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Put cloth of gold upon a fool and a multitude will do reverence to him; clothe a wise man in beggar's garments, and few will honor him. Yet those few will have their reward.—*Turkestan Proverb.*

WE WERE three men with two horses and two swords. We were outcasts in the thickets of the foothills of Badakshan, under the peaks of the Roof of the World. We had earned the wrath of the Mogul of India and there were two thousand riders searching for us.

It was the year of the Ox—the year 1608 by the Christian calendar—and Jani Beg, the Uzbek, had taken Badakshan from my lord, Baber Shirzad Mir, sometimes called the Tiger Lord.

Nevertheless, we three were happy. We had taken Shirzad Mir from the hands of Jani Beg, who had marked him for death.

Aye, Shirzad Mir sat in the clean white robes in which he had prepared to die by a twisted bowstring around the neck, and laughed for joy of seeing the sun cast its level darts of light over the peaks and through the trees that gave us shelter. Our hearts—the *Ferang's* and mine—were lifted up for a moment by the warmth that comes with early morning. We had an ache in our bellies for lack of food; we had not slept for a day and a night. Also, I was stiff with many bruises.

"Tell me," said Shirzad Mir, fingering his full beard, which was half gray, half black, "how you got me out of the prison of Khanjut."

While I watched, lying at the edge of the thicket on my side, the *Ferang*—the Englishman, Sir Ralph Weyand—explained how we had climbed through the water tunnel of Khanjut into the walls, and how we two alone had freed the *Mir* while Jani Beg and his men were tricked into looking the other way by a herd of cattle that we had sent to the gate of Khanjut.

He spoke in his broken *Moghli*, but Shirzad Mir, who was quick of wit, understood.

"And whence came you?" he asked.

Sir Weyand told how he had been sent to India as a merchant, and had been driven from the court of the Mogul by the wiles of the Portuguese priests. When he had done, Shirzad Mir rose up and touched his hand to earth, then pressed the back of it to his brow. This is something he has seldom done, being a chieftain by birth, and a proud man. Sir Weyand rose also and made salutation after the manner of his country.

I watched from the corner of my eye, for my curiosity was still great concerning the *Ferang*: also, for all he had borne himself like a brave man that night, he was but a merchant and I knew not how far we could trust him. While I lay on the earth and scanned the groups of horsemen that scurried the plain below us, seeking for our tracks, the thought came to me that our fortunes were desperate.

We were alone. The followers of Shirzad Mir were scattered through Badakshan, or slain. The

family of my lord was in the hands of Jani Beg—upon whom may the curse of God fall. To the north of Badakshan we would find none but Uzbeks, enemies. To the east was the nest of bleak mountains called by some the Hindu-Kush, by others the Roof of the World. To the West, the desert.

True, to the south, the Shyr Pass led to the fertile plain of Kabul, but up this pass was coming Said Afzel, the son of Jani Beg, with a large caravan. I had heard that Said Afzel was a poor warrior, being a youth more fond of sporting with the women of his harem and with poets, than of handling a sword. Still, he had followers with him, for he was bearing the gifts of the Mogul Jahangir from Agra to Jani Beg.

Something of this must also have been in the mind of Shirzad Mir, who had been lord of Badakshan for twice ten years, during the reign in India of the Mogul Akbar—peace be on his name!

“I am ruler,” he smiled sadly, “of naught save two paces of forest land; my dress of honor is a robe of death. For a court I have but two friends.”

Shirzad Mir was a broad man with kindly eyes and a full beard. He had strength in his hands to break the ribs of a man, and he could shoot an arrow with wonderful skill. He was hasty of temper, but generous and lacking suspicion. Because of this last, he had lost Badakshan to Jani Beg, the Uzbek.

He knew only a little of writing and music; still, he was a born leader of men, perhaps because there was nothing he ordered them to do that he would not do himself. Wherefore, he had two saber cuts on his head and a spear gash across the ribs.

Thinking to comfort him, I rose up from the place where I was watching and squatted down by them.

“There are many in Badakshan,” I said—long ago he had granted me leave to be familiar with him—“who will come to you when they know you are alive.”

“Who will tell them, Abdul Dost?” he asked mildly. “We will be hunted through the hills. The most part of the nobles of Badakshan have joined the standard of Jani Beg.”

“The men of the hills and the desert’s edge are faithful, Shirzad Mir,” I said.

They were herdsmen and outlaws for the most part. Our trained soldiers had been slain, all but a few hiding out in the hills.

“Aye,” he exclaimed, and his brown eyes brightened. “Still, they are but men. To take up arms against the Uzbeks we need arms—also good horses, supplies and treasure. Have we these?”

SO WE talked together in low tones, thinking that the *Ferang* slept or did not hear. Presently I learned that he understood, for, with many pains, he had taught himself our tongue.

We spoke of the position of Jani Beg. Truly, it was a strong one. He himself held Khanjut, which was the citadel at the end of the Shyr ravine leading into India. Paluwan Chan, leader of his Uzbeks, was at the great town of Balkh with a garrison. Reinforcements were coming through the passes to the north from Turkestan. Outposts were scattered through the plains. Jani Beg was a shrewd commander. Only once did I know him to err badly in his plans. Of that I will tell in due time.

Shirzad Mir, who was brave to the point of folly, said he would go somehow to Agra and appeal for mercy from Jahangir himself. I had been to Kabul and I knew that the intrigues of Jani Beg had made his quarrel seem that of the Mogul and—such is the witchery of evil words—Shirzad Mir seem to be a rebel.

“That may not be,” I answered.

Then the *Ferang* lifted his yellow head and spoke in his deep voice.

“I heard at Agra, Shirzad Mir,” he said, weighing his words, “that you were a follower of the Mogul Akbar.”

“Of Akbar,” nodded my lord, “the shadow of God and prince of princes. He was a soldier among many.”

“So it has been told me.” Sir Weyand rested his chin on his fists and stared up where the blue sky of Badakshan showed through the trees. “When Akbar was in difficulty what plan did he follow?”

“He was a brave man. God put a plan into his head when it was needed. He had the wisdom of books and many advisors.”

“And with this wisdom, I have heard he always did one thing when he was pressed by great numbers of enemies.”

Shirzad Mir looked thoughtfully at the *Ferang*. It was a strange thing that this merchant, who carried a straight sword and came over the sea in a boat, should know of the great Akbar. Verily, wisdom travels hidden ways.

“Aye,” he said, “the Mogul Akbar would say to

his men that they should attack—always attack.”

“Then,” repeated Sir Weyand promptly, “we will attack. It is the best plan.”

I threw back my head and laughed. How should the three of us, with but two horses, ride against the army of Jani Beg? How should we draw our reins against Khanjut? We should be slain as a lamp is blown out in the wind. A glance from Shirzad Mir, who frowned, silenced me when I was about to put this thought into speech.

“How?” he asked, still frowning.

Then I remembered that I also had asked this question of the *Ferang* and that his answer had freed Shirzad Mir. I drew closer to listen.

“In my country,” said Sir Weyand, “there is a saying that he who attacks is twice armed.”

He then told how an *ameer* of Spain, whose empire extended over *Ferangistan* and the lands across the western ocean, had sent a fleet of a thousand ships against England in Sir Weyand's youth; and how the Queen of England had fitted out a much smaller fleet, dispatching it to sail against the invader.

“Had we waited for the Spaniards on land, the issue might have been different,” he said. “As it was, few of the Dons escaped with a whole skin. The advantages of those attacking are these: they can chose the ground best suited to them; they can strike when they are ready; also, their numbers appear greater in a charge or onset.”

The thought came to me that perhaps the *Ferang*, being a bold man, would not hesitate to turn against us if the chance offered. After all, he had been sent by his king to get money and trade concessions from India, and the small province of Badakshan could mean little to him. What did we know of the King of England—except that he had ships and very fine artillery?

Still, at this time Sir Weyand needed the friendship of Shirzad Mir. And, although he was a merchant—which is a getter of money—he never in the weeks to come, and I watched closely, shunned the dangers we faced. Instead he welcomed a battle, and laughed, when he swung his long sword, as if he were about to go to a feast. It is written that a fight is like a cup of strong wine to some. Sir Weyand was such a man.

“True,” nodded Shirzad Mir, who had listened with care, “the great Mogul Akbar once, when his men were wavering, went forward on his elephant to a knoll where all could see him; then he ordered

his attendants to shackle the legs of the elephant with an iron chain so that he could not retreat. Whereupon his men rode forward, and the battle was won. Yet we are only three against as many thousands. In what quarter should we attack?”

“Aye,” I put in, “where? We are not yet mad.”

“We are like to be so from hunger or thirst,” replied the *Ferang*, “if we do not better our fortunes. I heard you say we had no place to flee, and so we must attack.”

“Khanjut?” smiled Shirzad Mir almost mockingly.

But the *Ferang* was not in jest.

“If we had a few score followers, it would not be a bad plan. But that is for you to decide, Shirzad Mir. You know the country. If I think of a plan, I will tell you.”

That was all he had in his mind. I was disappointed. Perhaps I had expected too much of him.

“Meanwhile we must eat,” I pointed out, feeling the urge in my stomach. “Iskander Khan will surely give us food, also weapons, if he has any.”

I did not add that my horse was at the *aul* of Iskander Khan. Last night I had ridden a wild ass from Khanjut. But I did not want to do so again—until my bruises healed.

“It is well,” said Shirzad Mir.

So he mounted one horse and the *Ferang* the other. I trotted before them, to spy out if the way was safe. Iskander Khan was the friend who had aided us with his herd of cattle and his two sons the night before. His *aul* was hidden in the hills not far away. But, as we traveled, we did not think to find what was awaiting us there.

II

ABOUT the time of noonday prayers we came to the Kirghiz' *aul*—three dome-shaped tents of willow laths covered with greased felt and hides. Over the opening of the biggest tent were yaks' tails, also an antelope's head. Under this sat Iskander Khan, cross-legged on the ground.

He was a very old man, bent in the back, with the broad forehead and keen eyes of his race and a white beard that fell below his chest. His eyes were very bright and his skin had shriveled overnight. His turban was disarranged as if he had torn it in grief.

He rose unsteadily to his feet when he saw

Shirzad Mir. But my lord—because Iskander Khan had rendered him a great service, and because the Kirghiz was the older man—sprang down from his horse and went to meet him. Iskander Khan touched his hand to the earth and to his forehead three times; then Shirzad Mir embraced him.

“We have come for food,” I said, looking for Wind-of-the-Hills, but seeing him not.

Iskander Khan lifted his hands in despair and pointed to the empty huts.

“It is my sorrow,” he said, “that Shirzad Mir of Badakshan should come to my *aul* and ask meat when I have none to give. There is kumiss in the cask, and this I will bring you.”

He did so, filling a bowl with the mare’s milk, which is the distilled drink of the Kirghiz. Neither Shirzad Mir nor I liked kumiss. When we saw how disappointed Iskander Khan was at our refusal, we forced ourselves to drink some. As it happened, this was well, because the strong fluid eased the pang in our insides.

Shirzad Mir glanced curiously about the vacant *aul*. In the days when he had known Iskander Khan, the Kirghiz had many sheep and cattle.

Then Iskander Khan told us what had happened. The herd and flock which his sons had driven to the gate of Khanjut had been taken by Jani Beg, who was greatly angered at the trick we had played on him. Also, the two boys and the daughter of Iskander Khan had been taken by the Uzbek horsemen.

One of the youths Jani Beg had impaled on a spear which was then fastened to the gate of Khanjut. The other Kirghiz had been shot in the stomach with a matchlock ball and thrown from the walls of the citadel.

The girl Jani Beg had had flayed alive. Iskander Khan had been too feeble to ride with his sons. News of what happened had been brought him by a Kirghiz sheep-boy who saw. Truly, a heavy sorrow had been laid on the khan for what he had done for Shirzad Mir.

My lord put his hand on the arm of Iskander Khan and spoke softly.

“It is written that what evil-doers store up for themselves they shall taste. You shall have revenge for the death of your sons. By the beard of the prophet, I swear it.”

He felt at the peak of his turban for the jewel he had been accustomed to wear there, intending to give it to Iskander Khan as a token. He smiled

ruefully when his hand met naught but the cloth. The small turban of white cotton he wore was part of his grave clothes.

“Truly, Iskander Khan,” he meditated aloud, “I am a beggared monarch. I have not even a token to give you for this service.”

“I am content, Shirzad Mir.”

I thought of the riches that the poet son of Jani Beg was carrying to Khanjut from the Mogul Jahangir, while Shirzad Mir had not so much as a spare horse, and I voiced this thought, being embittered by hunger and much soreness. At this the *Ferang* sprang to his feet so swiftly that I thought he had seen some Uzbeks approaching, so I did likewise. He clapped me on the back, rudely.

“Ha, Abdul Dost!” he cried. “That is the word I have been waiting for. So the caravan of Said Afzel is now in the Shyr Pass? Here is our chance. We will attack Said Afzel!”

“Ride against two score, when we are but three?” I laughed at the man. If he was mad, I must see to it that Shirzad Mir did not suffer from his folly. “I was in Kabul three days ago, and Said Afzel was just setting out. Besides his slaves and personal servants he has a bodyguard of some Pathans. They are well armed; the pass is narrow. Also they have many camels. You know not what you say!”

“Peace, Abdul Dost!” called my lord, whose eyes had taken on a strange sparkle. “You have not wit to see farther than your horse’s ears. Let the *Ferang* speak!”

“It is better to be mad than calm at this time when caution will gain us nothing, excellency,” said Sir Weyand respectfully. “Here is a noble chance. Said Afzel does not yet know you have escaped. He will not be watchful of danger. His caravan may be numerous but it is made up for the most part of women and eunuchs. Moreover, in the narrow ravine they must extend their line of march. We can choose our place of attack—”

“And they will dig our graves there,” I said.

Shirzad Mir frowned at me.

“And we will have the advantage of surprise,” continued the *Ferang*. “Jani Beg will hardly think to send reinforcements to his son because he knows that Said Afzel is well attended. We will have time to gain the narrow point of the pass just before dark—the best time to strike.”

“How can three horsemen ride against camels and an elephant in a ravine?” I asked, for I was not

to be silenced.

Shirzad Mir was foolhardy of his life and it was plain to me he liked well the words of Sir Weyand.

"We will not ride against them, Abdul Dost. If you had thought, you would remember that we could stand on the ridge above the caravan trail, where our arrows will command Said Afzel's men."

It was true I had not thought of that, in my concern for Shirzad Mir. It angered me—a *mansabdar* of the army—to be corrected by a foreign merchant, and I was silent for a space. Not so the Tiger Lord.

"*Hai*—that was well said!" he cried. "Such a plan warms my heart. Now if we had the strong sons of Iskander Khan—" he broke off with a glance at the mourning Kirghiz. "What men and slaves are with the caravan?"

"I heard at Kabul," replied the *Ferang*, settling his tall body against the tent, "that Said Afzel was a courtier and a gallant—fond of music, toys, verses and the Indian dancing girls. He is bringing a throng of such with him, also several camel loads of treasure as gift from the Mogul. What do we care for eunuchs and Ethiopian slaves?"

"Said Afzel has at least seven Pathans with him," I reminded him. "They are good fighters."

"Are you an old nurse, Abdul Dost?" cried my master in great anger. "Speak again, and I will set you to tend swine!" He turned to the *Ferang*. "Said Afzel is truly called 'the dreamer,' Sir Weyand. He is the most elegant in dress and can recite verses as well as his boon companion Kasim Kirlas, the professional courtier. It is true that he travels with cumbersome baggage—unlike his father—and is usually stupefied with *bhanga* and opium. I would risk much to set hand on his jewels."

"We would risk much," nodded the *Ferang* bluntly, as was his custom; "especially as there is one of the big Indian elephants in the caravan."

"An elephant!" Shirzad Mir clapped his stout hands and laughed. "*Hai*—an elephant. That would be Most Alast from the stables of Jahangir. I heard it said at Khanjut when I was prisoner. Verily, the star of our good fortune is in the ascendant."

I thought the madness that had come upon Sir Weyand had bitten my lord, for he laughed again and fell to talking in low tones to the other. I strained my ears but could not hear. Being angry and perhaps a little jealous, I withdrew slightly to show them I did not care what they said.

Once Shirzad Mir called to Iskander Khan.

"Have you a great cauldron?" he asked.

The Kirghiz pointed to the ashes of the fire, where a pot stood, large enough to boil a sheep whole.

"Will you give it me?"

Iskander Khan made a sign to show that all he had was Shirzad Mir's for the asking. Once more the two talked together, and I saw them glance at me and laugh. Then Iskander Khan lifted up his white head.

"You will need a good horse, Shirzad Mir," he said slowly. "The one you have is a sorry pony. In a thicket yonder I have Abdul Dost's horse, also an Arab stallion that has carried me for five years. I will fetch it for you so that you may mount as is fitting for a king."

The eyes of the Tiger Lord softened.

"Thrice happy is the man who has a faithful friend," he said and with his own hand helped the aged Kirghiz to rise.

Before the two left the tent to go for the horses, he spoke quickly to Sir Weyand.

The *Ferang* rose and stretched his big frame. I did not move, for they had not confided in me. He disappeared into the tent and presently came forth, lugging a basket filled with something heavy. I wanted to see what was in it, but I would not show him that I was curious.

He was singing to himself after his strange fashion. He moved with his hands that which was in the basket and put it in the cauldron. I watched him.

When he had nearly finished there came a dog that was hungry and whined. Seeing the dog, Sir Weyand threw him a piece of the stuff he was handling. The dog wagged his tail and carried off the stuff. I saw him eat it.

This was very strange, so I rose up without seeming to be interested and walked toward Sir Weyand, until I could see into the pot.

"*B'illah!*" I cried, for the stuff was rotting swine's flesh, which it is defilement for a follower of the prophet to touch. It had been used by Iskander Khan to grease the tents. The *Ferang*, who knew this, laughed.

"Tell me, Abdul Dost," he smiled, rising from his labor when the pot was nearly full, "is that dog better than you, or are you better than that dog?"

He was a *caphar*, one without faith. Those words might well have cost him his life.

"If I have faith," I answered him sternly, "I am better than that dog; if I have not faith, he is better than I." I laid a hand on my sword. "If you wish a quarrel—"

"Peace!" cried the voice of Shirzad Mir behind us. "It is time we mounted."

He was leading a fine gray stallion, and Iskander Khan had Wind-of-the-Hills. Likewise, the Kirghiz gave to us two good bows and quivers full of arrows—also he brought his own sword from the tent and girded it on Shirzad Mir. What man could do more than Iskander Khan did for us?

"The blessing of God go with you, Shirzad Mir," he said in parting. "I shall stay at this tent, and perhaps—"

"I will come back," said my lord swiftly. "I will not forget."

We watched the bent form of the old man go into the empty tent; then we set spurs to our mounts. The cauldron Sir Weyand had slung on a long pole, one end of which he carried and I the other. Shirzad Mir rode bridle to bridle with him—I following behind. Still they talked together eagerly, like boys with a new sport. Once Sir Weyand looked back at me and grinned.

"If you are afraid to come, Abdul Dost," he said, "you are free to drop the pole and go."

Before I could think of a fitting answer, he was speaking again with Shirzad Mir. Verily, I was angered. The pole leaped and jumped, and I was forced to watch lest the vile fat should fly out on me. There was no doubt in my mind that lack of food had unsettled my lord's brain.

Why else should we ride at a fast trot through the hot ravines of the hills to the Shyr Pass, where at any moment we might meet a wandering patrol on the watch for us? And why did we carry that accursed pig's flesh?

As for Sir Weyand, my brain was black with anger. I wanted to swing my scimitar against his long sword. Had it not been for the events of that evening, I should have done so.

OUR horses were steaming when we came out of a poplar thicket on a hill near the caravan track and saw a boy shepherd watching us from his flock. When he recognized Shirzad Mir, the lad put down his bow and dropped to his knees.

"*Hazaret salamet!*" he cried joyfully, in the dialect of his tribe.

He had thought Shirzad Mir was dead. My lord

questioned him swiftly. The boy told him that the caravan of Said Afzel had not yet passed this point. Our good fortune still held, yet I was doubtful of what was to come. Shirzad Mir bent over the boy.

"Speak, little soldier," he laughed, "how would you like to shoot an arrow in the service of your lord?"

The boy's eyes brightened and he fingered his bow, being both pleased and shy with the attention paid him. He was a slight, dark-skinned Kirghiz—the same that had visited Iskander Khan's *aul*—and the words delighted him. Shirzad Mir honored him by taking him up behind on his horse. My belly yearned for the mutton that we might have cooked and eaten, but my master would not linger.

It was mid-afternoon, and the sun was very hot. We were in the pass now, and once we met a runner coming up the ravine. It was a man of Said Afzel, and when he saw us he bounded up into the rocks. But Shirzad Mir fired an arrow swiftly. My lord was an excellent shot. From the body we took the message.

It said that Said Afzel would camp that night at a certain level spot in the pass, for the caravan track was too narrow, besides being on the bank of the turbulent stream Amu Daria, to travel at night. Probably Said Afzel liked better to sit on the cushions of a silk tent than to ride.

"God is good to us," exclaimed Shirzad Mir and pressed forward.

Although I still said nothing, I had a great foreboding. No man has ever called me a coward, but our strength was sapped by hunger—we had no armor or firearms. We were acting on the mad whim of the *Ferang*, and for the first time in his life my master had put aside my advice for another's—that of the merchant who made me carry the pot of swine-flesh.

We passed the open place where Said Afzel had planned to camp. We knew now that the caravan could not be far away, and Shirzad Mir sent the boy ahead to spy. He ran swiftly, like a young mountain goat.

We came to the very place where I had first met the *Ferang*, and I bent my ears back like a horse, listening for hoofs on the trail behind us, for here we were in a trap. On one side the cliff rose sheer for perhaps four spear lengths. On the left hand the slope, steep and strewn with rocks and thorns, dropped abruptly to the rushing stream which was deep enough to drown a man.

Truly, I thought, the madness of Sir Weyand had brought us to an evil place. If a patrol of Uzbek horsemen should come behind us we would be caught between them and the caravan.

Even a brave man feels a prickling of the flesh when he knows not what is before and behind him. The mad fantasy of the other two had veiled their minds from danger. Shirzad Mir, to make matters worse, set Sir Weyand and me to rolling some stones into the path from the slope. While we were doing this he dismounted and led our three horses by a roundabout path up to the top of the cliff.

Not until we had the stone heap nearly the height of a man and were panting from the toil—my bruises had not yet healed—did he call for us to cease. Then Sir Weyand made me take the pole with him and carry it up the slope to the top of the cliff. If the foul fat had fallen back on me, I should have struck him, but it was my fate that it did not.

Back into a cedar grove we carried the accursed thing. Here Shirzad Mir had kindled a fire from dried cedar branches.

"The trees may hide the smoke," he said. "Quick—our time is little!"

As if possessed of a demon, Sir Weyand worked at the fire, placing the cauldron over the logs so that the fat began to heat. Meanwhile, Shirzad Mir stood at the edge of the cliff to watch for the coming of the boy.

The sun had dropped behind the peaks at our backs. There was no wind. The scent of the cedars was sweet in my nostrils, but Sir Weyand made me labor over the evil-smelling pot. I had none of his wild hope. For, without doubt, Said Afzel, whom we sought, would ride the elephant, and I had once tried to attack one of the beasts in a battle.

The ravine in which the stream muttered was clothed in shadows and it must have been the time of sunset prayers when the boy came running back up the path, looking for us.

Shirzad Mir called to him, and the youth came nimbly up the cliff, clinging somehow to the sheer rock, until my lord reached him a hand. Then he bowed his head to Shirzad Mir's feet.

"The caravan comes, Lord of Badakshan!" he cried eloquently.

"How many and in what order?" asked Shirzad Mir swiftly.

"Some horsemen, riding slowly, are in front. Then a group of slaves with burdens on foot. Following them some armed riders. Then a black

elephant with a glittering *howdah*."

"God is with us!" cried Shirzad Mir. He turned to me merrily. "Ho—Abdul Dost of the dark brow! What think you of an elephant in the ravine of Shyr?"

We had seen none of the beasts in Badakshan before, but something of Shirzad Mir's purpose flashed on me, and I felt the heart-leap of the hunter when he sees game approach his hiding place. Sir Weyand stirred the fat, which was now boiling and bubbling odorously.

Above the place where we had piled the stones so they would look as if they had fallen down the slope, my lord sent the boy with his arrows. He, himself, took his bow and crawled forward to where he could see him down the pass.

At a sign from Sir Weyand, I helped him lift the cauldron from the fire by its stick. We carried it to the edge of the ravine.

"Go with your master," said Sir Weyand to me under his breath, "and take your bow. I will manage the rest of my task alone."

Nothing loath, I obeyed. Crouching beside Shirzad Mir, I could see the caravan coming up the pass, in the quiet of the evening. The bearers and camelmen were pushing ahead with loud cries, for the camping-place was just around a turn.

IT WAS a brave sight. The Pathans, as the boy had said, were in the lead—lean men, riding easily and fully armed. Next came the Ethiopians, with their heavy burdens. They, of course, were unarmed. I counted seven Pathans.

Then appeared Most Alast, the elephant of the Mogul. He had two red stripes down his forehead, and silver bells at his neck. I could see the white heron's plume of Said Afzel in the *howdah* behind the *mahout*. Slowly, slowly, they came forward.

"It could not be better, Abdul Dost," cried my master joyfully.

I took heart from this. For, though his eyes were shining, he was laughing to himself, which was a good sign. He was not mad. I had begun to see his plan.

Last came the long-haired camels, bearing the women, the baskets which probably contained the treasure, and the eunuch guards of the harem. A few slaves in gorgeous tunics walked with the dirty camelmen.

A lone Pathan brought up the rear. I felt Shirzad Mir's hand on my arm.

“Shoot your arrows among the camelmen, Abdul Dost,” he said. “I will take care of the leading riders—I and the boy. When I shout, raise our battle-cry and shout as if you were many men.”

I nodded to show that I understood. I strung my bow and waited, lying on my belly. It was just as if Shirzad Mir and I were stalking antelope. Yet never had we stalked such game as this.

The sun had left the pass, but there was still light when the Pathans passed under us and arrived at the heap of stones. After talking together, three of them dismounted and began to clear away the stones, dropping them down the slope into the stream to free the path for the elephant.

We four were silent on the cliff, though I could hear Sir Weyand working at the fire. The swaying *howdah* of Most Alast came nearer—so near I could see the jewels set in the turban of Said Afzel, who was laughing with a fat man on the cushion by him—Kasim Kirlas, I thought. I could have almost reached down and touched their heads.

Then Shirzad Mir bellowed his battle-cry.

“*Hai—Shirzad el kadr—hai!*”

He leaped to his feet and began to speed arrows down at the riders.

“*Hai—Shirzad el kadr!*” I echoed, twanging a shaft among the camels.

It must have reached its mark, for one of the beasts yelled with pain. I heard the shrill shout of the boy and the startled cries of the slaves below us.

Then Sir Weyand came to my side.

“St. George for England!” he cried. I asked him later what it was, and he told me.

As he shouted, he pushed the cauldron over on its side. The boiling fat fell on the broad rump of Most Alast.

An elephant has a thick hide, but he is sensitive and nervous as a woman—and the boiling grease was very hot. Most Alast lifted up his trunk and bellowed his pain. Then he charged forward. The *howdah*, with Said Afzel and Kasim Kirlas, slipped its girths as Most Alast shook himself—the fat had missed the *howdah*, to my sorrow—and the two went to earth.

Then Most Alast dashed among the riders. Several horses leaped over the slope in their fright. Finding himself against the stones, the elephant turned in the narrow path and charged back against the camels, which gave way before him. Some stumbled into the brush of the slope. Others pressed

against the cliff wall. *B`illah*, there was much confusion!

The camels, being frightened and hurt, began to yell also, and the horses too. The black slaves had leaped to shelter and stood watching, their eyeballs showing white. The camelmen sought safety where they could.

Shirzad Mir had reckoned well what havoc an angered elephant would make along that narrow path.

I was a middling shot with a bow, but my lord was a marksman among many. His shafts sought out the Pathans, who had no time to use their matchlocks before they had to leap out of the way of Most Alast. Yet he killed none. Before long, I knew why.

“*Hai—Shirzad el kadr—hai!*” cried my lord for the last time, and ordered me to seek the horses.

While the boy plied his arrows from the cliff, we two, with the *Ferang*, rode rapidly down until our horses stood at the slope above the pile of stones. Here Shirzad Mir called upon the Pathans to throw down their arms.

A Pathan is a good fighter when and if it suits him. These men were less afraid of us than of Most Alast, who was trumpeting back and forth along the path, heedless of the efforts of his *mahout*. They saw that we were armed and ready. They did not know how many more of us there were.

Three of the Pathans were hurt by the arrows of Shirzad Mir. Two others had fallen among the rocks and thorns of the slope below. The other two were afoot and watching the elephant.

All who could do so put down their muskets and swords and said that they had had enough of the affair. Shirzad Mir would not move until he had seen the two who were in the thorn thicket climb out, cursing, but little the worse for their fall, and join the others. Then we left Sir Weyand, who had picked up a brace of their discarded pistols, to watch the group, and went forward with me at his side.

“Find Said Afzel,” he ordered me.

I saw the Uzbek prince leaning turbanless against a rock, feeling of himself tenderly. It is no light thing to fall from the *howdah* of an elephant. Kasim Kirlas, the professional courtier, was stretched on the ground at his feet—but this was no salaam; the man was stunned.

Shirzad Mir caught the dazed prince by the shoulder and bade him sternly walk before his

horse. My lord had drawn his sword, and this he kept near the bare neck of Said Afzel.

"Where is the elephant?" he asked me.

I pointed to the stream below and Shirzad Mir laughed aloud. He ever appreciated a good jest. Most Alast had smelled water, and had somehow got himself down the slope to the stream unhurt. He was drawing water up in his trunk and squirting it over his sore back—*mahout* and all. Later Most Alast lay down in the mud. It was many hours before we could get him to leave it.

Shirzad Mir pushed through the bewildered bearers swiftly. Half of the camelmen had fled. One or two of the eunuchs drew their scimitars when my lord came near the camels on which were the women, but when they saw the plight of Said Afzel, with my lord's sword at his ear, they threw down their weapons.

It was a sorry gathering that we grouped against the cliff wall. Eunuchs and slaves are masters of brave words, but I have yet to see the ones who will face danger to their bodies without shrinking. I cast about and discovered that the Pathan who had formed the rear guard had fled.

Shirzad Mir was now master of the field. He called to the boy on the cliff—our foes thought that many more were there—to shoot down the first man of the caravan who moved from his place.

Then he ordered me to ride my horse slowly back and forth among the remaining camels, the women and their attendants, and see that none escaped.

It was now growing dark, so of my own will I set four of the camelmen to building a great fire at the lower end of the caravan and another by the heap of stones. So it happened that when it grew dark we had our prisoners securely between the two fires and could see all that passed.

Shirzad Mir had gone straight to the Pathans and talked with them a long time. Presently he came to me and said:

"They will join my party, being men who sell their swords: For this reason I did not slay them. They were near enough for good shooting. I have cared for those who were hurt. The others are cooking food. In the morning we will give them a sword apiece—perhaps."

With the other attendants we did not speak. They were men of low breeding and jumped to obey our orders. Shirzad Mir kept Said Afzel ever at his side, in case of treachery.

One at a time we ate of the food for which we yearned. The boy joined us proudly, and Shirzad Mir set him to collecting the few weapons of the eunuchs. Of these he made a pile and sat on it, feeling greatly the honor we did him.

Shirzad Mir talked with Said Afzel through the night. There was no chance for me to sleep, but I think Sir Weyand slept a little during his watch over the Pathans. Before dawn I had spoken with the *mahout* of Most Alast and given him a handful of gold from the treasure bags. He—one master being as good as another—consented to serve us.

At dawn I had finished my task. The loads were all recovered and placed on the camels and the slaves' backs. All had eaten. The women were put back on their camels, and the eunuchs herded in front.

At first break of light in the sky we set out, my lord and Said Afzel mounted on the elephant, who was now quiet, the injured in litters borne by the slaves, the Pathans on their own horses, and the sheep boy on another.

We struck away from the Shyr Pass into the hills. Then, for the first time in two days and nights, I slept a little in the saddle, being weary, but only a little.

III

SAID I not our star was in the ascendant, so that for a space we were given strength to trick our enemies? Later, evil fortune came upon us again, but not then.

Three courses were open to my lord. He could slay Said Afzel, to strike terror into the Uzbeks; he could exchange the prince and the women for his own family, and perhaps a strip of Badakshan; or he could ransom our prisoners for gold with which to pay an army. I urged the first plan, Sir Weyand the second, and the Pathans, who had now cast their fortunes with us, the third.

Our danger was great, for when news of what had happened in the pass reached Khanjut by way of some escaped bearers, the whole army of Jani Beg was sent to hunt us down. As yet we had no followers other than the four uninjured Pathans and the sheep boy, whom Shirzad Mir appointed head of the camelmen and gave a sword, to his great satisfaction. The bearers, the slaves and the camel drivers were useless to us and would have been glad to fall again into the hands of Jani Beg, who

would not drive them through the by-paths of the hills, as we did.

It is written in the annals of India, the curious thing that my master did in this difficulty.

“We will keep the prisoners and the treasure,” he said, “and we will regain the foothills of Badakshan from Jani Beg; also we will gather together a small army.

And this thing we did, by the will of God. How was it done? We held a *darbar*—that is, a crowning ceremony. The people of Badakshan had been told my lord was dead. The *darbar* showed them he was not.

Verily, not before or since has such a *darbar* been held in Hindustan or Badakshan or Turkestan. We traveled with the caravan through the villages of the hills. At each village Shirzad Mir would dismount from Most Alast and spend money—from the bags of Said Afzel—for a feast.

Wine he bought freely, and food, and scattered silver among the people. So that all might see, he held his *darbar*. Said Afzel, the opium-eating prince, he forced to do homage in public to him; fat Kasim Kirlas, the professional courtier, Shirzad Mir made pay him extravagant compliments; *el ghias*, the buffoon of the caravan, performed his tricks; the musicians of Said Afzel sang—at the sword points of the Pathans—and the dancing girls danced. It was a great feast. Shirzad Mir, looking the proud king he was by birth, sat on cushions under a cloth-of-gold tent which we found in the baggage, and watched idly, saying nothing.

Sir Weyand cleaned his soiled garments and sat at the right hand of Shirzad Mir, as the ambassador from England. Only I did not attend, for at every feast I was out in the lookout places, with certain men of the hills who rallied to our standard, keeping watch. The men of Jani Beg pressed us close. We moved each day, marching in the night to a new village. I kept a good watch and at each new place more of our men came in to see and hear, for rumors of what had happened spread

through the hills. Shirzad Mir gave to them gold and weapons from the store we had taken.

In the plain of Badakshan we could not have avoided being overtaken by the cavalry of the Uzbeks. But in the hills they were at a loss—and the people aided us. It was a mad scheme, yet its very madness protected us.

He himself put on the jewels he took from Said Afzel, and—sitting placidly on Most Alast, the black elephant, with the two crimson stripes of the Mogul on his nose—he looked the king he was. The hearts of his old soldiers, who thronged to us from the hills, were uplifted at this sight.

Always Shirzad Mir directed me to travel in a circle, through Anderab, Ghor and Bamian, back to where we had started, at the Shyr Pass. In spite of danger he did this, and we all wondered, until one day we came to the desolate *aul* of Iskander Khan, as Shirzad Mir had planned.

When the old Kirghiz chieftain came forth and lifted up his hands at the sight, Shirzad Mir in his gorgeous robes dismounted from Most Alast and embraced Iskander Khan, while we all watched.

Then my lord pointed to the caravans, to the camels, the treasure and the women.

“Choose,” said he to Iskander Khan; “it is all yours for the asking.”

But Iskander Khan would not, saying that he was unworthy of such honor. Whereupon Shirzad Mir called for us all to see. He loaded the horse Iskander Khan had given him in his need—the fine Arab stallion—with pots of gold and gems, and put the bridle in the Kirghiz’ hand himself.

He put a robe of ceremony on Iskander Khan and girded on him the sword from his own waist.

“This man,” he said loudly, “shall be always at my left hand until he dies. Those who do homage to me shall bow to him also.”

In this manner did Shirzad Mir pay his debt to Iskander Khan. He was a good man. A man among ten thousand. Aye, among ten times ten thousand.