

Fraser William Alexander

The Sa'-Zada Tales



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Introduction

All his life Sa'-zada the Keeper had lived with animals. That was why he could talk to them, and they to him; that was why he knew that something must be done to keep his animal friends from fretting themselves to death during the dreadful heat that came like a disease over their part of the Greater City.

In the Greater City itself the sun smote with a fierceness that was like the anger of evil gods. The air vibrated with palpitating white heat, and the shadows were as the blue flame of a forge. Men and women stole from ovened streets, wide-mouthed, to places where trees swayed and waters babbled feebly of a cooler rest; even the children were sent away that they might not die of fevered blood.

But in the Animal City there was no escape. The Dwellers from distant deep jungles and tall forests had only blistering iron bars between them and the sirocco that swept from the brick walls of the Greater City.

It was because of this that Sa'-zada said, "I must make them talk of their other life, lest they die of this."

In the Greater City men thought only of themselves; but with Sa'-zada it was different. The animals were his children – his friends; so he had contrived that all of the Peace-kind – the Grass-feeders and others – should come from their cages and corrals and meet each evening in front of the iron-bound homes which contained those of the Blood-kind, to tell stories of their past life.

Sa'-zada had asked Hathi, the one-tusked Elephant, who had been Ganesh in Hindustan, about it. In Hathi's opinion those who had seen the least, and were of little interest, would do all the talking – that was his experience of jungle life; so the Keeper had wisely arranged that each evening some one animal, or group, should tell the tale.

FIRST NIGHT THE STORIES OF WHITE, YELLOW, AND BLACK LEOPARD

Through the listless leaves of the oaks and elms the moon was spraying silver over the hot earth when Sa'-zada, throwing down bars and unlocking gates, passed the words to his friends to gather at Leopard's cage.

As he slipped the chain from Hathi's foot, and it fell with a soft clink on the hay bed, he said, "Ganesh, you of the one tusk, keep thou the Jungle Dwellers in order, for if one may judge from the manners of one's own kind, who are men, this weather is a breeder of evil tempers."

"Umph, umph!" grunted Hathi complacently. "I who have seen fifty such times of discomfort think little of it. Surely the Sahib-kind, who are also long dwellers, can remember that there comes another season of cool. But, as you say, Master, perhaps it were well if I take into my trunk a cooler of water for such as may fret themselves into a fever."

Even as Hathi spoke an angry roar shook the building they were in.

"Hear that, Patient One," cried Sa'-zada; "Pardus, the Black Panther, who is at best a mighty cross chap, is in an evil way."

The cry of Black Panther, which was like the falling of many cataracts, was causing the dead night air to tremble. "Hough-hough; a-hough! Huzo-or, Wah-hough!"

"There, make haste, Little One!" said the Keeper to Elephant. "The sight of our friends who are gathering at his cage, has put Pardus in a temper, I fear."

In front of the Leopard's house all the outside animals of the Park had assembled: Arna, the India Buffalo; Sher Abi, the Crocodile; Gidar, the Jackal, and many others; even Magh, the Ourang-Outang, was there with a Fox Terrier who lived in her cage.

"Friends," began Sa'-zada, "if we are all to live here together in this Park, it were well that we know of each other's ways."

"That's a good idea," declared Sher Abi; "for in my time I have known little of the habits of other animals. A dog, for instance, will come down to the water to drink –"

"I know," interrupted Gidar; "and not having the wisdom of a Jungle Dweller like me, he will come to drink and stop to sup with one of your kind. Is that not so, Sher Abi?"

"Perhaps, perhaps," sighed the Magar; "and at home the Pups, having lost a parent, fall into the clutches of Gidar the Jackal."

"I like this meeting," broke in Magh; "a gathering of thieves, and cannibals, and murderers – Eaters of Dogs –"

"And Apes," came like a soft summer sigh from the bellows-mouth of the Crocodile.

"Friends," interrupted the Keeper, "do not fall to quarreling. Let us decide who is to tell the first tale. As we are at Leopard's cage, perhaps he should have the first chance."

"I'm agreed," declared Magh; "murder stories are always interesting."

"I am sure everybody would be glad to hear of your killing, Magh," sneered Pardus.

"Well," continued Sa'-zada, "here are three Leopards: Pard, the Black Leopard; Rufous, the Yellow Leopard, and White Leopard. We'll have their stories for this evening."

"I'm no Leopard," objected Pardus, ceasing his restless walk for a minute. Then he took three turns up and down in front of the bars, his big velvet feet sounding "spufh, spufh," on the hard polished floor. "No," he continued, stopping in front of Sa'-zada, sitting down, and letting his big round head sink between his shoulders, until he looked up from under heavy brows with yellow-green eyes, "no, I'm a Panther. That is the way with the men of my land; to them we are all 'Chita,' or else 'Bagh,' which surely means a Tiger."

"I know," answered Sa'-zada, "you are neither Bagh the Tiger, nor Chita the Leopard."

"I should say not," answered Pardus. "Chita is long of leg and slim of gut – a chaser of Rabbits, and of the build of an Afghan Hound. With one crunch of my jaws – Waugh! Why, I could break his neck."

"What's the difference, anyway," objected Magh, "whether you are a Leopard or Panther – you all belong to the family of Throat Cutters? But what bothers me is that one is black, one is yellow, and one is white; now, in my family, we are all of one shade."

"A very dirty color, too," sneered Pardus. "Waugh-hough! no color at all – just *dirt*!"

"That is so that murderers like you cannot see me to eat me," answered Magh. "If I am on the ground, am I not the color of the ground? And when I am curled up on the limb of a tree am I not like a knot on the tree trunk? That is to keep me safe from you and Python."

"That may be so," answered Pardus, "but I, who hunt in the early night, find this black coat the very thing. Soft Paws! I have come so close to a Bullock, working up wind, of course, that one spring completed the Kill."

"Umph, umph!" grunted Hathi, with eager interest. "All that appears reasonable; but, tell me, Brothers, why is Yellow Leopard so bright in his spots? And if your black coat serves you so well, how does the other, who is white, manage?"

"I speak only of myself," joined in Rufous, the Yellow Leopard. "True, I also hunt at night at times, but it's slow work; perhaps a long night watch by a water pool, and then only the kill of a Chinkara – a mouthful, and in the time of scarce food, why, one must stalk when the Grass-feeders are within range of one's eye. Who is there amongst you all, even Soor (Wild Boar), with his sharp Pig eyes, that can say, when I am crouched amongst the bushes with the sun making bright spots all over the jungle, 'There is Yellow Leopard, who is a slayer.' Not only is it good for the Kill, this coat of mine, but when the hunt is on from the other side, when I seek to keep clear of the Men-kind – by my caution! more than once, when it has been that way, have I slipped quietly through the young jungle, and left the Beaters running up against each other, asking which way went Bagh. I am no night prowler like Pardus, for often have I killed in the open."

"I know nothing of all this matter," declared White Leopard; "but had I been black like Pardus, or black-spotted like Rufous, I had died of a lean stomach in the white mountains from which I come. Why, there, on the hillside, every rock gleams white in the sunlight – not spotted, mind you, for there is no jungle such as Rufous speaks of; even the sand-hills are so white with the hot light that a mate of mine has been almost at my side before I knew it."

"White Leopard is from the *Safed Kho* Mountains, the White Range, in Afghanistan," said Sa'-zada for the information of the others.

"I know," declared Unt the Camel; "I've been there – just the loveliest hot sandy hills and plains in the whole world. But, tell me, Little Brother of the Blood-kind," he bubbled, "it is not always sunlight there – at times the white storm comes – high up in the range – what do you do then?"

"My coat gets whiter still," answered Leopard; "and if I close my eyes and stalk by scent alone, why, you would never see me till I was at your throat."

"It's either a lie or most curious truth," grunted Magh, biting the Fox Terrier's ear till he squealed. "Here is a Pup that is white all the time, and no lies about it, either."

"Oh, it's the truth," asserted Wapoos, the Hare; "in the winter time I, also, turn white to save my throat from Lynx or Marten; though it is not of my own doing, to be sure."

"It's Wie-sak-ke-chack, who is God of all Animals, who arranges it this way," said Mooswa, solemnly.

"Well," interrupted Sa'-zada, "one of you Leopards tell us of the manner of your coming here."

"As I have said," began White Leopard, "I was born in the Safed Mountains, and it was a year of much hunger – "

"The very year I was born," declared Magh; "there hardly seemed more than three nuts or berries in the world."

"Come up here, Chatterbox," grunted Hathi, winding his trunk around Magh's body, and lifting her to his massive head.

"Let me hold the Pup," whined Sher Abi, spreading his shark mouth in a disinterested yawn. Hathi blew a handful of small stones which he had been picking up, into the opening, causing Sher Abi to sputter and choke. When the laughter had subsided, White Leopard proceeded with his story.

"As I have said, it was a year of much hunger, because the Affrides made war, and the Sahibs came, and it seemed as though everything that had life in it was driven out of the country. They ate up the Goats and Sheep, and the Bullocks and Camels they took to carry their loads. It was indeed a time of distressed stomachs; and, to make matters worse, my Father, who was a killer of Bullocks and not a Goat eater, dropped the matter of a thousand feet over a cliff and was killed. Then my mother came with me, and I was still a Cub, down to the land of the Marris, where there were many Sheep – the short-legged kind with the broad fat tails; small they were, to be sure, and hardly of the bulk of even a Cub's desire. The very sweetness of their flesh made one wish that they had grown larger. Hunger pains! but it was a long tramp on a lean stomach, and in the end we fell among Men thieves – those of the White-kind, the Sahibs."

"Birds of a feather on one limb," sneered Magh, tickling Hathi on the ear with her sharp finger.

"And in that land, though there were many Sheep, it was hard to make a kill. Why, the Herd Men, Pathans they were called, which I think means the greatest of all thieves, were as wary as Jungle Dwellers. At the first try my Mother got a blow in the shoulder from one of their evil, long-necked Firesticks."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Sa'-zada; "that long gun was a *jezail*, and the Pathans are good marksmen, too. I could tell a story myself of their shooting; but go on, Chita, it's your say."

"As for making a kill at night, Waugh! we had near starved watching for a chance; these Hillmen huddled their Sheep and Goats into caves like children, and slept across the opening.

"And do you know, Friends, they lived so close with their Sheep, that I swear by my mustache they were of the same smell. Fine as my scent is, one night I had crept close to what my nose told me was a Sheep, and was just on the point of taking it by the neck when it got up on its hind legs and roared at me with the man cry.

"We were like to die of hunger when Jaruk the Hyena came sneaking and laughing, and talked of a blood compact to Rani, who was my Mother. We were so hungry! but it was all to our undoing; for the grinning sneak was a coward, and led us into an evil trap. He told us of three Sahibs, a short journey from where we had our hunt; and these Sahibs were like Cubs in their little knowledge of jungle ways, having Sheep and Goats which they tied to stakes close by the white caves in which they lived, and never a guard over them at night. Waugh! well I remember, hungry as I was, how the smell of Hyena fair turned my stomach, so that I had little longing for eating of any kind; but Rani, being older and having more wisdom, knew that unless we soon found some method for making a kill we should surely die.

"That night there was a small moon as we crept down over the valley and up to a flat-land where the Men-kind lived in little white caves – such odd caves, too, in one place to-day and in another the next."

"He means tents," explained Sa'-zada; "being a Cave Dweller himself, his knowledge of houses is limited."

"It's a wonder he didn't call them trees," muttered Magh.

"Hyena stole along like a shadow of nothing, so smooth and soft were his feet – a proper sneak, I must say I thought him even then, Cub as I was."

"Are you listening, Jaruk?" called Magh, maliciously; "this was a Brother of yours who was in partnership with Chita."

But Hyena only grinned a frothy laugh, and slunk over behind Sher Abi.

"Well," proceeded White Leopard, "we crept along, our bellies close to earth, till we came to a little ledge, where Rani and I waited, while Jaruk stole up to the white caves to see how the stalk was.

"'They sleep like the young of Owls in daytime,' he whispered when he returned; 'even I, who am a creature of fear, and not like you, Rani, a slayer of Bullocks, have rubbed my lean jaws against two fat Goats that are chewing the sweet cud of plenty.'"

"How your mouth must have watered, White Shirt," sneered Magh.

"Then Rani commenced the stalk, and I, even a Cub, though I had always lain hidden while she was making the kill before, followed close at her heels. Even now I remember just how Rani made the kill. First one paw, and then the other, she stretched out, and pulled herself along, with never so much as the rattle of a single stone. The Goats were like the Sahibs in the caves, safe in the conceit which comes of a full stomach. When Rani crouched lower than ever and braced her hind paws carefully, I knew that the charge was on. Waugh, waugh-houk! By the neck she had one – for that is the way of our kind always – and with a jerk he was thrown on her shoulder, and away up the hill she raced. I tried for the other, but, being new to the kill, missed, getting only the rope in my teeth. Even as I chased after Rani I could not help but laugh in spite of my miss, for Hyena was screaming as he ran, 'Did you get the fat one, the very fat one?'"

"The Greedy Pig," commented Magh.

"Ugh, ugh, ugh!" grunted Soor. "Why should he be likened to one of my kind? More like he had a paunch full of peanuts, or other filth, such as you carry, Miss Bleary-eye; or if he were greedy, was he not like unto his mate, Chita, who will eat half his own weight at a single kill?"

"Such a row I never heard in all my life," continued White Leopard; "the Sahibs, and the black men who serve them, ran here and there with blinking red eyes in their hands –"

"The Man Fire," quietly commented Mooswa.

"And all at once, over to one side, there was a short growl from a Firestick; and a Sahib called loudly, 'I've got him! I've got him!'"

"I wondered what it could be, for Rani and I were together with the Goat. I almost hoped it was Jaruk; but he was close at our heels, sniffing with his hungry nose, and fairly eating the sand where some of the Goat's blood had trickled into it. Then all the blinking red eyes passed swiftly to where the Sahib was, and we heard them laughing – only louder than Hyena laughs.

"Next day Jaruk discovered that the Sahib had killed the other Goat with his Firestick in the dark, thinking it was Rani.

"Of course, one Goat did not keep the hunger off very long; but for three days we did not make another kill. Not but that we tried. Each night we went close to the white caves, and Jaruk – I must say he had a nose like a Vulture's eye – came back with a tale that the Sahibs were watching with their Firesticks. But the next night we got another Goat. Cunning Animals! but Jaruk used to laugh, and even coaxed Rani to make a kill of one of the Men-kind.

"Then one night we crept as before, close for a kill, and Jaruk came back to us laughing as though there wasn't a Sahib in all the Marri country. Rani growled at him for a fool. Waugh-houk! did he mean to have us all killed with his noise? And who was to do the killing, Jaruk asked mockingly, for the white caves were empty, he said. The Sahibs, and even the black-faced kind, had all gone away, and left the Goats and Sheep for the pleasure of our kill.

"'It's a Raji (war), I'm sure,' he said; 'and they have gone out amongst the Pathans to kill and be killed, and while they are at it we, who are possessed of a great hunger, will make a kill of the Goats and Sheep.'"

"At this we went more boldly than before; but it was only a trap. These of the Men-kind whom we had likened to young Owls, were up on the hill behind a stone sangar; and just as we came to the Goats in the bright moonlight there was such a crashing of Firesticks, and appearing of

what Mooswa calls the Man Fire, that I hope I may never see it again. Rani was killed, as also was – which was not so bad – Jaruk the Hyena. I had a paw broken, which to this day makes me go lame.

"Then the Men-kind rushed down, and the black-faced ones were for killing me also; but one of the Sahibs, speaking, said: 'This is a Cub. We will send him to Sa'-zada.'"

White Leopard ceased speaking, and Sa'-zada, putting his hand in between the bars, patted his paw, and said: "Poor old Chita! it may not be so nice here as in your own land, but we'll see that you do not go hungry, anyway. Now, Rufous, my big Yellow Leopard, you should also have an interesting account of yourself to give."

"Quite likely," exclaimed Magh; "we'll hear some more rare boasting, I'll warrant."

"A true tale is no boast," said Mooswa, solemnly. "I, who have had strange adventures, think it no harm to talk them over."

"Oh, you'll have a chance, Fat Nose!" retorted Magh; "but first let us have a good, hearty lie from Leopard."

"There will be no lies," declared Sa'-zada, "for I have all these matters in The Book – though they are not half so interestingly written, I must say, as you can tell them yourselves, if you are so minded."

"Phrut!" muttered Hathi through his big trunk. "We'll have the lies as spice – that will be when Magh's turn comes."

Thus appealed to, Yellow Leopard commenced: "I came from a jungle land – Burma."

"My home," muttered Hathi, longingly.

"It may have been the year White Chita speaks of, for I remember I was also wondrous hungry – "

"You always are," sneered Magh.

"Because I have not a paunch that holds a thief's load, whether it be fish, fruit or filth," retorted Rufous. "But, as I was saying when this Goat-faced Ape interrupted me, I was hungry, and, walking through the thick jungle, discovered a Bullock – young, of great fatness. By a rare chance it seemed caught in a branch of the elephant creeper – "

"Elephant what?" muttered Hathi. "Not of our kind. We have naught to do with the killing of any young."

Sa'-zada explained: "Yellow Leopard means the giant jungle vine called 'elephant creeper,' which runs for perhaps the length of a mile, and is so strong that it pulls down great trees and smothers them in its grasp."

"Oh, jungle wood," cried Hathi, much relieved, "that's an elephant of another color."

"I shikarried the small Bullock most carefully," continued Rufous. "Round and round I went, taking the wind from every quarter; there was the scent of nothing but the white jasmine, and the yellow-hearted champac. When he saw me the Bullock-young became stupid with much fear; the two of us stood facing each other. He pulled back tight on the thing that held him, watching me with eyes that seemed as big as the black spots on my ears. I crept closer, and closer, and closer; for that is always the way with my kind; whether the prey be small or great, we kill after the same manner always. Brothers, know you aught of fear? We of the Blood-kind know it well. The Bullock's legs shivered like leaves that tremble in the wind; and he asked me with his big eyes to go away and not take him by the throat for his blood. How did he know that, Brothers – how did he know that I was not coming like one of his own kind to help him in his trouble? And the fear that I speak of was in his eyes."

"With a roar, Waugh-hough! I charged full at him; my strong jaws fastened on his throat, and, with a quick turn upwards, I threw him on his back, and his neck was broken. Ghu-r-r-r-h! Whur-r-r-h! his young blood was sweet as it trickled into my jaws, for I was so hungry. Not that I drank his blood – that is a lie of the Men-kind who know little of our ways."

"They're all alike," chattered Magh; "they murder, and it is all right because they are hungry."

"Yes," retorted Yellow Leopard, "if I alone made a kill perhaps that would be wrong; but we are all alike – it is our way of life. You are an evil-looking, flea-covered, pot-bellied Monkey, but your kind are all alike, so that is also your excuse."

Hathi shoved the tip of his trunk in his mouth, pretending to pick his teeth, but really to smother the laughter that fairly shook his huge sides.

"By a find of much eating!" ejaculated Gidar. "How I wish I had been with you, Killer of Cattle. A whole Bullock! Eating of the choicest kind for three days at least. Often for the length of that time have I searched through a famine-stricken village in my native land, and in the end achieved nothing, in the matter of food, but a pot of hot rice water thrown on my back by a Boberchie (cook) – an opium-eating stealer of his Master's goods."

"Would that you had been in my place," sneered Yellow Leopard, "for even as I was going away with my kill – "

"Squee-squee-squee!" interrupted Magh with a sneering laugh. "Even I, who am a Tree Dweller of little knowledge, knew that a tale from this Cut-throat would soon run into a lie of great strength. May I kiss the Tiger if I believe that Chita carried away a young Bullock."

"You are wrong, Magh," reproved Sa'-zada; "in my hunting days have I seen even Bhainsa, the tame Buffalo, who is like unto a small Elephant, carried a full half-mile by Bagh."

"Yes," asserted Yellow Leopard, "had the kill been an Ape like unto Magh, I had bolted it at one mouthful lest the sight of it made me ill. As I was saying, I took the young Bullock in my mouth, but at the first step my forepaw was lifted by something of great strength. I was surprised, for I had seen nothing – nothing but the kill. The thing that had me by the paw was of a fiendish kind. Jungle-wisdom! but I was at a loss. Dropping my prey I tried first this way and then that to break away, but it gave with me every time, and when I was tired lifted me to my hind legs, for the pull was always upward."

"Was it a Naht?" queried Hathi. "One of the Burmese jungle Spirits that live in the Leppan Tree?"

"You were snared," declared Sa'-zada; "I know, I've seen it. A strong green bamboo bent down, the snare fastened to it, and once over your paw – no wonder you were on your hind legs most of the time like a dancing Dervish."

"Why did you not bite it off?" queried Wolf.

"Neither would you," answered Leopard; "though I tried. The evil-minded Men seemed to know just what I would do, and had put a big loose bamboo over the cord. It was always down against my paw, and simply whirled about from my teeth."

"Why didn't you trumpet?" asked Elephant.

"I haven't a bugle nose like you, Brother; but I roared till the jungle shook in fear – even at the risk of bringing about me the Jungle Dogs, who hunt in packs, as you all know."

"Whee-ugh!" whined Boar; "Baola, the mad kind. Nothing can stand against them. When they drive, the jungle is swept clean. Better to die in peace than make a noise and be torn to pieces by their ugly fangs."

"And who came?" queried Magh. "I suppose you were like the Bullock, and your eyes grew big with the fear, and you begged them to go away and not hurt you. It was all right when you were to make the kill yourself – it was fine sport. Bah! I'm glad you were snared – I hate a taker of life."

"The Men-kind came," answered Leopard meekly, for the mention of his fear made him abashed; "and seeing that I was caught, a Sahib would not let the Black-Men kill me, but set them to make a strong Bamboo cage. I was put in that and sent here to Sa'-zada."

"I've been thinking," began Mooswa, plaintively.

"Well, now!" exclaimed Magh; "I thought you were asleep, Old Heavy-eye. If you think with your nose, your thoughts must have been of great importance."

Mooswa sniffed solemnly and continued: "You said you were hungry, Yellow Leopard. Was it not a land of much good feeding?"

"It was a bad year – a year of starvation," answered Chita. "Up to that time the way of my life had been smooth, for I had found the manner of an easy kill. To be sure, Soor is not the pick of all good food – "

"Soor,' indeed!" grunted Wild Boar. "Ugh, ugh, ugh! by the length of my tusks you would have found me tough eating."

"You see," continued Chita, paying no attention to this interruption, "the wild Pigs were horrid thieves – "

"You were well mated," mumbled Magh, stuffing a handful of peanut shells in Hathi's ear.

"They used to go at night to the rice fields of the poor natives, and chew and chew, and grunt, and row amongst themselves, until the Men-kind were nearly ruined because of their greediness."

"But they did not eat the natives," objected Boar.

"Neither did I," protested Chita – "while the Pigs lasted," he muttered to himself. "Knowing of all this, I made out a new kill-plan. At the first beginning of dark time I would go quietly down to the rice fields, hide myself in the straw that was near to the place where the Men-kind tramped the grain from its stalk with Buffalo, and wait for the coming of the rice thieves. Soon one dark shadow would slip from the jungle, then another, and another, until they were many.

"Chop, chop, chop!" I'd hear their wet mouths going in the rice; and all the time growling and whining amongst themselves because of the labor it was, and for fear that one had better chance than another; not in peace, but with many rows, striking sideways at each other with their coarse, ugly heads."

"You're a beauty!" commented Wild Boar. "When you shove your ugly face up to the bars the women-kind scream, and jump back – I've noticed that."

"Presently," continued Chita, "one would come my way, seeing the great pile of straw, and I'd have him. Jungle Dwellers! how he'd squeal; and his mates would scurry away jinking and bounding like Kakur Deer. Cowardly swine they were. Now, Buffalo, when one of my kind charged them, would throw themselves together like men of the war-kind, and stand shoulder to shoulder."

"Yes; but, great Cat," objected Boar, "you took care to seize upon a young one, I warrant. Suppose you come out here and try a charge with me. Ugh, ugh! I'll soon slit up your lean sides with my sharp tusks."

"Be still!" commanded Sa'-zada; "here we are all friends, and this is but a tale of what has been."

Chita had turned in a rage at Boar's taunt, and glared through the bars, his great fangs bared, and tail lashing his sides. When the Keeper spoke he snarled in disdain at the bristling Pig, and continued the story.

"Then came the hungry year. At the turning of the monsoons there should have been rain, but no rain came. All through the cold weather the jungle had gone on drying up, and the grass turned brown, even to the color of my coat. The Tree-Crickets and Toads whistled shrill and loud, until the jungle was like a great nest of the sweet-feeders – the Bees. Then when it was time for rain there was only more dryness.

"The yellow-clothed Phoongyis (Priests) prayed; and the Men-kind brought sweetmeats and sheet-gold to their God Buddha; but still there was no rain. Miles and miles I traveled for a drink; and if I made a kill at the pool it was nothing but skin and bones. The small Deer that bark, what were they? Not a mouthful. And the Pigs shriveled up until one might as well have eaten straw. The Nilgai and the Sambhur-deer, as big as you, Mooswa, went away from that land of desolation, and soon nothing seemed to stir in all the jungle but the Koel Bird; and his cry of 'fee-e-ever!' forever ringing in my ears drove me full mad.

"Then it was that I stalked close to the place of the Men-kind – though I had never killed a Bullock before – and I made a kill. But after that they took the Bullocks under their houses at night, thinking I would not venture so close.

"But hunger is the death of all fear, and even there I made a kill. Then again the Men-kind, in their selfishness, thought to outwit me, for about the small village they built a stockade."

"Were there no guns?" queried Hathi. "I, who have been in a big hunt with the Men-kind, have had them on my back with the fierce-striking guns, and all that was in the jungle presently fell dead."

Chita laughed disagreeably.

"I almost forgot about that. One day, when they were still at the stockade making, I saw one of these Yellow-faced Men tying two sticks together and sticking them in the ground, somewhat after the fashion of Mooswa's hind legs. Then surely it was a gun he put in the crotch of the sticks, pointing at the little runway I had made for myself.

"I went into the elephant-grass that grew thereabout, and watching him took thought of this thing. 'It is to do me harm,' I said, 'for is not that my road? Always now I will come a little to one side, because of this new thing.'

"And in the evening, as I came to the village, walking through the same coarse grass, but to one side, mind you, there saw I two of these Men sitting behind this thing that was surely a gun.

"Only, because of thee, Sa'-zada, perhaps this part were better not in the story."

"If it is a true tale it is a true tale," quoth Hathi, sententiously; "and, as the good Sa'-zada has said, of things that have happened."

"Oh, tell it all," commented the Keeper.

"Only say first you were hungry," sneered Magh; "hunger covers many sins."

"Yes; I was hungry," moaned Chita; "chee-wough! so hungry. The Bullock I had killed was but a collection of bones tied up in a thick skin; I broke a good tooth trying to get a supper off him. And were not the Men-kind trying to do evil for me also, little nut-eater, Magh? They would take my skin to the Sahib and get much profit in bounty. I heard them say that as I lay in the thick grass. I crept close, close – "

"Behind them," volunteered Wolf, "I know. You didn't look in their eyes, Brother, did you?"

"They were busy talking," declared Chita, "and did not look my way. Suddenly I sprang out just to frighten them, for they were close to the stockade, and one ran away."

"Only one?" demanded Mooswa, simply.

But Chita had gone over to the corner of his cage, and sitting down, was swinging his big head back and forth, back and forth, with his face turned to the wall, like a Dog that has been whipped.

"He has caught Sa'-zada's eye," whispered Magh in Hathi's ear.

"It's a nasty tale," said the Keeper, "but I think it is true."

"Yes; it is true," declared Wild Boar; "that is the way of his kind."

"Then," said Sa'-zada, "they got this Sahib who has written in The Book, and set the snare for Chita and caught him."

"At any rate, you were caught," muttered Hathi; "and from what you say, it seems to me a change for the better."

"Now, Pardus," cried the Keeper, gently tapping Panther's tail, which hung through between the bars, "tell us of the manner of your taking."

"I was caught twice," replied Pardus, blinking his eyes lazily, and yawning until the great teeth shone white against his black coat; "but you are right to call me Panther, for I am no Leopard. And it is so hot here and dry; quite like the place they took me to – they of the black faces – when I was first caught, being not more than a full-grown Cub, as was White Leopard. That was at Vizianagram, up in the hills; but the hills were not like White Leopard's, all hot and dry. The jungle was cool and fresh, and full of dark places to hide in, with deep pools of sweet water that one

might drink after a kill. Here the Birds do nothing but scream and scold; Hornbill, and Cockatoo, and Eagle make my head ache with their harsh voices; there, if a Bird had occasion to speak, it was a song about the sweet land he lived in. It is well enough for Hathi to say that being trapped and brought here is a piece of great luck; for my part, all day long I do nothing but think, think of the Madras Hills. There were mango and tamarind, and peepul, and huge banyan trees, with strong limbs stretching so far that one could walk out full over the Deer paths, and wait in sweet content for a kill. Perhaps even a big family of bamboos growing up about one's resting-place, and whispering when the wind blew, and closing up their thick green leaves to make shade when the sun shone.

"Even where the Men-kind came and sought to grow raji were plantain trees and palm trees – Urgh-h-ah! why should there be anything but jungle all over the world, it is so beautiful?"

"Don't cry about it, Little Bagheela," sneered Magh, "for surely there's some sort of a story, some wondrous lie, in that head of yours."

"True," continued Pardus, as though he had not caught Magh's observation, "there were disagreeable things even there. Of course, it will always be that way when the Bandar-log, the Monkeys, are about. Silly-headed thieves, they were doing no manner of good to any one; but more than once, when I've lain for hours waiting for the chance of a small kill, and the time of the eating had drawn near, everything would be upset by the mad laugh of Lungour, the Bandar-log.

"But I was caught, as Leopard has said, through the coming together of a lean stomach and a trap of the Men-kind – neither a snare, nor the Fire-stick, but a cage with a door that fell. True, inside was a Goat, but what mattered that once the door was down?

"Then they brought me down to the Raja's palace in the Plains. Stricken land! that was a place for any one to choose as a home – nothing but red earth, with less growth than there is on the end of my nose. The Men-kind lived in great square caves that blared white in the sun. Me-thinks White Leopard would have felt more at home there than I did."

"What did those of our kind eat?" queried Hathi. "Also, where the Men-kind are is the Animal they call Horse, who is a Grass-eater – was there no grass?"

"Scarce any," answered Pardus; "the Black-faced ones ran here and there with sharp claws, taking up the poor grass by the root, and all for the Raja's stables."

"What did they do with you, Bagheela?" asked Magh, anxious to hear the story, for she was getting sleepy.

"Put me in a cage in the rose garden, where were others of my kind – only they were of the color of Yellow Leopard. Of course, at first I thought it was because the Raja was not hungry, and would eat me another day; but in the next cage was a Leopard who had been there a long time, and he told me why we were shut up that way. 'It's for shikar,' he said. 'Soon all the Sahibs will gather, and we will be turned loose, and they will kill us with spears and the firestick.'"

"That's right," commented Sa'-zada, nodding his head, "I've seen it; also is it written in The Book. The Raja was a great sportsman, and each year at Christmas time they had a hunt of this kind."

"My Mate taught me a trick or two that helped pass the time," continued Black Panther. "'Bagheela,' he said to me, 'they will come to us here on Horses; you who have the end cage may perchance keep your hand in, and forget not the manner of a quick clutch with your paw. First, purr and look sleepy,' he advised; 'second, never strike when the Horse is beyond reach, for he is a creature of much fear; third, wait, wait, wait – have patience, Little Bagheela. Also, from in front nothing is done; but stand you ready at the end of your cage, which is a wall, because there they cannot see you, and if the Man comes close, strike quick and sure, for of this manner there is never but one chance.'"

"Now, it happened that a fat Sahib came often to the cage, and I could see that it was to teach the Horses not to be afraid of us. It was hard to mind what my Mate said, for the Sahib poked me in

the ribs with a stick, or tickled me in the face with his riding-whip; but Yellow Leopard was always whispering through his whiskers, 'Wait, wait, wait – have patience, Little Bagheela.'"

"This is a long tale," whined Magh, sleepily.

"Keep still, Little One," objected Hathi, "no great stalk is ever done in a hurry."

"One day," continued Pardus, "I heard the Horse coming by the end of my cage."

"Quick! Up!" called my Mate, Yellow Leopard.

"Like a spring on a Buck I was up on my hind legs against the end wall, just at the last iron bar, ready. Around the corner came the Sahib quite close. It was a new Horse, and he thought to take pleasure out of frightening the poor Animal by a sudden sight of us."

"Waugh-houk! With a strong reach I had the Sahib by the leg."

"Whoo-whoo, waugh-waugh, whoo-o-o-o-waugh! how he roared. Of course, I did not get him altogether, for the Horse saved his life by jumping sideways. I licked the blood that was on my claws, and Yellow Leopard and I both laughed till the Keeper came running with a sharp iron bar."

"I warrant you didn't laugh then," chimed in Magh.

"No; he beat me, though it was all Yellow Leopard's fault. The fat Sahib swore that he would have the first spear in when I was let out at the time of the hunt. He was for having me killed in the cage; but the Raja said, 'No; his turn will come in the Shikar'; and when the Raja spoke there was an end of all argument."

"Little Bagheela,' said Yellow Leopard to me, 'we will get away to the jungles together at the hunt time. If they let you out first – never fear, Little One, you will have a start, for that is the Raja's way, we are to have a show for our lives, though I warrant one cannot get very far in five minutes – do you run very fast, and when you have come to the small mud-caves of the Black-kind, hide in the place where the Bullocks are kept. They will not look for you there, and not finding you they will come back, thinking you have gone to the jungles. When I am let out, I, too, will go that way, and together nothing will stand between us and the hills. Should I go first I will wait for you.'"

"Then one day a cage that was on wheels was put against the door behind which I was kept, and with bars that were hot they drove me into it. Then I was taken out to the fields, and when the Sahibs – there were many of them – had gone back on the road, the door was opened. Would you believe it, Friends, though I had been eating my heart out behind the bars yonder, now that I had the chance, I was almost afraid to venture on the plain. Even as I crept forth, a yellow-leaved bush suddenly bent in the wind, and I sprang into the air as though it were the charge of a Wild Boar – "

"Listen to that, Friends," grunted Soor; "of all Jungle Dwellers, he has most fear of me."

"But remembering what Yellow Leopard had said, I ran swiftly toward the little village that was between me and the hills; but not straight in the open, mind you – I had not lived by the kill in the jungle for nothing. First I leaped full over a long line of the fierce-pointed aloe bush – "

"Phrut! I know that plant," muttered Hathi; "it has points sharper than the goad of any Mahout. Sore toes! but I know it well."

"Even so," continued Pardus, "I ran swiftly along in the shadow of this, and soon found a Bullock cave such as Yellow Leopard spoke of. In the end the Men-kind could not find me, for I lay still, though once I heard the voice of the fat Sahib quite close, swearing that he longed for a sight of the 'black brute.' That was not my name, for I am Pardus the Panther."

"After a little I heard more shouting; then there was a rustling noise which I knew was the gallop of Yellow Leopard. He was calling as he ran, 'Ehow-Ehow-Hough, Bagheela!' just as we call to our Mates in the jungle."

"A-Houk! here am I," I cried, rushing out, thinking that we would soon be safe in the cool jungle again. And away we dashed. By the loss of a Kill! we had not gone far till almost in front of us we saw the fat Sahib and three others on their Horses full in our path."

"Oh-ho, my Black Beauty!" he cried, when he saw me; 'now we'll wipe out the score.'"

"That's like the Men-kind," growled Raj Bagh, the Tiger; "they cage us and kill us, and if we so much as raise a claw in defence of our lives we are reviled, and they have a score against us to wipe out."

"Yes," asserted Pardus, "and long holding in their hate, too. If we fail in a kill, do we go long hungered, turning from everything else until we have slain the one that has escaped us? But there was the fat Sahib, who had not gone back with the others, but was still searching to kill me, Black Panther. Surely that was not what they call shikar (sport), but a matter of hate he had laid up against me."

"You should have taken his beatings," declared Hathi, "even as I have, more times than there are tusks to your paws; phrut, phrut! it has always been that way with us Jungle Dwellers. When the Sahib beat us it is evil fortune if we do not let it rest at that. True, there was a Mahout once that went too far – but what am I saying? surely I am half asleep. It is your story, Bagheela – you were saying that the fat Sahib had killed you – I mean – "

"Yes," said Pardus, "the fat Sahib – I stopped; so did Yellow Leopard, with an angry growl. Then behind I heard a little trumpet from Hathi."

"Not me," exclaimed the big Elephant; "I wasn't there."

"Most surely it is a wondrous lie," declared Magh; "and now he asks Ganesh to say he was there and saw it."

"No, no!" interrupted Sa'-zada, "it was another Elephant."

"Even so," affirmed Pardus; "and on his back was the Raja, coming in great haste."

"Charge!" roared Yellow Leopard to me, and with a rush that was full of wickedness he went straight for the fat Sahib; and before I knew how it was done, had broken his neck with the hold that we all know so well.

"The Raja, without waiting for Hathi to kneel, jumped from his back, and rushing like the charge of a Sambhur, drove his spear through Yellow Leopard as he still held the Sahib by the throat, and killed him. Well I remember the spear was buried head deep in the ground."

"In fear, I raced back to the mud-caves in which were the Bullocks; and they brought the cage again and put it to the door. But I was afraid to enter till they dropped fire on me from above. Then I was taken back to my old quarters, and in the end sent here to Sa'-zada."

"It's a pity the Sahib was killed," said the Keeper; "it was a horrible death."

"I was sorry for Yellow Leopard," declared Pardus, "for he tried to get me away with him to the jungles."

"Chee-chee! but I am sleepy," yawned Magh, sliding down Hathi's trunk with the Pup under her arm. "These tales of killings are enough to make one have bad dreams."

"Dreams!" exclaimed Sher Abi, opening his eyes, for he had been sound asleep; "to be sure, to be sure! I've had a very bad dream. One should not eat so much; but after all, I suppose it is the feathers that are indigestible. E-ugh-h! Sa'-zada, could you not pluck the chickens before you give them me to eat? There was a time when I could digest – "

"Oh, move along, Magar!" interrupted Sa'-zada; "it is bed-time now. You'll have a chance to talk some other night."

And presently the Animal town of the Greater City was quiet, save for the bubble of Camel's long throat, and the gentle snore of Hathi's pendulous nose. The moon blinked curiously through the whispering leaves, and over all there was the solemn hush that comes in the night when the days are days of fierce heat.

SECOND NIGHT

THE STORY OF HATHI GANESH, THE WHITE-EARED ELEPHANT

It was very hot. The Summer moon, pushing lazily through the whispering tracery of tall elm trees that cut the night sky, fell upon the same group of forest friends gathered in front of Tiger's cage that had been there the previous evening, when the Leopard brothers had discoursed so pleasantly of their Jungle life.

"What is the tale to-night, Sa'-zada, loved Master?" asked Magh, the Ourang-Outang, standing with one hand on Mooswa's back, who was lying down.

"It is the talk of Hathi," answered the Keeper.

Hathi could be heard blowing softly through his trunk to clear his throat, then he began his story:

"We were a mighty herd, all of forty, with two great Bulls in charge, I remember; though to be sure when it came to be a matter of danger they seemed to forget all about being in charge and cleared off as fast as they could. I soon got to know that the herd was very proud of me."

"I should think they would be, my big beauty," cried Magh, patting his forehead affectionately.

"You see," continued Hathi, "these white and pink spots all over my neck and ears were a sign that great luck had come to the herd. Even the Men-kind – but that, of course, I discovered years after at Ava – even the Men-kind looked upon me as sacred, being a White Elephant. Besides, I had but the one tusk, the right, and that is why I am Ganesh, the Holy One.

"We wandered about in the Jungle, and when we Babe Elephants were tired, the whole herd waited until we had rested and fed. That's why the Bulls had nothing to do with leading the herd. They knew little of what a calf could stand, so Mah, my Mother, always gave the signal when we were to start or stop. I think she was very proud of being the mother of the lucky Calf.

"But it was a lovely land to dwell in; all hills and valleys with plenty of cover; and down in the flat lands the Men grew raji and rice, and plantains.

"I think there must be some very wise animal who arranges all these things – puts each one in the Jungle he likes best. Pardus was happy in his hills, and White Chita liked the snow mountains, and Yellow Leopard the rice fields; and Mooswa has told me when we've talked together, that on the far side of his lands are the loveliest spruce forests any Moose could wish to live in."

"Perhaps it was Sa'-zada or one of his kind," ventured Muskwa, the Bear.

"It is God who arranges it," declared the Keeper, in a soft voice.

"I don't know who that may be," muttered Hathi, "but I thought there was someone. Such a lovely Jungle it was; tall teak trees and pinkado, and Telsapa from which the Men-kind drew oil for their fires.

"For days, and weeks, and months it would be hot and dry; and then three times the big flower would come out on the padouk tree, and all the Elephants would laugh and squeal with their trunks, for they knew the rain would surely come. Yes, when we could see for the third time a big cluster of flowers, patter, patter on the leaves we could hear the rain, and soon drip, drip, drip, trickle it would come down on our backs, washing the dust and little sticks out of every wrinkle until even the old Bulls would commence to play like Calves.

"We finally came to a big river early in the morning, and every one went in for a wash. Mind, I was only a babe about the size of a Buffalo. The old ones lay down in the river, just keeping their trunks out to breathe, and I thought to do the same, of course; but when I flopped over on my side – bad footing! there was nothing anywhere but soft, slippery water – there was quite a thousand

miles of it, and dark as the blackest night. I could see nothing, hear nothing only the angry talk of the water that ran fast. They said that I screamed like a young pig. Then something strong grabbed me by the hind leg, and pulled me out up on the bank – it was Mah. She scolded roundly. Then she spanked me good and hard.

"All that season I was not allowed to go in the water again. Mah washed me down with her trunk, squirting the water over me.

"The eating was sweet in those Jungles; but best of all I liked the young plantains when they were just beyond the blossom age, all wrapped up in a big leaf, and juicy, and sweet.

"The first happening was from an evil-minded Bagh (tiger). That evening I had wandered a little to one side, not knowing it, and Bagh, with a fierce word in his big throat, jumped full on my head. Of course I screamed – "

"Like a Pig," interjected Boar.

"Like a Babe Hathi," corrected Elephant. "And Mah, who had been looking for me, just in the nick of time threw Bagh many yards into the Jungle with her trunk. I don't know how other animals get along without a trunk; it seems just suited for every purpose.

"The next happening was worse, for it came from the Men-kind. It was a hot, hot day. We were all standing on a hill in the shade of trees, flapping our ears to keep the flies off, when suddenly Old Bull kinked his head sideways, whistled softly through his trunk, and we all stopped flapping to listen. Even Calf as I was, I knew there was some danger near. In the wind there was nothing – nothing unusual, just the sweet scent of the tiny little white flowers that grow close to the short grass. But Old Bull was afraid; he gave a signal for us to move, and we started.

"In a minute there was an awful cracking like the breaking of a tree, only different, and we all ran here, there, everywhere. Of course since that, having been taken in the hunt by the Men-kind, I know it was a gun, as they call it.

"Old Bull charged straight for a little white cloud that rose from where the noise had been; then crack! crack! crack! the guns trumpeted all over the Jungle – but I won't tell any more of that happening, because Old Bull was killed; and Mah, too – though the Men-kind said afterwards, so I've heard, that it was a mistake, as they only killed Bulls, being white hunters, for the sake of the feet and tusks.

"It was late in the evening before the herd gathered again, and we traveled far, fearing the evil of the Men-kind."

"Was there no evil with your own people?" queried Wolf. "Just feeding, and nothing else?"

"Well," answered Hathi, hesitatingly, "sometimes in a herd there grows up one who is a 'Rogue.' We had one such, I remember. But that also came about because of the Men-kind – a yellow man. It was a Hill-man, and when this Rogue of whom I speak – he also was a Bull – was just full grown, a matter of perhaps twenty years, this Hill-man thrust into his head, from a distance, too, being seated in a tree, an arrow.

"The arrow remaining there as it did, caused this Bull to become of an evil temper. Quarreling, quarreling always, butting his huge head into a comrade because of a mere nothing; and with his tusks putting his mark on many of us without cause; sometimes it would be a kick from his forefoot, or a slap of his trunk. When we were near to the places of the Men-kind he would wallow in the rice fields, and pull up the young plantain trees by the roots, even knock the queer little houses they lived in to pieces, for they were but of bamboo and leaves. Of course the dwellers ran for their lives, and sometimes brought fire, and made noise with their guns, and beat gongs to frighten him away.

"Many times we drove him forth from the herd; and sometimes he stayed away himself for days, sulky. In the end we lost him altogether, and we were all glad; but strange as it may appear, I saw him again in Rangoon in the timber yards. That was after I was caught."

"Tell us about that happening," pleaded Sa'-zada, "for it is even not written in The Book."

"I was taken in a manner full of deceit, and because I had faith in those of my own kind. I was, perhaps, fifteen or twenty years old at the time – but in a Hathi's life a year or two is of no moment, for we are long-lived – and what might be called second in charge of the herd, a condition of things which I resented somewhat, but the Herd Bull had been leader while I was growing up, so there was no just claim on my part really.

"And it happened in our wanderings that we came not far from the greatest of all the Men's places in that land, Ava (Mandalay). One day as I was pulling down the young bamboos and stripping the feathered top, a strange *Hathni* (female elephant) came to me and put her trunk softly on my neck. She was all alone, and I felt sorry for her; besides, she was nice – showed me such lovely places for good feeding. I spent a whole day with her, and the next day, too, and as we went through the jungle, suddenly we came to a sort of immense, strong *hauda*. It wasn't a bit like the Men's *haudas* that they live in, else I should never have been deceived; great trunks of trees growing up out of the ground straight, and close together, but no branches or leaves to them; as square on top as the end of my leg. This queer-looking jungle thing troubled me. 'What is it?' I asked Hathni.

"'It's my home,' she replied; 'come in, Comrade.'"

"And of course the woman had her way," remarked Sa'-zada; "you went into the parlor, Hathi, old chap, I suppose."

"Not by that name knew I it, Sa'-zada; they called it a Keddah, as I found out. But I went in."

"And was caged," laughed Black Chita.

"Inside," continued Hathi, "was a winding path, and Hathni trotted down this so fast that I lost her. A great wooden gate dropped behind me, and I knew that I was in a trap. It was a big place, but no openings to get out.

"Then the Men-kind showed their yellow faces all over the walls, just like *Hanumen*– the gray-whiskered Monkey of those parts.

"'A White Elephant at last, at last!' they cried; 'now will the King be pleased.'"

"I was left alone that night, but the next day the Men-kind came with two ruffianly Bulls of my kind who bunted and bustled me about, and fought me, while the men slipped great strong ropes over my legs. In a week I was that tired and sore from this treatment that I was ready to go any place. Then I was taken to Ava; and such doings! I dislike to tell it all; it's hardly modest.

"They put a silk covering over me to keep the Flies off, and a garland of white jasmine flowers about my neck – sweet-smelling flowers they were; in my ears two big red stones of the ruby kind were placed; and always as I walked a great silk umbrella was over my head. And as for eating – humpf, humpf, humpf! they just made me ill with sweets to be eaten out of gold dishes."

"Is this a true tale, O Sa'-zada?" queried Black Leopard. "For one of the jungle folk it is a strange happening."

"It is true," replied the Keeper; "that was the way with the White Elephant at the Burma King's court, it is written in another book I have read."

"And no one was allowed to ride on my back but the King," declared Hathi, "excepting, of course, the Mahout. As I walked I was afraid of stepping on some one; the Men-kind were forever flopping down on their knees to worship me. It was this way for years; then one season there came war; great guns spoke with a roar louder than Bagh's; and vast herds of the white-faced Men-kind came, letting free the blood of the yellow-faced ones; and in the end I was taken away, and sent down to Rangoon, and put to work in the timber yards. There was no worship, and few sweetmeats, and for silk covering I was given a harness with leather collar and chain traces. It was like being back in the jungle again – I was just a common Hathi, only I was called there Raj Singh.

"It was at that time I met the Bull who was a Rogue. He was also working in the timber yards, but it had done him much good – his temper was improved."

"Was it kind treatment cured him?" asked Sa'-zada.

"No," replied Hathi; "they whipped him into a gentle behavior. Two big Bulls with heavy iron chains swinging from their trunks thrashed him until he promised to cease making trouble. But one day he broke out bad, and smashed everything – tore the Master's dogcart to pieces, knocked the Cooly's *haudas* down, and trumpeted like an evil jungle spirit. He even killed his Mahout, which was a silly thing, though he declared his driver, the Mahout, sitting up on his back, one foot on either side, had prodded viciously at his head until poor Rogue's blood was on fire.

"But in the end they sent me away to Sa'-zada, and I am quite content"; and reaching his big trunk over to the Keeper, Hathi caressed the latter's cheek lovingly.

"Oh, we are all content," declared Magh; "for Sa'-zada is a kind and gentle Master."

"Now, all to your cages and your pens," cried the Keeper, "for it is late. To-morrow night, perhaps, we shall have the tale of Gidar, the Jackal."

THIRD NIGHT THE STORIES OF GIDAR, THE JACKAL, AND COYOTE, THE PRAIRIE WOLF

"To-night," commenced Sa'-zada, "we are to have the interesting life story of the two half-brothers, Gidar and Coyote."

"A thief's tale of a certainty," chuckled Magh.

"In my land, which was Burma, there were none so useful as we," began Gidar. "Not of high repute our mission, perhaps, but still useful, being scavengers; and to this end we are all born with a fair appetite; but useful always, even Bagh knows that. I was Lieutenant to one of his kind – a great killer he was – for a matter of two years. Then he came by way of a dispute with the Men-kind, and they finished him in short order.

"Now, you know, Brothers, our kind have steadily worked southward from India, pushing into new lands from all time, even like the Sahibs, until we are now half down through Burma. It must be a dull land that has not our sweet song at night. If there were but a Pack here now we'd sing you a rare chorus."

"I've heard the song," quoth Bagh; "it's wretched."

"How goes it?" asked Wolf. "Our Pack has a cry of great strength; the 'bells of the forest,' the Redmen call it."

"It's somewhat this way," said Jackal, and sitting on his haunches he raised his long, sharp nozzle high in air, stretching his lean throat toward the moon that glinted fretfully through the swaying trees; and on the still, quiet night air floated his cry of far-off India:

"Oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-o-o-o-o!"

I smell a dead Hindoo-oo!"

"That would be my cry, Brothers. Then from all quarters of the jungle the Pack would take up the song and sing back:

"Where, where, where, where, where, where?"

"And I would answer back cheerily:

"Here, here, here, here, here, here!"

"Then all together we would sing with all our lungs:

"Oo-oo-oo-o-o-o-o-h

Mussulman or Hind-oo?

Here, there, or anywhere,

All flesh is flesh, we do not care."

"A charming song," sneered Magh.

"Ah, I cannot give it right; you should have heard it, little Eater-of-sour-fruit, in the dead closeness of a Burman jungle, from the many throats of a hungry Pack.

"The people of that land liked the song full well, and they never molested us. But life was one continuous struggle for food. We were not slayers like Chita, or Bagh, or Python; or stealers of crops like Boar and Rogue Hathi; almost as simple in our way of life as Mooswa.

"I remember once a fat Dog-pup of the Terrier kind, which I bagged. It was all the fault of the Pup's master; he tried to kill me."

"You had probably been singing to him," said Sa'-zada.

"We had, I admit," answered Jackal. "It was on Borongo Island; two men, Sahibs they were called there, you know, lived in a bungalow built on high posts, after the manner of all houses in that land. The bungalow was built on the shore, and every day the water came up under it, and then went back again. This was a most wise arrangement of the water's traveling, for it threw up many a dead Fish and Crab for our eating.

"Well I remember the cook-house was a little to one side from the bungalow, with a poor, ill-conditioned bamboo door to it. Regularly, doing our scavenger work, we used to clean up that cook-house, eating everything the servant-kind had not devoured. Several times I made a great find in that very place, for the cook, it appears, was a most forgetful fellow. When there was nothing left for us in the way of food, we'd carry off the pots and pans into the jungle grass; why, I hardly know, but it seemed proper to do so.

"Neither do I know which of the Pack first started singing under the bungalow; but this also afforded us much content. Many hours on in the dark we'd all steal gently down from the jungle, and gather under the house. Then, as one, we'd give voice to the hunger cry together, until even the Sahibs would shout in fear. It was good to make the Men-kind afraid; but also we would flee swiftly, for the two Sahibs would rush out like a jackal that had suddenly become possessed of much poisoned meat, and 'bang, bang, bang' with the guns.

"I had much to do with Men, and just when I thought they were full cross because of our serenade, what was my surprise to find each evening a full measure of rice put in a certain place for me. 'It is full of the datura' (poison), I thought, and watched while a lean Pariah Dog from the village ate it. But there was nothing wrong with it. So the next evening I made haste to get a full share of it myself. As I ate, hurriedly I must say, twang-g! came a mighty Boar-spear.

"But only the shaft of it struck my back, so I made off with great diligence. I heard the Sahib say as he picked up the spear, 'Missed him, by Jove!' You see, he had been hiding in a corner of the bungalow. But I was hungry, and the rice was good – most delicious – so I crept back with two comrades, and keeping to the thick grass, stalked the bungalow most carefully. I saw the Sahibs all at their eating, for the door was open, it being hot; you see, he thought I wouldn't come back so soon.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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