

either that I have found him or that I have given up all hope and have abandoned my efforts."

The next morning a lad brought Dick a message from Pertaub that he had fulfilled all his commissions, and on the following morning Annie Mansfield again came to Dick's room.

"Everything is going on well, Annie," Dick said, as he shook hands with her. "The horses have been bought. There is your disguise in that corner, and we can start any moment at a quarter of an hour's notice. Now I want you to tell me how you came to be brought up here."

"I have not much to tell," she said. "You see, I was only six years old. I can remember there was a great deal of firing of guns, and that lasted for a long time; then the firing stopped. I suppose the place surrendered."

"Do you know what place it was, Annie?"

She shook her head. "I do not know at all. I suppose I did know then, but I do not remember ever to have heard the name. I remember quite well that there were soldiers, and father and mother, and servants, and many other people, and every one was very miserable, and we all went together out of a gate, and on each side there were a great many natives with guns and swords, some on horse and some on foot; and there were elephants. I don't think I had ever seen one before, for I noticed them particularly. We went on and on, and I know one of the soldiers carried me. At night we stopped somewhere. I think it was in a wood, and there were fires, and we lay down to sleep on the ground. Then I woke up suddenly, and there was a great noise and firing of guns, and some one caught me up and threw something over my head, and I don't remember anything more for a long time. I know that presently I was on horseback before a fierce-looking man. There were a good many of them, and when I cried for my father and mother they said they would cut off my head if I were not quiet.

"I do not know how long we were travelling, but after the first day there was only the man who carried me and another. I was brought here, and there were many people, and I was very much frightened. Then I found myself only among women, and they took off my clothes and dressed me in their fashion. I think I was very happy when I once got accustomed to it. The ladies made a sort of pet of me, and I was taught to dance and to sing little native songs. There were other white girls here, and they were all very kind to me, though they always seemed very sad, and I could not make out why they cried so often, especially when they were beaten for crying. As I grew bigger I was not so happy. I had ceased to be a plaything, and little by little I was set to work to sweep and dust, and then to sew, and then to do all sorts of work, like the other slave-girls. The other white girls gradually went away, the oldest first. The last two, who were two or three years older than I was, went about three years ago.

"At first I used to wonder why they cried so when they went, and why the others all cried too; but by the time the last two left I had come to know all about it, and knew that they had been given by the sultan to his favourite officers. There were many white men here when I first came. When I went out with one of the slaves into the town I saw them often. Sometimes they would burst into tears when they saw me. Then I used to wonder why, but I know now that I must have reminded them of girls of their own, whom they would never see again. Then, till three years ago, there were about twenty white boys who had been taught to dance and sing, and who used to come sometimes, dressed up like women, to amuse the ladies of the harem; but I heard that they were all killed when the sultan first thought that the English might come here. One of the slave-girls told me that it was done because the sultan had often sworn to the English that there were no white captives here, and so he did not wish that any

should be found if they came. I don't think that I have anything else to tell you."

"Well, I hope that what you have told me will be enough to enable us some day to find out who you belong to. Evidently you were in some place that was besieged eight years ago, and had to surrender. The garrison were promised their lives and liberty to depart. They were attacked at night by an armed party, who may have been Hyder's horsemen, but who were perhaps merely a party of mounted robbers, who thought that they might be able to take some loot. Most likely they were defeated, especially as you saw no other captives in the party, but in the confusion of the night attack, one of them probably came upon you, and carried you off, thinking you would be an acceptable present here, and that he would get a reward for you from the sultan. Are you not noticed when you go into the streets on errands?"

"No; I always go veiled. Except the slaves who are old and ugly, all the others wear veils when they go outside the Palace, and we all wear a red scarf, which shows we are servants in the harem; and so, even when the town is full of rough soldiers, no one ventures to speak to us. Now tell me, Dick—you see I have not forgotten—all about how you came to be here."

Dick told her briefly how he had come out with his mother; and how, finding war had broken out, he had joined the army; and how, at the end of the war, having been able to learn nothing about his father, he had come up with Surajah to search for him.

"And then you saw that tiger break in," the girl said eagerly; "that was dreadful. I will tell you how it was the tiger came to seize me. I was standing behind a lady, and could not see anything. Suddenly they all began screaming, and ran, some to one side some to the other, of the window, and I, who could not think what was the matter, remained where I was, when there was a great cry, and before I had

time to move, or even to wonder, some great thing knocked me down. It was only from the screams of the ladies, and their cries of 'Tiger!' that I knew what had happened. I felt something heavy standing on me—so heavy that I could hardly breathe; and indeed, I did not try to breathe, for I knew many stories of tigers, and had heard that sometimes, when a man shams being dead, the tiger will walk away and kill some one else.

"The tiger was keeping up an angry growl, and I felt that unless it took its paw off me I should soon die, when I heard a shot, and a fierce growl from the tiger, and then the weight was gone, and I think I fainted. When I came round I was lying where I fell, for many of the ladies were insensible, and every one was too busy with them to think anything of me. When I got up, one of the other slave-girls who had been brave enough to look out of the window, told me that it had been killed by two young men, one of whom must have been the one who had fired the shot in at the window. I went and looked out, and saw it lying there. After that every one talked, and laughed, and cried, and then the sultan's chief wife said that every one must make a present to the young men who had saved us, and that each one ought to give one of her best jewels. Of course every one did. I had nothing to give except a little cross of gold filigree work that hung round my neck when I was carried off; it had been hidden by my dress; the men had not noticed it, and they had not taken it away when I was brought here. It was such a poor little gift, but it was all I had."

"I noticed it Annie," Dick said; "there was a little flat plate behind it with the letters 'A. M.,' and I thought then that it must be some little ornament taken from one of the Englishwomen Hyder's troops killed. It is fortunate you kept it, for it may be useful some day in proving that you are Annie Mansfield."

"Now I must be going," she said. "I was slapped and

pinched last time for being so long, but I have several things to get to-day, so that if I hurry I can be back again as soon as they expect me. You have not settled when you are going yet?"

"No; but we rather think of going the day after to-morrow. It will be better to do so before Tippoo comes back, for we might be ordered away so quickly as to have no time to make arrangements; besides, there will be ten times as many people about in the Palace, and more guards at the entrances when he returns. So, altogether, it will be better to go before he does so. If we settle it so, I will come along past your door to-morrow evening; and if I say, 'To-morrow morning,' get here as soon as you can in the morning, and directly you have stained your skin and put on your disguise, we will start. My servant, who is going with us, will act as your guide, and will take you to the place where the horses are, and where we shall join you almost as soon as you get there."

At the appointed time next evening Dick told Annie that they should start in the morning. He and Surajah then went down and said good-bye to Pertaub, and Dick gave him a letter to his aunt, to give to her should he ever go to Tripataly with his daughter.

"It may be," he said, "that neither Surajah nor I may be there, but I shall speak to her about you, and of course tell her how much you have done for us; so you may be sure of the heartiest welcome from her."

"And you will also find a hearty friend in my father, Rajbullub," Surajah said. "He is principal officer in the Rajah's household, and will treat you as a brother, and your daughter as if she were my sister."

Then they returned to the Palace, where they had a final talk over the route that it would be best to pursue.

The nearest point to the new frontier was the territory ceded to the English on the Malabar coast. But this would entail a long sea voyage, and they therefore determined to

make for Caveripatam, going by the road that led through Anicull, and then through Ryacotta, which stood just outside the line of territory ceded to England, and from whence a road led direct down the passes. Anicull lay nearly due south of Bangalore, but the road they would follow would not be the one by which Tippoo would return, as he would come by the main road, which ran in a direct line between the two cities.

Ibrahim was informed of their plans, and was told to warn the syce to get their horses saddled and in readiness at eight o'clock, and that, as they were going for a long day's ride, he would not be required to accompany them—as he always did when they rode only into the town, for then he might be wanted to hold the horses if they dismounted and went into a shop.

He was also to give notice in the kitchen that they would not return to the mid-day meal, and that dishes for them would therefore not be required. Thus it would be unlikely that any suspicion would be aroused by their absence until they had been gone twenty-four hours, by which time they would be more than half-way to the frontier.

They went to bed at their usual time, and slept soundly, for it seemed to them both that there was practically no risk whatever to be run, and that they would be across the frontier before any active search was made for them. Even when it was discovered that they had left the Palace, it would be thought that they had received some order from Bangalore, either to join the sultan, or to go on some mission for him that had occupied more time than they had anticipated on starting. The idea that two officers, who were considered to stand high in Tippoo's favour, should desert, would scarcely occur to any one.

In the morning they were up early, completed their slight preparations, and took their early breakfast, reserving a portion for Annie, who, they thought, would not improbably have eaten nothing before coming to them.

She was a quarter of an hour late in arriving, and looked somewhat pale and flurried.

"They did not send me out this morning," she said, "and so I had to stay until I could slip out without being noticed; but they may miss me at any moment."

"That will be all right," Dick said confidently. "They will search all the rooms in the harem for you first, and certainly won't look for you outside until there has been a lot of talk over your absence. But even if they do search, you will be able in a few minutes to walk through the middle of them without being suspected. However, we will lose no time; and to begin with I will cut off what hair is necessary. I shall do it a good deal quicker than you would. Then we will leave you to yourself, to stain your skin and put on your disguise. When you have finished, clap your hands. Ibrahim will come in and see that your disguise is all right, and that your turban covers your hair; then he will go with you. We shall be waiting near the gate; there is practically no chance of your being asked any questions, but if you are, and there is any difficulty, we will pass you through all right. Having seen you on your way, we shall mount and follow you."

The operation of cutting off Annie's hair to the line of her ears was speedily done; then, with a few reassuring words, Dick joined Surajah in the corridor. As they walked down it he said,—

"I don't like leaving them to themselves. Look here, Surajah, you go down to the stable and mount at once; tell the syce I shall come for my horse in a few minutes, then ride out and take your post where you can see them come out of the gate, and then follow them closely. I will stay here and see them safely through the gate, and then mount and follow you. I shall overtake you before you get to the ford."

"That will perhaps be safest," Surajah agreed, "though I should think there is no chance of her being suspected, seeing that she will be with Ibrahim. Even if they met one of the

Palace officers, and he asked Ibrahim who he had with him, he could say it was a lad who had come to you respecting some horses you had bought."

"Yes, that would do very well."

Dick returned to Ibrahim, who was squatting down in the corridor near the door.

"I am going to follow you until you are through the gate, and shall keep a short distance behind you. If you should meet any officer on your way out, who may ask you who you have with you, say he has come with a message to me from a trader in the town. By the time you have told him that, I shall be up."

"There is no chance of being questioned, my lord; people come and go all day."

"That is so, Ibrahim, but one cannot be too careful."

They stood talking together until they heard Annie clap her hands within. Ibrahim entered at once, and in two or three minutes came out again with the girl. Ibrahim carried a bundle.

"You will do very well," Dick said to Annie. "I should not know you in the least; you make a capital boy. What bundle is that, Ibrahim? I thought you took our other disguises on yesterday to the stable where the horses are."

"Yes, my lord, I took them on; these are the things she has taken off. I thought perhaps it would be better not to leave them here, as, if they were found, it would be known that she had gone with you."

"I don't think it makes much difference, Ibrahim, but perhaps it is as well to bring them away; we can leave the bundle in the wood. Now go along; I will follow. Perhaps I had better go first; keep a few paces behind me."

They passed through the long passages of the Palace without attracting the slightest attention. Once or twice Dick paused to speak to some officials of his acquaintance, the others stopping respectfully a few paces away; then he went

out into the courtyard and across to the gate, and as the sentries saluted he stopped and asked them a few questions as to the regiment they belonged to, until Ibrahim and his companion, who had passed straight through, were well away. He saw Surajah sitting upon his horse a couple of hundred yards away, and then went to the stables.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE JOURNEY

THE syce brought out his horse as soon as he saw Dick approaching.

"You need not wait up for us after nine o'clock," Dick said, as he mounted. "It is possible that we may be detained and shall not return until to-morrow evening. If we come we shall certainly be back by nine at the latest, and we shall not be back before seven at any rate, so that until then you are free to do as you like."

He rode quietly off, and did not quicken his pace until he had got beyond the fort; then he touched the horse with his heel and cantered down to the ford. Surajah was half-way across the river when he reached it; the other two figures were just ascending the road up the other bank. Surajah checked his horse when he got across, and waited till Dick joined him.

"Shall we go on with them to the farmhouse?" he asked.

"We may as well do so as halt in the road; besides, there are the things Ibrahim took over yesterday, to put into our saddlebags. There is another thing that I never thought of. Of course, the girl has never been on a horse, and that may give us a good deal of trouble. I wonder I did not think of it, though if I had I don't see that anything else could have been done. We must see how she gets on, and if she cannot manage

I must take her before me whenever we see that the road is clear for a good distance ahead. Of course it does not matter about country people, but if we see a body of troops coming in the distance she must mount her own horse again, and follow us at a walk. If we find that things don't go well, we must halt in a wood somewhere and ride only by night."

They cantered on now and overtook the others just as they reached the farmhouse. The farmer was at his door, and looked a little surprised at seeing two of the officers of the Palace come up; he salaamed deeply.

"We have not come to requisition anything," Dick said, with a smile, as he saw that the farmer looked alarmed as well as surprised. "We have only come for the two horses that we have bought for our servants, as we are going on a journey."

"Can I assist you in any way, my lords?"

"No, our men will saddle the horses," Dick said, and, dismounting, went into the stable with Ibrahim and Annie.

"You are not afraid of riding I hope, Annie?" he said.

"I am not afraid of anything, Dick, so that I can but get away."

"We will go quietly at first, anyhow. Mind, as you mount put your left foot in the stirrup. When you are seated, carry yourself as easily as you can. The pony looks quiet enough, but if, when we get fairly off, you find that you cannot sit comfortably, you must get up before me, and Ibrahim must lead your pony. When we are fairly on the road I will fasten a bit of rope to your bridle to act as a leading-rein, and you can ride by my side, unless we see people coming along; then you must drop behind with Ibrahim."

"I won't give more trouble than I can help," she said.

Ibrahim had taken some rugs over with him on the previous afternoon, which had been bought in case they should sleep out at night. When the horses were saddled Dick rolled two of these up, strapped one on the high peak and the other on the cantle of the saddle upon which the girl was to ride.