



MOUNG NAY was sitting under the banyan tree in front of the *dak* bungalow of which he was the caretaker, feeling the edge of the *dah* he had been sharpening, and gazing thoughtfully at a series of immense tiger pugs that led out from behind the house past where he sat, and away into the jungle across the road. There was not a man in the whole Sitang valley who would not have recognized those tracks, and Moug Nay, who had in spite of his scant eighteen years, justly earned the reputation of being one of the best *shirkurs* of the district, did not need to be told. They had been made by the Mindoon maneater, the tiger which had terrorized the whole country for fifty miles around during the last six years, and driven great number of the farmers from the wilder parts to seek safety in the towns; all, in spite of the thousand-rupee bounty on his skin, and a long series of hunts organized to rid the district of the scourge.

Countless had been the escapades of Mindoon since as a young tiger he had first earned his name by forcing the abandonment of the village of Mindoon in a series of uncanny raids, against which no traps, watchfulness, or organized hunts had availed. Men, women, and children had continued to disappear with appalling regularity, until finally the demoralized villagers deserted their rice clearings

and fled to the more settled parts of the country.

The only effect of this flight, however, had been to enlarge the field of activity for Mindoon to cover the whole Tavoy district, for he was a brute of no common cunning. Thereafter he never killed twice in succession from the same village. A victim snatched from one settlement almost invariably meant that the next one would be from some place forty or more miles away.

He also developed a predilection for young children, and once he was reported to have entered a house filled with sleeping Karens made several peregrinations about among them as they lay on the floor, in the course of which he received several kicks from individuals who resented the intrusion of what their semiconscious minds took for one of their big dogs, who were then lying mangled near by in the jungle, and concluded his visit by departing with the plumpest child in the room.

Every possible means had been tried to put an end to his career of slaughter. Spring traps consisting of a poisoned spear so arranged that when the tiger touched a string a bent bamboo would drive it into the brute's body, which were usually so effective, had failed miserably when tried against Mindoon. Poison had been equally useless, Mindoon never returned to an old kill.

Organized hunts had been able to do no more

than cause him a little excitement, and enable him to add to his fame by further exploits. Every party that went out after him came back with fresh stories of his cunning and daring. On several occasions he had entered the camp of the hunters and carried off one of their number. MOUNG NAY himself had been present when the tiger, disregarding the tethered cow, had shaken a servant-boy from the very tree or rather the small bush on which an army officer was keeping watch, and made off before the startled soldier could fire a shot.

Small wonder then that MOUNG NAY had been busy putting an extra edge on the great knife in his hand, and was now studying the tracks of the tiger or devil, as he with the majority of the inhabitants of the district firmly believed.

"Uncle, rice is cooked," called a child's voice from the back of the bungalow.

"All right, Sharoo," answered MOUNG NAY, rising and making his way to the house to help his ten-year-old nephew in the task of getting the huge earthen *chattie* off the fire. In a few minutes the pair were making inroads upon the heaping plates of rice, such as only two hungry Karens can make.

For a time they were too busy to say anything, but at last little Sharoo stopped cramming the rice into his mouth long enough to ask, "Uncle, when will Deputy Commissioner Sahib let you have that rifle he promised you?"

MOUNG NAY stopped eating and looked out through the door at the tracks. "He says as soon as he gets a permit from Calcutta, which will be next dry season. I wish I had it now."

Sharoo frowned, and was about to say something derogatory about the government forbidding guns to people, but he was prevented by a voice from in front of the house shouting. "Ho, MOUNG NAY, MOUNG NAY."

MOUNG NAY leaped to his feet, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand just as the form of MUTHOO, the Hindu mail-runner, appeared in the doorway holding out a blue envelope with the impressive "On His Majesty's Service" printed across the top.

MOUNG NAY stoically took the letter as if he had always been in the habit of receiving such missives regularly, when as a matter of fact this was the first letter of any description that had ever come to him. He tore it open, but after a futile stare at the enclosed sheet, handed it over to Sharoo to see what

three years spent at the mission school at Donebu would enable him to do with it. Sharoo grew an inch taller as he rose to the occasion. He was none too enthusiastic about going back to school that rain, but he felt the dignity of his position as he slowly spelled out the following:

MOUNG NAY:

You are hereby ordered to close the bungalow, and report at once to me at Donebu to assist in hunting down the Mindoon maneater

C. E. WHITE.

Deputy Commissioner.

MOUNG NAY turned to the mail-runner. "What is White Sahib thinking of," he said, "to start after the Mindoon devil at this time when the rains will be here in a day or two at the most. Then it will be like trying to chase an eel in the Papoon Swamp to go after old Mindoon. If I only had a gun I would have a better chance if I stayed right here. That is if even a rifle would hurt him. Look at those pugs."

The letter-carrier, after a respectful survey of the tracks, shrugged his shoulders. "Have you not heard?" he asked. "Only three days ago at the water feast at the Donebu Pagoda, the striped devil entered the Pagoda grounds in broad daylight and took the boy who was carrying the high priest's fan. White Sahib is very angry. He says, 'This is too much.' He is going to slay Mindoon this time if he has to get permits from Calcutta and arm the whole province.

"It is very strange how the old fellow always picks out a plump boy if he can. Better look out, Sharoo, you are getting as fat as Ko Bwe's wife. You may get a ride one of these nights, from which there is no return. He must be hungry to-night, too. He got scared away from Saw Ker's last night by a pot of water which fell down upon him as he was trying to crawl by the shelf it was sitting on into the house. So be careful, fat one, and keep away from the jungle."

Sharoo made no answer, and MUTHOO went on: "By the way, White Sahib raised the bounty to two thousand rupees yesterday. Much good that will do against a devil."

"Right," agreed MOUNG NAY, "It would do no good now even if old Mindoon were flesh and blood. He had better wait till the dry season. All we will get now is that Daingu fever. By the looks of those clouds in the south there the rains are close

upon us now. But I suppose I must go or White Sahib will be very angry, and I shall never get that rifle he promised me. Have you had rice yet?"

The mail-runner smiled apologetically and pointed to the red and white cast marks on his forehead, and vanished down the mail road, breaking out as he entered the jungle into a high-pitched squealing chant that was calculated to induce even Mindoon to leave that part of the country at once.

Under ordinary conditions Moug Nay would never have thought of starting until the next day, but the unusual event of the letter showed White Sahib was in a hurry, and White Sahib was a man to be obeyed. Moreover Sharoo's school began the day after next in Donebu, and he could take him along home with him, and make sure he arrived safely.

Moug Nay and Sharoo therefore lost no time in tying a few necessaries up in a bundle and locking up the bungalow. Nevertheless, it was well past noon before the pair finally set off along a jungle-path which, though untraveled recently on account of old Mindoon, would mean a saving of several miles over the cart-road, and would enable them to reach Donebu before night.

For several miles the path wound along through closely packed clumps of bamboos, the glassy leaves of which formed a most effective sun-shield, but at the same time cut off all view of the heavens. Late in the afternoon the path entered the more open growth of big mangoes and scrubby trees that characterized the lowlands of the Sittang Valley. Here, for the first time in several hours, the two caught a glimpse of the sky, and saw immediately that Moug Nay's prediction of the coming of the rains was to be speedily realized. Already masses of clouds, driven by the first of the monsoons, was pouring up over the mountain ranges to the south. Donebu was only a matter of three miles away now, and Moug Nay quickened his pace to such an extent that little Sharoo's short legs were kept on the run most of the time. Presently there came a flash of lightning, followed by a growl of thunder, and then, with a roar, a squall came driving over the jungle, sending grub-eaten mango-limbs crashing to the ground and following them with a storm of mangoes.

Everything pointed to a miserable, wet night spent in a dripping tree, for it was manifestly impossible to proceed much farther in the gathering

darkness and deluge of rain, which experience had taught them was not far off. Suddenly Moug Nay started to run, shouting back: "Come on, Sharoo; we'll see if we can find Ba Tin's old house."

Sharoo's legs did their best, and he was close behind his uncle when, a moment later, they rushed out from the jungle into an abandoned rice-clearing. The owner's thatched house was still standing on its frail bamboo posts. With a glad cry the two Karens rushed forward, climbed the rickety ladder, and pushed through the doorway into the black interior. The rain held off for a minute or two, but then came down in a torrent that blotted out the sight of the jungle, less than seventy-five yards away, with a white wall of drops, and threatened to flay the flimsy thatch roof from the house.

Moug Nay and Sharoo, however, were too accustomed to rain and too thankful for a roof over their heads to spend any time worrying about the weather, especially when there was a good supply of boiled rice in their bundle. Night shut down before they had finished eating, and, without more ado, they stretched out on the floor, and were soon sound asleep.

The rain proved to be only a passing storm, and three hours after the two Karens had fallen asleep, the tropical moon was pouring a flood of light down on the old hut in the rice-clearing. A barking deer tripped out of the jangle and nibbled its way daintily across the field, and then back again, finally settling down beneath a lone bush midway between the house and the place where the path vanished into the black jungle to chew its cud and listen to the frogs singing their welcome to the rains.

The hours slipped by, and morning was close at hand, when suddenly the deer sprang to its feet. For a moment it paused, staring with quivering nostrils along the path to where it entered the dark jungle. Then it dashed madly away across the field, and vanished into the jungle on the opposite side.

Presently a shadow drifted out from the jungle under the blazing moon. It was the Mindoon maneater. For a second he hesitated, staring and sniffing in the direction of the house. Then the great, striped sides began to ripple in the moonlight as the great brute slouched cautiously along the path to the foot of the ladder. There he stopped for several minutes, sniffing up at the house and gathering himself. Then he sprang lightly to the platform; slipped through the door; seized Sharoo,

and before the boy could do more than scream, had borne him crashing through the thatch wall.

Moung Nay was on his feet in an instant. There before him gaped the hole in the wall, and there across the field was trotting the tiger with Sharoo's limp body swung across his back. Moung Nay did not stop to think. With a shout he sprang through the hole down to the ground, and rushed after old Mindoon clutching his big *dah*. The man-eater was already half-way to the jungle, and did not deign to do more than quicken his pace. His long series of escapes had made him contemptuous of any mere man.

Moung Nay raced after him. Once the tiger reached the jungle, pursuit would be useless, as the crafty old desperado well knew. Moung Nay strained every nerve and his sturdy legs brought him up even with the haunches of the brute, but he did not dare even then, though in a paroxysm of anxiety to save Sharoo, to risk a stroke which would do no more than enrage the tiger and might kill the boy.

Moung Nay was gaining steadily, but the blackness of the shade of the mangoes was all but reached. Five yards more and the tiger would have vanished with his prey. The straining Karen realized it was now or never. Every last bit of reserve strength went into a crucial spurt, and, fixing his eyes on the swelling arch of Mindoon's neck, he threw himself forward as a varsity sprinter throws himself at the tape that means victory or defeat, and struck with all his might at the roots of the jaunty white ruff. He felt the tip of the *dah* bite into the tiger's flesh, tripped, and fell prostrate in the mud and darkness under the first of the mangoes.

Mindoon snarled, half turned, and struck viciously at the body on the ground, ripping Moung Nay's left arm open from shoulder to wrist. Then, without relaxing his grip on Sharoo, was swallowed up in the jungle.

Moung Nay staggered to his feet. The fall and the blow had shaken him. For a full minute he stood with the blood dripping from his arm, staring at the blackness which had engulfed Sharoo. Slowly the realization of what he had done broke in on his mind.

He, with only a *dah*, had dared to chase old Mindoon, the devil of the jungles, and was still alive. A panic seized him; the boy was forgotten, and Moung Nay skulked back to the hut with terrified backward glances. He scrambled up the

rickety ladder, but the darkness of the doorway appalled him, and he cowed down in a corner of the platform, clutching the *dah* nervously, and staring at the edge of the jungle.

As the minutes slipped by without incident, his terror passed, and a full comprehension of Sharoo's fate dawned upon him. Few men have ever seen a Karen weep, but as Moung Nay squatted there and thought of the part the little fellow had played in his life, the hunts they had had together, the tears trickled down his cheeks. The ache of his wound finally forced him to bind it up as well, as he could with some strips torn from his *lungi*, but he sat on. Time passed. The sun rushed up over the Pegu hills and poured its heat down on the drenched earth, but still Moung Nay crouched there, gripping his *dah* and weeping silently.

The sun was some hours into the sky before he finally got up, convulsively clutching the monster knife. He paused for a minute, looking along the trail of tracks to where they disappeared, apparently, in the direction of an enormous padouk-tree. Then he slipped down the ladder and stole as quietly as he could along the trail. He was grimly determined to save what he could of the boy's body, even at the risk of his own life. At least he now knew that old Mindoon was not a devil, or, if he were, he was not invulnerable to a *dah* stroke. But it was no small thing to follow any wounded tiger into the jungle and take away its prey. Moung Nay longed ardently for a rifle in place of his *dah*, or, at least, the full use of both his arms. Still he pressed on slowly, very slowly, ever ready to meet the anticipated coughing roar and charge, while before him in his mind's eye was the image of the torn and half-devoured boy urging him on.

The trail was plain; blood was everywhere. The stems of the elephant-grass on either side of the path Mindoon had broken for himself was smeared with it. Pools of it were thickening on the ground. Moung Nay advanced still more cautiously. In vain, for in spite of his care a log on which he was standing crumbled beneath him, and he pitched through the elephant-grass down into a hollow beneath the tree. The ground was smeared with half-clotted blood. With a shriek of terror Moung Nay slid, in spite of all his efforts, across it, and brought up with a bump against the crouching body of Mindoon. Half-clotted blood from the deep *dah* gash in the neck showed where the jugular vein had been severed.

At MOUNG NAY'S cry a small figure huddled up against the tree-trunk stirred and sat up, trying in a dazed way, at the same time, to feel of a badly bitten arm and a great bump where his forehead had evidently struck a beam as the man-eater had borne him through the wall.

It was a long four miles before the two Karens finally reached the first inhabited house on the outskirts of Donebu and sank down on its steps. Any white man would have fainted from the strain of the night's events, and even MOUNG NAY could only give a very fragmentary account of what had happened when Deputy Commissioner White, who had been swearing all the morning at the dilatoriness of natives in general and MOUNG NAY in particular, came rattling furiously up to the house in his dog-cart in response to the message brought him by a Kachin about dead devils and bloody men.

He ended by sending the Karens to the hospital in the dog-cart, and going on foot himself to investigate and, if possible, save the skin. He was too late. The news had spread like the waters of the lower Sitang when there is a cloudburst in the hills. Every man, woman, or child who could toddle or totter, or could inveigle any one else into carrying them, were already gathered there in an ecstatic mob about the carcass, venting on it the years of accumulated terror and spite with every conceivable weapon, from the *dahs* of the withered old bamboo-cutters to the fly brush wielded by the doctors *syce*, and the oiled-silk sunshade in the hands of the haughty Thugyi's wife; and in torrents of abuse poured forth in all of the nineteen languages of Donebu.

Confident in the prestige of his white skin, however, he plunged into the mob in an effort to drive them off; but after his topi had been crushed

down about his neck by the frenzied hand of his own big *totec*, who ordinarily cringed at his slightest look, and he had seen a group of yellow-robed *poongyees*, whose cardinal articles of faith are freedom from all emotion, abhorrence of all women, and doing no harm to anything, wildly embrace women of the town and fight their way into the center of the riot and wildly belabor the body with their staffs, he withdrew to a safe distance, and watched the surging mass of people as it hacked, trampled, and ground the remains of the tiger into mashed and distorted remnants.

Utter weariness alone finally forced a lull, and brought enough of the police-men in the mob to their senses to enable White, with their help, to drive the reluctant mob off and bear the remains back to Donebu, followed by a still jabberingly jubilant procession.

All this happened years ago. Now MOUNG NAY is chief man of the largest town in the Tavoy district. On special occasions, particularly when Sharoo comes from his position in Rangoon on the commissioner's staff to spend his vacation with MOUNG NAY, he will unlock his iron-bound teak-box and take out of their wrapping a *dah* and an immense tiger's tooth, the only unbroken thing left in old Mindoon's body by the mob. Then the two men gaze at them for some minutes, while Sharoo's hand steals up to two great dents in his biceps, and MOUNG NAY fingers silently the scars on his left arm, and both of them think of the race with old Mindoon and death that MOUNG NAY ran that night out in the Tavoy jungle, and the victory that meant life itself for Sharoo, and for MOUNG NAY the best rifle money could buy in London and the only perpetual gun permit in all Burma.