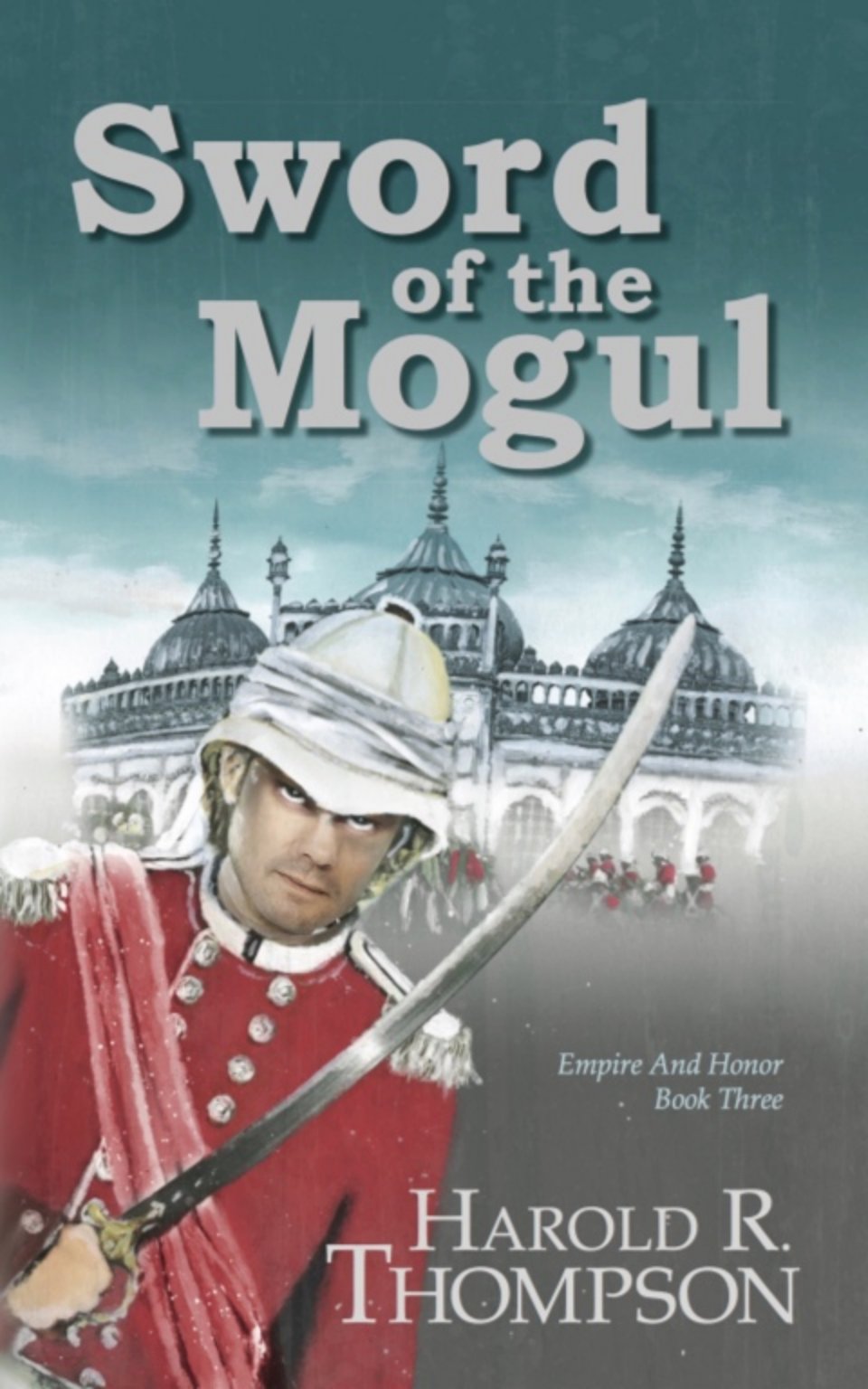


Sword of the Mogul

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration. In the foreground, a British soldier is depicted from the chest up, wearing a red tunic with white epaulettes and a white turban with a yellow top. He holds a curved sword across his body. In the background, a large, ornate Mogul-style palace with multiple domes and minarets is visible under a blue sky with light clouds. A group of people in red and white uniforms is seen in the distance near the palace.

Empire And Honor
Book Three

HAROLD R.
THOMPSON

*Sergeant Barker awoke to
a blinding light in his
eyes...*

and a thundering voice in his ears. When he emerged from the fog of sleep, he saw that the shouting came from Lieutenant Morris. Morris stood just inside the door to Barker's quarters and was speaking in a loud but normal voice. The blinding light was just the yellow flame from a lantern in the lieutenant's hand.

"Sergeant Barker, Sergeant Bell," Morris was repeating. "We have to assemble on parade at once!"

Barker threw back his mosquito net and swung himself out of bed.

"What's up, sir?"

An eager excitement lit the young officer's face.

"It's happened, Sergeant! The Bengal sepoy's have mutinied! They murdered their English officers and made off for Delhi. And the entire Ganges valley is in flames!"



SWORD OF THE MOGUL

Empire And Honor 3



HAROLD R. THOMPSON

ZUMAYA YESTERDAYS

2015

AUSTIN TX

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SWORD OF THE MOGUL

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CHAPTER 1

Hampshire
June 1856

He had forgotten the green of England.

The quilted fields nestled amongst the hedgerows, the dark stone houses seeming to grow out of that fertile soil—he was almost home. The familiar lane was firm beneath his feet, and there beyond the trees rose the square stone tower of his uncle's church, the slate rooftops of the school. Beyond that, surrounded by ancient oaks he remembered well, stood the house. The leaves of the oaks shone bright emerald, luminescent in the early summer sun.

It was strange to walk here again, to see this place. This was the land of his childhood, where he had conjured romantic dreams of soldiering, dreams that had become twisted by the blood, filth, horror and valour of the war with Russia.

Now, he had returned. His regiment, the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers, had been among the first to arrive in England from the Crimea, the voyage under steam having taken less than two weeks. When they had landed in Portsmouth, the regiment had paraded up from the docks, the

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

band crashing out “Cheer, Boys, Cheer,” the townsfolk lining the streets to greet the conquering heroes.

It had been a triumphant moment, but William Dudley had only half-shared that sense of victory, so heavy was the burden he carried. The burden of fear that he was no longer welcome in his uncle’s house.

I betrayed him, he reminded himself, betrayed his wishes. He did everything for me, raised me as his own upon the death of my father, secured for me a position at St. John’s College, Cambridge, and I turned my back on him, ran off to enlist as a soldier. A common soldier in the ranks.

Yet here he was to seek forgiveness.

The previous night he had roomed at the Black Horse Tavern; from there, he had sent word of his arrival, a letter explaining he had secured four weeks leave away from his regiment, four weeks before he would have to depart for his next posting in India. He wondered now whether he would spend those four weeks here, or whether he would need to return to the tavern, seek his old lodgings there, the room he had kept when he had served as a tutor for the Wilkes family.

The latter was a possibility he was prepared to face. His aunt would receive him warmly, that much he knew, for she had maintained a steady correspondence with him throughout the war, as had his cousins. But if his uncle, who had never sent or returned a letter, would not have him, he could not remain.

He reached the end of the lane and halted at the gate. He stared at the house, the simple Georgian box of dark slate. The shutters and window frames were painted a bright red that matched his tattered uniform, his scarlet coatee with its faded bullion epaulettes. He had worn the uniform in the hope it would help demonstrate his success as a soldier, his improbable promotion. He was now *Ensign* William Dudley, a commissioned officer, a rank be-

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

fitting his social status. He was a gentleman, and a veteran of war who had been wounded twice and survived.

Survived thanks, in part, to Miss Florence Nightingale's nurses, in particular a young woman named Elizabeth Montague he had met in Scutari Hospital. She, too, was from Hampshire, and she, too, had returned to her family's ancestral house outside Winchester. Dudley had promised to visit her and would, when this was done with, one way or the other.

So much had happened in the past three years. Three years since he had run off—"gone for a soldier." So much.

"He's here!" someone cried, and he started. He had been lost in his thoughts, had not seen the front door open, the small figure emerge. Running toward him was a dark-haired and bright-eyed boy, a boy Dudley realized must be his little cousin Phillip, grown three years older. Behind Phillip came a beautiful young woman, her face a perfect heart framed by a mantle of golden curls. Cousin Jane, his closest childhood companion. Dear Cousin Jane.

Dudley snatched off his forage cap as Phillip opened the gate. Jane was smiling at him, crying, "Oh, William! William! It is you! You're home! You're home!"

She threw her arms around his neck, almost knocking him backwards, and he let out one sharp bark of laughter. Phillip was tugging at his sleeve, asking, "Can I see your sword? Can I see your sword?"

Dudley let the laughter take him, and for a moment, his fears were forgotten, his cousins' joy was so sincere, so infectious.

"Oh, my dears! It's so very fine to see you both. I will show you the sword later, Phillip! Later!"

Then he spied his Aunt Bronwyn, waiting on the steps. With her was Agnes, the housekeeper, looking the same as always, stern features hiding her jolly interior. The sight of them brought the expected pleasure but also a twist in

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

his heart, for it reminded him of the confrontation that awaited.

“Let me take your satchel,” Phillip insisted, and Dudley did not resist. Jane took his hand and led him forward. A few paces from the step he halted, his cap in his hands.

“Well, Aunt,” he said, “I’m back.”

She was smiling, a smile as warm and inviting as he could have wished. Then she descended, arms raised, and embraced him as well.

“It has been too long, William,” she said, and she stood back. “Your uncle is waiting for you in his study.”



The Reverend Robert Mason stood behind his vast oak desk, facing the windows, his head wreathed in pipe smoke. The air was heavy with the scent of his tobacco, the leather of his books. Dudley stood at attention, as if awaiting an interview with his colonel.

His aunt’s words had been reassuring, and he found further solace in the old drill. It released him from thoughts and worries, although he took a moment to survey the room. He found it unchanged, and thought it strange how he had always been comfortable here. The bookcases, the framed maps, the globe in one corner, and the stuffed birds on their stands had all contained mysteries for him. He had played here as a child, his tin soldiers battling on the carpet with invisible foes. Here, he had formed his desire to seek adventure in the far-flung corners of the empire.

The tin soldiers had played their role as well. They had been a gift from his father, a last gift before Thomas Dudley’s foolish accident, before he had toppled into the River Test in a drunken stupor, still mourning the passing of his beloved wife. With both parents gone, Dudley

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

had come here to live with his mother's brother, bringing with him dim memories and the box of soldiers.

Only one of those soldiers had survived. As a boy, Dudley had named it Wellington, after his hero, and now he wore it on a chain around his neck, inside his uniform as a charm of good luck and a connection to his past, to his family. It had helped him maintain his sense of home when he had found himself in such places as Gibraltar, Malta, Turkey, the Crimea. He realized now that family and home had never been far from his thoughts; he had constantly been sending back gifts with his letters. Turkish slippers for Aunt. A Russian helmet for his uncle.

He stared at his uncle's cluttered desk. There sat the Russian helmet, the *pickelhaube* he had captured and shipped home the previous year. Next to it stood the photograph of No. 3 Company he had ordered from the photographer Roger Fenton.

He would not display such things, Dudley thought, if not for pride in me, in my accomplishments.

His uncle cleared his throat. Dudley fixed his eyes on the window opposite and straightened his shoulders, which had begun to slump. His uncle at last turned to face him.

Robert Mason was an imposing man even when in the best of tempers. He stood over six feet, his piercing eyes passing judgment upon whatever they saw. He did not tolerate wrong-doing as he saw it, not in friend, family, or foe. And yet Dudley knew him as an honest man, a man of honour.

The pipe he smoked was the one Dudley had purchased as a gift for him in Constantinople.

"You have grown, my boy," Uncle Robert said. "You are thinner. Though you have done well for yourself. Well, indeed, winning a commission. Most extraordinary."

"You always taught me to strive to do my best, sir," Dudley replied, although, in fact, luck had also played a

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

part in his success. He had survived the hard-fought battle of Inkerman, a desperate struggle against overwhelming enemy numbers, a battle fought for the most part in a dense morning fog that had blown in from the Black Sea. The queen herself had been so impressed with the conduct of her soldiers that she had issued a Royal Warrant authorizing the granting of an ensign's commission to one sergeant from every battalion engaged. Dudley had been chosen for the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers.

He was proud of that achievement, for merit had played its part. He had led his company in the capture of a battery of Russian guns near the end of the fighting. But his social standing had also played a part, elevating him beyond other sergeants who had performed equally brave and daring deeds that day. Dudley had been known as a "gentleman" ranker, an educated man who would have little trouble surviving in the society of the officers' mess.

"Yes," his uncle said, "it seems I taught you well in some things, though your impulsive nature was one trait I have been unable to curb. An inheritance from your late father, I can only assume."

"I did not know my father well," Dudley replied. "You were always a father to me, and Aunt is the only mother I have ever known."

Uncle Robert eyed him for a moment, puffing on his pipe. Then he moved to his leather chair and sat. He held the pipe clamped between his teeth, one hand on the edge of his desk.

"You cannot conceive the depth of my shock, my boy," he said, "when I received your letter explaining that you had enlisted in the army. Enlisted in the ranks as a private soldier!"

Dudley swallowed. Three years ago, he had sent that letter from the Black Horse, just hours before he had been

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

required to follow the recruiting sergeant north to the regimental depot at Fairbridge.

“Uncle, I know I have wronged you,” he blurted. “You did your best for me, and I cast away your gifts. I felt I had to choose my own course in life, and I cannot apologize for that, but the manner in which I made the decision was abominable. I should have discussed it with you and Aunt. Yet it was the right choice for me. I can only hope that you can find it within yourself to see that, and to forgive me.”

His uncle let a curl of smoke seep from the corner of his mouth.

“Humility and defiance all at once. That was ever the way with you, my boy. Though I believe Miss Wilkes also played a part in your rash decision to follow the drum?”

“Yes, sir, she did.” Dudley had been engaged to marry Martha Wilkes, the elder sister of his single pupil. One day, he had discovered her in the arms of another man—the day he had enlisted.

“You discovered that she did not return your affections as you originally thought?”

“Yes, Uncle.”

“And in your state of despair you thought to run from it.” Uncle Robert nodded. “I have given much thought to those events. I was a boy once, too, you recall, and understand the passions of the young. I also understand that, once you had taken the Queen’s Shilling, you were bound by your decision. There was nothing I nor anyone else could do to change that.

“However, you must also understand that what you did was an act of rebellion, that by giving in to your passions, you betrayed my judgment and my trust.”

Dudley faced the window, trying to find a suitable reply. He had rehearsed something for just such a statement, but he found it eluded him.

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

“Yet you have done well for yourself,” his uncle continued. “As well as the circumstances allowed.”

Dudley sighed with relief. “The war with Russia provided many with opportunities for advancement, sir.”

“A concept part of me finds difficult to accept, for I do not approve of war, not as a rule. Yet Britain’s interests must be protected.”

Dudley gripped his hands together behind his back. The interview was going better than he had hoped. Far better.

“I agree, sir.”

“Perhaps soldiering does suit you. I remember you and your books of battles, your play with wooden swords. I had hoped that you would lose interest and, in fact, dreaded the day you would come to me, declaring your intention to seek a commission. Of course, I never dreamed that you would join the ranks! I understand now that I misjudged you, that I was in error to establish a trust to enable you to attend Cambridge.”

Dudley bowed his head. “I no longer deserve such a gift, Uncle.”

“I am happy that you think so. I am glad that you are capable of observing that fact. But you are home now, safe and sound. I shall give you this gift anyway, as a token of your return, in the manner in which the Lord no doubt intended that I give it to you.”

Uncle Robert rose from his chair with a creaking of leather then moved around to the front of his desk. Dudley stared at him, astonished by his last statement.

“I have given you much consideration, my boy,” Uncle Robert said. “In many ways, you were the primary occupant of my thoughts. I would not speak of you and did not return your many letters—that you know. And yet I thought of you. I believed that you would be killed, that all my work in raising you would be cast away on some

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

foreign battlefield. I did not expect to see you in this room again.”

“I understand, sir. It was a reasonable fear.”

Uncle Robert took hold of Dudley’s left forearm with one broad hand, gave a gentle squeeze.

“I have played no small part in what you have become, William. Somehow, I did not understand the strength of your wishes, and now I will have to accept my lack of perception. Perhaps it was selfishness on my part to expect you to follow in my footsteps. You see, I, too, can admit my errors.”

“You always taught me to do the same, sir.”

“Yes, and you have done so here. It would be unchristian of me not to admit mine then not accept your apology.” He drew back his hand and chewed the stem of his Turkish pipe, brows knit in thought. “The question remains, if you are to follow your own path, what shall you do now?”

Dudley’s answer was obvious.

“I must return to my regiment, sir. As I explained in my note, I have four week’s leave, then we are off to a new posting. Madras, sir. India.”

“Indeed, you must return, but in what capacity?” Uncle Robert smiled for the first time that afternoon. “I am not a rich man, you know, my boy, but I have done my duty by your elder cousins, and I have not wavered from that intention where you are concerned. I have simply modified the specifics.”

“I don’t understand, sir.”

“It is simple. The funds which I had intended for St. John’s will go towards the purchase of a lieutenant’s commission in your regiment when you are eligible. I understand that you are required to first serve for a certain period of time at your current position?”

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

“That is so, as an ensign raised from the ranks.” Although such rules were flexible, as necessity dictated. Indeed, Dudley’s promotion to sergeant had been sooner than regulations allowed, coming in the field after the Alma.

“Then I will have fulfilled my duty to you at last. After that, you must keep your independence. I trust you will accept this gift?”

“Of course I accept, Uncle,” he cried, for this was no true choice at all. “And gratefully!”

“Good. I pride myself on being a just man, William. Just and fair. I am happy to have you returned to us, safe from the war.”

He extended his hand. Like a man, not a mere nephew, Dudley shook it. He felt the strength there.

“That is all,” his uncle said by way of conclusion. “I will see you for supper. I believe Agnes has prepared something special in celebration of your return.”



Dudley’s happiness seemed complete, the fear that had haunted him for three years gone. His family had at last accepted the life he had chosen for himself, and now all he must do was live it. And live it as a lieutenant, when he was eligible! He had never dreamed of such a possibility so soon!

He had one regret. His uncle had spoken of duty; and although Dudley had demonstrated his competence in his chosen profession, he had failed in his first duty to those who had raised him. He could never undo that action, but he vowed he would never make such a mistake again. He would observe his responsibilities to his family, just as he did for his regiment.

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

For now, he would enjoy his furlough, bask in the simple pleasures of home. Although, he had one more promise to fulfill.

That promise saw him, five days later, making his way south to the outskirts of Winchester, to the house of the Montague family. He had sent word ahead of his arrival, and the response had been welcoming. Miss Elizabeth Montague, just having recently arrived home from the war in the Crimea, where she had served as one of Miss Nightingale's nurses, would see Dudley at two o'clock in the afternoon.

At precisely that hour, Dudley stood waiting in another hallway. Elizabeth's father, who sat in the Commons as a Radical pledged to reform, was not at home. It would just be a moment, the maid had told Dudley, and Miss Elizabeth would come down.

He waited. For some reason, his hands began to tremble, and he thrust them into the mule-ear pockets of his civilian trousers. He could find no reason for the trembling, for his heart to suddenly quicken with anxiety. When he had last seen Elizabeth, it had been a happy occasion, a surprising reunion in Gibraltar on the voyage home.

By coincidence, her transport had also been there to re-coal; Dudley had stumbled upon her in the street. Their exchange had been brief, he going up the town and she coming down, but they had agreed to see each other at home, in Hampshire. And now he had nothing but good news to tell her.

"Why, my dear William!" her voice chimed, and there she was, sweeping down the stairs. At once his anxiety vanished, for she was more beautiful than he remembered, far more so than when he had first met her in Scutari. There, she and the other nurses had dressed in simple attire of brown and gray, their hair plain and pulled back. Here she was in a spring dress of pink-and-white, with

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

white ribbons in her hair and a smile brighter than any she had ever managed during the war.

"I'm so glad you came," she went on, taking both his hands, her flesh warm. "So glad! Come! We will have tea in the back garden!"

The late-spring day was warm, the sun beaming and the air fresh after a morning rain. They sat on either side of a little iron table, a tray of tea and pastries between them. Small birds danced and chased each other through the hedges as Dudley related the story of his meeting with his uncle.

"That must be a great weight lifted from your shoulders," she said.

"Greater than I understood." He laughed. "I feel as light as a feather. I don't know what could bring me down now." He leaned back in his chair, grinning as he took in his surroundings—the solidity of the house, the long stretch of green lawn—and breathed in the scent of the rose bushes. "It's a long way from the stink of war, isn't it?"

This was not the sort of thing a young man said to a lady, but Elizabeth had been there, buried in that stink. She had been there during Dudley's darkest moments, when he had been wounded at the Redan. It had been then their bond had formed, a bond first of gratitude on his part, then of friendship.

Later, that friendship had begun to grow into something more, although Dudley had never felt comfortable, had never been certain of that something. Neither of them had been willing to face it, to put a name to it. He had never been able to understand why that was. He had always been forthright in his dealings with women he found attractive, but not Elizabeth.

She placed her tea cup on the table and shaded her eyes.

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

“It is a different world here, one of blissful ignorance. I love it, and I shall miss it.”

“Miss it? You mean you did miss it.”

“I did, but that is not what I mean. You see, I mean to go to America.”

“America?” Dudley said. “Indeed. For how long?”

Elizabeth said nothing for a moment. Her eyes flickered to her teacup before again meeting his.

“There is a new hospital in Boston, an experimental hospital.”

“You mean to visit it, to study it?”

“No, I mean to offer them my services, my experience.”

Dudley sat forward in his chair. His buoyant mood, so assured a moment before, was suddenly forgotten. He did not like the thought of her leaving for another continent an ocean way.

At once, he reminded himself that to fear such a separation made no sense, since he was for the East in three weeks, and he had no idea for how long. What did it matter that she was going to America?

“I suppose...” he began, but his voice cracked. He cleared his throat and tried again. “I suppose I should not be surprised. You have claimed it’s in your nature to continue moving, to...continue seeking.”

She smiled. “God has more work for me to do, my dear William. I’m glad you understand that.”

“Yes.”

He did understand. It made perfect sense. She had never been one for the domestic life, to remain in her parents’ house until the right gentleman came along. It was something they had discussed many times.

“You may continue to write me, of course,” she said. “Write me here, for I will not leave for another two months. I cannot wait to hear of your adventures in India!”

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

“Of course I will write you,” he said. He did not wish to break the thread that bound them, whatever else happened.

His chair creaked as he again leaned back. His shock at her news was subsiding, and his contentment was beginning to return. There was only the future now, stretching before him. Three more weeks of rest, then the steamer for India. India—exotic land of princes and adventurers. He had always dreamed of one day going there, of walking in the footsteps of his military heroes, men like Wellington and Clive. What would that country hold for him? What new wonders?

And of course, India was at peace, so there would be time to see the sights, the land and its people in harmony, untouched by war.

CHAPTER 2

Madras
April 1857

Sergeant Brian Barker peeled a ripe orange and let the scraps fall where they might. The famous Madras surf pounded the beach to his right, the broken waves receding with a hiss. Gulls and terns swooped and screeched among the fishing boats pulled up on the sand. A native girl, a clay jar perched on her head, moved along the promenade, and the sergeant touched his cap in greeting. She seemed surprised by the gesture and stared with suspicion for a moment, but at last, she smiled. Barker saw the flash of her teeth as she passed.

A pretty thing, he thought, and like as not good to go.

He began to whistle, a random series of notes. He studied the almost empty stretch of road. Save for the gulls and terns wheeling overhead, the girl was one of only two things moving in the heat. The other was a solitary rider, his mount loping along the line of lampposts that separated the promenade from the beach. Barker recognized the horse, the chestnut gelding that belonged to Mister Dudley.

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

The horseman drew closer. Barker let the last piece of orange peel fall to the dust then touched his cap again, this time in a proper salute. Mister Dudley slowed his horse to a halt, lifting his wide-brimmed straw hat in return, revealing a head of sweat-soaked golden curls.

“Good afternoon, Sergeant,” Dudley said. “I did not expect to meet the likes of you here.”

“I could say the same for you, sir. Funny time of day to be out riding. The heat is at its worst, sir.”

Dudley leaned back in his saddle.

“Yes, but at least it’s quiet with no one else about, no choking crowds, for once. Peaceful, and I, for one, cannot get enough of peace.”

“I agree, Mister Dudley.”

In the evening, the beach and promenade would become crowded with members of Madras society, out to stroll or ride, the cooler air a welcome relief from the oppressive heat of spring in southern India. But Barker loved the early afternoon for its silence, its promise of solitude. It was a chance to get away, to think while everyone else slept in the shade.

And he needed to think, to find a solution to a growing problem in the company, the problem of Private Geary.

The regiment had been here for nine months now, and in that time, Geary had gone from a good soldier to a mediocre one, then to nothing but trouble. Barker did not understand why.

“Well, it is good that we agree,” Dudley said. “Not like the old days, eh?”

“No, indeed, Mister Dudley. No, indeed.”

Dudley nudged his horse forward.

“Well, I must be off. I wish to feel the wind in my face, cool myself off a bit.”

Again they exchanged salutes, and the brief meeting was over. That was the extent of their social involvement.

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

They had been friends in the ranks, were still friends, Barker reminded himself, but Dudley was an officer now. For the sake of discipline, he kept the society of the officers' mess and none other.

It was enough that they exchanged words now and then.

The sergeant tossed the dripping orange from hand to hand. Ahead of him loomed the Madras ice house, a great stone cube with a round turret jutting from one corner, a little flagstaff on its pointed roof. Farther north lay the sprawling masonry walls of Fort St. George and the twisting and crowded streets of Black Town. West lay the suburb of Vepery and the cantonments where the Royal Hampshire Fusiliers had its new quarters.

There was a sudden pounding of hoofs behind him, too fast for the promenade at any time of the day; and he stepped aside, looking back in alarm. Two more riders were thundering along almost at a gallop, another officer and a European woman in a pale yellow habit. They hurtled towards the native girl with the jar, doing nothing to check their pace. The girl leapt aside, crying out as her jar fell with a splintering crash. The riders simply laughed.

"Bloody aristocrats," Barker muttered.

The mounted officer reined in hard when he came alongside Mister Dudley, the dust rising in a small cloud. His companion did the same, squealing with delight.

"Hello, William!" the officer cried. Barker knew the man, another young gentleman from his regiment, Lieutenant Tom Carlisle.

"Afternoon, Tom," Dudley replied, and Barker saw him glance at the native girl as she gathered the pieces of her shattered jar.

"Will you be attending tiffin at the colonel's later?" Carlisle asked.

Barker did not linger to hear more of the conversation. The social life of Mister Dudley's mess did not con-

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

cern him. He had an orange to eat, and a problem to ponder.

He wandered a few yards to the left of the promenade, making for a grove of pagoda trees, their spreading branches ablaze with white-and-yellow blossoms. A number of native men lay in slumber at the base of each trunk, some clad in white robes, a few naked in the heat. Beyond the trees, a flight of wide stone steps led to the ice house. Barker chose a step and sat.

The position offered a view down the length of the promenade, and he saw Carlisle and his companion leave Dudley and resume their ride. Barker expected them to pass by his nook, but they turned off the road as he had done, coming to a halt to the left of the stairs. He could see them through the intervening blossoms, although they had not noticed him.

Lieutenant Carlisle dismounted and helped the woman do the same. Barker noted her slim figure and fine features. She had all the appearances of a true English lady, with a dainty mouth and pale complexion. Something twisted in his gut, and he thought of the native girl again, relived her hesitant smile.

There was certainly no shortage of beautiful women in India. Some of the lads took temporary wives to sooth their spirits, but such arrangements only lasted until the regiment shipped out to its next station; and unless a man could afford to pay for passage, the wife would remain here.

That was a situation Barker did not wish to find himself in. He had been married before, to a horrible mean-spirited lass who had died of a fever in Turkey before the Crimean campaign. He missed her sometimes, but he did not think he would like her much now. He had been a bitter, mean-spirited fellow himself then, and she had suited his mood.

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

"There, now," Carlisle was saying. "It is nice and shady in here. Never mind the few niggers lying over there. They won't bother you."

"You are most thoughtful, Lieutenant," the woman replied. "Though I must chastise you for not introducing me to that young gentleman just now. Your friend William?"

"Ah, yes," Carlisle said, and Barker thought he saw the man's suntanned face turn a deeper shade. "Well, that young gentleman, Miss Edwards, is Ensign William Dudley, and he is not properly a gentleman at all, in my opinion."

Barker stifled a snort of disgust. Some of the subalterns still delighted in revealing Mister Dudley's humble origins, as if it made them better officers by comparison. Mister Dudley was twice the gentleman any of them was.

"He's an officer, is he not?" the lady asked.

"Yes," Carlisle admitted, "but he was promoted from the ranks, like our quartermaster, our paymaster! He may have the bearing of a gentleman, and some of the manners, but he has neither family, money, nor connections. His parents are deceased, their lineage unknown. He is, or was, the ward of a radical clergyman—his uncle, the Reverend Robert Mason. And the Reverend Mason is a fellow of scandalous notions, indeed!"

Miss Edwards glanced back to where they had encountered Mister Dudley, although he was now nowhere in sight.

"Why, I have heard Mister Dudley's name mentioned several times since I arrived in Madras, and that was just the day before yesterday. He must be the most talked about officer in the regiment!"

Barker chuckled to himself. Carlisle appeared to have sparked the lady's interest rather than dampened it.

"Dudley is, indeed, notorious," the lieutenant stated with a note of disapproval. "He enlisted as a private sol-

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

dier, fleeing broken marriage vows or some such scandal. A private soldier, mind you, in the ranks! In the recent war with Russia, he gained a promotion to sergeant, then won his commission at Inkerman. He led some of his fellows in a charge against some enemy guns."

Carlisle paused, as if realizing he was making Dudley sound more impressive by the word. Perhaps to add to his discomfort, Miss Edwards exclaimed, "That all sounds rather heroic!"

"Save for the fact that the Russian guns had pulled back by the time he finished his charge, so really, it was nothing at all," Carlisle asserted. "Nothing at all! As for his commission, it came by Royal Warrant, so they had to choose someone, and I suppose the colonel thought Dudley would fit in better. Nothing to do with him being the most deserving.

"And he was by no means a popular fellow at first in the mess. He still isn't popular with some, for a supposed gentleman who enlists as a common soldier is always suspect. That is a desperate act. Who would choose to live in the gutter? Yet, Dudley has his friends and supporters, including Captain Norcott of our Grenadiers. But really, it seems a wonder that a fellow like that is kept on. Don't you think?"

"I think he sounds most intriguing," Miss Edwards said. "*Most* intriguing. And you seemed very friendly with him just now. Really, Lieutenant, is it fair to be friends one moment then speak ill of him the next?"

"Oh, but we *are* friendly," Carlisle stammered. "That is to say, we're not friends exactly, but...no sense in being rude, you see. A proper gentleman remembers his manners. We must have harmony amongst the officers, at least in public. For the good of the regiment, you understand."

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

“Well, then,” said the lady, touching his elbow, “you must grant me a proper introduction to Mister Dudley later.”

Carlisle’s smug grin had disappeared.

“Of course, Miss Edwards.” He patted her hand. “Of course. I would do anything for you, you know.”

Barker crouched low beneath the stair railing, clamping his hand over his mouth to keep from laughing out loud.

CHAPTER 3

Madras
April 1857

Dudley turned off the promenade, heading west along an avenue of tall ornamental palms. The hot breeze rustled the fronds high overhead, and a gentle scent of orange blossoms drifted from the garden enclosures. He drew in a deep breath.

“A fine afternoon,” he remarked to his horse Akbar. It was a habit of his whenever he went riding alone. “Not too hot for you, I hope, old fellow?”

The gelding snorted, and Dudley rubbed its neck. He missed Bill, his little Crimean pony, but Akbar was of similar temperament, calm without being lazy, spirited when it counted. The horse had only cost two hundred rupees, a price Dudley’s comrades had insisted was more than reasonable.

He had been reluctant to spend the money, but a horse was essential in India, and he had no reason to complain. He had purchased his saddle at a discount from a captain of the 1st Madras Fusiliers, while his spurs had been a gift from a friend in his own company, Lieutenant Trevor Mor-

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

ris. He could not have done better for the sake of frugality.

Riding into the Madras suburb of Vepery, he saw the British cantonments just ahead. This was his new home, an expanse of dusty parade ground between wide roads and a series of brick barrack buildings. At one end of the barracks stood the junior officers' quarters, the mess, the theatre, the library, and the billiard room. Nearby were a dusty racecourse, a tennis court, an icehouse, the Anglican church and a Catholic chapel.

The compound was home to most of the Madras garrison, one Queen's Regiment and two regiments of the Madras Native Infantry. A fourth regiment, the 1st Madras Fusiliers, one of the East India Company's European battalions, made its home within the walls of Fort St. George.

Dudley headed for the junior officers' quarters and veered toward the stables in the rear. When he halted, a native syce rushed forward to take Akbar's bridle. Dudley dismounted, removed his saddle valise and nodded to the syce.

"Thank you."

The man nodded but said nothing. They were unaccustomed to courtesy.

The journey from the stables to Dudley's bungalow was not more than a dozen paces. The bungalow was a narrow building of pukka brick, its clay tile roof shading two wide verandas, one in front and the other in back. On the front veranda, Dudley found Captain Norcott of the Grenadier Company perched in a rattan chair reading a weeks' old edition of the *Times*. Beside him stood an ancient native wearing nothing but a white puggaree on his head and a dhoti about his thin waist. The native held a fan on a long pole, which he swept back and forth to provide the British officer with a cooling breeze.

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

On the other end of the veranda stood Kesab Bardai, Dudley's principal servant, a middle-aged Brahmin with a graying beard and a mustache upswept at the tips. A black patch of cloth covered Kesab's left eye socket.

"Did you enjoy your ride, Dudley Sahib?" he asked, stepping forward.

Dudley climbed the veranda steps.

"I did, thank you, Kesab."

"Allow me to take your valise, sahib."

"There's nothing in it, I'm afraid," Dudley said, passing the leather case to the servant. "Matter of habit, I suppose, in case I stumble on a souvenir."

Kesab bowed. "I will put it in its rightful place, sahib."

As the Brahmin disappeared inside, Dudley sighed and sank into another rattan chair, a twin to Norcott's. He swept off his hat and undid the collar of his tunic, aware of the greasy sweat that had pooled around his neck.

The tunic was of fine doeskin wool, part of the new uniform he had purchased from a London tailor while on leave. It was made according to the new regulations, with an even hem that hung to the upper thigh. With it went a whitened leather waist belt and a silk sash that draped from the left shoulder to the right hip. Rank insignia came in the form of twisted golden shoulder knots in place of the old fringed bullion epaulettes that had still been in vogue during the Russian war.

It was a smart garment but not practical for India. Dudley's only concession to comfort was the straw shade hat, a nonregulation item that was tolerated by the garrison.

Norcott glanced up from his paper.

"Collecting flotsam from the beach, were you?" the captain remarked.

"No, sir, just out for a ride. I didn't feel like a lie-down."

"Neither did I, though I believe I could now, tiffin or no tiffin."

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

The bungalow door squeaked open a second time, and Trevor Morris emerged. He yawned and stretched.

“Thought I heard voices,” he said. “Back from your adventures, eh, William? Conquered the Mahrattas again, did you?”

Dudley smiled. “Actually, I was just off having a bit of a think. I was thinking I might write a memoir of my adventures in the Crimea.”

He had been toying with the idea for some time to organize his reflections of the war on paper as a fitting tribute to his comrades, men who had shown such devotion and sacrifice in the face of horror and misery. And, if the book sold, it would provide him with a private source of income.

“You’re just trying to rub it in, aren’t you?” Morris said. “To remind me of what I missed.”

Morris had joined the regiment only about six months ago.

“If I wanted to truly rub it in,” Dudley said, “I would end all my war stories in the mess by saying, ‘You know, chaps, Lieutenant Morris wasn’t there.’”

Morris dragged a third chair towards Dudley’s. After seating himself, he leaned back and hung one leg over the chair arm.

“Well, I *wasn’t* there, but I’m here now, in this most wretched of countries.” He ran one long hand through his lank blond hair. He was a slender man, pale and blue-eyed, the youngest son of a prominent Irish Protestant family. “I suppose I can always hope for war, some petty monarch rising in rebellion. I envy you, Dudley, you and your luck. Here I sit with five years of active service, all of it in garrison without a chance to distinguish myself. Just a chance, that’s all I ask.”

“You may get your chance if the Bengal Army rises in general mutiny. Then you might have your rebellion.”

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

The Bengal Army was one of three standing armies in the pay of the Honourable East India Company, the mercantile body that governed India on behalf of Britain. Morris rolled his eyes towards the veranda ceiling at its mention.

"It will never happen," he said. "Why should the Bengal Army rise? Because the men are paid more than regular British troops? Because they've never been flogged in the whole long history of the East India Company? These mutinies in the north will come to nothing."

Captain Norcott at last tossed his newspaper aside.

"Quite true. Native troops are a finicky lot, always upset over something, always threatening mutiny over some imagined outrage. Fifty years ago, the sepoy of the Madras Army threatened to rise because they did not like our English uniforms. Nothing was done, and it all blew over. Now it's the Enfield cartridge. Next year it will be something different. It's the same old story."

"What's not to like about the Enfield, anyway?" Morris said. "It is a fine weapon, the finest in the world."

"It is," agreed Dudley. The British Army had first received the new .577-calibre Enfield rifle during the second year of the Crimean campaign. It was a light, well-balanced, and accurate rifled musket, quick to load and with a maximum range of more than a thousand yards.

"But, as the captain says," he continued, "it's the cartridge, not the rifle itself, to which the sepoy object."

The ammunition for the Enfield was a type developed by Captain Claude Minié of the French army. It consisted of a conical bullet attached to a prepared cartridge of rolled paper. The paper was greased to increase the ease of loading, and it was this grease that had caused trouble when the Enfield had come to India the previous winter.

The rumour that the grease was made from cow and pig fat had spread fear and outrage amongst the Hindu and Muslim sepoy of the Bengal Army. The cow was sacred

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

to the Hindu and the pig unclean to the Muslim, and the standard loading procedure for any musket called for the soldier to bite the cartridge open. For the sepoy, biting into this grease would mean defilement.

“Whatever the reason,” Morris said, “it would be absurd for me to wish for a such a disaster, a mutiny of our own troops.”

And “*such a disaster*” it would be, Dudley thought, although perhaps Captain Norcott was right. Despite the fears and rumours, the troubles had been going on all winter, and still nothing had come of it.

The first incident had been in February, at Barrackpore on the Ganges River. The 2nd Bengal Native Infantry had refused the new cartridges. In response, the commanding general, Major-General Hearsey, had paraded the entire Barrackpore garrison. He had assured his men there was no plot to convert them to Christianity, which had seemed their greatest fear.

They had appeared to listen to him, but a month later, on March 29th, a more serious incident occurred in the same garrison.

A Brahmin sepoy of the 34th Native Infantry named Mangal Pande had donned his uniform, loaded his musket, and called upon his comrades to assemble on the parade square to defend their religion. Pande had been intoxicated on bhang, a distillation of native hemp, and had wounded both his adjutant and regimental sergeant-major when they had tried to disarm him.

At last, General Hearsey himself had come to deal with the situation. Under his stern gaze and loaded pistol, some of Pande’s comrades had moved to arrest him. The enraged sepoy had then turned his musket upon himself, pulling the trigger with his toe. The bullet had dug a furrow in his chest and the muzzle flash had burned his skin, but he had lived to face a court martial. His sentence had been to hang, and hang he soon did.

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

After the Pande affair, the men of the 19th Bengal Native Infantry, like those of the 2nd, had also refused the cartridges. Their lieutenant-colonel had been less accommodating than General Hearsey and ordered the regiment disbanded—an outrageous overreaction, in Dudley's opinion.

Since then, a new drill had been developed in which the sepoys could tear open the Enfield cartridge with their hands; but not every garrison had adopted the procedure, and rumblings of discontent continued in the north. Some army and East India Company officials feared a general mutiny, a violent rising, but such rumours had circulated for years. Most officials agreed that, in time, the troubles would pass.

There had been no trouble in the south. *All is quiet here in Madras*, Dudley had written in one of his frequent letters home.

He realized he didn't fear a rising of native troops, that the rumours had done nothing to spoil these last splendid months. Since the interview with his uncle, his life had been nothing but unending pleasure. He had found the acceptance in the officers' mess, at least from most of its members, that he had feared he would never receive as an ensign promoted from the ranks; and India itself had held nothing but fascination for him.

The first six weeks had been difficult, that was true, when his regiment had languished in the entry depot in Poonamalee, a cooler location twelve miles south of Madras. There they had done nothing but try to grow accustomed to the climate, and in that Dudley had been successful. Now he relished the mere fact of being here, in this famous and exotic country.

He enjoyed wandering the bazaars in Black Town just to take in the sights, the heady smell of the spices, the chatter of the people. On some days, he liked to ride west

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

into the country, past the fields of indigo and sugar cane, through the mango groves and into the brown hills. He meant to embrace India as he had embraced the army, to understand its history and its strange and often shocking customs. He longed to get out of Madras with its flat monotony and see more. He longed to see the Assaye battlefield, where Wellington had won his favourite victory.

“Perhaps I merely need a diversion from this garrison monotony,” Morris was saying. “The Enfield, I hear, is an excellent elephant gun. Perhaps we could arrange a hunt or some such excitement.”

As he spoke, he sat up in his chair and reached forward with one leg, stretching his leather boot toward the native servant with the fan. Some time during the conversation, the old man had faltered in his task, sunk to the veranda floor, and gone to sleep. His head rested against the wall, his eyes closed, his fan across his skinny knees.

Morris pursed his lips in disgust then gave the man a sharp kick in the shoulder, crying, “Wake up, you old black-guard!”

The servant yelped, his eyes springing open, but at once he heaved himself to his feet. Without a word, he raised the fan and began to wave it with added vigour.

Dudley’s brow creased in disapproval.

“See here, Trevor, a little kindness goes a long way, you know. The old fellow is tired, standing here listening to us prattle.”

“I would agree, were we dealing with European servants,” Norcott interjected. “But you have to know how to handle these people, Dudley. They are a lazy lot and require a firm hand, like children. It is a simple fact that the contempt in which we hold them is what has led to our maintaining this empire.”

“I don’t know if that’s so, sir,” Dudley said. “We won this empire through their cooperation. Clive had no con-

HAROLD R. THOMPSON

tempt for the Indians. Quite the contrary. And that is what led to his success.”

“Oh, here he goes again.” Morris sighed. “Always on about his precious heroes. Clive. Marlborough. Wellington—I suppose you think you’ll join their ranks some day?”

Dudley was unabashed.

“Shouldn’t we all wish to?”

Morris laughed. “In truth, I do! Though I suppose you have a better chance at it than I. Father thought me a wastrel, and he may have been right. The army for Trevor, he declared. Thought it would do me some good.

“But then I missed my chance by missing the Crimea.” He leaned forward, clasping his hands before him. “You’re the sort to reach those ambitions, for you do your duty and more. You have the strength and the ideals even to see some good in the Indians. I’m afraid I do not share those strengths.”

Dudley never quite knew how to take Morris’s compliments, unclear whether they were meant as flattery, mockery, or spoken with sincerity.

“You could at least try.”

“Yes.” Morris stared at his hands. After a moment, he added, “Though perhaps your capacity for tolerance comes from having served in the ranks. I can’t imagine how you stood it. Quite the experiment, I imagine.”

Dudley shrugged. “It wasn’t so bad as you would think. Some of our men are good and honourable fellows, as you well know. There were rough characters, for certain, with rough language and rough habits. But with stout hearts.”

“Rough habits! Yes, I can imagine them trying to drag you off to a bawdy house, kicking and screaming all the way.”

“That was, indeed, one of their habits, but I never partook. Sorry to disappoint you.”

“You do disappoint me! Were you not even tempted?”

SWORD OF THE MOGUL

Dudley paused before answering. The temptation had been there, but the establishments the lads in his company had frequented had seemed seedy and repulsive.

“Not even once.”

Morris seemed about to say something else, but there was a sudden flurry of hoofbeats as two riders came pounding up the road towards the officers’ quarters. Tom Carlisle had at last returned from his outing; in a whirl of dust and laughter, he and his fetching companion came to a halt on the edge of the parade ground.

“Quite right,” Morris said at length, and as if reading Dudley’s mind, he added, “I can understand how the quality of the houses in question would turn you off. Filthy places, of course. Not the standard that a gentleman would insist upon. But I know you, William. A pretty face and a whiff of perfume are your greatest weaknesses.” He stared as Carlisle and the young woman walked their horses towards the stables. “I wouldn’t mind taking that little filly for a few laps around the course. Would you?”

“Well, now that you mention it...” Dudley replied. He had noted the young woman’s beauty when he saw her on the promenade, and suspected that Carlisle had not introduced her on purpose. That would be just like Carlisle, trying to keep the attentions of such a creature to himself.

“Afternoon, gents!” Carlisle called as he passed.

“Afternoon, Tom,” Norcott returned, but Morris was frowning.

“Do you think,” Morris said to Dudley, “that he will bring his charming companion to the colonel’s?”

Dudley reached into his tunic to pull out his watch. It was an inferior instrument, purchased in the Madras market, but it served him well enough.

“I suppose we’ll soon find out,” he said. “It’s almost two o’clock. Time for tiffin.”

If you enjoyed the sample, you need not stop there!

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