



Author of "The Skull of Shirzad Mir," "The Prophecy of the Blind," etc.

Where is the man who knows what is hidden in the heart of a woman?

—Mohammedan proverb

MY MASTER and Jani Beg, the Uzbek, had been at drawn swords. Jani Beg had built a tower of the skulls of my master's retainers that he had slain. On the other hand, Shirzad Mir, who was my master, had taken prisoner the son of Jani Beg, who was called Said Afzel, the dreamer and eater of opium and *bhāng*.

Verily, it is written that the clashing of bright swords delights the soul of a brave man. Yet in this year—early in the seventeenth century of the Christian calendar—Jani Beg put aside the sword. He took up another weapon. He called upon Krishna Taya, a girl of the Rajputs.

This was because we, the hillmen of Badakshan, led by Shirzad Mir and the English merchant, Sir Weyand, had taken the citadel of Badakshan. It was by a trick, but nevertheless we sat securely behind the high stone walls of Khanjut and ate of the stores Jani Beg had gathered there for himself, and we were content. He could not take Khanjut by storm. No man has done that since the citadel was built under the white peaks of Kohi-Baba at the mouth of the pass that leads to Hindustan.

So Jani Beg, who was a man of guile, thought that he, also, would play a trick. And for this he chose Krishna Taya. He whispered an evil thing in the tiny ear of the girl, and she listened. Since the

memory of our fathers, woman has played the part of treachery and her beauty has made blind the eyes of warriors.

Aye, it is so. I, Abdul Dost, the *mansab-dar*, have seen it. And I watched the coming of Krishna Taya and harkened to her soft words, which were as artless as those of a child. Too late I saw what was in her heart.

She was the one Sir Weyand named "Rose Face." She was no taller than the armpit of my mail shirt and no bigger around than two small shields joined together. She was not a common courtesan, for she was of the Rajputs, who hold honor higher than life. Nevertheless, what is written is true—the face of a fair woman holds a spell.

I saw it all. It could not have happened had we and our men not been idle in Khanjut after many labors. We had starved and grown lean in the hills. Now we ate and slept. At such a time a warrior grows sluggish and his wits become dull and the sight of a shapely woman is not unwelcome.

This is the tale. There be few to tell it, for many in Khanjut died quickly and went to paradise or to the devil, after the coming of Krishna Taya.

The days had become still and the warmth of the sun tranquil, as Autumn spread its arms over the hills of Badakshan. The sheep from the hills

were pasturing in the valley as Jani Beg, in his camp at Balkh, sought out the tent of Krishna Taya. I was not there to see, but much I heard from one of the eunuchs of Said Afzel, and more came to my ears from a woman of the Uzbek harem.

Krishna Taya was no better than a slave. Said Afzel had seen her when he was with the Mogul, and Jahangir, the Mogul, had her carried off to please the prince, since Said Afzel's father was Jani Beg who commanded twelve thousand swords and twice that number of horses.

She was playing with pigeons in a pear garden when they took her. She had come from the Rajputs. There she had been a free woman, and high born, yet Jahangir was Mogul of India, lord of the Deccan, Kashmir and Sind. She was given as slave to Said Afzel, who was well pleased, for she was fair of face and body. Many thought—so said the eunuch—that Krishna Taya would slay herself, being of the Rajputs, where no women may be slaves.

Whether it was because she was a child, or for another reason, I know not, but Krishna Taya did not thrust a dagger into her throat. She became the property of Said Afzel and said little, waxing thinner of face as dark circles came under her calf-like eyes.

Said Afzel tired of her swiftly. Those who eat much opium are not firm of purpose. He left her in the tents of the Uzbek harem, where she was dressed in the white silk trousers and cap of cloth-of-silver that the Uzbek women wear. Said Afzel's eunuchs kept her from meeting with the Rajputs who sometimes came from the camp of Jahangir fearing that they might do her harm. By the law of the Marwar, no high-born woman may be a slave to an enemy.

Krishna Taya had broken this law. She had not done as her ancestors, who dressed in their bridal clothes and followed the queen of the Rajputs into the funeral flames when Chitore fell to the enemy.

Yet—so the eunuch whispered—she was but a child and might well fear the cold touch of death. Likewise, she ate opium, which kept her quiet and wrought upon her fancies. She had been partaking of it when Jani Beg visited her.

He sat on the carpet by her and talked. He was a shrewd man and her brain was aflame with the drug.

"The *ferang* is the shield on the arm Shirzad Mir," he said. "He is like to a devil loosed from the

Christian purgatory. Without him, Shirzad Mir would fare ill at our hands. He it was who took my son prisoner."

She lifted up her soft eyes at this and plucked at the cap which she wore instead of the veil of her people.

"Yet he is his own man," continued Jani Beg. "He serves himself. None other. What reward he seeks I know not, save that he has sworn to obtain certain trade concessions from the great Mogul. Jahangir will not see him so long as he fights with the rebels of Shirzad Mir."

Aye, Jani Beg, who was an Uzbek of low birth, dared to name Shirzad Mir, whose father and father's father ruled in Badakshan, a rebel.

"Mayhap," whispered Jani Beg, "Sir Weyand does not know that I am allied to the Mogul. If he knew this—" Jani Beg smiled—"I might forget certain wrongs she has done me. Aye, and Jahangir might also forget, for the Mogul has counted the swords I lead. Say this to the *ferang* —"

"How?" asked Krishna Taya softly.

The woman of the harem was listening behind the hangings of the tent and heard what passed.

"It is in my mind," said Jani Beg, stroking his long beard, "to send a present to this *ferang* dog. He is a merchant, and when did a merchant dislike the sight of gold? I will send a Persian sword with gold hilt, certain rubies and woven cloth-of-gold. I will send—" he touched the long hair of the girl and Krishna Taya's cheeks grew red—"you."

The girl was silent, being afraid to speak.

"The *ferang*," went on Jani Beg, "has a heart for fighting. But now there is a truce. I have willed it so. The men of Shirzad Mir think I am weak." He laughed and closed his hand on the girl's arm so her fingers became numb. "As for you, be not so blind. I am master of Badakshan, a frontier of the Mogul. I can ask and receive much, and I seek much." He broke off to finger his beard again. "Win me the *ferang*; aye, win me Sir Weyand. I reward those who serve me."

He unwound a long string of small pearls from his turban, where he had placed it in imitation of the Mogul fashion. This he laid about her throat and peered at her curiously.

"Can my words aid you, my lord?" she said, feeling the pearls with a trembling hand.

"Aye," smiled Jani Beg. "Put this thought in his head and you will serve me well.

"How?"

His brows knit together in a swift frown. He plucked forth his dagger and, so quickly that she had no time to draw back, passed the blade before both her eyelids, which fluttered in alarm. So near came the blade that it touched the skin. So said the woman who saw.

"Are you a *begum*—a wife of a noble—to question my words? So! Tell me in one word. Will you do this thing faithfully? If not—" His glance strayed to the dagger.

Perhaps he would have liked to slay her, for the blood lust was strong in him. I have seen Said Afzel, who was his son, wring the neck of a white pigeon in order to feel the life quiver out through his fingers. Nevertheless, Jani Beg was an excellent soldier and full of guile.

He had stirred the girl.

"Aye," she cried, looking wide-eyed at the dagger, "I will sever the prop from him who seeks the throne of Badakshan!"

"It is well," he said indifferently and rose. "Say what I have told you."

He lowered his voice, so the woman behind the curtain did not hear. Presently he laughed in his beard.

"So, Krishna Taya! Soon six men will stand alone together but, before they part, they shall be four and two."

This is what they said in the tent of Krishna Taya that night. I did not hear of it until long after—until what Jani Beg had promised had come to pass and ten thousand Uzbeks were storming the walls of Khanjut.

II

IT WAS a late watch in the afternoon and I was drowsy, for the sun was warm on the stones of Khanjut and no wind stirred in the dried leaves of the poplar trees that fringed the garden of the castle.

Past the corner where I sat on my heels one of the hillmen bore a jar. He had come from the cellars of the castle and I suspected there was wine in the jar, so I rose and followed silently.

Truly, I was a follower of the prophet, but my thirst was great. Where there was wine, I knew there would be drinking. I dogged the hillman past the battlements to the center garden. He went down some steps and I did likewise.

I came full upon my lord, Shirzad Mir and the Englishman, lying on some pleasant carpets under the trees. The bearer was just setting down the jar between them. Said Afzel was near-by, lying at full length.

"Ho, Abdul Dost!" cried Shirzad Mir, who had a quick eye. "You have come like a dog at the smell of meat in the pot. Nay, do not leave us. Come, here is another bowl. Said Afzel will not need his. He is rightly named the dreamer; he has taken opium until he is like a full-fed snake."

I looked at the Uzbek. His head was slack on the carpet, crushing the white heron plume on the turban. His olive face was red and he breathed heavily, while his slant eyes were glazed. They looked at me but seemed to see not. Truly they were like those of a snake. A snake that smelled of musk and attar of rose.

"Peace be unto you, my lord!" I greeted Shirzad Mir, and sat. "I do not seek the wine."

"A lie!" cried Sir Weyand jovially, shaking his yellow head. "Come, let me fill your bowl, Abdul Dost."

But I would not, as it would put me in the wrong. Then there came a soldier from the gate.

"A message comes for the lord *ferang*," he said, after his *salaam*. We saw coming toward us under the trees a fat eunuch leading a slim girl by the wrist, and after them a white horse of excellent breed. The saddle cloths were silk and there were jewels in the peak of the saddle. A scimitar with gold hilt and some rich stuffs were on the saddle. I stared and Sir Weyand sat up and looked at this curiously,

The eunuch dropped to his knees and made the triple *salaam*, beating his head, against the ground. The girl, who was veiled, fell also to her knees.

"What means this?" asked Shirzad Mir in surprise.

"It is a small, a very small gift from the treasury of Jani Beg, O lord of Badakshan and descendant of illustrious ancestors, O most munificent Shirzad Mohammed el Baber Hazret Mir," whined the eunuch.

"Ho!" muttered my master, who was not slow of wit. "Jani Beg sends me a horse and sword that I may mount and fight him. Then I will send back a silk rug of Persia and a spindle, for he seems more inclined to sit in a corner than to fight—"

"Thrice blessed, pardon!" the eunuch chattered. "The gift is for the *ferang*. It is for the

illustrious stranger in our country. Jani Beg does not wish to be thought an ungenerous foe."

"For me!" Sir Weyand looked from the eunuch to the girl and then to the horse.

"Aye, may it be pleasant in the sight of your nobleness! Truly, the woman is of the Rajputs and surpassingly fair. I have guarded her with zeal. There is not a blemish on, her—"

"Please!"

Sir Weyand's cheeks became red. Shirzad Mir began to laugh.

"Jani Beg honors you with a wife," he chuckled. "Now that you have taken Khanjut, he sends you a slave."

I did not laugh, considering what this might mean. The eunuch plucked the veil from the woman's face, enough to show her beauty.

"It is a slave," he boasted. "And such a slave. I will take good care of her for my lord the *ferang*. I like not the service of Jani Beg."

He caught sight of Said Afzel and gasped. The poet's heavy eyes had turned slowly to the girl and he was twisting his thin black beard. The miserable guardian of the harem quivered in fright like a fish caught between two nets.

But Sir Weyand looked long into the dark eyes that sought his and fell silent.

"She is not ill to look upon," commented Shirzad Mir gravely. "Jani Beg is unusually thoughtful. I would have said this woman was chosen by Said Afzel, if we had him not prisoner for the last moon.

"A royal gift to one who deserves it, lord," whined the eunuch, who thought this, at least, was safe to say.

"And are you also a royal present?" demanded my master quickly.

"Nay," the fat one *salaamed*. "I am but dirt from a dunghill."

"Do we deserve dirt?"

"Nay," the unhappy man wriggled, fearing that his death was near, but voluble after his kind. "I meant that I was but a servant who had come to a garden of paradise from a swine-pen."

"From the Uzbeks?" The merry eyes of Shirzad Mir twinkled.

The eunuch lifted his head long enough to see that Said Afzel was listening.

"Have mercy, lord! What was in my mind was that your presence has made me blessed, like one who comes from darkness to light. Now that I

know the gift of the illustrious Jani Beg has been well received——"

"Enough!"

Shirzad Mir frowned. He whispered to Sir Weyand that a eunuch was a breeder of trouble.

"Get to your feet, O dunghill-that-came-to-the-garden-of-paradise! Abdul Dost, go to the battlements and take up the first bow that comes to hand. This dog may now begin to run out of the gate. Bring him down with an arrow, if you can, from the wall. If not, he goes free."

He waved his hand and the fat man galloped off like a frightened elephant. I also, made speed to the wall. I would have been well content to plant a shaft in his haunches.

But when I gained the battlement he was far below me. He had rolled from the winding road down the slope of the cliff. His bones must have been well shaken; still, he saved his life.

So it happened that when I reached the spot under the trees again, all were gone but the soldier, who was taking a drink from the jar. I upbraided him well, for I had remembered the jar and was still thirsty.

He said the girl had fallen to weeping and Sir Weyand had softened to her tears when she cried that it would be her death to send her back to Jani Beg.

The *ferang* had offered her a room in his residence. The horse and sword he had presented to Shirzad Mir who had taken them readily, saying that he would ride the one and cut off Jani Beg's head with the other.

But I was not content, knowing it was not wanted that a woman of the Rajputs should consent to be a slave.

I dismissed the man. There was still some wine in the jar and no one was looking.

SO THE girl of the Rajputs came to Khanjut.

But I knew that any gift from Jani Beg was not meant for our happiness. I sent the soldier who had drunk from my jar of wine—Bihor Jan, a long-legged Afghan with nimble wits and a quick ear—to Sir Weyand to serve as a guard for the woman. Thus Bihor Jan would tell me what she did.

A day passed and then another. Then I sought out Bihor Jan, who was squatting on the stone of the entrance hall of the castle. I asked him what had passed between the woman and Sir Weyand.

"Eh!" The Afghan spat and looked about him. "The *ferang* has seen her but once. It was when she carried his curry and wine from the kitchen to his room."

"What did Sir Weyand?"

"The *ferang*? What you or I would have done, Abdul Dost. He ate of the food."

"And the woman?"

"She said in a soft voice, so I could scarce hear, although the door was open, that she was his slave. She asked why he turned his face from her service."

"What said he?"

"He became red and said that in his country they had no slaves. He did not wish her to wait upon him."

That was well, so far. But before long the Afghan came to my room—an alcove opening from that of Shirzad Mir—and greeted me. I saw from his dark face that he had news on his stomach and invited him to kneel and eat, as I was doing.

This he did readily, scooping up in his dirty fingers some choice sugared fruit that I had selected for myself.

"This day" he grunted between mouthfuls, "Krishna Taya seated herself by the embrasure of the *ferang*'s room and waited for his arrival. When he came she *salaamed* and cried that her heart was troubled with loneliness."

He took up the bowl of jelly for which I had been about to reach. Now that it was too late, I pretended that I did not want the jelly.

"She was lonely with desire for her own country. She asked the *ferang* if he would help her to get back to Rajputana. Then he questioned her concerning the Rajputs and their alliance with the Mogul. I could not hear what they said after that, though I sat with my back to the door. But the name of Jani Beg was spoken."

From this time forth I sometimes saw Sir Weyand walking about the garden with the woman. They talked much, for she was trying to teach him the language of the Rajputs and he was anxious to learn.

How is a man to scent danger in the perfume of a woman's robes or the quick glance of dark eyes?

Once, when they had been sitting under the bare pomegranates, I watched her walk back to the castle. She carried herself proudly, for all she was a slave.

"Eh, Sir Weyand," I said curiously, "she is fair. Jani Beg sent you a princely gift."

"Nay, I know not what to do with her, Abdul Dost," he said, quickly. "Jani Beg will not take her back, nor will her own people, now that she is under the cloud of dishonor."

"Why not sell her? It would not be hard to find a buyer.

"That I will not do—unless it should be her will."

Truly, the *ferang* had a strange nature. The woman embarrassed him; he would not let her serve him and wait on him; yet he would not take a round sum for her or even sell the fine necklace she wore.

Then I saw he was frowning, looking out under the trees. I also looked and noted that the Uzbek prince had stopped her. Said Afzel was leaning close and whispering, fingering the pearls at her throat, for he knew not we watched.

She listened to what the Uzbek said, but when the poet laid hand on her arm she freed herself and ran off into the building.

"Once," I whispered, wishing to test the *ferang*, "Said Afzel owned Krishna Taya. He it was who took her for a slave against the law of her people. Perhaps she loves Said Afzel."

He looked at me keenly.

"Think you so, Abdul Dost?"

"Aye," I lied, "why else did she not slay herself, as is the custom of her people after an injury that they can not avenge?"

He fell silent, but the look he cast after the languid figure of the Uzbek was not friendly, I thought of the verses in the Koran which say that fire, once kindled, is put out with difficulty. Why had the *ferang* named the girl Rose Face if his heart had not wanted to her?

For the moment all thought of the girl was driven from my mind. Bihor Jan approached and said that Shirzad Mir demanded my presence.

A rider had been sighted in the plain before the citadel. He had made signs to our outposts that he was on a mission of peace and would speak with those in Khanjut.

It was Shirzad Mir's order that I should mount and ride to meet this man. I donned a clean tunic over my mail and wrapped a white turban about my head. I chose a good sword and a sightly horse.

While the others watched from the wall I passed down the cliff road, over the drawbridge and neared the rider. Then I saw that it was Raja

Man Singh, one of the highest ameer of the Mogul court and general to Jahangir himself, also leader of the Rajputs.

He was very elegantly dressed, with a jewelled sword stuck through his girdle and a single large diamond on the front of his turban. He rode excellently well and seemed quite fearless. He had a neatly combed black beard divided on each side of his chin, and his glance was that of a man of many followers.

Raja Man Singh greeted me in soft Persian, somewhat contemptuously. I did not dismount, despite his high rank, for I considered myself the emissary of Shirzad Mir. Besides, I was the older man.

I lifted my hand to my forehead and beat my head very slightly. I waited for him to speak my own tongue, as I knew not Persian. This he presently did.

"Have you learned manners among the dogs, soldier," he cried harshly, "that you know not the courtesy due an ameer of the Mogul?"

"Nay, Raja Man Singh," I made response, "I was bred in the camp of the great Mogul Akbar, on whom be peace. There I also was given rank—on the battlefield"

His horse was moving restlessly, but he did not sit the less straight for this. He was a splendid horseman and a soldier among many. It surprised me that he had come alone to Khanjut. Later, however, the thought came to me that he was but just arrived from Jahangir's army and sought to look upon the strength of the fortress.

"The greater shame to be a rebel now," he cried with all the intolerance of his race.

"Nay," I said again, "Shirzad Mir has been faithful to the Moguls before the barbarian Uzbeks set foot in Badakshan."

He merely grunted, fingering his beard disdainfully.

"Take me then to Shirzad Mir," he ordered, "since I come, on a mission of truce."

"Shirzad Mir bade me bring the message to him, not the messenger."

"Dog!" he gritted his white teeth. "Am I one to exchange words with such as you? Tell your master that Jani Beg would speak with him. The Uzbek ameer will ride to this spot when the sun is at noon. He and I will be alone. Let Shirzad Mir come hither with one man—no more. We seek a parley, not war—at present. Let him come or not, as suits him. I care not."

Wheeling his mount, the Rajput spurred away, raising a cloud of dust. He was a fearless man, although merciless.

III

IT IS the wisdom of God that no man can know the fate in store for him. It was our fate that we should not see the black cloud of peril rising over Khanjut, or the toils of the snare that closed about Shirzad Mir.

My men gambled and ate and were happy thinking of insulting things to say to the Uzbek patrols that sometimes neared our walls. And I, also, would have been happy, but for Krishna Taya.

I could not linger, yet I whispered a word of caution to Bihor Jan as I rode off with Shirzad Mir to meet with our foes.

If the Rajput had not been with Jani Beg, we would not have gone. But the Rajput was a man of his word, as was Shirzad Mir.

I was proud of my lord as he cantered to meet the other two. Jani Beg, who was there first, thought to impose a hardship on my lord by dismounting and sitting upon his cloak. Thus he hoped to make Shirzad Mir approach him on foot as an inferior in rank. Raja Man Singh, impatient of such pettishness, kept to his horse.

But my master saw through the artifice. He cantered straight up to the sitting Uzbek and he did not dismount. He reined in his horse only when its hoofs were fair upon the silk cloak of Jani Beg. In spite of himself the Uzbek drew back and scowled.

I turned my head to hide a smile and I saw the Rajput's beard twitch. He and Shirzad Mir greeted each other briefly. Jani Beg was made to look ridiculous, squatting beneath our horses' legs, so he rose and mounted, and I saw the pulse in his forehead beating. I, being inferior in rank, made the *salaam* from the saddle, which is not customary, yet I followed the example of Shirzad Mir and he cast me an approving glance.

"We have come, Shirzad Mir," said Raja Man Singh, "to arrange certain terms between the Uzbeks and the rebels. Jani Beg desires to treat for the ransom of his son."

The Uzbek chieftain looked darkly at the general of the Mogul. He would have liked better to play with words, but the Rajput was impatient.

"We—" Jani Beg waved his lean hand toward the Rajput—"will offer you a continuation of the truce you desire if you will release Said Afzel and his personal followers."

Again Shirzad Mir smiled.

"Is the truce of our seeking, Jani Beg? Nay, you have chosen it. For my part, I shall not rest from fighting until Badakshan is free from invaders."

"Then you will continue to rebel against the Mogul?"

"Nay. Badakshan is part of the Mogul empire. I fight only with Uzbeks."

"Yet I and my men are serving the Mogul. And you see Raja Man Singh."

Shirzad Mir did not smile this time.

"Let the Rajput give heed to this," he said slowly. "Lies have been spoken against me in court, and I have taken up the sword of vengeance against the author of those lies. My quarrel is not with the Mogul. When the fighting is ended, he shall receive my allegiance."

They were bold words, spoken by an outlawed chieftain with only a handful of hillmen opposed to the Uzbek army, which possessed powder and artillery and was strengthened by a force of the invincible Rajput cavalry. I held my head high with pride and listened keenly. Jani Beg began to speak words of another color.

"You have an ally, Shirzad Mir," he observed shrewdly, "a *ferang*. You owe him much. Tell him, as ransom for my son, I will procure his pardon from Jahangir, who is at Kahbul, and also an audience with Jahangir. Thus he may obtain the trade rights he seeks for England."

Truly, the guile of the Uzbek was great. If Shirzad Mir should refuse this offer, it must offend Sir Weyand. Should my master keep the offer secret from the *ferang*, Jani Beg would find means of getting the news to the Englishman's ears. Yet both Shirzad Mir and I knew that it would not do to give up Said Afzel for a promise of Jani Beg.

Shirzad Mir fingered his beard thoughtfully. Then he turned to the elegant figure of the Rajput.

"Do you also pledge your word, Raja Man Singh," he asked courteously, "that this privilege will be granted the *ferang* and that he will not be harmed?"

Jani Beg had spoken cleverly. He knew that we could ill afford to lose the services of Sir Weyand, but the Rajput cherished the

righteousness of his spoken pledge as a woman guards her honor.

"Nay," he cried, "this is not my affair. I have no authority to give a promise for Jahangir. Settle the matter between yourselves."

I pricked up ears at that, for it sounded as if the Rajput were not over fond of the Uzbek. Jani Beg had hinted that the two were as brothers. The Uzbek frowned slightly; then his brow cleared. He smiled with thick lips.

"I will give up Balkh as ransom for my son."

When he said that, I saw the Rajput's brows twitch in involuntary surprize. The thought came to me that Jani Beg was offering more than he intended to pay. Shirzad Mir was not one to be caught by such a trap.

"Nay," he said pleasantly. "Does a falcon give up its perch to strut on the ground where are many wolves? Keep Balkh—if you can."

By now Raja Man Singh was waxing restless. His handsome face was petulant.

"Shiva—and Shiva!" he cried. "Name the rebel a price, Jani Beg. I am thirsty. Give him a camel-load of gold!"

He lifted some grains of brown powder from a jeweled box that hung at his throat and placed them on his tongue. Jani Beg thought swiftly. He had no wish to exasperate the Rajput.

"Two lacs of rupees and twenty horses of Arabia—" he began, when Shirzad Mir broke in.

"We have no need of such." He turned to the Rajput. "Give me twelve donkeys heavily loaded with powder and two others bearing camel swivels, also twenty-four good matchlocks and as many braces of Turkish pistols, and you shall have Said Afzel."

The Rajput seemed to be about to refuse. Powder and cannon—even such small pieces of brass—were beyond price in Badakshan, and I judge that the swivels belonged to Raja Man Singh himself. Sir Weyand had said that there were many in the Mogul's army, although the Uzbeks had them not.

But Jani Beg cast him a glance.

"It is well" the Uzbek said swiftly. "Two days we must have to make ready the things. We will then bring them to this place when the sun is at the same hour."

"The beasts of burden must be driven by a half-dozen unarmed men on foot," bargained Shirzad Mir.

"Aye. And Said Afzel must be unharmed."

"Not a scratch will be on his skin. He shall be whole, although probably drunk, as is his custom."

So it was agreed. Jani Beg's party, including the beasts with the ransom, would ride to this spot in the plain. We would come forth to meet them. Then, while we still held Said Afzel and any who came to attend him, the men who drove the beasts would retire to the Uzbek lines. Then we would join Jani Beg's party and deliver the prisoner and they would ride away, leaving us the animals with their valuable burden.

"I will come alone with Raja Man Singh," added Jani Beg. "And you will bring only Sir Weyand."

Shirzad Mir was surprized and hesitated. I was angered that I should not accompany my lord, as was my hereditary right, but Jani Beg said smoothly that both he and the Rajput desired to look upon the *ferang*, and Shirzad Mir assented, saying only that in case Said Afzel was drunk I should be allowed to escort his litter down to the meeting place and should remain ten spear-lengths distant. He asked this because it was my right by custom.

"Likewise—" and he looked at the Rajput, not at Jani Beg—"this thing shall be done in peace and the curse of God be on the man who sets hand to sword. I pledge this for myself and those with me."

Then I noted that Jani Beg spoke swiftly before the Rajput.

"Aye, we trust you, Shirzad Mir."

Whereupon both wheeled their horses and made off. Not however, before I saw a gleam of satisfaction on the Uzbek's hawk-like face. For some secret reason he was well pleased with the bargain. The thought came to me that he was using the Rajput's honor as a shield and that Shirzad Mir had got too readily what he asked.

Jani Beg glanced back shrewdly over his shoulder as he rode, but the Rajput, who was a fearless man, looked neither to right nor left. In spite of my foreboding, my heart swelled at the thought of possessing the powder and the brass cannon.

"Eh, Abdul Dost," cried my lord, "we have strengthened mighty Khanjut at the price of an opium-guzzling animal."

And think as I would, the bargain seemed safe to me notwithstanding my distrust of Jani Beg. Sir Weyand and my lord would be alone with Jani Beg and the Rajput. If swords should, by chance, be

drawn the odds would be even and I should not be far distant. Men have said I am an excellent hand with the scimitar. Likewise, there was the honor of Raja Man Singh, who would not draw the first sword, although in a quarrel he would be forced to side with Jani Beg. As for Said Afzel, he could not lift a weapon.

A CHANGE had come upon Sir Weyand. He fell moody and he seemed to avoid Shirzad Mir and me. Jan reported that he talked long and quietly with Krishna Taya and at other times walked by himself on the ramparts.

This was not wanted, for, when himself, the *ferang* was a merry man, although not fond of words. Once I asked him if the devil of illness had gripped him,

"I know not what devil it is, Abdul Bert," he made reply. "There is a matter lies heavily on my mind. It is not always easy to settle what is right and what is wrong."

He spoke with seeming frankness, yet the words had a strange ring. He turned on me suddenly.

"Is it true, Abdul Dost, that Jani Beg offered to give me a safe conduct to Jahangir.

I started, for how could the news have come to him?

"The words of Jani Beg are false as a wolf's whine," I replied after thinking up on the matter. "If he made an offer, he did not mean to keep it. When Shirzad Mir gives his pledge of friendship, he will abide by it."

"I doubt it not!" he muttered. "It is long since I came to India, yet I am no nearer the ear of Jahangir than at first. I can not forget my mission —"

He broke off and walked away.

There came Bihor Jan, on the *ferang's* footsteps, and whispered to me in passing.

"Rose Face is beloved."

"Ho!" I was surprized "The *ferang*?"

"I know not. I have watched Said Afzel. The poet's eyes follow the girl when she walks by and there is a gleam in them. He plays to her on a guitar, lying at her side, and strokes the pearls of the necklace she wears. Sir Weyand likes it not. Why should he waste thought on the woman?"

Perhaps Bihor Jan would have liked the necklace of pearls for himself. For many hours I considered the matter. The *ferang* had known of

the offer of Jani Beg, yet neither Shirzad Mir nor I had spoken of it.

God has strengthened the walls of Khanjut. I did not think any spy of the Uzbeks had climbed within them, so the thought came to me that some one had known the offer was to be made, Perhaps Said Afzel, perhaps Krishna Taya and perhaps Sir Weyand.

Here was a horse that would require grooming. I went to Sir Weyand and spoke what was on my mind. How was I to know that I blundered?

"The girl distresses you, Sir Weyand," I said bluntly. "Why not give her to Said Afzel? Then she will have a master. It is true that you do not desire a slave?"

"Death's life, Abdul Dost" he swore. "It is true." He fell silent. "That might be best Krishna Taya must be cared for. I think Said Afzel is fond of her. She is no more than a child."

I did not smile.

So it came to pass that Krishna Taya consented to serve Said Afzel. She gathered up her belongings in a bundle and went to the dwelling of the Uzbek prince.

Yet that night I found Sir Weyand walking moodily the length of her room, which was now empty as a year-old nightingale's nest. I think it was the first time he had been there. The room smelled of attar of rose, after the manner of a woman's apartment. I did not speak to him, for his face was not pleasant

Nevertheless, I considered it was well. Now that Krishna Taya was with the Uzbek, she would not bother Sir Weyand—nor would it be so easy for her to talk with him.

I kept thinking of the meeting with Jani Beg which was to take place the next day. There seemed to be no danger. The plain before the castle was bare and no followers of the Uzbeks could approach the spot without being seen from the battlements. Since I was old enough to shoot an arrow at a stag, it was my task to safeguard the person of Shirzad Mir. I wearied my brains upon the matter of the meeting—without result. God had willed that I should not foresee what was to come to pass.

Still, one thing I did see.

The demon of unrest kept me awake that night and I walked the edge of the garden, past the stables and the door of Shirzad Mir. It was a still night and the splendor of the stars beat down on

Khanjut, I harkened to the challenges of the sentries and the stamp of a hoof among the horses.

Then I heard voices among the bare trees of the garden. For the space milk takes to boil I waited, holding my breath. Then I stepped softly nearer the voices.

The *ferang* and Krishna Taya were talking together. By staring for a long time I made out their forms against the gray stretch of a wall. They stood close and whispered.

I heard Krishna Taya laugh and it sounded like the low murmur of a rivulet. Sir Weyand's voice came to me, harsh and urgent.

"You must not do this thing, Rose Face," he said.

Again I held my breath, but her whispered words were not clear. His reply was spoken in the swift, broken phrases of a man who is troubled by a great trouble. I caught the name of Shirzad Mir and bristled. Then—

"You will come and be at my side when the time is near," she whispered wistfully after the fashion of a woman who has bound a man by the silken cord of love.

"Aye, Rose Face."

Sir Weyand had made a decision and it had cost him much. For a space the two forms by the gray wall merged together, and the thought came to me that he had kissed her before she sped away through the garden. Thereupon he turned and went to his own quarters.

B'illah! If I had had her slim throat between my hands, I should have strangled her by the rope of pearls, for there had been pain and unwillingness in the voice of Sir Weyand, and this betokened ill to my lord.

This thing I told to Shirzad Mir after the dawn prayer, and he laughed in his beard.

"Of the servant who brings me food and of my foster brother, I might believe evil, Abdul Dost," he responded, "but not of Sir Weyand."

Yet I marked a flush in the cheeks of the Rajput maiden that morning and heard her sing in the apartment of Said Afzel for the first time since she had come to Khanjut.

What was I to do?

NOON came, the hour we were to ride to meet Jani Beg. Bihor Jan told me with a grin that Said Afzel was wrapped in opium dreams and lay like a stricken pig.

So, as this was my task, I had a litter brought, and the Afghan and I placed Said Afzel upon it. Then Krishna Taya, who watched, came and said that she also was to ride on the litter, as she would go with the Uzbek.

I would not consent. I smelled evil in this, as a hound smells the trace of a hare. Striding to Shirzad Mir, I demanded angrily that Krishna Taya should not go, Sir Weyand, who was listening, spoke curtly.

"It shall be as she wishes, Abdul Dost. Did not your master promise that any attendant of the prince might accompany him?"

Shirzad Mir made me a careless sign to be about my business. He was not one to suspect treachery, yet the *ferang's* eye had not met mine as he spoke.

As I had been ordered, I did. I placed a Kashmir shawl over the frame of the litter where Krishna Taya sat by Said Afzel's head. This was to guard the two from the sun and from curious eyes.

When it was time, I summoned Bihor Jan with seven others and accompanied them as they bore the litter from the castle across the courtyard and down the winding road to the plain.

Out over the drawbridge the litter passed. When we reached the spot of the meeting, I bade the eight set down their burden. When Shirzad Mir and Sir Weyand rode from the castle gate, I ordered the bearers to retire to Khanjut.

I sat moodily on the horse, watching the languid movement of Said Afzel's slippered feet—all that I could see of the poet—and thought blackly upon the danger to Shirzad Mir.

When he and the *ferang* gained my side Shirzad Mir bade me withdraw ten spear lengths toward Khanjut. This I did and when I turned at my new station, the Uzbek party came in view.

Raja Man Singh, in all his finery, was leading with Jani Beg, who sat his horse in grim silence. Behind them came the cavalcade of donkey ushered by four or five miserable slaves. The little beasts carried weighty packs. I caught the glitter of brass upon one.

A cloud of dust rose about them and hung in the air, for there was no wind. The jewels gleamed in the turban of the Rajput and he laughed more than once, but Jani Beg did not laugh.

Nearer they came and nearer. I could see the sweat on the donkeys' shoulders and marked the outline of the powder boxes under the packs.

God has given me keen sight, and all that followed I saw clearly. I saw the Rajput halt the donkey-men and order them off with a contemptuous gesture and Jani Beg and Sir Weyand peer in the packs as if to make sure of what they held. I saw the beasts begin to nuzzle for grass to crop and Raja Man Singh ride up to the waiting two. By now the donkey-men were a good bow-shot distant.

Then all four of the riders dismounted, watching one another. I leaned upon the peak of my saddle and swallowed hard, for my throat was dry. The dust settled down. I marked a pigeon wheeling over head.

There was a great stillness on the plain of Badakshan. Khanjut was far, far distant and Shirzad Mir stood with three men at his side, all being, armed.

The Rajput's white teeth showed in a laugh. This time Jani Beg smiled. He was in a cordial mood, for he advanced to Shirzad Mir and made a low *salaam*.

Afar off, I heard a holy man cry to prayers.

Then suddenly I saw the lean arms of Jani Beg spring forth and grip Shirzad Mir. Like a swift snake he twined about my master, holding Shirzad Mir's arms to his sides.

"Strike him!" cried Jani Beg. "In the throat above the armor!"

It was to the *ferang* that he had said this. The eyes of Raja Man Singh widened in astonishment.

Sir Weyand's muscles quivered, but he did not move to aid the treacherous Uzbek. Instead he stepped toward the litter.

The thing was clear to me. Jani Beg thought that the *ferang* would slay Mir, as he had cried for him to do. Something had gone amiss with Beg's plan, for neither Sir Weyand nor the Rajput moved. Aye, the Rajput was a man of high honor.

Shirzad Mir strained at the Uzbek's grip. Jani Beg's face grew dark with rage. I dug my spurs deep into the side of my horse. He sprang forward—a leap that would have unsettled another rider—and I bore down on Jani Beg.

Hot was my heart with anger at the sight of Shirzad Mir helpless among the three. I had lifted my scimitar to strike down Jani Beg. I had galloped within arm's reach and there reined in my mount on its haunches.

Aye, I drew rein at sight of the three, for the Rajput and Sir Weyand's and Shirzad Mir were

staring not at Jani Beg but at the litter, and on the three faces was the mark of amazement and horror.

I also looked down at the litter. Krishna Taya had pushed back the shawl. She sat upon her knees with the head of Said Afzel on her lap. The sleek face of Said Afzel was red and his eyes glazed, as in the opium trance. He lay still, very still.

From his gaping mouth hung the end of a string of pearls. The pearls looked like the tip of a necklace. I had seen them before. I looked from the mottled face that glared up at me to the neck of the maiden. The necklace had gone from the throat of Krishna Taya.

She sat very straight on the litter and there was a smile on her childlike face.

"Here is Said Afzel, Jani Beg," she said softly, "whole and without a scratch upon his skin."

The Uzbek looked from her to the head of the dead man on her knee, and his mouth opened slowly. His arms that were about Shirzad Mir dropped to his side and he tried vainly to swallow, like one who has the palsy. I heard my lord mutter in his beard—

"By the ninety holy names of God, I knew naught of this."

Yet I heeded not. The pigeon overhead fluttered away.

Then hate leaped into the evil face of Jani Beg as flame sears paper.

"Wench! Child of sin—traitress—" he grasped and then choked to silence.

"Nay," she spoke calmly, "What I promised you has been done. I have cut the prop from him who would usurp the throne of Badakshan."

So great was the rage of Jani Beg that his hand trembled so he could scarce grip the dagger in his girdle. He raised the dagger with one hand; the other he twisted in the hair of the maiden, who looked up at him and smiled.

"It is well," I heard her whisper. "I have made clean the honor of the Rajput.

Neither I nor Shirzad Mir would have checked Jani Beg in the slaying of Krishna Taya, but the dagger did not reach her slender throat. Sir Weyand had gripped the hand that held the weapon. For the space of a long breath the eyes of the *ferang* and the Uzbek met and held. The arms of the two quivered and strained. The lips of the *ferang* were closed in a tight line.

Then Jani Beg spoke in level words.

"Every soul in Khanjut shall die if this woman is not slain."

Sir Weyand did not relax his grip.

"She avenged the wrong that was done her." His voice was curiously strained. He turned his face to the Rajput.

"Krishna Taya needs the protection of the Rajputs."

Raja Man Singh sighed and twisted a strand of his curly beard. His glance went from the end of the pearl necklace that had strangled Said Afzel to the woman.

"Come," he said at length, curtly. He took the girl and lifted her to the back of his horse behind the saddle. We knew, and Jani Beg knew that Krishna Taya was now safe under the sword of the Rajput.

Many things were in my mind as I drove the donkeys up to Khanjut, following after Shirzad Mir and Sir Weyand. I thought of the reckless honor of Shirzad Mir that had let Jani Beg depart unharmed, because of his pledge. I wondered whether one of us would live to tell of the Uzbek storm that would be launched upon us because Sir Weyand had guarded the life of Krishna Taya when Jani Beg lusted for vengeance. But among these thoughts one was uppermost. It was a verse from the Koran.

Who knows what is in the heart of a woman?

TO A VOYAGER

by Berton Braley

SO YOU'RE off to storied China and to Java and Bombay
And the grin upon your face is high and broad;
Oh, you poor deluded mortal with your dreams of faraway,
Where you "hear the paddles chunkin' from Rangoon to Mandalay,"
Do you think that I am envious and awed?

Do you fancy I'm made restless by your visions of the East
And your talk of sailing far across the foam?
Do you look on me as jealous or affected in the least
That you're squandering your money, while my savings are increased
As I labor on efficiently at home?

Do you figure for a moment that the trouble and the fret
Which a traveler today must undergo,
All the passports and the papers and the visas you must get,
And the bureaucratic satraps and officials to be met,
And the bothers and delays that you must know?

Do you think I'd care to face them, do you somehow fancy me
Bearing all such tribulations with delight?
Do you dream I'd like to follow, that I'd give my soul to be
On a list of idle wasters who are putting out to sea?
Do you think so?—Well, you certainly are right!