THE CHARLOTTETOWN GUARDIAN

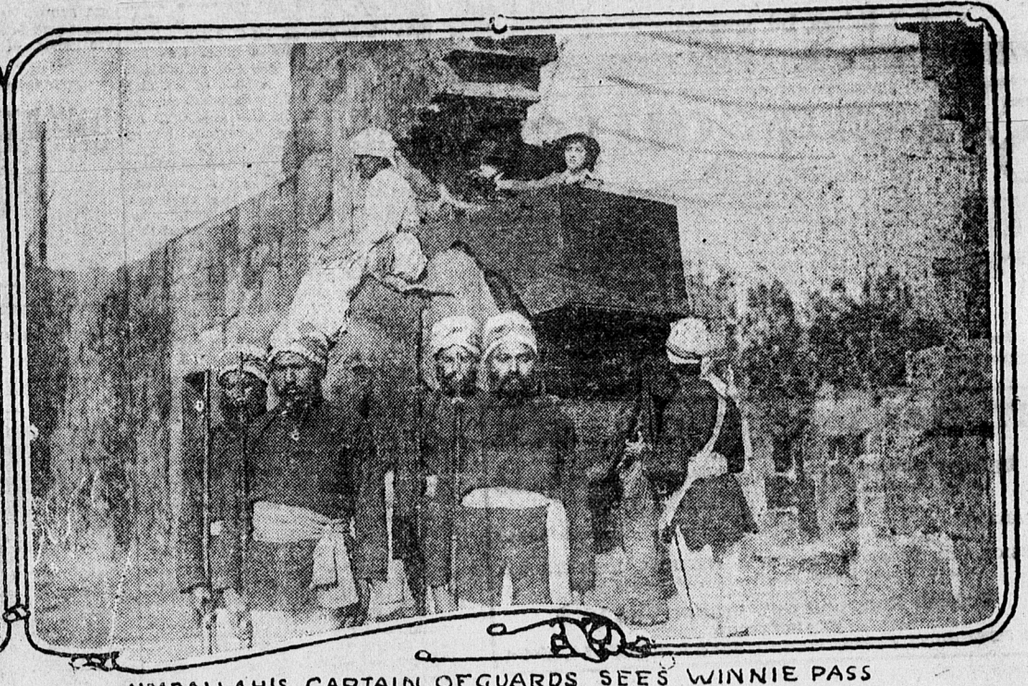
MORNING DAIYL

MORNING DAILY FOUNDED 1891 WEKLY (NOW EVENING DAILY) 1887 | "THE LATEST NEWS | CHARLOTTETOWN, CANADA, SATURDAY, AUG ST 15, 1914 | "FIRST OF ALL" | $2.50 PER YEAR (DELIVERED) IN TOWN AND 2.50 PER YEAR BY MAIL IN ADVANCE

THE ADVENTURES OF KATHLYN

By HAROLD MacGRATH

KATHLYN AND HER FATHER WERE FORCED TO WITNESS THE EVENT, DRESSED IN NATIVE COSTUME, THEIR FACES STAINED; AND THEIR HEARTS SWELLING WITH IMPOTENT ANGER AND DESPAIR.



UMBALLAH'S CAPTAIN OF GUARDS SEES WINNIE PASS THROUGH THE GATE TO THE CITY OF ALLAHA.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Kathlyn Hare, believing her father Co . Hare, in peril has summoned her leaves her home in California to go to him in Allaha, India. Umballah pretender to the throne of that principality, has imprisoned the colonel, named by the late king as his heir, because he fears the American may insist on his royal rights. Upon her arrival in Allaha, Kathlyn is informed by Umballah that her father being dead, she is to be queen, and must marry him forthwith. Because of her refusal she is sentenced to undergo two ordeals with wild beasts.

John Bruce, an American and fellow passenger on the boat which brought Kathlyn to Allaha, saves her life. The elephant which carries her from the scene of her trials becomes frightened and runs away, separating her from Bruce and the rest of the party

After a ride filled with peril she takes refuge in a ruined temple. The holy men and villagers, believing her to be an ancient priestess, risen from the tomb, allow her to remain as the guardian of the sacred fire. But Kathlyn's haven is also the abode of a lion, and she is forced to flee from it, with the savage beast in pursuit. She escapes and finds a retreat in the jungle, only to fall into the hands of a band of slave traders, who bring her to Allaha to the public mart. She is sold to Umballah, who, finding her still unsubmissive, throws her into the dungeon with her father.

Bruce and his friends effect the release of Kathlyn and the colonel. Umballah's attempt to recapture them is unsuccessful, and the fugitives are given shelter in the palace of Bala Khan.

Supplied with camels and servants by that hospitable prince, they start on their journey to the coast. The party is overpowered and taken in custody by brigands. The leader, recognizing the colonel, dispatches Ramabai and Pundita to Allaha for ransom for the white king, his daughter, and Bruce. Umballah journeys to the lair of the bandits. The colonel is delivered to him and he orders that Kathlyn and Bruce be killed.

But the brigands quarrel over the division of the money which Umballah has paid to obtain possession of the colonel, and during the confusion the prisoners escape and return to Allaha. Kathlyn, Bruce and Ramabai concoct a plan to get the colonel out of Umballah's clutches.

During the ceremony of betrothal the leopards which guard the treasury become free and enter the throne room, throwing the entire court into a wild panic. This makes it possible for Bruce and Ramabai to rescue Kathlyn and her father, and the party steals away from Allaha.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE CORONATION OF WINNIE.

With the assistance of the shepherd Kathlyn went down the rope agilely and safely. Once firmly on her feet, she turned to thank the wild eyed hillman. But her best Hindustani (and she was able to speak and understand quite a little by now) fell on ears with head but did not sense what she said. The man, mild and harmless enough, for all his wild eyes, shrank back, no woman of his kind had ever looked like this. Kathlyn, with a deal of foreboding, repeated the phrase, and asked the way back to the hunters rest house. He shook his head; he understood nothing.

But there is one language which is universal the world over, and that is sign language. Kathlyn quickly stooped and drew in the dust the shape of the red house. Then she pointed in the direction from whence she had come. He smiled and nodded excitedly. He understood now. Next, being unarmed, she felt the need of some sort of weapon. So she drew the shape of a rifle in the dust, then produced four rupees, all she had the shepherd gurgled delightedly, ran into the hut, and returned with a rifle of modern make and a belt of cartridges. With a gesture he signified that it was useless to him because he did not know how to use it.

So took the rupees and Kathlyn took the rifle, vaguely wondering how it came into the possession of this poverty stricken hillman. Of one thing she was certain; it had become his either through violence of his own or of others. She examined the breech and found a dead shell, which she cast out. The rifle carried six cartridges, and she loaded skillfully, much to the astonishment of the hillman. Then she swung the butt to her shoulder and fired up at the ledge where the panthers had last been seen.

The hillman cried out in alarm and scutted away to his hut. When he peered forth again Kathlyn made a friendly gesture, and he approached timidly. One more she pointed to the dust, at the picture of the red house; and then by many stabs of his finger in the air, he succeeded in making the way back sufficiently clear to Kathlyn, who smiled, shouldered the rifle, and strode confidently down the winding path; but also she was alert and watchful.

There was not a bit of rust on the rifle, and the fact that one bullet had sped smoothly convinced her that the weapon was serviceable. Some careful hunter had once possessed it, for it was abundantly oiled. To whom had it belonged? It was of German make, but that signified nothing. It might have belonged to an Englishman, a French man, or a Russian; more likely the latter, since this was one of the localities where they crossed and crossed with their note books to be utilized against that day when the Bear dropped down from the north and tackled the Lion.

Kathlyn had to go down to the very bottom of the ravine. She must follow the goat path, no matter where it wound, for this ultimately would lead her to the rest house. As she started up the final incline, through the cedars and pines, she heard the bark of the wolf, the red wolf who hunted in packs of twenty and thirty, in reality far more menacing than a tiger or a panther, since no hunter could kill a whole pack.

To this wolf, when hunting his kill the tiger gave wide berth; the bear took to his cave, and all fleet flooted things of the jungles fled in panic.

Kathlyn climbed as rapidly as she could. She dared not mount a tree, for the red wolfe would outwit her. She must go on. The bark, or yelp, had been a signal; but now there came to her ears the long howl. She had heard it often in the great forest at home. It was the call of the pack that there was to be a kill. She might shoot half a dozen of them, and the dying rend the dead but the main pack would follow on and over take her.

She swung on upward, catching a sapling here, a limb there, pulled herself over hard bits of going. Once the direction of the howling. Faraway came the roar of one of the mountaine lions; and the pack of red wolves became suddenly and magically silent Kathlyn made good use of this interval. But presently the pack raised its howl again, and she knew that the grim struggle was about to begin.

She reached the door of the rest house just as the pack, a large one, came into view heads down, tails streaming, Pundita, who was at the fire preparing the noon meal, seized Kathlyn by the arm and hurried her into the house barricading the door. The wolves, arriving, flung themselves against it savagely. But the door was shut, and only a battering ram in human hands could have made it yield.

Unfortunately, there was no knowing when the men folk would return from their chase of the horses, nor how long the wolves would lay siege. The two women tried shooting though Pundita was the veriest tyro, being more frightened at the weapon in her hands, than at the howling animals outside. They did little or no damage to the wolves for the available cracks were not at sufficiently good angles. An hour went by. Kathlyn could hear the wolves as they crowded against the door, sniffling the sill.

The Colonel, Bruce, Ramabai, and Ahmed had found the horses half a dozen miles away; and they had thrashed the thieving natives soundly and instilled the right kind of fear in their breasts. At rifle point they had forced the natives back to the rest house. The crack of their rifles soon announced to Kathlyn that the dread of wolves was a thing of the past. She wisely refrained from recounting her experiences. The men had worry enough.

After a hasty meal the journey toward the sea-port began in earnest. Umballah's attack had thrown them far out of the regular track. They were now compelled to make the wide detour. Where the journey might have been made in three days, they would be lucky now if they reached the sea under five. The men took turns in standing watch whenever they made camp, and Kathlyn nor Pundita had time for idleness. They had learned their lessons; no more carelessness, nothing but the sharpest viligance from now on.

One day, as the pony caravan made a turn round a ragged promontory, they suddenly paused. Perhaps twenty miles to the west lay the emerald tinted Persian gulf. The Colonel slipped off his horse, dragged Kathlyn from hers, and began to execute a hornpipe. He was like a boy.

"The sea, Kit, the sea! Home and Winnie out of this devil's caldron. You will come along with us, Bruce?"

"I haven't anything else to do," Bruce smiled back.

Then he gazed at Kathlyn, who found herself suddenly filled with strange embarrassment. In times of danger, sham and subterfuge have no place. Heretofore she had met Bruce as a man, to whom a glance from her eyes had told her secret. Now that the door to civilization lay but a few miles away, the old conventions dropped their obscuring mantles over her, and she felt ashamed. And there was not a little doubt. Perhaps she had mistaken the look in his eyes, back there in the desert, back in the first day when they had fled together from the ordeals. And yet. . . .

On his part, Bruce did not particularly welcome the sea. There might be another man somewhere. No woman so beautiful as Kathlyn could possibly be without suitors. And when the journey down to the sea was resumed he became taciturn and moody, and Kathlyn's heart correspondingly heavy.

The Colonel was quite oblivious to this change. He swung his legs free of the primitive stirrups and whistled the airs which had been popular in America at the time of his departure.

There was no lightness in the expression of Ramabai and Pundita. They were about to lose these white people forever, and they had grown to love, nay, worship them. More, they must return to face they knew not what.

As for Ahmed, he displayed his orientalism by appearing unconcerned. He had made up his mind not to return to America with his master. There was much to do in Allaha, and the spirit of intrigue had laid firm hold of him. He wanted to be near at hand when Ramabai struck his blow. He would break the news to the Colonel Sahib before they sailed.

It was 4 o'clock when the caravan entered the little seaport town. A few tramp steamers lay anchored in the offing. A British flag drooped from the stern of one of them. This meant Bombay; and Bombay, in turn, meant Suez, the Mediterranean, and the broad Atlantic.

The air was still and hot, for the Indian summer was now beginning to lay its burning hand upon this great peninsula. The pale dust, the white stucco of the buildings, blinded the eye.

They proceeded at once to the single hotel, where they found plenty of accomodation. Then the Colonel hurried off to the cable office and wired Winnie. Next he ascertained that the British ship Simla would weigh anchor the following evening for Bombay; that there they would pick up the Delhi, bound for England. There was nothing further to do but wait for the answer to the Colonel's cable to Winnie, which would arrive somewhere about noon of the next day.

And that answer struck the hearts of all of them with the coldness of death. Umballah had beaten them. Winnie had sailed weeks ago for Allaha, in search of father and sister.

Ahmed spat out his betel nut and squared his shoulders. Somehow he had rather expected something like this. The reason for Umballah's half hearted pursuit stood forth clearly.

"Sahib! it is fate," he said. "We must return at once to Allaha. Truly, the curse of that old guru sticks like the blood leeches of the Bengal swamps. But as you have faith in your guru, I have faith in mine. Not a hair of our heads shall be harmed.'

"I am a very miserable man, Ahmed! God has forsaken me!" The Colonel spoke with stoic calm; he was more like the man Ahmed had formerly known."

"Don't you want me?" asked Bruce quietly.

Kathlyn had gone to her room to hide her tears.

"Want you! But no!" The Colonel wrung the young man's hand and turned to go back to Kathlyn.

"Wait a moment, Colonel. Supposing I wanted to go, what then? Supposing I should say to you what I dare not yet say to your daughter, that I love her better than anything else in all this wide world: that it will be happiness to follow wherever she goes. . . even unto death?"

The Colonel wheeled. "Bruce do you mean that?"

"With all my heart, sir. But please say nothing to Kathlyn till this affair ends, one way or the other. She might be stirred by a sense of gratitude, and later regret it. When we get out of this—and I rather believe in the prophecy of Ahmed's guru or fakir—then I'll speak. I have always been rather a lonely man. There's been no real good reason. I have always desired to be loved for my own sake, and not for the money I have."

"Money?" repeated the Colonel. Never had he in any way associated this healthy young hunter with money. Did he not make a business of trapping and selling wild animals, like himself? "Money! I did not know that you had any, Bruce."

"What! The man who owned nearly all of Peru and half the railroads in South America?"

"Yes. You see, Colonel, we are something alike. We never ask questions. It would have been far better if we had. Because I did not question Katalyn when I first met her, I feel half to blame for her misfortunes. I should have told her all about Allaha and warned her to keep out of it. I should have advised her to send native investigators, she to remain in Peshawur till she learned the truth. But the name Hare suggested nothing to me, not till after I had left her at Singapore. So I shall go back with you. But please let Kathlyn think of me as a man who earns his own living."

"God bless you, my boy! You have put a new backbone in me. It's hard not to have a white man to talk to, to live with. Ahmed expects that we shall be ready for the return in the morning. He, however, intends to go back on a racing camel, to go straight to my bungalow, if it isn't destroyed by this time. Perhaps Winnie has not arrived there yet. I trust Ahmed."

"So do I. I have known him for a long time—that is, I thought I did—and during the last few weeks he has been a revelation. Think of his being your headman all these years, and yet steadily working for his Raj, the British Raj!"

"They can keep secrets."

"Well, we have this satisfaction; when Pundita rules it will be under the protecting hand of England. Now let us try to look at the cheerful side of the business. Think of what that girl has gone through with scarcely a scratch! Can't you read something in that? See how strong and self-reliant she has become under such misfortunes as would have driven mad any ordinary woman! Can't you see light in all this? I tell you, there is good and evil working for and against us, and that Ahmeds fakir will in the end prove stronger than your bally old guru. When I am out of the orient I laugh at such things, but I can't laugh at them somehow when I'm in India."

"Nor I."

That night Kathlyn signified that she wished to go down to the beach beyond the harbor basin. Bruce accompanied her. Often he caught her staring out at the twinkling lights on board the Simla. By and by they could hear the windlass creacking. A volume of black smoke suddenly poured out to sea.

"Why do you risk your life for us?" she asked suddenly.

"Adventure is meat and drink to me, Miss Hare.."

The prefix sounded strange and unfamiliar in her ears. Formality. She had been wrong, then; only comradeship and the masculine sense of responsibility. Her heart was like lead.

"It is very kind and brave of you, Mr. Bruce, but I will not have it."

"Have what?" he asked knowing full well what she meant.

"This going back with us. Why should you risk your life for people who are almost strangers?"

"Strangers?" He laughed softly. "Has it never occurred to you that the people we grow up with are never really our friends; that real friendship comes only with maturity of the mind? Why, the best man friend I have in this world is a young chap I met but three years ago. It is not the knowing people that makes friendships. It is the sharing of dangers of bread in the wilderness; of getting a glimpse of the soul which lies beneath the conventions of the social pact. Would you call me a stranger?"

"O, no!" she cried swiftly. "It is merely that I do not want you to risk your life any further for me. Is there no way I can dissuade you?"

"None that I can think of. I am going back with you. That's settled. Now let us talk of something else. Don't you really want me to go?"

"Ah, that isn't fair," looking out to sea again and following the lights aboard the Simla.

It was mighty hard for him not to sweep her his arms then and there. But he would never be sure of her ill she was free of this country, free of the sense of gratitude, free to weight her sentiments carefully and unbiasedly. He sat down abruptly on the wreck of an ancient hull embedded in the sand. She sank down a little way from him.

He began to tell her some of his past exploits; the Amazon, the Orinoco, the Andes, Tibet and China; of the strange flotsam he had met in his travels. But she sensed only the sound of his voice and the desire to reach out her hand and touch his. Friendship! Bread on the wilderness!

* * *

Ahmed was lean and deceptive to the eye. Like many Hindus, he appeared anemic; and yet the burdens the man could put on his back and carry almost indefinitely would have killed many a white man who boasted of his strength. On half a loaf of black bread and a soldier's canteen of water he could travel for two days. He could go without sleep for forty-eight hours, and when he slept he could sleep anywhere on the moment.

Filling his saddle bags with three day's rations, two canteens of water he set off on a dhagin, or racing camel, for Allaha, 300 miles inland as the crow flies. It was his intention to ride straight down to the desert and across this to Col. Hare's camp, if such a thing now existed. A dromedary in good condition can make from sixty to eighty miles a day; and the beast Ahmed had engaged was of Arab blood. In four days he expected to reach the camp. If Winnie had not yet arrived, he would take the road, meet her, warn her of the dangers which she was about to face, and convey her to the seaport. If it was too late he would send the camel back with a trusted messanger to the Colonel, to advise him.

They watched him depart in a cloud of dust, and then played the most enervating game in existence—that of waiting; for they had decided to wait till they heard from Ahmed before they moved.

Four nights later, when Ahmed arrived at the bungalow, he found conditions as usual. For reasons best known to himself Umballah had not disturbed anything. In fact, he had always had the coming of the younger sister in mind and left the bungalow and camp untouched, so as not to alarm her.

She had not yet arrived. So Ahmed flung himself down upon his cotton sug, telling the keepers not to disturb him; he would be able to wake himself when the time came. But Ahmed had overrated his powers; he was getting along in years; and it was noon of the next day when a hand shook him by the shoulder and he awoke to witness the arrival of Winnie and her woman companion.

For the first time in many years Ahmed cursed his prophet. He that had had time to warn the child had slept like the sloth of Ceylon!

He went directly to the point. He told her briefly what had happened. He had not the least doubt that Umballah was already aware of her arrival. She must remain hidden in the go-down of the bungalow; her maid also. That night, if Umballah or his men failed to appear, he would lead her off to safety. But there was no hope of stealing away in the daytime. In his heart, however, he entertained no hope; and like the good general he was, he despatched the messenger and camel to the sea. The father and daughter were fated to return.

Ahmed had reckoned shrewdly. Umballah appeared later in the day and demanded the daughter of Col. Hare. Backed as he was by numerous soldiers, Ahmed resigned himself to the inevitable. They found Winnie and her maid (whom later they sent to the frontier and abandoned) and took them to the palace.

There was no weeping or wailing or struggling. The dark, proud face of the young girl gave forth no sign of the terror and utter lonliness of her position. And Umballah realized that it was in the blood of these children to be brave and quiet. There was no mercy in his heart. He was power mad, and gold mad, and his enemies lived because he could reach neither of his desires over their dead bodies.

The rigmarole and mummery Winnie went through affected her exactly as it had affected her sister. It was all a hideous nightmare, and at any moment she expected to wake up in her cozy corner at Edendale.

In the bazars they began to laugh at Umballah and his coronations, or durbars. They began to jest at his futile efforts to crown some one through whom he could put his greedy hand into the treasury. Still, they found plenty of amusement and excitement. And so they filled the square in front of the platform when Umballah put the crown on Winnie's head. How long would this queen last?

And Kathlyn, her father, and Bruce were forced to witness the event from behind the cordon of guards, dressed in native costume, their faces stained, and their hearts swelling with impotent anger and despair. For it was in such guise they had returned to Allaha.

During a lull in the ceremonies a resonant voice from out of the dense throng cried, "Give us a queen of our blood and race, thou black, gutter born dog!"

Ramabai started at the sound of that voice, but caught himself before he looked in the direction from whence it rose. It belonged to one Lal Singh.

Umballah scowled, but gave no other sign that he heard. But a guard dove into the crowd; uselessly, however.

Kathlyn touched Ramabai's arm. "O, I must speak to her!"

"Be careful, Memsahib!" he warned.

But even as she spoke she stepped past him, toward her beloved sister, and offered the flowers she held.

Winnie, not dreaming that this dark veiled creature was her sister, smelled the flowers and beheld a card which had written on it—English!

"Courage! Father and I have a plan for your escape. Kathlyn."

(Continued next Saturday.)

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