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THE RED YEAR
 A Story of the Indian Mutiny

—By—
LOUIS TRACY

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 CHAPTER XVI
 In the Vortex

Malcolm was not one to throw his
 life away without an effort to save it.
 Once, during a visit to Delhi, Captain
 Douglas, the ill-fated commandant of
 the Palace Guards, had taken him to
 his quarters for tiffin. As it happened,
 the two entered by the Delhi Gate and
 walked through the gardens and corri-
 dors to Douglas's rooms, which were
 situated over the Lahore Gate. Thus
 he possessed a vague knowledge of
 the topography of the citadel, and his
 visit that morning had refreshed his
 memory to a slight extent. On that
 slender reed he based some hope of
 escape. In any event he prayed that
 his ruse might better Chumru's
 chances, and he promised himself a
 soldier's death if brought to bay in-
 side the palace.

Crossing the drawbridge at a fast
 gallop, he saw a number of guards
 looking at him wonderingly. It oc-
 curred to him that the exciting events
 of the early hours might have led to
 orders being given on the question of
 admitting sepoys in large numbers.
 If that were so, he might gain time by
 a bit of sheer audacity. At any rate,
 there was no harm in trying. As he
 clattered through the gateway he
 shouted excitedly:

"Close and bar the door! None must
 be admitted without the King's special
 order!"

The spectacle of a well-mounted se-
 poy officer, blood-stained and travel-
 weary, who arrived in such desperate
 haste and was evidently pursued by a
 body of horse, so startled the attend-
 ants that they banged and bolted the
 great door without further ado.

Already the story was going the
 rounds that the precious life of Baha-
 dur Shah had actually been threatened
 by the overbearing sepoys—what more
 likely than that this hard-riding offi-
 cer was coming to apprise his majesty
 of a genuine plot, while the flying
 squadron in the rear was striving to
 cut him down before the fateful mes-
 sage was delivered?

Not to create too great a stir, Mal-
 colm pulled up both horses at the
 entrance to the arcade. He called a
 chaprassi and bade him hold Chumru's
 steed. Then, learning from the uproar at the gate that the
 guards were obeying his instructions
 literally, he went on at an easier pace.
 The palace was humming with excite-
 ment. Its numerous buildings housed
 a multitude of court nobles and other
 hangers-on to the court, and each
 of these had his special coterie of at-
 tendants who helped to advance their
 own fortunes by clinging to their mas-
 ter's skirts. The jealousies and in-
 trigues that surround a throne were
 never more in evidence than at Delhi
 during the last hours of the Great
 Mogul. Already men were preparing
 for the final catastrophe. While the
 ignorant mob was firm in its belief
 that the rule of the sahib had passed
 forever, those few clearer-headed per-
 sons who possessed any claim to the
 title of statesmen were convinced that
 the Mutiny had failed.

Nearly four months were sped since
 that fatal Sunday when the rebellion
 broke out at Meerut. And what had
 been achieved? Delhi, the pivot of
 Mohammedan hopes, was crowded
 with a licentious soldiery, who obeyed
 only those leaders that pandered to
 them, who fought only when some per-
 fervid moullah aroused their worst
 passions by his eloquence, and who
 were terrible only to peaceful citizens.
 All public credit was destroyed. The
 rule of the King, nominal within the
 walls of his own palace, was laughed
 at in the city and ignored beyond the
 walls. The provincial satraps and
 feudatory princes who should be
 striving to help their sovereign were
 wholly devoted to the more congenial
 task of carving out kingdoms for
 themselves.

Nana Sahib, rehabilitated in Oudh,
 was opposing Havelock's advance;
 Khan Bahadur Khan, an expensioner
 of the Company, had set up a barbar-
 ous despotism at Bareilly; the Moulvi
 of Fyzabad, intent on the destruc-
 tion of the Residency, meant to estab-
 lish himself there as "King of Hindu-
 stan" if only that stubborn entrench-
 ment could be carried; Mahadi Hu-
 sain, Gaffur Beg, Kunwer Singh, the
 Rane of Jhansi, and a host of other
 prominent rebels scattered throughout
 Oudh, Bengal, the Northwest Pro-
 vinces and Central India, cared less
 for Delhi than for their own private
 affairs, and were consequently per-
 mitting the British to gather forces by
 which they could be destroyed piece-
 meal.

From Nepal, the great border state,
 lying behind the pestilential jungles of
 the Terai, came an army of nine thou-
 sand Ghoorkahs to help the British.
 At Hyderabad, the most powerful Mo-
 hammedan principality in India, the
 Nizam and his famous minister, Sir
 Salar Jung, crushed a Jihad with can-
 non and grapeshot. In a word the

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 as mercury will surely destroy the sense of
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orgy had ended, and the day of reck-
 oning was near.

Malcolm, therefore, was confronted
 with two separate and hostile sets of
 conditions. On the one hand, he was
 threading his way through a maze of
 conflicting interests, and this was a
 circumstance most favorable to his
 chances of escape; on the other, every
 man regarded his neighbor with dis-
 trust and a stranger with positive sus-
 picion, while Malcolm's distinguished
 appearance could not fail to draw
 many inquiring eyes.

He crossed the large garden beyond
 the arcade and was making for an
 arch that gave access to the long cov-
 ered passage leading to the Delhi
 Gate, when he saw Akhab Khan stand-
 ing there.

The rebel leader was deep in con-
 sultation with a richly-attired personage
 whom Frank discovered afterwards to
 be the Vizier. Near Akhab Khan an
 escort of sowars stood by their horses,
 and Malcolm felt that the instant the
 former lance-corporal set eyes on
 either Nejdji or himself recognition
 would follow as surely as a vulture
 knows its prey.

He could neither dawdle nor hesi-
 tate. Wheeling Nejdji towards the
 nearest arch on the left, he found him-
 self in an open space between the
 walls of the fortress and the outer line
 of buildings. Underneath the broad
 terrace, from which troops could de-
 fend the battlements, stood a row of
 storerooms and go-downs. At a little
 distance he could distinguish a line
 of stables, and the mere sight sent the
 blood dancing through his veins.

If only he could evade capture un-
 der the cover of night he would no longer
 feel that each moment might find him making
 a last fight against impossible odds.
 Dismounting, he led Nejdji to an un-
 occupied stall. As there was nothing
 to be gained by half measures he re-
 moved saddle and bridle, hung them on
 a peg, put a halter on the Arab, ad-
 justed the heel-ropes, and hunted the
 adjoining stalls for forage.

He came upon some grain in a sack
 and a quantity of hay. All provender
 was alike to Nejdji so long as it was
 toothsome. He was soon busily en-
 gaged, and Malcolm resolved to avoid
 observation by grooming him when
 anybody passed whose gaze might be
 too inquisitive.

He took care that sword and rev-
 olvers were handy. It was hard to tell
 what hue and cry might be raised by
 the troopers against whom the guards
 had closed the Lahore Gate. Perhaps
 they were searching for two men and
 the finding of one horse in charge of
 a chaprassi might suggest that the
 rider of the other and his companion
 had dodged through the Delhi Gate.
 Again, his pursuers might have gal-
 loped straight to the other exit and
 thus made certain that he was still in
 the palace. If that were so, and they
 ferreted him out, as well die here as
 elsewhere. Meanwhile, he chewed
 philosophically at a few crumbs of the
 gram, and awaited the outcome of
 events that were now beyond his con-
 trol.

A wild swirl of wind and rain seem-
 ed to favor him. There was not much
 traffic past his retreat, and that little
 ceased when a deluge lashed the dry
 though the water were beating on an
 open. Now and again a syc hurri-
 ed past, with head and shoulders envel-
 oped in a sack. Once a party of se-
 poys trudged through the palace,
 towards the water bastion of the palace,
 and the men whom they had relieved
 came back the same way a few min-
 utes later.

Nejdji had seldom been groomed so
 vigorously as during the passing of
 these detachments, but no one gave the
 slightest heed to the cavalry officer
 who was engaged on such an unusual
 task. If they noticed him at all it
 was to wonder that he could be such
 a fool as to work when there were
 hundreds of loafers in the city who
 could be kicked to the job.

The rain storm changed into a
 steady drizzle and the increasing
 gloom promised complete darkness
 within half an hour. Malcolm was be-
 ginning to plan his movements when
 he became aware of a man wrapped
 in a heavy cloak who approached from
 the direction of the arcade and peered
 into every nook and cranny.

"Now, thought Frank, "comes my
 first real difficulty. That man is
 searching for some one. Whether or
 not he seeks me he is sure to speak,
 and if my presence has been reported
 he will recognize both Nejdji and me
 instantly. If so, I must strangle him
 with as little ceremony as possible."

The newcomer came on. In the half
 light it was easy to see that he was
 not a soldier but a court official. In-
 deed, before the searcher's glance
 rested on the gray Arab, munching
 contentedly in his stall, or the stall
 sower who hid in obscurity near
 his head, Frank felt almost sure that
 he was face to face with the trusted
 confidant who had carried out Rosh-
 inara Begum's behests in the garden of
 Bithoor.

That fact saved the native's life.
 The Englishman would have killed
 him without compunction were it not
 for the belief that the man was ac-
 tually looking for him and for none
 other, and with friendly intent, too,
 else he would have brought a body-
 guard.

Sure enough, the stranger's first
 words were of good import. He could
 not see clearly into the dark stable
 and it was necessary to measure one's
 utterances in Delhi just then.

"If you are one who rode into Delhi
 this morning I would have speech
 with you," he muttered softly.

"Say on," said Malcolm, gripping his
 sword.

"Nay, one does not give the Prin-
 cess Roshinara's instructions without
 knowing that they reach the ears they
 are meant for."

The Englishman came out from the
 obscurity. He approached so quickly
 that the native started back, being far
 from prepared for Frank's very con-
 vincing resemblance to a rissaldar of
 cavalry.

"I look for one—" he began, but
 Frank had no mind to lose time.

"For Malcolm-sahib?" he demanded.

"It might be some such name," was
 the hesitating answer.

"I am he. I saw thee last at Bith-
 oor, when I escaped with Mayne-sahib
 and the missy-bahs," he demanded.

"By Mohammed! I would not have
 known you, sahib, though now I re-
 member your face. Come with me, and

quickly. Each moment here means
 danger.

"Ay, for thee. I am not one to be
 tricked so easily."
 "Huzoor, have I not sought thee
 without arms or escort? I and another
 have searched the palace these two
 hours. Leave your horse. I will have
 him tended. Come, sahib, I pray you.
 The Begum awaits you, but there are
 so many who know of your presence
 that I shall not be able to save you if
 you fall into their hands."

These were fair-seeming words with
 the ring of truth about them. At any
 rate Malcolm's whereabouts were no
 longer a secret, and it would not be
 war but murder to offer violence to
 one who came with good intent on his
 lips if not in his heart.

"Lead on," said Frank, sternly, "and
 remember that I shall not hesitate to
 strike at the first sign of treachery."

"I shall not betray you, sahib, but
 you must converse with me as we walk
 and not draw too many eyes by hold-
 ing a naked sword."

This was so manifestly reasonable
 that Malcolm felt rather ashamed of
 his doubts. Yet, he thought it best
 not to appear to relax his precautions.
 "I will pass through the palace
 with a sword in my hand," he said
 with a quiet laugh, "but I have a pis-
 tol in my belt, and that will suffice
 for six men."

His guide set off at a rapid pace.
 When they were near the great arch
 leading into the garden they halted
 in front of a small door in a dimly-
 lighted building, and the native rapped
 twice with his knuckles on three sep-
 arate panels. Some bolts were drawn
 and the two were admitted, the door
 being instantly barred behind them
 by an attendant. The darkness in the
 passage was impenetrable. Frank held
 himself tensely, but his companion's
 voice reached him from a little dis-
 tance in front, while he heard other
 bolts being drawn.

"You will see your way more clearly
 now," was the reassuring message, and
 when the second door was opened the
 rays of a lamp lit the stone walls and
 floor. They went on, through lofty
 corridors, across sequestered gardens
 and by way of many a stately chamber
 until another narrow passage termi-
 nated in a barred door, guarded by an
 armed native. The man's shrill voice
 betokened his calling, and Frank knew
 that he was standing at the entrance
 to the zenana.

"There is one other within," said
 the guard, leaning at them.

"Who is it, slave?" asked Frank's
 guide, scornfully, for he was annoyed
 by the eunuch's familiar tone.

"Nay, I obey orders," was the tart
 response. "Enter, then, and may Al-
 lah prosper you."

There was a hint of danger in the
 otherwise excellent wish, but the man
 unlocked the door, and they passed
 within.

Frank's wondering eyes rested on a
 scene of fairy-like beauty, so exquisite
 in its colorings and so unexpected
 withal, that not even his desperate
 predicament could repress for an in-
 stant the feeling of astonishment that
 overwhelmed him. He was standing
 in a white marble chamber, pillared
 and roofed in the Byzantine style,
 while every shaft and arch was chiseled
 into graceful lines and adorned
 with traceries or carved festoons of
 fruit and flowers. The walls were
 brightened with mosaics wrought in
 precious stones. Texts from the
 Koran in the flowing Persi-Arabic
 script, ran above the arches. In the
 floor, composed of colored tiles, was
 set a pachisi board, as the wide en-
 trance hall to a European house might
 have a chess-board incorporated with
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