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## The Memsahib

By ANTHONY HAMILTON

An up-country bungalow in India, at night. The stillness broken by the croaking of frogs, the hum of mosquitoes, and the whining bark of pariah dogs. Occasionally also the tinkle of ice against a glass when Ransome sipped a peg.

"Hama! ha-ma!" he called presently, quietly putting his glass down as he listened for the answer. "Sahib?" quickly came the answer from the servants' quarters, followed by the shuffling of bare feet on the matting. Then a tinkling of beads as the door clicked waiting, and the hama! stood waiting.

"Where's the khitmatgar?"

"Fetching his honor's letters." Ransome lit another cheroot, and settled himself more comfortably on his long-armed veranda chair. He found his thoughts a jumble of blue eyes, official reports, rustling of skirts, and his balance at Watson's. He was engineer in charge of the building of a big bridge. He had been in India some years, and the novelty of sightseeing and shooting had worn off. He had plenty of work to fill up time, but for some months past he had felt something lacking. This feeling had become more and more troublesome to him, and he was unable to understand it.

One evening, however, he went to dine with the new policeman and his wife. They proved to be very jolly people, and before he had been with them half an hour he discovered the secret of his restlessness. He wanted a wife—to return to his bungalow to see a woman smiling at him, to hear the swish of skirts, to be the "lord" of a woman. The fascination of this thought had grown upon him so strongly that he determined to write to a certain Miss Jeffreys in England.

The bead chicks were again brushed aside. He turned quickly and saw the khitmatgar salaaming.

"Five letters and one packet for your honor." As he took these Ransome trembled and breathed hard. The chicks rattled, and he was alone. He turned the letters over quickly, found what must be the one, and looked at it so long that the address seemed to fade and become a picture of a face looking at him. The writing came slowly back; he shifted his chair and ripped the letter open. He had to read it twice before he realized that she said she would come out to him in the cold weather; meanwhile she sent him some photographs to go on with. The packet was quickly opened, and six photographs lay gleaming up at him in the lamplight. His eyes fell on her cheeks, her beautiful neck and shoulders.

"Good Lord!" he whispered to himself at last, with a catch in his breath. "What a wonderful thing a woman is! I was awfully in love with her at home, and now she's coming all those thousands of miles to marry me! I can hardly realize it."

A sound made him start and look round. He shuffled the photographs under their wrapper just as a voice hailed him from the garden.

"Hallo, Ransome," said the station doctor, as he came up into the veranda. "Thought I'd come in for a cup."

"Hallo, doc," said Ransome, shoving the letter hastily into one of his pockets. "Glad to see you. Got your mail?"

"Yes, thanks. But I don't hanker after mine like some men. Poor Benedicks, for instance, or engaged men. Marriage doesn't appeal to me."

"How's that?" asked Ransome, feeling a sort of pity for such a man.

"Oh, I don't believe much in women," said the doctor, with a short laugh of disgust. "Awful nice to speak to, and all that, of course; but, no, thanks. After marriage all the woman wants is to splash, try to outdo all the other women in the station, and keep on going home and coming again."

"They aren't all like that," said Ransome, feeling a little uncomfortable.

"If they aren't to start with," answered the doctor, pitching his cheroot end forcibly over the veranda. "I give them a year of Indian life to become full-blown."

"Well, I hope it won't happen in my case," said Ransome, laughing. "I'm going to be married soon."

"H'm!" said the doctor. They sat silent for some time, and the unearthly yelling of a jackal rang through the night, and brought on a chorus of yelps from pariah dogs.

After Ransome had tucked himself in under the mosquito net, and lay thinking, with his head on his arms, the doctor's pessimism troubled him.

"Bah!" he muttered finally, as he turned over. "He has had a backhand from some woman, perhaps, poor chap!"

At the club he was questioned, or congratulated. Some of them were very eager and inquisitive, asking if she was tall or fair; when she was coming out; if they would be married at the station. One woman buttonholed him, and got his promise to buy some of her things. She was going home for a year, "and those nasty pariahs cheat so, and it costs so much palisa to store everything, and thank you so much." He recollected immediately afterward that she had shabbled bits of furniture.

For weeks Ransome's veranda was

invaded by relays of borahs spreading their goods out, with deft fingers, best silver things, the best silk work, and gently unfolding silks, purdahs, and phulkaris in a persuasive manner. He became immensely interested in buying, and chose the carved woods, brasses, and ivory. The borahs found him strangely easy about price.

At last the day came when Ransome took the train for Bombay. He had already arranged for the wife of the collector to bring his fiancée out from England, and for them to be married from her bungalow.

In the hot, tiring train journey, the quick beating of the wheels on the rail joints seemed to keep time with Ransome's pulse. In two days, in one day, in a few hours, he would be one of the first at the Ballard Pier, waiting for the tenders. He felt he could stand on his head for a piece.

The Arabia was a crowded boat, and as it was impossible to get away from the crowd, Miss Jeffreys soon became much discussed. She was a wild and uncontrollable flirt. She was a tall, elegant, and fashionable girl. Her face always full of expression and animation, large blue eyes with wonderfully long lashes, warm complexion, and very good features made up a tout ensemble that compelled admiration and interest.

During the first part of the voyage all the women had made friends with her; but by the time Aden was reached scarcely one would speak to her.

There wasn't a man who could resist her, and those with wives on board had many uncomfortable quarters d'heures in their cabins.

Poor Mrs. Curtis, the collector's wife, was shocked and angry; she argued with her, and asked her what Ransome would think of her. At last she refused to speak to her. Miss Jeffreys had answered that she was quite free till she was married. She had desperate flirtations with all the nice men in turn, dropping them suddenly or taking them up unexpectedly. The little-tattle and discussion about her evoked the information that seven proposals had been overheard. She had led one man on till he began to propose to her every morning as soon as she appeared on deck.

The day before the ship reached Bombay Mrs. Curtis went up to her. The girl wondered, as they were not on speaking terms.

"I would like you to come to my cabin for a few minutes," said Mrs. Curtis, in rather a commanding tone.

The girl followed her down, guessing there was going to be a scene. Arrived at the cabin, the door was shut, and Miss Jeffreys leaned against one of the berths, tidying her hair as she happened to face the small glass.

"I asked you to come down here," began Mrs. Curtis, in a hard voice, "because I really must speak to you finally. Mr. Ransome asked me to chaperon you to Udupore, and to let you be married from my bungalow. My husband and I being old friends of Mr. Ransome, we were delighted to do him any service."

"Yes!" said the girl, in a bored manner. "Yes," went on Mrs. Curtis, getting angry at the girl's indifference, "and I'm not going on like this without some understanding. Your behavior is perfectly scandalous. You know every man on the ship. You flirt outrageously with many of them, and I saw you last night kissing some man. And you are going to be married!"

"Well, I don't see—" interrupted the girl petulantly.

"Don't interrupt me, please," said Mrs. Curtis, with an impatient gesture. "I say you are going to be married, and you have no sense of shame, of disgust with yourself. What would you think of Mr. Ransome if he went on like you do? You could only think one thing—you would despise him, as I despise you."

"Really," said Miss Jeffreys, with flushed face, moving to the door, "I won't be spoken to like this."

"As I despise you," went on Mrs. Curtis vehemently, talking her down, "you make me say it. I pity Mr. Ransome. Heaven knows what will happen if you do marry him! I suppose you are incurable, and it will mean a tragedy. You will become a bad woman, and then—"

"How dare you, woman?" cried the girl, stamping her foot and threatening to strike Mrs. Curtis.

"I say what I think," answered Mrs. Curtis, with flaming cheeks. "I say it is women like you who cause scandals and misery out here. I wish I had never seen you. And I tell you this, that I will never speak to you again. I tell you there will be no marriage from my bungalow. And Mr. Ransome shall know exactly why. I will not let him marry you with his eyes shut. Leave my cabin."

She flung the door open. They looked at one another with gleaming eyes, breathing quickly; but the girl went out without a word.

Mrs. Curtis shut the door, threw herself on to her berth, and burst into a fit of crying.

The girl heard her, stopped, and listened an instant. Something urged her to go back, to admit her wrong; to throw her arms round the poor woman's neck. But she let the good impulse pass; a wave of anger overcame it, and she went away with a hard look on her face.

The first tender from the Arabia

had just made fast to the Ballard Pier. Ransome hung over the wall, eagerly scanning the people trooping over the gangway. She was not there. The second came and went. A frightful uneasiness came over him. Could she have missed the steamer? No, he knew she would have cabled. The third tender came steaming up, and his eyes roved among the passengers. He could see no one he knew, not even Mrs. Curtis. His state became pitiable. Although it was not hot, he perspired in large drops. Something seemed to stick in his throat and made him keep swallowing.

After some delay a fourth and last tender steamed up, piled high with luggage and carrying a few remaining passengers. Ransome dared not look at them. He edged away so that he should only see them as they reached the top of the steps. Presently Mrs. Curtis appeared, and he went quickly to her.

"Where is she?" he demanded, gripping her arm.

"She is not here," answered Mrs. Curtis, wincing at his grasp.

"Is she dead?" he asked, in a dreadful whisper.

"No, no. Don't look like that," she said, frightened at his face. "Oh, I can't tell you here. Come away with me."

She walked quickly away to the road and he followed mechanically. They hailed a tloca-garry.

"Great Western Hotel. Jaldi, jaldi," she said to the garry-wallah, in such a tone that he slashed his horse into a canter.

The bumping and rattling prevented any talking, and so they sat silent. He stared at the glaring road as it slipped by, afraid to look at her. She looked at him once or twice, and once put her hand on his.

"And then," she said finally, "instead of coming ashore with me to meet you, she went off in a launch with some Bombay people—a man and his wife—something to do with the government, I believe. I told her not to; but she said something about a scene, and walked off."

Ransome left her abruptly, hating her for telling him. He made his way to the street, and walked away in the now burning sun, with clenched hands, till he reached Apollo Bunder. He strode up and down, wondering what he should do. At last he determined to see her.

He crossed over to the Taj Mahal Hotel, and made the Goanese clerk look through the names. Yes, there was a Miss Jeffreys, Room 44.

Ransome followed the clerk up to her room, went in, shut the door, and faced his fiancée. They stood looking at each other in silence till a big crow hopped on to the veranda rail, eyed them with suspicion, and fled with a discordant croak. This loosened the tension, and the girl gave a nervous laugh as her eyes fell away from Ransome's.

"I see from your reputation of me," she said, fidgeting her rings, "that Mrs. Curtis has been croaking too."

Ransome was silent. The shock to his expectations had given him a racking physical pain. He felt he hated her. What a frightful position to be in after his long-treasured and built-up hope for this moment!

"My God!" he exclaimed in English, longing to be able to take her in his arms but held back by a feeling of anger. The thought that she had lately been in another man's arms clutched him and wrung his soul.

"The girl could not or would not understand. She was impatient at his standing there silent and accusing."

"So you are poisoned against me," she said, talking him by the arm. "I don't see what all this fuss is about. Because I spoke to a few men—"

"Spoke to a few men?" he echoed fiercely. "Good heavens! You were the talk of the ship! And you were coming to be my wife! You allowed—you encouraged men to—"

"What didn't you do?" he asked, walking up and down, facing round at her.

"You've only damned my life, absolutely killed my respect-for-women, that's all. I thought, decent women—Good Lord! are there any decent women? You make me suspect every one. What are you doing here? Fancy coming here alone—leaving Mrs. Curtis. It shows you knew what I should think of you."

"You are not going to marry me, then?" asked the girl, rising nervously, with flushed face.

"Marry you? With all this to think of, and doubt worrying my soul out!" He moved toward the door, and turned to look at her.

"No," he said deliberately, "I will not marry you."

"But I—I have very little money—here? I—have very little money. I can't—"

Ransome had opened the door, but her words stopped him, and he closed the door again. "You shall have a passage home by to-morrow's boat," he said, "and every rupee I possess."

He went out, his eyes smarting with tears. He did not know of the flood of tears in hers. He had gone.

Just before the train left the Ballard Pier his wondering bearer respectfully asked him if the memsahib was coming.

"There will be no memsahib, boy."

The whistle sounded, and the train moved out.

In Spain Hebrews are not permitted to erect and maintain houses of worship. They have no civil rights and exist in the kingdom only as aliens.

In the province of French-Canada, where the children of French-Canadian parents are no less numerous than those of English parents, the children of French-Canadian parents are no less numerous than those of English parents. The children of French-Canadian parents are no less numerous than those of English parents.

When the law was passed for the first time, it was calculated that the large families would prove a great benefit to the country. It is probable, however, that the children of French-Canadian parents are no less numerous than those of English parents.

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