

CHAPTER XXXIII

DAWN was breaking when I staggered stiffly into the rest house compound. The cart with my baggage and bedding had squealed away into the blackness two hours earlier and I had spent the interval dozing in a long arm-chair of Hanbury's, listening to the shrill cry of herald cocks and waiting for the grey of the morning. Not till the last moment did I venture to put on my boots. I was in a panic lest Hanbury should hear me, and wake and want to chatter and argue.

There had been a time, an hour back, when, lying in the dark, in the border-land between dream and vigil, with my socks on the leg rests, I had thought of leaving some kind of message behind. It seemed altogether unparadoxical that I should sneak away under cover of the night like this without a word to my companions, and when it came to the point, what could I do? I might have written, of course, but I ought to have thought of it before. How was I to lay hands on pen and paper now without rousing some one? It was too late. I could write from Padu. At the moment I positively dared do nothing!

I felt ineffably mean, the meanest thing in Upper Burma, as I slunk out into the open. Not a soul