

THE NAULAHKA

RUDYARD KIPLING
& WOLCOTT BALESTIER



LIBRARY EDITION

THE NAULAHKA

A STORY OF WEST AND EAST

By RUDYARD KIPLING
AND WOLCOTT BALESTIER

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THE NAULAHKA

BOOKS BY RUDYARD KIPLING

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THE NAULAHKA :

A STORY OF WEST AND EAST

I

There was a strife 'twixt man and maid—
Oh that was at the birth o' time !
But what befell 'twixt man and maid,
Oh that's beyond the grip o' rhyme.
'Twas : 'Sweet, I must not bide wi' you,'
And : 'Love, I canna bide alone' ;
For baith were young, and baith were true,
And baith were hard as the nether stone.

Auchinleck's Ride.

NICHOLAS TARVIN sat in the moonlight on the unrailed bridge that crossed the irrigating ditch above Topaz, dangling his feet over the stream. A brown, sad-eyed little woman sat beside him, staring quietly at the moon. She was tanned with the tan of the girl who does not mind wind and rain and sun, and her eyes were sad with the settled melancholy of eyes that know big mountains, and seas of plain, and care, and life. The women of the West shade such eyes under their hands at sunset in their cabin-doors, scanning those

hills or those grassless, treeless plains for the home-coming of their men. A hard life is always hardest for the woman.

Kate Sheriff had lived with her face to the West and with her smouldering eyes fixed upon the wilderness since she could walk. She had advanced into the wilderness with the railroad. Until she had gone away to school, she had never lived where the railroad ran both ways. She had often stayed long enough at the end of a section with her family to see the first glimmering streaks of the raw dawn of civilisation, usually helped out by the electric light ; but in the new and still newer lands to which her father's civil engineering orders called them from year to year there were not even arc lamps. There was a saloon under a tent, and there was the section-house, where they lived, and where her mother had sometimes taken to board the men employed by her husband. But it was not these influences alone that had produced the young woman of twenty-three who sat near Tarvin, and who had just told him gently that she liked him, but that she had a duty elsewhere.

This duty, as she conceived it, was, briefly, to spend her life in the East in the effort to better the condition of the women of India. It had come to her as an inspiration and a command two years before, toward the end of her second year at the St. Louis school, where she went to tie up the loose ends of the education she had given herself in lonely camps.

Kate's mission had been laid on her one April afternoon, warmed and sunned with the first breath

of spring. The green trees, the swelling buds, and the sunlight outside had tempted her from the prospect of a lecture on India by a Hindu woman; and it was finally because it was a school duty not to be escaped that she listened to Pundita Ramabai's account of the sad case of her sisters at home. It was a heart-breaking story, and the girls, making the offerings begged of them in strange accents, went from it stilled and awed to the measure of their natures, and talked it over in the corridors in whispers, until a nervous giggle broke the tension, and they began chattering again.

Kate made her way from the hall with the fixed, inward-looking eye, the flaming cheek, and air-borne limbs of one on whom the mantle of the Spirit has descended. She went quickly out into the school-garden, away from everybody, and paced the flower-bordered walks, exalted, rich, sure, happy. She had found herself. The flowers knew it, the tender-leaved trees overhead were aware, the shining sky had word. Her head was high; she wanted to dance, and, much more, she wanted to cry. A pulse in her forehead went beat, beat; the warm blood sang through her veins; she stopped every little while to take a deep draught of the good air. In those moments she dedicated herself.

All her life should take breath from this hour; she vowed it to the service this day revealed to her, as once to the prophets—vowed all her strength and mind and heart. The angel of the Lord had laid a command upon her. She obeyed joyfully.

And now, after two years spent in fitting herself for her calling, she returned to Topaz, a capable

and instructed nurse, on fire for her work in India, to find that Tarvin wished her to stay at Topaz and marry him.

‘You can call it what you like,’ Tarvin told her, while she gazed at the moon ; ‘you can call it duty, or you can call it woman’s sphere, or you can call it, as that meddling missionary called it at church to-night, “carrying the light to them that sit in darkness.” I’ve no doubt you’ve got a halo to put to it ; they’ve taught you names enough for things in the East. But for me, what I say is, it’s a freeze-out.’

‘Don’t say that, Nick ! It’s a call.’

‘You’ve got a call to stay at home ; and if you haven’t heard of it, I’m a committee to notify you,’ said Tarvin doggedly. He shied a pebble into the irrigating ditch, and eyed the racing current with lowering brows.

‘Dear Nick, how can you bear to urge any one who is free to stay at home and shirk after what we’ve heard to-night?’

‘Well, by the holy smoke, some one has got to urge girls to stand by the old machine, these days ! You girls are no good at all under the new regulations until you desert. It’s the road to honour.’

‘Desert !’ gasped Kate. She turned her eyes on him.

‘Well, what do you call it ? That’s what the little girl I used to know on Section 10 of the N. P. and Y. would have called it. O Kate dear, put yourself back in the old days ; remember yourself then, remember what we used to be to each other,

and see if you don't see it that way. You've got a father and mother, haven't you? You can't say it's the square thing to give them up. And you've got a man sitting beside you on this bridge who loves you for all he's worth—loves you, you dear old thing, for keeps. You used to like him a little bit too. Eh?'

He slid his arm about her as he spoke, and for a moment she let it rest there.

'Does that mean nothing to you either? Don't you seem to see a call here, too, Kate?'

He forced her to turn her face to him, and gazed wistfully into her eyes for a moment. They were brown, and the moonlight deepened their sober depths.

'Do you think you have a claim?' she asked, after a moment.

'I'll think almost anything to keep you. But no; I haven't any claim—or none at least that you are not free to jump. But we all have a claim; hang it, the situation has a claim. If you don't stay, you go back on it. That's what I mean.'

'You don't take a serious view of things, Nick,' she said, putting down his arm.

Tarvin didn't see the connection; but he said good-humouredly, 'Oh yes, I do! There's no serious view of life I won't take in fun to please you.'

'You see,—you're not in earnest.'

'There's one thing I'm in earnest about,' he whispered in her ear.

'Is there?' She turned away her head.

'I can't live without you.' He leaned toward

her, and added in a lower voice : ‘ Another thing, Kate—I won’t.’

Kate compressed her lips. She had her own will. They sat on the bridge beating out their difference until they heard the kitchen clock in a cabin on the other side of the ditch strike eleven. The stream came down out of the mountains that loomed above them ; they were half-a-mile from the town. The stillness and the loneliness closed on Tarvin with a physical grip as Kate got up and said decisively that she must go home. He knew she meant that she must go to India, and his own will crumpled helplessly for the moment within hers. He asked himself whether this was the will by which he earned his living, the will which at twenty-eight had made him a successful man by Topaz standards, which was taking him to the State Legislature, and which would one day take him much further, unless what ceased to be what. He shook himself scornfully ; but he had to add to himself that after all she was only a girl, if he did love her, before he could stride to her side, as she turned her back on him, and say, ‘ See here, young woman, you’re away off !’

She did not answer, but walked on.

‘ You’re not going to throw your life away on this Indian scheme,’ he pursued. ‘ I won’t have it. Your father won’t have it. Your mother will kick and scream at it, and I’ll be there to encourage her. We have some use for your life, if you haven’t. You don’t know the size of your contract. The land isn’t fit for rats ; it’s the Bad Lands—yes, that’s just what it is, a great big Bad

Lands—morally, physically, and agriculturally, Bad Lands. It's no place for white men, let alone white women ; there's no climate, no government, no drainage ; and there's cholera, heat, and fighting until you can't rest. You'll find it all in the Sunday papers. You want to stay right where you are, young lady !'

She stopped a moment in the road they were following back to Topaz and glanced at his face in the moonlight. He took her hand, and, for all his masterfulness, awaited her word with parted lips.

'You're a good man, Nick, but,' she drooped her eyes, 'I'm going to sail on the 31st for Calcutta.'

II

Beware the man who's crossed in love,
For pent-up steam must find its vent ;
Step back when he is on the move,
And lend him all the Continent.

The Buck and the Saw.

To sail from New York on the 31st she must leave Topaz by the 27th at latest. It was now the 15th. Tarvin made the most of the intervening time. He called on her at her home every evening, and argued it out with her.

Kate listened with the gentlest willingness to be convinced, but with a dread firmness round the corners of her mouth, and with a sad wish to be good to him, if she could, battling in her eyes with a sadder helplessness.

‘I’m called!’ she cried. ‘I’m called. I can’t get away from it. I can’t help listening. I can’t help going.’

And, as she told him, grieving, how the cry of her sisters out of that dim misery, that was yet so distinct, tugged at her heart—how the useless horror and torture of their lives called on her by night and by day, Tarvin could not refuse to respect the solemnly felt need that drew her from

him. He could not help begging her in every accent he knew not to hearken to it, but the painful pull of the cry she heard was not a strange or incredible thing to his own generous heart. He only urged hotly that there were other cries, and that there were other people to attend to this one. He, too, had a need, the need for her ; and she another, if she would stop a moment to listen to it. They needed each other ; that was the supreme need. The women in India could wait ; they would go over and look them up later, when the Three C.'s had come to Topaz, and he had made his pile. Meanwhile there was happiness ; meanwhile there was love ! He was ingenious, he was deeply in love, he knew what he wanted, and he found the most persuasive language for making it seem to be what she wanted in disguise. Kate had to strengthen her resolution often in the intervals between his visits. She could not say much in reply. She had no such gift of communicating herself as Tarvin. Hers was the still, deep, voiceless nature that can only feel and act.

She had the kind of pluck and the capacity for silent endurance which goes with such natures, or she must often have faltered and turned back from the resolve which had come upon her in the school-garden that spring day, in the two years that followed it. Her parents were the first obstacle. They refused outright to allow her to study medicine. She had wished to be both physician and nurse, believing that in India she would find use for both callings ; but since she could follow only one, she was content to enrol herself as a

student at a New York training-school for nurses, and this her parents suffered in the bewilderment of finding that they had forgotten how to oppose her gently resolute will through the lifelong habit of yielding to it.

Her ideas had made her mother wish, when she explained them to her, that she had let her grow up wild, as she had once seemed certain to do. She was even sorry that the child's father had at last found something to do away from the awful railroad. The railroad now ran two ways from Topaz ; Kate had returned from school to find the track stretching a hundred miles to the westward, and her family still there. This time the boom had overtaken them before they could get away. Her father had bought city lots in the acre form and was too rich to move. He had given up his calling and had gone into politics.

Sheriff's love for his daughter was qualified by his general flatness ; but it was the clinging affection not uncommon with shallow minds, and he had the habit of indulgence toward her which is the portion of an only child. He was accustomed to say that 'what she did was about right,' he guessed, and he was usually content to let it go at that. He was anxious now that his riches should do her some good, and Kate had not the heart to tell him the ways she had found to make them do her good. To her mother she confided all her plan ; to her father she only said that she wished to learn to be a trained nurse. Her mother grieved in secret with the grim, philosophic, almost cheerful hopelessness of women whose lives have taught

them always to expect the worst. It was a sore trial to Kate to disappoint her mother ; and it cut her to the heart to know that she could not do what both her father and mother expected of her. Indefinite as the expectation was—it was simply that she should come home and live, and be a young lady, like the rest of the world—she felt its justice and reason, and she did not weep the less for them, because for herself she believed, modestly, that it was ordered otherwise.

This was her first trouble. The dissonance between those holy moments in the garden and the hard prose which was to give them reality and effect, grew deeper as she went on. It was daunting, and sometimes it was heart-sickening ; but she went forward—not always strong, not every moment brave, and only a very little wise, but always forward.

The life at the training-school was a cruel disillusion. She had not expected the path she had set before her to bloom with ease ; but at the end of her first month she could have laughed bitterly at the difference between her consecrating dreams and the fact. The dreams looked to her vocation ; the fact took no account of it. She had hoped to befriend misery, to bring help and healing to pain from the first days of her apprenticeship. What she was actually set to do was to scald babies' milk-cans.

Her further duties in these early days were no more nearly related to the functions of a nurse, and looking about her among the other girls to see how they kept their ideals alight in the midst

of work so little connected with their future calling, she perceived that they got on for the most part by not having any. As she advanced, and was trusted first with babies themselves, and later with the actual work of nursing, she was made to feel how her own purpose isolated her. The others were here for business. With one or two exceptions they had apparently taken up nursing as they might have taken up dressmaking. They were here to learn how to make twenty dollars a week, and the sense of this dispirited her even more than the work she was given to do as a preparation for her high calling. The talk of the Arkansas girl, who sat on a table and swung her legs while she discussed her flirtations with the young doctors at the clinics, seemed in itself sometimes a final discouragement. Through all ran the bad food, the scanty sleep, the insufficient hours for recreation, the cruelly long hours assigned for work, the nervous strain of supporting the life from the merely physical point of view.

In addition to the work which she shared with the others, she was taking regular lessons in Hindustani; and she was constantly grateful for the earlier days which had given her robust health and a sound body. Without them she must often have broken down; and soon it began to be a duty not to break down, because it had become possible to help suffering a little. It was this which reconciled her finally to the low and sordid conditions under which the whole affair of her preparation went on.

The repulsive aspects of the nursing itself she