

one or two of the hill-fortresses, but unless absolutely sent by him, that is the utmost we could hope for; for were we missing, messengers would be sent all over the country to order our arrest, and in that case we should have to take to some disguise. The first thing now is to procure our dresses. How much is there in that purse, Surajah? It seems pretty heavy."

Surajah poured the gold out on the table.

"There are fifty tomana. That will be more than enough to clothe you handsomely," the Hindoo said.

"Much more than enough, I should think, Pertaub."

"Tippoo likes those round him to be well dressed. It is not only a proof of his generosity, but he likes to make a brave show on great occasions, and nothing pleases him more than to be told that neither the Nizam, nor any other Indian prince, can surpass him in the magnificence of his Court. Therefore, the better dressed you are, the more he will be satisfied, for it will seem to him that you appreciate the honour of being officers of the Palace, and that you have laid out his present to the best advantage, and have not a mind to hoard any of it. I will take the matter in hand for you. You will need two suits, one for Court ceremonies and the other for ordinary wear in the Palace."

"I shall be very much obliged to you, Pertaub, for indeed I have no idea what ought to be got. Had we better present ourselves at the Palace this evening or to-morrow morning?"

"This evening, certainly. Did he take it into his head to inquire whether you were in the Palace, and found that you were not, it might alter his humour towards you altogether. He is changeable in his moods; the favourite of one day may be in disgrace and ordered to execution the next. You will soon feel that it is as if you were in a real tiger's den, and that the animal may at any moment spring upon you. Take with you the clothes you now wear and those in which you came, so that at any moment, if you see a storm gathering,

you can slip on a disguise and leave the Palace unobserved. In that case hasten here, and you can then dress yourselves as merchants."

"The worst of it is, Pertaub, that our faces will soon become known to so many in the Palace that they would be recognised, whatever our dress."

"A little paint and some false hair and a somewhat darker stain to your skin would alter you so that those who know you best would pass you without suspicion. I trust that no such misfortune will befall, but I will keep everything in readiness to effect a transformation should it be required. Now I will go out at once to get the clothes."

In two hours he returned, followed by a boy carrying the goods he had purchased, and in a few minutes Dick and his companion were arrayed in Court dresses. The turbans were pure white, and the tunic was of dark, rich stuff, thickly woven with gold thread; a short cloak or mantle, secured at the neck by a gold chain three or four inches in length, hung from the back, but could, if necessary, be drawn round the shoulders. A baldric, embroidered with gold, crossed the chest, and from this hung a sword with an ivory handle. The waist-sash was of blue and gold in Dick's case, purple and gold in that of Surajah. Silver-mounted pistols and daggers were stuck into the sashes. The dresses were precisely alike, except that they differed in colour. The trousers were white.

Surajah was greatly delighted with his dress. Dick laughed.

"Of course it comes naturally to you," he said, "but I feel as if I were dressed up for a masquerade."

The other suits were similar in style, but the tunics were of richly figured damask instead of cloth of gold. Half-an-hour later they started for the Palace, a coolie carrying a box containing their second suits and the simple dresses they had worn on their arrival. Dick could not help smiling at the manner in which the people in the streets obsequiously made way for them.

"I shall be very glad," he said, as they traversed the space that divided the town from the fort, "when we have got over the next day or two, and have settled down a bit; it all seems so uncertain, and I have not the most remote idea of what our duties are likely to be. Hitherto we have always had some definite plan of action and had only ourselves to depend upon; now everything seems doubtful and uncertain. However, I suppose we shall soon settle down; and we have the satisfaction of knowing that if things do not turn out well, we can go off to our good friend Pertaub, and get out of the place altogether."

On arriving at the Palace they inquired for the chamberlain.

"He is expecting you my lord," one of the attendants said, coming forward. "I will lead you first to the room that is prepared for you, and then take you to Fazli Ali."

The room was a commodious one, and the richness of the covering of the divan and the handsome rugs spread on the floor, were satisfactory signs that the chamberlain considered them prime favourites of the sultan. Having seen the box placed in a corner, and paid the coolie, they followed the attendant along some spacious corridors and passages, until they entered a room where Fazli Ali was seated on a divan. The attendant let the curtains that covered the door drop behind them as they entered. They salaamed to the chamberlain, who looked at them approvingly, and motioned to them to take their seats on the divan beside him.

"I see," he said kindly, "that you possess good judgment as well as courage and quickness. The former qualities have won you a place here, but judgment will be needed to keep it. You have laid out your money well, as the sultan loves to see all in the Palace well attired, and quiet also and discreet in behaviour."

"Can you give us any idea what our duties will be?" Surajah asked, as Dick had requested him always to be the spokesman if possible.

The chamberlain shook his head. "That will be for the sultan himself to decide. For a time probably you will have little to do but to attend at the hours when he gives public audiences. You will, doubtless, occasionally carry his orders to officers in command of troops, at distant places, and will form part of his retinue when he goes beyond the Palace. When he sees that you are worthy of his favour, prompt in carrying out his orders, and in all respects trustworthy, he will in time assign special duties to you; but this will depend upon yourselves. As one who admires the courage and promptness that you showed to-day, and who wishes you well, I would warn you that it is best when the sultan has had matters to trouble him, and may blame somewhat unjustly, not to seek to excuse yourselves; it is bad to thwart him when he is roused. You can rely upon me to stand your friend, and when the storm has blown over to represent the matter to him in a favourable light. The sultan desires to be just, and in his calm moments assuredly is so; but when there is a cloud before his eyes, there is no saying upon whom his displeasure may fall. At present, however, there is little chance of your falling into disgrace, for he is greatly impressed with the service you have rendered him, and especially by the promptness with which you carried it out.

"After you had gone he spoke very strongly about it, and said that he would he were possessed of a hundred officers capable of such a deed; he would in that case have little fear of any of the foes of his kingdom. It is fortunate that you came here this afternoon; it is well-nigh certain that he will ask for you presently, and though he could hardly blame you had you required until to-morrow to complete your preparations, your promptitude will gratify him, and he will, I am sure, be still more pleased at seeing that you have so well laid out his gift. He gave you no orders on the subject, and had you appeared in the dresses you wore this morning, he would, doubtless, have instructed me to provide you with more suitable

attire. The fact that you have so laid out the money will show that you have an understanding of the honour of being appointed to the Palace, and a proper sense of fitness. The sultan himself dresses plainly, and, save for a priceless gem in his turban and another in his sword-hilt, there is nothing in his attire to lead a stranger to guess at his rank; but while he does this himself, he expects that all others in the Palace should do justice to his generosity. And now you had best return to your room and remain there until sent for; if he does not think of it himself, I shall, if opportunity occurs, inform him that you have already arrived."

They had some difficulty in finding their way back to their room, and had, indeed, to ask directions of attendants they met before they discovered it. A native was squatting at the door; he rose and salaamed deeply as they came up.

"Your slave is appointed to be your attendant, my lords," he said. "Your servant's name is Ibrahim."

"Good," Surajah said, as he passed him and entered the room. "Now, Ibrahim, tell us about the ways of the Palace, for of these we are altogether ignorant. In the first place about food: do we provide ourselves, or how is it?"

"All in the Palace are fed from the sultan's kitchen. At each meal every officer has so many dishes, according to his rank; these vary from three to twelve. In the early morning I shall bring you bread and fruit and sherbet; at ten o'clock is the first meal, and at seven there is supper; at one o'clock the kitchens are open, and I can fetch you a dish of pillau, kabobs, a chicken, or any other refreshment that you may desire; at present I have no orders as to how many dishes your Excellencies will receive at the two meals."

"We shall not be particular about that," Surajah said; "it is evident we shall fare well, at any rate."

"I am told to inform you, my lords, that the sultan has ordered two horses to be placed at your service. A ghorra-walla has been appointed to take charge of them; his name is

Serfojee. If you ask for him at the stable you will be directed to him, and he will show you the horses. In an hour supper will be served, but this evening I shall only be able to bring you three dishes each; such is always the rule until the sultan's pleasure has been declared."

Ibrahim then proceeded to light two lamps hanging from the ceiling, for it was now getting dusk, and then, finding that his masters had no further need of his services, he retired.

"So far, so good, Surajah; we are certainly in clover as far as comfort is concerned, and the only drawback to the situation is Tippoo's uncertain temper. However, we must try our best to satisfy him; we have every reason to stand well with him, and if he sees that we are really anxious to please him, we ought to be able to avoid falling into disgrace, even when he is in his worst moods."

Their attendant presently brought up the six portions of food, and they enjoyed their meal heartily. Each had an ample portion of a pillau of rice and chicken, a plate of stew, which Dick thought was composed of game of some kind, and a confection in which honey was the predominating flavour. With this they drank water, deliciously cooled by being hung up in porous jars. Surajah ate his food with the dexterity of long habit, but Dick had not yet learned to make his bread fulfil the functions of spoon and fork, for at his uncle's table European methods of eating were adopted.

Half-an-hour after they had finished, an officer presented himself at the door, and said that he was ordered to conduct them to the sultan. Tippoo had supped in the harem, and was now seated on a divan in a room of no great size, but richly hung with heavy silken curtains, and carpeted with the richest rugs. Two or three of his chief officers were seated beside him; seven or eight others were standing on either side of the room. A heavy glass chandelier of European manufacture hung from the richly carved ceiling, and the fifty

candles in it lighted up the room. The chamberlain met them at the door and advanced with them towards Tippoo.

"Great Sultan," he said, "these are the young men whom it has pleased your Highness to appoint officers in the Palace."

The two lads salaamed until their turbans touched the ground.

"Truly they are comely youths," Tippoo said, "and one would scarcely deem them capable of performing such a feat as that they accomplished this morning. Well, my slayers of tigers, you have found everything fitly provided?"

"Far more so than our deeds merit, your Highness," Surajah replied. "We have found everything that heart could desire, and only hope for an opportunity to show ourselves worthy of your favours."

"You have done that beforehand," Tippoo said graciously, "and I am glad to see, by your attire, that you are conscious that, as my officers, it is fitting you should make a worthy appearance. It shows that you have been well brought up, and are not ignorant of what is right and proper. At present you will receive orders from Fazli Ali, and will act as assistant chamberlains until I decide in what way your services can be made most useful. Now follow me; there are others who wish to see you."

Rising, Tippoo led the way through a door with double hangings, into a room considerably larger than that which they had just left. The chandeliers at the end of the room where they stood were all lighted, while the other end was in comparative darkness. Leaving them standing alone, Tippoo walked towards the other end and clapped his hands. Immediately a number of closely veiled figures entered, completely filling the end of the room.

"These are the young men," Tippoo said to them. "It is the one on the right to whom it is chiefly due that the tiger did not commit havoc among you; it was he who climbed up the balcony and fired twice at the beast. You owe your lives

to him and his companion, for among all my officers and guards there was not one who was quick-witted enough to move as much as a finger."

There was a faint murmur of surprise among the veiled figures at the youth of their preserver.

"Hold your heads fully up," Tippoo went on, for Dick and his companion, after making a deep salaam, had stood with bent heads and with eyes fixed upon the ground. Then two of the attendants, girls of thirteen or fourteen years old, came forward from behind the others, each bearing a casket. "These are presented to you with my permission by the ladies whose lives you saved," Tippoo said; "and should you at any time have a favour to ask, or even should you fall under my displeasure, you can rely upon their good offices in your behalf."

There was another low murmur from the other end of the hall, then Tippoo clapped his hands, and the women moved out as noiselessly as they had entered.

"You can retire now," Tippoo said, as he moved towards the door into the other room. "Be faithful, be discreet, and your fortune is assured." He pointed to another door, and then rejoined his councillors. Dick and his companion stood in an attitude of deep respect until the hanging had fallen behind the sultan, and then went out by the door he had pointed to, and made their way back to their own room.

"Truly, Surajah, fortune is favouring us mightily. This morning we walked the streets in fear of being questioned and arrested; this evening we are officers of the Palace, favoured by Tippoo, and under the protection of the harem. I wonder what the ladies have given us."

They opened the caskets, which were of considerable size. As they examined the contents, exclamations of surprise broke from them. Each contained some thirty or forty little parcels done up in paper, and, on these being opened, they were found to contain trinkets and jewels of all kinds. Some were very costly and valuable. All were handsome. It was evi-

dent that every one of the ladies who had been in the room when the tiger burst in, had contributed a token of her gratitude. Many of the more valuable gems had been evidently taken from their settings, as if the donors did not care that jewels they had worn should be exposed to view. One parcel contained twenty superb pearls, another a magnificent diamond and ten rubies, and so on, down to the more humble gifts—although these were valuable—of those of lower rank. Dick's presents were much more costly than those of his companion, and as soon as this was seen to be the case, Dick proposed that they should all be put together, and divided equally. This, however, Surajah would not hear of.

"The whole thing is due to you," he said. "It would never have occurred to me to interfere at all. I had no part in the matter, beyond aiding to kill a wounded tiger, and it was no more than I have done many times among our hills, and thought nothing of. These jewels are vastly more than I deserve for my share in the affair. I do not know much about the value of gems, but they must be worth a large sum, and nothing will induce me to take any of those that you have so well earned."

"I wonder whether Tippoo knows what they have given us," Dick said, after in vain trying to alter his companion's decision.

"I don't suppose he troubled himself about it," Surajah replied. "No doubt he was asked for permission for each to make a present to us. The jewels in the harem must be of enormous value, as for the last fifteen years Tippoo has been gathering spoil from all southern India, having swept the land right up to the gates of Madras. They say that his treasures are fabulous, and no doubt the ladies of his harem have shared largely in the spoils. The question is, What had we best do with these caskets? We know that, in the course of our adventures, it may very well happen that we shall be closely searched, and it would never do to risk having such valuables found upon us."

"No; I should say that we had best bury them somewhere. Some of these merchants here may be honest enough for us to leave the jewels in their care without anxiety, but as they themselves may at any moment be seized and compelled to give up their last penny, these things would be no safer with them than with us. As to Pertaub, I have absolute faith in him, but he himself is liable to be seized at any moment. However, I should say we had better consult him. If we were to bury them, say, under the floor of his house, we might leave them there for a time. If we saw any chance of this place being some day captured by our people, we could wait till then for their recovery; but the war may not be renewed for years. Possibly Pertaub may be able to arrange to send them down, only entrusting a portion at a time to a messenger, so that, if he got into trouble, we should only lose what he had upon him. We will put the caskets into our box and lock it up for the present, and take them down to Pertaub tomorrow evening, after it gets dark. It will be as well to get them off our minds as soon as possible, for although just at present we are in high favour, there is no saying how long it may last, or when it may be necessary for us to move."

CHAPTER XIII

OFFICERS OF THE PALACE

THE next morning, just as they had finished their early breakfast, they were sent for by Fazli Ali.

"You had better accompany me on my rounds," he said. "I shall not commit any special duties to you until I see whether the sultan intends that you shall remain with me, or whether, as is far more likely, he assigns other work to you. Were you placed in separate charge in the Palace, I should have to fill your places if you left; therefore I propose that at