

Before the Dawn.

The scene was India, and it all happened during the awful Mutiny. Things were very quiet at the Hill Station, and Col. Ross and the majority of Officers under his command had gone on a tiger-shooting expedition. Left in command of the Fort was Major Ross, the Colonel's cousin, and in his care was left Jimmie Ross, the Colonel's only son, and the pet of the Officers' Mess.

Jimmie was a fine wee lad, and had almost been spoiled by the Officers and men of the garrison. His mother was miles and miles away in England, where she stayed because of her delicate health, and every man in the Fort seemed to have the idea that it was his duty to "Mother" the Colonel's son. However, there remained yet in the lad fine streaks of manliness that bore out the fact that he was his father's son, and of good fighting stock.

One day, however, just at noon, and the sun was glaring down fiercely, and the whole Fort was taking its siesta, a mighty yell rang out as from a thousand throats, and hordes of crazy fanatics rushed the fort, and in a few minutes the scene was changed from a place of lazy droning flies and sleeping inhabitants to one of terrible carnage. No one had been prepared, news of the native rising had not yet come up from the south, and the attack came with the suddenness of a cloud-burst.

Major Ross and Jimmie were sleeping in their bungalow when the attack took place, and their resistance was less than useless against such overwhelming odds, so they were both quickly bound and carried off through the battered gates of the fallen Fort, thrown across horses, and the whole tribe faded to the hills again as quickly as they descended. Once in the rocky fastness where the tribe had made their headquarters, the captors unloosened the two prisoners and threw them into a cave together, and left a strong guard over them.

The Major was grave and white to the lips: maybe he realised their position much more than the lad, whose lips were almost bitten red in his effort to stifle back his tears and sobs, and for a long while neither had much to say. Presently, however, a tall, black-bearded, swarthy tribesman came in with a note from his chief and gave it to the Major, who, on reading it, started back with an appalled stare, and crumpled the note into a paper ball, threw it on the floor, and sank with a look of despair to the ground.

"What is it, sir," cried the boy, and for a while no answer was forthcoming, then the Major said, in slow measured tones, "My boy,

they have been good to us, much better than I expected. One must live and the other must die, and it is left to us to choose."

Then out came Jimmie's breed. Without a moment's hesitation he marched across the cave and saluted the Major, and spoke in a voice without a tremble. "Sir, I shall stay. I am a nobody and of no account: you are an Officer and can be of some use to our country yet, therefore, it is you who must take the opportunity to return to the Fort, and then, maybe, you will avenge me." Jimmy's voice broke then, and he took from his pocket a silver watch that had been given to him on his fourteenth birthday by his father, and a locket containing his mother's picture. He kissed both and handed them to the Major. "Give these to Dad and Mother, and tell them I died as Dad would have liked me to—like a soldier."

Just at dawn, into the darkened doorway of the cave stepped the Chief, and with him were four tribesmen armed with rifles. He spoke to the Major in Hindustani, and said, "Have you chosen?" The Major answered, "Yes, it is the boy."

Tears stood in the Major's eyes as he grasped the hands of Jimmie, who was unable to speak. "Good-bye, laddie, good-bye," was all the Major could say. Then, for a short space of time a glance of admiration showed in the eyes of the fanatic chief, as he grasped the shoulders of the boy roughly to hustle him out of the cave, but it was just a glance and then it changed to one of fierce hate and cruelty.

The party left the room, and for a while all was silence, and the Major sank to the ground with a look of utter despair, then, with startling suddenness, shots rang out, and for the moment, the Major thought that Jimmie had gone to his death: but hark, what was that, a cheer, surely not. Yes, there it rang again, first a shrill bugle call, then a wild hurrah, and shots were flying everywhere. Out to the doorway rushed the Major, and he beheld the tribesmen flying in all directions, and British troops were pouring into the rocky fastness from a dozen different ways.

Jimmie had been placed with his back to a large rock, and the firing party were drawn up, when the attack broke loose, and the first man to jump over the rocky parapet was his father, Col. Ross, who led the storming troops. He saw Jimmie, and rushed towards him, and the first party rushed away, too eager to save their own skins to think about Jimmie. The father and son clasped one another in a tight embrace for a moment, and then the Col. suddenly remembered the firing party, and asked Jimmie what it meant. In a few words Jimmie told his story, and then his father's face was rigid and stern, and for a while his look boded ill for his cousin.