

**DOYLE
CHARLES
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THE TAMING OF THE
JUNGLE

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The Taming of the Jungle:

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C. W. Doyle

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Preface

For a better understanding of this story, it will be necessary to say a few words concerning the people of the Terai, – the great tract of jungle that skirts the foothills of the Himalayas, in the Province of Kumaon. They are a simple, primitive folk, and migratory in their ways: inhabiting the interior valleys of the hills in the hot weather and the monsoon, and the foothills and the Terai during the winter.

In official reports they are described as "low-caste Hindoos;" but they are as far removed from the low-caste Hindoos of the plains, on the one hand, as they are from the high-caste Rajpoots, who are the gentry of Kumaon, on the other. The monstrous Pantheism of the Brahmin is unknown to them, and the ritual and severe limitations of caste that shackle the former in all the relations of life have no influence on the Padhans of Kumaon. Tending their flocks and their herds, and cultivating their terraced fields in the summer and their patches of rye and corn in the winter, they pass lives of Arcadian simplicity among scenes that surpass Ida and Olympus in beauty, and which vie with the glades of Eden, as Milton and Tennyson described them.

"Me rather, all that bowery loneliness,
The brooks of Eden mazily murmuring,
And bloom profuse, and cedar arches charm."

Tennyson might have written that of the Terai in midwinter. And its people conform, as might be expected, to their environment. Life among them is found at first hand: their loves and hates are ingenuous, and present social aspects that must vanish before the march of civilization.

The critics may object to the manner of the courtship of Tara, as not being in accord with the marriage customs of the natives of India. To them I would reply, that the experience of a dozen years spent in intimate relations with, and in close observation of, the Kumaon Padhans, has satisfied me that these children of nature are guided strongly by their natural feelings; and that, in the selection of their wives, they are as often swayed by their affections as we are.

C. W. Doyle.

Santa Cruz, California, January, 1899.

CHAPTER I

A Jungle Vendetta

"This was the way of it," said Ram Deen to a circle of listeners sitting round a fire by the side of the jungle road near Lal Kooah. Ram Deen drove the mail-cart in its final stage to Kaladoongie, and with his relay of fresh horses was awaiting the arrival of the mail. He was, next to the Assistant Superintendent of the Forest Department of the District, a power on the road, and his audience, accordingly, listened to him with due respect. "This was the way of it: I owed Bheem Dass one rupee and six annas for flour and pulse and ghee, and my donkey fell sick, so that he could not be forced by goad, nor by the lighting of a fire beneath him, to rise; and I could not convey my earthenware to Moradabad and sell it, and so remove the galling of Bheem Dass's tongue.

"Then the Thanadar came, and read script to me that was written on government paper, whereof I understood but little, save that the words were Urdu, and sounded very terrible to me, who speak Gamari only, and am a poor man. And he took my potter's wheel from me, and bade his chuprassi beat me then, and daily thereafter at noon – twelve strokes each day – till I made restitution to Bheem Dass.

"Brothers, we be all poor men here, and ye know that God

hath not given us understanding save to suffer stripes like beasts of burden, and to sleep and eat when we can, and beget children to succeed to our blows."

There was a deep "humph" of assent when he had ceased speaking. The little man who freighted village produce from Kaladoongie to Moradabad by bullock-cart said, as he handed Ram Deen the hookah that was circling round the fire, "A knife-thrust in the dark has settled heavier scores than thine;" and one suggested a blow from a weighted bamboo club, and another the evil eye; but Ram Deen smoked in silence, and after they had all had their say he passed the hookah to his neighbor and went on:

"Whenas my back smarted shrewdly that night from the blows of the chuprassi's shoe, so that I could not sleep, I took the oil from my chirag and anointed my back therewith. As soon as the false dawn blinked in the east I made a fire and light, without waking my son – my babe, Buldeo, and he without a mother – and I made store of chupattis with all the flour that was left, putting the remainder of the ghee on the first batch. Then I dug up three rupees and two annas that I had buried under the hearth, and waking Buldeo I fed him; and whilst he ate I made a bundle of such things as even a poor man has need of, – a blanket, a hookah and lotah, and shoes to wear through the villages, and the food I had prepared.

"And ere the village cocks waked or the minas and crows and green parrots opened council in the peepul trees, Buldeo and I were footing the jungle path to Nyagong, he holding his hand

over his head to reach mine, for he was but three years in age.

"And when we had proceeded a mile or twain into the jungle Buldeo spake and said, 'Thy man-child is tired.' And I set him on my shoulder, and so carried him until the sun began to shoot slant rays from the west. Whereon we stopped and ate; and, after, I fastened him with my waistband in the fork of a tree, saying, 'Son of mine, bide here till I return, and be not afraid.'

"Then, collecting grass and scrub, I made a circle of fire round the tree, and sped back to the village; and as the bell tolled the hour of ten that night a flame leaped up from the hut of the bunnia, Bheem Dass, to whom I owed money.

"Ere I returned to the jungle path I could hear Bheem Dass shout as a man being beaten, 'ram dhwy! ram dhwy!' and the smart on my back waxed easier."

By this time the hookah had made the round of the circle and once more reached Ram Deen, and as he paused again to "drink tobacco" his listeners made comment:

"Wah! coach-wan ji," said the little carrier, "knives may be blunt and clubs cracked, but fire loveth stubble and thatch. Ho, ho!"

And Ram Deen smiled grimly as he passed the hookah to his neighbor, who said as he took it, "And what of thy man-child, Buldeo?"

Ram Deen tucked the ends of his parted beard under his turban, and spitting bravely into the fire to conceal the tremor in his voice, he said, "As the dawn broke I reached the tree whereon

I had fastened my son. When I came near a pack of jackals that had been worrying something under the tree slunk away. The child was not to be seen, but the bark of the tree was scored with the talons of a leopard, and at its foot was a small red cap and a handful of fresh bones."

Ram Deen puffed the hookah in silence when it reached him again.

By and by, in response to the expectation of his listeners, he said, "Bheem Dass rode after me on the mail-cart to Kaladoongie that night. I knew he would come, and therefore I brake the telegraph wire and fastened it across the road a foot above the ground. When the horse stumbled over it and fell the driver was thrown on his head and killed. But Bheem Dass lay groaning on the road with a broken thigh-bone.

"And I held a lamp taken from the cart to my face, so that he should know me, and I spat and stamped on him; and thereafter I mounted the mail-cart and drove it over his skull as he screamed for mercy.

"I took the mail to Kaladoongie, and it was told the sahib-log that the mail-cart had been overturned and the coach-wan and Bheem Dass killed; and they made me driver because the road was unsafe and I had shown them that I was not afraid.

"Ye are poor men and know naught, – knowledge dieth suddenly!"

And the bullock driver said, "Ho, ho! coach-wan sahib, we be poor men and know nothing, and are fain to live."

The mail-cart drove up in a few minutes out of the darkness, the horses were rapidly changed, and Ram Deen dashed off into the jungle with a brave tarantara.

CHAPTER II

Hasteen

"Ram deen," said the stout Thanadar of Kaladoongie, "it is by the order of the sircar (government) that I question thee concerning this jungle wanderer. Whatsoever thou sayest will be set down by the munshi and laid before the commissioner sahib."

The "wanderer" put one hand on a tubby stomach that ill-assorted with his attenuated limbs, and with the fingers of the other in close apposition he pointed to his mouth, whining and saying to those round him, "Oh, my father and my mother, we be hungry, – Hasteen and I."

He was a wee little manikin of the chamar (tanner) caste, and about six years old. There was not a rag on him, save a sorry whip of puggri that made no pretence of covering the top-knot of hair which all Hindoos of the male sex, and of whatever caste, wear on their heads as a handle for the transportation of their souls to heaven.

He crouched in front of the fire of cowpats and grass, holding up his little hands to the blaze, and beside him lay a huge pariah dog with its head on his lap. One of its ears had been recently cut off close to the skull, and it moved the bloody stump to and fro as the heat of the fire fell on it. When any one approached the little chamar the dog growled threateningly, and the small crowd

of listeners was fain to keep at a respectful distance.

"Thanadar ji," replied Ram Deen, the redoubtable driver of the mail-cart to Kaladoongie, "the night air is shrewd, and it were well to feed the little one and to put a blanket round him ere I tell you of his finding."

"Ay, and forget not Hasteen," said the small chamar, pointing to the dog. When the great beast heard its name it slapped its tail against the ground.

A woman standing on the outskirts of the crowd took off her chudder and passed it to Ram Deen, who, keeping a wary eye on Hasteen, wrapped it round the little waif; and Tulsi Ram, the village pundit, also handed his blanket to Ram Deen. By the time the little one was duly happed up, Gunga Deen, the fat sweetmeat vender, returned with a tray of cates and milk, sufficient for three grown men, and set it before the new arrival, who, to his honor be it told, shared bite and bite with his four-footed friend. And between mouthfuls he answered questions and told his story to the Thanadar:

"My name, Most Honorable, is Biroo, and we be chamars of the village of Budraon, – my father and mother, Hasteen and I. There were none others of our family, and Hasteen and I be brothers, for we sucked the same pap, and that my mother's, as she hath so often told me. I am the older by three months, wherefore he mindeth me.

"Whence is Hasteen's name? How should I know, Protector of the Poor? I am but a poor man and know naught."

Tulsi Ram, the pundit, ventured to throw some light on the derivation of Hasteen's name. He hoped, ere he died, to pass the entrance examination of the Calcutta University; and, after the manner of his kind, he was preparing himself for it by the slow and steady process of learning the prescribed text-books off by heart.

"Thanadar ji, the dog hath its name from Warren Hasteen, the great sahib who killed the Kings of Delhi, as thou wottest, and daily fed on young babes, whereof midwives and old women who saw him tell to this day. And, moreover, he was a great fighter."

"Wah, Tulsi Ram!" exclaimed the Thanadar, "thou shalt yet become a baboo in the post-office at Naini Tal."

"But there never was fighter like Hasteen," said the little chamar, whose courage rose as his hunger abated, and rolling up a chupatti he gave it to the dog, who made one mouthful of it. "He hath blackened the faces of all the dogs of our village," he went on; "and last winter he overcame a dog of fierce countenance and crooked legs, that belonged to the sahib who camped near our village, and left it for dead on the plain; and the sahib would have beaten me, but Hasteen rose upon him and threw him down, and stood over him till I smote Hasteen with my bamboo club and dragged him off the sahib. Ah, thou wicked one, thou budmash!" and the great beast cowered before the wee man's threatening finger and licked his feet. "And therefrom came all our woes, for our folk drave us from Budraon, fearing trouble for the killing of the sahib's dog, and my father would have slain Hasteen,

but I restrained him. So we went to Nyagong, and there thieves came by night and would have despoiled us of our hides, but Hasteen prevented them; and thereafter the son of the Jamadar of Nyagong, who was a vain fellow and wore his turban awry, walked lame for many a day; and the bunnia (shopkeeper), who is the Jamadar's brother, put ground glass in the raw sugar he sold us – for so my father said – and my mother died.

"Last week my father came not home, and for three days I saw him not; then – I looking on – they drew a man out of the village well with his hands tied behind his back and a great stone fastened to his feet, – and it was my father!

"And this night a flame leaped up from our hut, and Hasteen went swiftly forth into the moonlight, his crest standing on his neck and back. I followed with what haste I could, and thereafter I came up with Hasteen, and he lay beside a dead man, whose eyes were wide open and on whose lips was froth, and a sharp knife in his hand; – and it was the son of the Jamadar!

"Thereupon I caught Hasteen by one ear and smote him on the other, – for he had done this killing; and the hand wherewith I smote him was covered with blood, so I saw his hurt, and that he had lost an ear.

"And the villagers waked whenas they heard the crackling of the flames from our hut and the barking of the village dogs; and Hasteen and I ran towards the road that leads to Kaladoongie, being more fearful of the men of Nyagong than of the wild things of the jungle.

"When we came to the bridge over the Bore Nuddee my feet were tired, and calling Hasteen to me for warmth I set my back to the wall of the bridge and so fell asleep; and now that I have eaten of thy bounty I would fain sleep again," and the little man yawned in the presence of the most august assembly he had ever faced.

"It was thus I found him, Thanadar ji," said Ram Deen, "and I came none too soon. A mile from the bridge I heard the hunting bay of a gray wolf, and when I came nearer I could see in the moonlight, crouched beside the end of the bridge, some great beast that leapt into the jungle as the cart approached; and then the mail of the Rani (Empress) of Hindoostan was stayed by a graceless pariah dog that guarded this jungle wayfarer, and, frightening my horses, denied me passage over the bridge. I could not have brought in the mail to-night had it not been for this Rustum, who beat the dog and restrained him. Is it not so, O Terror of Nyagong?"

But the little man was fast asleep by this time, and Ram Deen, by permission of Hasteen, who followed close at his heels, carried the small chamar to his own hut and put him into his own bed; "for that he was of the age," he said to himself, "of Buldeo, my son, who was lost to me three years ago, – and he without a mother."

CHAPTER III

The Hunting of Cheeta Dutt

A few nights after the finding in the jungle of Biroo, the little chamar (tanner), by Ram Deen, who drove the mail-cart from Lal Kooah, the notables of Kaladoongie were gathered round a fire in front of the police-station. The Thanadar (chief of police), as befitted his rank and dignity, sat cross-legged on his charpoi, smoking gravely, whilst the rest of the company squatted on their heels, after the manner of the natives of India, passing a hookah round the circle and discussing in a desultory fashion the current events of that section of the Terai.

A faint bugle-note far off in the jungle announced the approach of the mail-cart, and soon after the distant rumble of the wheels was heard as Ram Deen drove over the Bore bridge. When he was within a quarter of a mile of the village he blew a brave blast, and presently dashed up at full speed into the firelight, Biroo standing between his knees, and a huge pariah dog bounding along by the side of the cart. Soon after Ram Deen, followed by Biroo and the big dog, joined the circle round the fire.

"Salaam, malakoom!" said Biroo, gravely saluting the Thanadar, and including the rest of those assembled in his sweeping salute.

"Malakoom, salaam!" returned the Thanadar. "So thou hast brought in the Queen's mail safely, my Rustum?"

"Hasteen and I," began the little fellow, putting a caressing hand on the head of the great dog, who lay beside him winking at the fire, "Hasteen and I fear nought that moveth in the jungle, save only the men of Nyagong; – and then, too, there was Ram Deen."

This was said so seriously that the men sitting round the fire laughed at the little man's gravity; and Ram Deen smiled as he spread an armful of dry grass on the ground, into which he tucked the little fellow, and wrapped him up in his blanket. Hasteen settled himself beside Biroo, and they soon became oblivious of the circle round the fire.

"How likest thou the little jungle waif, Ram Deen?" inquired the Thanadar.

"Thanadar ji, he is to me as mine own son, Buldeo, come back to life; and he knoweth not fear. As we drove through the jungle yesterday and to-night he turned his face towards Nyagong and cursed that village, and swore that he would burn it to the ground when he had a beard; and 'tis like as not that he will do so when he is a man grown."

"Durga aid him in his attempt!" said fat Gunga Ram, the sweetmeat vender; "that village hath always bred rogues and budmashes, before and since Cheeta Dutt, the son of the last Jemadar (head man of the village), committed a deed of hell in the jungle thereby."

The silence of those who sat round the fire was a mute request to Gunga Ram to tell the story thus prefaced.

"Brothers," he began, "'twas in the second year after the great mutiny that a young Englishman came into the Terai to look after the sâl trees, which always seemed a foolishness to me till I learned that sâl timber is good for the building of the ships that cross the Black Water.

"And he had but little to do, save to shoot black partridge and spotted deer and watch the Padhani women crossing the ford in front of his camp; that was the evil of it.

"In those days I was but a span round the waist, and the best shikari (hunter) and tracker in these parts; and Bonner Sahib – that was his name – hired me to show him where game was to be found. But he soon tired of shikar (sport), and fell to playing the songs of the Padhani women on his cithar, the like of which I never heard before.

"One day, after he had eaten his morning meal and swam in the deep pool above the ford of the Bore Nuddee, he lay on the grass by the stream smoking, whilst I cleaned his guns by the side of his tent. Presently, when I looked up, the sahib was gazing from under his hand at certain wayfarers who came down the slope on the other side of the stream towards the ford; and on his finger there glittered a stone that took mine eye even at that distance. In front there rode on a hill-pony, loaded with household goods, Cheeta Dutt, the son of the Jemadar of Nyagong, and he wore the garments of a man who taketh his wife

home for the consummation of his marriage. Behind him walked Naringi, his wife, the daughter of the Jemadar of Huldwani. She was well named 'Orange Blossom;' and though I live to a thousand years, yet shall I never see the like of her as she walked behind Cheeta Dutt with a small bundle on her head and lifted her sari as she took the ford with her bared limbs.

"Brothers, she was but sixteen years in age, and in the budding of her beauty; and it seemed as though the morning shed all its joys about her feet. What wonder, then, that even a young Faringi (Englishman) should look upon her with admiration?"

"When she was half-way across the ford her foot slipped, and the bundle she bore fell into the stream. Wullahy, but these Faringis be fools! Eyes may look, and thoughts may fall about the face of a fair woman, though she be another man's wife, but only a Faringi would do what Bonner Sahib did. Kali Mai afflict the race! Women were made but to carry burdens and bear children. Nowhere can it be shown – not even in the Shastras, wherein I, Gunga Ram, have read – that a man should demean himself to serve a woman; but Bonner Sahib leapt into the stream and recovered the young woman's bundle. Worse than that, as she stood beside her husband's horse, wringing the water out of the hem of her garment, he put her bundle in her hand, and Cheeta Dutt scowled at him.

"'Protector of the Poor,' said I to the sahib, as I dried his feet and changed his shoes, 'thou hast not done well.'

"'Wherefore?' he replied, sending the smoke of his cheroot

skywards.

"Because Cheeta Dutt (well is he named Hunting Leopard) may repay thee hereafter in his own way for thy service to his wife this day. Belike, he may render her nakti (noseless), and so send her back to her father's house. But the sahib is a great lord, and a nakti Padhani woman more or less concerneth him not, for they be bought and sold like cattle, and the sahib hath the price of many such on his little finger. – But I speak like a fool, sahib, for I am a poor man and know nothing, save how to serve thee.'

"But he only laughed and stroked the yellow beard on his upper lip.

"A moon thereafter our camp was pitched near Nyagong. As ye know, the Terai thereby is full of shikar, and I showed Bonner Sahib where to find black partridge. One day, as we set our faces campwards, – I following the sahib with his spare gun and the morning's kill, – the voice of a young woman singing a Padhani song suddenly rose from a thicket near by, and the jungle became silent to listen to her. Bonner Sahib parted the tall grass with his hands, and I, looking over his shoulder, beheld Naringi, the wife of Cheeta Dutt, seated on a fallen tree trunk in an open glade, tending a flock of goats. As she sang she strung together flaming cotton-wood flowers, whereof she had placed one behind each ear.

"When she had finished her song the sahib took it up, stepping at the same time into the clearing; and Naringi fled like a roe hunted by wolves.

"The shikar is shy, Gunga Ram,' said the sahib.

"'Tis dangerous hunting, Protector of the Poor,' I replied. But the sahib only laughed and lit a cheroot.

"And thereafter he sought the black partridge unattended by me, for he set me morning tasks to fulfil within the camp. But, brothers, he brought not so much as a jungle-fowl home for more than a week, and I was fain to know what the sahib hunted.

"So I followed him unperceived one morning, and he went straightway to the clearing wherein we had seen Naringi with the goats. When I looked through the grass, behold! I saw Bonner Sahib seated on the fallen tree trunk, wearing a necklace of red flowers, and Naringi sat on his knee with an arm round his neck! Toba, toba! what fools these Faringis be, who know not that the birds of the air carry messages when a sahib stoops to a woman of our people."

"The jungle hath many eyes," said the Thanadar, sententiously.

After Gunga Ram had refreshed himself with the circling hookah, he went on: "As I looked and listened there was a rustling in the grass on the other side of the clearing, and the sahib's dog dashed into the jungle in pursuit of something. The next moment it yelped as a dog that is sorely stricken, but the sahib, who was toying with Naringi, heard nothing.

"Then Naringi, stroking the sahib's golden beard, said, 'My Lord, Cheeta Dutt beat me last night because I spake thy name in my sleep. Look,' and she lifted the hair from her forehead,

whereon was a bruise; and as she turned her face to the sahib I saw that she had been weeping, for her eyelids were swelled.

"'He is swine-born,' said the sahib; and as he spake his face flushed like the morning sky. Then he folded her in his arms and saluted her mouth after the manner of Faringis; and when she was comforted he said, 'Naringi, my Blossom, thy husband is a dog. To-night will I take thee hence and make thee envied of the mem-sahibs of Naini Tal. Wilt thou trust thyself with me?'

"For answer she threw herself before him and clasped his feet, but the sahib raised her up, saying, 'Beloved, I will come for thee to-night on the stroke of the tenth hour by the village bell. Gunga Ram – my shikari – and I will wait for thee with a covered byli (cart) at the foot of that tall sesame tree thou seest yonder on the open plain. And for pledge that I shall be here, see, I set on thy finger this ring, which all the villages in the Kumaon Terai could not buy; and if I fail to come my punishment is in thy hands. It is a thousand years till I see thee again, little one.' Then he folded her in his arms once more and set his face homewards, shouting to her from the end of the glade, 'Fail me not, my Wild Rose!' For answer, she swept the ground with her salaams.

"Hastening campwards by a path that skirted the other side of the glade, I came across the sahib's dog. It was shorn in twain by the stroke of a khookri, and I knew that Cheeta Dutt, The Leopard, was a-hunting.

"'What shikar?' asked I of Bonner Sahib when he returned to his tent.

"Thou art a liar, Gunga Ram. The jungle hereabout is barren of game, and it is in my mind to send thee with a note to the Thanadar of Kaladoongie commending the soles of thy feet to the bamboo staff of one of his men;' and, laughing, he threw himself into a long chair.

"I am sorry for thee, sahib,' I said in reply, 'for not only art thou empty handed this day, but thou hast lost the great stone that shone on thy finger when thou wentest forth this morning. Toba, toba!'

"'Tis in my pocket, O Chattering Jay.'

"Perchance the sahib shot his dog this morning, seeing that the game was scarce?' I said.

"Hath he not returned, Gunga Ram?'

"Ere I answer thee, sahib, 'twere well to drink some brandy-pani;' and I mixed the liquor as he had taught me.

"It is well, Provider of the Poor,' I went on, 'it is well to be young and well favored, and the special care of thy gods who have bestowed on thee wealth and a moonstone that all the villages in the Kumaon Terai could not purchase,' – hereat the sahib looked at me out of the corner of his eye, – 'but it is not well to look for partridges where great beasts hunt. Thy dog was slain in the jungle this morning by a leopard. He lieth outside the tent, and 'twere well the sahib should see what a leopard can do.'

"Following him out of the tent, I uncovered the dead dog. The sahib clutched at his throat and would have fallen, so I put my arm round him and laid him on his bed.

"This is the work of Cheeta Dutt, sahib. Said I not that perchance he would hunt some one hereafter for thy service to his wife at the ford last month?"

"Rising from the bed, the sahib drank another draught of the strong waters. 'Cheeta Dutt's back shall smart for this,' he said.

"And then, sahib, he will slay his wife because of thy ring in the pocket of her bodice.'

"Budmash, thou hast been playing the spy!' and turning upon me like a wild boar, his face aflame, he caught me by the beard.

"Sahib,' I said, 'I am but a poor man, and thou of consequence in the Terai, but, man to man, thou durst not lay thy hand on my beard in the jungle and away from thy camp. I fear not to tell thee, sahib, that I did, indeed, watch thee this morning; but the jungle is full of eyes, not the least keen being those of Cheeta Dutt, who slew thy dog this morning, and who will slay the woman thou lovest, or do worse to her, ere he sleepeth, as is his right.'

"Gunga Ram, thou art a man, and I ask forgiveness of thee for blackening thy face, but I am moved from myself by great fear for what may befall the woman. Tell me what is to be done, for thou knowest the ways of these jungle folks better than I;' and the sahib walked the floor as one distraught.

"Will one thousand – will ten thousand rupees save the young woman?' asked the sahib.

"The honor of a Brahmin is not to be appraised in money, sahib,' I replied.

"Will he fight, Gunga Ram, as a Faringi would under like

circumstances?'

"He will fight, assuredly, sahib; but he will fight after the manner of his kind, and in the dark.'

"Much talk had we, but we could only hope that Cheeta Dutt may not have witnessed the meeting that morning."

Gunga Ram stopped to "drink tobacco" once more, whilst the little bullock driver, who would start in the morning with freight for Moradabad, said, "That was a poor hope, O Seller of Cates, for the jungle hath ears and tongues as well as eyes."

"Therefore, byl-wan," rejoined Gunga Ram, "I saw to it that my gun was properly loaded as we went in the byli that night to the place of meeting.

"The moon was almost in mid-heaven, in an unclouded sky, when we reached the sesame tree, and it was a time for the deeds of Kama, but Kali Mai was abroad in the jungle that night.

"The sound of the distant village bell striking the hour of ten had scarcely died away when there rose from the glade the voice of a young woman singing a Padhani song.

"Heart of my Heart, she cometh!" said the sahib. 'Oh, Gunga Ram, she is safe!' and he lifted up his voice, singing the refrain of her song.

"He had scarcely ceased by a breath, when he was answered by the scream of a woman who looks upon Terror and Pain hunting together.

"Like an arrow from a bow he sped across the plain and entered the glade, I following with what haste I could. As I set

foot therein there arose a yell the like of which was never made by jungle beast, and, brothers, my heart stood still with fear. I could hear the sahib crashing through the underbrush, and I followed, but the glade was in deep darkness by reason of the thick foliage of the trees overhead that stayed the moonlight, and my pace was slow.

"Presently I saw the sahib in the open space where was the fallen tree trunk that had served him for a seat that morning. He stopped suddenly within a few paces of the log, like a stricken man. Falling on his knees and clasping his hands together, he bowed his head thereon; and in that instant a dark figure leaped upon the sahib from behind a tree, and I saw the flash of a khookri in the moonlight.

"I raised my gun and fired as I ran, but I was too late.

"When I came up to the sahib his head lay two paces from his body.

"On the fallen tree trunk, with the sahib's moonstone glittering on its forefinger, was the small hand of a woman that had been lopped off above the wrist, and which still dripped blood."

CHAPTER IV

The Spoiling of Nyagong

Goor Dutt, the little bullock driver, who was on his way to Moradabad with the effects of one of the clerks of the Lieutenant-Governor's office, reached Lal Kooah long after sunset. It was his intention to travel through the night, but he could not resist the temptation of joining the circle round the fire in front of the bunnia's hut whilst his bullocks ate their meal of chaff and chopped hay.

The bunnia had given up his charpoi to Ram Deen, who drove the mail-cart to Kaladoongie, and who was a man swift of anger and dangerous to cross, but not altogether hard. Had he not, but three days since, found and adopted Biroo, the little chamar (tanner) waif, who lay asleep by the fire with a huge pariah dog stretched beside him?

"Salaam, coach-wan ji," said Goor Dutt, saluting Ram Deen, "I have news for thee: the Commissioner Sahib hath sent word to the Thanadar of Kaladoongie that he should make inquiry concerning the finding of Biroo's father in the well at Nyagong."

"'Tis well, Thwacker of Bullocks. And when goeth the Thanadar thither?" inquired Ram Deen.

"Belike he is there now."

"Oh, that a man were here to take the mail to Kaladoongie to-

night!" exclaimed Ram Deen.

"The man is here," piped the little carrier, "if some one will tend my cattle till I return."

"That will I," said the bunnia, with the stress of Ram Deen's eyes on him.

When the mail-cart drove up Ram Deen took the reins, with Biroo, wrapped in a blanket, between his knees, whilst Goor Dutt climbed to the back seat. The big dog, Hasteen, ran beside the mail-cart and woke the jungle echoes with his bark.

"How didst thou fare last night, coach-wan ji?" asked the bunnia, next evening.

"As should innocence wronged, and avenging strength."

When none of those sitting round the fire spoke, Ram Deen went on: "As we came nigh to the path leading to Nyagong, Biroo turned his face thereto and spat vehemently; and I said, 'Son of mine, canst thou lead me to Nyagong?' and he replied, 'Of a surety; the path is here.'

"Thereat we got down from the cart – Biroo and I; and I bore the bugle hanging at my side and a stout bamboo club in my hand. As we picked our way along the jungle path, Hasteen ran beside us, growling; and when the moon gave light I saw the crest on his back bristling, and his teeth gleamed through his lips.

"When we reached Nyagong I put an armful of grass on the fire that was still smouldering in front of the Jemadar's house, and, as the flame leaped up, I blew upon my bugle. Straightway the village watchman, who had been sleeping in his hut, after

the manner of his kind, came running forth bravely; but when he saw who it was that stood by the fire he salaamed, and whined, saying, 'Great pity 'tis that Ram Deen, Lord of Leopards, should be put to the trouble – and at this unseasonable hour! – to return to our village this small villain and budmash, who is worse than the evil eye.'

"For answer, I felled him to the ground, and Hasteen stood over him. So he dared not move.

"Then came the Jemadar and the men of the village and stood round us; and the former said, 'Wah! Ram Deen, coach-wan, is it well to disturb peaceful folk at night and rouse them from their sleep? What wouldst thou with us?'

"'Justice to this little one, whose father and mother ye and your people have slain,' I answered.

"'And what of my son, found dead, and with teeth-marks about his throat?' he asked.

"'Jemadar Sahib,' I replied, 'Kali Mai gave thy son, her follower, fitting end. As he lived, so he died. 'Tis well.'

"'Dog!' he exclaimed; 'darest thou to speak thus to me in front of mine own people?' And he ran upon me.

"So I took him by the beard and laid him at my feet; and the men of Nyagong feared to help the Jemadar, for Hasteen growled fiercely over him.

"'Fetch the bunnia,' I demanded; 'and lose no time, O Swine of the Terai, or I give your Jemadar to the dog.'

"They brought him trembling before me, and he folded his

hands and bowed his head in the dust at my feet, crying, 'Ram dhwy! ram dhwy! the great and strong are ever merciful. What wouldst thou with me, coach-wan ji?'

"'The bhalee of raw sugar,' I answered, 'from which this man-child's mother got her death.'

"'She died of Terai fever, Most Worshipful, as the old woman who was with her will tell thee.'

"'Nevertheless, Biroo and I will go to thy shop with thee, in the matter of that sugar, whilst the dog seeth to the Jemadar. Proceed.'

"'But, Coach-wan Bahadoor,' said the Jemadar, 'thou wilt not leave me to be devoured by this beast?'

"'Lie very still, Jemadar Sahib, very still. The dog is a good dog, and was never known to harm an honest man. But let no one come to thine aid, lest there be nothing of thee left to take to the burning ghat.'

"'Go away, brothers,' wailed the Jemadar to his people; 'go away, lest evil befall me.'

"'But I said, 'Nay, not so. Stay till I return, O Village Thugs, for I would speak with ye.'

"'At the bunnia's hut Biroo pointed out the bhalee from which he had received the portion of raw sugar whereof his mother had eaten; but the bunnia denied, saying that he had already sold all that remained of that bhalee. So I broke off a piece of it and gave it to the bunnia, saying, 'Eat!' Whereat he clasped my knees, begging for mercy, and I knew Biroo had not erred.

"Swine-born!" said I, 'set panniers on thy ass.' And when the ass was brought to the door of the hut I made the bunnia load it with such produce as he had, till it could scarce stand.

"I am fain to borrow fifty rupees of thee, bunnia ji, on behalf of this motherless child,' I said.

"Whereon he wailed, saying, 'Ram Deen, Compeller of Elephants, there is not so much money in all the village stalls of the Terai. What I have I will give thee;' and he laid one rupee and nine annas in my palm and a handful of cowries.

"He lieth, my father,' said little Biroo, drawing forth a cocoa-nut shell from beneath the bunnia's seat, – and it was full of silver!

"Bap re bap!" moaned the trader, "tis all I have against mine old age; and the men of Nyagong despoil me; and my milch cow died last week. Aho! aho!"

"It is a very little child, bunnia ji; and consider he hath nor father nor mother. God will repay thee for thy kind loan to the orphan,' and I tied the money in the corner of my waistband.

"But, Ram Deen, Sun of Justice,' whined the bunnia, 'there be one hundred and thirty-seven rupees, some of it in gold mohurs, in thy waistband. Take fifty, and return the rest.'

"Thank Nana Debi, Bunnia Sahib,' I rejoined, 'for having put it in thy power to do so much more for the fatherless than thou didst first intend. It will comfort thee in thy old age to think thereon.'

"But this is robbery,' he said, desperately, 'for which I will have thee cast in the great prison at Bareilly.'

"There be gallows there, too,' I retorted, 'for such as put ground glass in gur, Mea ji. Ho, ho!"

"So he said no more, but, at my command, put panniers on another ass, which I had in mind to have loaded by the men of Nyagong.

"When we returned to the fire, the dog Hasteen and the Jemadar were as we had left them; and the Jemadar's teeth shook in his head with fear and cold. So I called Hasteen to me, and when the Jemadar had risen from the ground and put his turban on, I spake:

"O Jemadar, and ye, O men of Nyagong, I would have ye witness that I brought this bhalee of sugar from the bunnia's stall. Is it not so, O great mahajun (banker)?"

"And the bunnia assented. So I placed the great lump of raw sugar in a bag which I had brought from the bunnia's shop. Then, at my bidding and in the presence of his people, the Jemadar sealed the bag with his seal, which was well known to the Thanadar of Kaladoongie.

"Then I spake thus to those assembled there: 'Jemadar Sahib, and men of Nyagong, ye have brought shame on the Kumaon Terai, and, in the eyes of all men, ye have blackened the faces of those who dwell in this paradise of God. This child that ye see here – and he is a very little child and hath nor father nor mother – came amongst ye but a moon since, and ye slew those who fed and cared for him. And him – his milk-teeth still in his mouth – ye would have burnt to death in his sleep had Nana Debi

and this dog slept, too. It were a good deed done to burn your huts about your ears, and give your fields to the wild boar and to the Thanadar of Kaladoongie, who is my friend and the friend of this little one, and who would say that a jungle fire had swept your village away; but I am more merciful than ye. Inasmuch, then, as ye took the bread from this little one's mouth, and slew his people, it is but right that ye should feed him, and be his father and his mother. The bunnia hath already made some small reparation for the sudden taking off of the little one's mother. What will ye do for him whose hut ye burnt? Or would ye that the Thanadar of Kaladoongie should ask, or the Commissioner Sahib, he who can put ropes round the necks of murderers, how it was that the corpse of this child's father had its hands tied behind its back and a stone fastened to its feet?

"Then the Jemadar, clasping suppliant hands, whined, saying, 'Ram Deen, Rustum of the Terai, gentle as thou art brave and strong! the child's mother died of Terai fever, as thou knowest; and his worthy father, the chamar, leaned too far over the edge of the well in drawing up his lotah, and so fell in. Why speak to us, then, of slaying? We be sorry for the little chamar, Brahmins though we be, and we would have been father and mother to him, but he ran away, and the village mourned, thinking he had fallen a prey to the jackals. To none else but thee would we give up the boon of rearing him. Brothers,' he went on, turning to those about him, 'naught can restore a child's father to him, but a brass lotah with sufficient coin therein, and a necklace of gold and plum-

seeds, such as I will bestow upon him, may help him in time of need, and, mayhap, resolve the Thanadar not to visit our village. Eh, coach-wan ji? Brothers, see to it that our much-loved orphan goeth not empty-handed from the generous village of Nyagong.'

"So it was that the other ass groaned beneath a weight of silver bangles and toe-rings still warm from the taking off, blankets and hide-sewn shoes, sweetened tobacco and unbleached cotton cloth, and many a purse filled with two-anna pieces.

"And when the ass's knees shook, by reason of the load on his back, I said, 'Men of Nyagong, perchance the Thanadar of Kaladoongie may have an asthma to-morrow.'

"And one said, 'Of a surety he hath scant breath. Ho, ho!'

"Then I set Biroo upon the second ass; and when we had reached the Bore Nuddee I blew upon the bugle.

"When the Thanadar of Kaladoongie came out to meet me I put my hand on Biroo's shoulder, saying, 'Much care awaiteth thee, Thanadar Sahib, in tending this little budmash, whose merchandise this is. Moreover, he is a mahajun now, and hath much money to lend.'"

CHAPTER V

The Woman in the Carriage

When Ram Deen's bugle was heard at the Bore bridge, the munshi from the post-office came across the road and joined the group sitting round the fire in front of the police-station, at which only the great felt free to warm themselves.

The munshi was struggling with "the po-ets of the In-gel-land," as he expressed it in Baboo-English, and did not often take part in the proceedings round the Thanadar's fire; but that night he took his place with the assurance of one who has something to tell. A mem-sahib, in evident distress, with a very young baby in her arms, and unattended, had taken special passage to Moradabad on the mail-cart; and Ram Deen, the driver, would therefore have to return to Lal Kooah that night without any rest. Such a thing had never happened before, and beards wagged freely round the fire in all sorts of surmisings. For once in his life, the munshi, whom Kaladoongie had always looked upon as a mere rhyme-struck fool, held the public eye, and moved largely and freely among his fellows.

Beauty in distress appeals even to the "heathen in his blindness," and the munshi drove round to the dâk-bungalow to receive and translate the lady's final instructions to Ram Deen. Not that there was any occasion for his services, for the lady with

the fair hair and blue eyes used excellent Hindustani; her soft "d's" and "t's" showed that she had been born in India, and that she had spoken Nagari before she acquired English.

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