



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The King Dog

Maud Lindsay

There was once a King who had for a pet a great dog, and the love between the two was as strong as the love between friends.

Wherever the King went, the dog followed. He lay at the King's door at night and stood beside his throne in the council-chamber, and did the King's bidding like a faithful servant.

The King had a collar of gold made for the dog's neck, and on the collar was written so that all might read, "This is Luarth, the King's Dog." And it came to pass that wherever the King was known, Luarth, the dog, was known also.

In those days, there was a drouth in the King's land, and because of the drouth, the harvest failed; and because the grain had not grown, bread was scarce in the land; and because there was little bread, the King's people were troubled and ill-content.

And as the way is when there is discontent and misery, they began to look about to find someone on whom to cast the blame for their plight.

"The King had power over all," said some, "why should he let his people hunger? The King is to blame."

"Yes, the King is to blame," said the King's enemies who were not slow to seize the opportunity to stir up strife.

Nor was it long before the whole land was filled with the cry: "Rid us of this King who gives no bread!" and angry men went to the King's palace to reckon with him.

The palace doors were broken down, and the halls of the King's house filled with the mob, raging and roaring among themselves and crying out for the King that they might wreak their wrath upon him. They hurried from room to room, tearing down the tapestries, breaking the King's treasures, and having their will in all things, for the King and his men had fled for their lives, and there was none to stand against the foes.

But when they had come to the council-chamber, what should they see seated upon the throne in the King's own place but Luarth, the dog!

And the sight tickled the fancy of the crowd. "Hail! King Dog, hail!" cried one

among them, and his fellows took up the cry.

"Hail, King Dog! Hail!" And they doffed their caps to the King's dog.

Now among the King's enemies, there were two who were stronger and greater than the rest. Both were smooth of speech and cunning of wit, and bold of deed, and both desired above all other things to reign in the King's stead.

Therefore when the King's dog sat upon the throne, and the people cried "Hail, King Dog," the one whom we will call Sir Wily-Way spoke out and said: "'Tis a wise jest. A dog may be as good a king as any." And he threw up his cap and cried, "Long live King Dog!" for he thought to himself, "If the rioters are humored, they will go to their homes satisfied; and then it will be an easy matter to lay hold upon the throne."

"Aye, aye, let us make the dog king. Long live King Dog!" said the people; and they would have laughed and gone their ways as the wily knight had planned if it had not been for him whom we will call Sir Crafty-Heart.

"Not so fast," said he. "A dog may be as good a king as any, but he must have a counsellor. Never a king without a counsellor. 'Tis the law of the land."

"Good word. King Dog must have a counsellor," cried the crowd.

"Nay, two," said Wily-Way. "Safety's in two; and if one counsellor be wise, it goes beyond a doubt that two will be wiser."

"Aye, two counsellors," echoed the people; and the upshot of it all was that Sir Wily-Way and Sir Crafty-Heart were made king's counsellors, and the crowd, having shouted until they were hoarse, went home and to bed without more ado.



Then Sir Wily-Way gathered his henchmen together in one corner of the palace and plotted and planned how he might seize the throne; and Sir Crafty-Heart and those who followed him gathered in another corner and planned and plotted how he might wear the crown. But the well-wishers of the one were as strong as and no stronger than the well-wishers of the other, and because of this, each bided his time. And King Dog reigned in the land.

Every day King Dog sat upon the throne in the council-room with a counsellor on either side, and every day those who had been wronged and those who had wronged them came before him. And the council-chamber was filled with people to hear the King's judgments.

Sir Crafty-Heart and Sir Wily-Way were the King's spokesmen, and many a one

sought their favor. When Master Thief had robbed a widow of her sheep, he slipped gold into the counsellors' hands that he might go scot-free though twenty witnesses were there against him.

"An innocent fellow, say I," quoth Wily-Way.

"Maligned by evil folk," said Crafty-Heart; but King Dog springing from the throne set hard upon the thief and, ere he could be freed, the clothes were torn from off his back.

"A judgment! A judgment!" shouted the crowd; and the counsellors, trembling lest their own guilt should be discovered, made haste to hale the fellow off to prison.

And when Goody Gammon, who had been a pensioner of the old King, was condemned as a witch by the counsellors, what should King Dog do but come down from his throne to lick her trembling hand and rub his head against her skirt! "A sign! A sign!" cried the lookers-on; and, willy-nilly, Crafty-Heart and Wily-Way were forced to yield.

Yet in spite of King Dog, evil began to grow in the land. The strong oppressed the weak, and justice was often sold and bought, and the people began to groan under the burden of taxes which the false counsellors imposed.

"'Tis all the fault of Crafty-Heart," said Wily-Way. "Were I the ruler, none would have complaint." And deeming that the time was ripe, he and his conspirators agreed that on a certain day, Sir Wily-Way should don the King's robes and his crown and await the people in the council-room.

"Let them but see thee thus and they will be content," said the conspirators.

The King's robes were of purple, woven of the finest wool, and his crown of gold was richly set with gems.

Sir Wily-Way was nothing loath to don such splendor.

"Had they been made for me, they could not fit me better," he whispered as he stole through the palace halls to the council-chamber.

But he had not crossed the threshold when Luarth, the dog, who had come behind him unawares, sprang upon him and, seizing the purple robe between his teeth, held this false king back till Crafty-Heart and all his men came running fast.

"I was but bearing the royal robe and crown to place upon the throne for the greater honor of our King, the Dog," said Wily-Way as smooth as silk.

And because neither the one counsellor nor the other was certain of the people's favor, the matter passed; though Crafty-Heart was not deceived.

"Long live King Dog!" quoth he, and he would have patted the dog upon the head, but Luarth would have none of his caresses.

The dog reigned, and the counsellors plotted, and trouble grew apace in the land.

"'Tis Wily-Way who is to blame," said Crafty-Heart to all who made complaint. "He would even usurp the throne and set his heel upon your necks. But were I king, all would be well."

And he laid plans that on a certain night, he would open the palace doors to those who would make short work of Wily-Way and dog alike.

On the given night, the false-hearted counsellor stole through the palace in his stocking feet. He would not even take a rushlight in his hand, lest it betray him, but trusting to the glimmer of the moon to show the way, he slipped toward his goal.

Yet quiet and cautious as the counsellor was, King Dog heard his step and sounded an alarm. The highest tower and the deepest dungeon in the palace rang with his barking. Nor would he let Sir Crafty-Heart pass on till Wily-Way and all the palace servants ran in haste to see what caused the stir.

Crafty-Heart was hard put to it to explain why he should wander in his stocking feet at such a late hour. "I heard a tapping at the gate," said he, "and 'twas so loud it woke our gracious King, the Dog, as well."

Wily-Way was not deceived. He knew what Crafty-Heart was fain to do. But because he was not sure of his own strength, he let the matter rest. And King Dog reigned as before.

Taxes grew heavier and wrongs grew greater in the land, and a murmur rose among the folk:

"The old king was the best king," said they. "In his day, the poor were heard. Would that he were here again!"

And it so happened that when the murmur was loudest, King Dog and the evil counsellors came from the palace to ride in the royal carriage through the city streets.

As the custom was, a throng of people stood at the palace gate to watch them go, and among the throng was a gray palmer with a cowl about his face.

"An alms to thee," said Sir Wily-Way, for he had learned that a free hand makes for favor with the crowd, and he was about to bestow a coin upon the holy man when, with a joyful bark, King Dog dashed by and leaped upon the palmer's breast, to kiss his face. As the dog made this loving onset, the palmer's hood fell

back; and who should stand revealed before the wondering throng but the King's self!

"The King! The King! The King is here! Long live the King!" cried those who saw, and the cry grew apace from mouth to mouth. The city was filled with the shout. "The King! The King! Long live the King!"

The evil counsellors hastened away at the sound of it. Whither they went and how, no man took heed nor cared. And there's an end to them.

But as for the King's dog, he walked by the King's side and slept at his door and stood beside his throne all the days of his life; and the love between the two was as the love between friends.

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