

to scratch his flowing beard and think.

"The sahib left this with me!" said King, and held up his wrist. The gold bracelet Rewa Gunga had given him gleamed in the pale moonlight.

"May God be with thee!" boomed all five men together.

King jumped to his feet so suddenly that all five gave way in front of him, and Darya Khan brought his rifle to the port.

"Hast thou never seen me before?" he demanded, seizing Ismail by the shoulders and staring straight into his eyes.

"Nay, I never saw thee!"

"Look again!"

He turned his head, to show his face in profile.

"Nay, I never saw thee!"

"Thou, then! Thou with the belly! Thou! Thou!"

They all denied ever having seen him.

So he stepped back until the moon shone full in his face and pulled off his turban, changing his expression at the same time.

"Now look!"

"Ma'uzbillah! (May God protect us!)"

"Now ye know me?"

"Hee-ye-ye!" yelled Ismail, hugging himself by the elbows and beginning to dance from side to side. "Hee-ye-ye! What said I? Said I not so? Said I not this is a different man? Said I not this is a good one—a man of unexpected things? Said I not there was magic in the leather bag? I shook it often, and the magic grew! Hee-ye-ye! Look at him! See such cunning! Feel him! Smell of him! He is a good one—good!"

Three of the others stood and grinned, now that their first shock of surprise had died away. The fourth man poked among the packs. There was little to see except gleaming teeth and the whites of eyes, set in hairy faces in the mist. But Ismail danced all by himself among the stones of Khyber road and he looked like a bearded ghoul out for an airing.

"Hee-ye-ye! She smelt out a good one! Hee-ye-ye! This is a man after my heart! Hee-ye-ye! God preserve me! God preserve me to see the end of this! This one will show sport! Ah-ye-ye-ye!"

Suddenly he closed with King and hugged him until the stout ribs cracked and bent inward and King sobbed for breath among the strands of the Afridi's beard. He had to use knuckles and knees and feet to win freedom, and though he used them with all his might and hurt the old savage fiercely, he made no impression on his good will.

"After my own heart, thou art! Spirit of a cunning one! Worker of spells! Allah! That was a good day when she bade me wait for thee!"

King sat down again, panting. He wanted time to get his breath back and a little of the ache out of his ribs, but he did not care to waste any more minutes, and his eyes watched the faces of the other four men.

"Ma'uzbillah!" they murmured as Ismail's meaning dawned and they recognized a magician in their midst. "May God protect us!"

"May God protect me! I have need of it!" said King. "What shall my new name be? Give ye me a name!"

"Nay, choose thou!" urged Ismail, drawing nearer. "We have seen one miracle; now let us hear another!"

"Very well. Khan is a title of respect. Since I wish for respect, I will call myself Khan. Name me a village the first name you can think of—quick!"

"Kurram," said Ismail, at a hazard. "Kurram is good. Kurram I am! Kurram Khan is my name henceforward! Kurram Kahn the dakitar!"

"But where is the sahib who came from the fort to talk?" asked the man whose stomach ached yet from Ismail and Darya Khan's attentions to it.

"Gone!" announced King. "He went with the other one!"

"Went whither? Did any see him go?"

"Is that thy affair?" asked King, and the man collapsed. It is not considered wise to the north of Jamrud to

argue with a wizard, or even with a man who only claims to be one. This was a man who had changed his very nature almost under their eyes.

"Even his other clothes have gone!" murmured one man, he who had poked about among the packs.

"And now, Ismail, Darya Khan, ye two dunderheads!—ye bellies without brains!—when was there ever a dakitar—a hakim, who had not two assistants at the least? Have ye never seen, ye blinder-than-bats—how one man holds a patient while his boils are lanced, and yet another makes the hot iron ready?"

"Aye! Aye!"

They had both seen that often.

"Then, what are ye?"

They gaped at him. Were they to work wonders too? Were they to part and parcel of the miracle? Watching them, King saw understanding dawn, behind Ismail's eyes and knew he was winning more than a mere admirer. He knew it might be days yet, might be weeks before the truth was out, but it seemed to him that Ismail was at heart his friend. And there are no friendships stronger than those formed in the Khyber and beyond—no more loyal partnerships. The "Hills" are the home of contrasts, of blood-feuds that last until the last-but-one man dies, and of friendships that no crime or need or slander can efface. If the feuds are to be avoided like the devil, the friendships are worth having.

"There is another thing ye might do," he suggested, "if ye two grown men are afraid to see a boil slit open. Always there are timid patients who hang back and refuse to drink the medicines. There should be one or two among the crowd who will come forward and swallow the draughts eagerly, in proof that no harm results. Be ye two they!"

Ismail spat savagely.

"Nay! Bismillah! Nay, nay! I will hold them who have boils, sitting firmly on their bellies—so—or between their shoulders—thus—when the boils are behind! Nay, I will drink no draughts! I am a man, not a cess-pool!"

"And I will study how to heat hot irons!" said Darya Khan, with grim conviction. "It is likely that, having worked for a blacksmith once, I may learn quickly! Phaughgh! I have tasted physic! I have drunk Apsin Saats! (Epsom Salts.)"

He spat, too, in a very fury of reminiscence.

"Good!" said King. "Henceforward, then, I am Kurram Khan, the dakitar, and ye two are my assistants, Ismail to hold the men with boils, and Darya Khan to heat the irons—both of ye to be my men and support me with words when need be!"

"Aye!" said Ismail, quick to think of details, "and these others shall be tasters! They have big bellies, that will hold many potions without crowding. Let them swallow a little of each medicine in the chest now, for the sake of practise! Let them learn not to make a wry face when the taste of cess-pools rests on the tongue—"

"Aye, and the breath comes sobbing through the nose!" said Darya Khan, remembering fragments of an adventurous career. "Let them learn to drink Apsin Saats without coughing!"

"We will not drink the medicines!" announced the man who had a stomach ache. "Nay, nay!"

BUT Ismail hit him with the back of his hand in the stomach and danced away, hugging himself and shouting "Hee-ye-ye!" until the jackals joined him in discontented chorus and the Khyber Pass became full of weird howling. Then suddenly the old Afridi thought of something else and came back to thrust his face close to King's.

"Why be a Rangar? Why be a Rajput, sahib? She loves us Hillmen better!"

"Do I look like a Hillman of the 'Hills'?" asked King.

"Nay, not now. But he who can work one miracle can work another. Change thy skin once more and be a true Hillman!"

"Aye!" King laughed. "And fall heir to a blood-feud with every second man I chance upon! A Hillman is

cousin to a hundred others, and what say they in the 'Hills'?—to hate like cousins, eh? All cousins are at war. As a Rangar I have left my cousins down in India. Better be a converted Hindu and be despised by some than have cousins in the 'Hills'! Besides—do I speak like a Hillman?"

"Aye! Never an Afridi spake his own tongue better!"

"Yes—does a Hillman slip? Would a Hillman use Punjabi words in a careless moment?"

"God forbid!"

"Therefore, thou dunderhead, I will be a Rangar Rajput—a stranger in a strange land, travelling by her favour to visit her in Khinjan! Thus, should I happen to make mistakes in speech or action, it may be overlooked, and each man will unwittingly be my advocate, explaining away my errors to himself and others instead of my enemy denouncing me to all and sundry! Is that clear, thou oaf?"

"Aye! Thou art more cunning than any man I ever met!"

The great Afridi began to rub the tips of his fingers through his straggly beard in a way that might mean anything, and King seemed to draw considerable satisfaction from it, as if it were a sign language that he understood. More than any one thing in the world just then he needed a friend, and he certainly did not propose to refuse such a useful one.

"And," he added, as if it were an afterthought, instead of his chief reason, "if her special man Rewa Gunga is a Rangar, and is known as a Rangar throughout the 'Hills,' shall I not the more likely win favour by being a Rangar too? If I wear her bracelet and at the same time am a Rangar, who will not trust me?"

"True!" agreed Ismail. "True! Thou art a magician!"

THE moon was getting low and Khyber would be dark again in half an hour, for the great crags in the distance to either hand shut off more light than do the Khyber walls. The mist, too, was growing thicker. It was time to make a move.

King rose. "Pack the mule and bring my horse!" he ordered and they hurried to obey with alacrity.

They brought the horse, and King laughed at them, calling them idiots—men without eyes.

"I am Kurram Khan, the dakitar, but who in the 'Hills' would believe it? Look now—look ye and tell me what is wrong?"

He pointed to the horse, and they stood in a row and stared.

"The saddle?" Ismail suggested. "It is a government arrificer's saddle."

"Stolen!" said King, and they nodded. "Stolen along with the horse!"

"Then the bridle?"

"Stolen too, ye men without eyes! Ye insects! A stolen horse and saddle and bridle, are they not a passport of gentility this side of the border?"

"Aye!"

"Shorten those stirrups, then, six holes at the least! Men will laugh at me if I ride like a British arrificer!"

"Aye!" said Ismail, hurrying to obey.

"Aye! Aye! Aye!" agreed the others.

"Now," he said, gathering the reins and swinging into the saddle, "who knows the way to Khinjan?"

"Which of us does not!"

"Ye all know it? Then ye all are border thieves and worse! No honest man knows that road! Lead on, Darya Khan, thou Lord of Rivers! Do thy duty as badragga and beware lest we get our knees wet at the fords! Ismail, you march next. Now I. You other two and the mule follow me. Let the man with the belly ache ride last on the other horse. So! Forward march!"

So Darya Khan led the way with his rifle, and King legged his horse up the narrow track that led northward out of the Khyber bed.

"Cheloh!" he called. "Forward, men of the mountains! Kuch dar nahin hai!"

"Thy mother and the spirit of a fight were one!" swore Ismail just in front of him, stepping out like a boy going to a picnic. "She will love thee! Allah! She will love thee! Allah! Allah!"

(To be continued.)

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