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**THE RED YEAR**  
 A Story of the Indian Mutiny  
 —By—  
**LOUIS TRACY**

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 CHAPTER IX.  
 A Long Chase  
 It was not Lawrence's order but Malcolm's own suggestion that led to the desperate task entrusted to the young aide by the chief. While those few heroic volunteer horsemen drove back the enemy's cavalry and held the bridge over the Kokrall until the beaten army made good its retreat, Sir Henry halted by the roadside and watched the passing of his exhausted men. He had the aspect of one who hoped that some stray bullet would end the torment of life. In that grief-stricken hour his indomitable spirit seemed to falter. Ere night he was the Lawrence of old, but the magnitude of the calamity that had befallen him was crushing and he winced beneath it.  
 Out of three hundred and fifty white soldiers in the column he had lost one hundred and nineteen. Every gun served by natives was captured by the enemy. Worst of all, the moral effect of such a defeat outweighed a dozen victories. It not only brought about the instant beginnings of the siege, but its proportions were grossly exaggerated in the public eye. For the first time in many a year the white soldiers had fled before a strictly Indian force. They were outnumbered, which was nothing new in the history of the country, but it must be confessed they were outgeneralled, too. Lawrence, never a believer in Gubbins's forward policy, showed unwonted hesitancy even during the march to Chihnoot: he halted, advanced and counter-marched the troops in a way that was foreign to a man of his decisive character. Where he was unaccountably timid the enemy were unusually bold, and the outcome was disastrous.  
 Yet in this moment of bitterest adversity he displayed that sympathy for the sufferings of others that won him the esteem of all who came in contact with him.  
 By some extraordinary blunder of the commissariat the 32nd had set forth that morning without breaking their fast. Now, after a weary march and a protracted fight in the burning sun, some of the men deliberately lay down to die.  
 "We can go no farther," they said. "We may as well meet death here as a few yards away. And, when the sepoys overtake us, we shall at least have breath enough left to die fighting."  
 Lawrence, when finally he turned his horse's head toward Lucknow, came upon such a group. He shook his feet free of the stirrups.  
 "Now, my lads," he said quietly, "you have no cause to despair. Catch hold of the leathers, two of you, and the horse will help you along. Mr. Malcolm, you can assist in the same way. Another mile will bring us to the city."  
 One of the men, finding it in his heart to pity his haggard-faced general, thought to console him by saying: "We'll try, if it's only to please you, your honor, but it's all up with us, I'm afraid. If the end doesn't come today it will surely be with us to-morrow."  
 "Why do you think that?" asked Lawrence. "We must hold the Residency until the last man falls. What else can we do?"  
 "I know that, your honor, but we haven't got that ghost of a chance. They're a hundred to one, and as well armed as we are. It'd be a different thing if help could come, but it can't. I wish people are saying is true, sir, the nearest red-coats are at Allahabad, and 'praps they're hard pressed, too."  
 "That is not the way to look at a difficulty. In war it is the unexpected that happens. Keep your spirits up and you may live to tell your grandchildren how you fought the rebels at Lucknow. I want you and every man in the ranks to know that my motto is 'No Surrender.' You have heard what happened at Cawnpore. Here, in Lucknow, despite to-day's disaster, we shall fight to a finish."  
 An English battery came thundering down the road to take up a fresh position and assist in covering the retreat. The guns unlimbered near a well.  
 "There!" said Lawrence, "you see how my words have come true. A minute ago you were ready to fall before the first sower who lifted his saber over your head. Go now and help by drawing water for the gunners and yourselves. Then you can ride back on the carriages when they limber up."  
 Malcolm, to whom the soldier's words brought inspiration, spurred Nejdli alongside his chief.  
 "Will you permit me to ride to Allahabad, sir, and tell General Neill how matters stand here?" he said.  
 Lawrence looked at him as though the request were so fantastic that he had not fully grasped its meaning.  
 "To Allahabad?" he repeated, turning in the saddle to watch the effect of the first shot fired by the battery.  
 "Yes, sir," cried Malcolm, eagerly. "I know the odds are against me, but Hodson rode as far through the enemy's country only six weeks ago, and I did something of the kind, though not so successfully, when I went from Meerut to Agra and from Agra to Cawnpore."  
 "You had an escort, and I can spare not a man."  
 "I will go alone, sir."  
 "I would gladly avail myself of your offer, but the Residency will be invested in less than an hour."  
 "Let me go now, sir. I am well mounted. In the confusion I may be able to reach the open country without being noticed."  
 "Go, then, in God's name, and may

your errand prosper, for you have many precious lives in your keeping." Lawrence held out his hand, and Malcolm clasped it.  
 "Tell Neill," said the Chief Commissioner in a low tone of intense significance, "that we can hold out a fortnight, a month perhaps, or even a few days longer if buoyed up with hope. That is all. If you succeed, I shall not forget your services. The Viceroy has given me plenary powers, and I shall place your name in orders to-night, Captain Malcolm."  
 He kept his promise. When Luck-

now was evacuated after the Second Relief, the official gazette recorded that Lieutenant Frank Malcolm of the 3rd Cavalry had been promoted to a captaincy, supernumerary on the staff, for gallantry on the field on June 30, while a special minute provided that he should attain the rank of major if he reached Allahabad on or before July 1.  
 From the point on the road to Chihnoot where Malcolm bade his chief farewell, he could see the tower of the Residency, gray among the white domes and minarets that lined the south bank of the Gomtee. He had no illusions now as to the course the mutineers would follow. Native rumors had brought the news of the massacre at Cawnpore, though the ghastly tragedy of the Well was yet to come. He knew that this elegant city, resplendent and glorious in the sheen of the setting sun, would soon be a living hell. A fearsome struggle would surge around that tower where the British flag was flying. A few hundreds of Europeans would strive to hold out against thousands of eager rebels. Would they succeed? Pray Heaven for that which Winifred lived! And in all human probability their fate rested with him. If he were able to stir the British authorities in the south to almost superhuman efforts, a relieving force might arrive before the end of July. It was a great undertaking he had set himself. Yet he would have attempted it for Winifred's sake alone, and the thought of her anguish, when she should hear that he was gone, gave him a pang that was not solaced by the dearest honor a soldier can attain—promotion on the field.  
 It was out of the question that he should return to the Residency before he began his self-imposed mission. Already the enemy's cavalry were swooping along both flanks of the routed troops. In a few minutes the only available road, which crossed the Gomtee by a bridge of boats and led through the suburbs by way of the Dikusha, would be closed. As it was he had to press Nejdli into a fast gallop before he could clear the left wing of the advancing army. Then, easing the pace a little, he swung off into a by-way, and ere long was cantering down the quiet road that led to Rai Bareilly and thence to Allahabad.  
 At seven o'clock he was ten miles from Lucknow, at eight, nearly twenty. The quick-falling shadows warned him that if he would procure food for Nejdli and himself he must seize the next opportunity that presented itself, while a rest of some sort was absolutely necessary if he meant to spare his gallant Arab for the trial of endurance that still lay before him.  
 Though he had never before travelled that road he was acquainted with its main features. Thirty miles from his present position was the small town of Rai Bareilly. Fifty miles to the southeast of Partabgarh lay Allahabad. The scheme roughly outlined in his mind was, in the first place, to buy, borrow, or steal a native pony which would carry him to the town. Then, remounting Nejdli before dawn, either ride rapidly through the town, or make a detour, whichever method seemed preferable after inquiry from such peaceful natives as he met on the road. Four hours beyond Rai Bareilly he would leave the main road, strike due south for the Ganges, and follow the left bank of the river until he was opposite Allahabad. He refused to ask himself what he would do if Allahabad were in the hands of the rebels.  
 "I shall tackle that difficulty about this hour to-morrow," he commended, with a laugh at his own expense. "Just now, when a hundred miles of unknown territory face me, I have enough to contend with. So, steady is the word! good horse! Caesarum in-vehis et fortunam ejus!"  
 Thus far the wayfarer encountered during his journey had treated him civilly. The ryots, peasant proprietors of the soil, drew their rough carts aside and, as a salutation, as he passed. These men knew little or nothing, as yet, of the great events that were taking place on the south and west banks of the Ganges. A few educated bunnials and zemindars, who doubtless had heard of wild doings in the cities, glanced at him curiously, and would have asked for news if he had not invariably ridden by at a rapid pace.  
 As he happened, the route he followed was far removed from the track of murder and rapine that marked the early progress of the Mutiny, and the mere sight of a British Officer, moving with such speed and confidence, must have set these worthy folk wondering. Between Rai Bareilly and the Grand Trunk Road stood the wide barrier of the sacred river, while the town itself must not be confused with Bareilly—situated nearly a hundred miles north of Lucknow—which became notorious as the headquarters of Khan Bahadur Khan, a pensioner of the British Government, and a ruffian second only to Nana Sahib in merciless cruelty.  
 All unknown to Malcolm, and indeed little recognized as yet in India save by a few district officials, there was a man in Rai Bareilly that night who was destined to test the chivalry of Britain on many a hard-fought field. Ahmed Ullah, famous in history as the Moulvie of Fyzabad, and in the young officer's path once already. When Malcolm took his untrammelled charger for the first wild gallop out of Meerut—the ride that ended ignominiously in the moat of the King's of Delhi hunting lodge—he nearly rode over a Mohammedan priest, as he tore miles south of the station.  
 It would have been well for India if Nejdli's hoofs had then and there struck the breath out of that ascetic frame. Of all the firebrands raised by the Mutiny, the Moulvie of Fyz-

abad was the fiercest and most dangerous. Early in the year he was imprisoned for preaching sedition. Unhappily he was liberated too soon, and a fanaticism only inflamed the more by punishment, he went to the Punjab and sowed disaffection far and wide by his burning zeal for the spread of Islam. By chance he returned to Fyzabad before the outbreak at Meerut. The feeble loyalty of the native regiments at Lucknow sufficed to keep all the borderland of Nepal quiet for nearly two months. But the reports brought by his disciples warned the moulvie that the true believers' day of triumph was approaching. Moreover, the Begum of Oudh, one of three women who were worth as many army corps to the mutineers, was waiting for him at Rai Bareilly, a placid eddy in the backwash of the torrent sweeping through Upper India, and Ahmed Ullah had left Fyzabad on the evening of the 29th to keep his tryst.  
 It was, therefore, a lively brood of scorpions that Malcolm proposed to disturb when he dismounted from a wretched tat he had purchased at his first halt, and fed and watered Nejdli again, just as a glimmer of dawn appeared in the east. According to his calculations he was about a mile from Rai Bareilly. The hour was the quietest and coolest of the hot Indian night. Some patterning drops of rain and the appearance of heavy clouds in the southwest gave premonitions of a fresh outburst of the monsoon. He was glad of it. Rain would freshen himself and his horse. It made the ground soft and would retard his speed once he quitted the high road, but these drawbacks were more than balanced by the absence of the terrific heat of the previous day. He unstrapped his cloak and flung it loosely over his shoulders. Then he waited, until the glowing light brought forth the untiring sappers of the fields, and he was able to glean some sort of information as to the position of affairs in the town. If the place were occupied by a prowling gang of rebels he might secure a guide by payment and avoid its narrow streets altogether. At any rate, it would be a foolish thing to dash through blindly and trust to luck. The issues at stake were too important for that sort of imprudent valor. His object was to reach Allahabad that night—not to hew his way through opposing hordes and risk being cut down in the process.  
 The lowing of cattle and the soft stumbling tread of many unshod feet told him that some one was approaching. A herd of buffaloes loomed out of the half light. Their driver, an old man, was quite willing to talk.  
 "There are no sahiblog in the town," he said, for Malcolm deemed it advisable to begin by a question on that score. "The collector-sahib had a camp here three weeks ago, but he went away, and that was a misfortune, because the budmashes from Fyzabad came, and honest people were sore pressed."  
 "From Fyzabad, sayst thou? They must be cleared out. Where are they?"  
 "You are too late, huzoor. They went to Cawnpore, I have heard. Men talk of much dacoity in that district. Is that true, sahib?"  
 "Yes, but fear not; it will be suppressed. I am going to Allahabad. Is this the best road?"  
 "I have never been so far, sahib, but it lies that way."  
 "The bazaar quiet now?"  
 "I have seen none save our own people these two days, yet it was said in the bazaar last night that a Begum tarried at the rest-house."  
 "A Begum. What Begum?"  
 "I know not her name, huzoor, but she is one of the daughters of the King of Oudh."  
 Malcolm was relieved to hear this. The wild notion had seized him that Princess Roshinara, a stormy petrel of political affairs just then, might have drifted to Rai Bareilly by some evil chance.  
 "You see this pony?" he said. "Take him. He is yours. I have no further use for him. Are you sure that there are none to dispute my passage through the town?"  
 The old peasant was so taken aback by the gift that he could scarce speak intelligibly, but he assured the Presence that at such an hour none would interfere with him.  
 Malcolm decided to risk it. He mounted and rode forward at a sharp trot. Of course he had not been able to adopt any disguise. While doing duty at the Residency he had thrown aside the turban worn from Abdul Hq and he now wore the peaked Shako with white puggaree, affected by junior staff officers at that period. His long military cloak, steel scabbard, sabretache and Wellington boots proclaimed his profession, while his blue riding-coat and cross-belts were visible in front, as he meant to have his arms free in case the necessity arose to use sword or pistol.  
 And he rode thus into Rai Bareilly, watchful, determined, ready for any emergency. So boldly did he advance that he darted past half a dozen men whose special duty it was to stop and question all travelers. They were stationed on the flat roofs of two houses, one on each side of the way, and a rope was stretched across the road in readiness to drop and hinder the progress of any one who did not halt when summoned. It had not been seen by the man who drove the buffaloes, and by reason of Malcolm's choice of the turf by the side of the road as the best place for Nejdli, it chanced to dangle high enough to permit their passing beneath.  
 The sentries, though caught napping, tried to make amends for their carelessness. In the growing light moments and he yelled loudly: "Ohe, bhai, look out for the Feringi-hi!"  
 Frank, unfortunately, had not noticed the rope. But he heard the cry and understood that the "brother" to whom it was addressed would probably be discovered at the end of the short street. He shook Nejdli into a canter, drew his sword, and looked keenly ahead for the first sign of those who would bar his path.  
 Dawn was peeping grayly over the horizon, and Ahmed Ullah, moulvie and interpreter of the Koran, standing in an open courtyard, was engaged in the third of the day's prayers, of which the first was intended soon after sunset the previous evening. He was sober

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