

"Yes," answered Loristan, "I'll look at them, and we'll talk them over."

As they went on, he told him that he and Marco could do many things together. They could go to museums and galleries, and Marco could show him what he himself was familiar with.

"My father said you wouldn't let him come back to Barracks when you found out about it," The Rat said, hesitating again and growing hot because he remembered so many ugly past days. "But--but I swear I won't do him any harm, sir. I won't!"

"When I said I believed you could be trusted, I meant several things," Loristan answered him. "That was one of them. You're a new recruit. You and Marco are both under a commanding officer." He said the words because he knew they would elate him and stir his blood.

XII

"ONLY TWO BOYS"

The words did elate him, and his blood was stirred by them every time

they returned to his mind. He remembered them through the days and nights that followed. He sometimes, indeed, awakened from his deep sleep on the hard and narrow sofa in Marco's room, and found that he was saying them half aloud to himself. The hardness of the sofa did not prevent his resting as he had never rested before in his life. By contrast with the past he had known, this poor existence was comfort which verged on luxury. He got into the battered tin bath every morning, he sat at the clean table, and could look at Loristan and speak to him and hear his voice. His chief trouble was that he could hardly keep his eyes off him, and he was a little afraid he might be annoyed. But he could not bear to lose a look or a movement.

At the end of the second day, he found his way, at some trouble, to Lazarus's small back room at the top of the house.

"Will you let me come in and talk a bit?" he said.

When he went in, he was obliged to sit on the top of Lazarus's wooden box because there was nothing else for him.

"I want to ask you," he plunged into his talk at once, "do you think he minds me looking at him so much? I can't help it--but if he hates it--well--I'll try and keep my eyes on the table."

"The Master is used to being looked at," Lazarus made answer. "But it would be well to ask himself. He likes open speech."

"I want to find out everything he likes and everything he doesn't like,"
The Rat said. "I want--isn't there anything--anything you'd let me do
for him? It wouldn't matter what it was. And he needn't know you are not
doing it. I know you wouldn't be willing to give up anything particular.
But you wait on him night and day. Couldn't you give up something to
me?"

Lazarus pierced him with keen eyes. He did not answer for several
seconds.

"Now and then," he said gruffly at last, "I'll let you brush his boots.
But not every day--perhaps once a week."

"When will you let me have my first turn?" The Rat asked.

Lazarus reflected. His shaggy eyebrows drew themselves down over his
eyes as if this were a question of state.

"Next Saturday," he conceded. "Not before. I'll tell him when you brush
them."

"You needn't," said The Rat. "It's not that I want him to know. I want
to know myself that I'm doing something for him. I'll find out things
that I can do without interfering with you. I'll think them out."

"Anything any one else did for him would be interfering with me," said Lazarus.

It was The Rat's turn to reflect now, and his face twisted itself into new lines and wrinkles.

"I'll tell you before I do anything," he said, after he had thought it over. "You served him first."

"I have served him ever since he was born," said Lazarus.

"He's--he's yours," said The Rat, still thinking deeply.

"I am his," was Lazarus's stern answer. "I am his--and the young Master's."

"That's it," The Rat said. Then a squeak of a half-laugh broke from him. "I've never been anybody's," he added.

His sharp eyes caught a passing look on Lazarus's face. Such a queer, disturbed, sudden look. Could he be rather sorry for him?

Perhaps the look meant something like that.

"If you stay near him long enough--and it needn't be long--you will be his too. Everybody is."

The Rat sat up as straight as he could. "When it comes to that," he blurted out, "I'm his now, in my way. I was his two minutes after he looked at me with his queer, handsome eyes. They're queer because they get you, and you want to follow him. I'm going to follow."

That night Lazarus recounted to his master the story of the scene. He simply repeated word for word what had been said, and Loristan listened gravely.

"We have not had time to learn much of him yet," he commented. "But that is a faithful soul, I think."

A few days later, Marco missed The Rat soon after their breakfast hour. He had gone out without saying anything to the household. He did not return for several hours, and when he came back he looked tired. In the afternoon he fell asleep on his sofa in Marco's room and slept heavily. No one asked him any questions as he volunteered no explanation. The next day he went out again in the same mysterious manner, and the next and the next. For an entire week he went out and returned with the tired look; but he did not explain until one morning, as he lay on his sofa before getting up, he said to Marco:

"I'm practicing walking with my crutches. I don't want to go about like a rat any more. I mean to be as near like other people as I can. I walk farther every morning. I began with two miles. If I practice every day,

my crutches will be like legs."

"Shall I walk with you?" asked Marco.

"Wouldn't you mind walking with a cripple?"

"Don't call yourself that," said Marco. "We can talk together, and try to remember everything we see as we go along."

"I want to learn to remember things. I'd like to train myself in that way too," The Rat answered. "I'd give anything to know some of the things your father taught you. I've got a good memory. I remember a lot of things I don't want to remember. Will you go this morning?"

That morning they went, and Loristan was told the reason for their walk. But though he knew one reason, he did not know all about it. When The Rat was allowed his "turn" of the boot-brushing, he told more to Lazarus.

"What I want to do," he said, "is not only walk as fast as other people do, but faster. Acrobats train themselves to do anything. It's training that does it. There might come a time when he might need some one to go on an errand quickly, and I'm going to be ready. I'm going to train myself until he needn't think of me as if I were only a cripple who can't do things and has to be taken care of. I want him to know that I'm really as strong as Marco, and where Marco can go I can go."

"He" was what he always said, and Lazarus always understood without explanation.

"'The Master' is your name for him," he had explained at the beginning.

"And I can't call him just 'Mister' Loristan. It sounds like cheek. If he was called 'General' or 'Colonel' I could stand it--though it wouldn't be quite right. Some day I shall find a name. When I speak to him, I say 'Sir.'"

The walks were taken every day, and each day were longer. Marco found himself silently watching The Rat with amazement at his determination and endurance. He knew that he must not speak of what he could not fail to see as they walked. He must not tell him that he looked tired and pale and sometimes desperately fatigued. He had inherited from his father the tact which sees what people do not wish to be reminded of. He knew that for some reason of his own The Rat had determined to do this thing at any cost to himself. Sometimes his face grew white and worn and he breathed hard, but he never rested more than a few minutes, and never turned back or shortened a walk they had planned.

"Tell me something about Samavia, something to remember," he would say, when he looked his worst. "When I begin to try to remember, I forget--other things."

So, as they went on their way, they talked, and The Rat committed things

to memory. He was quick at it, and grew quicker every day. They invented a game of remembering faces they passed. Both would learn them by heart, and on their return home Marco would draw them. They went to the museums and galleries and learned things there, making from memory lists and descriptions which at night they showed to Loristan, when he was not too busy to talk to them.

As the days passed, Marco saw that The Rat was gaining strength. This exhilarated him greatly. They often went to Hampstead Heath and walked in the wind and sun. There The Rat would go through curious exercises which he believed would develop his muscles. He began to look less tired during and after his journey. There were even fewer wrinkles on his face, and his sharp eyes looked less fierce. The talks between the two boys were long and curious. Marco soon realized that The Rat wanted to learn--learn--learn.

"Your father can talk to you almost as if you were twenty years old," he said once. "He knows you can understand what he's saying. If he were to talk to me, he'd always have to remember that I was only a rat that had lived in gutters and seen nothing else."

They were talking in their room, as they nearly always did after they went to bed and the street lamp shone in and lighted their bare little room. They often sat up clasping their knees, Marco on his poor bed, The Rat on his hard sofa, but neither of them conscious either of the

poorness or hardness, because to each one the long unknown sense of companionship was such a satisfying thing. Neither of them had ever talked intimately to another boy, and now they were together day and night. They revealed their thoughts to each other; they told each other things it had never before occurred to either to think of telling any one. In fact, they found out about themselves, as they talked, things they had not quite known before. Marco had gradually discovered that the admiration The Rat had for his father was an impassioned and curious feeling which possessed him entirely. It seemed to Marco that it was beginning to be like a sort of religion. He evidently thought of him every moment. So when he spoke of Loristan's knowing him to be only a rat of the gutter, Marco felt he himself was fortunate in remembering something he could say.

"My father said yesterday that you had a big brain and a strong will," he answered from his bed. "He said that you had a wonderful memory which only needed exercising. He said it after he looked over the list you made of the things you had seen in the Tower."

The Rat shuffled on his sofa and clasped his knees tighter.

"Did he? Did he?" he said.

He rested his chin upon his knees for a few minutes and stared straight before him. Then he turned to the bed.

"Marco," he said, in a rather hoarse voice, a queer voice; "are you jealous?"

"Jealous," said Marco; "why?"

"I mean, have you ever been jealous? Do you know what it is like?"

"I don't think I do," answered Marco, staring a little.

"Are you ever jealous of Lazarus because he's always with your father--because he's with him oftener than you are--and knows about his work--and can do things for him you can't? I mean, are you jealous of--your father?"

Marco loosed his arms from his knees and lay down flat on his pillow.

"No, I'm not. The more people love and serve him, the better," he said.

"The only thing I care for is--is him. I just care for him. Lazarus does too. Don't you?"

The Rat was greatly excited internally. He had been thinking of this thing a great deal. The thought had sometimes terrified him. He might as well have it out now if he could. If he could get at the truth, everything would be easier. But would Marco really tell him?

"Don't you mind?" he said, still hoarse and eager--"don't you mind how

much I care for him? Could it ever make you feel savage? Could it ever set you thinking I was nothing but--what I am--and that it was cheek of me to push myself in and fasten on to a gentleman who only took me up for charity? Here's the living truth," he ended in an outburst; "if I were you and you were me, that's what I should be thinking. I know it is. I couldn't help it. I should see every low thing there was in you, in your manners and your voice and your looks. I should see nothing but the contrast between you and me and between you and him. I should be so jealous that I should just rage. I should hate you--and I should despise you!"

He had wrought himself up to such a passion of feeling that he set Marco thinking that what he was hearing meant strange and strong emotions such as he himself had never experienced. The Rat had been thinking over all this in secret for some time, it was evident. Marco lay still a few minutes and thought it over. Then he found something to say, just as he had found something before.

"You might, if you were with other people who thought in the same way," he said, "and if you hadn't found out that it is such a mistake to think in that way, that it's even stupid. But, you see, if you were I, you would have lived with my father, and he'd have told you what he knows--what he's been finding out all his life."

"What's he found out?"

"Oh!" Marco answered, quite casually, "just that you can't set savage thoughts loose in the world, any more than you can let loose savage beasts with hydrophobia. They spread a sort of rabies, and they always tear and worry you first of all."

"What do you mean?" The Rat gasped out.

"It's like this," said Marco, lying flat and cool on his hard pillow and looking at the reflection of the street lamp on the ceiling. "That day I turned into your Barracks, without knowing that you'd think I was spying, it made you feel savage, and you threw the stone at me. If it had made me feel savage and I'd rushed in and fought, what would have happened to all of us?"

The Rat's spirit of generalship gave the answer.

"I should have called on the Squad to charge with fixed bayonets. They'd have half killed you. You're a strong chap, and you'd have hurt a lot of them."

A note of terror broke into his voice. "What a fool I should have been!" he cried out. "I should never have come here! I should never have known him!" Even by the light of the street lamp Marco could see him begin to look almost ghastly.

"The Squad could easily have half killed me," Marco added. "They could

have quite killed me, if they had wanted to do it. And who would have got any good out of it? It would only have been a street-lads' row--with the police and prison at the end of it."

"But because you'd lived with him," The Rat pondered, "you walked in as if you didn't mind, and just asked why we did it, and looked like a stronger chap than any of us--and different--different. I wondered what was the matter with you, you were so cool and steady. I know now. It was because you were like him. He'd taught you. He's like a wizard."

"He knows things that wizards think they know, but he knows them better," Marco said. "He says they're not queer and unnatural. They're just simple laws of nature. You have to be either on one side or the other, like an army. You choose your side. You either build up or tear down. You either keep in the light where you can see, or you stand in the dark and fight everything that comes near you, because you can't see and you think it's an enemy. No, you wouldn't have been jealous if you'd been I and I'd been you."

"And you're not?" The Rat's sharp voice was almost hollow. "You'll swear you're not?"

"I'm not," said Marco.

The Rat's excitement even increased a shade as he poured forth his confession.

"I was afraid," he said. "I've been afraid every day since I came here. I'll tell you straight out. It seemed just natural that you and Lazarus wouldn't stand me, just as I wouldn't have stood you. It seemed just natural that you'd work together to throw me out. I knew how I should have worked myself. Marco--I said I'd tell you straight out--I'm jealous of you. I'm jealous of Lazarus. It makes me wild when I see you both knowing all about him, and fit and ready to do anything he wants done. I'm not ready and I'm not fit."

"You'd do anything he wanted done, whether you were fit and ready or not," said Marco. "He knows that."

"Does he? Do you think he does?" cried The Rat. "I wish he'd try me. I wish he would."

Marco turned over on his bed and rose up on his elbow so that he faced The Rat on his sofa.

"Let us wait," he said in a whisper. "Let us wait."

There was a pause, and then The Rat whispered also.

"For what?"

"For him to find out that we're fit to be tried. Don't you see what

fools we should be if we spent our time in being jealous, either of us. We're only two boys. Suppose he saw we were only two silly fools. When you are jealous of me or of Lazarus, just go and sit down in a still place and think of him. Don't think about yourself or about us. He's so quiet that to think about him makes you quiet yourself. When things go wrong or when I'm lonely, he's taught me to sit down and make myself think of things I like--pictures, books, monuments, splendid places. It pushes the other things out and sets your mind going properly. He doesn't know I nearly always think of him. He's the best thought himself. You try it. You're not really jealous. You only think you are. You'll find that out if you always stop yourself in time. Any one can be such a fool if he lets himself. And he can always stop it if he makes up his mind. I'm not jealous. You must let that thought alone. You're not jealous yourself. Kick that thought into the street."

The Rat caught his breath and threw his arms up over his eyes. "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" he said; "if I'd lived near him always as you have. If I just had."

"We're both living near him now," said Marco. "And here's something to think of," leaning more forward on his elbow. "The kings who were being made ready for Samavia have waited all these years; We can make ourselves ready and wait so that, if just two boys are wanted to do something--just two boys--we can step out of the ranks when the call comes and say 'Here!' Now let's lie down and think of it until we go to sleep."