

# The Richest Gift

The great Shah of Persia, who history records, reigned magnificently in Persia, loved to mingle in disguise among the people. Once, dressed as a poor man, he descended the long flight of stairs to a tiny cellar where a fireman, seated on ashes, was tending the furnace.

The Shah sat down beside him and began to talk. At meal-time the fireman produced some coarse, black bread and a jug of water which they shared together. The Shah went away, but returned again and again, for his heart was touched and filled with sympathy for the lonely man.

The great Shah gave him sweet counsel, and the poor man opened his whole heart to receive it and loved this friend, so kind, so wise, and yet, as the fireman thought, as poor as himself.

At last the emperor thought, I will tell him who I am, and see what request he will ask. So he said, "You think me poor, but I am the Shah, your emperor." He expected a petition for some great thing, but the man sat silent, gazing at him with love and wonder.

The Shah said, "Have you not understood? I can make you rich and noble, can give you a city, I can appoint you to a position of rule. Have you nothing to ask?"

Quietly the man replied, " Yes Sir, I do understand. But what is this that you have done, to leave your palace and glory, to sit with me in this dark place, to partake of my coarse food, to care whether my heart is glad or sad? Even you can give nothing more precious than this!

On others you may bestow rich presents, but to me you have given yourself. There remains but one request and that is that you never withdraw this gift of your friendship from me."

---- C.B.R.

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