

**A FURY IN
WHITE VELVET**

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A fury in white velvet by Herbert Compton

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HERBERT COMPTON

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WHITE VELVET**

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BY

HERBERT COMPTON

AUTHOR OF "A FREE LANCE IN A FAR LAND,"

"THE INIMITABLE MRS MASSINGHAM,"

ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER I

A GOD AND SOME LITTLE FISHES

"WHAT is it all about, Jenkinson?" asked the Viceroy, pushing away, with a gesture of petulant irritation, a docket of printed papers which his secretary laid before him. "And how did I ever come to give this Mr—Mr Howard an audience?"

"You will remember, your Excellency, he is a connection of Lord Westerham, and he sent in a Memorial—"

"Westerham? Ah, yes—of course. But this change in the Ministry alters the situation. Westerham has lapsed into a neglectable quantity. And this—Really!" His Excellency pointed fretfully to the bundle of papers and sighed. "What is it all about? Tell me in ten words if you can."

"The Memorialist is Lieutenant Howard of the Political Department. He was assistant to Mr Badger on the Punjab Frontier. When the Afghan tribesmen made their raid last December, and took the outpost of Putghurri, it appears Howard was out shooting somewhere. Badger ascribed the surprise to want of intelligence which Howard should have obtained, and applied for the appointment of another assistant. Howard contends that Badger's action was unjust, and the result of personal feeling; and files copies of several official letters to show how he was treated—"

"Pooh! Pooh!" broke in his Excellency. "And I am supposed to waste my time adjudicating between a Political Resident and his trumpery assistant who are squabbling? What did the Lieutenant-Governor do in the matter?"

"Sir Henry supported Badger, but mainly on a side issue."

"And what was that?"

"A passage in one of Howard's letters of which Badger filed a copy. It was a private letter, and Howard wrote, 'He would not be addressed, either privately or officially,

in such offensive terms as Badger used, by a gentleman whose ancestors for three generations had supplied the Howard family with trousers.'"

"And was the ancestral relationship between the Howard family and Badger really sartorial?" asked the Viceroy, with a grim smile.

"There is no denial of it, sir."

"What did Sir Henry do?"

"Gazetted Howard for transfer to Juggra-pore, which was tantamount to reducing him a grade."

"Well—introduce Mr Howard."

Mr Jenkinson left the chamber, and a minute later returned accompanied by a young officer, in full-dress uniform, whom he formally presented to the Viceroy before retiring.

"Sit down, Mr Howard," said his Excellency, with a slight bend of the head in return for the young man's elaborate salute.

Howard dropped into a chair, within whose capacious arms many hearts had beaten fast and heavily at interviews with the Pro-Consul, who has been called His Majesty's Greatest Subject.

The subaltern was a handsome, soldierly-looking young man of six-and-twenty, with clear grey eyes, black hair and moustache, and an aristocratic cast of features. He exhibited none of the nervousness usually associated with the chair of doom he sat in.

"And so you were out shooting when Putghurri, which was under your jurisdiction, was surprised?" began his Excellency, with a suave air of omniscience implying complete knowledge of the case.

"It is so far true, your Excellency, that I was on a tour of inspection duty, and in marching from camp to camp carried my gun."

"It would have been better, Mr Howard, if you had denied yourself the distraction of carrying a gun, under the circumstances of your district being in a disturbed state, and confined your attention to your duties."

"With every respect for your Excellency's assumption, my district was not in a disturbed state. The raid was made unexpectedly by a tribe that lived forty miles beyond the border. And in those parts a gun is necessary for self-defence."

"You had your escort?"