

"What? What bally nonsense is this?"

"It is only what I've been told sahib. Hare Sahib is dead."

"Bruce let his pipe slip through his fingers. 'Hare? Good Lord!'"

"Yes, sahib. But that is not all. It seems the king went mad after we went to Africa. You remember how Hare Sahib saved him from the leopard? Well, he made Hare Sahib his heir. He had that right; the law of the childless king has always read so in Allah. The white queen is Hare Sahib's daughter."

"Bruce leaned against a tent pole. 'Am I dreaming or are you?' he gasped."

"It is what they tell me, sahib. I know it not as a fact."

"The king dead, Hare dead, and his daughter on the throne! How did she get here? And what the devil is a chap to do?" Bruce stooped and recovered his pipe and swore softly. "All, if this is true, then it's some devil work; and I'll wager my shooting eye that that sleek scoundrel Umballa, as they call him, is at the bottom of it. A white woman, good old Hare's daughter. I'll look into this."

"The native who had spread this astounding news in Bruce's camp was already hastening back to the city, some 14 miles away. He had been a bhisti (water carrier) to the house of Ramabai up to the young banker's incarceration. To him, then, he carried the news that a white hunter had arrived outside the city—Bruce Sahib has returned!"

Ramabai lost no time in taking this news to Kathlyn.

And so they comforted each other. There was a garden in the palace grounds, lovely indeed. A fountain tinkled and fat carp swam about in the fluted basin. There were trellises of flowers, too; Persian roses, despite the fact that it was still winter. It was called the Garden of Brides.

Kathlyn, attended by Pundita, awaited there the coming of Umballa and the Council. Her heart ached with bitterness and she could not think clearly. The impression that all this was some dreadful nightmare recurred to her vividly. What terrors awaited her she knew not nor could conceive. Marry that smiling demon?—for something occult told her that he was a demon. No; she was ready to die.

And but a little while ago she had been working happily in the outdoor studio; the pet leopard sprawled at her feet; from the bungalow she heard the nightingale voice of Winnie, soaring in some aria of Verdi's; her father was dozing on the veranda.

Out of that, into this! It was incredible. From time to time she brushed her forehead, bewildered.

In this mood, bordering on the hysterical (which is sometimes but a step to supreme courage), Durga Ram, so-called Umballa, and the Council found her. The face of the former was cold, his eyes steady and expressionless.

"Has your majesty decided?" asked the eldest of the Council.

"Yes," quietly.

"And your decision is?"

"No, absolutely and finally. There is no reason why I should obey any of your laws; but there is a good reason why all of you shall some day be punished for this outrage."

"Outrage! To be made queen of Allah? The spokesman for the Council stamped his foot in wrath."

"Think!" said Umballa.

"I have thought. Let us have no more of this cat-and-mouse play. I refuse to marry you. I'd much prefer any beggar in the street. There is nothing more to be said."

"There are worse things than marriage."

"What manner of indignities have you arranged for me?" Her voice was firm, but the veins in her throat beat so hard that they stifled her.

Said the spokesman of the council: "We have found a precedent. We find that one hundred and ninety years ago a like case confused the Council of that day. They finally agreed that she must submit to two ordeals with wild beasts of the jungle. If she survived she was to be permitted to rule without hindrance. It would be a matter for the gods to decide."

"Are you really human beings?" asked Kathlyn, her lips dry. "Can you possibly commit such a dreadful crime against one who has never harmed you, who asks for nothing but the freedom to leave this country?"

Pundita secretly caught Kathlyn's hand and pressed it.

"Once more!" said Umballa, his compassion touched for the first time. But he had gone too far; for the safety of his own head he must go on.

"I am ready!"

The four men saluted gravely. They turned, the flowing yellow robes of the Council fluttering in the wind, the sun lighting with green and red fires the hilt of Umballa's sword. Not one of them but would have emptied his private coffers to undo what he had done. It was too late. Already a priest had announced the ordeals to the swarming populace. You feed a tiger to pacify him; you give a populace a spectacle.

That night Umballa did not rest particularly well. But he became determined upon one thing; no actual harm should befall Kathlyn. He would have a marksman hidden nearby in both ordeals. What a woman! She was a queen, and he knew that he would go through all the hells of Hind to call her his. Long ere this he would have looted the treasure chests and swept her up on his racing elephant had he dared. Sa'adi's hour!

A thousand times he heard it through the night:

"I am ready!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Two Ordeals.

Meantime Lal Singh was hurrying on a racing camel toward the railway, toward Simla, more than a thousand miles away. He was happy. Here was the long delayed opportunity for the hand of the British raj; a captive white woman. What better excuse was needed? There would be armed Sikhs and Gorkhas and Tommies near Rawal Pindi. Ah! how time moved, how fate twisted! How the finest built castle in schemes came clattering down! At the very moment when he had secretly worked upon the king to throw himself into the protecting arms of the British raj—assassinated! The Council? The egg of Brahma was strangely hatched—this curious old world!

Ahmed remained hidden in the bazaars, to await the ordeals. Nothing should harm his mistress; he was ready now and at all times to lay down his life for her; in this the British raj came second. He had sent a courier to Bruce Sahib's bungalow, but the man had returned to report that it was still unoccupied.

And while he hid his nails in futile wrath and smoked till his tongue grew bitter, some miles away there was much confusion in the jungle by the water. Tents were being set up, native bearers and coolies were running to and fro, building fires, carrying water, hobbling the pack elephants. Wandering in and out this animated scene was a young man, clean shaven, deeply tanned, with blue eyes which were direct, small pupils, yet kindly. Presently he called to one of the headmen.

"All, you might send three or four men on to the bungalow to clean up

and ammunition the hour he starts back to camp."

"And in the meantime?"

"The sahib is free to come and go about the city so long as he does not approach the palace. If he is found in the vicinity of the zenana he will be arrested and imprisoned."

"This is all very high handed."

"Sahib, there is no British raj here. The orders of the regent and the Council are final. Submit."

"Very well."

"Ramabai!"

Ramabai stepped forward. By a kind of clairvoyance he saw what was coming.

"Ramabai, the orders are that you shall retire to your house and remain there till further orders."

"I am the queen's bodyguard."

"Ah! Well said! But I do not take my orders from the queen—yet. Obey. The sahib may accompany you if he wishes; there are no orders against that."

"We have been betrayed," said Ramabai. "I know not how."

"You were followed. A moment," said Bruce, turning to the officer. "I have a servant by the name of Rao."

"It is what they tell me, sahib. I know it not as a fact."

"The king dead, Hare dead, and his daughter on the throne! How did she get here? And what the devil is a chap to do?" Bruce stooped and recovered his pipe and swore softly. "All, if this is true, then it's some devil work; and I'll wager my shooting eye that that sleek scoundrel Umballa, as they call him, is at the bottom of it. A white woman, good old Hare's daughter. I'll look into this."

"The native who had spread this astounding news in Bruce's camp was already hastening back to the city, some 14 miles away. He had been a bhisti (water carrier) to the house of Ramabai up to the young banker's incarceration. To him, then, he carried the news that a white hunter had arrived outside the city—Bruce Sahib has returned!"

Ramabai lost no time in taking this news to Kathlyn.

"Ramabai, I have saved your life; save mine. Go at once to him and tell him that I am a prisoner but am called a queen; tell him I am Colonel Hare's daughter, she who traveled with him on the same ship from Hongkong to Singapore. Go! Tell him all, the death of my father and Umballa's treachery. Hasten!"

Bruce was eating his simple evening meal when Ramabai arrived.

"Bruce Sahib?"

"Yes, your face is familiar."

"You have been twice to my bank. I am Ramabai."

"I remember. But what are you doing here?"

"I have come for aid, sahib, aid for a young woman, white like yourself."

"Then it is true? Go ahead and let me have all the facts. She is Hare Sahib's daughter; All told me that. Precious rigamarole of some sort. The facts!"

"She is also the young lady who traveled in the same boat from Hongkong to Singapore," Ramabai paused to see the effect of this information.

Bruce lowered his fork slowly. The din about him dwindled away into nothing. He was again leaning over the rail, watching the phosphorescence trail away, a shoulder barely touching his: one of the few women who had ever stirred him after the first glance. In God's name, why hadn't she said something?

"I shall enter the city as soon as I can settle my bungalow. This rather knocks me out."

"No, sahib; don't wait; come back with me!" Quickly he outlined the desperate straits in which Kathlyn stood. "Tomorrow may be too late."

"All!" called Bruce, rising.

"Yes, sahib."

"The pasha. No questions. Give him water. Use the hunting howdah. Both guns and plenty of cartridges. That's all."

"There will be many pitfalls, sahib," said Ramabai.

"Indeed!"

"I have some influence with the populace, but Umballa has the army, paid for. The priests and the Council are back of him. And, after all, the priests are most to be feared. They can always sway the people through fear."

Bruce laughed again. "Either Kathlyn Hare will be free tomorrow or Umballa and the Council meet for the jackals . . . or I shall be," he added, in afterthought. "No, do not speak till I speak. I wish to think, for I've got to act quickly; I can't make any mistakes when I get there."

Far away a brown figure in clout and turban watched the young man. When he saw the elephant with the hunting howdah he knew that he had the information for which his master had detailed him to follow, night and day, the young banker Ramabai. The white hunter was coming hot-foot to the city. He turned and ran. Running was his business; he was as tireless as a camel and could run 20 and 30 miles at a stretch. The soles of his feet were as tough as elephant's hide. Thus he reached the city an hour before Bruce and Ramabai.

When Bruce and the native banker arrived at the gate cooled stout about with torches. Suddenly beyond the gate half a regiment drew up. The officer in charge raised his hand warningly.

"The white hunter is Bruce Sahib?"

"Yes," Bruce spoke the dialects with passable fluency.

"Good. The sahib will be pleased to dismount."

"I am on my way to the palace."

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LIVE WIRE IN GROWING TREE

Limbs Have Fastened It Securely in Place Without Causing Perceptible Damage.

New York.—Where overhead wires are run through the branches of trees, complaints from the owners of the trees that the wires are killing or injuring the trees are frequent.