

Cumner & South Sea Folk, v1

Gilbert Parker

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CUMNER'S SON AND OTHER SOUTH SEA FOLK

by Gilbert Parker

Volume 1.

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INTRODUCTION

In a Foreword to Donovan Pasha, published in 1902, I used the following words:

"It is now twelve years since I began giving to the public tales of life in lands well known to me. The first of them were drawn from Australia and the islands of the southern Pacific, where I had lived and roamed in

the middle and late eighties. . . . Those tales of the Far South were given out with some prodigality. They did not appear in book form, however; for at the time I was sending out these antipodean sketches I was also writing--far from the scenes where they were laid--a series of Canadian tales, many of which appeared in the 'Independent' of New York, in the 'National Observer', edited by Mr. Henley, and in the 'Illustrated London News'. On the suggestion of my friend Mr. Henley, the Canadian tales, Pierre and His People, were published first; with the result that the stories of the southern hemisphere were withheld from publication, though they have been privately printed and duly copyrighted. Some day I may send them forth, but meanwhile I am content to keep them in my care."

These stories made the collection published eventually under the title of Cumner's Son, in 1910. They were thus kept for nearly twenty years without being given to the public in book form. In 1910 I decided, however, that they should go out and find their place with my readers. The first story in the book, Cumner's Son, which represents about four times the length of an ordinary short story, was published in Harper's Weekly, midway between 1890 and 1900. All the earlier stories belonged to 1890, 1891, 1892, and 1893. The first of these to be published was 'A Sable Spartan', 'An Amiable Revenge', 'A Vulgar Fraction', and 'How Pango Wango Was Annexed'. They were written before the Pierre series, and were instantly accepted by Mr. Frederick Greenwood, that great journalistic figure of whom the British public still takes note, and for whom it has an admiring memory, because of his rare gifts as an editor and publicist, and by a political section of the public, because Mr. Greenwood recommended to Disraeli the purchase of the Suez Canal shares. Seventeen years after publishing these stories I had occasion to write to Frederick Greenwood, and in my letter I said: "I can never forget that you gave me a leg up in my first struggle for recognition in the literary world." His reply was characteristic; it was in keeping with the modest, magnanimous nature of the man. He said: "I cannot remember that there was any day when you required a leg up."

While still contributing to the 'Anti-Jacobin', which had a short life and not a very merry one, I turned my attention to a weekly called 'The Speaker', to which I have referred elsewhere, edited by Mr. Wemyss Reid, afterwards Sir Wemyss Reid, and in which Mr. Quiller-Couch was then writing a striking short story nearly every week. Up to that time I had only interviewed two editors. One was Mr. Kinloch-Cooke, now Sir Clement Kinloch-Cooke, who at that time was editor of the 'English Illustrated Magazine', and a very good, courteous, and generous editor he was, and he had a very good magazine; the other was an editor whose name I do not care to mention, because his courtesy was not on the same expansive level as his vanity.

One bitter winter's day in 1891 I went to Wemyss Reid to tell him, if he would hear me, that I had in my mind a series of short stories of Australia and the South Seas, and to ask him if he could give them a place in 'The Speaker'. It was a Friday afternoon, and as I went into the smudgy little office I saw a gentleman with a small brown bag emerging from another room.

At that moment I asked for Mr. Wemyss Reid. The gentleman with the little brown bag stood and looked sharply at me, but with friendly if penetrating eyes. "I am Wemyss Reid--you wish to see me?" he said. "Will you give me five minutes?" I asked. "I am just going to the train, but I will spare you a minute," he replied. He turned back into another smudgy little room, put his bag on the table, and said: "Well?"

I told him quickly, eagerly, what I wished to do, and I said to him at last: "I apologise for seeking you personally, but I was most anxious that my work should be read by your own eyes, because I think I should be contented with your judgment, whether it was favourable or unfavourable." Taking up his bag again, he replied, "Send your stories along. If I think they are what I want I will publish them. I will read them myself." He turned the handle of the door, and then came back to me and again looked me in the eyes. "If I cannot use them--and there might be a hundred reasons why I could not, and none of them derogatory to your work--" he said, "do not be discouraged. There are many doors. Mine is only one. Knock at the others. Good luck to you."

I never saw Wemyss Reid again, but he made a friend who never forgot him, and who mourned his death. It was not that he accepted my stories; it was that he said what he did say to a young man who did not yet know what his literary fortune might be. Well, I sent him a short story called, 'An Epic in Yellow'. Proofs came by return of post. This story was followed by 'The High Court of Budgery-Gar', 'Old Roses', 'My Wife's Lovers', 'Derelict', 'Dibbs, R.N.', 'A Little Masquerade', and 'The Stranger's Hut'. Most, if not all, of these appeared before the Pierre stories were written.

They did not strike the imagination of the public in the same way as the Pierre series, but they made many friends. They were mostly Australian, and represented the life which for nearly four years I knew and studied with that affection which only the young, open-eyed enthusiast, who makes his first journey in the world, can give. In the same year, for 'Macmillan's Magazine', I wrote 'Barbara Golding' and 'A Pagan of the South', which was originally published as 'The Woman in the Morgue'. 'A Friend of the Commune' was also published in the 'English Illustrated Magazine', and 'The Blind Beggar and the Little Red Peg' found a place in the 'National Observer' after W. E. Henley had ceased to be its editor, and Mr. J. C. Vincent, also since dead, had taken his place. 'The Lone Corvette' was published in 'The Westminster Gazette' as late as 1893.

Of certain of these stories, particularly of the Australian group, I have no doubt. They were lifted out of the life of that continent with sympathy and care, and most of the incidents were those which had come under my own observation. I published them at last in book form, because I felt that no definitive edition of my books ought to appear--and I had then a definitive edition in my mind--without these stories which represented an early phase in my work. Whatever their degree of merit, they possess freshness and individuality of outlook. Others could no doubt have written them better, but none could have written them with quite the same touch or turn or individuality; and, after all, what we want in the art of fiction is not a story alone, not an incident of life or soul simply as an incident, but the incident as seen with the eye--and that eye as truthful and direct as possible--of one individual personality. George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson might each have chosen the same subject and the same story, and each have produced a masterpiece, and yet the world of difference between the way it was presented by each was the world of difference between the eyes that saw. So I am content to let these stories speak little or much, but still to speak for me.

THE CHOOSING OF THE MESSENGER

There was trouble at Mandakan. You could not have guessed it from anything the eye could see. In front of the Residency two soldiers marched up and down sleepily, mechanically, between two ten-pounders marking the limit of their patrol; and an orderly stood at an open door, lazily shifting his eyes from the sentinels to the black guns, which gave out soft, quivering waves of heat, as a wheel, spinning, throws off delicate spray. A hundred yards away the sea spread out, languid and huge. It was under-tinged with all the colours of a morning sunrise over Mount Bobar not far beyond, lifting up its somnolent and massive head into the Eastern sky. "League-long rollers" came in as steady as columns of infantry, with white streamers flying along the line, and hovering a moment, split, and ran on the shore in a crumbling foam, like myriads of white mice hurrying up the sand.

A little cloud of tobacco smoke came curling out of a window of the Residency. It was sniffed up by the orderly, whose pipe was in barracks, and must lie there untouched until evening at least; for he had stood at this door since seven that morning, waiting orders; and he knew by the look on Colonel Cumner's face that he might be there till to-morrow.

But the ordinary spectator could not have noticed any difference in the general look of things. All was quiet, too, in the big native city. At the doorways the worker in brass and silver hammered away at his metal, a sleepy, musical assonance. The naked seller of sweetmeats went by calling his wares in a gentle, unassertive voice; in dark doorways worn-eyed women and men gossiped in voices scarce above a whisper; and brown children fondled each other, laughing noiselessly, or lay asleep on rugs which would be costly elsewhere. In the bazaars nothing was selling, and no man did anything but mumble or eat, save the few scholars who, cross-legged on their mats, read and laboured towards Nirvana. Priests in their yellow robes and with bare shoulders went by, oblivious of all things.

Yet, too, the keen observer could have seen gathered into shaded corners here and there, a few sombre, low-voiced men talking covertly to each other. They were not the ordinary gossipers; in the faces of some were the marks of furtive design, of sinister suggestion. But it was all so deadly still.

The gayest, cheeriest person in Mandakan was Colonel Cumner's son. Down at the opal beach, under a palm-tree, he sat, telling stories of his pranks at college to Boonda Broke, the half-breed son of a former Dakoon who had ruled the State of Mandakan when first the English came. The saddest person in Mandakan was the present Dakoon, in his palace by the Fountain of the Sweet Waters, which was guarded by four sacred warriors in stone and four brown men armed with the naked kris.

The Dakoon was dying, though not a score of people in the city knew it. He had drunk of the Fountain of Sweet Waters, also of the well that is by Bakbar; he had eaten of the sweetmeat called the Flower of Bambaba, his chosen priests had prayed, and his favourite wife had lain all day and all night at the door of his room, pouring out her soul; but nothing came of it.

And elsewhere Boonda Broke was showing Cumner's Son how to throw a kris towards one object and make it hit another. He gave an illustration by aiming at a palm-tree and sticking a passing dog behind the shoulder. The dog belonged to Cumner's Son, and the lad's face suddenly blazed with anger. He ran to the dog, which had silently collapsed like a punctured bag of silk, drew out the kris, then swung towards Boonda Broke, whose cool, placid eyes met his without emotion.

"You knew that was my dog," he said quickly in English, "and--and I tell you what, sir, I've had enough of you. A man that'd hit a dog like that would hit a man the same way."

He was standing with the crimson kris in his hand above the dog. His passion was frank, vigorous, and natural.

Boonda Broke smiled passively.

"You mean, could hit a man the same way, honoured lord."

"I mean what I said," answered the lad, and he turned on his heel; but presently he faced about again, as though with a wish to give his foe the benefit of any doubt. Though Boonda Broke was smiling, the lad's face

flushed again with anger, for the man's real character had been revealed to him on the instant, and he was yet in the indignant warmth of the new experience. If he had known that Boonda Broke had cultivated his friendship for months, to worm out of him all the secrets of the Residency, there might have been a violent and immediate conclusion to the incident, for the lad was fiery, and he had no fear in his heart; he was combative, high-tempered, and daring. Boonda Broke had learned no secrets of him, had been met by an unconscious but steady resistance, and at length his patience had given way in spite of himself. He had white blood in his veins--fighting Irish blood--which sometimes overcame his smooth, Oriental secretiveness and cautious duplicity; and this was one of those occasions. He had flung the knife at the dog with a wish in his heart that it was Cumner's Son instead. As he stood looking after the English lad, he said between his teeth with a great hatred, though his face showed no change:

"English dog, thou shalt be dead like thy brother there when I am Dakoon of Mandakan."

At this moment he saw hurrying towards him one of those natives who, a little while before, had been in close and furtive talk in the Bazaar.

Meanwhile the little cloud of smoke kept curling out of the Governor's door, and the orderly could catch the fitful murmur of talk that followed it. Presently rifle shots rang out somewhere. Instantly a tall, broad-shouldered figure, in white undress uniform, appeared in the doorway and spoke quickly to the orderly. In a moment two troopers were galloping out of the Residency Square and into the city. Before two minutes had passed one had ridden back to the orderly, who reported to the Colonel that the Dakoon had commanded the shooting of five men of the tribe of the outlaw hill-chief, Pango Dooni, against the rear wall of the Palace, where the Dakoon might look from his window and see the deed.

The Colonel sat up eagerly in his chair, then brought his knuckles down smartly on the table. He looked sharply at the three men who sat with him.

"That clinches it," said he. "One of those fellows was Pango Dooni's nephew, another was his wife's brother. It's the only thing to do--some one must go to Pango Dooni, tell him the truth, ask him to come down and save the place, and sit up there in the Dakoon's place. He'll stand by us, and by England."

No one answered at first. Every face was gloomy. At last a grey-haired captain of artillery spoke his mind in broken sentences:

"Never do--have to ride through a half-dozen sneaking tribes--Pango Dooni, rank robber--steal like a barrack cat--besides, no man could get there. Better stay where we are and fight it out till help comes."

"Help!" said Cumner bitterly. "We might wait six months before a man-of-war put in. The danger is a matter of hours. A hundred men, and a score of niggers--what would that be against thirty thousand natives?"

"Pango Dooni is as likely to butcher us as the Dakoon," said McDermot, the captain of artillery. Every man in the garrison had killed at least one of Pango Dooni's men, and every man of them was known from the Kimar Gate to the Neck of Baroob, where Pango Dooni lived and ruled.

The Colonel was not to be moved. "I'd ride the ninety miles myself, if my place weren't here--no, don't think I doubt you, for I know you all! But consider the nest of murderers that'll be let loose here when the Dakoon dies. Better a strong robber with a strong robber's honour to perch there in the Palace, than Boonda Broke and his cut-throats--"

"Honour--honour?--Pango Dooni!" broke out McDermot the gunner scornfully.

"I know the man," said the Governor gruffly; "I know the man, I tell you, and I'd take his word for ten thousand pounds, or a thousand head of cattle. Is there any of you will ride to the Neck of Baroob for me? For one it must be, and no more--we can spare scarce that, God knows!" he added sadly. "The women and children--"

"I will go," said a voice behind them all; and Cumner's Son stepped forward. "I will go, if I may ride the big sorrel from the Dakoon's stud."

The Colonel swung round in his chair and stared mutely at the lad. He was only eighteen years old, but of good stature, well-knit, and straight as a sapling.

Seeing that no one answered him, but sat and stared incredulously, he laughed a little, frankly and boyishly. "The kris of Boonda Broke is for the hearts of every one of us," said he. "He may throw it soon--to-night--to-morrow. No man can leave here--all are needed; but a boy can ride; he is light in the saddle, and he may pass where a man would be caught in a rain of bullets. I have ridden the sorrel of the Dakoon often; he has pressed it on me; I will go to the master of his stud, and I will ride to the Neck of Baroob."

"No, no," said one after the other, getting to his feet, "I will go."

The Governor waved them down. "The lad is right," said he, and he looked him closely and proudly in the eyes. "By the mercy of God, you shall

ride the ride," said he. "Once when Pango Dooni was in the city, in disguise, aye, even in the Garden of the Dakoon, the night of the Dance of the Yellow Fire, I myself helped him to escape, for I stand for a fearless robber before a cowardly saint." His grey moustache and eyebrows bristled with energy as he added: "The lad shall go. He shall carry in his breast the bracelet with the red stone that Pango Dooni gave me. On the stone is written the countersign that all hillsmen heed, and the tribe-call I know also."

"The danger--the danger--and the lad so young!" said McDermot; but yet his eyes rested lovingly on the boy.

The Colonel threw up his head in anger. "If I, his father, can let him go, why should you prate like women? The lad is my son, and he shall win his spurs--and more, and more, maybe," he added.

He took from his pocket Pango Dooni's gift and gave it to the lad, and three times he whispered in his ear the tribe-call and the countersign that he might know them. The lad repeated them three times, and, with his finger, traced the countersign upon the stone.

That night he rode silently out of the Dakoon's palace yard by a quiet gateway, and came, by a roundabout, to a point near the Residency.

He halted under a flame-tree, and a man came out of the darkness and laid a hand upon his knee.

"Ride straight and swift from the Kimar Gate. Pause by the Koongat Bridge an hour, rest three hours at the Bar of Balmud, and pause again where the roof of the Brown Hermit drums to the sorrel's hoofs. Ride for the sake of the women and children and for your own honour. Ride like a Cumner, lad."

The last sound of the sorrel's hoofs upon the red dust beat in the Colonel's ears all night long, as he sat waiting for news from the Palace, the sentinels walking up and down, the orderly at the door, and Boonda Broke plotting in the town.

II

"REST AT THE KOONGAT BRIDGE AN HOUR"

There was no moon, and but few stars were shining. When Cumner's Son first set out from Mandakan he could scarcely see at all, and he kept his way through the native villages more by instinct than by sight. As time passed he saw more clearly; he could make out the figures of natives lying under trees or rising from their mats to note the flying horseman. Lights flickered here and there in the houses and by the roadside. A late traveller turned a cake in the ashes or stirred some rice in a calabash; an anxious mother put some sandalwood on the coals and added incense, that the gods might be good to the ailing child on the mat; and thrice, at forges in the village, he saw the smith languidly beating iron into shape, while dark figures sat on the floor near by, and smoked and murmured to each other.

These last showed alertness at the sound of the flying sorrel's hoofs,

and all at once a tall, keen-eyed horseman sprang to the broad doorway and strained his eyes into the night after Cumner's Son. He waited a few moments; then, as if with a sudden thought, he ran to a horse tethered near by and vaulted into the saddle. At a word his chestnut mare got away with telling stride in pursuit of the unknown rider, passing up the Gap of Mandakan like a ghost.

Cumner's Son had a start by about half a mile, but Tang-a-Dahit rode a mare that had once belonged to Pango Dooni, and Pango Dooni had got her from Colonel Cumner the night he escaped from Mandakan.

For this mare the hill-chief had returned no gift save the gold bracelet which Cumner's Son now carried in his belt.

The mare leaned low on her bit, and travelled like a thirsty hound to water, the sorrel tugged at the snaffle, and went like a bullmoose hurrying to his herd,

"That long low gallop that can tire
The hounds' deep hate or hunter's fire."

The pace was with the sorrel. Cumner's Son had not looked behind after the first few miles, for then he had given up thought that he might be followed. He sat in his saddle like a plainsman; he listened like a hillsman; he endured like an Arab water-carrier. There was not an ounce of useless flesh on his body, and every limb, bone, and sinew had been stretched and hardened by riding with the Dakoon's horsemen, by travelling through the jungle for the tiger and the panther, by throwing the kris with Boonda Broke, fencing with McDermot, and by sabre practice with red-headed Sergeant Doolan in the barracks by the Residency Square. After twenty miles' ride he was dry as a bone, after thirty his skin was moist but not damp, and there was not a drop of sweat on the skin-leather of his fatigue cap. When he got to Koongat Bridge he was like a racer after practice, ready for a fight from start to finish. Yet he was not foolhardy. He knew the danger that beset him, for he could not tell, in the crisis come to Mandakan, what designs might be abroad. He now saw through Boonda Broke's friendship for him, and he only found peace for his mind upon the point by remembering that he had told no secrets, had given no information of any use to the foes of the Dakoon or the haters of the English.

On this hot, long, silent ride he looked back carefully, but he could not see where he had been to blame; and, if he were, he hoped to strike a balance with his own conscience for having been friendly to Boonda Broke, and to justify himself in his father's eyes. If he came through all right, then "the Governor"--as he called his father, with the friendly affection of a good comrade, and as all others in Mandakan called him because of his position--the Governor then would say that whatever harm he had done indirectly was now undone.

He got down at the Koongat Bridge, and his fingers were still in the sorrel's mane when he heard the call of a bittern from the river bank. He did not loose his fingers, but stood still and listened intently, for there was scarcely a sound of the plain, the river, or jungle he did not know, and his ear was keen to balance 'twixt the false note and the true. He waited for the sound again. From that first call he could not be sure which had startled him--the night was so still--the voice of a bird or the call between men lying in ambush. He tried the trigger of his pistol softly, and prepared to mount. As he did so, the call rang out across

the water again, a little louder, a little longer.

Now he was sure. It was not from a bittern--it was a human voice, of whose tribe he knew not--Pango Dooni's, Boonda Broke's, the Dakoon's, or the segments of peoples belonging to none of these--highway robbers, cattle-stealers, or the men of the jungle, those creatures as wild and secret as the beasts of the bush and more cruel and more furtive.

The fear of the ambushed thing is the worst fear of this world--the sword or the rifle-barrel you cannot see and the poisoned wooden spear which the men of the jungle throw gives a man ten deaths, instead of one.

Cumner's Son mounted quickly, straining his eyes to see and keeping his pistol cocked. When he heard the call a second time he had for a moment a thrill of fear, not in his body, but in his brain. He had that fatal gift, imagination, which is more alive than flesh and bone, stronger than iron and steel. In his mind he saw a hundred men rise up from ambush, surround him, and cut him down. He saw himself firing a half-dozen shots, then drawing his sword and fighting till he fell; but he did fall in the end, and there was an end of it. It seemed like years while these visions passed through his mind, but it was no longer than it took to gather the snaffle-rein close to the sorrel's neck, draw his sword, clinch it in his left hand with the rein, and gather the pistol snugly in his right. He listened again. As he touched the sorrel with his knee he thought he heard a sound ahead.

The sorrel sprang forward, sniffed the air, and threw up his head. His feet struck the resounding timbers of the bridge, and, as they did so, he shied; but Cumner's Son, looking down sharply, could see nothing to either the right or left--no movement anywhere save the dim trees on the banks waving in the light wind which had risen. A crocodile slipped off a log into the water--he knew that sound; a rank odour came from the river bank--he knew the smell of the hippopotamus.

These very things gave him new courage. Since he came from Eton to Mandakan he had hunted often and well, and once he had helped to quarry the Little Men of the Jungle when they carried off the wife and daughter of a soldier of the Dakoon. The smell and the sound of wild life roused all the hunter in him. He had fear no longer; the primitive emotion of fighting or self-defence was alive in him.

He had left the bridge behind by twice the horse's length, when, all at once, the call of the red bittern rang out the third time, louder than before; then again; and then the cry of a grey wolf came in response.

His peril was upon him. He put spurs to the sorrel. As he did so, dark figures sprang up on all sides of him. Without a word he drove the excited horse at his assailants. Three caught his bridle-rein, and others snatched at him to draw him from his horse.

"Hands off!" he cried, in the language of Mandakan, and levelled his pistol.

"He is English!" said a voice. "Cut him down!"

"I am the Governor's son," said the lad. "Let go." "Cut him down!" snarled the voice again.

He fired twice quickly.

Then he remembered the tribe-call given his father by Pango Dooni. Rising in his saddle and firing again, he called it out in a loud voice. His plunging horse had broken away from two of the murderers; but one still held on, and he slashed the hand free with his sword.

The natives were made furious by the call, and came on again, striking at him with their krises. He shouted the tribe-call once more, but this time it was done involuntarily. There was no response in front of him; but one came from behind. There was clattering of hoofs on Koongat Bridge, and the password of the clan came back to the lad, even as a kris struck him in the leg and drew out again. Once again he called, and suddenly a horseman appeared beside him, who clove through a native's head with a broadsword, and with a pistol fired at the fleeing figures; for Boonda Broke's men who were thus infesting the highway up to Koongat Bridge, and even beyond, up to the Bar of Balmud, hearing the newcomer shout the dreaded name of Pango Dooni, scattered for their lives, though they were yet twenty to two. One stood his ground, and it would have gone ill for Cumner's Son, for this thief had him at fatal advantage, had it not been for the horseman who had followed the lad from the forge-fire to Koongat Bridge. He stood up in his stirrups and cut down with his broadsword, so that the blade was driven through the head and shoulders of his foe as a woodsman splits a log half through, and grunts with the power of his stroke.

Then he turned to the lad.

"What stranger calls by the word of our tribe?" he asked.

"I am Cumner's Son," was the answer, "and my father is brother-in-blood with Pango Dooni. I ride to Pango Dooni for the women and children's sake."

"Proof! Proof! If you be Cumner's Son, another word should be yours."

The Colonel's Son took out the bracelet from his breast. "It is safe hid here," said he, "and hid also under my tongue. If you be from the Neck of Baroob you will know it when I speak it;" and he spoke reverently the sacred countersign.

By a little fire kindled in the road, the bodies of their foe beside them, they vowed to each other, mingling their blood from dagger pricks in the arm. Then they mounted again and rode towards the Neck of Baroob.

In silence they rode awhile, and at last the hillsman said: "If fathers be brothers-in-blood, behold it is good that sons be also."

By this the lad knew that he was now brother-in-blood to the son of Pango Dooni.

III

THE CODE OF THE HILLS

"You travel near to Mandakan!" said the lad. "Do you ride with a thousand men?"

"For a thousand men there are ten thousand eyes to see; I travel alone and safe," answered Tang-a-Dahit.

"To thrust your head in the tiger's jaw," said Cumner's Son. "Did you ride to be in at the death of the men of your clan?"

"A man will ride for a face that he loves, even to the Dreadful Gates," answered Tang-a-Dahit. "But what is this of the men of my clan?"

Then the lad told him of those whose heads hung on the rear Palace wall, where the Dakoon lay dying, and why he rode to Pango Dooni.

"It is fighting and fighting, naught but fighting," said Tang-a-Dahit after a pause; "and there is no peace. It is fighting and fighting, for honour, and glory, and houses and cattle, but naught for love, and naught that there may be peace."

Cumner's Son turned round in his saddle as if to read the face of the man, but it was too dark.

"And naught that there maybe peace." Those were the words of a hillsman who had followed him furiously in the night ready to kill, who had cloven the head of a man like a piece of soap, and had been riding even into Mandakan where a price was set on his head.

For long they rode silently, and in that time Cumner's Son found new thoughts; and these thoughts made him love the brown hillsman as he had never loved any save his own father.

"When there is peace in Mandakan," said he at last, "when Boonda Broke is snapped in two like a pencil, when Pango Dooni sits as Dakoon in the Palace of Mandakan--"

"There is a maid in Mandakan," interrupted Tanga-Dahit, "and these two years she has lain upon her bed, and she may not be moved, for the bones of her body are as the soft stems of the lily, but her face is a perfect face, and her tongue has the wisdom of God."

"You ride to her through the teeth of danger?"

"She may not come to me, and I must go to her," answered the hillsman.

There was silence again for a long time, for Cumner's Son was turning things over in his mind; and all at once he felt that each man's acts must be judged by the blood that is in him and the trail by which he has come.

The sorrel and the chestnut mare travelled together as on one snaffle-bar, step by step, for they were foaled in the same stable. Through stretches of reed-beds and wastes of osiers they passed, and again by a path through the jungle where the briar-vines caught at them like eager fingers, and a tiger crossed their track, disturbed in his night's rest. At length out of the dank distance they saw the first colour of dawn.

"Ten miles," said Tang-a-Dahit, "and we shall come to the Bar of Balmud. Then we shall be in my own country. See, the dawn comes up! 'Twixt here and the Bar of Balmud our danger lies. A hundred men may ambush there, for Boonda Broke's thieves have scattered all the way from Mandakan to

our borders."

Cumner's Son looked round. There were hills and defiles everywhere, and a thousand places where foes could hide. The quickest way, but the most perilous, lay through the long defile between the hills, flanked by boulders and rank scrub. Tang-a-Dahit pointed out the ways that they might go--by the path to the left along the hills, or through the green defile; and Cumner's Son instantly chose the latter way.

"If the fight were fair," said the hillsman, "and it were man to man, the defile is the better way; but these be dogs of cowards who strike from behind rocks. No one of them has a heart truer than Boonda Broke's, the master of the carrion. We will go by the hills. The way is harder but more open, and if we be prospered we will rest awhile at the Bar of Balmud, and at noon we will tether and eat in the Neck of Baroob."

They made their way through the medlar trees and scrub to the plateau above, and, the height gained, they turned to look back. The sun was up, and trailing rose and amber garments across the great Eastern arch. Their path lay towards it, for Pango Dooni hid in the hills, where the sun hung a roof of gold above his stronghold.

"Forty to one!" said Tang-a-Dahit suddenly. "Now indeed we ride for our lives!"

Looking down the track of the hillsman's glance Cumner's Son saw a bunch of horsemen galloping up the slope. Boonda Broke's men!

The sorrel and the mare were fagged, the horses of their foes were fresh; and forty to one were odds that no man would care to take. It might be that some of Pango Dooni's men lay between them and the Bar of Balmud, but the chance was faint.

"By the hand of Heaven," said the hillsman, "if we reach to the Bar of Balmud, these dogs shall eat their own heads for dinner!"

They set their horses in the way, and gave the sorrel and mare the bit and spur. The beasts leaned again to their work as though they had just come from a feeding-stall and knew their riders' needs. The men rode light and free, and talked low to their horses as friend talks to friend. Five miles or more they went so, and then the mare stumbled. She got to her feet again, but her head dropped low, her nostrils gaped red and swollen, and the sorrel hung back with her, for a beast, like a man, will travel farther two by two than one by one. At another point where they had a long view behind they looked back. Their pursuers were gaining. Tang-a-Dahit spurred his horse on.

"There is one chance," said he, "and only one. See where the point juts out beyond the great medlar tree. If, by the mercy of God, we can but make it!"

The horses gallantly replied to call and spur. They rounded a curve which made a sort of apse to the side of the valley, and presently they were hid from their pursuers. Looking back from the thicket they saw the plainsmen riding hard. All at once Tang-a-Dahit stopped.

"Give me the sorrel," said he. "Quick--dismount!" Cumner's Son did as he was bid. Going a little to one side, the hillsman pushed through a thick hedge of bushes, rolled away a rock, and disclosed an opening which

led down a steep and rough-hewn way to a great misty valley beneath, where was never a bridle-path or causeway over the brawling streams and boulders.

"I will ride on. The mare is done, but the sorrel can make the Bar of Balmud."

Cumner's Son opened his mouth to question, but stopped, for the eyes of the hillsman flared up, and Tang-a-Dahit said:

"My arm in blood has touched thy arm, and thou art in my hills and not in thine own country. Thy life is my life, and thy good is my good. Speak not, but act. By the high wall of the valley where no man bides there is a path which leads to the Bar of Balmud; but leave it not, whether it go up or down or be easy or hard. If thy feet be steady, thine eye true, and thy heart strong, thou shalt come by the Bar of Balmud among my people."

Then he caught the hand of Cumner's Son in his own and kissed him between the eyes after the manner of a kinsman, and, urging him into the hole, rolled the great stone into its place again. Mounting the sorrel he rode swiftly out into the open, rounded the green point full in view of his pursuers, and was hid from them in an instant. Then, dismounting, he swiftly crept back through the long grass into the thicket again, mounted the mare, and drove her at laboured gallop also around the curve, so that it seemed to the plainsmen following that both men had gone that way. He mounted the sorrel again, and loosing a long sash from his waist drew it through the mare's bit. The mare, lightened of the weight, followed well. When the plainsmen came to the cape of green, they paused not by the secret place, for it seemed to them that two had ridden past and not one.

The Son of Pango Dooni had drawn pursuit after himself, for it is the law of the hills that a hillsman shall give his life or all that he has for a brother-in-blood.

When Cumner's Son had gone a little way he understood it all! And he would have turned back, but he knew that the hillsman had ridden far beyond his reach. So he ran as swiftly as he could; he climbed where it might seem not even a chamois could find a hold; his eyes scarcely seeing the long, misty valley, where the haze lay like a vapour from another world. There was no sound anywhere save the brawling water or the lonely cry of the flute-bird. Here was the last refuge of the hillsmen if they should ever be driven from the Neck of Baroob. They could close up every entrance, and live unscathed; for here was land for tilling, and wood, and wild fruit, and food for cattle.

Cumner's Son was supple and swift, and scarce an hour had passed ere he came to a steep place on the other side, with rough niches cut in the rocks, by which a strong man might lift himself up to safety. He stood a moment and ate some coffee-beans and drank some cold water from a stream at the foot of the crag, and then began his ascent. Once or twice he trembled, for he was worn and tired; but he remembered the last words of Tang-a-Dahit, and his fingers tightened their hold. At last, with a strain and a gasp, he drew himself up, and found himself on a shelf of rock with all the great valley spread out beneath him. A moment only he looked, resting himself, and then he searched for a way into the hills; for everywhere there was a close palisade of rocks and saplings. At last he found an opening scarce bigger than might let a cat through; but he

laboured hard, and at last drew himself out and looked down the path which led into the Bar of Balmud--the great natural escarpment of giant rocks and monoliths and medlar trees, where lay Pango Dooni's men.

He ran with all his might, and presently he was inside the huge defence. There was no living being to be seen; only the rock-strewn plain and the woods beyond.

He called aloud, but nothing answered; he called again the tribe-call of Pango Dooni's men, and a hundred armed men sprang up.

"I am a brother-in-blood of Pango Dooni's Son," said he. "Tang-a-Dahit rides for his life to the Bar of Balmud. Ride forth if ye would save him."

"The lad speaks with the tongue of a friend," said a scowling hillsman, advancing, "yet how know we but he lies?"

"Even by this," said Cumner's Son, and he spoke the sacred countersign and showed again the bracelet of Pango Dooni, and told what had happened. Even as he spoke the hillsmen gave the word, and two score men ran down behind the rocks, mounted, and were instantly away by the road that led to the Koongat Bridge.

The tall hillsman turned to the lad.

"You are beaten by travel," said he. "Come, eat and drink, and rest."

"I have sworn to breakfast where Pango Dooni bides, and there only will I rest and eat," answered the lad.

"The son of Pango Dooni knows the lion's cub from the tame dog's whelp. You shall keep your word. Though the sun ride fast towards noon, faster shall we ride in the Neck of Baroob," said the hillsman.

It was half-way towards noon when the hoof-beats drummed over the Brown Hermit's cave, and they rested not there; but it was noon and no more when they rode through Pango Dooni's gates and into the square where he stood.

The tall hillsman dropped to the ground, and Cumner's Son made to do the same. Yet he staggered, and would have fallen, but the hillsman ran an arm around his shoulder. The lad put by the arm, and drew himself up. He was most pale. Pango Dooni stood looking at him, without a word, and Cumner's Son doffed his cap. There was no blood in his lips, and his face was white and drawn.

"Since last night what time the bugle blows in the Palace yard, I have ridden," said he.

At the sound of his voice the great chief started. "The voice I know, but not the face," said he.

"I am Cumner's Son," replied the lad, and once more he spoke the sacred countersign.

BY THE OLD WELL OF JAHAR

To Cumner's Son when all was told, Pango Dooni said: "If my son be dead where those jackals swarm, it is well he died for his friend. If he be living, then it is also well. If he be saved, we will march to Mandakan, with all our men, he and I, and it shall be as Cumner wills, if I stay in Mandakan or if I return to my hills."

"My father said in the council-room, 'Better the strong robber than the weak coward,' and my father never lied," said the lad dauntlessly. The strong, tall chief, with the dark face and fierce eyes, roused in him the regard of youth for strong manhood.

"A hundred years ago they stole from my fathers the State of Mandakan," answered the chief, "and all that is here and all that is there is mine. If I drive the kine of thieves from the plains to my hills, the cattle were mine ere I drove them. If I harry the rich in the midst of the Dakoon's men, it is gaining my own over naked swords. If I save your tribe and Cumner's men from the half-bred jackal Boonda Broke, and hoist your flag on the Palace wall, it is only I who should do it."

Then he took the lad inside the house, with the great wooden pillars and the high gates, and the dark windows all barred up and down with iron, and he led him to a court-yard where was a pool of clear water. He made him bathe in it, and dark-skinned natives brought him bread dipped in wine, and when he had eaten they laid him on skins and rubbed him dry, and rolled him in soft linen, and he drank the coffee they gave him, and they sat by and fanned him until he fell asleep.

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The red birds on the window-sill sang through his sleep into his dreams. In his dreams he thought he was in the Dakoon's Palace at Mandakan with a thousand men before him, and three men came forward and gave him a sword. And a bird came flying through the great chambers and hung over him, singing in a voice that he understood, and he spoke to the three and to the thousand, in the words of the bird, and said:

"It is fighting, and fighting for honour and glory and houses and kine, but naught for love, and naught that there may be peace."

And the men said in reply: "It is all for love and it is all for peace," and they still held out the sword to him. So he took it and buckled it to his side, and the bird, flying away out of the great window of the chamber, sang: "Peace! Peace! Peace!" And Pango Dooni's Son standing by, with a shining face, said, "Peace! Peace!" and the great Cumner said, "Peace!" and a woman's voice, not louder than a bee's, but clear above all others, said, "Peace!"

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He awoke and knew it was a dream; and there beside him stood Pango Dooni, in his dress of scarlet and gold and brown, his broadsword buckled on, a kris at his belt, and a rich jewel in his cap.

"Ten of my captains and three of my kinsmen are come to break bread with Cumner's Son," said he. "They would hear the tale of our kinsmen who

died against the Palace wall, by the will of the sick Dakoon."

The lad sprang to his feet fresh and well, the linen and skins falling away from his lithe, clean body and limbs, and he took from the slaves his clothes. The eye of the chief ran up and down his form, from his keen blue eyes to his small strong ankle.

"It is the body of a perfect man," said he. "In the days when our State was powerful and great, when men and not dogs ruled at Mandakan, no man might be Dakoon save him who was clear of mote or beam; of true bone and body, like a high-bred yearling got from a perfect stud. But two such are there that I have seen in Mandakan to-day, and they are thyself and mine own son."

The lad laughed. "I have eaten good meat," said he, "and I have no muddy blood."

When they came to the dining-hall, the lad at first was abashed, for twenty men stood up to meet him, and each held out his hand and spoke the vow of a brother-in-blood, for the ride he had made and his honest face together acted on them. Moreover, whom the head of their clan honoured they also willed to honour. They were tall, barbaric-looking men, and some had a truculent look, but most were of a daring open manner, and careless in speech and gay at heart.

Cumner's Son told them of his ride and of Tang-a-Dahit, and, at last, of the men of their tribe who died by the Palace wall. With one accord they rose in their places and swore over bread and a drop of blood of their chief that they would not sheathe their swords again till a thousand of Boonda Broke's and the Dakoon's men lay where their own kinsmen had fallen. If it chanced that Tang-a-Dahit was dead, then they would never rest until Boonda Broke and all his clan were blotted out. Only Pango Dooni himself was silent, for he was thinking much of what should be done at Mandakan.

They came out upon the plateau where the fortress stood, and five hundred mounted men marched past, with naked swords and bare crises in their belts, and then wheeled suddenly and stood still, and shot their swords up into the air the full length of the arm, and called the battle-call of their tribe. The chief looked on unmoved, save once when a tall trooper rode near him. He suddenly called this man forth.

"Where hast thou been, brother?" he asked.

"Three days was I beyond the Bar of Balmud, searching for the dog who robbed my mother; three days did I ride to keep my word with a foe, who gave me his horse when we were both unarmed and spent, and with broken weapons could fight no more; and two days did I ride to be by a woman's side when her great sickness should come upon her. This is all, my lord, since I went forth, save this jewel which I plucked from the cap of a gentleman from the Palace. It was toll he paid even at the gates of Mandakan."

"Didst thou do all that thou didst promise?"

"All, my lord."

"Even to the woman?" The chief's eye burned upon the man.

"A strong male child is come into the world to serve my lord," said the trooper, and he bowed his head. "The jewel is thine and not mine, brother," said the chief softly, and the fierceness of his eyes abated; "but I will take the child."

The trooper drew back among his fellows, and the columns rode towards the farther end of the plateau. Then all at once the horses plunged into wild gallop, and the hillsmen came thundering down towards the chief and Cumner's Son, with swords waving and cutting to right and left, calling aloud, their teeth showing, death and valour in their eyes. The chief glanced at Cumner's Son. The horses were not twenty feet from the lad, but he did not stir a muscle. They were not ten feet from him, and swords flashed before his eyes, but still he did not stir a hair's breadth. In response to a cry the horses stopped in full career, not more than three feet from him. Reaching out he could have stroked the flaming nostril of the stallion nearest him.

Pango Dooni took from his side a short gold-handled sword and handed it to him.

"A hundred years ago," said he, "it hung in the belt of the Dakoon of Mandakan; it will hang as well in thine." Then he added, for he saw a strange look in the lad's eyes: "The father of my father's father wore it in the Palace, and it has come from his breed to me, and it shall go from me to thee, and from thee to thy breed, if thou wilt honour me."

The lad stuck it in his belt with pride, and taking from his pocket a silver-mounted pistol, said:

"This was the gift of a fighting chief to a fighting chief when they met in a beleaguered town, with spoil, and blood, and misery, and sick women and children round them; and it goes to a strong man, if he will take the gift of a lad."

At that moment there was a cry from beyond the troopers, and it was answered from among them by a kinsman of Pango Dooni, and presently, the troopers parting, down the line came Tang-a-Dahit, with bandaged head and arm.

In greeting, Pango Dooni raised the pistol which Cumner's Son had given him and fired it into the air. Straightway five hundred men did the same.

Dismounting, Tang-a-Dahit stood before his father. "Have the Dakoon's vermin fastened on the young bull at last?" asked Pango Dooni, his eyes glowering. "They crawled and fastened, but they have not fed," answered Tang-a-Dahit in a strong voice, for his wounds had not sunk deep. "By the Old Well of Jahar, which has one side to the mountain wall, and one to the cliff edge, I halted and took my stand. The mare and the sorrel of Cumner's Son I put inside the house that covers the well, and I lifted two stones from the floor and set them against the entrance. A beggar lay dead beside the well, and his dog licked his body. I killed the cur, for, following its master, it would have peace, and peace is more than life. Then, with the pole of the waterpail, I threw the dead dog across the entrance upon the paving stones, for these vermin of plainsmen will not pass where a dead dog lies, as my father knows well. They came not by the entrance, but they swarmed elsewhere, as ants swarm upon a sandhill, upon the roofs, and at the little window where the lamp burns.

"I drove them from the window and killed them through the doorway, but they were forty to one. In the end the pest would have carried me to death, as a jackal carries the broken meats to his den, if our hillsmen had not come. For an hour I fought, and five of them I killed and seven wounded, and then at the shouts of our hillsmen they fled at last. Nine of them fell by the hands of our people. Thrice was I wounded, but my wounds are no deeper than the scratches of a tiger's cub."

"Hadst thou fought for thyself the deed were good," said Pango Dooni, "but thy blood was shed for another, and that is the pride of good men. We have true men here, but thou art a true chief and this shalt thou wear."

He took the rich belt from his waist, and fastened it round the waist of his son.

"Cumner's Son carries the sword that hung in the belt. We are for war, and the sword should be out of the belt. When we are at peace again ye shall put the sword in the belt once more, and hang it upon the wall of the Palace at Mandakan, even as ye who are brothers shall never part."

Two hours Tang-a-Dahit rested upon skins by the bathing pool, and an hour did the slaves knead him and rub him with oil, and give him food and drink; and while yet the sun was but half-way down the sky, they poured through the Neck of Baroob, over five hundred fighting men, on horses that would kneel and hide like dogs, and spring like deer, and that knew each tone of their masters' voices. By the Bar of Balmud they gathered another fifty hillsmen, and again half-way beyond the Old Well of Jahar they met two score more, who had hunted Boonda Broke's men, and these moved into column. So that when they came to Koongat Bridge, in the country infested by the men of the Dakoon, seven hundred stalwart and fearless men rode behind Pango Dooni. From the Neck of Baroob to Koongat Bridge no man stayed them, but they galloped on silently, swiftly, passing through the night like a cloud, upon which the dwellers by the wayside gazed in wonder and in fear.

At Koongat Bridge they rested for two hours, and drank coffee, and broke bread, and Cumner's Son slept by the side of Tang-a-Dahit, as brothers sleep by their mother's bed. And Pango Dooni sat on the ground near them and pondered, and no man broke his meditation. When the two hours were gone, they mounted again and rode on through the dark villages towards Mandakan.

It was just at the close of the hour before dawn that the squad of troopers who rode a dozen rods before the columns, heard a cry from the dark ahead. "Halt-in the name of the Dakoon!"

V

CHOOSE YE WHOM YE WILL SERVE

The company drew rein. All they could see in the darkness was a single mounted figure in the middle of the road. The horseman rode nearer.

"Who are you?" asked the leader of the company.

"I keep the road for the Dakoon, for it is said that Cumner's Son has ridden to the Neck of Baroob to bring Pango Dooni down."

By this time the chief and his men had ridden up. The horseman recognised the robber chief, and raised his voice.

"Two hundred of us rode out to face Pango Dooni in this road. We had not come a mile from the Palace when we fell into an ambush, even two thousand men led by Boonda Broke, who would steal the roof and bed of the Dakoon before his death. For an hour we fought but every man was cut down save me."

"And you?" asked Pango Dooni.

"I come to hold the road against Pango Dooni, as the Dakoon bade me."

Pango Dooni laughed. "Your words are large," said he. "What could you, one man, do against Pango Dooni and his hillsman?"

"I could answer the Dakoon here or elsewhere, that I kept the road till the hill-wolves dragged me down."

"We be the wolves from the hills," answered Pango Dooni. "You would scarce serve a scrap of flesh for one hundred, and we are seven."

"The wolves must rend me first," answered the man, and he spat upon the ground at Pango Dooni's feet.

A dozen men started forward, but the chief called them back.

"You are no coward, but a fool," said he to the horseman. "Which is it better: to die, or to turn with us and save Cumner and the English, and serve Pango Dooni in the Dakoon's Palace?"

"No man knows that he must die till the stroke falls, and I come to fight and not to serve a robber mountaineer."

Pango Dooni's eyes blazed with anger. "There shall be no fighting, but a yelping cur shall be hung to a tree," said he.

He was about to send his men upon the stubborn horseman when the fellow said:

"If you be a man you will give me a man to fight. We were two hundred. If it chance that one of a company shall do as the Dakoon hath said, then is all the company absolved; and beyond the mists we can meet the Dakoon with open eyes and unafraid when he saith, 'Did ye keep your faith?'"

"By the word of a hillsman, but thou shalt have thy will," said the chief. "We are seven hundred men--choose whom to fight."

"The oldest or the youngest," answered the man. "Pango Dooni or Cumner's Son."

Before the chief had time to speak, Cumner's Son struck the man with the flat of his sword across the breast.

The man did not lift his arm, but looked at the lad steadily for a moment. "Let us speak together before we fight," said he, and to show

his good faith he threw down his sword.

"Speak," said Cumner's Son, and laid his sword across the pommel of his saddle.

"Does a man when he dies speak his heart to the ears of a whole tribe?"

"Then choose another ear than mine," said Cumner's Son. "In war I have no secrets from my friends."

A look of satisfaction came into Pango Dooni's face. "Speak with the man alone," said he, and he drew back.

Cumner's Son drew a little to one side with the man, who spoke quickly and low in English.

"I have spoken the truth," said he. "I am Cushnan Di"--he drew himself up--"and once I had a city of my own and five thousand men, but a plague and then a war came, and the Dakoon entered upon my city. I left my people and hid, and changed myself that no one should know me, and I came to Mandakan. It was noised abroad that I was dead. Little by little I grew in favour with the Dakoon, and little by little I gathered strong men about me--two hundred in all at last. It was my purpose, when the day seemed ripe, to seize upon the Palace as the Dakoon had seized upon my little city. I knew from my father, whose father built a new portion of the Palace, of a secret way by the Aqueduct of the Falling Fountain, even into the Palace itself. An army could ride through and appear in the Palace yard like the mist-shapes from the lost legions. When I had a thousand men I would perform this thing, I thought.

"But day by day the Dakoon drew me to him, and the thing seemed hard to do, even now before I had the men. Then his sickness came, and I could not strike an ailing man. When I saw how he was beset by traitors, in my heart I swore that he should not suffer by my hands. I heard of your riding to the Neck of Baroob--the men of Boonda Broke brought word. So I told the Dakoon, and I told him also that Boonda Broke was ready to steal into his Palace even before he died. He started up, and new life seemed given him. Calling his servants, he clothed himself, and he came forth and ordered out his troops. He bade me take my men to keep the road against Pango Dooni. Then he ranged his men before the Palace, and scattered them at points in the city to resist Boonda Broke.

"So I rode forth, but I came first to my daughter's bedside. She lies in a little house not a stone's throw from the Palace, and near to the Aqueduct of the Falling Fountain. Once she was beautiful and tall and straight as a bamboo stem, but now she is in body no more than a piece of silken thread. Yet her face is like the evening sky after a rain. She is much alone, and only in the early mornings may I see her. She is cared for by an old woman of our people, and there she bides, and thinks strange thoughts, and speaks words of wisdom.

"When I told her what the Dakoon bade me do, and what I had sworn to perform when the Dakoon was dead, she said:

"But no. Go forth as the Dakoon hath bidden. Stand in the road and oppose the hillsmen. If Cumner's Son be with them, thou shalt tell him all. If he speak for the hillsmen and say that all shall be well with thee, and thy city be restored when Pango Dooni sits in the Palace of the Dakoon, then shalt thou join with them, that there may be peace in the

land, for Pango Dooni and the son of Pango Dooni be brave strong men. But if he will not promise for the hillsmen, then shalt thou keep the secret of the Palace, and abide the will of God."

"Dost thou know Pango Dooni's son?" asked the lad, for he was sure that this man's daughter was she of whom Tang-a-Dahit had spoken.

"Once when I was in my own city and in my Palace I saw him. Then my daughter was beautiful, and her body was like a swaying wand of the boolda tree. But my city passed, and she was broken like a trailing vine, and the young man came no more."

"But if he came again now?"

"He would not come."

"But if he had come while she lay there like a trailing vine, and listened to her voice, and thought upon her words and loved her still. If for her sake he came secretly, daring death, wouldst thou stand--"

The man's eyes lighted. "If there were such truth in any man," he interrupted, "I would fight, follow him, and serve him, and my city should be his city, and the knowledge of my heart be open to his eye."

Cumner's Son turned and called to Pango Dooni and his son, and they came forward. Swiftly he told them all. When he had done so the man sprang from his horse, and taking off the thin necklet of beaten gold he wore round his throat, without a word he offered it to Tang-a-Dahit, and Tang-a-Dahit kissed him on the cheek and gave him the thick, loose chain of gold he wore.

"For this was it you risked your life going to Mandakan," said Pango Dooni, angrily, to his son; "for a maid with a body like a withered gourd." Then all at once, with a new look in his face, he continued softly: "Thou hast the soul of a woman, but thy deeds are the deeds of a man. As thy mother was in heart so art thou."

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Day was breaking over Mandakan, and all the city was a tender pink. Tower and minaret were like inverted cups of ruddy gold, and the streets all velvet dust, as Pango Dooni, guided by Cushnan Di, halted at the wood of wild peaches, and a great thicket near to the Aqueduct of the Failing Fountain, and looked out towards the Palace of the Dakoon. It was the time of peach blossoms, and all through the city the pink and white petals fell like the gay crystals of a dissolving sunrise. Yet there rose from the midst of it a long, rumbling, intermittent murmur, and here and there marched columns of men in good order, while again disorderly bands ran hither and hither with crises waving in the sun, and the red turban of war wound round their heads.

They could not see the front of the Palace, nor yet the Residency Square, but, even as they looked, a cannonade began, and the smoke of the guns curled through the showering peach-trees. Hoarse shoutings and cries came rolling over the pink roofs, and Cumner's Son could hear through all the bugle-call of the artillery.

A moment later Cushnan Di was leading them through a copse of pawpaw trees to a secluded garden by the Aqueduct, overgrown with vines and

ancient rose trees, and cherry shrubs. After an hour's labour with spades, while pickets guarded all approach, an opening was disclosed beneath the great flag-stones of a ruined building. Here was a wide natural corridor overhung with stalactites, and it led on into an artificial passage which inclined gradually upwards till it came into a mound above the level by which they entered. Against this mound was backed a little temple in the rear of the Palace. A dozen men had remained behind to cover up the entrance again. When these heard Pango Dooni and the others in the Palace yard they were to ride straight for a gate which should be opened to them.

There was delay in opening the stone door which led into the temple, but at last they forced their way. The place was empty, and they rode through the Palace yard, pouring out like a stream of spectral horsemen from the altar of the temple. Not a word was spoken as Pango Dooni and his company galloped towards the front of the Palace. Hundreds of the Dakoon's soldiers and terrified people who had taken refuge in the great court-yard, ran screaming into corners, or threw themselves in terror upon the ground. The walls were lined with soldiers, but not one raised his hand to strike--so sudden was the coming of the dreaded hillsman. They knew him by the black flag and the yellow sunburst upon it.

Presently Pango Dooni gave the wild battle-call of his tribe, and every one of his seven hundred answered him as they rode impetuously to the Palace front. Two thousand soldiers of the Dakoon, under command of his nephew, Gis-yo-Bahim, were gathered there. They were making ready to march out and defend the Palace. When they saw the flag and heard the battle-cry there was a movement backward, as though this handful of men were an overwhelming army coming at them. Scattered and disorderly groups of men swayed here and there, and just before the entrance of the Palace was a wailing group, by which stood two priests with their yellow robes and bare shoulders, speaking to them. From the walls the soldiers paused from resisting the swarming herds without.

"The Dakoon is dead!" cried Tang-a-Dahit.

As if in response came the wailing death-cry of the women of the Palace through the lattice windows, and it was taken up by the discomfited crowd before the Palace door.

"The Lord of all the Earth, the great Dakoon, is dead."

Pango Dooni rode straight upon the group, who fled at his approach, and, driving the priests indoors, he called aloud:

"The Dakoon is living. Fear not!"

For a moment there was no reply, and he waved his men into place before the Palace, and was about to ride down upon the native army, but Cumner's Son whispered to him, and an instant after the lad was riding alone upon the dark legions. He reined in his horse not ten feet away from the irregular columns.

"You know me," said he. "I am Cumner's Son. I rode into the hills at the Governor's word to bring a strong man to rule you. Why do ye stand here idle? My father, your friend, fights with a hundred men at the Residency. Choose ye between Boonda Broke, the mongrel, and Pango Dooni, the great hillsman. If ye choose Boonda Broke, then shall your city be levelled to the sea, and ye shall lose your name as a people."

Choose!"

One or two voices cried out; then from the people, and presently from the whole dark battalions, came the cry: "Long live Pango Dooni!"

Pango Dooni rode down with Tang-a-Dahit and Cushnan Di. He bade all but five hundred mounted men to lay down their arms. Then he put over them a guard of near a hundred of his own horsemen. Gathering the men from the rampart he did the same with these, reserving only one hundred to remain upon the walls under guard of ten hillsmen. Then, taking his own six hundred men and five hundred of the Dakoon's horsemen, he bade the gates to be opened, and with Cushnan Di marched out upon the town, leaving Tanga-Dahit and Cumner's Son in command at the Palace.

At least four thousand besiegers lay before the walls, and, far beyond, they could see the attack upon the Residency.

The gates of the Palace closed on the last of Pango Dooni's men, and with a wild cry they rode like a monstrous wave upon the rebel mob. There was no preparation to resist the onset. The rush was like a storm out of the tropics, and dread of Pango Dooni's name alone was as death among them.

The hillsmen clove the besiegers through like a piece of pasteboard, and turning, rode back again through the broken ranks, their battle-call ringing high above the clash of steel. Again they turned at the Palace wall, and, gathering impetus, they rode at the detached and battered segments of the miserable horde, and once more cut them down, then furiously galloped towards the Residency.

They could hear one gun firing intermittently, and the roars of Boonda Broke's men. They did not call or cry till within a few hundred yards of the Residency Square. Then their battle-call broke forth, and Boonda Broke turned to see seven hundred bearing down on his ten thousand, the black flag with the yellow sunburst over them.

Cumner, the Governor, and McDermot heard the cry of the hillsmen, too, and took heart.

Boonda Broke tried to divide his force, so that half of them should face the hillsmen, and half the Residency; but there was not time enough; and his men fought as they were attacked, those in front against Pango Dooni, those behind against Cumner. The hillsmen rode upon the frenzied rebels, and were swallowed up by the great mass of them, so that they seemed lost. But slowly, heavily, and with ferocious hatred, they drove their hard path on. A head and shoulders dropped out of sight here and there; but the hillsmen were not counting their losses that day, and when Pango Dooni at last came near to Boonda Broke the men he had lost seemed found again, for it was like water to the thirsty the sight of this man.

But suddenly there was a rush from the Residency Square, and thirty men, under the command of Cumner, rode in with sabres drawn.

There was a sudden swaying movement of the shrieking mass between Boonda Broke and Pango Dooni, and in the confusion and displacement Boonda Broke had disappeared.

Panic and flight came after, and the hillsmen and the little garrison were masters of the field.

"I have paid the debt of the mare," said Pango Dooni, laughing.

"No debt is paid till I see the face of my son," answered Cumner anxiously.

Pango Dooni pointed with his sword. "In the Palace yard," said he.

"In the Palace yard, alive?" asked Cumner. Pango Dooni smiled. "Let us go and see."

Cumner wiped the sweat and dust and blood from his face, and turned to McDermot.

"Was I right when I sent the lad?" said he proudly. "The women and children are safe."

VI

CONCERNING THE DAUGHTER OF CUSHNAN DI

The British flag flew half-mast from the Palace dome, and two others flew behind it; one the black and yellow banner of the hillsmen, the other the red and white pennant of the dead Dakoon. In the Palace yard a thousand men stood at attention, and at their head was Cushnan Di with fifty hillsmen. At the Residency another thousand men encamped, with a hundred hillsmen and eighty English, under the command of Tang-a-Dahit and McDermot. By the Fountain of the Sweet Waters, which is over against the Tomb where the Dakoon should sleep, another thousand men were patrolled, with a hundred hillsmen, commanded by a kinsman of Pango Dooni. Hovering near were gloomy, wistful crowds of people, who drew close to the mystery of the House of Death, as though the soul of a Dakoon were of more moment than those of the thousand men who had fallen that day. Along the line of the Bazaar ranged another thousand men, armed only with crises, under the command of the heir of the late Dakoon, and with these were a hundred and fifty mounted hillsmen, watchful and deliberate. These were also under the command of a kinsman of Pango Dooni.

It was at this very point that the danger lay, for the nephew of the Dakoon, Gis-yo-Bahim, was a weak but treacherous man, ill-fitted to rule; a coward, yet ambitious; distrusted by the people, yet the heir to the throne. Cumner and Pango Dooni had placed him at this point for no other reason than to give him his chance for a blow, if he dared to strike it, at the most advantageous place in the city. The furtive hangers-on, cut-throats, mendicants, followers of Boonda Broke, and haters of the English, lurked in the Bazaars, and Gis-yo-Bahim should be tempted for the first and the last time. Crushed now, he could never rise again. Pango Dooni had carefully picked the hillsmen whom he had sent to the Bazaar, and their captain was the most fearless and the wariest fighter from the Neck of Baroob, save Pango Dooni himself.

Boonda Broke was abroad still. He had escaped from the slaughter before the Residency and was hidden somewhere in the city. There were yet in Mandakan ten thousand men who would follow him that would promise the most, and Boonda Broke would promise the doors of Heaven as a gift to the city, and the treasures of Solomon to the people, if it might serve his purposes. But all was quiet save where the mourners followed their dead

to the great funeral pyres, which were set on three little hills just outside the city. These wailed as they passed by. The smoke of the burnt powder had been carried away by a gentle wind, and in its place was the pervasive perfume of the peach and cherry trees, and the aroma of the gugan wood which was like cut sandal in the sun after a rain. In the homes of a few rich folk there was feasting also, for it mattered little to them whether Boonda Broke or Pango Dooni ruled in Mandakan, so that their wealth was left to them. But hundreds of tinkling little bells broke the stillness. These were carried by brown bare-footed boys, who ran lightly up and down the streets, calling softly: "Corn and tears and wine for the dead!" It was the custom for mourners to place in the hands of the dead a bottle of tears and wine, and a seed of corn, as it is written in the Proverbs of Dol:

"When thou journeyest into the Shadows, take not sweetmeats with thee, but a seed of corn and a bottle of tears and wine; that thou mayest have a garden in the land whither thou goest."

It was yet hardly night when the pyres were lighted on the little hills and a warm glow was thrown over all the city, made warmer by roseate-hued homes and the ruddy stones and velvety dust of the streets. At midnight the Dakoon was to be brought to the Tomb with the Blue Dome. Now in the Palace yard his body lay under a canopy, the flags of Mandakan and England over his breast, twenty of his own naked body-guard stood round, and four of his high chiefs stood at his head and four at his feet, and little lads ran softly past, crying: "Corn and tears and wine for the dead!" And behind all these again were placed the dark battalions and the hillsmen. It went abroad through the city that Pango Dooni and Cumner paid great homage to the dead Dakoon, and the dread of the hillsmen grew less.

But in one house there had been no fear, for there, by the Aqueduct of the Failing Fountain, lived Cushnan Di, a fallen chief, and his daughter with the body like a trailing vine; for one knew the sorrow of dispossession and defeat and the arm of a leader of men, and the other knew Tang-a-Dahit and the soul that was in him.

This night, while yet there was an hour before the body of the dead Dakoon should go to the Tomb with the Blue Dome, the daughter of Cushnan Di lay watching for her door to open; for she knew what had happened in the city, and there was one whom her spirit longed for. An old woman sat beside her with hands clasped about her knees.

"Dost thou hear nothing?" said a voice from the bed. "Nothing but the stir of the mandrake trees, beloved."

"Nay, but dost thou not hear a step?"

"Naught, child of the heaven-flowers, but a dog's foot in the moss."

"Thou art sure that my father is safe?"

"The Prince is safe, angel of the high clouds. He led the hillsmen by the secret way into the Palace yard." There was silence for a moment, and then the girl's voice said again: "Hush! but there was a footstep-- I heard a breaking twig."

Her face lighted, and the head slightly turned towards the door. But the body did not stir. It lay moveless, save where the bosom rose and fell

softly, quivering under the white robe. A great wolf-dog raised its head at the foot of the bed and pointed its ears, looking towards the door.

The face of the girl was beautiful. A noble peace was upon it, and the eyes were like lamps of dusky fire, as though they held all the strength of the nerveless body. The love burning in them was not the love of a maid for a man, but that which comes after, through pain and trouble and wisdom. It was the look that lasts after death, the look shot forward from the Hereafter upon a living face which has looked into the great mystery, but has not passed behind the curtains.

There was a knock upon the door, and, in response to a summons, Tang-a-Dahit stepped inside. A beautiful smile settled upon the girl's face, and her eyes brooded tenderly upon the young hillsman.

"I am here, Mami," said he.

"Friend of my heart," she answered. "It is so long!"

Then he told her how, through Cumner's Son, he had been turned from his visit two days before, and of the journey down, and of the fighting, and of all that had chanced.

She smiled, and assented with her eyes--her father had told her. "My father knows that thou dost come to me, and he is not angry," she said.

Then she asked him what was to be the end of all, and he shook his head. "The young are not taken into counsel," he answered, "neither I nor Cumner's Son."

All at once her eyes brightened as though a current of light had been suddenly sent through them. "Cumner's Son," said she--"Cumner's Son, and thou--the future of Mandakan is all with ye; neither with Cumner, nor with Pango Dooni, nor with Cushnan Di. To the old is given counsel, and device, and wisdom, and holding; but to the young is given hope, and vision, and action, and building, and peace."

"Cumner's Son is without," said he. "May I fetch him to thee?"

She looked grave, and shrank a little, then answered yes.

"So strong, so brave, so young!" she said, almost under her breath, as the young man entered. Cumner's Son stood abashed at first to see this angelic head, so full of light and life, like nothing he had ever seen, and the nerveless, moveless body, like a flower with no roots.

"Thou art brave," said she, "and thy heart is without fear, for thou hast no evil in thee. Great things shall come to thee, and to thee," she added, turning to Tang-a-Dahit, "but by different ways."

Tang-a-Dahit looked at her as one would look at the face of a saint; and his fingers, tired yet with the swinging of the sword, stroked the white coverlet of her couch gently and abstractedly. Once or twice Cumner's Son tried to speak, but failed; and at last all he could say was: "Thou art good--thou art good!" and then he turned and stole quietly from the room.

At midnight they carried the Dakoon to the resting-place of his fathers. A thousand torches gleamed from the Palace gates through the Street of

Divers Pities, and along the Path by the Bazaar to the Tomb with the Blue Dome. A hundred hillsmen rode before, and a hundred behind, and between were two thousand soldiers of Mandakan on foot and fifty of the late Dakoon's body-guard mounted and brilliant in scarlet and gold. Behind the gun-carriage, which bore the body, walked the nephew of the great Dakoon, then came a clear space, and then Pango Dooni, and Cumner, and behind these twenty men of the artillery, at whose head rode McDermot and Cumner's Son.

As they passed the Path by the Bazaar every eye among the hillsmen and among the handful of British was alert. Suddenly a savage murmuring among the natives in the Bazaar broke into a loud snarl, and it seemed as if a storm was about to break; but as suddenly, at a call from Cumner, the hillsmen, the British, and a thousand native soldiers, faced the Bazaar in perfect silence, their lances, swords, and rifles in a pose of menace. The whole procession stood still for a moment. In the pause the crowds in the Bazaar drew back, then came a loud voice calling on them to rescue the dead Dakoon from murderers and infidels; and a wave of dark bodies moved forward, but suddenly cowered before the malicious stillness of the hillsmen and the British, and the wave retreated.

Cumner's Son had recognised the voice, and his eye followed its direction with a perfect certainty. Even as he saw the figure of Boonda Broke disguised as a native soldier the half-breed's arm was raised, and a kris flew from his hands, aimed at the heart of Pango Dooni. But as the kris flew the youth spurred his horse out of the ranks and down upon the murderer, who sprang back into the Bazaar. The lad fearlessly rode straight into the Bazaar, and galloped down upon the fugitive, who suddenly swung round to meet him with naked kris; but, as he did so, a dog ran across his path, tripped him up, and he half fell. Before he could recover himself a pistol was at his head. "March!" said the lad; and even as ten men of the artillery rode through the crowd to rescue their Colonel's son, he marched the murderer on. But a sudden frenzy possessed Boonda Broke. He turned like lightning on the lad, and raised his kris to throw; but a bullet was quicker, and he leaped into the air and fell dead without a cry, the kris dropping from his hand.

As Cumner's Son came forth into the path the hills men and artillery cheered him, the native troops took it up, and it was answered by the people in all the thoroughfare.

Pango Dooni had also seen the kris thrown at himself, but he could not escape it, though he half swung round. It struck him in the shoulder, and quivered where it struck, but he drew it out and threw it down. A hillsmen bound up the wound, and he rode on to the Tomb.

The Dakoon was placed in his gorgeous house of death, and every man cried: "Sleep, lord of the earth!" Then Cumner stood up in his saddle, and cried aloud:

"To-morrow, when the sun stands over the gold dome of the Palace, ye shall come to hear your Dakoon speak in the hall of the Heavenly Hours."

No man knew from Cumner's speech who was to be Dakoon, yet every man in Mandakan said in the quiet of his home that night:

"To-morrow Pango Dooni will be Dakoon. We will be as the stubble of the field before him. But Pango Dooni is a strong man."

VII

THE RED PLAGUE

"He promised he'd bring me a basket of posies,
A garland of lilies, a garland of roses,
A little straw hat to set off the blue ribbons
That tie up my bonnie brown hair."

This was the song McDermot sang to himself as he walked up the great court-yard of the Palace, past the lattice windows, behind which the silent women of the late Dakoon's household still sat, passive and grief-stricken. How knew they what the new Dakoon would do--send them off into the hills, or kill them? McDermot was in a famous humour, for he had just come from Pango Dooni, the possessor of a great secret, and he had been paid high honour. He looked round on the court-yard complacently, and with an air of familiarity and possession which seemed hardly justified by his position. He noted how the lattices stirred as he passed through this inner court-yard where few strangers were ever allowed to pass, and he cocked his head vaingloriously. He smiled at the lizards hanging on the foundation stones, he paused to dip his finger in the basin of a fountain, he eyed good-humouredly the beggars--old pensioners of the late Dakoon--seated in the shade with outstretched hands. One of them drew his attention, a slim, cadaverous-looking wretch who still was superior to his fellows, and who sat apart from them, evidently by their wish as much as by his own.

McDermot was still humming the song to himself as he neared the group; but he stopped short, as he heard the isolated beggar repeat after him in English:

"He promised he'd bring me a bunch of blue ribbons,
To tie up my bonnie brown hair."

He was startled. At first he thought it might be an Englishman in disguise, but the brown of the beggar's face was real, and there was no mistaking the high narrow forehead, the slim fingers, and the sloe-black eyes. Yet he seemed not a native of Mandakan. McDermot was about to ask him who he was, when there was a rattle of horse's hoofs, and Cumner's Son galloped excitedly up the court-yard.

"Captain, captain," said he, "the Red Plague is on the city!"

McDermot staggered back in consternation. "No, no," cried he, "it is not so, sir!"

"The man, the first, lies at the entrance of the Path by the Bazaar. No one will pass near him, and all the city goes mad with fear. What's to be done? What's to be done? Is there no help for it?" the lad cried in despair. "I'm going to Pango Dooni. Where is he? In the Palace?"

McDermot shook his head mournfully, for he knew the history of this plague, the horror of its ravages, the tribes it had destroyed.

The beggar leaned back against the cool wall and laughed. McDermot turned on him in his fury, and would have kicked him, but Cumner's Son,

struck by some astute intelligence in the man's look, said:

"What do you know of the Red Plague?"

Again the beggar laughed. "Once I saved the city of Nangoon from the plague, but they forgot me, and when I complained and in my anger went mad at the door of the Palace, the Rajah drove me from the country. That was in India, where I learned to speak English; and here am I at the door of a Palace again!"

"Can you save the city from the plague?" asked Cumner's Son, coming closer and eagerly questioning. "Is the man dead?" asked the beggar.

"Not when I saw him--he had just been taken."

"Good. The city may be saved if--" he looked at Cumner's Son, "if thou wilt save him with me. If he be healed there is no danger; it is the odour of death from the Red Plague which carries death abroad."

"Why do you ask this?" asked McDermot, nodding towards Cumner's Son.

The beggar shrugged his shoulders. "That he may not do with me as did the Rajah of Nangoon."

"He is not Dakoon," said McDermot.

"Will the young man promise me?"

"Promise what?" asked Cumner's Son.

"A mat to pray on, a house, a servant, and a loaf of bread, a bowl of goat's milk, and a silver najil every day till I die."

"I am not Dakoon," said the lad, "but I promise for the Dakoon--he will do this thing to save the city."

"And if thou shouldst break thy promise?"

"I keep my promises," said the lad stoutly.

"But if not, wilt thou give thy life to redeem it?"

"Yes."

The beggar laughed again and rose. "Come," said he.

"Don't go--it's absurd!" said McDermot, laying a hand on the young man's arm. "The plague cannot be cured."

"Yes, I will go," answered Cumner's Son. "I believe he speaks the truth. Go you to Pango Dooni and tell him all."

He spurred his horse and trotted away, the beggar running beside him. They passed out of the court-yard, and through the Gate by the Fountain of Sweet Waters.

They had not gone far when they saw Cumner, the Governor, and six men of the artillery riding towards them. The Governor stopped, and asked him where he was going.

The young man told him all.

The Colonel turned pale. "You would do this thing!" said he dumfounded. "Suppose this rascal," nodding towards the beggar, "speaks the truth; and suppose that, after all, the sick man should die and--"

"Then the lad and myself would be the first to follow him," interrupted the beggar, "and all the multitude would come after, from the babe on the mat to the old man by the Palace gates. But if the sick man lives--"

The Governor looked at his son partly in admiration, partly in pain, and maybe a little of anger.

"Is there no one else? I tell you I--"

"There is no one else; the lad or death for the city! I can believe the young; the old have deceived me," interposed the beggar again.

"Time passes," said Cumner's Son anxiously. "The man may die. You say yes to my going, sir?" he asked his father.

The Governor frowned, and the skin of his cheeks tightened.

"Go-go, and good luck to you, boy." He made as if to ride on, but stopped short, flung out his hand, and grasped the hand of his son. "God be with you, lad," said he; then his jaws closed tightly, and he rode on. It was easier for the lad than for him.

When he told the story to Pango Dooni the chief was silent for a moment; then he said:

"Until we know whether it be death or life, whether Cumner's Son save the city or lose his life for its sake, we will not call the people together in the Hall of the Heavenly Hours. I will send the heralds abroad, if it be thy pleasure, Cumner."

At noon--the hour when the people had been bidden to cry, "Live, Prince of the Everlasting Glory!"--they were moving restlessly, fearfully through the Bazaar and the highways, and watching from a distance a little white house, with blue curtains, where lay the man who was sick with the Red Plague, and where watched beside his bed Cumner's Son and the beggar of Nangoon. No one came near.

From the time the sick man had been brought into the house, the beggar had worked with him, giving him tinctures which he boiled with sweetmeat called the Flower of Bambaba, while Cumner's Son rubbed an ointment into his body. Now and again the young man went to the window and looked out at the lines of people hundreds of yards away, and the empty spaces where the only life that showed was a gay-plumaged bird that drifted across the sunlight, or a monkey that sat in the dust eating a nut. All at once the awe and danger of his position fell upon him. Imagination grew high in him in a moment--that beginning of fear and sorrow and heart-burning; yet, too, the beginning of hope and wisdom and achievement. For the first time in his life that knowledge overcame him which masters us all sometimes. He had a desire to fly the place; he felt like running from the house, shrieking as he went. A sweat broke out on his forehead, his lips clung to his teeth, his mouth was dry, his breast seemed to contract, and breathing hurt him.

"What a fool I was! What a fool I was to come here!" he said.

He buried his head in his arms as he leaned against the wall, and his legs trembled. From that moment he passed from headlong, daring, lovable youth, to manhood; understanding, fearful, conscientious, and morally strong. Just as abject as was his sudden fear, so triumphant was his reassertion of himself.

"It was the only way," he said to himself, suddenly wresting his head from his protecting arms. "There's a chance of life, anyhow, chance for all of us." He turned away to the sick man's bed, to see the beggar watching him with cold, passive eyes and a curious, half-sneering smile. He braced himself and met the passive, scrutinising looks firmly. The beggar said nothing, but motioned to him to lift the sick man upright, while he poured some tincture down his throat, and bound the head and neck about with saturated linen.

There came a knocking at the door. The beggar frowned, but Cumner's Son turned eagerly. He had only been in this room ten hours, but it seemed like years in which he had lived alone-alone. But he met firmly the passive, inquisitorial eyes of the healer of the plague, and he turned, dropped another bar across the door, and bade the intruder to depart.

"It is I, Tang-a-Dahit. Open!" came a loud, anxious voice.

"You may not come in."

"I am thy brother-in-blood, and my life is thine."

"Then keep it safe for those who prize it. Go back to the Palace."

"I am not needed there. My place is with thee."

"Go, then, to the little house by the Aqueduct." There was silence for a moment, and then Tang-a-Dahit said:

"Wilt thou not let me enter?"

The sudden wailing of the stricken man drowned Tang-a-Dahit's words, and without a word Cumner's Son turned again to the victim of the Red Plague.

All day the people watched from afar, and all day long soldiers and hillsmen drew a wide cordon of quarantine round the house. Terror seized the people when the sun went down, and to the watchers the suspense grew. Ceaseless, alert, silent, they had watched and waited, and at last the beggar knelt with his eyes fixed on the sleeper, and did not stir. A little way off from him stood Cumner's Son-patient, pale, worn, older by ten years than he was three days before.

In the city dismay and misery ruled. Boonda Broke and the dead Dakoon were forgotten. The people were in the presence of a monster which could sweep them from their homes as a hail-storm scatters the hanging nests of wild bees. In a thousand homes little red lights of propitiation were shining, and the sweet boolda wood was burning at a thousand shrines. Midnight came, then the long lethargic hours after; then that moment when all cattle of the field and beasts of the forest wake and stand upon their feet, and lie down again, and the cocks crow, and the birds flutter their wings, and all resign themselves to sleep once more. It was in

this hour that the sick man opened his eyes and raised his head, as though the mysterious influence of primitive life were rousing him. He said nothing and did nothing, but lay back and drew in a long, good breath of air, and afterwards fell asleep.

The beggar got to his feet. "The man is safe," said he.

"I will go and tell them," said Cumner's Son gladly, and he made as if to open the door.

"Not till dawn," commanded the beggar. "Let them suffer for their sins. We hold the knowledge of life and death in our hands."

"But my father, and Tang-a-Dahit, and Pango Dooni."

"Are they without sin?" asked the beggar scornfully. "At dawn, only at dawn!"

So they sat and waited till dawn. And when the sun was well risen, the beggar threw wide open the door of the house, and called aloud to the horsemen far off, and Cumner's Son waved with his hand; and McDermot came galloping to them. He jumped from his horse and wrung the boy's hand, then that of the beggar, then talked in broken sentences, which were spattered by the tears in his throat. He told Cumner's Son that his face was as that of one who had lain in a grave, and he called aloud in a blustering voice, and beckoned for troopers to come. The whole line moved down on them, horsemen and soldiers and people.

The city was saved from the Red Plague, and the people, gone mad with joy, would have carried Cumner's Son to the Palace on their shoulders, but he walked beside the beggar to his father's house, hillsmen in front and English soldiers behind; and wasted and ghostly, from riding and fighting and watching, he threw himself upon the bed in his own room, and passed, as an eyelid blinks, into a deep sleep.

But the beggar sat down on a mat with a loaf of bread, a bowl of goat's milk, and a long cigar which McDermot gave him, and he received idly all who came, even to the sick man, who ere the day was done was brought to the Residency, and, out of danger and in his right mind, lay in the shade of a banyan tree, thinking of nothing save the joy of living.

VIII

THE CHOOSING OF THE DAKOON

It was noon again. In the Hall of the Heavenly Hours all the chiefs and great people of the land were gathered, and in the Palace yard without were thousands of the people of the Bazaars and the one-storied houses. The Bazaars were almost empty, the streets deserted. Yet silken banners of gorgeous colours flew above the pink terraces, and the call of the silver horn of Mandakan, which was made first when Tubal Cain was young, rang through the long vacant avenues. A few hundred native troops and a handful of hillsmen rode up and down, and at the Residency fifty men kept guard under command of Sergeant Doolan of the artillery--his superior officers and the rest of his comrades were at the Palace.

In the shade of a banyan tree sat the recovered victim of the Red Plague and the beggar of Nangoon, playing a game of chuck-farthing, taught them by Sergeant Doolan, a bowl of milk and a calabash of rice beside them, and cigarettes in their mouths. The beggar had a new turban and robe, and he sat on a mat which came from the Palace.

He had gone to the Palace that morning as Colonel Cumner had commanded, that he might receive the thanks of the Dakoon for the people of Mandakan; but he had tired of the great place, and had come back to play at chuck-farthing. Already he had won everything the other possessed, and was now playing for his dinner. He was still chuckling over his victory when an orderly and two troopers arrived with a riderless horse, bearing the command of Colonel Cumner for the beggar to appear at once at the Palace. The beggar looked doubtfully at the orderly a moment, then rose with an air of lassitude and languidly mounted the horse. Before he had got half-way to the Palace he suddenly slid from the horse and said:

"Why should I go? The son of the great Cumner promised for the Dakoon. He tells the truth. Light of my soul, but truth is the greatest of all! I go to play chuck-farthing."

So saying, he turned and ran lazily back to the Residency and sat down beneath the banyan tree. The orderly had no commands to bring him by force, so he returned to the Palace, and entered it as the English Governor was ending his speech to the people. "We were in danger," said Cumner, "and the exalted chief, Pango Dooni, came to save us. He shielded us from evil and death and the dagger of the mongrel chief, Boonda Broke. Children of heavenly Mandakan, Pango Dooni has lived at variance with us, but now he is our friend. A strong man should rule in the Palace of Mandakan as my brother and the friend of my people. I speak for Pango Dooni. For whom do you speak?"

As he had said, so said all the people in the Hall of the Heavenly Hours, and it was taken up with shouts by the people in the Palace yard. Pango Dooni should be Dakoon!

Pango Dooni came forward and said: "If as ye say I have saved ye, then will ye do after my desire, if it be right. I am too long at variance with this Palace to sit comfortably here. Sometime, out of my bitter memories, I should smite ye. Nay, let the young, who have no wrongs to satisfy, let the young who have dreams and visions and hopes, rule; not the old lion of the hills, who loves too well himself and his rugged ease of body and soul. But if ye owe me any debt, and if ye mean me thanks, then will ye make my son Dakoon. For he is braver than I, and between ye there is no feud. Then will I be your friend, and because my son shall be Dakoon I will harry ye no more, but bide in my hills, free and friendly, and ready with sword and lance to stand by the faith and fealty that I promise. If this be your will, and the will of the great Cumner, speak."

Cumner bowed his head in assent, and the people called in a loud voice for Tang-a-Dahit.

The young man stepped forth, and baring his head, said:

"It is meet that the race be to the swift, to those who have proven their faith and their swords; who have the gift for ruling, and the talent of the sword to sustain it. For me, if ye will hear me, I will go another way. I will not rule. My father hath passed on this honour to me, but I

yield it up to one who hath saved ye from a double death, even to the great Cumner's Son. He rode, as ye know, through peril to Pango Dooni, bearing the call for help, and he hath helped to save the whole land from the Red Plague. But for him Mandakan would be only a place of graves. Speak, children of heavenly Mandakan, whom will ye choose?" When Cumner's Son stood forth he was pale and astounded before the cries of greeting that were carried out through the Palace yard, through the highways, and even to the banyan tree where sat the beggar of Nangoon.

"I have done nothing, I have done nothing," said he sincerely. "It was Pango Dooni, it was the beggar of Nangoon. I am not fit to rule."

He turned to his father, but saw no help in his eyes for refusal. The lad read the whole story of his father's face, and he turned again to the people.

"If ye will have it so, then, by the grace of God, I will do right by this our land," said he.

A half-hour later he stood before them, wearing the costly robe of yellow feathers and gold and perfect silk of the Dakoon of Mandakan.

"The beggar of Nangoon who saved our city, bid him come near," he said; but the orderly stepped forward and told his story of how the beggar had returned to his banyan tree.

"Then tell the beggar of Nangoon," said he, "that if he will not visit me, I will visit him; and all that I promised for the Dakoon of Mandakan I will fulfil. Let Cushnan Di stand forth," he added, and the old man came near. "The city which was yours is yours, again, and all that was taken from it shall be restored," said he.

Then he called him by his real name, and the people were amazed.

Cushnan Di, as he had been known to them, said quietly:

"If my Lord will give me place near him as general of his armies and keeper of the gates, I will not ask that my city be restored, and I will live near to the Palace--"

"Nay, but in the Palace," interrupted Cumner's Son, "and thy daughter also, who hath the wisdom of heaven, that there be always truth shining in these high places."

An hour later the Dakoon passed through the Path by the Bazaar.

"Whither goes the Dakoon?" asked a native chief of McDermot.

"To visit a dirty beggar in the Residency Square, and afterwards to the little house of Cushnan Di," was the reply.

IX

THE PROPHET OF PEACE

The years went by.

In the cool of a summer evening a long procession of people passed through the avenues of blossoming peach and cherry trees in Mandakan, singing a high chant or song. It was sacred, yet it was not solemn; peaceful, yet not sombre; rather gentle, aspiring, and clear. The people were not of the city alone, but they had been gathered from all parts of the land--many thousands, who were now come on a pilgrimage to Mandakan.

At the head of the procession was a tall, lithe figure, whose face shone, and whose look was at once that of authority and love. Three years' labour had given him these followers and many others. His dreams were coming true.

"Fighting, fighting, naught but fighting for honour and glory and homes and kine, but naught for love, and naught that there may be peace."--This was no longer true; for the sword of the young Dakoon was ever lifted for love and for peace.

The great procession stopped near a little house by the Aqueduct of the Failing Fountain, and spread round it, and the leader stepped forward to the door of the little house and entered. A silence fell upon the crowd, for they were to look upon the face of a dying girl, who chose to dwell in her little home rather than in a palace.

She was carried forth on a litter, and set down, and the long procession passed by her as she lay. She smiled at all an ineffable smile of peace, and her eyes had in them the light of a good day drawing to its close. Only once did she speak, and that was when all had passed, and a fine troop of horsemen came riding up.

This was the Dakoon of Mandakan and his retinue. When he dismounted and came to her, and bent over her, he said something in a low tone for her ear alone, and she smiled at him, and whispered the one word "Peace!"

Then the Dakoon, who once was known only as Cumner's Son, turned and embraced the prophet Sandoni, as he was now called, though once he had been called Tang-a-Dahit the hillsman.

"What message shall I bear thy father?" asked the Dakoon, after they had talked a while.

Sandoni told him, and then the Dakoon said:

"Thy father and mine, who are gone to settle a wild tribe of the hills in a peaceful city, send thee a message." And he held up his arm, where a bracelet shone.

The Prophet read thereon the Sacred Countersign of the hillsmen.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Ate some coffee-beans and drank some cold water
His courtesy was not on the same expansive level as his vanity

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