KING DON:

A STORY OF MILITARY LIFE IN INDIA.

.....BY MAVOR ALLAN.....

CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

"Pardon me," said Don; and now he was so thoroughly in earnest it never occurred to him the accusation might justly have been brought against him not so very long ago—"I love Lillie too much to have dreamed of taking her from luxuries to which she is accustomed. She loves me, and I repeat my right to claim her."

He tossed away the stump of his cigar and turned to look at his companion with haughty defiance that proud air of majesty which had put fear and trembling into the heart of many a raw recruit.

But Captain Derwent was no raw recruit himself, very veteran in affairs of love and war, and he could afford to meet Don with nonchalance with an equally calm smile.

"My dear lad, the extremists seem to be the only ones who are just set and as I happen to have mapped out a most brilliant career for her I'm afraid I must emphatically veto that claim of yours."

"A most brilliant career!" repeated Don, with flaming indignation. "Even if you are callous to my feelings, Captain Derwent, have you no care for Lillie's happiness? You, I feel sure, love me—at least she loves you best."

And, as frequently occurs, it was a lady's privilege to change her mind, rejoined Lillie, rather smiling. "As for example, my little Lillie's short lived affair with your Cousin Reggie not so many years since."

It is the custom sometimes to have complimentary blushes at the expense of the fathers of the brides, and Don, who knew perfectly well that Lillie's faith was as firm as the rock of ages, blushed accordingly.

"Reggie and I were mere children, and I was a fellow who had no right to be courting his commanding officer's daughter," he said, with a touch of pride in his voice, remembering the past and his own peculiarly.

But Don was in no humor for politeness.

"I will be candid in a moment, for it is somewhat unfair to bracket me with Prince Clement Sing. I am in deadly earnest about my desire to marry your daughter."

"And so is he, my good fellow, much in earnest, in fact, that he has my permission to pay his addresses to her, may be doing so this very minute, indeed," broke off Captain Derwent lightly.

For one instant Don glared at the speaker in speechless amazement.

"You cannot mean it!" was the boorish exclamation which at last came from his white lips.

"And why not?" queried the other, with an exasperating coolness. "The Indian Prince is by no means a prince of Truth and his intentions are honorable, I should say, as far as marriage goes. Moreover, as rich as Croesus, with immense influence at Court. He would be the very ground she treads on, and would make her a princess."

Again Don stopped short in his walk, and now his face showed pale as death. "I would kill him and son too before that should ever happen," he cried.

CHAPTER IV.

Strange to say, it was almost at that self same moment Lillie Derwent at Rawal Pindi was listening to Prince Clement Sing's suit. The afternoon siesta, so general and necessary and indulgent throughout India, was over, and some hour and a half later Lillie was returning from a ride, attended by her native groom, when she was joined at the gate of the compound by the Prince, who was also on horseback, and escorted by two native troopers.

The fierce heats and moist seasons of India had not as yet robbed Lillie's cheeks of their English roses, and she was looking particularly fair in her plain brown holland habit, beautifully cut and braided with white, perfectly suggestive of comfort and coolness.

Her hat was a large, white straw, with a long, white ostrich feather, which suited to perfection her clear-cut profile and the thick coils of her fair hair. Her light riding gauntlets were of white wash leather, and the Prince's admiration of the hand so covered was only too evident by the pressure he bestowed upon it.

He himself wore white undress uniform and a sun hat, so like a mushroom that it would have been trying in the extreme to an ordinary wearer, but set off to perfection his dark, good-looking features with an air of distinction.

Indeed, Prince Clement Sing was an acquisition to society, both in personal appearance and high intellectual standing; and Lillie would gladly have welcomed the diversion of his company, but that she was consumed by the fear that his visit portended to matters concerning herself.

And she was not long in discovering such to be the case.

"You did not honor the course today, Miss Derwent. I looked for you in vain," he said.

"No. I was in a mood for a solitary ride," she answered.

"I trust that does not mean my presence is inopportune dear lady?"

She smiled, blushing slightly.

"By no means, Prince, for now my ride is over," was her polite reply.

"Then I may venture to invite myself indoors, I hope," he queried.

"I am not quite sure if you will find Mrs. Franklin at home," she began. But Prince Clement Sing looked straight at her with a glance from his black eyes that brought the color flooding to her face.

"Your presence is all sufficient," he said, bowing low as he swerved his horse aside to allow her to pass through the gate before him.

Arrived at the bungalow, he waited the attendant syce and himself assisted her to alight, a condescension which embarrassed her all the more as the prince took occasion to command that Mrs. Franklin should not be summoned for the next quarter of an hour as it was with Lillie his call be devoted to private interview.

Lillie passed into the drawing room alarmed at what she instinctively knew was to be the subject of that interview, but fearful to give offence by refusing it.

And when the prince joined her it was apparent he meant to waste no time in going straight to her business.

He had left his sword and belt in the vestibule and removed his gloves, and now he took his hostess's hand and led her to a seat with a deferential ceremony.

At the close of the evening she returned to the depths of the dak gharry something to begin the work of the day's mail.

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