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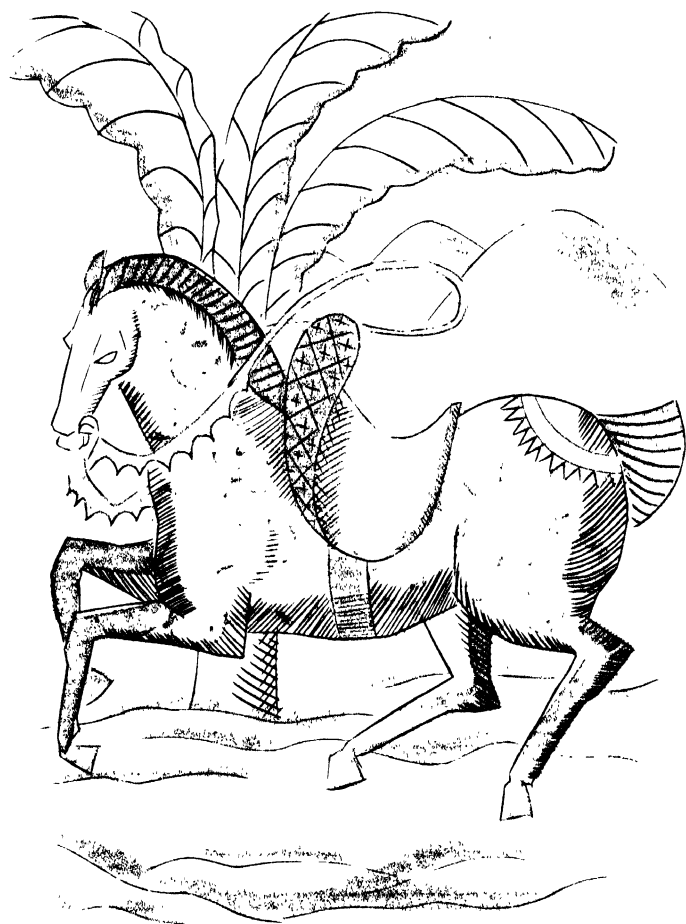
THE EASTERN ANTHOLOGY

VOLUME II



Volume 4

*The Young Wives' Tale
(Kissat Al-'Arā'is
Al-Sabīya) and Tales
of Fez*



EASTERN LOVE



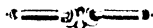
THE YOUNG WIVES' TALE AND TALES OF FEZ



ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE
KISSAT AL-'ARĀ'IS AL-SABĪYA OF
AMOR BEN AMAR AND TALES
OF FEZ FROM THE ARABIC BY
E. POWYS MATHERS



*
VOLUME IV
*



JOHN RODKER
FOR SUBSCRIBERS
LONDON ' 1927

MADE IN ENGLAND

THIS EDITION OF THE KISSAT AL-'ARĀ'IS
AL-SABĪYA OF AMOR BEN AMAR, AND
TALES OF FEZ, FROM THE ARABIC,
BEING VOLUME 4 OF "EASTERN LOVE,"
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THE FIRST TIME, BY E. POWYS MATHERS.
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

MODERN *Arabic fiction*, in so far as it concerns Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, may be conveniently divided into three groups. One consists of the work of the superficially educated author who writes novels in French about his own part of the country, adopting the exterior point of view, taking the least interesting type of French sexual romance as his model, and imitating it badly; with this we need not be concerned. The second comprises the work of those conscientious artists who write either in Arabic or in unaided French or in French with the collaboration of a Frenchman, and who, while altogether discarding the traditional mechanism which would prevent them coming into living contact with their characters, yet remain enthusiastically native in their point of view. When we come to consider, in our Terminal Essay, Eastern Love as a whole, stories of this second class will be found, sheerly because of their method, to have no place in our series. The third group contains all fiction which is not written down; and this may be again divided into tales told privately, in the household, and those told publicly. Examples of the first kind, collected in Fez, form the major part

of this volume. But a single example, chosen not as typical but as unusual among the latter class of professional stories, is given first in

THE YOUNG WIVES' TALE

(*Kissat al-'arā'is al-sabīya*)

of Amor ben Amar.

In translating from the French version prepared by M. G. de Villeneuve for his most interesting series of note books Une Vie Tunisienne, I have had the advantage of consultation with the collector himself, who took down the tale from its professional teller thirty years ago.

'Most of the stories I have listened to in the squares,' says M. de Villeneuve, speaking of researches made by him in Tunis, Sousse and Kairouan, 'are not worth any attention from those who have the authentic wheat of the Arabian Nights at their disposal; for they are but the surviving husks, and the repast is often of intolerable length. . . .

'But Amor ben Amar struck me as a man of some education, with a pleasant malice in his embroidery of the old themes. I took down three stories from his lips, in each case being given, at my own request, the shortest version. In The Young Wives' Tale, for instance, I was spared two complete recapitulations of the narrative up-to-date, which would have been patiently listened to by the usual audience. . . .

'He took a very intelligent interest in the customs

of other countries, and in this he differed from such others of his profession as I have met. . . . The supernatural was to him a living problem, and he never tired of any exposition, such as of the Black Masses of Guibourg, which I could give him of occult procedure among other peoples. This fact leads me all the more readily to believe that the ritual details which he was fond of introducing were authentic and not invented. . . .

'Amor ben Amar was born near Nabeul in about the middle of the Nineteenth Century, and died in his own house at Kairouan, the Holy City, in 1906.'

Of the ten

TALES OF FEZ

the first nine are selected and translated from Contes Fasis, an admirable volume in which M. E. Dermenghem, a young anthropologist and writer of considerable talent, and M. Mohammed el Fasi have made (taking them from the lips of the latter's grandmother) a collection of simple fairy stories quite peculiar to the city of Fez. Their book is the only one which has been written out of this material. The tradition of these tales is an entirely amateur one, and is said to be dying out; they are told in the household at evening, nearly always by women, and, though ostensibly addressed to the children of the house, make a strong appeal to all adults. It will be necessary in our Terminal Essay to speak of the

ritual surrounding the telling of such stories, to compare the individual tales with those of other countries, and especially to consider the affinities of the ninth with the legend of Cupid and Psyche. For the moment, if their charm has not been too far lost in a second process of translation, the stories may be found worth reading for themselves.

The tenth tale, or collection of anecdotes, the Sayings and Adventures of the Sultān's Dādā, belongs to a more sophisticated and universal tradition. The material from which I have selected was taken down by M. Heinrich Crucy from a prostitute in Fez about five years ago. Tales from such sources may be said, in these days, properly to belong to our first class rather than to our second, for the public woman has ceased in any serious sense to function as a public story teller in North Africa. She still sings and makes impromptu stanzas to attract her clients; but most of her tales are told in intimacy, and most are, besides, quite worthless. The special interest of the Sultān's Dādā lies in its unusual transference of the jester idea to a female, the blending of the philosophy of a Goba or Buhlūl with the epical ugliness and misbehaviour of Old Mother of Calamity. The nearest approach in The Book of The Thousand Nights and One Night, or indeed in Arabic literature, to the character of Dādā, seems to be that of Delilah the Wily, and the latter was rather a noble old lady forced by circumstances to

play practical jokes in her capacity of super-thief than a conscious Rabelaisian teacher such as Dādā is.

In nearly all cases I have kept such place and proper names and special local words as occur in the text in the form in which a native with some French education would transcribe them to-day ; but, in order that there should be no inconsistency between these tales and the literary ones which will occupy Volume VII, I have transliterated universal and literary words according to the same simple system of accents adopted in the revised edition of my translation of Dr.

*Madrus' Book of The
Thousand Nights
and One
Night.*

The Young Wives' Tale
(*Kissat Al-'Arā'is*
Al-Sabīya) from the
Arabic of Amor ben
Amar

The Young Wives' Tale

THERE WAS ONCE—BUT ALLĀH WAS ONCE and always, the Merciful, the Compassionate—a wealthy silk-merchant at the Holy City of Sidi Oqba* who, growing old in the accumulation of riches, had stayed unmarried. Therefore when at last he chose a wife, she remained childless, in spite of the old man's exertion, and he despaired.

Year followed after year with no change in the woman's condition, until at length the merchant sought out his wisest friend, who was also the possessor of a large shop, and greeted him, saying: 'Behold, O Mohammed, my white hairs are many and the marrow of my bones has grown thin; also the years have accumulated upon my head, and I remain childless. Therefore I come to make trial of your wisdom, because I fear to leave no son of my own blood to enjoy the good things which shall remain after me.' The merchant Mohammed reflected a certain time, and then answered: 'O friend, despair should have no place in the heart of a True Believer, for there is neither power nor might save in Allāh; He is the Highest. To-night, before you enter the harīm, take care to fulfil all the prescribed

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rites, and to make your ablution scrupulously, and to pray with fervour; also insert some rosy peppers beneath your tongue. Then if it be God's will that you achieve a son, you shall not die childless.'

The old merchant thanked him, and departed in joy; and that night did all that his friend had suggested. He made his ablution scrupulously, he prayed with fervour, and fulfilled each of the prescribed rites with careful attention; then he placed some rosy peppers beneath his tongue, and, entering his wife's apartment, did that which he had to do with her. And behold! she remained childless as before.

More grieved than ever at the disappointment of his hope, and forgetting that no man may escape the Destiny which is bound about his neck, the merchant now determined to have recourse to a certain Jewish sorcerer, who had become famous throughout all the lands of the Bey for his unnatural powers. And because this magician had been banished to a dwelling beyond the walls of their sacred city by the people of Kairouan, he set out at nightfall to visit him, his face muffled in his mantle, so that he should not be recognised.

He found the Jew's dwelling without misadventure, though it was in a desolate place among tombs, and was about to put his difficulty

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before him, when the wizard, who was very old and tall, and most repulsive to the sight, cried out: 'Give me the fifty golden pieces which you have brought, and then keep silence!' Now this was the exact sum with which the merchant had taken care to provide himself, though he had hoped not to have to dispense the half of it, so, hearing it named thus surely, he believed in the Jew's power and, handing over the gold, waited in silence for what might happen.

The Jew counted over the money, and then cast a ball, made of the fat and hair of a goat mixed up with benzoin, into a perfuming pan. When this began to melt and fill the chamber with fumes, he placed a copy of the Holy Koran on the floor at his feet—I seek with Allāh a refuge against the Stoned One, the Accursed—and, opening his garment, made water liberally upon it. After this he wrote a Name upon the palm of his left hand in his own excrement and licked it off with his tongue, crying: 'I invite you! I invite you!' By this time the pupils of his eyes had disappeared within his head, and, as he darted back and forth in the room, calling again and again: 'I invite you, I invite you!' he appeared to the unfortunate merchant, who was half suffocated with fear and smoke, to be thrice his natural

The Young Wives' Tale

size. Finally he ran out through the open door, and could be heard rolling among the tombs.

Forgetting all but his terror, the merchant also made haste to leave that place of ill-omen and, fetching a wide arc to avoid the sorcerer's body as it lay still now among the graves, ran as fast as his age and emotion would allow him back to the City. But as he ran a great white bird flew by his ear, endlessly repeating :

*Set her head towards the West,
Sprinkle rue upon her vest,
She will bear a son and he
Must die or wed the pepper tree.*

Nor did it quit him until he was almost within touch of the sacred walls.

Next morning the merchant had largely recovered from his terror, and began to remember his fifty gold pieces. Therefore, though he supposed the white bird to have been some one of the Invisible in the service of the Jew, or else the Jew himself whose spirit had assumed that body, he yet determined, as a last resort, to follow the advice which the bird had given him. 'For after a son is born,' he said to himself, 'there will be time enough to take counsel about the business of the pepper tree.'

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So when night came he went in to his wife, without fulfilling any of the proper usages; he sprinkled rue upon her shift and set her head towards the West and did with her that which he had to do.

And behold! at the end of a month his wife was pregnant, and at the completion of nine, amid the rejoicing of the whole household and of the merchant especially, she bore a son. Also, though the circumstances of his begetting were marvellous in no good sense, the child, through the infinite Mercy of Allāh, was born with *baraka** upon him, and throve from the first hour.

Yet on the night of the seventh day, when a sheep had been killed and the child had been called Asad ('For he lies like a lion upon my heart,' the mother said), and while the merchant sat a little apart from the loud rejoicing, and from the yuyus of the women, and the flute- and the drum-playing, a large white bird came down out of the sky towards him. It lit upon the ground at his left hand and regarded him, saying: 'He shall wed the pepper tree or die.' 'What pepper tree?' asked the old man in consternation, and the bird replied: 'He shall seek and find her.' 'How shall he know her?' asked the merchant, and the bird answered again: 'One sits beneath her preparing

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kuskus* and feeding the fire with his left hand.' But this time the voice of the bird was as the voice of the abhorrent Jew, so that the old man fainted away ; and when he came to himself the bird had gone. Allāh yen'a lek wa-yakhzik ya Iblīs*.

Afterwards he returned to his house and kept silence about these things ; so that, when he was stricken suddenly a few weeks later, and fulfilled the portion of every man, neither his wife nor any other had heard of the fate which awaited the new-born child. So much for him.

But Asad grew to boyhood and increased in strength and perfect beauty until he was like the moon, the shame of the stars, and was graceful as a young cypress, so that sheep would stop feeding to look at him. When he was four years old his mother chose for him a wise and virtuous teacher, who made him acquainted with all the Koran and the Sunna* and also our grammar in its intricacy. By the time he was eight he could repeat the sūras* of the Holy Book and knew the hadīths* of the Prophet (upon whom be Prayer and Peace !) and could speak and write Arabic like the wisest poet. And other teachers were selected for him, so that he soon excelled in running, wrestling, riding and fencing, in

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swimming and firing off guns and hunting with slight hounds, until it became a marvel that such strength could be wed to so much languor and beauty. Nor were these qualities all, for he grew to possess such virtue and happy kindness that even the flowers which were crushed by his foot could love him.

But as for that which concerned the Jewish sorcerer: very many times during Asad's boyhood the old man said to himself: 'God's curse is upon me, seeing that the merchant is dead and has said nothing of the pepper tree. Now if the youth should find the pepper tree by chance, and by chance wed it, then will all my plans have come to nothing!' (And as for these plans, you shall be told about them later.)

So on each occasion that this thought occurred to him he sent one of the Invisible in the form of a large bird, sometimes white and sometimes black, that it might inform the boy of his danger and drive him to seek and wed the pepper tree. But each time that one of these birds flew into the presence of Asad, behold! he so smiled upon it, and virtue and kindness so shone from him, that the creature was moved to an exaltation and spoke the *Fātīhah**. Then would Allāh cause it to disappear, so that it neither gave its message nor returned to the sorcerer.

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In this it will be seen that Allāh, who is the Most High, puts out exceptional good into the world as a balance for exceptional evil, thus confounding the wiles of those who do not believe in the mission of the Prophet (upon whom be Prayer and Benediction!) This good and this evil have to be purchased at the last, for He is the King of the Day of Judgment.

Now it happened one evening, when Asad was full fifteen years old, that he rode at the hour of moghreb* in a part of the plains far to the west of Kairouan, which he had not visited before. The air was filled with a poetic silence and with the scent of wild blossoms; the vault of the sky was growing full of stars.

Asad urged his horse across a stream and, rounding a clump of fig trees which grew upon its bank, beheld at fifty paces distant the figure of an old man seated by a small fire beneath a solitary pepper tree. Surprised at seeing a stranger in a place which he esteemed to be empty save for the presence of Allāh, the young man rode forward and dismounted, asking: 'Jinnī or man?' Then the ancient, whose white beard fell into his lap and who was eating kuskus and feeding the fire with his left hand, made answer: 'I am a man of flesh and blood even as you are, though of all God's creatures I am the most dejected.' So Asad

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compassionately sat down by the old man and questioned him concerning the cause of his wretchedness, but first, since he was as wise as he was kindly, he refused with great politeness to partake of the stranger's kuskus.

*The Tale of the Old Man under
the Pepper Tree*

‘YOU MUST KNOW, DELIGHTFUL YOUTH,’ answered the old man, ‘that I was once a farnachi* and practised my calling in a great city beyond the mountains of Djurdjura. At the time of which I speak—it now seems many years ago—I was a widower and, when I collected dung about the streets and stables, I had but two ends in view: to protect my only child, my dearly loved daughter, from all want, and to provide myself on special occasions, since I have a great gust for dulcification, with those very sweet little cakes which are called horns. In both these projects I throve, by Allāh’s aid, so that at least once in every month I was able to afford my cakes, and my daughter was kept from all want and provided with necessities, and grew in remarkable grace and beauty every year.

‘The bows of the archer could not suggest the moving curves of her brows, and all the coral of the deep sea was in her lips; her hair was night and her forehead day, and the lights of day and night were gathered in her eyes; her breasts were two citrons, and their little points could pierce through any fabric. Would to Allāh she had been less fair!

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‘ Now it happened that one day as I was taking my load of dung to the hammām, that a tall Jew of venerable appearance stopped me in the street and, after cordial salutation, wished to be informed of the situation of any little shop which I knew might be to let. As it chanced that such a one stood vacant in the street just opposite my own poor dwelling, I directed the stranger to it, and by the time that I returned to my daughter in the evening I found that the stranger had installed himself at the shop and, in spite of the pooriness of the neighbourhood, had stocked it with stuffs and metal work of every colour and great beauty.

‘ But, as day followed day, it was noticed that the Jew would be absent from his place of business for hours together, though none had, on any occasion, seen him leave. I also found, though this was not known to the rest of the quarter, that each of the old man’s absences coincided with periods of great wretchedness on the part of my dear Amīna, who would complain of headache and of an unclean feeling as if eyes devoured her in secret.

‘ So I, who had heard a great deal from the public story-tellers concerning the unpleasant powers of sorcerers, especially if they be Jews, took counsel with a very holy man of my

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acquaintance and told him that I suspected our neighbour, to what end I could only too well imagine, of visiting and spying upon my daughter by means of his art. The saint considered for a long while and then advised me to return home and, on the next occasion of the Jew's absence from his shop, to throw handfuls of cut onions about my daughter's apartment.

'I thanked my holy friend in the name of the Most High, and, returning home, expended the money which I had set aside for my monthly treat of sweet cakes all upon onions.

'And, on the next occasion when I saw that the Jew had disappeared from his shop and yet none had seen him leave it, I chopped up the onions very fine and, entering my daughter's chamber, sprinkled the fragments all about the floor. I withdrew, closing the door after me, but stationed myself behind a hole in it to see what should befall.

'At once my daughter began to weep at the eyes, and, even as she did so, I perceived the dim figure of a man standing within a pace of her; this appearance swiftly grew clearer, and in a moment I beheld the accursed sorcerer, who still turned his eyes upon her, though they were blind with weeping from the onions, as if he would swallow her up.

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‘ For you must know that, according to custom, this impious person had endued his eyes with a magic ointment to make himself invisible, and that his tears had gradually washed it away, until he became plain to the outraged sight of my daughter and myself.

‘ Amīna cried in terror, and I, leaping into the room, began to belabour the intruder about the head with the brush of my trade. Immediately he jumped from the window on to a low, adjoining roof; but I followed him, and, as I pursued him, uttered loud cries which brought many other members of my guild to my assistance. We chased the Jew from roof to roof with sticks and brushes, and had just surrounded him upon a certain one, when it opened beneath him and he evaded us. Hastening down to the street we saw that all the precious goods of his shop had also disappeared. Therefore I returned home and consoled my daughter, imagining that our troubles had come to a final end.

‘ Indeed for a whole month we saw and heard nothing of the sorcerer, and it was with joy in my heart that I one day discovered I had collected enough copper coin for my mensual supply of cakes. I hastily made my purchase, but even as I brought the first exquisite trifle of almond paste towards my mouth and it

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touched my lips, the world grew black before me and I knew nothing more.

‘When I came to myself it was near evening, and I sat, even as you see me now, in this unknown place, with a little fire beside me on which kuskus, the food from which I have the greatest abhorrence, lay in a pot preparing ; and at my back this pepper tree stood and sighed, and its leaves seemed to whisper *Amīna*.

‘As I was taking in my surroundings and beating my head to know how I had come here, I saw the Jew (may the compassion of God visit him not !) rolling towards me, riding upon a cloud of dust. When he reached me, he dismounted and his steed lay down upon the desert. He stood and regarded me with malignant triumph, and then said (and alas ! each word is written in blood upon my memory :) “O beast, O low gatherer of infamous matters, know that when Fakfash son of Kakrash son of Makmash deigned to pasture his eyes upon your beautiful but ill-born daughter, you beat him about the head with a dirty broom ; know also that the wrath of Fakfash is terrible.” After this he stood silent for a space gloating upon me and upon this pepper tree, and then continued : “It is *Amīna*, and she shall stand still to all the winds, while you sit down in her shadow and eat kuskus and feed the fire

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with your left hand. But this shall not be so for ever ; for in a week, in a month, in a year shall come a youth, thinking to save his life by wedding the pepper tree, and on his coming you shall die, and the souls of the youth and of Amīna shall be shut in boxes, to serve me with degradation for ever and ever.” Thus far had the Jew spoken in a tone of triumph, and I felt my heart turn over in my breast at the fate which awaited my daughter and at the thought of an everlasting kuskus with death at the end ; but now a cloud crossed the wizard’s face, and he continued : “ Had the matter rested with Fakfash this should have been my vengeance, rounded and complete ; but He whom I serve not is the Highest, nor will He permit the last thread of hope to be snatched altogether from the vilest of His creatures. Therefore should any man come and wed the pepper tree for loving kindness, not seeking to save his life thereby—this thing is most unlikely—then not only shall no harm come to him, but also Amīna and you, O dungy one, shall be made free. But in much learning is much power, and, even should such a man be found willing, he must first seek out from the face of the earth two married girls, two only, who have remained with pearl unpierced and flower unplucked—this

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thing is less likely still—and must wed them both before he weds the pepper tree. Therefore I think, O unhappy dealer in excrement, that you may prepare for death after a surfeit of kuskus. Therefore I think that the souls of the pepper tree and of her groom shall serve me in boxes throughout eternity.”

‘With this, O amiable young man, the Jew called up his steed of dust from where it lay upon the desert, and departed from me, I cannot tell how long ago. Since then I have not moved from this place, and the Invisible have kept me supplied with kuskus, the food of all others which I most detest. Also, when I have tried to feed the fire with my right hand, behold! my left has undertaken the service against my will. Often and often have noble youths ridden this way, and I have told them my sad story; but those who would have married a pepper tree, yet objected to wed into the house of a farnachi, and those who could stomach my trade have shrunk from the search for unmounted brides, or have feared to undertake the piercing of those unlucky pearls, the plucking of those ominous flowers. Therefore I sit in despair and await the coming of the youth who, thinking to save his life, shall seek us, bearing my death, and my daughter’s and his own damnation. And

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in my dreams I sit down to exquisite sweet horns.'

When he had made an end of this tale, the old man wept until the tears fell like a cascade down his white beard into the lap of his garment. And to Asad it seemed as if the pepper tree shivered in loveliness at the chill breath of night and sighed throughout all her leaves: *Ab, save me, save me!* So he made up the resolution of his mind in silence for a full hour, and then said: 'Old man, there is no inconvenience. As for your story, the grief of it touches me. As for your daughter, I love her already, for your description has inflamed me, and also I have seen her dancing and heard her sighing. As for your trade, my father was a silk merchant. Do not the women cry *ya gemel el-bēt** when they have lost their master? Is not the horse a lofty animal? Surely it is as noble a calling to collect that which proceeds from these as to gather what comes from a worm, a thing in the likeness of Evil? And as for the brides with pearl unpierced and flower unplucked, there is in every man an emulous will to succeed where another man has failed. Therefore I swear to free the delicate Amīna or perish in the attempt.' And, as he ceased speaking, tears of happy dew fell from the pepper tree, and the old man

The Young Wives' Tale

caught him to his breast with murmurs of content.

But as for that which concerned Fakfash bin Kakrash bin Makmash: his servants among the Invisible hurried in a flock to tell him what had passed between Asad and the old man and the pepper tree; but nothing is to be gained by repeating it in this place. And when he had heard them, his fury knew no bounds, and he at once set about the master conjuration of his life, in order that he might utterly destroy all three, seeing that his plan had come to nothing. He took off all his garments and put them on again inside out; then he made his ablution in urine, and started to pray impiously towards the West. But the matter of his ablution had excited the flies so that one of them came and settled upon his nose. He threw up his hand to drive it away and behold! his ring of power flew from a finger into the mouth which was opened in prayer, and descended and choked him; he fell over with his feet in the air, and his soul escaped by way of his back parts, and was gathered by that Hell which had so long hungered for it. So much for him.

From this it will be seen that Allāh, who is the All-Potent and the Most-High, though He permits a certain power upon the earth to men who glory

Amor ben Amar

in evil and to those rebellious spirits who bowed not to the orders of Sulaimān-bin-Dāūd (upon whom be Prayer and Peace !), yet will pluck up that evil like grass in His hour, and not suffer the True Believer to be devoted before his birth to ultimate destruction. For now if Asad, with God's aid, can find endurance for that search and strength to pierce those pearls, then he shall be saved and Amīna and the old man with him. But God knows all.

Young Asad remained all night by the pepper tree, and in the morning, as he rose to depart, the old man blessed him, for he now hoped that an end to his own and his daughter's sufferings might be expected, and had steeled himself to bear his vigil and his diet of kuskus until, if it were Allāh's wish, the bridegroom should return. Also, as Asad mounted his horse, the tree let fall a cluster of rose-coral-coloured peppers upon him, and he put them in his breast as he rode away.

Soon Asad reached home, and told his mother all that had befallen ; but, though the old woman wept, she put no other obstacle than tears in her son's way. Therefore, without losing an hour, he loaded a pack-horse with silks and jewels, with henna and amber and gold pieces, and arming himself with sword and gun, rode out upon his search for wedded virgins.

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There followed for Asad a random journey of indescribable peril and weariness: he scoured the world, in search of unmounted brides, to North and South and West, riding in torment through great deserts and venturing more than once in a wābūr* upon the sea. Thrice he was set upon by bands of robbers, who cared nothing for his exceptional beauty, and on each occasion he beat them off with slaughter, saving the load of his pack-horse from their hands; on each occasion also, because of the spirit with which he defended himself, he was cast into prison by the būlīs* of the Franks, and only escaped with difficulty. And all the while, though he enquired diligently, he found himself no nearer to the object of his quest.

But one day, after he had been thus travelling for three months, he entered a certain city, and put up his horses at a certain khān. Then, as the day invited him, he went out beyond the walls and walked he knew not whither, thinking with sorrow of his long search and its unsuccess. Presently the heat of the sun in the hour of zuhr* wearied him, and he therefore lay down under some trees which grew by a lonely pool in the oued* watering that city, and slept, covering his face.

He was wakened by the sound of approaching

Amor ben Amar

footsteps, though they were as light as moths, and, looking round, perceived a young woman dressed as a widow approaching the pool. She came down to it quite unaware of Asad's presence, and to his unbounded surprise began to collect handfuls of mud, till she had made a pile of it before her, and to pick up little sharp stones and knead them with fragile hands into the pile. Then she unveiled, and it was as if the sky held instantly two glories of the sun; for her cheeks were of jasmine brightened by the blood of roses, and her lips were stained with scarlet sugar; also her eyes, under brows curved like the wings of a dark bird, shone with the lustre of precious candles, and her hair was night. Asad, who had never before been granted so paradisal a vision, caught his breath as he beheld it. But, all unwitting, the woman bent and took two handfuls of the mud with the sharp pebbles and began to rub it violently over the beauties of her face. Then she uncovered her bewildering breasts, which were as two proud pomegranates, and treated them in the same sorry fashion. She was about to undress further and to commit God knows what more intimate maceration, when Asad gave vent to a long and dolorous sigh. The woman started at this sound and, swiftly adjusting her veils,

The Young Wives' Tale

sank without power of movement upon the bank of the oued, so great was her surprise and perturbation. Asad immediately approached and sat beside her, comforting her trouble with kind words ; and when her spirit was a little appeased, he asked, but with all humility, how it came about that she heaped so much indignity and harm on beauties which could have filled the world with light. So, in a little, the woman looked upon her beautiful interrogator with kind eyes, and sighing said :

The First Young Wife's Tale

YOU MUST KNOW, O AMIABLE BUT IMPRUDENT youth, that I am the daughter of the wali of yonder city, by his adored and favourite wife ; and it was supposed that I was born in an auspicious hour. I grew up to miraculous beauty and took glory in the form which the Giver gave. (How great is He who modelled and created it !) Also, I can say these things without shame ; for you shall hear how my vanity was punished. By day I would look long at my face in the mirror, and sometimes at the splendour of my breasts, or my thighs' excellence. I would look haughtily upon my beauty in the glass even at night* ; and by this it may be I invited the Jinn and wooed misfortune.

‘ Soon the fame of my beauty was noised abroad, and one poet said such and such of it, and a second such and such ; but yet another thrice took up his pen to write of it, and thrice fainted away.

‘ Now this last was a young man called ‘Ali el-Mishmish* because of the sweetness of his verses ; and after he had thus thrice failed to celebrate me, he purchased a house near that of my father, and, when none could hear but I, would walk upon its roof and sing to my shadow.

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‘When I saw that, in spite of his faintings, he was as strong as Antar, as graceful as a reed, and as handsome as a night filled with moon and stars, I loved him, and we exchanged sweet letters in secret. Then, when our feelings could be denied no longer, he asked me in marriage of my father the wali, and because he was also rich and highly-born, as well as a poet, my father consented.

‘We were wedded with great splendour, and when the night came and the women had withdrawn, I lay naked upon the bed (this was my pride), and a faint lamp glowed near me, since I could not forego my glory. Then my husband entered the apartment and drew near, and his eyes fell upon me, and he cried: ‘Now glory and praise to God!’ At the same instant he fell forward upon the bed, imprisoning my legs; and when my women ran to me, in answer to my calling, we found that his spirit had departed. Since then I have been held in abhorrence by the young men who before praised me, therefore I sigh and strive to lessen the beauty of my nakedness, for I wish to be wed and pierced like other women.’

When she had made an end of this tale the girl wept, and the two young people looked at and loved each other. Asad at length broke the silence of constraint between them, saying:

Amor ben Amar

‘There is no inconvenience.’ And he told her all the circumstances of his search, which I shall not here repeat, and begged her to journey with him, suitably attended, to his mother’s house in Kairouan, there to abide until he should succeed in the rest of his mission and return to wed her.

‘With pleasure and good heart,’ she answered ; so he gave rich gifts from his store to the wali her father, thereby winning his consent ; and on the morrow the two started for the Holy City, the girl in a litter, suitably attended, and Asad riding beside her. God prospered their journey, and they soon came to the house of the dead silk-merchant, where his mother wept tears of joy over her son and received the bride with a warm heart.

But Asad, as soon as he had replenished the riches upon his pack-horse and without delaying at all to rest himself, set out upon a journey which proved, before its end, more filled with danger and hardship even than that former one. Again he scoured the world, in hunger and thirst, to South and West and North, riding upon his horse or sikket el-hadīd*, or venturing in a wābūr on the sea. Not only was he again attacked by thieves, and defended himself and was cast into prison ; but also certain Franks doated upon his beauty, and he escaped

The Young Wives' Tale

from their hands only with great difficulty, and by rudeness. But all the while, though he enquired with diligence, he came no nearer to the object of his quest.

Then one day, after he had thus been travelling fruitlessly for three months, he entered a certain city and saw a great concourse of people jostling excitedly before a large and well-built house in a pleasant street. 'What is the meaning of this crowd?' he asked of a bystander, and the man replied: 'O sidi, this is the house of the Sheikh of the Goldsmiths, and the commotion is that he offers the hand of his daughter to any who will make her tell the way it happened.' 'The way what happened?' questioned Asad, and the man answered: 'You are indeed a stranger! Did you not know that her husband cast himself from the window on her marriage night, and fractured his neck?'

So Asad, thinking that this as well might be his affair as it might be far to the contrary, crossed the spacious courtyard of the house and entered a richly adorned and brightly carpeted hall, in which, upon a seat of honour, sat an old man in deep perplexity.

As soon as this venerable host saw so handsome and suitable a stranger approaching, he greeted him with every benevolence and asked him his

Amor ben Amar

name and country. To this Asad made fitting reply, and then ventured to ask in his turn: 'Is it true, O Sheikh of the Goldsmiths, that your daughter's husband threw himself from the window on his marriage night, and thereafter broke his neck?' 'Alas, it is but too true,' answered the old man, 'and now she will not even tell how this came to pass, so that evil murmurs begin to be made against her, and against my house. Therefore I offer her in marriage, together with a gift of two thousand pieces of gold, to any who shall make her reveal that secret, and who, when he has heard it, shall yet have a heart to wed her. Many, brooding upon the fate of that unhappy man, have found no courage for this enterprise, and the very many who have been tempted both by the gold and by the notorious beauty of my daughter, have been displeasing to her and have therefore not succeeded.'

'May I be permitted to make the attempt?' asked Asad. For though he could not tell what had happened in that chamber of death and bridal, and therefore was unaware whether he had to do with a pearl unpierced as yet or far to the contrary, he reasoned that the old man's condition would, should he wish to withdraw, sufficiently absolve him.

At once the old man led him into an inner

The Young Wives' Tale

apartment and, taking his own seat upon a mattress, bade him be seated upon another. Upon a third an unveiled woman sat and shone in all the brightness of her childhood. Her hair was a river, dark and deep, the stars reflected among it were her eyes, the floating foam and roses of its surface were her cheeks, her lips were the scarlet fruit adrift upon it. And as Asad looked he felt the love mount upwards to his heart.

Servants served tea with mint flowers, and as the two young people drank of it, Allāh alone knows what shy signalling, what up-lifting and down-dropping of brows and eyes and hearts, took place between them. Scarcely had the servants withdrawn, when Asad cried: 'O delight of my eyes, blood of my heart, and angle of my liver, tell me, I pray you, the way your bridegroom came by his death, or I myself will perish yet more quickly!'

Then the girl, to the great delight of her father the Sheikh of the Goldsmiths, said: 'I love and honour,' and turning her long eyes slantwise upon

Asad, thus
began:

The Second Young Wife's Tale

YOU MUST KNOW, O DELIGHTFUL YOUTH, that I was wedded with great splendour, as befitted my father's position. And on the night of my marriage, after the women had retired and I lay upon the couch in darkness awaiting my husband, one of the cats which had conceived a liking for me entered before him and settled by me, though I did not know it, upon the silks. Then my husband came to me and leaned over to caress me, but he set his hand upon the cat and it moved and squeaked beneath him, and he mistook it. Therefore, calling aloud that he sought refuge in Allāh, he ran to the window and cast himself forth from it. Since then, because I could not bring myself to relate this thing, I have been held in abhorrence by all the youths who before praised me; and so I weep and sigh, for I wish to be wed and pierced like other women.'

When she had finished speaking, the girl hid her face in her hands, but Asad cried: 'As Allāh lives, there is no inconvenience.' Then he explained to the Sheikh of the Goldsmiths the circumstances of his search, and gave him many handsome gifts, and received the promised pieces of gold and an auspicious blessing. On the morrow the two young people set out for

The Young Wives' Tale

the Holy City, the girl in a rich litter, suitably attended, and Asad riding beside her. Allāh prospered their journey, and they soon arrived at the house of the dead silk-merchant in Kairouan, where his mother wept tears of joy over her son and received the bride with a warm heart.

After this, and with as little delay as possible, Asad and his mother and the two brides set forth, with great provision of tents and carpets and silks, of food and drink and perfume, and journeyed towards the place of the pepper tree. And they took the whole household with them and many guests, and the kādī and witnesses, and a troop of those women whose business is in weddings.

As soon as they arrived at the grove of fig trees, and while a great encampment was being arranged, Asad went forward and greeted the old man under the pepper tree, who immediately praised Allāh and overset his pot of kuskus into his little fire. But as for Amīna the pepper tree, she seemed to glory and laugh throughout all her leaves.

When all had been suitably prepared, Asad wedded the wali's daughter amid feasting and loud rejoicing. And that night, as he entered the bridal tent where the girl lay naked upon the bed, with a faint lamp glowing near her because she could not forego her glory, he

Amor ben Amar

muffled his eyes in a silk scarf and, thus approaching, blew out the lamp. Also he did many times with her that which he had to do. But as for the old man, he was immersed in a provision of those sweet cakes which are called horns; and as for the pepper tree, she shook her branches in anger, and sighed with a woeful sound.

Then, when the prescribed interval was over, Asad, amid the loud rejoicings of all the guests, wedded the daughter of the Sheikh of the Goldsmiths. And that night, as he entered the bridal tent where the girl lay waiting him in the dark, the cat came in with him; but, as the creature loved him for his virtue and kindness, it rubbed against his legs as he approached the couch. Therefore when, in leaning over to caress his bride, he set his hand upon it and it moved and squeaked beneath him, he mistook it not, but did that which he had to do, and so continued until the morning. But as for the pepper tree, she sighed with a woeful sound and shook her branches in anger.

After this, when the prescribed interval was over, Asad wedded the pepper tree herself, amid such a feasting and rejoicing as far outdid those which had gone before. And as soon as they were man and wife in the sight of Allāh, behold! the pepper tree vanished away, and

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in its place stood a woman of such exceeding loveliness that neither tongue nor pen could tell it in a thousand years. The beauty of the first bride, set in the scale against it, would have been as feathers, and of the second would have been as thistle-down.

As soon as Amīna looked upon her husband, her jealous resentment passed for ever, and love alone remained. But she showed to Asad her right hand from which the little finger was wanting, and asked: 'My lord, in what place did you cast down the pepper cluster?' For wonder, and because of her beauty, he made no answer, but, taking the peppers from his bosom, laid them within her hand. And immediately they vanished out of sight, and lo! the finger of the hand was altogether restored in loveliness.

That night Asad again entered the bridal tent. Allāh gave him strength, and he behaved mightily until the morrow. Then the whole encampment returned to the Sacred City, and Asad and his three wives abode there together in all felicity until they were visited in their turn by the Builder of Tombs, the Pillager of Palaces, the Destroyer of Delights, the Provider to the Grave.

But God knows all.

The End.

NOTES

PAGE

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|---|------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>Sidi Oqba</i> | referring to Kairouan in Tunisia, which he founded, and not to Sidi Oqba (Okba), near Biskra in Algeria, where he is buried. |
| 5 | <i>Baraka</i> | good luck, in such a context. |
| 6 | <i>Kuskus</i> | the rejects from flour, prepared as rice, usually served with stewed meat and vegetables, and a hot red sauce; but here obviously plain. |
| 6 | <i>Allāh yen'a lek</i> | May God damn you and cause your ruin, O Iblīs. |
| 6 | <i>Sunna</i> | the orthodox tradition, made up of the Koran and the <i>hadīths</i> of the Prophet. |
| 6 | <i>Sūras</i> | chapters. |
| 6 | <i>Hadīths</i> | sayings or teachings of Mohammed, not found in the Koran. |
| 7 | <i>Fātihah</i> | ‘ The opening ’ <i>sūra</i> of the Koran, beginning :
‘ In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise to God, Lord of the worlds. . . ’ |

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8	<i>Moghreb</i>	the sunset prayer.
10	<i>Farnachi</i>	one who collects dung for heating the ham- mām.
17	<i>Ya gemel el-bēt</i>	O camel of the house.
20	<i>Wābūr</i>	steamer. (<i>vapeur</i>)
20	<i>Būlis</i>	police.
20	<i>Zuhr</i>	the prayer one hour after noon.
20	<i>Oued</i>	stream.
23	<i>Even at night</i>	to look in a mirror at night is one of the many negligences which attract the Jinn. Others are not to fold up the clothes at night, to omit to say <i>Bismillah</i> before sitting down to eat, to yawn, to whistle, to sleep on one's slippers.
23	<i>El-Mishmish</i>	the apricot.
25	<i>Sikket el-hadīd</i>	the railway.

Tales of Fez
from the Arabic

The Slipper-Mender's Son

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a princess as beautiful as the moon, who was dearly loved by her father, the Sultān. Since one day she conceived a desire to visit the markets, and as it would not have been fitting for her to be seen on foot in the streets by day, an order was sent out to all the merchants to light their shops that evening, to display their most desirable merchandise, and to go away. And all obeyed, except a single simple slipper-mender, who was, in spite of his mean profession, a great sorcerer, and who also had a son as handsome as the day. This man counselled the youth rather to shut himself up inside the shop.

Afterwards the princess and her followers walked in the markets, which were all lighted and quite empty, admiring the objects displayed on the counters, the chiselled brasses, the finely-gilded leathers, the multi-coloured stuffs, the potteries with sumptuous designs, the perfumes, the hennas, the dyes, the daggers and damascened guns, the Toledo blades, the girdles,

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the varied fruits, the great steel spurs, the silver and copper ornaments, and those fashioned out of rare woods. Nothing but their laughter sounded in the deserted streets.

But when the princess arrived before the shop of the slipper-mender and found its door fast closed, she became enraged against the mannerless fellow who had disobeyed and seemed to defy the Sultān's daughter. Therefore she ordered the eunuchs who followed her to force the door; but her rage quickly abated when she saw the young man seated, shining with beauty, among his father's leathers. They looked at each other for a moment without speaking, and were both dazzled.

And the princess returned to her father's palace without further delay, and quite in silence.

Also the son of the slipper-mender lost no time in falling ill.

'He is ill of love,' said the doctor.

But the father was, as we have said, a great magician, therefore he knew a magic formula of invisibility. He wrote this on his son's brow, and the latter was able to enter the palace, and even into the apartments of his well-beloved.

When she ate, he sat facing her and also helped himself from the dish, so that the plates which left the princess's chamber bore two holes, one

From the Arabic

on each side of such food as was left, as if she had been eating from both sides at once. We can imagine the rage and shame of the Sultān when he heard of this. But no one could find any man with the princess ; the mystery was incapable of solution. So a Jewish sorcerer was summoned, who ordered a great fire to be lighted in the room. This was done, and at the end of a few moments the temperature was raised considerably ; therefore the young man, who, though invisible, was present in real flesh and bone, began to sweat, and passed his hand over his brow to wipe away the great drops which fell from it. But in doing so he gradually effaced the magic formula and suddenly appeared to the sight of all.

The Sultān was too much astonished and went in too great fear of magicians in general to dare to punish him. Instead he contented himself with ordering the young man's father to come to him to explain the matter. The slipper-mender answered that he would certainly come if he were sent a horse and sumptuous clothing, so that he might present himself at the Court in a costume worthy of his science.

Furious at such pretension, the Sultān sent two eunuchs with orders to fetch the old man in chains if he refused to come of his own free will. The eunuchs obeyed ; they chained the old

Tales of Fez

man and led him to the palace. But, O marvel, it was a chained and dying ass that appeared before the King. Being more and more furious he sent four eunuchs. But this time it was a dead mule which arrived before his throne. He sent eight others, and it was a horse which fell at his feet in the last stage of decomposition ! Therefore the Sultān decided to send the horse and the clothes, and the old magician came. After saluting him respectfully, the latter said :
' Why do you oppose the marriage of our children, seeing that they love each other ? '
' Does my daughter really love your son ? '
' Ask her ! '

And as the princess, when she was called into the Presence, did not conceal her love in any way, the marriage was celebrated forthwith.

Then he who had been the slipper-mender wished to return the Sultān's hospitality, so he invited first the chamberlain, then the wazīr, then the Sultān himself.

The chamberlain came, and after dinner the magician led him to a certain barrel, telling him to look within. Then the chamberlain saw himself falling into the barrel, falling long and long, and coming at last to a garden, where he was violated by fifteen provincial gardeners. He became a pregnant woman, and with infinite pain gave birth to a dead child.

From the Arabic

Then suddenly the chamberlain found himself as before, leaning over the barrel.

‘Have you seen pretty things?’ asked his host.

‘Are you satisfied?’

‘Oh yes, perfectly satisfied, thank you!’ the terrified official made haste to answer.

‘It is useless to hide anything from me,’ said the other. ‘Now you know my power. Say nothing to anyone.’

The wazīr came in his turn, was sumptuously entertained, and was also conducted to the rim of the magic barrel. He fell into it likewise, or had the impression that he fell into it, and found himself transformed into an ass, loaded with lime. A brutal donkey-boy maltreated him, raining blows on him with a stick, or thrusting a sharp needle into a sore kept open at the base of his neck, and leading him for fifteen days up all the mountainous lanes of the city.

‘I could procure you all those ills in reality,’ said the magician to the wazīr, when that great man found himself clinging giddily at last to the rim of the barrel.

Nor was the Sultān spared. He saw himself first in a boat which was shipwrecked, and then clinging for twenty-one days, dying of thirst and hunger, to a plank which was tossed about by the wild waves.

Tales of Fez

‘ Are you satisfied ? ’ asked his host at length.
‘ Have you seen interesting things in my barrel ? ’

‘ Very interesting things indeed,’ answered the Sultān, who had been much moved. And the impression of what he had seen was so great
that he made the slipper-mender
his grand-wazīr and
most intimate
friend.

*The Merchant's Daughter and
the Sultān's Son*

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a rich merchant who had a daughter called Āishah, as beautiful as the moon. Glory to God who created and modelled a creature so very fair !

As she was taking the air one evening on the terrace, her dādā* climbed up to her with a bowl of thin soup, and while she was drinking it the girl let one of the little balls of paste fall on her breast, and afterwards picked it up and put it in her mouth.

The Sultān's son, who was walking on the neighbouring terrace, saw this and said :

‘ O Lalla, you who grow basil, you who water a pot of basil on the terrace, tell me, I pray you, how many leaves there are in your basil-plant ! ’

‘ O son of the Sultān,’ she answered, ‘ O you who hold all lands, O learned Lord, O sage who reads in the book of Allāh, tell me how many fish there are in the water, stars in the sky, and stops in the Koran ! ’

‘ Be quiet, greedy ! ’ he mocked. ‘ You took

Tales of Fez

up the ball of the thin soup from your breast and ate it.'

The young girl came down from the terrace in a very bad humour, and asked her dādā to take her to Moulay Idrīs for a little distraction.

As they went on their way, she saw the Sultān's son again, sitting at the stall of a fruit-merchant and eating a pomegranate. A seed from this pomegranate fell to the earth between his slippers, and he picked it up and ate it.

The girl was delighted to have surprised this gesture in him, and returned home in the best of humours. Early next morning she went up on to her terrace to water her pot of basil, as was her custom, and to work at her embroidery.

Thus it happened that the same dialogue took place as on the previous day.

'O Lalla, you who grow basil, how many leaves are there in your plant?'

'O son of the Sultān, O you who hold all lands, O learned Lord, O sage who reads in the book of Allāh, tell me how many fish there are in the water, stars in the sky, and stops in the Koran!'

'Be gone, greedy! You took up the ball of the thin soup from your breast and ate it.'

But this time she replied in triumph:

'Be gone, greedy! You took up the pomegranate seed which had fallen in the mud between your slippers and ate it.'

From the Arabic

It was the prince's turn to grow angry and to depart. He made his way to the Jews' quarter, to a certain one whose clothes he purchased. Disguised as a little wandering Jewish pedlar, covered with a black bonnet, wearing black slippers, and bearing a tray full of merchandise for women, he walked through the streets crying his goods until he came to the dwelling of Lalla Āishah. Imitating the voice of a little Jewish pedlar, he cried: 'Scents and mirrors! Kerchiefs and combs and rings!' and this he did so well that the girl took him for a true son of Israel, and sent her dādā out to him to buy some perfume.

Seeing that his ruse had succeeded, the disguised prince said to the negress:

'Choose out and take all that you wish.'

And, when she asked the price:

'I only require one kiss of your mistress's cheek," he said.

The girl consented and allowed herself to be kissed on the cheek by this filthy pedlar, who straightway departed, glorying in his success.

Next morning, at the first hour, he climbed up on to the terrace, and saw the daughter of the merchant watering her basil.

'O Lalla, you who grow basil,' he said, 'tell me how many leaves it has!'

'O Sultān's son,' she replied, 'O learned Lord,

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and the like, tell me how many fish there are in the water, stars in the sky, and stops in the Koran ! ’

‘ Be gone, greedy ! You took up the ball of the thin soup from your breast and ate it. ’

‘ Be gone, greedy ! You took up the pomegranate seed which had fallen in the mud between your slippers and ate it. ’

It was now the prince’s turn to triumph, and he said :

‘ I was the Jew, I walked along the streets, and I had my will of the cheek of the merchant’s daughter. ’

When she heard these words, Lalla Āishah was covered with confusion and quickly descended from the terrace.

‘ Dādā, ’ she said, ‘ I wish to go at once to see my aunt. Will you come with me ? ’

‘ Willingly, ’ said the dādā.

Lalla Āishah told her aunt all that had happened and begged her to colour her black, that she might seem in everything a slave. As soon as she had been turned into a negress, she had her aunt lead her to the House of the Converted Jew and sell her.

The merchant found the young girl so beautiful that he offered her to the Sultān’s son, and the latter had her sent to his dwelling.

But before she departed, Lalla Āishah got ready

From the Arabic

a razor, a cucumber, some red ochre, a mirror and a violent narcotic.

She caused the prince to drink of this drug and, when he was asleep, shaved off his beard and moustache, painted him like a woman, hung the mirror round his neck, thrust the cucumber up his bottom, and then escaped.

Returning to her aunt's house, she carefully washed and had already become quite white again, when the Sultān's son awoke to find himself in a very humiliating position.

After the usual dialogue had taken place between the two upon the following morning from terrace to terrace, that is, between the merchant's daughter and the prince who was shaved as close as a woman, the girl was able to finish it in triumph, crying :

‘ I was a slave, I went to the House of the Converted Jew ; then I played several splendid tricks on the Sultān's son.’

Furious, humiliated, and vexed to the bottom of his heart, the Sultān's son swore to marry this young obstinate, and to compel her to confess that man is more subtle than woman.

He asked for her hand in marriage, and her father consented. As soon as he had her in his possession he placed her in an underground granary, giving her very coarse clothes and,

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for sole nourishment, a daily barley loaf and a jar of water from the oued.

But the cunning girl dug a subterranean tunnel between the granary and her parents' house ; thus she was able to go home every day to eat, and had only to take care to be back in her prison at the time when her husband came with her daily ration.

Stretching out the black bread and the jar, he would say :

'O Lalla Aïshah, O sad dweller in this granary, which is the more subtle, man or woman ? '

'Woman, my Lord,' she would always answer, and he never could make her alter her reply.

The days passed thus, and the Sultān died, and his son succeeded him. At the beginning of Spring he decided to spend certain days in the country, as was his custom, and therefore came to visit his wife in the granary.

'In eight days,' he said, 'I shall go to Sūr at five o'clock in the morning and spend a fortnight there.'

'For your health, Lord ! ' answered the young woman, 'and may it bring you happiness.'

She hastened along the tunnel to her father's house, and begged him to make preparations even more magnificent than those of the Sultān at Sūr, and told him that she wished to be

From the Arabic

installed in that place an hour before her husband could himself arrive.

On the night before his departure the Sultān came to say farewell to his wife, and at dawn the next day he set out upon his journey. When he came to Sūr, he found velvet tents, far handsomer than his own, set up there, and at the door of one of these tents he saw a young slave dressed with marvellous richness. He asked about in his astonishment, and learned that a very beautiful young woman had come earlier that same morning to settle down in that place for a few days. Being filled with curiosity, he begged the slave to ask her mistress if she would receive him. She sent back answer that she would not see him until he had spent three days in the city as a scavenger of dung.

The Sultān consented, and returned in three days, all dirty and covered with dung. Water was heated for him, and he was washed, and afterwards dressed in sumptuous clothing. Finally and at length he went below the tent of the mysterious unknown.

‘I will not speak to you,’ said Lalla Āishah, ‘until you have a marriage contract made for us, and give me your sabre and its belt for dowry.’

Moved by the sweetness of the voice in which this demand was made, the Sultān consented,

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and then, losing all sense of time, passed twenty whole days with his loved one without recognising her.

On the twentieth day they sent to tell him that if he did not return a revolution would break out in the City ; therefore he left his wife, who had by this time become pregnant.

When the Sultān reached home, Lalla Āishah was already back in her granary. The first thing he did was to go and visit her, being sure that she would now acknowledge the superiority of masculine cunning. He said :

‘ I have just passed twenty days of delight in the country with a woman who has eyes like yours, hands like yours, a face like yours, and a voice like yours.’

‘ For your health, Lord ! ’ she answered simply.

‘ Your good fortune is a great good fortune, and happiness ceases not to fall upon you. May joy and pleasure abide in your dwelling ! ’

After this all went on as before.

In the fifth month of her pregnancy, Lalla Āishah began to make preparations for the birth of her child. At the end of the ninth month she brought forth a son, and called him Sūr.

Next Spring the Sultān went again to the country, choosing this time to pitch his tents at a place called Dūr. Lalla Āishah had preceded him, and all went between them as before.

From the Arabic

She insisted that the Sultān should spend three days as a wandering sweet-seller, and demanded his silver prayer-case with its silken cord as dowry. In course of time she bore a second son, whom she called Dūr.

In the third year matters fell out precisely in the same way, but this time at el-Kusūr. The Sultān had to spend three days cleaning the tent where his loved one's horse was tethered, and to give his ring as dowry. This time the child was a daughter, and her mother called her Lalla Hamamet el-Kusūr, the Dove of the Palaces.

Each time her husband returned to the granary, Lalla Āishah refused to admit the superiority of men over women in matters of ingenuity. Therefore the Sultān ended by feeling that he had had enough of so headstrong and proud a wife, and told her that he intended to take another favourite.

‘I love and honour her!’ she answered imperturbably. ‘May Allāh consolidate your reign, and cause your triumph! When will they get the chamber ready for your new bride?’

‘On such a day,’ he answered.

‘I wish you luck,’ she said.

When the time came, she put her three children into their most beautiful clothes. Then she gave Sūr a pair of scissors, Dūr a small knife, and young Hamamet el-Kusūr a little watering-can.

Tales of Fex

Finally, she had the children introduced into the palace and bade them cut and wet all that the negresses were preparing.

The children carried out their task to a marvel, and thoroughly spoilt all the preparations. When the servants would have driven them forth, they cried :

‘ This house is the house of our father, and yet these sons of dogs would drive us from it ! ’

And when the servants tried to catch them and put them to the door by force, they called out as loudly as they possibly could :

‘ Come, my brother Sūr ! Come, my brother Dūr ! Come, my sister Lalla Hamamet el-Kusūr ! Look, look, we can see Uncle Packet flying up to heaven ! ’

And while the people of the house lifted their eyes to see Uncle Packet, the three little ones escaped.

Thus it was that the Sultān learnt that these were his own children. The whole tale was made clear to him, and he had to acknowledge that woman is much more cunning than man. He sent back the girl he was about to marry, and it was in honour of Lalla Āishah the Merchant’s daughter that the festival

preparation went
forward.

The Fatal House

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a man who had two wives, each of whom had given him seven daughters.

Fourteen daughters ! Not one son ! That is an exceptional misfortune ! The father had a marked preference for one of his wives, but she was very evil and had no thought but to rid herself of the daughters of her rival.

Now there was a fatal house in that city, haunted by the Jinn. We died if we passed the night there. So, having heard of this house, the bad woman persuaded her husband to hire it, and to send the seven daughters of the spurned wife to sleep there one evening. This was done.

But these girls were very cunning, as well as being exceedingly virtuous, courageous and well-brought-up. They were not disturbed by what they thought was going to happen, but only requested their miserable father to buy them brooms and fishes, milk and perfumes.

The house was very dirty, and full of the dry carcasses of men who had perished there ; but

Tales of Fez

the seven sisters courageously swept the whole place, and cast milk upon the floor to appease the Jinn, who are very partial to this drink, and burned the perfumes for the same purpose.

And during this time one of them lit a fire and began to grill the fish for supper ; but suddenly a hand without either arms or body appeared, stretching out to her, while a voice said in gentle, supplicating accents :

‘ My sister, give me a fish to eat.’

‘ With pleasure and good heart, dear friend,’ answered the cooking girl, without showing any sign of disturbance. ‘ This one is still too hot.

It would hurt you. I will cool it.’

As soon as the fish had become cool enough, she stretched it out to the hand, and did the same for seven other hands which came, one after the other, to beg for grilled fish.

Then, as night had fallen, the seven sisters lit candles, and set themselves to table, and ate.

Then a Jinnī with two noses presented himself, having a candle in his hand ; but, instead of being frightened, they welcomed him in friendly fashion, and made him sit beside them, and offered him very sweet tea with mint.

‘ Do you require a being with three noses ? ’ cried another Jinnī, suddenly appearing.

‘ Certainly ! ’ they answered. ‘ With heart most friendly and in duty bound ! ’

From the Arabic

And thereafter successively appeared a Jinnī with four, a Jinnī with five, a Jinnī with six, and a Jinnī with seven noses, who were all received most kindly by the sisters.

Then the voice of a little child was heard weeping, moaning and saying :

‘ O my sister ! O my sister ! Fetch me down ! Fetch me down ! ’

The bravest of all took a candle and mounted the staircase leading to the terrace. On the top step lay a great slab of meat, and it was this which was making all the noise. So she took it tenderly in her robe and carried it downstairs.

The Jinn were affected by their welcome from the seven sisters, and therefore, instead of doing them harm, thanked them for having fed and scented them, for having washed the house, and for having kept them company.

Next day, at dawn, the father came to the fatal house with fourteen bearers, provided with seven planks, to carry away the corpses of his daughters ; but, instead of finding them dead, he saw them joyous and in excellent health, and covered with jewels which the grateful Jinn had given them. Therefore he was compelled to dismiss the bearers and to take the young girls home with him.

Who was disappointed ? It was the wicked, jealous wife. Seeing the gifts with which her

Tales of Fez

step-daughters had been loaded, she wished the same for her daughters, and accused her husband of being very clumsy. At length, at her insistence, he led his seven other daughters to the haunted house and left them there alone.

They had asked for fishes and victual as the others had, but, as they were negligent and dirty, they had not thought for either brooms or perfumes. Without tidying at all, they began to prepare their meal ; and at once a hand showed itself before the one who was grilling and begged for a fish.

‘ What horror ! ’ cried the girl, and began to recite the formula of exorcism : ‘ In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate ! I seek near God a refuge against Satan, the Stoned One ! ’

And she cried to her sisters :

‘ Give me an axe.’

But the menaced hand disappeared with no word spoken.

When the Jinn with two, three, four, five, six and seven noses came to ask to share their repast, instead of receiving them cordially as the other sisters had done, these sisters refused them company, and not without heaping curses and mockeries upon them.

When the voice of the child cried from the terrace : ‘ Fetch me down ! ’ not one of them

From the Arabic

went to the help of the enchanted meat, but each one cried : ‘ God damn you ! ’

When the father arrived next morning at dawn, this time without either bearers or planks, he found seven corpses in the fatal house.

He repented bitterly of his fault, and ceased to love the wicked woman who had caused this calamity through her evil intention with regard to her step-daughters.

For an evil intention is
everything.

Atīk and Edb-Dhahī

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a rich merchant who had a very beautiful and learned son. The charm, the manners, the intelligence, the courage of this lad won the admiration of all who came near him, and his father, fearing for him the danger which his beauty might excite, took care to hide him from the world, and saw to it that all his time should be passed, either in study or in fencing and riding, far from the thronged streets and bustling markets.

But the father underwent that which is undergone by all men, and died on a certain day, leaving his son a great fortune, a fair house, and many slaves. Now that he had become master of his own acts, the young man got into the habit of going every day to walk in the city, and of rejoicing in a sight of the rich shops and the coloured crowd. And all the world was astonished to see such beauty.

‘Yā Allāh !’ said each. ‘Who is this delicious adolescent ? We have never remarked such an exquisite appearance in our streets before.



From the Arabic

He is like the moon upon her fourteenth night.'

And each time he entered one of the markets, the people would turn round to him, troubled to the extreme limit of trouble by his radiant face and by the damnation for all souls which shone from it. Then, without caring for his confusion, they would cluster round him, and exclaim :

' Yā Allāh ! The crescent of Ramadān twinkles upon us, and the full moon is rising in our market ! Doubtless this is an angel from the seventh Paradise or a King from the lands of Dream ! '

Has not a poet said :

' O Lord, You have created Beauty to steal away our brains, and have said to us : My servants, be virtuous. You are the Source of all Beauty and You love that which is Fair ; how then can You forbid Your creatures not to love the Beauty which You have created, and not to be troubled in their wits by that which you have made Fair ? '

Soon all the city spoke of the boy, and he dared not go abroad. The Sultān learnt that there was a lad of marvel in Fez, the rich heir of a merchant who had just died ; therefore he resolved to make the acquaintance of the youth, and sent to fetch him.

But scarcely had the messengers come to him, when an old woman also sought him out, and said to him :

Tales of Fez

‘If the Sultān asks your name, you must answer : I am called Atīk-he-believes-in-God-he-does-not-drink-alcohol-he-is-not-seduced-by-fortune-or-conquered-by-man-he-will-reach-Edh-Dhahi-even-if-she-be-up-in-the-clear-sky.’

‘Your words upon my head and before my eyes, O mother of wisdom. I will do as you say.’

Next day, therefore, when he entered the palace and the Sultān, who had graciously replied to his polite salutation, asked him his name, he answered :

‘Atīk-he-believes-in-God-he-does-not-drink-alcohol-he-is-not-seduced-by-fortune-or-conquered-by-man-he-will-reach-Edh-Dhahi-even-if-she-be-up-in-the-clear-sky.’

Now the King had a daughter who was called Edh-Dhahi ; but no one knew her name, for, since her birth, he had taken great care to hide her in a subterranean palace in order to preserve her from the evil-eye. This palace had no other entrance than a secret flagstone in the middle of the royal fountain basin. Therefore, being exceedingly astonished to hear the young man name her, the Sultān said nothing for the meanwhile, and sent away Atīk with the peace of Allāh. Two days afterwards he invited him to come to spend the night at the palace with all his wazīrs and the people of his court. The most skilful muscians played their happiest airs while the

From the Arabic

wine-cups went round among the guests. But Atīk refused to drink, even when the Sultān offered wine with his own hand ; so the Sultān handed him the keys of the Public Treasury.

Besides coined gold and silver, the treasure contained all sorts of precious and splendid works of art, massive gold thrones encrusted with jewels, sceptres and crowns fit for the great among sultāns, and all the booty taken from vanquished kings. It was a dazzling reunion of marvels. The Sultān had ordered young Atīk to enter the treasure in order to fetch a certain cup carved from a single emerald, from which he wished to drink that night. He thought that the young man would be dazzled by all the varied splendours which lay to his hand, but, instead of being so, Atīk lifted the cup and carried it to the King without giving a single glance to the other matters. So the Sultān sought out another way to catch him.

He whose function it was to make the tea came to ask for mint stalks.

‘ Oh,’ cried the Sultān, ‘ I never use any except of the mint which grows in my gardens at the East Gate, Bab Sidi Bou Jida, and it is now too late to go and look for them in such a deserted place.’

‘ But,’ objected a certain wazīr, ‘ Atīk can go, since he says he is invincible.’

Tales of Fez

‘Be it upon my head and before my eyes,’ cried the young man, and at once set forth.

But scarcely had he passed the ramparts and entered the gardens of the Sultān, when a troop of forty armed men, springing out from behind rocks and trees, threw themselves upon him. These men had been sent there by the Sultān himself. But Atīk overcame them all, and cut off their heads ; then, with the same sword which ran red from their blood, he cut forty lemons in the orchard, plucked the requisite mint stalks, and returned to the palace, where all the guests were astonished to see him still alive. When he perceived the forty lemons, the Sultān understood that his men had been killed, and began to fear that Atīk might in very fact fulfil his promise of reaching Edh-Dhahi. The tea which was forthwith prepared with the fresh mint was then drunk, and all the guests returned to their own houses.

When Atīk reached his home, he found the mysterious old woman waiting for him.

‘Now that you have triumphed in all things, and have proved the truth of your declaration as to what you were, it remains only to reach Edh-Dhahi. You must open your father’s treasure to me, and in two days I will tell you what more you have to do.’

He gave her the key of the chamber where all

From the Arabic

the riches of the dead merchant were stored in minted pieces and unwrought ingots. The old woman took what she needed and then went to the Jewish quarter, to the shop of two jewellers of that faith, whom she begged to come with her to her home to undertake a certain labour.

The Jews accepted, and the dame bade them fashion, out of the gold which she had, a gazelle large enough for a youth to hide within it. Two days later the golden gazelle was finished, and had been provided with an invisible door, opening on the inside. The old woman then gave the Jews a fistful of gold pieces each, telling them to carry this to their families and then to return for the rest of their wage. They obeyed her joyfully, and in the meanwhile told no one of the matter, because they had not yet touched all their money.

But the woman dug a great hole in the courtyard of her house, and covered the bottom of it with dry faggots; then she thatched all with reeds, and set a mat above. When the jewellers returned, she offered them tea and made them be seated on the mat. They fell into the hole, and she threw down cans of flaming petroleum upon them and upon the dry wood until the two unfortunates were completely burned. At last she replaced the tiles which she had had to move, and all was hidden.

Tales of Fez

She then fetched Atik to her and, after making him enter the gold gazelle, went to the Sultān's palace. By crying and insisting to the guards, she was at length admitted into the Presence, and said to the Commander of the Faithful :

‘ Lord, I have come to ask you, of your great goodness, to take care of a gold gazelle for me, since I am about to depart to the East, to make my pilgrimage to Mecca. I am very old, and perhaps it is written that I shall die there. If I return to Fez, you can give me back my gazelle ; if not, she shall be yours.’

The Sultān accepted this trust and gave the old woman two eunuchs to fetch the gold gazelle for her. And when he saw it, he was thrown into stupefaction, since he had never before set eyes upon the like.

‘ This object will give a great deal of pleasure to my daughter, Edh-Dhahi, since she lives all alone in her subterranean palace.’

He had the gazelle lowered by the flagstone in the middle of the fountain basin, and the girl received the gift with rapture. She began to caress the pretty gilded animal, and shower all sorts of tender and gentle words upon it ; but Atik did not make a move till nightfall.

When Edh-Dhahi was asleep, however, he opened the door, came out from the gazelle, and sat down to eat the remnants of the girl's supper.

From the Arabic

Afterwards he returned noiselessly to his hiding-place.

After a few days, the slaves of the princess began to be astonished at finding all the plates quite empty every morning. They asked each other how their mistress had eaten so much, and began to feel themselves aggrieved, since it was their habit to finish the rest of the meal themselves.

One night Edh-Dhahi woke while Atīk was still eating. Without the least trace of fear she asked: 'Man or Jinnī?' 'Man,' he answered. 'I am of the race of Adam, and I bear witness that there is no godhead save that of God, and that Muhammad is the Prophet of God!'

The princess immediately fell in love with the handsome Atīk. Therefore, instead of dismissing him, she begged him to continue his meal, and herself kept him company. Thus the two lived together for several days, in mutual delight, and whenever a slave entered the apartment, the young man would run to conceal himself in the gold gazelle. At length Atīk proposed that they should marry, and himself drew up the following contract upon a sheet of paper: 'Before Atīk notary, Allāh kādī, and His Angels witnesses, Edh-Dhahi consents to marry the consenting Atīk, according to the will of Allāh and the words and traditions of the Prophet.'

Tales of Fez

Then he signed the contract in his quality of notary, and that night was the night of penetration.

When they had lived together for a whole year, without once leaving the sweetness of each other's arms, a little child was born, and the mother laid him, with the marriage contract inserted in his swaddling bands, on the border of the basin a few moments before that hour when she knew that her father, the Sultān, made a habit of coming for his prayer and ablution by the fountain.

The Sultān was exceedingly astonished and a little annoyed at the trick which Atīk had played upon him. But, as it was now too late to do anything and as he was in his heart of hearts delighted to be a grandfather, he smiled upon the little morsel and embraced him tenderly ; then, calling up his daughter and son-in-law, he gave order that their marriage should be celebrated with every kind of pompous and public festivity. Glory
be to Allāh.

Lalla Khallāl the Green

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a certain very rich family whose only child was a daughter. The mother died and the girl was placed as an apprentice in the house of a neighbour, that she might be taught embroidery. This neighbour was a wicked and cruel woman and used to load little Lalla Khallāl the Green with blows. Also, as she herself desired through avarice to marry the widower, she employed the child to urge on her father to this wedding, promising as a reward that she would no longer beat her.

But when she had gained her end she was far from remembering what she had undertaken. This vile stepmother had a daughter of her own by her first marriage, who was a gross and ill-educated child, and made dirtinesses in her bed ; while Lalla Khallāl was both charming and intelligent, and as clean as she was pretty. Glory be to Him who created and modelled so fair a creature ! Now, in order to alienate the father from his daughter, this unpleasant woman used to saddle her with all the incongruities of her own child.

Tales of Fez

One day, under pretence of being very amiable with her, she took that little stepdaughter out into the country. When they had found a patch of shade, they sat down together and the old woman began to comb the child's long hair and take the lice from it. As the day was very warm the patient went to sleep ; then her step-mother rolled her long hair about a thorn bush and departed.

During the child's sleep a certain gazelle, a creature of God, passed by that way, had pity on her, and unwound the hair with his feet. The little girl woke and saw the gazelle licking her brow. At first she was very frightened, but soon she became accustomed to the animal and lived for many years with him.

Thus she became a young woman, quite as beautiful as the moon, a marvel of creation. One day, as she was going for a walk, she came near a village and, seeing a house which took her fancy, climbed up to the terrace of it. She leaned over the well of the house and could see no one ; yet the place appeared to be inhabited, for there were various objects of use about the courtyard and carpets at the entrance of the rooms. But there were not even any women there, such as we would expect if the men were abroad.

Climbing down and entering the kitchen, she



From the Arabic

saw that it was full of great quarters of venison, and game of fur and feather ; therefore she understood that the house belonged to hunters. Men when they live alone can never take care of their surroundings. If the truth must be told, this house was not in very good order. So the sweet young woman, who loved cleanliness, set herself to wash the whole place, to set the rooms in order, to do the cooking and to make all ready for a meal.

Then she hid herself.

Soon she saw seven hunters returning with all sorts of game ; and these good fellows were astonished to find their table served and the house in order. Yet, as they were mistrustful, they first made an old dying greyhound eat of the kuskus which they found prepared. As the animal did not die, they gaily began to eat, but not without having first said : In the name of God !

Next morning all the hunters set out once more, except the eldest, who wished to probe the mystery and therefore feigned to be asleep. But from feigning he passed into real sleeping, and Lalla Khallâl the Green, after she had set the house in order and cooked the dinner, went up to him, stained his right hand and his left foot with henna, and returned to her hiding-place.

Tales of Fez

Next day the second brother, who trusted to be more successful, stayed behind in his turn ; but he also fell into a true sleep and the young girl played the same jest on him. And afterwards the same thing happened with four more of them.

But when the youngest stayed behind under the same conditions, he succeeded in keeping awake, while pretending to sleep, until the moment when Lalla Khallāl, after tidying the house and preparing the meal, came up to him. She put henna on his left foot as she had done to the others, but, when she would have painted his right hand, he seized her suddenly by the arm, crying :

‘ Mortal or of the Jinn ? ’

‘ I am a woman of the race of Adam. I say over the confession of Faith.’

As she was very beautiful, the youngest hunter fell in love with her and asked her if she would accept him as a husband. When she said that she would, he advised her to say to his six brothers : ‘ He who caught me shall marry me.’

When the rest returned in the evening, the young man showed them his unpainted right hand, and then introduced them to the girl. All were stricken with amazement at her beauty, and each desired her for himself. But she declared :

‘ He who caught me shall marry me.’

From the Arabic

So the two were married, and the whole eight lived together in great happiness ; for the other hunters greatly appreciated the sweetness of Lalla Khallāl's disposition and the excellent management which she introduced into the affairs of their house.

One day, while her husband and her six brothers-in-law were hunting, Lalla Khallāl heard a Jew crying his wares for women in the street. She recognised him as one Dāūd, a wandering pedlar from the city where she had been born.

She signed him to come to her, bought different trifles from him, and asked him the news of her family. When he had told her that her father and stepmother were still alive, she dismissed him with a little purse full of gold pieces. And the old man hurried to the stepmother and told her where he had found Lalla Khallāl. The old woman at once promised him two little purses of gold (for she had laid hold of all the dead mother's fortune) if he would procure a finger-ring rich in sleep-producing qualities.

Dāūd soon returned to the village where he had seen Lalla Khallāl, knocked at her door, gave her good-day, and handed her the ring as a present from her stepmother ; also he exclaimed that the latter had not been at all to blame, that she had not lost the child on purpose by the

Tales of Fez

thorn bush, and that she was desolated at no more beholding her.

While she was preparing the kuskus for that night's meal, the young woman placed the ring between her teeth in order that she might mix the semolina with both hands, and immediately fell down unconscious.

As soon as the seven hunters returned they supposed her dead and gave way to great grief. 'The joy of our life is passed,' they said. 'We shall never hear her voice again, we shall no more take pleasure in her tender presence. Our dwelling will lack her valuable cares for evermore. There is no power or might save in God! Such is the Destiny which He had written for us.'

'What are we to do with the body?' asked the youngest, the husband, who was well-nigh dead from his despair. 'I can never resign myself to letting so sweet a thing go rotten in the earth.'

Now these seven brothers had a she-camel whose name was Nala. They dressed the young woman's body in all magnificence, covering it with jewels and precious veils, and then placed it upon the she-camel, saying to her:

'Go forward, Nala, go forward ceaselessly; and do not halt unless someone calls you by your name.'

From the Arabic

Nala obeyed, and all the land was soon talking about this prodigy: a she-camel who went forward for ever, bearing the body of a very beautiful woman, dressed like a queen.

Many tried to catch Nala, but none succeeded; for no horse could run as fast as she. The Sultān himself could not succeed. Therefore he promised a great reward to any who should bring the she-camel and her burden of mystery into his presence.

‘I shall make him rich,’ he said. ‘I shall make him in every way as rich as God meant him to be.’

Now a poor harvester was going along a certain road on his ass, and just at the moment when the she-camel passed him, he dropped his sandal.

‘Give me, I pray you,’ he said to a little ragamuffin, ‘give me my nala.’

Hearing her name, the she-camel halted instantly, and gently allowed herself to be led by the peasant into the presence of the Sultān, who generously rewarded the man.

Lalla Khallāl was still sleeping. Her heart did not beat, and no breath raised her breasts.

‘She must be buried,’ said the Sultān, and sent for women to undertake this task according to the rites.

These first drew the ring from the place where it

Tales of Fez

still remained between the teeth of the young woman, and at once the body sat up, fresh and smiling. In his delight the Sultān asked first for her story and then for her hand. And she accepted him in the end, for she did not know how she could find her actual husband.

Nala was put in the palace stable.

One day Lalla Khallāl the Green, who could not forget her first love, and did not at all care to share the favours of a single master with a whole harīm, resolved to be gone from that place at any cost. Therefore she organised a pleasure party in the Sultān's gardens with six maids of her honour, bidding them conceal about them anything they valued. All seven hid themselves in a large chest which was put on Nala's back, as if it were provision for the excursion. But as soon as they came to the entrance of the garden, Lalla Khallāl said to Nala :

‘Go forward, Nala, and do not halt until you reach the door of your masters.’

Thus it was that she discovered the village again, and the house of the seven hunters.

‘We have forfeited,’ they were saying, ‘all our good luck along with her. And to put a crown upon our grief, Nala is lost to us.’

On hearing her name and the voice of her masters the she-camel began to utter loud glou-glous of great joy.

From the Arabic

The brothers were indeed happy to find their dear Lalla Khallāl the Green again, when she fell weeping into the arms of her husband. Then she brought the six maids of her honour out of the chest.

‘ See,’ she said to her brothers-in-law, ‘ these are the wives I have brought you.’

And she vaunted to the young girls the
charm of every woman
having a husband
apiece.

Prince Ahmed Ben Amar

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a King who had long vainly desired to be a father, and who came to the height of happiness when at length his wife, having been so far barren, gave him a little daughter.

As he feared to lose this child for whom he had waited so long, and that he might preserve her from the evil-eye, he had her shut up in a richly-furnished underground palace, with an old negress to look after her. Her feeding was very specially cared for, and she was only given the crumb of bread and such parts of meat as had no bones.

The walls on one side of this palace were made entirely of glass and looked upon a garden where an oued ran.

When the young girl was fifteen years of age, her old nurse died and was replaced by another slave. But this woman, who had not been warned in the matter, gave her mistress bread whole with its crusts and unfileted meat.

‘ This bread has a crust such as I have never seen before, and this meat has bones such as I

From the Arabic

have never seen before,' said the young princess. And she hammered a bone against the wall to let the marrow out of it.

The glass wall broke at once, and, leaning out by the hole thus made, the girl found that her palace looked upon a fair garden divided by an oued.

A young man as handsome as the full moon was walking in the garden.

'Oh! what a handsome young man upon the shore of the sea!' cried the princess, who had never seen such a sight.

'Oh! what a fine palace on the shore of the sea!' said the unknown in his turn. 'O Girl, I wish it had a series of dream verandahs which would take a month to cross.'

At their first mutual glance these two had fallen in love with each other.

Caught by this passion and by the desire to have the dream verandahs, the princess fell ill. The Sultān called doctors to him in his despair, and said to his daughter:

'The treasures of the East and those of the West shall come to your bedside if you desire them. Every head you wish shall be cut off and brought to your feet.'

'The only thing I wish,' she said, 'is a series of dream verandahs which it would take a month to cross.' And the Sultān immediately

Tales of Fez

ordered the construction of these things. Would he not have done better to ask at once who had inspired such an idea ?

After the masons of that land had laboured to satisfy the princess's caprice, she went forth once more, perceived the same young man, and cried :

‘ Oh ! what a handsome young man by the shore of the sea ! ’

‘ Oh ! what a fine palace by the sea with a series of dream verandahs which would take a month to cross ! ’ he answered. ‘ I would it were provided with two benches, the one of male amber and the other of yellow amber.’

The princess fell ill again. Her father said to her :

‘ The treasures of the East and those of the West shall come to your bedside if you desire them, and the heads you wish shall be cut off and placed at your feet.’

‘ I only want two benches,’ she answered, ‘ the one of male amber, the other of yellow amber.’ These were made. She was cured. She leaned forth. She perceived the young man, and cried :

‘ Oh ! the handsome young man by the shore of the sea ! ’

And he :

‘ Oh ! the fine palace by the sea, with its series of dream verandahs which it would take a

From the Arabic

month to cross, and its two benches, the one of male amber and the other of yellow amber. O Girl, I wish it had a column of musk and a column of right amber also.'

'The treasures of the East and the treasures of the West shall come to your bedside if you desire them,' said the Sultān to his daughter, when she became ill of love and caprice for the third time. 'And such heads as you wish shall be cut off and placed at your feet.'

'I only want two columns, the one of musk and the other of right amber.'

When this desire had been satisfied, the princess leaned forth afresh.

'Oh! the fine palace by the sea,' said the youthful unknown in the garden. 'Oh! the fine palace with its series of dream verandahs that it would take a month to cross, with its benches of male amber and yellow amber, with its columns of right amber and musk! I wish it had two fountain basins in the midst of a court yard paved with bright mosaics, one having a jet of rose-water and the other a jet of orange-water.'

The Sultān fulfilled this new wish. Then it was emerald tiles with ruby incrustation which the stranger wished for and the princess demanded. Finally, when she had leaned forth yet again, the girl heard these words :

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‘ Oh ! the fine palace by the sea with its series of dream verandahs which it would take a month to cross, with its two benches, the one of male amber and the other of yellow amber, its two columns of right amber and musk, its two basins, one having a jet of rose-water and the other a jet of orange-water, its emerald tiles with ruby incrustation ! Now nothing lacks save the Sultān’s daughter seated on one of the benches and Prince Ahmed ben Amar on the other.’

This time the princess fell even more seriously ill. She became yellow, and admitted to herself that she was taken in the toils of this young man. None of the doctors in the Fortunate Empire could succeed in curing her. All the old women came to tell her tales in order to distract her. She was not distracted. None could find the cause of this sickness, and the girl kept her secret.

At last a really old and very intelligent woman came to her. As the princess dearly loved a certain little bird which lived ever in a cage at her side, the old woman took the bird and cut its throat upon the breast of the sleeping invalid. The princess cried in anger and desolation as she woke :

‘ O Lord, my Master ! May he who has deprived me of this bird be deprived in his turn

From the Arabic

as I am deprived of Prince Ahmed ben Amar ! ' The old woman's subtlety had succeeded, and she hastened to tell the Sultān of it. When he learned that his daughter was in love with a man, he fell into a fury and ordered a certain eunuch to carry the princess into the country, to kill her there, and to bring back her blood-stained shift in proof.

But the eunuch, feeling pity rise within him, warned the princess, advised her to provide herself with all the precious and easily-portable treasures on which she could lay hands, and then went out with her beyond the city.

When they had come to a far-off farm, she requisitioned a sheep, undressed herself, and stretched out her chemise. The eunuch cut the animal's throat above this garment. Then the princess put on the clothes of a servant and, after having hidden her treasures under the coarse veil which covered her abundant hair, went forward alone into the desolate country, where there is neither bird to fly nor beast to walk.

She journeyed from city to city, passing herself off as a beggar, and seeking Prince Ahmed ben Amar in every place. At length she found work in a house where a certain woman dwelt, and this woman kept her on as servant, because she was hard-working and courageous in spite of her noble education. This woman was none

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other than the Prince's sister. He had also two other sisters living in different houses. He used to come and visit them in turn for one night every three years. He came to that house at length, and the disguised princess recognised him, without daring to reveal herself. He passed the evening with his sister, slept in the house, and departed at dawn, with no intention of returning save in three years. Not wishing to wait so long, the Sultān's daughter betook herself to the house of the second sister and, at the end of a single year, saw the object of her love again, but without summoning up the courage to show herself or to speak to him. Leaving her second mistress, she went to the house of the third sister, whose affection she was not long in winning.

‘ My brother seems to be the victim of I know not what enchantment,’ said this third woman to the princess. ‘ He can only come to visit us once every three years, and then but for a single night. No one knows what he does with the rest of his time.’

‘ All powerful Allāh will help us,’ said the disguised princess. ‘ There is no power or wisdom save in Him ! ’

So, when Prince Ahmed ben Amar came, both women questioned him anxiously, begging him tell what they might do to aid him.

From the Arabic

‘I indeed suffer from a sorcery,’ he said, ‘but no one can deliver me.’

‘You must not speak so,’ said the princess, who had by this time made herself known to him. ‘God will not refuse us His support, and perhaps we shall be able to do something for you.’

‘Very well ! This is what must be done : the first mouthful of kuskus must be subleised from my mouth without my noticing it, seven hairs must be dragged from my beard without my feeling it, I must be followed when I leave without my knowing it, I must be tracked whither I go without my seeing it, and in that place the mouthful must be cast down, the seven hairs must be burnt, and my follower must stay for a whole month without sleeping. At the end of the month a fish will come to that place, and spew me out of his mouth ; for I dwell within him, and can only leave his belly once every year. You see that all this is impossible ; therefore leave me in my wretched predicament.’

‘I will nevertheless try,’ answered the princess, who had a bold heart and came of a fine race.

Indeed the Prince’s third sister succeeded in subleising the first mouthful of kuskus, and in tearing out seven hairs from her brother’s beard while he slept. She gave the mouthful and the

Tales of Fez

hairs to the princess, who wrapped all in a handkerchief, and then followed Ahmed ben Amar to the seashore. There she beheld him go down and become ingulfed in a certain cave. Therefore, after casting down the mouthful and burning the hairs, she sat down near the entrance of this cave, and for a month her tears helped her to forego her sleep.

When the last day came, the poor girl was exceedingly fatigued, and sat there in continuous tears, thinking on the sad Destiny of him she loved. Only the hope of saving him sustained her in her task. As time went on, a peasant woman passed by and said to her :

‘ Oh, supernatural beauty, what do you here ?
O young girl unmeriting all misfortune, why do you weep so ? ’

Happy to see a human face once more, the princess told the new-comer her story (but she did not speak of the jewels which were hidden in her hair and which she had ever carefully preserved). Then, at the end of her strength, she slept.

The peasant woman set a stone beneath her head, so that her sleep might be the deeper ; but when Ahmed ben Amar, delivered by the month’s watching, came up out of the monstrous fish, which swam in to spew him upon the shore, she passed herself off as the princess by repeating

From the Arabic

the story which she had heard. The two returned to the city and were married.

The poor princess woke all alone beside the cave, and understood that she had been betrayed, for the stone which had shut the entrance had been moved aside. Following the footprints of the prince, she came to the city and learned that he was living with his wife in a beautiful house.

Instead of letting her grief overwhelm her, she went to a slave-merchant and, after causing him to stain her black all over, had herself sold to the Prince as a negress. Though her master did not recognise her, he learned to esteem her greatly because she worked very well, and, when at length he had children, he confided their education to the black slave. The children loved her very dearly.

One day she suggested to them that they should say to their father: 'We want Dādā to tell us a story.'

So when evening came the little children said to their father: 'We want Dādā to tell us a story.'

'It is not worth while,' said the Prince's wife, who had already recognised the princess-slave and had become very yellow in her anxiety. 'It is not seemly that slaves should tell night-tales.'

Tales of Fez

But the father gave way to his children and called the dādā, who at once began to tell a story. She began by describing the beautiful palace of her youth, with its series of dream verandahs which it would take a month to cross, its benches of male amber and yellow amber, its columns of right amber and musk, its jets of rose-water and orange-water, its emerald tiles with ruby incrustation, and telling of the handsome young man who walked beside the water.

‘Sit down near me, Dādā,’ said the Prince.

Then she described her illness, the Sultān’s anger, the eunuch’s pity, and how she herself had undertaken to destroy the fatal enchantment. ‘Come nearer to me, Dādā,’ said the Prince.

Then she told how she had stayed a month without sleeping, and had finally slept beside the cave, how the peasant woman had betrayed her, and how she had blackened herself and become a slave in order to live near her love. Finally she drew forth the royal jewels hidden in her hair.

‘Come nearer to me still,’ said the Prince. ‘Come nearer to me still, my darling. What shall be the punishment?’

He had the wicked peasant woman torn in sunder by two camels, and great feasts cele-

From the Arabic

brated his marriage to his dear one. Those two lived happily until the day on which the King of Death came seeking them.

Glory to the Living, who does not
die, to Whom alone
are due our
praises !

The Carpenter's Daughter

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLAH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a poor carpenter whose wife died in childbed, leaving a daughter on his hands ; in truth a beautiful baby, but one whose upkeep was like to be a grave burden upon her father, and who therefore seemed to have been born under very sad auspices. How could the unfortunate man take care of his child when he had no money, no relations, no slave, and was worn out by his work ?

But Allāh constitutes himself a Father to the fatherless.

As soon as he returned home after the burial of his wife and had anxiously opened his door, he found all the house as clean and well-arranged as when the dead woman had looked after these things. Better still, the cooking had been done and a meal set out. He had nothing to do but to wash his right hand, and dip it into the dish, saying : ‘ In the name of God ! ’ to drive away the devil.

To crown all, the little girl had been carefully swaddled and was sleeping peacefully.

From the Arabic

Yet there was no one there. And the miracle was repeated every day. A mysterious hand looked after the child and directed the house. The reason for these things was that the People of the Invisible had adopted the girl, and now looked after her and gave her suck. And she, being under the protection of the Jinn, developed with miraculous rapidity, growing greater, wick and lamp, by night and day.

When she was three, she seemed to be twelve, and her intelligence was remarkable. Her father had given her the name of Āishah, in memory of the favourite wife of the Prophet.

Now at that time there was a Sultān upon the throne who delighted in all fantastic things, and whose habit it was to ask strange questions, which his people had to answer on forfeit of their heads.

‘ Who will tell me,’ he asked, ‘ what the water-wheel says ? ’

Many persons had already been put to death for their silence, and at length the Sultān sent for Āishah’s father and asked him the same question, offering him a thousand dirhams or death.

But all that the carpenter could do was to obtain a delay of three days.

‘ Do not torment yourself so, my father,’ said Āishah, when she saw the good man return in terror to his house. ‘ Follow my advice. Do

Tales of Fez

not wait for the three days. What is the good of that ? Go to the Sultān to-morrow, sit down by the water-wheel which turns in the garden, stay there listening for a quarter of an hour, and then recite the verses which I am about to teach you.'

The carpenter did these things. After pretending to listen with great attention to the water-wheel as it turned, as it turned slowly groaning among the citrons and the jasmines, he advanced towards the throne of the Sultān, and said :

' O Commander of the Faithful, this is what the water-wheel says :

*I was a quince tree spreading perfume and
Giving all sorry lovers back their sighs.
The Sultān cursed me suddenly. I stand
A silly plank and weep from all my eyes.'*

Now you must know that the Sultān was afflicted with ringworm and hid the fact most carefully. One day the branch of a certain quince tree had knocked off his fez and surrounding turban, setting his head bare before all his following. Being furious that his malady was discovered, he had caused the tree to be cut down and a water-wheel made of its wood.

How had the carpenter known of this detail ? This seemed extraordinary to the Sultān, and he hurried to put a second question, giving a

From the Arabic

three days' respite as before. This time he required to know what the water sang as it boiled upon the fire.

And this time also young Āishah consoled her father, as he sat in his house groaning and brooding upon death.

'Go to the palace,' she said, 'sit down before the stove, lay your ear near to the kettle, and say to the Sultān :

*I was quick water, and the wood I fed
When I was living, burns me now I'm dead.'*

The Sultān had to be contented with this answer.

'But now I wish,' he said to the carpenter, 'that you bring me a vegetable garden on the back of a camel.'

This time the poor man gave up hope entirely.

'Beautiful verses will not help me now,' he said, 'for the matter is too material. My last hour is written for to-morrow.'

'How can you so lack courage?' asked the ingenious Lalla Āishah. 'You have only to ask for eight days' grace, and Allāh thereafter will provide !'

As soon as her father had obtained this delay, she set earth and dung in a saddle-tray and sowed various seeds within it.

At the end of a week all the vegetables had begun to sprout, and there was nothing left to

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do but to fasten the saddle-tray to the back of a camel.

But the Sultān propounded a further test.

‘You must come to me,’ he said, ‘at the same time mounted and on foot, and weeping and laughing at the same time.’

But it was weeping and by no means laughing that the carpenter returned to his own house.

‘Good-bye, my dearest daughter,’ he said.

‘Soon you will have no father at all.’

And he explained the Sultān’s strange and contradictory conditions to Āishah.

‘If it is only that,’ she said, ‘you may be quite tranquil. Go and find a quite little, little donkey, such a one as can walk between your legs without your sitting on him; also you must take some onions with you, for they can draw tears from your eyes without preventing your laughing at the same time.’

‘My daughter is a true Ifrītah,’ said the carpenter to himself next day as he made his entry into the palace in that bewildering fashion.

But though the Sultān could not help laughing, he was a little vexed also, and therefore he set a fifth problem, though promising that it should be the last.

‘Make me a robe out of a block of marble,’ he said.

‘Do not weep, my father,’ cried Āishah, when she heard of this. ‘Simply go back to the Sultān

From the Arabic

and require him to send you some threads of sand with which to sew the robe.'

The Sultān was quite disarmed by this request and gave the carpenter a rich reward ; at the same time he insisted upon knowing who had so wonderfully counselled him.

'It was my daughter, who has been raised, I think, by the Masters of Earth.'

'I wish her for my wife !' cried the King.

'For in truth no other could have shown such fine and handy intelligence.'

He took Lalla Āishah, the Carpenter's Daughter, for his legitimate Queen. And the two lived together for many happy days.

Now the Sultān frequently gave justice to his people at the palace entrance, and one day he had to judge between two men who were disputing over a new-born foal. One owned a gelding, the other a mare ; and both animals had dwelt in the same stable, with each of the men looking after them on alternate days.

'My mare was full,' said the plaintiff, 'and on the day when she was due to bring forth, it was my comrade's turn to look after the stable. When I entered in the evening, I saw the new-born foal under the gelding and not under my mare. O Commander of the Faithful, does it not nevertheless belong to me, in spite of this perfidious substitution ?'

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‘ May Allāh make the days of our master the Sultān innumerable,’ said the other. ‘ My animal is paſt peradventure the mother of the foal.’

Then said the Sultān : ‘ The foal belongs to the man under whose beaſt it was found. You may retire.’

Ulcerous with indignation, the maſter of the mare went aſide to hide his angry tears. Now the Queen’s window looked out upon the tribunal and Lalla Āiſhah had heard the ſentence pronounced. Therefore ſhe had pity on the unfortunate man and, without ſhowing herſelf, called to him through the lattice, aſking the cauſe of his grief.

‘ This is what you muſt do,’ ſhe ſaid. ‘ You muſt return to the Sultān and ſay to him : “ I ſowed my field near the river with grains of corn, but alas ! the fiſhes have eaten all the young ſhoots.” ’

‘ But do fiſh eat graſs and the like ? ’ cried the Sultān, with a great laugh.

So the owner of the mare, ſtill following the Queen’s advice, cried out : ‘ But do geldings bring forth ? ’

‘ Who told you to ſay that ? ’ ſaid the Sultān, and then low to himſelf : ‘ I only know one perſon in my kingdom capable.’

‘ I heard a voice through a window,’ answered the man, ‘ but I ſaw no one.’

From the Arabic

Being furious that his wife had spoken to a man, the Sultān ran to Lalla Āishah saying :

‘ I send you back to your father. You are no longer my Queen. But you have my permission to carry away with you a single chest filled with anything you most care to take.’

When that night came, Lalla Āishah mixed with the Sultān’s food a soporific dose sufficiently strong to keep him in a deep sleep for several hours ; then she placed him in the chest which it was her right to take away. Slaves followed her with it, and she took the road to the carpenter’s house.

The Jinn, who kept Lalla in the charge of their protection, had prepared all in the house for a reception of great splendour. As soon as the Sultān began to wake, a fortifying soup was given to him and, as he sat up, he began to admire the beauty of his surroundings.

‘ You are at my home, dear master,’ said Lalla Āishah. ‘ You gave me permission to bring away what was dearest to me.’

The Sultān threw himself at her feet, asking forgiveness for having suspected her, and thenceforward their happiness was

as perfect as it can be
among mortals.

Glory be to
Allāh !

The Language of the Birds

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a rich merchant in Fez who was in despair because he had no child. Also his advanced age seemed to forbid him any hope in this respect. But his desire was so great that he asked one of his friends, who lived at a great distance, to come to visit him and to give him advice. This friend was a magician. When he had consulted his art, he said :

‘ You will have a son.’

For he knew of the existence, in a far country, of a tree whose fruit infallibly rendered the eater fecund.

So he turned the ring of wisdom upon his finger and thus caused two colossal black men to appear before him, powerful Afārīt, whose feet were founded upon the earth and whose heads touched the tall sky.

‘ Why have you called us ? ’ they cried in a menacing tone. ‘ What work have you got for us ? Command and we shall obey.’

Then, on the magician’s order, they departed and plucked the fruit of the supernatural tree,



From the Arabic

which they brought back to the merchant and his wife, who both ate heartily of it.

Nine months afterwards a handsome boy was born, and his father took care to provide him with an excellent education at the best school in the city.

When the boy was ten years old, the merchant took him with him upon pilgrimage to Mecca. But before they arrived and while they were visiting a certain city of Egypt, they passed in front of a very strange school: through the delicately-carved lattice-work the pupils might be heard speaking in an unknown tongue. Father and son could distinguish nothing but *tiu tiu tiu kiwit kiwit kiwit tiu tiu tiu tiu*. . . .

‘That is the language of the birds. I teach it to my pupils,’ answered the master proudly, when the two strangers questioned him.

Allured by this original form of instruction and desirous of having his son grounded in every branch of learning, the merchant trusted the child to the old professor, giving him six little bags of gold to pay his fees until the day when he himself, having accomplished his pilgrimage, should return to take him back to Fez.

But two years passed and the father did not return. He had forgotten the way and had arrived at his own home without his son.

‘He fell into the sea,’ he explained to his wife,

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who thereupon became almost blind through weeping.

The merchant was a careless and self-centred man, and so, being absorbed in his business, he forgot his son for the whole of ten years, always putting off until the morrow that day on which he would set out to search for him. Yet a time came when he did at last go forth again on pilgrimage. He was more fortunate this time ; he found the city and the street and the school ; he heard *tiu tiu tiu kiwit kiwit* once more ; but he did not recognise the professor. Instead of the old man whom he had left, a very handsome youth of twenty was teaching the class. The merchant made inquiries and found that the master had stayed at home that day from illness, and that the best pupil was taking his place. When the old man had been fetched, he said, pointing to the young teacher :

‘Do you not recognise your son ? This is he whom you confided to my care ten years ago. He has become so learned that he can in all things take my place.’

The joyful merchant clasped his son in his arms and then, after thanking the old master, said farewell to him, with a present of new bags of gold to console him for the departure of his helper. The two now took boat for the Far West, and

From the Arabic

when they had been for some time in the open sea, three birds came to perch on the nettings and began to sing.

‘What are they saying?’ asked the father, but his son did not care to answer.

‘Chi chi chi tiu tiu tiu,’ cried the birds.

‘Why will you not tell me what they are singing?’ insisted the father, and many other rich men of Fez who were journeying with him began to mock him, saying :

‘It seems most profitable to pay money for the instruction of a son ! Why spend ten years in studying the language of the birds and then fail to interpret the very first birds that come to hand ?’

So, much against his heart, the young man gave way, and cried :

‘You insist on knowing what they say ? Very well, dear father. They say that I shall become a Sultān some day and you a porter.’

This prophecy was by no means to the old man’s taste, but he said nothing at the time. Yet he ruminated silently on his anger, and with such deep brooding that, when night fell, he went down into the hold, emptied one of his chests of its merchandise, and fastened his sleeping son within it. Then, when he had carefully closed down the lid, he threw the whole thing overboard.

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‘At least,’ he grumbled, ‘I shall not be lying to my wife this time when I say he fell into the sea. That will be God’s truth.’

And the ship continued on her way towards the Fortunate Empire.

When he came to the city of Moulay Idrīs, the old merchant found that his house had been completely burnt to the ground; and it took him several days to discover his wife, who had had to become a washerwoman to gain her bread. After these two ancient people had dragged out a miserable existence for some time, they decided to leave their native city; broken by age and worn with grief they crossed Bou Jloud, passed under Bab Segma, and went forth to find their fortune in some other place. So much for them.

There was, during that time, a certain poor fisherman who lived in a town by the sea and scarcely contrived to earn his livelihood. On a particular day he was in a very bad temper, because his wife had just been brought to bed of a daughter. A daughter—that is to say, a mouth to feed and no honourable incentive to do so. To put a crown upon his misfortune, he fished from sunrise and his net brought him in nothing. Therefore, in his discouragement, he climbed up again to the beach and sat

From the Arabic

there on the sand, with his head between his palms.

Lifting his eyes of a sudden, the fisherman saw a large chest floating upon the waves and being carried towards the shore. He therefore got back into his boat and, setting out towards this stray, brought it immediately back to his house. When his wife and himself at last succeeded in opening their booty, they saw that it contained a handsome young man dressed in rich garments.

‘Are you man or Jinnī?’ they cried in their astonishment.

‘I am a man of flesh and bone even as you are; therefore do not fear me,’ said the young man, and while they comforted him with a very hot soup and showed him all sorts of attention springing from pure pity, he continued:

‘You are henceforward my only parents. See, here is money which I had stowed away in my wallet. Take it, and also sell these expensive garments, since I have no use for them.’

Now this young man, who had been born, as must be remembered, under marvellous conditions, and educated in an exceptional manner, was a Luck-Bringer. He carried good fortune with him.

From the day on which the youth began to live at the fisherman’s house, that good man

Tales of Fez

always had excellent catches, and joy dwelt in the home. And the young man, for his part, being very learned, frequented the schools and the mosques and the University of that place, and became the intimate friend of the kādī's son. Now the Sultān of that place was considerably annoyed. Every day while he was sitting among the people of his court, three birds would come about him and vivaciously chatter for several moments, as if they were asking each other something. Then they would fly away, but only after having, O abomination !, done their needs on the head of Sidna* himself.

The Sultān had offered the half of his kingdom to anyone who would deliver him from this calamity ; but death was to be the penalty of one who should make the attempt and fail. Many persons had thus had their heads cut off, and none had been able to explain the mystery. Therefore, as the kādī bore the reputation of being very learned, the Sultān sent for him and gave him eight days in which to arrange the matter.

We can imagine that it was in a state of much depression that the unfortunate kādī left the palace. At the University where he taught, he cut short the time of his class, and all his pupils remarked his anxiety. When he had returned home, he put his affairs in order as if he

From the Arabic

were presently to die, and told his son of the Sultān's bidding.

That evening the fisherman's adopted son, the young man who had been saved from the waters, met his young friend, and noticed his sadness. He asked him concerning it, and learnt of the doom which hung over the kādī's head.

'If it be only that,' he said, 'do not torment yourself. I will get you clear of the business. It is useless to wait for eight days. Let your father present himself before the Sultān to-morrow, and I will go with him.'

The next day, when he stood with the kādī in the palace, he saluted the Sultān three times and then asked him if he would give the half of his kingdom in case of success. The three birds had already come and were beginning to chatter. 'Yes,' said Sidna.

'Let the notaries come, then, to register the deed of gift,' said the prudent young man, and, when this had been done, he began to speak with the birds. It sounded an incomprehensible exchange of: tiu tiu tiu—kiwit kiwit—chi chi chi—tiu tiu tiu.

'They ask justice,' he said at length, turning towards the King. 'They are two males and one female. This on the left is from the East, this other is from the West. The female

Tales of Fez

belonged to the latter, but he was absent for a very long time on a journey. Thinking him dead, she married the other and lived with him for a year. They demand that the Sultān should decide upon their case.'

But the Sultān felt himself very embarrassed.

'If you wish, O Prince of Believers, I will give judgment in your place, and all shall be made plain.'

When the Sultān acceded to this suggestion, the young man said to the bird who came from the East :

'Go towards the East !'

To him who came from the West :

'Go towards the West !'

And to the female :

'Follow him you love !'

When the two male birds had obeyed, the female followed her first husband into the West without a moment's hesitation.

All who were present became filled with marvel, but the Sultān regretted that he had to give half his kingdom away for a few *tiu tiu tiu*'s, and was not ready to sign the act which the notaries had drawn. Then the young man threatened to call all the birds of the world to that place, that they might behave upon Sidna as the first three had done.

Indeed he called out certain orders in the

From the Arabic

language of the birds, and immediately the Sultān saw the sky growing dark above his head. All the birds of every kind from every land of all the earth were assembled above that court; and there was a fine concert of tiu tiu tiu's. Then said the young man :

‘I will order them all together to do their businesses upon you if you do not fulfil your promise.’

The Sultān had to yield, and the birds departed. Nor did the royal ill-humour continue, for the young man was so amiable and seductive that none might help loving him. He caused the fisherman and his wife to be brought to the palace and dressed in the dresses of kings and of kings' sons, and they gave thanks to Heaven that they had been granted this most fortunate youth. Seven days afterwards the old Sultān died, leaving the kingdom to the young man who understood the language of the birds.

In the meantime his real parents, who had left Fez in their ruin, had come at last to that very city.

‘Try to get work as a porter,’ the old woman advised her husband. ‘I will myself again become a washerwoman. We can meet this evening.’ And with that the old man went to the small square near the ramparts, where those

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who wished to be hired as porters used to wait for work.

On that same day the Sultān bade his master of the palace to have wood laid in for the Winter. Therefore the master of the palace told his eunuchs to go out and engage porters for this work. Thus it was that the father became, according to the prediction of the birds, a porter in that city where his son was Sultān.

The old man was not at all accustomed to manual work, for, in his whole life, he had hardly ever done anything except sell goods and count over money. Therefore the eunuch, who was overseeing his labour, saw that he did his task ill and gave him a few blows with a rope to encourage him, while the two went on towards the palace.

The Sultān, who was reclining upon the terrace, recognised his father. He would doubtless have liked to know the old man's reason for throwing him into the sea, but his heart was too generous to nurture thoughts of revenge. Seeing his frail old father staggering under the blows of the eunuch, he sent down a message bidding them exchange their parts. Thus the porter took the rope and the eunuch the burden. Now, as the father was a much less generous man than his son, he gave back many

From the Arabic

more blows than he had received and was lashing his persecutor furiously when the two entered the palace. But, when a further order was brought from the Sultān that he should be led into the great hall, he began to feel afraid and asked himself if he were not going to be punished for having ill-treated a royal servant. While he was busy with such thoughts, the Sultān entered and began to question him concerning his existence.

‘Have you a family, a son, a wife?’ This he asked because he wished to have news of his mother.

‘I have never had a son,’ said the old man, whose conscience was not very clear upon this point. ‘But I have a wife who is very old and feeble and does washing.’

‘Go and fetch her,’ ordered the Sultān to two of his eunuchs.

These were not very pleased at this command, since its execution would not bring them anything; but the order was a formal one. After a long search in every place, they managed to find a house where a strange washerwoman had just been employed, and returned to the palace with the old woman.

All who are concerned in this story were thus brought together.

‘Poor woman,’ said the Sultān in deep emotion.

Tales of Fex

‘What misfortune has brought you down to this?’

‘Alas, O Sultān, my husband has caused all our grief by losing our son.’

‘Would you recognise your son?’

‘Yes, yes, Lord! He has a beauty-spot on his right shoulder.’

Immediately the Sultān undressed, showing his bare right arm, and embraced his mother, who wept exceedingly in her joy. He pardoned his father, and ordered slaves to wash the two old people at the hammām and to dress them in the garments of kings and the sons of kings.

Henceforward he lived with his real and his adopted parents; his reign was a long one and in every way fortunate for his subjects.

*The Kaftān of Love Spotted
with Passion*

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a man who had three daughters and, wishing to depart on pilgrimage, asked each of them what he should bring back for her. ‘Gold and silver bracelets crusted with gems,’ said the eldest. ‘Gilded slippers,’ said the second. But the youngest asked time to reflect before she answered. As soon as she found herself alone in her own chamber, a Jinniah appeared before her, saying :

‘Ask your father to bring you The Kaftān* of Love Spotted with Passion.’ Then she disappeared. When the moment came for her father’s departure, the little one asked him for The Kaftān of Love Spotted with Passion, and the good man, promising to find it for her, set forth upon the road of Allāh. He accomplished his pilgrimage to the sacred city and bought fine bracelets there for the eldest daughter, and gilded slippers for the second. But he forgot the kaftān.

Yet when he was half-way home he remem-

Tales of Fez

bered his promise and asked this garment of all he met. Everyone thought that he was mad. Some laughed in his face, others answered him gently that they did not know, yet others sighed in silence and made off as quickly as possible. But no one helped him at all in the matter.

At length, one day, he met, in a certain solitary place, a venerable old man sitting at the foot of a tree in deep meditation, and having white hair and a white beard which fell below his knees. When the man asked his usual question, the sheikh made answer :

‘ My poor child, what are you seeking ? Do you not know that it is impossible for a human to see the Kaftān of Love ? Yet, if you absolutely hold to the attempt, you must follow my instructions point by point. After a half-day’s journey from this place you will reach a very great tree. Sit down below it and wait. You will be given seven dishes on a wooden tray, one after the other. Taste of each of them and then go down to the edge of the sea ; drink a few mouthfuls of her water and then wait. Have courage, and God accord you peace ! ’

The traveller followed this advice, and all came to pass as the sheikh had said. Soon after he had drunk of the water of the sea, a being with the appearance of a man came up out of the waves, and said to him :

From the Arabic

‘He who has eaten of our food and drunken of our water is worthy to be given the desire of his heart. Why have you come here, and what do you wish?’

‘I wish,’ answered the father, ‘The Kaftān of Love Spotted with Passion.’

‘That is well,’ said the mysterious being. ‘Cast yourself into the sea, and you shall see what you shall see.’

So the man dived, and soon found a door below the waves. He passed through this, and came into the courtyard of a vast palace, where slaves were walking. ‘What do you wish?’ asked one of them. ‘The Kaftān of Love,’ he answered. ‘Come into this room,’ said the slave.

The man obeyed, and saw a male figure of imposing aspect, seated upon a splendid throne in the middle of that room. He saluted the seated figure three times, as we salute Sultāns, and asked him for the Kaftān of Love.’

The being welcomed him kindly and gave him a morsel of sandal-wood.

‘Hand it to the girl who wishes the thing,’ he advised, ‘and tell her to put henna upon herself, to wash her room very carefully, to go to the hammām, and then, after shutting herself in alone, to burn a small piece of this wood, and may God give you peace!’

Tales of Fez

Being delighted that he would be able to pleasure all his three daughters, the traveller returned home, gave his presents, and carefully repeated to his youngest the advice of the King of the Jinn.

The young girl, with no delay, did all that she had to do, and, when she had burned a little of the sandal-wood, a troop of beings, carrying lanterns, came and knocked at the door of the house, crying to the merchant to give his youngest daughter to them. If he should ever wish to see her again, he had but, they said, to go to a certain place and call her with his mind, and they themselves would then appear to conduct him to his child.

The girl departed fearlessly with them, and came to the palace of the Kaftān of Love. There she was placed in a room with a little negro to serve her, who gave her dinner and then made tea for her; but, in the last glass of tea which she drank, he placed a pinch of powder which plunged her into a profound sleep.

Now the Kaftān of Love was a Jinnī of the race of the Jinn, who had fallen in love with the young girl as he flew through the air one day and saw her sitting beautifully and gently at her window. He was the son of the King of that submarine palace, and the palace itself

From the Arabic

communicated by a glass pipe with the room where the child had been established. The Kaftān of Love now came by way of the glass pipe and joyfully contemplated the object of his love. He did not wake the little person, but lay down beside her until morning and departed before she was awake.

He did the same thing every day, and the girl's life went forward thus ; for the small negro put her to sleep every evening with banj before the coming of her mysterious husband. At the end of some months she began to grow rather weary, since she did nothing but eat and sleep, and saw no human face save that of the little slave. During this time also, her sisters began to regret her absence and ardently desired to see her. At their request, the merchant went to the place which he had been told to visit and sat down with closed eyes, thinking of his daughter. When he opened them again at the end of a moment, he found himself on the shore of the sea, and saw a little negro coming towards him, who asked him what he wished.

‘I have come to take my daughter home,’ he answered, ‘for her sisters wish to see her.’

‘No good will come of such a departure.’

‘I am resolved upon it, and her sisters have a great need to see her once again.’

‘I will go and tell my master.’

Tales of Fez

With that the slave departed, and presently returned with the announcement that the Kaftān of Love consented to his wife's leaving at the important hour of evening prayer, on condition that the little negro himself came to fetch her back on the morrow at the same time.

The father promised, shut his eyes once more, and found himself at home. And that very evening his daughter knocked at the door, accompanied by the little negro.

After they had tenderly embraced her, her mother and her two sisters questioned her about her husband and her life :

‘ Are you happy ? Where do you live ? ’

‘ Down there,’ she answered.

‘ And your husband ? What sort of man is he ? Does he love you ? Is he kind to you ? Where does he live ? ’

‘ Down there,’ she answered simply, and would add nothing more.

But when night had come and she went in to lie down with her sisters, these pressed her with new questions and sought for detailed information about this mysterious husband and his life.

‘ I have never seen my husband ! ’ she confessed at length. ‘ I only see the little negro who looks after me and gives me all I want. Every evening he makes tea, and I always go to sleep

From the Arabic

after the last glass. In the morning I always wake alone upon my bed.'

'Oh, how can you endure to live under such conditions?' cried her sisters. 'It is all too monotonous and too mysterious. You do not even know who your husband is. This cannot go on. You must follow our advice. Here are a napkin, a candle and some matches. To-morrow, when the little negro gives you the glass of tea, you must not drink it; you must pour it into this napkin, and then pretend to go to sleep. Thus you shall see all.'

Delighted with the idea of making plain her own dark problem, the young girl departed on the morrow with the little negro, who had come punctually to fetch her, and did all that her sisters had told her.

Thinking her asleep, the little negro took her in his arms and laid her on the bed. Then the Kaftān of Love came by way of the glass pipe, ate the rest of the supper, drank tea, and lay down to sleep by the side of his human wife, after having tenderly regarded and caressed her. When she was sure that he slept, she took the candle out of her pocket, lighted it and brought it near the face of the Jinnī.

She saw a very handsome young man lying by her, whose lids were closed and whose breast rose and fell regularly beneath a kaftān

Tales of Fez

of silk. Looking more closely at this garment, she noticed that the button-holes which closed it were each provided with a little padlock and a tiny key. Pricked on by curiosity, she worked the locks and opened the kaftān . . . and lo ! she found herself descending a great stairway into a vast house. Following the steps, she came first to a room filled with gold bars, then to one filled with powdered gold, and lastly to one cumbered with all kinds of precious stones. When she had visited these three, she ascended the staircase and shut all the padlocks. But, through her clumsiness, a drop of boiling wax fell from the candle on to the face of her husband, who woke in a very bad temper, divining all that had passed.

‘I was right to say that your journey to your father’s house had not good fortune in it.’

‘It was written,’ she answered humbly. ‘It was my Destiny. But my intention was by no means evil.’

‘I am willing to pardon you this time. But you must never return to your father’s house again.’ After that day, the Kaftān of Love came openly into his wife’s presence, without having her first sent to sleep with powdered banj. They lived thus together for six months, and at the end of that time the girl’s father came as before to ask leave to lead her back to his house. The

From the Arabic

little negro made known his master's intention in this matter, but the father so insisted that he was at length received by the Kaftān of Love in person, who told him that he had pardoned his wife her first indiscretion, but that he would certainly not stomach a second one. With this warning he allowed her to be absent again, between the important hours of the evening prayer of two days.

As soon as she arrived, her sisters questioned her anew, and she told them how she had succeeded, thanks to their stratagem, in seeing her husband, who now no longer hid himself from her.

‘What is his name?’ they asked.

‘I do not know. I have never questioned him about it.’

‘You must do so. And if he refuses to answer, you must sulk, you must become sad, you must refuse to eat and drink and speak, until he gives way and tells you his name. That is how it pays to behave with men.’

The little one answered by hearing and obeisance and, as soon as she arrived back at her own place, assumed a most dejected air, bitterly complaining to her husband that he had never told her his name.

The Kaftān of Love was indeed angry at this, and he answered that he would never tell his

Tales of Fez

name, since it was infinitely better that she should not know.

‘ My husband does not love me any more,’ she cried with a burst of tears. ‘ How can a woman live if she does not know her husband’s name ? ’ And she repulsed all the dishes which the little slave brought to her. Then, after she had sulked for a long time, she returned to the assault.

‘ I cannot tell you. Be quiet ! ’ said her husband.

But it is not easy to come to the end of a woman’s obstinacy. In final exasperation, the Jinnī went out into the courtyard and, by breathing air strongly into his lungs, began to swell and grow greater and greater, until his head was as high as the roof of the house. Then he cried several times in a horrible great voice :

‘ My name is The Kaftān of Love Spotted with Passion ! The Kaftān of Love ! The Kaftān of Love Spotted with Passion ! ’

Then, seizing his wife in his giant hands, he took her up and cast her far off into
a terrible deserted
place. . .

*Sayings and Adventures of the
Sultān's Dādā*

THERE WAS ONCE A SULTĀN IN FEZ—BUT Allāh is the only Sultān and reigns for ever—who was wiser and more just and glorious than any who have come after. But the sole Wise and the sole Just and the sole Glorious is Allāh. And this Sultān's mother had died as he was born, so that the milk and influence of his boyhood had depended upon a nurse picked from among the negro women in Fez by the unanimous voice of all the doctors and wise men of his father's court. When this Sultān came to the throne, he continued to pay great respect to his dādā, and allowed her a place of special licence in the women's and the men's parts of the palace.

For she was a woman of note ; she was hideous and wise and very fat ; her face made the birds flying in heaven drop their eggs out of due time ; her swift answers put every procuress to shame ; she was as lustful as a sparrow, as shameless as a bride, and had a kind heart.

I will tell you some of the things she said and did.

It happened once that the Sultān looked at and desired a very beautiful slave girl, belonging to an unimportant man about the court. But her

Tales of Fez

owner loved her, and, with many expressions of respect, refused to sell her. At length the Sultān grew angry, and offered the man the choice of selling or death. Then he had the girl weighed against her weight in gold pieces, and gave these to the man, who went forth from the Presence with a broken heart.

Later that day the Sultān boasted to Dādā of his generosity; but she refused to extol him for it.

Yet, when the time came for the noon meal on the following day, after the Sultān had blunted the first edge of his desire with the girl, Dādā intercepted the slave who was bringing the chief dish into the Presence, and took it from him. Now this dish was the Sultān's favourite, of skewered mutton-chops with a peculiar sauce. Throwing these out of the dish, Dādā made a great motion in their place, and then covered all again with the original blue silk. Afterwards she carried the dish into the Presence, saying to the Sultān that she would that day serve him herself because of his generosity. But, when she uncovered the terrible contents of the dish and the Sultān, stopping his eyes and nose with his hand, ordered all the palace cooks to be put to death, she said: 'What does it matter? They are of the same weight, my son. They are even a trifle more, for this dish has no bones.'

From the Arabic

One morning the Sultān, who had eaten and drunken too heavily the night before and was distempered, allowed his spleen to overcome his usual subtlety in statecraft, and, between two envoys, the one over-honest and the one over-suave, made the less advantageous alliance.

As night fell on that day he sent for Dādā and asked her to mix him sherbert in a fashion which she only knew. 'Hearing is obedience!' she answered and, shuffling off her ponderous slippers, smacked the Sultān's cheeks hard with them, once on the right and once on the left. 'O filthy Dādā!' cried the Sultān, 'how long shall I bear you? You have earned death by doing this.'

'It is my misfortune,' answered Dādā, getting again into her slippers. 'You lost your wits this morning, my son, I have just found them.' Dādā lay once on the marble of the harīm privy, taking great pleasure with a big green vegetable marrow. As matters were in ecstasie train, her favourite little girl of all the Sultān's women entered the privy, picking her nose with her finger, thinking herself quite alone. 'O child,' gasped out Dādā to the intruder, 'what is the use of trying to teach you manners?'

A madman was arrested by the guards in a certain street in Fez, while he was disturbing the citizens and crying: 'Even Maghrib is a

Tales of Fex

shadow, and we shadows on that shadow, and the Sultān a shadow upon us shadows.' As he was an object for mockery, he was dragged into the Presence, and the Sultān mocked him, and all the court mocked him, and the grand-wazīr mocked him, saying: 'He is so dull of perception that if he were beaten he would say it rains.'

After this the Sultān, wishing a special mock that should transcend all which went before, sent for Dādā and, when she entered the dīwān, said to her: 'Come, Dādā, this madman has said to the people: "Even Maghrib is a shadow, and we shadows on that shadow, and the Sultān a shadow upon us shadows." We have all mocked him as cleverly as we could, and our grand-wazīr has said: "He is so dull of perception that if he were beaten he would say it rains." Come now, excel yourself, Dādā, and say what you say.'

So Dādā, who hated the grand-wazīr, considered and then said: 'This matter of shadows and of shadows upon shadows is too high for me. But as for your most gracious grand-wazīr, it seems to me that his mind is so shining bright that only if his body were burned would he be at peace with himself.'

But the madman was beaten, and Dādā behaved in an outrageous fashion for many days.

From the Arabic

One day when the Sultān, who was devoted to his horses, wandered without an attendant among the stables, he saw a large groom, in stooping to make water, display a very great inheritance. At the same moment Dādā, who had been rather drunk all day and had also perceived the magnificence of the groom, came out and put a handful of gold pieces into the man's palm. As the Sultān watched without either of the two noticing him, Dādā lay down and made ready to receive the wonderful merchandise for which she had paid. But, just before the thing could take place, the Sultān ran forward, brandishing his sword. The groom fled, and Dādā reluctantly covered herself.

'O disgraceful Dādā, O blot upon our reign !' cried the Sultān. But Dādā, rolling over in the muck, answered : 'Better disgrace than death.' Then, unwrapping one of her great nipples, she sorrowfully continued : 'Not once did I deny you this, my child. And yet your need was never greater than mine.'

Dādā chanced to break wind in the very Presence, and the Sultān, growing angry at this, called her the daughter of a wanton bitch. 'You must be wrong, my son,' answered the old woman with a sigh. 'Qualities descend from mother to daughter, and a bitch can reach many parts of herself that I cannot.'

Tales of Fez

There was a time when the Sultān doted on a girl who was sent to him, and let his spirit be occupied with her to the exclusion of all other things. She was beautiful and very frail and most evil. Her breasts and flanks were slighter than is thought fitting, and her body was everywhere as cool as those of little children. Her mind was a knot of serpents, both poisonous and quick in doing ; and her life had the tenure of the flame of a match in a garden. After some months in which she had wound and interwound the affairs of Maghrib into subtle confusion, while the Sultān hung upon her soft red lip, the breath of Allāh blew upon that light flame and the girl died. She was prepared and set out, and the Sultān, throwing aside his turban and tearing his face, lay down over her knees.

As he was murmuring : ‘ O slight one of my reign, O wild dove, I die with you, I die with you, even I, the King ! ’, Dādā, who had ventured near, cried : ‘ Well done, my child ! Those are the first wise words I have heard in Fez for seven months. A girl like that is better to die with than to live with.’ Then the Sultān, who had not heard Dādā’s terrible voice for a long time, rolled away from the body and sat up and wept. At last he smiled, and then laughed so that he fell over on his backside.

From the Arabic

It was the Sultān's custom to take Dādā with him, when she was not overcome with drinking and could walk very softly, on his secret visits of inspection among his women.

One night, instead of remaining with his immediate favourite as all the girls had thought he would, he called his nurse to him, and the two made progress among the other rooms of the harīm.

As ill-fortune would have it, when they came to the chamber of a certain girl called Narcissus Petal, who was Dādā's preferred of all the women, and looked through a contrived lattice, they saw her clasping, with a great exchange of sighs and poetry, and among the remains of feasting, a rich young merchant, as fair as the full moon, who had been introduced in women's clothes into the secret places of the palace. The Sultān rushed in upon these two, crying for the bearer of his sword to kill them, but Dādā ran past him, and behaved as if she was demented. Before the astonished eyes of all three, she seized a banana which lay upon the floor near a bowl of flavoured rice cream, and thrust the fruit, with sighs and groans of delight, several times into the sweet dish. Then, changing her expression from amatory to a fine imitation of great wrath, she mashed the banana beneath her naked feet and dashed the bowl in

Tales of Fez

pieces against the wall, crying: 'Thus! thus! They have deserved to die!'

'O bestial Dādā,' cried the Sultān, while the guilty couple cowered before him, 'why do you do this?' Panting excessively, 'I have taken vengeance on the two vile things,' Dādā replied, and then, throwing her dirty kerchief to the culprits, she said: 'You are under my protection. The Sultān may not imitate the slave.'

When Dādā felt death coming to her, and took to the place where she lay, the Sultān would not leave her by day or night. At last she said: 'A thing troubles me, my son.' 'What is that?' asked the Sultān between his tears, and Dādā replied: 'God does not allow a black person into His Compassion.' Then she fell silent. Afterwards she smiled, and said: 'But you, my son, are a King, and yet you have put up with this black old bitch because she was amusing. Have you not put up with me? Have you not needed me?' 'O Dādā,' answered the weeping Sultān, 'I have indeed put up with you, I have indeed needed you.' 'Then,' she said in delight, 'Allāh, who is also a King, may perhaps put up with me; He may need an amusing black old bitch in His Paradise.'

After Dādā had been buried, the Sultān pro-

From the Arabic

claimed mourning for a year in the whole of Maghrib, and himself tasted no joy for that period. A poet said of her at the time :

*Dādā was very large and black,
Greater and darker is our lack.*

The End.

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Volume 5
The Loves of
Rādhā and Krishna
and Amores of
Amaru and Mayūra



E A S T E R N L O V E



THE LOVES OF RĀDHĀ
AND KRISHNA AND
AMORES



ENGLISH VERSIONS FROM
THE BENGALI OF CHANDĪDĀSA
AND FROM THE SANSKRIT
OF AMARU AND MAYŪRA BY
E. POWYS MATHERS



*

VOLUME V

*



JOHN RODKER
FOR SUBSCRIBERS
LONDON '1928

for
D. V.

MADE IN ENGLAND

THIS EDITION OF CHANDĪDĀSA FROM THE BENGALI, AND AMARU AND MAYŪRA FROM THE SANSKRIT, BEING VOLUME 5 OF "EASTERN LOVE," IS HERE TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH FOR THE FIRST TIME, BY E. POWYS MATHERS. THE EDITION OF 1,000 COPIES ON ALL RAG PAPER WAS PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY AND SONS, LTD., BUNGAY, SUFFOLK. THE COPPER PLATE ENGRAVINGS ARE BY HESTER SAINSBURY AND HAVE BEEN HAND PRINTED AND HAND COLOURED BY MESSRS. A. ALEXANDER AND SONS, LTD. FOR THE NUMBER OF THIS SET SEE VOLUME I

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*The Loves of
Rādhā and Krishna
from the Bengali
of Chāṇḍīdāsa*

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BENGAL has always been the home of sensuous mysticism, and Chandīdāsa, the first great vernacular poet of Bengal, was intensely a lover and a mystic. His date was about 1400 A.D.; we know at least, on the evidence of one of his poems, that he had composed 996 songs before the year 1403. He was born in Chhātnā in the Birbhum district, but moved in early life to the neighbouring village of Nānnura, ten miles to the south-east of Bolpur, where a mound is still exhibited as the site of his house. There he discharged priestly functions in the temple of Vāsulī Devī, until proclaimed by beat of drum to have "fallen from the Brahmanic order" because he loved Rāmi, a washer-girl. In spite of attempts at reinstatement by his brother Nakula, Chandīdāsa remained for the rest of his life an outcast, known in affection among the villagers as mad Chandī, and was killed, singing his latest songs, by the collapse of a house roof.

The majority of Chandīdāsa's songs, other than those composed for Rāmi, deal with the love of Rādhā for Krishna. They sound that note in the intellectual life of his time of the soul turning in on itself to brood over the love of God for Man and of Man for God. R. W. Fraser says that Chandīdāsa sang a "wail of love in which the soul, personified as Rādhā, pours forth his love for the Divine, incarnate in Krishna."

Briefly it may be said that, while the language of the

people was still groping among unconscious folk pastoral, the vernaculars of Bengal and Behar were suddenly enhanced by two men of universal genius, Chandīdāsa and Vidyāpati, precursors of the great Bengali constellation of the sixteenth century.

The significance of Chandīdāsa's songs with reference to Vaiṣṇava theology, to the manifold interpretations of erotic themes in Indian religious literature, and to the poetry of sex in general are dealt with in the Essay at the end of this series.

I have translated from a most satisfactory French linking and shortening of Chandīdāsa's songs by Man'ha, published last year; but have allowed myself an occasional divergence suggested by a friend who examined the original text for me.

PART
I
DAWN

HARI,* THE SON OF NANDA, SITTING ONE day in the shadow of a tree with his companions and keeping his herd of cows, said after silence, looking upon his friend Subala :
 ‘Tell me what I must do, and why my heart is hot ; for I cannot bear it. What ill is burning out my life ? Listen to me, and expound my suffering.’

‘The pain is in your heart,’ answered Subala.
 ‘What more can I say of it than that ? A vision has taken your glances unaware.’

Krishna said : ‘I am about to translate what passes in my heart. Yet my vision was so deep that a confused trouble as of flames followed upon it. Show me some cure, for my body is a prey to sorrow, and knows no respite.

‘Yesterday Dhavalī, the white cow, wandered unseen toward the forest by Brikvanupur. I sought her in many places. I followed the prints of her feet through the woods of Brikvanu. Dhavalī had joined with the cows of another.

‘That which I then saw is now unsayable, and my heart is overwhelmed in telling. I saw her, as soft as a shadow, leaving the royal house of Brikvanu.

‘She went with a friend and bore a gold jar at

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

her hip, the aureole of her beauty shone like a thousand moons, an unstill radiance brightened from her face.

‘I saw her as in a dream, and she shook my life.’

O Yadunatua, says the poet Chandīdāsa, the hour will come when you shall understand this mystery.

Chandīdāsa

II

‘ SHE departed, a figurine of gold, and plunged me into nameless trouble.

‘ She wore a blue sārī ; her belly gave itself to be guessed through her garment ; her beauty broke forth like light by all her veils.

‘ How shall I tell of her ? Her glances were ever moving, and knew no rest. She wore so many and so costly ornaments, it seemed as if a thousand gold bees had alighted upon her.

‘ When she walked, I knew the gliding of a wild swan across the waters.

‘ The music of her gold rings sent up the fifth note of the scale from her slim ankles, and was as suave as honey.

‘ She balanced carelessly as she passed by. She balanced carelessly.

‘ We could have seized her lioness waist between our hands as if it had been the neck of a water jar.

‘ That is the image of delight I saw with my own eyes. When she laughed, a nectar seemed to fall from her eyelids in a hundred drops.’

It is thus, says the poet Chandīdāsa, that the Princess showed to Krishna.

Rādbā and Krishna

III

‘I saw her, and the character of her beauty beat upon my soul. After she had looked at me, I lost all knowledge.

‘I returned, leading Dhavalī, the white cow. Subala, are you listening?

‘When shall I see that miracle again? It is something new to the world. Subala, my friend, can you hear me?

‘Ah, who can understand my grief? For I am so cast away. When this meeting returns suddenly, to whom may I tell it?

‘Since yesterday a thing, born in the deep of my heart, torments my life.

‘I know not hunger or thirst. Weariness is far from me when I lie down. I have the same dream, and sometimes my soul is heavy.

‘What is this thing in my corroded heart? My life has become as a mad elephant. The harmony of my soul is shattered.’

O Prince of Love, says the poet Chandīdāsa, you shall see her again, you shall touch her with your hands; of that you may be certain.

Chandīdāsa

IV

‘HER glance came forth like the light of a cloud. She mingled with her companions, and they followed her.

‘She wore a collar of pearl. Her deep glances combined a multitude of diverse colours and intentions. The hornet dashed himself towards the perfume of her body with the booming of a vibrant bell.

‘Sometimes she lifted a fold of her sārī, then covered herself again with a quick movement. She leaned upon the shoulder of her companion with a gesture of tenderness, and was curious of that which passed by.

‘She showed me her laughing glance, and I lost my soul to it. Tints played about her to the rhythm of her steps, and each drew forth my life.

‘Moonlike clarity shone from the ends of her fingers. She killed the souls of those she looked upon. The arrow of her glances pierced my flank, then ploughed a red way to my breast. Yet my heart was so stirred that I never felt it. I was lost when I saw her.

. . .

‘I saw her leaning upon the shoulder of her companion and passing along the road. She

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showed forth the works of Madana, the god of love.

'She glanced with laughter.

‘Friend of my heart, is it possible that I shall ever clasp her?’

‘ Her long collar of blue pearl, falling upon
her robe, girded her beauty. The new moon
is girded with a net of stars.

‘ Her breasts were two gold cups turned down.
How did God make them ?

‘ Ah, let her wish to make me an offering of all her laughers, and of the joy which abides within her !

‘I saw this miracle decked with her jewels and the light of her eyes. My patience will not much longer remain my patience.

‘ O tender friend, her regard was full of sorcery,
and shook my reason.

‘ Her face was as a weeping cup, was as a love snare.

‘ She kissed the end of her hair, then, twisting her body twice to catch at it, she set it high again upon her neck.

‘She held her falling sārī with one finger, and, seeing this, we fell a prey to all temptation. Madana himself grew enviously sad.

‘How can I hold my heart? This girl, appearing to me with her hair upon the bank of the river, has taken away my weapons.’

Chandīdāsa

‘She was immaculate. Her teeth caused us to dream of pearl last night, and when she laughed it was as if the moon came out of her mouth.’

‘My soul was mad. Her beauty broke up the sea of my heart by mirroring within it. The vile envelope of my being alone remained to me, for the life of my soul has fled away with her.’

‘I saw her passing along the road in day’s decline, and my eyes knew a contentment. I did not recognise her. Who would have dared to look steadily upon such a one?’

‘The beauty of her sārī added but little to her grace ; her grace ennobled all her jewels.

‘She wore a ring upon her left ring-finger, and carried a gold cup in her hand.

‘The division of her hair was tinted with vermilion, her eyes were underlined with a blue kohl. Pearl pendants beautified each nostril. The clinging of her azure sārī showed me the line of her body in profile.

‘ Who has my heart? I have consecrated it to the feet of this girl, and would be her slave. Her breasts outstand like hills; her gold cup shines in my spirit.

'She looked slowly. She stepped lightly.

‘She did not dare to let her glances linger upon me because of her companions, for she is noble.

‘ There is no image possible of her movement.

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‘ She walked in peace.

‘ Who has prayed long to the Lord of Umā * that he might obtain her? To whom has she been accorded?

‘ The light of her face is moonrise, making the soul tremble and the dark afraid.

‘ Who would dare to compare her breasts with the fruit of the bel tree?

‘ Her collar of gold pearl, shining with light borrowed from her, fell to her knees. It was as long as the unrolled trunk of a royal elephant.

‘ It was a chain to bind young men. Madana was confused, and did not venture to lift up his face.

‘ Gold bracelets were about her wrists.

‘ Her waist was as the waist of a lioness, the curve of a domri *.

‘ Her croup was as a chariot wheel.

‘ The hornets rebounded from the lotus of her feet, and made her flying anklets.

‘ Her toes, tinted with gum-lac, were more than sunshine.

‘ I could not look upon her body.

‘ My friend, tell me who is this young unknown with the gilded colouring?

‘ I saw her bathing in the ghat.

Chandīdāsa

‘ O confidant of mine, listen to what like this girl was as she washed.

‘ She sat down upon the bank of the Yamunā, her legs were crossed in the water ; she sat down upon her sārī, which she had taken off.

‘ Her gold collar balanced beneath her naked breasts, the ridges of the hills of Sumēru.

‘ When she rose after her bathing, her hair fell to the hollow of her back ; the darkness wept and went to find shelter and help behind the moon.

‘ The shell forms of her bracelets flamed like the slim crescent of the moon, when she rises against twilight.

‘ She went away upon the bank of the river Yamunā, twisting my soul into her blue sārī, and now peace dwells at the other end of the earth from my great fever.’

O Nagar, says the poet Chandīdāsa, learn, in the name of Vāsulī, that this girl is the daughter of the King of Brikvanu and is called Rādhā.

Subala, his companion, to prove that he has understood the suffering of Krishna, promises to bring him into the presence of Rādhā.

Rādhā and Krishna

V

SUBALĀ becomes incarnate in the form of Krishna. He grows of a beauty without rival, appearing like the thick cloud formed upon the sky.

His body is the colour of blue kohl, of the blue atasī, of blue lotuses, the colour of adoration.

He is like a garland of nelumbos, like the heart of a blue flower.

He is manifested incomparable among the beauty of the world.

The grace of love upon his body shines through his garments.

We see that the palms of his feet are redder than lac. We would say that his every step was crushing crimson cinnabar.

His feet are more coloured than the red fruit vimba, and the nails of his toes are ten moons lighting the ten directions of infinity.

The gold bells of the rings about his ankles chime with his yellow tunic; they recall the round blond flowers of the kadamba.

His members are soothed with incense, and the scent of musk goes forth from his body.

He wears a garland made of all the petals of the season, and a single flower of the kadamba shines in the midst of them.

Chandīdāsa

He is the reflection of the moon, wavering
in the river Yamunā.

One of those peacocks whose beauty satisfies
the soul has given plumes that his brow may
be exalted.

Curls shine like trembling light about his ears.
His lips may be compared with red flowers, his
teeth with seeds of pomegranate.

The lunar bow drawn on his forehead with a
paste of sandal is one with his gilded dresses.

The flowers of his eyes are underlined with a
curve of blue kohl, the curve of the shadow of
a cloud on the clear waters of Yamunā.

Two rows of pearl border his diadem. Its
jewels, circled with shining coral, are the nine
planets.

His hair is tressed with flower garlands, and is
as soft as white chamaras *.

He holds a bamboo flute in his hand, containing
a song of sorcery.

He is upright in three flexions. His right knee
is a little bended, and his head inclines toward
the left. His glance is lowered and does not
move. His smile has the sweetness of a nectar.

The women of the village are troubled. The
saints forget their sanctity. The people of
Brikvanupur are stricken with stupor, and the
King himself is rapt into a drunkenness.

So sings the poet Chandīdāsa.

Rādhā and Krishna

VI

Now Rādhā and the pretty Kṛittikā look forth from the balcony of the palace window.

Rādhā watches the magic games of Subala and reason suddenly fails and abandons her. Her companions are thrown into astonishment and grief.

‘Surely in the whole world, or in the imagination of any man, has there never been such beauty.’

‘Whence comes it? Who brought such treasure here? How might our God compose such colouring?’

The heart of Rādhā is bowed by this apparition, for it is impregnate and radiant with the love of Krishna.

She falls into the gulf of this love, for her heart is simple.

Her eyes, watching in languor and half-closed, now suddenly open to receive this wave of love.

‘What would I not give to have him for my own? With what price may I purchase him for myself alone? In each of my incarnations I would sing praises of his charm.’

And, so saying, Rādhā is betrayed to Srī-Krishna. She falls unconscious, as an inert gold doll might fall from the height of the sky.

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Thanks to the cunning of Krittikā, Rādhā's mother does not guess the cause of her daughter's illness. Nor do those about the princess pierce that mystery.

Lalitā cries in her astonishment :

‘ Why has Rādhā suddenly fainted ? A moment ago she watched the people passing. Why is she now unconscious ? That is a mystery.’

And Krittikā also says : ‘ Why does she stay thus stretched, with her eyes half-open, as stiff as a wooden toy ? ’

And Rādhā's mother laments with an unquiet heart, and weeps before them all :

‘ What grief ! Let a servant go swiftly to warn the King that Rādhā has been suddenly stricken with disease.’

So sings the Brahmin Chandiḍāsa.

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VII

ONE of Rādhā's girls fetches a milkwife, who knows all sorcery, and leads her to the royal house.

The milkwife takes the pulse of the sick girl, and understands that it is no fever, but the influence of pestilent air or of an evil spirit.

Yet, though there is no fever, the heart beats fast.

'I can tell nothing,' she says, 'it is no sunstroke, nor is it feigning. O King of Brikvanu, I will sit in the middle of the room and try my incantations.'

Gesturing with her gold stick, the milkwife conjures, while the girl Ramā knots a careful amulet about the neck of the princess.

But there is no change, or the disease grows worse.

Magic words are uselessly pronounced in her ear. The sorceress lights a fire and burns there upon resin an arrow fashioned by the goddess who was her mother.

. . .

Subala continues his magic feats at the threshold of the palace. He sees the King passing and says :

'The King has gone into the room of the

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women. Why has he passed so rapidly, not stopping to render homage to my magic?'

One of the palace maids comes to him, saying : ' O magician, a woman of the royal house has fallen unconscious while she was watching you. Her name is Rādhā, and her unsayable beauty charms the world. Our King is by her.'

At these words all the young shepherds overflow in question : ' What is the matter with her ? During which of the magic feats did the evil take her ? This is the work of one of those spirits which take demoniac form at the close of day. She has been touched by him and terrified.'

' A sorceress has come to care for her,' says the servant. ' She has taken her pulse, and fails to restrain the malady.'

. . .

' I know all exorcism and every spell,' answers Subala. ' The princess is certainly under the influence of some evil genius.'

' O magician,' cries the girl, ' if you can cure her you may receive fine robes and gifts and jewels, and as much gold and as much silver as a king could dream.'

' I know many and sure ways of saving her,' says the friend of Krishna.

Therefore the servant goes to the King and stands before him with hands joined in deep respect.

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‘Mahārāj,’ she says, ‘the sorcerer who does feats of magic by the threshold has declared he has knowledge of spells. He knows how to listen to sick hearts, and how to interpret the beating of the pulse. He says that the princess saw a demon while she was sitting near the window, and that the fright has sent her soul astray. Surely it cannot be otherwise. He bade me speak of him to the Mahārāj.’

These words send the King mad with happiness, and he cries : ‘Let him bring back my daughter to her own in any way he pleases. Call him. Let him come.’

The maid leads Subala to the women’s room. He approaches curiously.

He goes toward Rādhā and takes her pulse. He sets himself to conjure the evil spirit with invocation.

. . .

Subala leans nearer still and says the charm of all charm into the ear of Rādhā. He murmurs the name of that Krishna whom we know, who is the Master of Hearts, whose body is all beautiful, who lives and reigns in Gokula.

‘*Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, it is Krishna himself,*’ he whispers.

And these twenty sounds repeated in the ear of Rādhā renew the image of the god.

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Light was kindled within her, O Krishna, jewel of the world. O symbol of love, and centre of the life of Vraja. O loved of all the women of Gokula, O infinite power, protector of all life that lives, O Krishna. Your name vibrated in the ear of Rādhā, and she rose and her eyes were opened and her pain departed.

Subala regards her with stag-like glances, as she looks round.

The rays of her beauty blind the magician and fill his eyes with tears. He abases his lids, and cannot raise them.

‘What shall I give you?’ cries the King of Brikvanu to Subala. ‘What shall I give you now that you have brought back my daughter? Why cannot I let you into my heart and, when you are there, give you that heart itself?’

But Subala answers: ‘Hear me, O Mahārāj. I have done as one who knows how difficult it is to benefit others, and that to do ill to others is the greatest sin of the three worlds. Let the life of the evil-doer be pain. Let the man whose actions are as a friend’s before a friend be paid in this life and in all.’

So sings the Brahmin Chandīdāsa.

The King rewards Subala with gold and silver, and with embroidered robes. He entertains him at a great feast.

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VIII

‘BUT listen further, O King,’ said the five young shepherds, ‘for we also have a word to say to you. It may be that the shade of the demon dwells with your daughter still, for a spirit may persist in the body of his possession. Tell her to go down and bathe in the Yamunā, as an added precaution, so that the resentment of the demon may be laid. A bath in the waters of Yamunā has all the virtue of pilgrimage, and pilgrimage is cleansing to the bewitched.’ Rādhā was put in the charge of one of her companions, and the girl was bidden to lead her to Yamunā.

They walk, and the princess lights the world as she passes through it.

But the young shepherds hasten toward Vrindāvana, where Natavara stays, the pearl of cunning.

Subala tells his friend all that had passed, but his friend knows it, though he had not moved.

How beautiful is that corner of the bank of the Yamunā where the great banyan grows !

All birds are singing in trees of diverse essence, and the trees are flower heavy.

The perfumes of the wild date and the white chameli and of the jasmine mingle with the

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scents of the dark blue parul tree and of the champaks.

The amaranth and the round gajakanda dance with the parrot-flowers, and the double ranks of the kadamba wave and shine. Among a hundred thousand plants, the climbing madhobi mingles her white and saffron with the acacia.

Swans and the charbak duck and the moon-partridge people those thickets.

The white cows with suave silk hair come down to pasture.

Hornets murmur there.

And there Krishna stands forth, revealing his guise of most seduction, such as a blue cloud descended to the foot of the madhobi tree.

His bowed diadem and his tender, lowered glances fan up the world to ecstasy.

The lunar disk painted upon his brow with paste of sandal follows the line of the peacock plumes.

The frail arrows of the peacock lengthen the line of the slim pearls hanging at each nostril.

He stands there in three flexions, and drunken bees rest in the garland of flowers about his neck.

He is dressed in a yellow robe, bells chime at his ankles, and his bamboo flute, whose sound

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is honey, plays on five notes a song that makes the world forgotten.

Rādhā goes down to the bath with her companion.

Subala says: 'Young, incomparable beauty stands on the river bank. All men of mortal stuff lose their assurance when they come by her shadow. Hasten down to the bank of the river.'

The King's daughter goes, with her walking as of a wild swan, down to the stream.

She walks in the middle of the way, and Krishna and Subala pass forward toward her.

Krishna knows her and is faint in the light of her beauty.

Their glances mingle, life checks in the blood of Krishna.

They feel they are bound together for ever ; it is only with trembling glances that they touch ; it is only with the emanation of their hearts they come together.

The girl of Brikvanu searches him from feet to crown, and secretly vows her soul into his service.

In her thought she begins to pluck the wild flowers of the season, and would lay them down before those feet.

She may not touch him, but she carries his image in her heart for ever.

Chandīdāsa

Subala murmured : ‘ I shall bring her to you, with the girls Lalitā and Bisakhā. I will pretend to lead them to adore the sun. You shall approach and touch her.’

And Chandīdāsa sings: ‘ Love will seem sweeter when they have gone through the heavy trials that wait for them. Lovers and ladies shall henceforth recognise in Krishna the symbol of all love, under our guidance they shall know his many adventures and most clever artifice ! ’

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IX

THE princess has gone to the Yamunā, she has seen Shāma and has returned to her own place.

She sits in a lonely corner and begins to weep, dreaming of the beauty of Krishna.

She leans her cheek upon her palm, in a saint's attitude. Waters, like those which pour from the clouds in the rain month, fall from her eyes.

Lalitā falls into sadness also. She takes Rādhā between her arms and, wiping her face with a fold of her sārī, questions her tenderly :

‘ Your face knew laughter and was ignorant of grief, why are you now so desolate and weeping? My soul is anxious; you have not arranged the clusters of your hair. Why are your thoughts so far from you? ’

. . .

Rādhā goes forth for no reason twenty times an hour, and then returns.

Her spirit is pierced, and she looks sideways at the kadamba thicket.

Why is Rāī so full of care? She has nothing to fear from her parents. Does a demon in truth possess her?

She has lost her rest. She takes no further care to order the folds of her garment. She sits

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down. She lets her robe slip so that it bares her shoulder.

Is she not a King's daughter? Is she not young? Is she not married in a great and honourable family? What further can she desire? Does she want the moon?

. . .

What then is this trouble of Rādhā?

She sits alone in a far corner, and does not hear what is said.

She dreams, looking upon the sky, and the lobe of her ear moves not.

She will not eat. She wears the red robe of a nun.

She has undone her hair. She looks fixedly upon the blue cloud, twining her hands together.

She looks fixedly upon the blue necks of peacocks.

. . .

Rādhā's grandmother says : ' Adored one, what does this wild air mean? You do not cease from weeping. You went to bathe in the Yamunā and saw the Breaker-of-Hearts by a kadamba thicket. You are thinking of him now. When you looked at him, you covered all your respectable family with shame. You are the wife of an excellent gentleman. You belong to his house. His house is honourable.'

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The memory of the yellow robe and strange colouring of Krishna come back to Rāī. She shivers and falls, and her companions have to hold her up.

Some of them murmur : ‘ Rāī is possessed by an evil spirit. Let us have her cured by sorcerers.’

Words of power are said over her. Exorcism is practised with her hair.

One of the girls says jestingly :

‘ Let them bring her the flower garland of Kalia. Rādhā will lose the evil influence, and all her grief.’

. . .

‘ Who was it said the name of Shāma so near to me ?

‘ There is great sweetness in that name. I say it over and over. He puts a spell upon me when I say his name.

‘ My friend, how can I have Shāma ?

‘ If his name has this power upon me, what condition would be mine at the touch of his body ?

‘ Now that I have seen him, what can I know of religion ? I wish to forget him, and I cannot. What must I do, and how can I find refreshment from my pain ?

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‘ Dear friend, great beauty appeared to me to-day. I went down to the Yamunā and saw a man of sombre colouring, marvellously adorned. Upon his bent head he wore a diadem, framing the flowers of his hair. Peacock feathers rayed forth like the wavering beams of the sun. A yellow sign was upon his brow, in the midst of a gracious moon outlined in sandal.

‘ The bees came and went about him, drawn by the perfume of his body.

‘ He stood at the foot of a tree, upright, in three flexions.

‘ The son of Nanda has stolen my heart. Why was it not some other woman? Why should it be I?

‘ I preserved the repute of my family from all stain. But why did his flute sing: Rādhā, Rādhā, Rādhā?

‘ He wore a garland of jasmine and champak. He danced, and in his airy leaping, crossed and uncrossed his feet.

‘ The inclination of his head was gracious. It would have drawn you unresisting

‘ His head showed like a shaken moon, and was covered with a fillet made of fresh red berries.

‘ He ceased to dance, he crossed his feet, and leaned his back on the kadamba tree. But

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the garland went on wavering about his neck.'

• • •
'Marvellous is the blue colouring of Shāma.

'His beauty passes that of a million love gods. It flames like the sun.

'Shāma is the river of love. He is fatal to the eyes of those who see him.

'If I had not feared reproaches, I would have run to take him in my arms.

'His flute has so wiled my reason that I can no longer bear to live at home.

'I wish to tell my family what I suffer. I wish to confess all, and then to leave them.

'What could my brother do against love? Krishna has taken me. My faith and duty grow indifferent.

• • •
'A song fell suddenly, coming from the kadamba. It could have destroyed the peace of all the women of my high rank over the world.'

Lalitā says: 'Are there no other songs than that strange flute's? Why were you so troubled by that one? Try to be calm.'

But Rādhā continues: 'Why had the song of his flute that sweetness? I tremble, and my heart shakes as if water or great cold encompassed it.'

Chandīdāsa

‘Go no more to the river,’ says Lalitā, ‘go no more to the river. Kalia has his dwelling by the kadamba.’

‘His beauty is as that of a new-born blue cloud. It can seduce the hearts of yogis.’

‘Go no more to the river.’

‘His brightness passes the body of Madana and of the moon. The garland enhances his neck as the crescent enhances the corner of a cloud. It charms and bows down the world.’

‘His bended, moveless glance, the singing of his flute, are fatal to the spirit. To look upon him is to lose control.’

And Chandīdāsa sings, looking toward the place where the god is standing: ‘The face of Shāma is as the flower kaṇera. It waters the soul, even if she looks upon it from the corner of an eye.’

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X

BARAI, the companion of Rādhā, seeks out Sṛī-Krishna, saying :

‘ They tell me that you often talk with Rādhā. It is a good thing that I should have met you. You make advances to young wives when they come to the river. Those whom you have treated so have confided in me, coming from the Yamunā. What is the meaning of your conduct ?

‘ I will not be vexed with you if you behave differently. In the past you have not been virtuous. What is this desire that takes the wives of others ?

‘ I am the only one who has heard these stories. Think of your reputation, if they had come to other ears !

‘ You sigh with impatience, you fall upon the ground.

‘ I understand your fear ; but be assured that none can hear me.

‘ Do not begin again, or soil the family of Nanda.’

. . .

Sṛī-Krishna answers : ‘ Why has God pressed all the sweetness of the world into the name of Rādhā ?

‘ I cannot hear it without fainting. Its two

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sounds have taken possession of my heart. I tremble and I have lost tranquillity. Deign to understand me, my dear friend, for I do not know my way.'

. . .

Barai returns to the sweet Rādhā, saying :
' Fine symbol of all love, listen to the words of Krishna.

' I found him in desolation, near to the grove where you saw him. I found him weeping. I found him weeping for you.

' He sighed and repeated : " Rāī," and fell upon the ground.

' He took me by the hands and asked me anxiously. He asked how he might have you.

' That is why I have come to you, O Rāī. Go to him and learn his love. Go to him and make that love grow greater. Who can prevent you ?

. . .

' I have come to you, darling, straight from seeing him. He seems to be near his end. He does not tend his hair, or eat or drink, and his ill is growing.'

Now Rādhā is luminous with happiness.

But Barai says : ' He dreams of the sweetness of your name, and he knows no one. His lids are fixed. His glances are wooden, like a doll's. I touched a wisp of cotton to his nostril to see

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if he were breathing. Darling Rādhā, his life has not left him utterly. His breath a little remains to him. Go to him now.'

And Chandīdāsa the Brahmin sings: 'Grief alone is the cause of his sickness, Rādhā alone the remedy.'

Chandīdāsa

XI

SRĪ-KRISHNA disguises himself as a snake-charmer. He goes from house to house, and comes at last to the palace of Brikvanu.

All the girls crowd round him, to watch the tricks of Indra, the snake-master.

He lifts the lid of a clay vase, and makes a snake come forth, lifting it by the neck.

He beats the reptile, and it grows furious. It stiffens and rises up and wavers, following the movement of the hand which Krishna spreads above it.

The young women are pleased with this, and question the performer as to his dwelling.

‘I live in the near wood, and am called Nāga-damana, Lord of the Serpents, a very famous name. I came to earn wherewithal to clothe myself. In pity give me what I need, not a torn waist-cloth, but a new and excellent one. Give me the sārī you wear, give it for love of me.’

‘You are a jester and not worth a penny; yet you would have us give you costly garments. If you were not a beggar, you might demand such things. But you live in the wood and catch snakes, you dress in a rag and loiter upon the river bank.’

‘It would give me pleasure to have one of

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your garments ; my heart would be filled with joy ; I would care for it as the fruit of my eye. Also I dream of touching one of your feet. May I ? ’

‘ Be quiet, snake-charmer, take what you are given and depart in dignity. ’

‘ I am not a thief. I earn my bread by begging, and fear no man. I was but jesting with you. Why do you not make a poor man happy ? ’

Again, on the day of the festival of Indra, when the young women have gone to adore the god in Gokula, and the city is full of noise, Krishna disguises himself as a merchant.

He sets out his trestle, laden with necklaces, among the other stalls, and cries to the women : ‘ I have many fine things. I have treasures of pearl and coral, with gems which I have laid up for you. ’

And when the girls come near his stall, he sighs insinuatingly : ‘ What can I show you ? Pearls in a necklace ? The prices are rather high. ’

At this the young women protest : ‘ Oh, we are not purchasers. It is pleasant to look upon such things. ’

One pretty child takes up a necklace and passes it about the throat of her friend, in order to try it. She approves, and is asking the price,

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when another girl greedily lays hold of a gilded needle and runs away without paying.

Krishna catches and holds her by the breasts. She struggles, and he reclaims his due and does not let her go. He kisses her on the face, crying : ' How dare you steal my needles ? '

Then all the women crowd round to plunder his stall. Pillage and disorder reign. Each merchant is busy protecting his own stock, without caring for that of his fellows.

Delightful is the song of Chandīdāsa, the friend of the washer-girls. All is sacked into confusion, the fair comes to an end, the comedy is finished.

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XII

KRISHNA disguises himself as a barber. He enters the palace of Brikvanu, even to the chamber of Rāī.

Krishna prepares his case of instruments, and gives Rāī a mirror, saying tenderly : ‘ Sit down, that I may care for your beauty.’

The desirable young woman sits down, while the strange barber fetches a small jar of water, which he pours into a gold cup.

He files the corners of Rādhā’s nails, and shapes them to moon-forms. Bemused and half asleep, in a pleasant idleness, Rāī lets her hand fall softly on the barber’s shoulder.

Shāma, as like to melt as a statue of butter, rubs the feet of the princess with burnt earth, and has delight while doing so.

Still tasting his secret joy, he paints the soles of her feet with his vermilion.

He fards them skilfully. Then, pressing them to his breast, he inscribes his name on them.

‘ Look, pretty one,’ he says, ‘ look at your feet, and see if I have cared for them well.’

Rāī sees the name of Shāma written in full upon the sole of her foot.

She forces an air of indifference, and asks the barber : ‘ Is that your name ? ’

‘ I go from village to village. I call myself

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Shāma, that I may draw down the benevolence of the people.'

Now that the barber has completed his work, Rādhā retires from his presence.

. . .

Being in joyous humour, the Prince of Love disguises himself as a flower-seller. He fashions garlands, hanging them on his arm, and cries along the street : ' Who desires flowers ? Who desires flowers ? '

He comes to the house of Brikvanu, and Rāī leads him to a deserted corner, where she begins to bargain for a garland.

But the feigned flower-seller answers : ' Let me first adorn you with one of them. You can pay afterwards.'

Krishna passes a garland about the neck of Rāī, and kisses her face.

Rādhā recognises Krishna and, surprised that he should so jest in her own dwelling, keeps the god's hand in hers with a certain pain.

She murmurs to him : ' I am not a stranger.'

. . .

Krishna disguises himself as a doctor. He goes about from one house to another in the city of Gokula, visiting and curing the sick.

He frees them from all ills. He causes the man with headache, the sufferer from love fever, and him who cannot sleep because his heart is

Rādhā and Krishna

burning, to drink of a certain water. Only Dhanantari, who is the god of doctors, knew that remedy. The God of gods was ignorant of it.

He says to the afflicted : ‘ Take this water and be cured. You may pay me later.’

Someone tells Rādhā of these cures, and Rādhā rejoices.

She insists on seeing what sort the doctor may be, and one of her companions runs to fetch him. Krishna rejoices.

He goes to the dwelling of Rāī, and, as he waits to be called in, feels need to travesty himself.

. . .

He paints over his colouring and covers his hair with mud. He puts on his garments inside out, and disguises his walking in a singular way.

He sets an elaborate bag upon his shoulder, filled with roots and plants.

He sits without shame at Rādhā’s bedhead and lifts the veils from her face. He looks at her, and says most anxiously : ‘ She is very ill.’

He takes her left * wrist and counts the beating of her pulse. ‘ The water of love is rotting her heart like a poison,’ he cries aloud.

In her delight she rises up, stretching out all her limbs, and saying : ‘ You have seen clearly.

Chandīdāsa

Now tell me what I must take to be strong again and cleared of my sickness.'

'I would be shy to give you my remedy,' answers the physician. 'If I had place and time, I could allay your fever. I could cure you utterly.'

At the double meaning of these words Rādhā knows that this is another reckless trick of Krishna's.

. . .

Krishna dresses himself as a priestess. He assumes an expression of beatitude, and walks slowly.

The rumour of his arrival spreads about the city of Gokula, and the people of Vraja come out to meet him. They bow down before the lotus of his feet. There are tears in their eyes.

. . .

'I have come to Vrindāvana,' lies the divine Shāma, 'but my dwelling is in Mathura. I will tell you the secret of my life.'

'I adore my goddess, and have come into these places of pilgrimage to implore the aid of those who believe in her also. I am a pious wanderer, whose soul is satisfied. I tell you the simple truth. I will stay for some time in your city of Vraja.'

The priestess departs from the crowd, clapping

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

her fingers against her cheeks according to the ritual. She asks her way to Bṛikvanupur. 'I must go to that place also,' says the cunning lover, for he is inspired by love.

It is thus that he comes to enter the palace of Rādhikā, disguised as a priestess.

He wears curls at his ears, and has painted signs upon his forehead with red sandal paste. He carries a basket of flowers in his left hand, his body is covered in ashes, and he tells a chaplet of brown and ruddy beads.

'Glory be to the goddess who protects Gokula ! Whom the city of Vraja adores ! O herdsmen and milkmaids, bow down to Bhāgavatī, for she is the wife of the supreme God, and she gives happiness.'

Rādhā's grandmother, hearing of this grace, comes to the priestess with many questions.

'The herdsmen you speak of will do well. You will succeed in every undertaking. Your enemies shall be laid low. Your husband has only good intentions.'

Then Kulilā, the sister-in-law of Rādhā, enters with her mother, Jotilā, and both fall at the feet of the priestess, praying : 'O give us happiness for our daughter-in-law. O give us happiness for our sister-in-law.'

Chandīdāsa

But Shāma joyfully answers : ‘ She who desires my blessing must come to receive it.’

Jotilā fetches Rādhā and leads her by the hand. Rādhā sits down by the saint and unveils her face.

The priestess has only fortunate things to say to her :

‘ She carries the signs of happiness. The music of Gandharva, who sings in heaven, is purified by her beauty. She is the protector of the world, her name is Rādhā, and she is the King’s daughter of Brikvanu.’

The priestess takes Rādhā by the hand and looks upon her face. Joy becomes all her portion.

She opens her basket and, taking a flower, sets it in the hair of Rādhā. ‘ You shall live with joy about you. You shall have your desire,’ she murmurs. ‘ No shame shall come upon your house.’

But Rādhā answers gently : ‘ I cannot believe you unless you can cure the pain which is about my heart.’

‘ You have made a condition which I fear to fulfil. Have you not given your heart ? ’ questions the priestess.

Rādhā lets her smiling glance linger about Krishna, and asks : ‘ Where do you dwell, O priestess ? ’

Rādhā and Krishna

‘I dwell in this city. I can say no more than that.’

Rādhā looks more closely upon the priestess, and retires to her own chamber in confusion.

The faithful lover disguises himself for the last time. He visits the houses of Brikvanu as a necromancer.

He goes from door to door with an almanack in his hand, until he comes to the dwelling of the lovely Rādhā.

The girl Bisahka asks him of his life, and Krishna answers discreetly : ‘I dwell in Haṣṭinagara *, but I voyage through strange lands to gain my living. I stand ready, with contented mind, for those who would question me about the year.’

‘O Rādhā,’ says the poet Chandīdāsa, ‘this necromancer can make the most cunning calculations. He will answer all your questions. Embrace his knees, and you shall know the answer of a most strange science.’

Chandīdāsa

XIII

ON the path to the Yamunā, at the foot of the kadamba tree, the young, dark god stands upright in three flexions, wearing a gilded dress, holding his flute.

He stands on the path by which the daughter of the herd must pass.

‘If you must go to the ghat, take another way,’ he sings. ‘If you do not wish sorrow, O Rādhā, take another way.’

‘But I always go by this path,’ says Rādhā, ‘and who shall prevent me to-day?’

Thus the two lovers speak, and Rādhā struggles to pass, and Krishna opposes her. They push against each other.

And Chandīdāsa sings: ‘Dark-coloured lord, we feel ashamed of you.’

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

XIV

Complaints to the Moon

‘O moon of the sky,’ says Rādhā, ‘O moon more yellow than sandal-wood, would I not break you in a hundred pieces with a mallet of iron, if I could reach you !

‘Oh, that I might learn the charms of the Tantra, the magic of Rahu, then would I order your destruction, moon.

‘I would not have you driven from the sky, but I would veil you to make an end of your great pride.

‘I would adore Indra, that I might then demand this work from him ; I would compel you to stay covered up with complete clouds.

‘Ah, let the time of the new moon, when nights are dark, return and stay for ever.

‘Let a fog cover you over, as when Parasara was joined to Matsagandha.’

‘This is because the moon shone curiously upon the loves of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa,’ sings Chāṇḍīdāsa.

Chandīdāsa

XV

Answers of the Moon

‘ RĀDHIKĀ, my friend, O like a champak petal, listen. Which of us two shines the more brightly ?

‘ How many millions are bright in you ? One of your radiant feet could spurn a hundred moons.

‘ Your teeth are whiter than my body.

‘ It was from fear of your beauty that I chose the sky to shine in.

‘ What brightness could pass your limbs’ brightness ?

‘ If I tried to equal you God would resolve me into sixteen crescents.

‘ The sun trembles before the drop of vermillion twinkling on your brow ; even he trembles before the beauty of your lips.

‘ It is only the sun’s great audacity which allows him to return so quickly within the range of your glances. I who am more timid must keep away from you for fifteen days.

‘ Your two eyes glisten like the eyes of a bird.

‘ Your nose is a flower of sesame ; Madana is troubled to see your face.

‘ What further comparison may I use of you ?

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

‘ The form of your ear recalls the vulture *.

‘ How paradisaal are your eyes with their eye-brows !

‘ I have never seen a rival beauty.’

And Chandīdāsa the singer has no hope of seeing a rival beauty either.

Chandīdāsa

XVI

The Words of Rādhā to her Friend

‘ CARRY my thoughts to my well-belovèd.

‘Tell him that the sky and the evil moon are against me.

‘She came forth in all her brightness while I was speaking to my husband’s parents ; I passed the rest of the night in converse with my husband.

‘If the moon has pity, to-night I shall try to join my well-belovèd.

‘If not, I shall wait for the moment of the new moon, when the star seems dead.

‘Tell him that I have not the time to go to him ; the work of the house is endless.

‘My mother-in-law calls me at every moment, my sister-in-law is watching me, and the moon’s vigilance is greater still. She had already risen when I tried to go to the wood.

‘My mother-in-law is furious with me. What can I do against a family that fears dishonour? Half of my nights are passed in seeking opportunity.’

*'Rādhā, Rādhā, you shall soon join Krishna again,'
sings Chandidāsa the poet.*

Rādhā and Krishna

XVII

After the Night passed in the Thicket

THE sparrow, the crow and the blackbird are singing.

The night is over, and Rādhā and Krishna have passed it waking.

Now he orders his hair and gets ready to go from her.

But she stays indolent, her head lying on her wild pillow, her eyes half-closed; they are veiled with a joyful lassitude.

She rises at last, but sees that they have mistaken their garments.

‘What shall I do? My mother-in-law and my sister-in-law are foes; they will hasten to heap words upon me. If they guess the thing they will become furious. There is great danger in this morning.’

‘Love is perfidious, O my Lover.

‘I love you and I languish. How can I cure this ill of loving Krishna?’

‘The night is passed. Return swiftly to your own place, my Love.

‘My mother-in-law and my sister-in-law are

Chandīdāsa

waiting. Eat a little betel quickly. Carefully tie the undone tresses of your hair.

‘Your face is pale, and makes me sad.’

Smiling, he wipes the moon of his face ; he takes up the magic of his darling flute, which he had set down near Rādhā.

He gathers up his gilded robe, casting a long, smiling, equivocal glance at Rādhā.

Shāma has gone, and Rādhā’s heart is most sorrowful. For what may not happen to him ?

What can we do for her ?

So sings the poet Chandīdāsa.

Rādhā and Krishna

XVIII

IT is dawn, and the folk of Rādhā's house are waking.

After she has fulfilled her domestic tasks, she wanders restlessly, seeking to be elsewhere.

She enters her room and finds the dark scarf of Krishna, and the garland of atasi flowers which have fallen from his crown.

Rādhā, seeing them, gives up her heart to sadness; she wipes away the kohl from round her tear-wet eyes.

She looks out toward the path where Shāma plays on his flute. She neglects her household duty.

Sometimes she feels gay, and then is caught in a swift sadness.

She says words other than those she means to say.

She remembers that this is the hour when the herds lead their cows down into the field. She dreams that it would be wise to watch for Krishna and to warn him that he has forgotten his garland.

She hears the herds passing, with the noise as of a rolling river. Rādhā shows her face at the window, and Krishna appears to her. His brow is girt with a new gilded garland.

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He comes by the high-road with his herd of cows.

Balarāma, Chidana, Sudama are there about him, and he leans on Subala's shoulder.

He laughs and makes his flute sing the syllables of Rādhā. Subala alone may recognise them.

The young herds go to the wood by the high-road, crying Hai ! Hai ! to hasten their cows along.

And Rādhā, who is the image of love, looks upon the beauty of the young, dark god from her window. Their glances meet, and their souls hasten along their glances, and come together.

Yet, at the sight of so ensnaring a face, Rādhā is tormented and cries :

‘ How can they send so rare a treasury to the wood ?

. . .

‘ What shall I say in defence of his mother, O my friend ? She can have no shadow of feeling in her. Her heart is drained of pity. She lacks compassion to send a young flower to the forest, a youth of the carnation tint of Krishna.

‘ How can he go so far with such a delicate body ? How can he herd the cows ? The heat is callous, and the sun burns his face. Hundreds of snakes glide under the grasses of the wood, and the reed splinters will pierce his red feet.

Rādhā and Krishna

‘Also the hatred of his uncle Kansa is against him, and ever seeking him. My heart is ceaselessly aware and afraid of all these dangers.

‘Listen to me, O pretty friend. How can I live without seeing Kanu? I weep by night and day.

‘Lo, how fair he is with his beguiling flute! The glances of the world bless him for being Kanu.

‘When he laughs, it is as if coloured pearls were falling from his mouth. His laugh is running nectar.

‘My friend, I would lift up my garment and with it cover Krishna, for fear that someone should take hold of him.

‘I do not wish to trust to Fortune alone and leave him without protection in some place.

‘His habitation is here, near to my soul; it is here in my breast, for he has pierced a way to it.

‘I would hide him there in my breast from the world’s eye, and keep him carefully, lest they should seek him there, lest they should make a tunnel to my heart and steal him from me.

Rādhā and Krishna behold each other, for she has signed to him with her eyes, and he ha



Chandīdāsa

answered. This soundless language is only understood by Rādhā and Krishna and by Subala.

Now Subala drives the herd to the wood with Chidana and Sudama and Balarāma. But Krishna goes down toward Mathura.

The young and amorous god sits between two kadamba hedges. He puts on a garment of new appearance and plays his flute.

He is dressed as a dancer. He sits by the road as if to implore charity. He looks along the road and plays his sounding flute.

The moon-faced milkmaid thinks of the sign which Krishna's eyes have made her.

She calls Barai, she calls the milkmaids about her, saying : ' Let us set our baskets in order. Let us sell our milk at Mathura. Let us not delay.'

The milkmaids return to their houses and take up their baskets of butter, their gold jars of cream and milk. They cover them with costly tissues.

They put on their ornaments, and the moon grows pale.

Dressed in their coloured tunics, they set their baskets and gold jars upon their heads, and cluster again round Rādhā.

So sings the poet Chandīdāsa.

Rādhā and Kṛishna

The milkmaids go towards Mathura, to sell their butter and cream.

And as they go they meet Sṛī-Kṛishna, and take him, as is his will, to be a toll-gatherer.

He feigns to demand payment in cowries before he will let them pass.

But Barai knows him and, with Rādhā, gives skilful counsel, so that the two lovers are left together.

Chandīdāsa

XIX

LO! a matter of magic to see, comparable only with a cloud not dreamed of.

Is that a group of thick mists, fallen among the flowers?

A moon shows near it; the milkmaids seem adorned by its mystical shining. Is it a moon?

Is it a fruit? But how could a fruit grow upon a cloud?

The branches, bearing these fragmentary moons, seem to be playing together. Yet there is no grumbling of thunder, but from this magic knotting there rises a flute's song, and attentive peacocks hover about it.

It is Rādhā and Krishna, rounded by a halo of light and seated upon the thousand heads of a dancing serpent.

Who can understand the beauty and the mystery and the artifice of such a love?

The lark, snared by the shining of this universal cloud, flies drunkenly, hoping to reach it. The milkmaids are painted with light because of it.

• • •
'Barai, O Barai, a day is shining for me,'
Rādhā says.

'I am made one with my master. All my strivings have been to him for whom I suffered.

Rādhā and Krishna

The desire of my heart is satisfied, receiving Yadumuni.

‘Go now to Ayana, to my husband, and tell him that Rādhā is dedicate to Shāma.

‘Tell him that Rādhā has consecrated her soul to the red feet of Krishna.

‘What need have I to dwell any more with Ayana, or to be religious, or to be penitent ?

‘Let come what will to the fair renown of my house. Let the lightning break it, O Barai, for I know happiness.’

‘Never have I heard such exposition of happiness and love,’ says Chandīdāsa.

Chandīdāsa

XX

Rāī as a Herdsman

‘MY love has gone to the wood,’ said Rāī. ‘And I wish to plait my hair and set it up upon my head, I wish to disguise myself as a herdsman. Then I shall go in my joy to the place where the lotus eyes of Krishna are. I will go to the wood to meet Shāma ; he is the colour of a blue cloud. Plait your hair, my friends, set it up on your heads, and dress in yellow garments.’

Joyously the milkmaids dress themselves as herdsmen, and when they are ready, lo ! a myriad of cows come up from the Lower World and surge about them.

Whole lowing herds appear, and the world marvels.

Indra arrives on his elephant to see so rare a sight.

And Brahmā comes on his swan. Shiva applauds from the back of his bull, crying : ‘Excellent ! excellent !’ He claps his hands, dancing the dance of joy and making his cheeks resound beneath his fingers.

These novel herdsmen call their cows, Dhavalī they call, and Sangli. They leap in their pleasure, they go down to Yamunā.

Rādhā and Krishna

They come to a nook of the woods, and Shāma looks out at them.

‘From what village? And in what village? Why do you advance so joyously to my green retreat? What are your fathers’ and your mothers’ names?’

He speaks with a smile, but his spirit is in a snare of curiosity.

Now the perfume of Rādhā’s body intoxicates him. He looks long at her feet and her head.

‘O Shāma,’ asks Lalitā, ‘O our treasure, do you not know Rādhā? What sort of lover are you then?’

‘O Rādhā,’ sings Chandīdāsa, ‘Now look upon the beauty of your lover and be content.’

Chandīdāsa

XXI

Confidences held by Rādhā with One of her Companions

‘ THIS morning I slept by my sister-in-law. I shamelessly tell you all I felt, my friend. In the torpor of my sleep I dreamed that my lover embraced me.

‘ My sister-in-law woke in fury, saying : “ You think you are with your lover ! Alas, what wantonness ! Oh, that a woman of a good house should do so with another’s husband ! I have had proof of what was hinted to me. I will tell my brother when he returns.”

‘ You may understand how my heart trembled at these cruel words, how my heart died down for shame.

‘ I looked away and pretended not to hear her, but she continued to scold me. I rubbed one of my eyes with my hand ; I looked out of the other.’

‘ *Why are you afraid, Rādhā, when you have the love of Kṛṣṇa ?* ’ says *Chandīdāsa*.

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

XXII

Farewell

‘Now is the moment of separation,’ Rādhā says. ‘He keeps on saying the three words : I must go. How many kisses did he give me ? How many times did he bind me with his arms ? He took my hand in his ; he made me swear by him. He tried to persuade me to promise another meeting. He walked a few paces, and then turned and looked back anxiously.’

‘His love is so deep, Rādhā, his prayers are so warm,’ says Chāṇḍīdāsa. ‘Oh hold him in your heart for ever !’

C h a n d ī d ā s a

XXIII

The Bed of Flowers

THE milkmaids make a green couch and deck it with the three kinds of jasmine.

They make so fair a bed of flowers that yogis swoon to see it. Madana, who knows every marvel, is humbled by it.

Columns of flowers, walls of flowers, chambers of flowers, pillows of flowers wooing to idleness ! Arrows of flowers upon either hand !

The parakeet and the red-billed cuckoo guard the threshold ; Madana is sentinel. Hornets boom there, and the soft breeze whispers there, and the six seasons shake with Spring in the breast of that green cradle.

The night is lighted with lamps of precious stones.

They prepare perfumed water, anise and betel.

Rādhā looks at the green bed, she lies down on the green bed and waits.

But Krishna does not come, and Rādhā weeps.

She says : ‘ I made this bed for my lover. I pressed flowers for him. I prepared betel, and lit lamps so that the grove is shining. I have seen that there is no lack. Why does Kanu

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

not come to me, who is the prince of love, the bird of wisdom?

‘I was able to steal away to this deep wood. I beguiled my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law. Feeling my beauty and my youth in their ascendant, I had a great desire to meet my lover. How long shall I watch the path in vain? How shall I soothe me?’

‘The Prince of Love will come soon, Rādhā,’ says Chāṇḍīdāsa.

Kṛṣṇa was kept on his way to Rādhā by Chandra Bali, her jealous cousin. She forced him to spend the night with her. Kṛṣṇa was in despair, but next morning he found Rādhā on her bed of flowers.

End of Part One

PART
II
RĀSALĪLĀ

X X I V

THERE IS A JEWELLED THRONE IN A DELICATE
thicket on the bank of the Yamunā.

Trees of every essence blow about it, their
branches bending to the earth beneath a weight
of flowers, and birds sing in them.

The bees steal the honies which drip from the
trees there ; the peacock and the peahen round
out their tails there.

Creatures of the water, small glittering fishes,
swim in the Yamunā, and the ripe lotuses hold
up their nectar to the flies.

Every delight of nature decks that lonely wood,
and Sṛī-Krishna sits unseen there.

It is the full moon of the dry time Sarat, the
time of Rāsalilā *.

The full moon seems to be about to overflow,
nay, seems too pure.

Kanu, the king of dancers, sits with his flute to
his lip in a dell where the hornets murmur and
the birds are singing, where the peacock and
the peahen utter their harsh cries, and the
water-bird dahuki clamours out his joy.

It is for the love feast of Rāsalilā that Krishna,
the son of Nanda, the passionate, the over-
flowing, loses himself in dreams.

He loosens a few notes from his bamboo flute.

Rādhā and Krishna

Touching his face, it makes even that more beautiful. Then upon the five holes of it he sings five messages.

The flute calls: *Rādhā, Rādhā, my well-belovèd.*

And the milkmaids, hearing, dream of the forest.

The sound of the flute destroys their peace, even the peace of those who know not love torment. They seem mad. As the stags of the wood struck by the hunter's arrow, they flee at haphazard, with wild glances.

. . .

And Rādhā says: 'It is his flute of spells. It is Krishna of the lotus eyes. He calls us. I cannot be calm. My heart is troubled. Do you not feel that only our body remains here, that our soul is down in the forest, is by our Krishna?

'The amorous moon wakes the desire of the moon-partridge, and he dreams of touching her. You know his rapture of joy when he flies into her light.

'Tell me when we can meet Nagar. Tell me when we can find his arms again?

. . .

'What can those who live with us and rule us now do to us? What matters ill report? We are going to Shāma.

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‘ He without whom we cannot live, without whom the winking of an eye seems twelve years long, calls us upon his flute. Let us run swiftly to him ! ’

And another milkmaid says : ‘ We cannot stay. We must go down to the wood of Vrindāvana.

One girl leaves her house-work and runs toward the forest, without even changing her garment.

Another madly mixes a jar of water with the milk she is boiling, and then abandons it.

A third, hearing the flute as she is making a meal, leaves her vegetables and peas and spices on the fire, and hastens away.

One milkmaid who is giving the breast to her baby, lays him on the ground and makes off with troubled heart. She runs to this notorious Vrindāvana, while the suckling weeps. She has lost all sense of right and wrong for Krishna.

Another, sleeping beside her husband, wakes suddenly to the sound of the flute. She wipes her face and puts on her finest robe. Leaving her husband and the clasping of his arms behind her, she hurries to the wood.

A sixth fails to finish her house task, for love has blinded her to duty.

Rādhā and Kṛishṇa

And, at the sound of that flute, one who is living in loss finds joy again.

But the milkmaid's husband wakes and pursues and catches her, saying: 'The night is far spent, whither are you going? Are you not ashamed? Do you not fear the gauntlet of the world's opinion? Your behaviour is very strange. Whither are you going at such an hour? A little more and you will be driven out from your family, a little more and you will be covered with shame and make me die of grieving. Why did you leave me? Whither are you going? Alas! alas!'

The lotus-eyed milkmaid remains calm beneath these reproaches; but as soon as her husband has once more gone to sleep, she flees again.

She flees under the spur of love and can obey it only. She flees without fear to the wood where Kanu is.

All the tormented women dress in haste, hearing desire only.

One of them hangs her anklets about her neck, another girds her thighs with necklaces, and forces bracelets on her breasts.

A third hooks on one earring, a fourth decks one arm only. One paints a small vermilion

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disk upon her brow, and then smears kohl beneath a single eye.

One girl puts on her skirt hindpart before, and cannot run. The women of Vraja are filled with an impatience.

But have we seen a beauty parallel in all the world to Rādhā ?

Dressed in an ensnaring robe and with jewels, she hides among the women of Vraja, lest she should be prevented.

Her friends go down with her swiftly toward Vrindāvana.

Rāī walks with great grace, and says in her madness :

‘ Night of incomparable joy ! God is to give me stored-up happiness. I shall adore his two feet, and bathe my body in the well of joy. I shall know my hope and see desire granted.’

And alone in his green bower, Yadunātha still sings the name of Rādhā upon his flute.

They come to Vrindāvana, but the malicious Kanu cries : ‘ O milkmaids, it is deep night. Why do you break the laws of nature ? The names of young women are tainted, should they approach me.’

‘ O Yadunātha,’ Rādhā answers tenderly, ‘ what do I care for my name ? I have sacrificed my

Rādhā and Kṛishna

caste and my name before your feet. Why do you still speak of them? I am vowed entirely to your love. Why, then, on such a night do you recall those cares to me? You are the kohl of my eyelids, and the god of my heart. Why do you hold yourself thus with me; why have you strange thoughts? How can the well of the life of Vraja do so mischievously?'

• • •
'O love with lotus eyes, I have left my body at home, I bring you my spirit.

'I have abandoned all to come to the protection of your feet. O flute-player, do not repulse me. That would be wicked of you.

'My soul loses its rest when I am not watching your face.

'Grief has me by the throat when I cannot see you. I am in a room at night where the lamp has gone out.

'You are as the fruit of our eyes to all of us. We believe that you deck the world. Your name is The-Granting-of-Desire.

• • •
'You are amorous, O Kṛishna, and know all things. How then shall I teach you?

'O prince, you may tell me all your wishes. The people of my house have become strangers to me, and you, a stranger, have become mine.

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‘ The fire in my heart brightens. To what other may I tell my sufferings, when it is great pain to tell them even to myself? Ah, turn the cruel side of your heart away from me !

‘ My sister-in-law has spread her net of evil words, calling me a Vile-Mistress-of-Shāma. But I carry the shame which has come upon me for your sake as if it were a chain of gold.

‘ The dangerous reproaches of the world have come upon me, and now I have to bear your harshness also.

‘ You gave me your love the first time that you saw me. Do you steal souls, but for the pleasure of laughing afterwards ?

‘ I have abandoned my husband for love of you ; we cannot dwell before you, thus mad for you.

. . .

‘ All the words that you have ever said to me since that first day are now arrows to me.

‘ You made me vows. Is there any one as unhappy? For only such could receive my suffering.

‘ If we, as women, had behaved so, we should have died of broken vows.

‘ But it is allowed, because you are a man.

‘ O Krishna, I address a prayer to you. What need had you to come and throw yourself at my feet that day ?

Rādhā and Krishna

‘I trusted in you, as I would have trusted a friend.

‘O son of Nanda, what occasion had you to lie to me? I will say over your words. Rise then and listen.

‘Turn to me for the last time in my life. Look at me yet once more before I go.’

The Prince of Love wept in his trouble at Rādhā’s words; but his teasing had offended his mistress.

. . .

Her heart suffers, and her face betrays her. The dark lotuses of her eyes grow red with tears.

Leaving her friends, she goes and sits apart at the foot of a madhobi tree, and stays there in prostrate silence.

The moon of her face is pale. She scrapes the earth with her left foot nervously. The pearl ornaments at her nostrils waver in the wind of her sighs.

A great fire of despair burns up the heart of Rāī, and when one of her companions comes to give her counsel, and to ask the cause of her grieving, and to beg her to return to Shāma, she is obstinate in silence.

The Prince of Love is sad in his green bower.

Chandīdāsa

He is, indeed, as sad. He knows that Rādhā loves him, and is not gay.

He takes his flute and draws a joyous song from it, though his heart is tortured.

On his honey-tender flute he calls *Rādhā*, *Rādhā*, and weaves a rapid melody upon the breezes, picturing love.

So sweet is the song of Krishna that the beast and the bird of the wood rejoice, and the sylvan stags, falling beneath that spell, come together at the foot of the little hills. Krishna is trying to put an end to Rādhā's anger with his flute.

. . .

The messenger flute sings a love secret in its godlike rhythm, but the princess does not answer from her solitude.

Nagar forgets his happinesses ; the terror of grown absence is in his soul. He can do nothing save look upon the path which leads to Rādhā.

He sighs often in every moment, and can but repeat in his sorrow the name of Rādhā.

He does not know that his crown of peacock feathers, that his robe and his gilded waist-cloth have fallen from him. He does not know where his necklace of gems, his hair jewel, and his crown of fresh red berries have fallen from him ; he does not know

Rādhā and Krishna

where his honied flute and heavy little drums have fallen.

Courses of tears are flowing from his eyes.

And Chandīdāsa himself is sad to see these things.

Reduced by his pain, the Prince of Love chews not his betel.

‘Ah,’ he says, ‘I would forget all things. I would cease to be teasing if I could please and satisfy her.’

He orders a girl to go as messenger to Rādhā, saying: ‘I would know how to console her, if one would bring her to me. I have already sung upon my flute, praying her to return.’

‘O Prince,’ answers a certain one of the milkmaids, ‘I will go now to console Rādhā, and bring her back with me.’

She sought Rādhā in all diligence, and Rādhā, when she saw her, bent down her head. But the girl threw passionate arms about her, saying:

‘We cannot understand this novelty of yours, darling. You leave Nagar to whom you are consecrate. You abandon this incomparable lover, who seeks you anxiously.

‘Are you happy now that you have left him? You used to tress your hair so many times a day for him. Do you not remember how you

Rādhā and Krishna

‘Lift up your face to me but once. Ah, if you cease to look upon Krishna, he dies of grieving.

‘He sits alone in his green arbour. O you who are beautiful and the symbol of tenderness, how can you do so? Have you considered your anger? Can you abandon love?

‘You are not cruel, O fair Rādhā. Lift up your head. Why should you lose this lover? Why should you not continue to live your love?

‘I have never seen a young woman so strong and obstinate.

‘Nagar, a well of virtue, is failing now in sadness through your fault.

‘Go to his lotus eyes, go to the fairest of all men!’

. . .

The moon-faced Rādhā says no word. She is sadder still, and stays with her head bent forward.

Her ill-considered enmity grows a hundred times, and burns the centre of her heart.

She sighs, and her agony is to be read upon her eyes. She seems to be thinking, and answers nothing.

She scrapes the earth with her foot, sitting below the madhobi tree. Then she looks sideways at the messenger, saying at length :

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‘ O messenger, do not speak to me more of Kalia, for those syllables augment my grief.

‘ I will not go to see this Krishna. When you speak of him, the fire of sorrow grows bright in my heart again.

‘ Why should I go to him? Leave me, for I have understood his soul. I would stay here, in the lunar shade of the madhobi.

‘ I left all things for him. I stained my family renown, and took nothing in exchange for that. Dishonour alone remained to me, when all was over.

‘ What kind of lover is this? He gave me happiness ; but it is faint to-day. He drank at the stream of my love, for the sake of his heart’s thirst.

‘ My neighbours mock me when they hear the tale of my loves. But none can understand my grief.

‘ I have put an end to my love for Kanu. Speak no more of Kanu to me. Nothing is as bitter as the poison poured by Kanu.

‘ Go to him now, my friend, for I shall not do so.’

Thus Rādhā sends away the messenger, and stays at the foot of the madhobi, her face resting upon her palm.

She sighs and speaks to no one.

Rādhā and Krishna

A single girl stands by her silently.

A cuckoo comes to the branches of the madhobi, and makes his double cry.

Rādhā sees him, and the dark of his feathers reminds her of Krishna. She claps her hands to drive the bird away, crying :

‘ Why do you come to sing near me ? I drive you away. Fly rather to Shāma, fly to his thicket of voluptuous flowers. Your song seems to mean love and thus increases pain. Leave these branches.’

The cuckoo flies away, still letting fall his double cry.

. . .

But a peacock and his peahen comes to dance at the foot of the madhobi tree.

And Rādhā falls into a rage again, crying : ‘ Why do you come to dance with such drunkenness at the foot of my tree ? Go rather to where the Prince of Love dwells in his thicket. What happiness can you find in dancing near such pain ? You might have pleased me if your feathers held not the blue colouring of Krishna. A fire is lighted against my heart by the tint of your jewels. Go to the dark body of the Prince of Love.’

Then moon-faced Rādhā violently claps her hands, and the birds depart.

. . .

Chandīdāsa

But the flower scents call a thousand hornets about the madhobi, eager to drain its honey.

And golden Rādhā says to them :

‘Why were you born with bodies as dark as Shāma? What is your business, why do you buzz here? Is it to bring my grief to birth again, to relight the fire?’

‘The sight of you is wedded in my soul with the garlands of Syāma, upon which it pleases you to feed. Gorged with honey and fulfilled with love, you cling to the branches. And am I not troubled enough already?’

‘I have need to be alone. You increase my grieving. Why do you come to trouble me?’

The hornets fly away, and Rādhā snatches the blue and black fillet from her hair, leaving no morsel.

She throws away the blue scarf from about her breasts; she casts her black garment, and takes a robe and scarf of white.*

She wipes the kohl from her eyes, and renounces all dark ornaments.

One says: ‘O moon-faced Rāī, why do you not put an end to your anger before it kills you? Pretty one, why are you troubled? Ah, cease to tremble when you speak. Although your face is bitter, why should you spurn all ornament? O symbol of love, you are very

Rādhā and Krishna

beautiful ; you ought to end this most exaggerated battle.'

But Rādhā answers, with a sidelong glance :
' Dark colours weigh upon my heart.'

The messenger has returned again to Krishna, and he cries :

' You who have tried to bring back Rādhā, tell me your news ! '

' Rādhā is furious, O my Krishna,' the girl answers, ' but perhaps her rage would abate if yourself went to her. Alas, it is not my fault if I have failed.'

Then Kanu of the lotus eyes began to disguise himself, so that he might seek out Rādhā. He put on a robe of seduction, and tressed his hair with garlands of malati and chains of pearl. He put on a blue sārī and a gracious scarf, with ornaments of gold and heavy bracelets. He took a seven-stringed vīṇā * in his hand.

Thus changed and adorned, and with a single girl companion, the guileful Krishna goes to the madhobi tree.

Rādhā sees the beautiful woman afar off, and cries : ' Why have you come ? '

' Most beautiful, I come from a green bower where all the women of Vraja are about the Prince of Love.

Chandīdāsa

‘ They called me to them because I was poor, and there I sang such rāgas * as I know. And those are Gaurī, Nata, Kedāra, Sindha, Bhairavi, Dako, Sahāna, Kānadā, Madhumādhari, Vilāval, Mālgava, Hamira, Dīpaka, Belabeli, Surat, and Māllarī.

‘And while I sang these rāgas, Nagar was troubled. He wished to hear others.

‘I sang again, and the conjoined names of Rādhā and Krishna trembled upon my strings.

‘ But Nagar felt no further joy after the music of these names. He begged me not to depart, saying : “ Stay, that your songs may murmur in my ear, singing not two but one name, singing the essence of all names, singing the tender sounds of the name of Rādhā.”

‘The name of Rādhā was a tender delight to him. How can I bear witness to that love of Kanu? “Sing Rādhā,” he said, “for I wish no other music.”

‘I sang Rādhā, and my vīnā sang Rādhā also. He told me how his heart strangled beneath my singing, and with what infinite love it answered.

‘My vina sang, and Krishna lay beneath the charm of it. He seemed to know no other name but the name of Rādhā. Tears washed the

Rādhā and Kṛishna

lotus of his eyes more tender still ; he would not hear another music.

‘ Stilled with emotion, he yet grew frenzied, full of strange happiness. He stretched out his garland of pearls to me. See, most beautiful, here is his garland of pearls upon my breast.

‘ The Prince of Love, the Ocean of Wisdom, loses existence in the name of Rādhā.

‘ Why did my song please him so ? And why so trouble him ? Of what was he dreaming ? Alas, I do not know.

‘ He is alone in the thicket with his flute. I came to the madhobi, hoping that I might sing you certain ragas.

• • •
‘ Ah, listen also to the song of love.

‘ Lift up your head, my tender friend, for I shall sing you that rāga-which-is-inspiration.’

‘ Then sing, pretty musician,’ says the moon-faced Rādhā, ‘ for I wish to hear some music.’

So Syāma began to play the rāga Kedāra, with amorous melodies joining the names of Rādhā and Kṛishna.

The four sounds thrilled upon the strings of the vīnā ; but the woman sang :

‘ Why, oh, why did you leave him ? What happiness can you know in staying thus so far ? ’

Rādhā grew pale, and then her moon-coloured

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cheeks betrayed their fire. Her anger lost its sustenance, and she felt weary. She began to take off her heavy jewels.

But the seven-stringed vīṇā said :

‘ Why have your words lost all their tenderness ? Why are you desolate ?

‘ The Prince of Love is by the madhobi tree. His face betrays his anguish.’

. . .

Rādhā says : ‘ Your vīṇā trembles with sweetness, sing again. It brings me happiness to listen. Surely none could help his grief departing under such music.

‘ Where do you live and how did you come here, and what is your name, O you whose words are sweet ? ’

‘ I live in Gokula, a milkmaid, and am called Syāma. That is indeed true, I am called Syāma.

‘ But sometimes also they call me the Singer, to give me pleasure. Kanu, the son of Nanda, called to me and I came.’

. . .

‘ O do not speak of Kanu. Talk of some other thing, or play upon your vīṇā, for nothing is better than music.’

She clasped her vīṇā in the fold of her breast and began to sing : ‘ Rādhā, Rādhā.’

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

How tenderly those sounds swelled forth no man may say.

The glances of Rādhā and the player mingled,
joy flowed from each to each.

‘Gilded Syāma, sing Rādhā-Kanu, the-melody-that-brings-all-joy-to-birth.’

She plucked off her garlands of pearl and held them out to the musician, saying :

‘Take them, for you have sung most tenderly. Then come to me, come to me, that I may speak of my heart.’

She caught Syāma against her breast, and was filled with a strange delight. The perfumed sweetness exhaling at this touch from the body of Syāma, and her loving laughter and her side-long glances, betrayed her Lord of Hearts to the failing Rādhā.

‘Sly singer, you knew how to end our quarrel,’
Rādhā murmurs.

She has recovered her soft fashion of speaking. She is joyful because she understands that Krishna has disguised himself as a woman to bring about their reconciliation. Grief stands far off from her, and happiness invades the place of it.

Come now, O milkmaids, to see Rādhā in the arms of Krishna. Our glances tremble.

Ah, nameless marvel of a Stream running love

Chandīdāsa

and nectar ! Two so fair have not been seen in Gokula, spoken in Gokula, dreamed in Gokula. The wood of Vrindāvana is lighted by their perfect union, the milkmaids exult, and *Chandīdāsa is in ecstasy, for he sees Rādhā in the arms of her lover.*

Five young women rub those two bodies with paste of sandal and agor. One fans them and looks down upon their beauty, soft beneath the kisses of the fan. One prepares garlands for the neck of Shāma. One serves the desire of those two bodies.

Eight high-born milkmaids have abandoned all for Rādhā and Krishna, they have troubled delight itself, they have attained salvation.

This is how Krishna celebrates Rāsalīlā. He sings the flowers that are rising in his soul. He sings, and the trees about him put forth new honey-dripping flowers. The peacock and the peahen, and the lark and the swans come forward, coupled in their kind, to circle this Nagar and Nagara.

The wasp and the hornet murmur in drunkenness among the flower nectar. The water creatures come up from the river, each male with his female. The lotus opens, and the noise of the insects about it is a song of paradise.

Rādhā and Krishna

The beasts wander that green bower, the hind and the hart, the monkey and the monkey, and Rādhā delights to see them.

‘Listen, O Shāma, O Prince of Love,’ says Rādhā. ‘There is a prayer I have shame to make before your red feet.’

‘I would not know how to oppose your wishes.’ So Rādhā continues in a half voice :

‘I dream of having my hair tressed even as your hair is. Help me to do so. Then lend me your bamboo flute and teach me how to play it. That is my hid desire, and I have a haste toward it.’

The Prince of Love gives Rādhā a long smiling look. ‘Prince’s daughter, I will teach you to play upon the bamboo flute.’

But first he sinks at the foot of the tree to tress the hair of Rādhā.

He gives her a mirror to hold in her left hand, and then he adorns her. He wonderfully braids the hair of Rādhā, mingling garlands of jasmine within it, whose odour draws the bees, and a chain of diamond, blinding them.

He decks the diadem of his well-belovèd with new peacock feathers, and decorates her robe with pearl and coral-seed.

He lengthens the snaring line of kohl beneath



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each eye, even to her bright ears. He wipes away the vermillion tinting the division of her hair, and the mark of yellow earth upon her cheek, and sets on Rādhā's brow a single drop of sandal paste and musk.

He rubs ¹ her body with aguru,* and knots a yellow belt over her blue robe. He ties sounding gold bells about each ankle.

The Lover adorns his lover, and then looks upon
her face.

‘ O Rāī,’ he says, ‘ you must take the musician’s pose, if you would play upon the bamboo flute. Then shall the flute give you a first pleasure already. Afterwards I will teach you how to play it.

‘Do as I do. Rise on the points of your toes, and bend your left leg at the knee and cross it over your right foot. Turn your head to the left and thus, standing in three flexions, speak with your bamboo flute, and play your game.’

Rādhā gilded, Rādhā renewed, Rādhā transported, glitters for joy. She rises into the pose of three flexions, and the Prince of Shepherds teaches her to hold the bamboo flute. He guides her fingers over the openings, and Rādhā blows into the reed.

‘Sing melody, breathe a sweet sound, and do not stop,’ says Krishna. ‘I could learn all

Rādhā and Krishna

things from you,' she answers with a smile, 'but little by little only.'

'You are doubtless,' Krishna says, 'somewhat frightened by the presence of your companions.'

. . .

'O Symbol of Wisdom,' answers Rādhā, 'let us play together on the same flute and know a sweeter music.'

He smiled and began to breathe into the flute also ; the names of Rādhā and Krishna rose in one melody, and content swept over the hearts of those who heard them.

Under their united breaths so penetrating a song went up that it brought life to dead trees, and the waters of Yamunā, fainting below their bank, were troubled and lived again.

'Teach me to play well, Hari,' murmurs Rādhā.

'Tell me which note corresponds to which opening in the bamboo flute, and what sound we make by blowing into it. Tell me which word of love each says. We have ten fingers and play with seven only. Tell me the secret of each finger.'

. . .

'O player upon the bamboo flute, whose spirit is deep in ours, God has fulfilled my dream, for you have made me play upon the flute. Yet

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my heart is not altogether tranquil yet, so play alone now.

‘The milkmaids feel the one happiness in hearing you, the day and night pass by like dreams when you are playing. Let us hear song being born upon your mouth.

‘I do not know what you mean, but your music is suave poison, stealing into my heart and biting exquisitely.

‘When I see a snake, I lose all consciousness ; it is the same when the snake of your music rises within me.

‘Sometimes your music is a river of love, and sometimes a river of poison ; and yet again it is a river fatal and very sweet.’

Lotus-eyed Krishna says to the milkmaids :

‘I have a thought.’ And his face shows how hard he struggles to express it to them. Suddenly, sparkling with joy, he tells them the dream of his heart :

‘Here in this changed Vrindāvana and on this jewelled throne, I wish my Rādhā to be anointed King. I will sing her glory above the glory of women, I will mount guard by her standard, I will hold the royal umbrella over her.’

Rādhā, the herdsman’s wife, murmurs in smiling surprise :

Rādhā and Krishna

‘Is not what he says most singular?’

But all the women cry: ‘Your will be done, O Krishna, for in you abides our true salvation. The day of high delight has dawned for us. We would never have dared to dream of such felicity. O Prince of Learning, make Rādhā King in these places, and we will bow down drunkenly before her.’

There is joy not only in their faces, but in the folds of their garments.

They cull the water lotus of the Yamunā together with land lotuses, and gather the champak and the nāgeswara, the jasmine and madhobi. They pluck the kānadā and the fair red dhatki and the pale blossoms of the other jasmine, with flowers of the oleander, exquisite roses, and seductive chameli.

One milkmaid plants banana shoots about the throne, near to gold water jars covered with mango branches.

Another anoints the throne with tamarind essence and diversity of perfumes.

She also pours water over the feet of Rādhā until it seems as if many fountains had come to spill there.

And in that green bower the milkmaids sing together in honour of Rādhā, making their shells and little bells resound.

Chandīdāsa

Nagar takes part in these preparations with a suitable music.

Then, when the bath is over, he dresses Rādhā. He fastens her joyful diadem and stars it. He covers her with a blue robe, and thus the gilded Rādhā shows like the moon.

. . .

Then, while the milkmaids sing their benediction, he seats her upon the throne, and the throne shines.

The girls cry *bulus* of an infinite joy.

They bring herbs to scatter over Rāī's head, together with rice grains. They anoint perfumed betel upon her temples and set a water jar before her, with offerings of fruit and milk and flowers.

A row of lamps is lighted by the throne, and Rāī is sprinkled with water from the golden ewer. Then she is sprinkled with tender sandal, and then with profound musk, with paste of agor and with thuya essence.

Scented flowers are sown throughout that arbour, and the bees pursue them.

The glory of Rāī is sung upon the vīnā and the tambour, with conches and cymbals, with the music of Madana, with the pākhvāj* and the harmonious flute.

The milkmaids utter songs of blessing, in accord

Rādhā and Krishna

with the Vedas, and cluster round Rādhā upon her throne.

A peacock, amplified by a peahen, rounds his tail to be a frame behind the head of Rādhā.

The swan and the cuckoo, the blackbird and the dahuki sing about her ; the hornets murmur in time to the little bells.

• • •
Krishna sits at the right hand of Rādhā, and we see as it were a flame of fire within a cloud, a bee on a golden lotus.

• • •
‘Lo,’ says a milkmaid, ‘there are marvels appearing in the copper-coloured trees.

‘Are they fruits that so shine like moons ?

‘Whence come such moons, and why is the sun shining at moon time ? Gold flames are about the heads of the peacocks. What is the connection between all these things ?’

But another answers : ‘It is Rādhā and Krishna transfigured, who throw their halo.

‘Rādhā and Krishna are in everything.

‘In them and because of them the flowers are but one flower, though we see each separately.

‘The tresses of Rādhā seem to be serpents but are not. Moons are shining in her bright nails.’

• • •
Rāī and Syāma are one soul.

Chandīdāsa

She is all laced with him, their arms are con-founded, metals in one alloy.

The Princess and the Prince of Love are but one body.

. . .

A love song is about that throne. Its jewels waver sweetly in the green arbour. It shines throughout all its pearl; a shade is above it, held by four pillars.

The scents of the two jasmines fill the bower, spilling down drunkenness; a multitude of hornets noise there. The moon-partridges whistle there, and coupled swans walk with the amorous peacocks.

The blackbirds and dahukis sing there with passion. Herons and the dark cuckoos infinitely repeat their cries to the glory of Krishna.

The hind and the hart lift their soft glances to the sky, the ascending lark scatters her note of joy, winging toward the brightness of that throne. The white bulls and the white cows wander in that green shade. It is lighted by Krishna, and upon his left is Rāī.

. . .

Exalted even to drunkenness, the women of Vraja sing to their harmonies. Their songs are borne up upon the beating of the tambour. Their songs are swift and deep, chiming with flute and vīnā.

Rādhā and Krishna

They sing and sing again, being drunken, and *Chandīdāsa beholds them turning, turning endlessly, with a madness, with garments in disorder.*

But these hours of happiness go by, and Krishna departs to walk in the woods of Vrindāvana with one of the girls. Therefore Rādhā goes out to seek him with her companions.

Rādhā, the fairest among them all, begins to weep and wanders to seek that one who walked with her lover.

She goes deep into the wood and finds the mark of Krishna's feet upon the ground, going beside the prints of the feet of the milkmaid.

‘ See, she dragged Krishna thus in her delirious joy. And here he put vermilion on the brow of this woman. That is the pierced leaf he used. Here is a leaf stained by the kohl with which he adorned her. He put paste of sandal upon her arms, and here is proof of it.’

Rādhā's glances sparkle with flame. She falls from joy into a sombre mood, and covers her face again.

‘ He has plucked wild flowers to cover her,’ she says. ‘ He leaned on this branch in order to reach them, and, see, it has broken beneath his

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weight. What milkmaid is this who has taken Krishna ?’

Rādhā finds the milkmaid in the wood, lying alone and fainting upon the ground.

‘Why are you alone in this deep wood, my friend ?’ asks Rādhā. ‘Why do you lie upon the earth with no care for clothes or jewels ?’

‘I have great shame in answering. I am unhappy. I have committed an error.

‘When all Vrindāvana was murmurous with Rāsalīlā, and the first hours of the morning rose among the woken milkmaids, you yourself wished Krishna to take you upon his shoulder, and he was angry and left you. He led me into the wood instead of you, and told me things that bowed me down with joy.

‘But my pride was also to be wounded by his pride. I asked the same, that he would take me upon his shoulder. He vanished, and all my joy went with him. I am alone and despairing in the deep wood.’

And moon-faced Rādhā hears and suffers.

‘O my friends, what may we do now ?’ she says. ‘Death is our only shelter. Come down with me to the Yamunā, that we may die.’

All the women of Vraja determine to go down to the stream and drown themselves.

Rādhā and Krishna

But we are sure that Yadunātha will appear before it is too late, since he would not have the shadow of their death upon his conscience.

And we are right, for he appears and addresses them tenderly, so that all are filled with a complete drunkenness again.

‘O my love,’ says Rādhā, ‘you are without fleck, while I have had a fault since birth. It is that fault, I know, which made you angry.

‘I cannot sufficiently express myself, being simple and ignorant. But you know all, for you are Kalia. We understand that our ignorance shocks you, and that you are strong in your disapproval.

‘My love, I am awake to you even in my dreams. O Ocean of Compassion, pardon me. Tree of Desire, pardon me.

‘As soon as I felt their coolness, I put myself under the protection of your two most lotus feet.

‘To torture the innocent cannot add to your greatness. Whither did you go when you left the wood?’

But when he hears how Rādhā thus beseeches him, dark Krishna says :

‘O Rādhā, I am vowed to you in my body and in my spirit. If for a moment I cease to look

Chandīdāsa

upon you, good life leaves me. O face of the moon, my eyes are happy with you.'

Smiling, he began to wind her about with his tenderness. He was prodigal of words of love, and fixed a long, lowered look upon her.

'Do not think of that which is past, O my love, for your heart and my heart were for ever joined, and for ever shall be.'

The Prince of Love looks round upon the delighted milkmaids, *and Chandīdāsa joyfully sings: 'Never, never, have I known of such a love!'*

The feast of Rāsalilā is ended. All the milkmaids return home, and Krishna goes back to his dwelling.

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XXV

THE night is over. It is dawn, and yet that moon which is Shāma's face is rising. He washes himself in perfumed water, and Yasodā * tenderly brings him fortifying cream and milk. She lifts them, turn and turn about, to the lips of Krishna, and tenderly says to him :

‘You are going to the wood, and I am frightened. They are telling strange stories. It seems that the spies of Kansa are wandering to find you.’

‘Fear nothing, mother,’ Kanu answers. ‘Have I not received the benediction of your two feet as safeguard? What can the evil spies of Kansa do against me? I hardly think of them. I can destroy all the thousands of Kansa with a single wink. O troubled mother, you may give me my clothes without misgiving.’

Thus Krishna speaks, answering the tender words of his mother. Thus of his wise intelligence he consoles her,

*according to the poet
Chandīdāsa.*

End of Part Two

PART
III
THE JOURNEY TO MATHURA

Rādhā's Dream

RĀDHĀ, WAKING EARLY, SAID TO HER friends :

‘ If you knew of what I had dreamed your hearts could not hold out for apprehension ; I saw and heard prodigious things. You who still have your reason, explain my dream to me.’

Then all cried : ‘ Speak quickly, Rādhā, for we burn to hear you.’ And Rādhā laid forth her dream :

‘ It was at dawn and I was lost in a deep sleep. I saw myself walking with Barai on the road to Gokula, for we wished to sell our milk there. I saw a man coming towards us in a chariot. I stopped him, to ask whither he was going and his name and all that concerned him. And he said : “ My name is Akrūra, and I have come to lead Krishna and Balarāma to the palace of King Kansa.” I felt troubled at these words, and returned home swiftly.’

The milkmaids were troubled also, and said to Rādhā :

‘ Be very calm, for you well know that only one out of a hundred dreams comes true.’

The princess continued : ‘ After that moment of the night I could not shut my eyes. My

Rādhā and Krishna

heart is haunted. I fear that my waking happiness is threatened.'

'Rādhā, your story has made us understand the trouble of your soul most clearly. It would be good to consult an astrologer,' suggested one of the women. 'If you are afraid that your dream may come true, let one of us go to a priest and question him.'

A milkmaid went to the temple and set flowers upon the head of Gaurī.

'If the flower falls,' said the priest, 'there will be no danger.'

But the flower stayed upon the head of the goddess, and the priest said: 'A great misfortune, whose kind I know not yet, weighs upon Gokula.'

'O milkmaid,' sings the Brahmin Chandīdāsa, 'dreams are not always false. I have heard that some of them sometimes come true.'

Soon they hear that Krishna is making ready to go to Mathura.

His uncle Kansa does in truth send Akrūra as a messenger, to lead him to a religious festival. The man seeks for him at his foster-mother's house, and Krishna, as also his half-brother Balarāma, is obliged to accept the invitation because of its sacred nature.

The night before his departure has now come, and all the people are weeping.

Chandīdāsa

XXVII

RĀDHĀ says: 'Deep night is stretched over the sky, and presently the morning will be born.

'O Night, I beg you to stay, to cover us with your dark robe.

'O Moon, do not take up your dawn position, nor put on your morning face. Stay, O stay as you are now.'

'Listen to me, O Rāī,' says one of the milkmaids; 'I know a way to succeed in what you wish: so that none may see when she assumes her morning face, we will cover up the moon with our sārīs.'

Another says: 'We will go and be like Rahu, eclipsing all of her. Then none shall see the coming of dawn, and so shall our dear master, and so shall the king of the world, stay near us. Or else I shall imitate evil auspices, to appear to the eyes of Krishna and prevent him going.'

'I will be the jackal passing Krishna on the right,' said a third.

'I will rise in his path in the likeness of a hermit,' a fourth suggested.

And yet another said: 'I shall become thunder and in my breaking kill Akrūra.'

'And thus,' reasons the poet Chandīdāsa, 'Krishna will be constrained to stay at Gokula.'

Srī-Krishna is on the point of departure. Yasodā and Robini are lamenting. Robini is the mother of Balarāma and a further wife of Vasudeva, Krishna's father.

Rādhā and Krishna

XXVIII

YASODĀ and Rohini weep, looking upon the moon face of their Krishna.

Upon a plaintive modulation Yasodā sighs :
 ‘O Krishna, how may my spirit be without
 you? How may it live far from that treasure
 which you are to me? It would be better to
 kill me, for my maternal heart has lost all
 resting. It shakes me, and I do not know what
 has become of the soul of my life. To whom
 shall I carry milk and cream, O moon-faced
 Krishna? How shall I continue in my
 sorrow?’

‘ Listen, O Nanda, my husband : when Krishna has gone, we will leave our dwelling, and I will set it on fire. What is the worth of life, how may we cleave to her, when we have lost the very fruit of our eyes ? My prayer to God has been in vain.

‘ O Krishna, turn and look upon your mother for this last time. Tell me who has persuaded you to go. Have you carefully thought upon the matter? All Gokula will die in a torment of grief during your absence. All the children of Vraja, remembering your graces, will refuse to live without you.

'Who will drive the cows to pasture? Who

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will start the games in the meadow? We shall not hear your voice or your sweet words at the time of the driving of the flock. To whom shall I give cream and milk and butter? And who will call me mother now? '

Nanda, the husband of Yasodā, weeping, passes his arms about his wife, while *the poet Chandīdāsa bursts into tears, holding the foot of the excellent mother of Krishna.*

During this time, Rādhā, who had been told of these things, comes down into Gokula.

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

X X I X

The Lamentation of Rādhā

‘ O Kalia, I cannot let you go. Say all you will, but I shall drown myself in the waters of the Yamunā. I will be born again as you, O Krishna, and when I am the son of Nanda, you shall be Rādhā. You shall know grief in your turn who to-day remain unknowing.

‘ O lotus-eyed Krishna, I have forgotten all for you, my name and family renown. My sister-in-law and my mother-in-law used to love me as their ear-rings, but now the sight of me can burn their eyes. They make me suffer because of their words by day and night.

'I have abandoned all for you. Are you ungrateful? Or is it worthy of you to leave me so ?

‘ You made my love grow under the tenderness of your smile, and caused me to break most holy bonds. How can you wish to go to Mathura ? All the milkmaids are resolved to die. What price shall we set upon the light if the idol of our heart be far from us ?

‘ It is ever you, O Kalia : you in my dreams,
and you before my eyes. You in my waking,
and you within my sleeping.

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‘ Kalia of my heart, O Kalia of my remorse, the thought of you is with me when I eat.

‘The thought of you is with me when I walk.
I say over your name; I love you endlessly
and carry your image about with me, O Kalia.

'If my eyes are turned to the sky, the blue tinting of the clouds gives me a dream of your body. My guilty spirit knows sweet satisfaction: the fountain of love rises and weeps in her.

‘ I stand with my eyes fixed upon anything that shows the dark colouring of your colour.

‘ I wear your scarf, and it is as blue as the hair upon my head.

‘Because musk is dark like you, O Kalia, I rub myself with it.

‘I keep your garland of scented flowers. I take delight in looking upon the plumage of peacocks because it is blue, and when there are no peacocks about me, I take a blown lotus and look at it until the hunger of my eyes is fed.

'I pluck atasi flowers and wear them with devotion. I move through you alone and suffer for you, and you wish to leave me.

‘ Sometimes my sad heart also weeps. My spirit is often alarmed, as if there were a fire in its neighbourhood. I am without rest when I do not see you.

Rādhā and Kṛishṇa

‘ O Kṛishṇa, I am altogether vowed to your two god-like feet ; I know nothing in all the world but your two feet.

‘ I try to calm my heart, and yet it rustles like a leaf, and I fall to weeping.

‘ Oh, that your love might stay for ever with me, O Kṛishṇa! If you leave me, you mortify me in the eyes of the world, you wound my woman’s pride.

‘ Oh, that your love might stay with me for ever, Kṛishṇa. I try to be strong, but my heart has forgotten how. Ah, stay in Gokula for ever.

. . .

‘ Master, lift up your face and speak to me but once only. My happiness is drawing toward a close. You go to Mathura and break our womanish hearts.

‘ I have said so much to you, I have said so many things to you, O Yadumuni, that I have nothing left to say.

‘ Your red feet know my heart. Why are you so cruel ?

‘ I will take you into the solitude of my chamber, and there watch over you by night and day. I will fan you with fans. I will stretch you on a flower-bed, I will touch your feet, and give you a box of betel scented with anise. I will put betel scented with anise in your mouth, and your wearinesses shall depart. I will wash your

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feet and cover them with an essence of thuya and of sandal. Whither would you go, disdainng such happiness? Rest, O Krishna of my spirit, I pray you rest.'

And the Brahmin Chandīdāsa also implores him, saying: ' O Krishna, whither shall we go to dwell without your presence? '

Rādhā and Krishna

X X X

AND the herdsmen also lamented :

‘ O player upon the bamboo flute, where are you going? Whither are you departing, to make us grieve? We do not know that, or what you mean, or why you let our love for you so grow.

‘ With whom shall we live now? Your picture is in the deep of our eyes. Ever we see you in our dreams, and think of you, eating and walking. How can we forget our love, lotus-eyed Krishna? ’

Thus the herdsmen weep in their passion, looking upon the face of Krishna. In the great disorder of their grief, they sink along the road, sighing :

‘ O Krishna, we shall hear your tender words no more. We shall play with you no more, though the cows are at pasture; we shall hear the singing of your bamboo flute no more. We shall no more answer at the day’s end when you say “ friend ” and “ brother.” ’

. . .

Krishna answers : ‘ I am constrained to go, but I shall return. Do not be grieved, O Rāī. I know the sweetness of your heart. It is filled full of love. I shall indeed return.’

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Then he mounts into Nanda's chariot, while Nanda urges the bullocks forward.

The milkmaids bar his way, and Rādhā, falling to the earth, stretches her arms across the path of the car.

'Go if you must, but only by killing Rādhā!' cry the women of Vraja, and would hold back the chariot.

They cry and roll in the dust.

Also Chandīdāsa, suffering Rādhā's own despair, goes to the Prince of Love with clasped hands, to beg him to give some further explanation.

Rādhā and Krishna

XXXI

After the Going of Krishna

ALL the cows low to Mathura, for the Prince of Love has gone that way. The sad calves no longer suck the udders, they leave them to rush with lifted tails toward Mathura.

The sad stags will not eat. Their unquiet eyes are filled with tears, looking along the road of Krishna.

The voice of the red-billed cuckoo, a melody once desirable, now sounds no more among the desolate branches. Yet certain of the birds repeat the name of Shāma all through the day and night most sadly. But the moon-partridge and the dahuki and all the swallows are dumb with grieving.

And the swan and the parakeet and the heron are dumb with grieving.

They stay still and weep silently, and none knows whither their voices have gone.

The hornets have ceased to murmur. The world is laid low by the departure of Krishna. The children and the young men and the old men of the city are now in tears.

. . .

Krishna goes toward Mathura with Balarāma, and on the way he steals, from the washer-

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man of King Kansa, garments of the royal family.

Balarāma and Krishna dress themselves as warriors in the stolen garments. But Kansa, who has heard of these things, sends out an elephant to fight with the two audacious young men. In the course of the battle the elephant loses his tusks, and flees in great fright.

Then the King sends two known warriors, Chānāra and Mushtika, against them. But these are also driven back.

Krishna enters the palace, and kills his uncle Kansa. The people of Mathura crown him king.

He sets his father Vasudeva and his mother Devakī free, whom Kansa has kept prisoner for many years.

Rādhā and Krishna

XXXII

DEVAKĪ, the mother of Krishna, says : ‘ My son, O Yadumuni, where have you stayed so long and far from me ? My heart was dying.

‘ Let me fill my eyes with the sight of you, my son, seeing your moon face.

‘ How could Kansa have sent such a son away from me into Gokula? Grief has been eating me for many years. My heart became sick, and the flesh dropped away from me. But now I have found the fruit of my eyes again. O lamp of my heart, sight of my glances, where have you been throughout the long day ? ’

She takes Yadumuni over her knees, and gives him milk to drink and butter and cream to eat. And all the Brahmins tell Krishna of the eyes of marvel, Krishna incomparable, the secret of his birth and the story of his life.

Preparations are made for great feasting because Krishna has found the folk of his own blood again.

When Nanda, Krishna’s adopted father, drives back into Gokula, the crowd, who hear the rumbling of his chariot, run out to meet him, hoping to see the god again.

Yasodā and Rohini hasten, desiring to embrace their sons. And at the sight of the empty

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car they stand stricken as if they were dead trees.

They cry: 'Where are our Krishna, our Balarāma?'

The herdsmen and the milkmaids, having run along the bank of the Yamunā upon the impulsion of their heart, now stay as stones.

'Where is he?' Yasodā cries. 'I do not see him. I do not see him.'

And Nanda answers, weeping gently:

'They have both stayed in far Mathura. They have stayed there without me. Why do you come to ask them of me? I have lost my Krishna. I have lost my Balarāma. I return to my labour alone. It seemed to me that the thunder beat upon my head. They let me depart alone with my great grief.'

He comes down out of the chariot, lamenting aloud and blinded by his tears. He has to be held on either side before he can walk, and *the heart of Chandīdāsa is filled with agony.*

Yasodā says: 'Where can I go to find Krishna and Balarāma? They two were the treasure and light of the world. What can I say to those who approach me concerning them?

'My spirit is near my sons.

'O Nanda, my husband, I wish to go there. I will stretch out my arm, and take my sombre-

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

tinted child again, my child with a strange Destiny. I will set him on my knee, and lift up milk to his lips.

‘And have a certain happiness.

‘Let us go and see our two children, my husband.

‘I will kiss their faces. I will take care of them.’

Yasodā and Rohini weep by turns, and know no peace.

They weep daily and nightly, repeating: ‘O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa!’

And the poet Chāṇḍīdāsa says: ‘The fruit of our eye has stayed in Mathura. Kṛṣṇa has left us all. The thunder is pouring down upon my head.’

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XXXIII

The Lamentation of Rādhā

‘MY belovèd, my well-belovèd is in Mathura. He said that he would return, but he has not kept his promise. His heart is as hard as stone or as the thunder.

‘I live only in an impatient waiting for his return. I rise and I seat myself and I rise again. I look endlessly at the long road. My eyes are dim.

‘ Can anyone tell me when the son of Nanda will come back to Vraja ? He is my content ; how shall I live without him ?

‘ My treasure has stayed in the city on the other side of the river. I would be a bird and fly to him, but God has not given me wings.

‘If I knew how to swim, I would dive into the Yamunā and cross it and be with him.’

‘ But I do not know how to swim, and we cannot stay the Yamunā by drawing all his water in our jars.

‘The name of Mathura terrifies me. O Barai, Barai, I wish to see Kanu. When may I hold him in my arms? He is the light of Gokula.

‘He was mine to me, even a jewel, and by my carelessness I lost him.

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‘When I would throw myself into the fire, the flames die down before me.

‘ When I would hide in their night the caves all
close against me.

‘I seek succour near some tree, and the tree denies me his shadow. He for whom I live is cruel to me.

‘ O Barai, the year is reaching its end ; the Spring is to be born again. The madhobi opens, the cuckoo makes his song near me, and the hornets are murmurous.

‘Of what use to me are my hair and my sārī,
if my well-belovèd stays in Mathura ?

‘The youth of my body, which was a gem to me, means less than a fragment of glass now he is gone.

“My Prince of Love lives doubtless with another woman. He is in a far city.

‘Who is this seduction who holds my amorous
hornet in her charm? Rise, O my friend, and
go to Mathura. Speak of me to him. Try to
find out if he will ever return.

‘ I will go to live in the forest, like Sītā who left Rāma and was an exile in the woods.

‘ I will live alone in the forest, lost in meditation and seeing no one.

'I will gather fruits and roots and the wild

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flowers. I will wipe the vermilion from my brow, and my untended hair shall grow into great mats.

‘I shall go to the forest, carrying my love within me in my heart. Perhaps my grief shall sleep in the forest while my love is waking.

‘I cannot abide in this agony. What use have I for a house? I know that my Lord is cruel and that he has left us.’

Barai lets fall her head and answers :

‘Speak and speak, my pretty Rādhā. Words bring relief, and by listening I shall help you.’

. . .

Rādhā suffers the pain of infinite love.

She goes into the wood, and the sight of the kadamba tortures her.

She goes to the ghat of the Yamunā where she first saw Krishna and felt fire.

She sees the place where the Prince of Love once stole the robes of the milkmaids as a jest. She is stricken with bitterness and can think of nothing.

She sees the madhobi, and it pictures her meeting with Krishna, so that her tears flow down.

She sees the place where the Prince of Love made her his lover, and dies down upon the earth.

Rādhā and Kṛishna

And again she says : ‘ My friend, now go to Kanu of the lotus eyes and tell him that the river of my happiness has dried away, and that therefore my soul is thirsting.

‘ Take Kanu’s hand in yours and cease not to speak of the boon of his return to me.

‘ God has gone up against all the desires which cross my heart in sleep, which cross my heart in waking and in dreaming.

‘ I am innocent and can no more bear this grief.

‘ Try to read in the heart of Kanu. Practise upon him until he comes to us.’

So sings the Brahmin Chandīdāsa.

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XXXIV

THE messenger came to Mathura, and said to Krishna :

‘ O friend of Kobunja*, have you abandoned the moon-faced Rāī ?

‘ O Prince, O wearer of the turban, Rādhā has sent me hither to bring back to your mind a certain signature, of which we all were witnesses.

‘ You wrote your name upon one of her feet, on a day when you came to her as a barber.

‘ When you return to Vraja, the people will heap reproaches upon you, yet they will sound joyful cymbals.

‘ Seeing you so fair, Rāī, as we take a coloured bird in a snare, tangled you in her glances.

‘ She kept you in her heart’s cage, binding your life to her life with chains of the spirit.

‘ She fed you with nectar and taught you to say Rādhā, Rādhā. But the bird became unfaithful, he broke the bars of her heart, and flew away to this strange city.

‘ I sought him for her a long while. I learned that Kobunja had caught him in this place. Now Rāī sends me to fetch her jewelled bird.

‘ You are cruel. How can you thus live far away from Rādhā, the symbol of love?

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‘She weeps by day and night, and knows no sleep. She loses her wits and does not answer, she stays still and hides her face under her hand. Her tears fall wet upon her robe.

‘She went to sit at the foot of the kadamba ; her sorrow became two sorrows.

‘She does not eat her daily rice. She does not drink. Her dreams are endless.

‘Sometimes she cries : “My love, my love !” and for a moment comes to life again.

‘O Kanu, she may be cured if you return.’
Krishna’s heart breaks when he hears these things.

‘Let us go swiftly,’ he says. ‘I desire to see Rādhā.

‘How could I forget that gilded loveliness which was part of my dreams and sleeping ?

‘I live at Mathura, but I see her in night vision, and when I think by day.

‘She is by my side when I walk and when I lie down. I remember Rādhikā and her delights, even in my laughter.

‘To whom shall I tell my agony ? I cannot say it, yet my soul is aware of it.

‘My unresting heart sees Rādhā ; I play nothing except her name upon my bamboo flute.

‘Say to her that she is my lover and that I am

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ever telling, as if they were a prayer, the sounds of her name over upon my fingers.

‘Go now before me, and say my messages. I will follow, and surely see her at the last.’

So sings the poet Chandīdāsa.

Krishna goes forth from the palace. He leaves Mathura and hastens back to Rādhā.

End of Part Three

PART
IV
REUNION



X X X V

‘MY FRIEND,’ RĀDHĀ SAYS, ‘THE EVIL DAYS are drawing towards an end and happiness is born. Come to the temple of the madhobi tree, to the temple of Krishna, since I have happy forecastings.

‘My hair waves in the small wind ; my robe has fallen under the ardency of my youth. The lids of my left eye are twitching, and my necklace is moving on my breast.

‘I saw the crows coupling at dawn, and sharing food, and coming to perch near me to sing of my love’s return.

‘The betel fell from my lips, and the flower which they had put on the head of the goddess Gaurī has also fallen.’

One of Rādhā’s companions came smiling to her, and said :

‘O face of the Moon, rise up, so that the pain of your heart may cease. Your evil days are drawing to their end. The madhobi appears before you, therefore arise.’

Rādhā, hearing, cannot constrain herself ; she raises delighted eyes and sees her lover.

‘Come to me, come to me,’ she murmurs, smiling and stretching forth her arms.

‘Come to me, for I have found my

Rādhā and Krishna

treasure for ever. The suffering in my heart is dead.'

And her companions sing the ocean of their joy about her.

• • •
She wipes the feet of Krishna with her long hair, and seats him on a bed of marvel.

She rubs his limbs with musk and aguru and sandal.

She spreads perfumed water over him ; she washes his two feet carefully.

She hangs a garland of lyric flowers about the neck of Krishna.

She looks upon his beauty and is drunken. She does not turn away her eyes.

The face of Kanu is the full moon, and Rāī is as the snared moon-partridge, drinking the source of love.

• • •
'What shall I say to you, my well-belovèd, except that you shall be Lord of me in this life and in all my lives ?

'I will bind your feet in a noose of love, woven from the substance of my soul.

'I have dedicated my being to you, and become your servant.

'None other lives for me in the three worlds, of sky and earth and hell.

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‘ I will rise up for none other, answering to the sweet name of Rādhā.

‘None other shall be mine in my two lives.’

‘I put myself under the protection of your lotus feet, because they are cool and tender.

‘Do not deceive me, for I am innocent. You cannot do so, being a god.

'I could not dwell without the Lord of my soul
to stay me.

‘My spirit dies if I cease from looking upon
your face.

‘I carry you as an amulet by my heart, O
Krishna.

‘O my love, what shall I say to you? You know my heart and my thought, my works and my belief.

‘ Joyful I run to take refuge in your bounty.

‘Because you adore me, the world bows down to me, though I cannot understand what may be lovable of mine.

**‘ My father and my mother and the city of Vraja
venerate me.**

‘ The adoration of my milkmaids, who respect me whether I be chaste or unchaste, makes my heart tender.

‘ My soul is yours ; it expands within your joy.

Rādhā and Krishna

‘ Your words are as ornaments to my body.

‘ O Krishna, I would dress myself in your robe.

• • •

‘ My lover, I have known your love since I was a child in my father’s house, and you have not wished me to dwell among my people.

‘ I shall make plans to drown myself in the sea.

‘ I shall die, and in my other birth I shall be Krishna, the son of Nanda, I shall make you Rādhā.

‘ I shall have myself loved of you, I shall abandon you as you have abandoned. I shall stand at the foot of the kadamba tree, upright in three flexions, as ever you have.

‘ I shall sing in my bamboo flute when you pass down to Yamunā.

‘ And you shall be snared by that singing, O sweet, ingenuous and well-born woman.

‘ Thus you shall know love’s sorrow.

• • •

‘ You are the jewel that assures me happiness.

‘ My body more than gilds itself in coming against your body. You are the sign of love, and you are the sign of love.

‘ We are but ignorant milkmaids, not knowing how to adore you.

‘ When I wander seeking you in the woods, a single minute is more than a hundred times twelve years.

Chandīdāsa

‘ I rub my body with musk and sandal because they have the blue colour of your body.

‘ Your two feet are upon my heart ; I clasp them and shut my eyes.

‘ Krishna of all marvel, O my single memory, my life has no other knowledge.

‘ Krishna is my life, Krishna is the treasury of my soul, Krishna is my collar. He is as my garments ; I carry him for ever with me, like a sārī.

‘ Krishna of my heart, and of my body and of my soul, Krishna, my meditation and my adoration, O Krishna, I have become your servant.

‘ Krishna is my peculiar treasury, he is all my power, he is my caste, and my renown.

‘ Krishna is the tree of happiness.

‘ God has given me the inestimable treasure of Krishna, and the cuckoo sings ; the hornet murmurs because my king is in my arms.’

Krishna smiles tenderly at Rāī, and says to her :

‘ Who may know your youth and your wisdom ? The joy of your youth is without price, my Rādhā.

‘ Your heart is bound to my heart everlastingly, your soul to my soul for ever.

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

‘For your sake I became a herder of cows in the house of Nanda.

‘I abandoned the blue fields of the sky, and came to the earth fields of Gokula.

‘I sing the sweet sounds of your name for ever, and you know it. I think of you solely, and my happiness would faint without you.

. . .

‘Rāī, you are the instigation of my life.

‘I sit on the bank of the Yamunā to see you bathing.

‘I wait at the foot of the kadamba tree to watch your beauty.

‘Beautiful young lover, I look on every side as the lark glances ; I am on timid alert for the tenderness of your face.

‘I am drunken with your love ; my imagination is exhausted by you ; it sings you for ever.

. . .

‘I dream of you when I wake, O my young lover, and in my meditation.

‘You are as my collar.

‘My lover is my reason for adoring.

‘The feet of my young lover are all to me.

‘I think of her in my walking.

‘She is my meditation before I eat.

‘Rādhā, do not withdraw your feet from my feet, for they depend on you.

‘I am your slave.

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‘ I am the yellow robe you wear.

‘ More mercy shall be shown to him who has adored my Rādhā for a minute of time than to him who has adored myself for a million times twelve years.

‘ Rādhā alone has power and access with me.

‘ All is dark in my heart without this Rādhā.

‘ O Rāī, O sign of love, I feel that I am dying when I do not see you.

‘ Your love and the story of your joy make all my learning.

‘ Rādhā, I wear the yellow robe of your delight, and I sing.

‘ Your greatness and glory are held in the two notes of Rādhā. I tell your name over on my fingers, as if it were a prayer, by night and day.

‘ All is dark without you, O Rāī, all is without hope. Rādhā, my life, my light.’

*And the Brahmin Chandīdāsa eternally
sings the Splendour of Rādhā
and Krishna.*

The End.

NOTES

Chandīdāsa

The Sanskrit form of native words has been generally adopted as being the more consistent; but it might be borne in mind, as a rough guide, that in Bengali *v* is pronounced as *b*, *a* as *o*, *s* as *sh*, and *e* generally as French *é*.

Hari

It has not been thought necessary to point out the changes rung throughout on the many names of Krishna.

The Lord of Umā

Shiva.

domri

Narrow-waisted drum.

chamaras

Fly-whisks of cow tails.

left

It was the custom to take the pulse of a woman's left wrist, and of a man's right.

Hastinagara

Ancient Delhi; see also Amaru, 16.

vulture

All these are classic comparisons in Bengali verse.

Rāsālīlā

A love festival taking place in early Autumn.

white

The widow's colour.

vīṇā

Instrument of strings stretched on a long fretted finger-board over two gourds.

rāga
aguru

Mode.

A fragment of aloe wood
paste.

pākhvāj
Yasodā

Loud finger-drum.

Krishna's nurse and foster-
mother, to whom he was
taken after the miraculous
birth in prison at Mathura.
Krishna's mistress in Ma-
thura.

Kobunja

*Amores of Amaru
and Mayūra from
the Sanskrit*

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

AMARU

IT appears astonishing that these poems should, if I except one which I myself suggested in Coloured Stars, be the first introduction of this poet into English; for Amaru was, from our modern point of view, one of the supreme early lyric poets of the East, perhaps not very much less startling and satisfying than Li Po and Tu Fu among the Chinese. Amaru has often been compared as love lyrist with Bhartrhari and Bilhana, but he was, though this may by no means be obvious through my interpretation, whole centuries ahead of either of them in subtlety. Amaru holds among scholars, at least, the highest distinction as a poet of the phases of love: desire and attainment, estrangement and reconciliation, joy and sorrow.

There are many theories and rumours concerning his time and identity, but A. B. Keith says with authority: 'He figures as one of the gems of the Court of Vikramāditya, but it is impossible to suppose that he was really a contemporary of Kālidāsa. We definitely know that he dates before Anandavardhana, and that he cannot be later, therefore, than about A.D. 800.'

It is possible that a reading, even at third hand, will make clear how the legend arose that Amaru was the hundred and first incarnation of a soul which had previously occupied a hundred women.

Amaru's Century of poems was only discovered soon after 1800, his supplementary fragments and the 'lyric counterpoints' to his work by pupils, only after 1900.

The poems which follow are not the original Century of Amaru, but a hundred selected from the complete available examples of his work and school. I have translated from the French versions of A. L. Apudy and Franz Toussaint, and from the Italian of Umberto Norsa.

MAYŪRA

It seems feasible, in order to give an impression of Amaru as a poet born out of due time, to append an erotic fragment written by one who was more or less a contemporary, and adjudged a poet of considerable merit.

Mayūra, who flourished in the first half of the seventh century, was the father-in-law of the poet Bāna. His main work was the Sūryasataka, a hundred stanzas in praise of the sun. He was a favourite of King Harsa (606-647), and, apart from anthology stanzas, the only other indubitable writings of his that have come down to us are an erotic fragment, Mayūrāsataka (written, legend says, about his own daughter, and given as the cause of his leprosy), and the present fragment, recently edited with a French translation by M. Eugène Féval, a great authority on the Sanskrit lyric.

Apart from these last few repetitive and, I think, admirable lines, all Mayūra's work has had the advantage of brilliant editing and translation in English by George Payn Quackenbos, who issued his work in 1917.

*A comparison of such poets with
Amaru is contained in
my Terminal
Essay.*

AMARU

Man

1.

THE TENUOUS BAMBOO BRIDGE SPANNING the double tide of the Mālinī has been carried away, and now my handsome is cut off from me upon an island. Has her father enough black millet? The rain continues. Each night I climb up the hill from which I can see the trembling light of the house of Sarmichā. It shines in the wet darkness like a glance through tears.

2.

Her robe clung close to her body, and the tissue of it became transparent. I thank you, rain. You were, Sanābavī, as if you were naked. But, when the rainbow broke in flower, who warmed your little shivering breasts for you?

3.

If I had the talent of Vālmīki I would write a poem with my lover as heroine. The first ten parts would be given over to the ten fingers of her hands, for they wove a veil in which I have wrapped up all my ancient loves. And I would consecrate the ten others to the ten nights we spent at Mābhahāt.

Amores

4.

‘Pity!’ she says, with bruised breasts and disordered hair. With eyes closed and legs still trembling, ‘Finish!’ she says. She says in a choked voice: ‘It is enough!’ And now her silence grows eternal. Is she dead or sleeping, is she meditating in delight on what has happened, or thinking of another?

5.

My tender friend, my Sodarā, returns to her dwelling at sunset; Nārāyaṇī, the guardian of the temple, leaves me as soon as the star Asva is shining, and I sleep alone on my reed mat. Too seldom I dream Nārāyaṇī has stayed, caressing me until the dawn.

6.

I have seen you at your source, a child could have jumped over you, O river, a bunch of flowers deflected you. Here you are a wide flood, and might engulf this fine boat. Alas, Dayāmati! My love for Dayāmati!

7.

She makes me a precise salute, and withdraws her little feet under her fringes. She looks attentively at the flowers painted upon her fan. If I venture to caress her gazelle, she starts to

Amaru

smooth the feathers of her painted parakeet. If I speak, she asks a question of one of her women. I find a thousand delights in her timidity.

8.

When you used to make dolls out of wet leaves, they always cried however much you rocked them. And once I told you to put your doll out in the sunlight. You have played with my heart since then and I have wept. But in the end I remembered my own advice, and my tears are dry for ever.

9.

This is the first time that the wind blows from the East, O Sadamī, O precious crown, and brings me the sound of the temple bell of Anāgarī. Soon the Five Flowers of Spring will be scenting my house, and you, the Sixth, will bring me in your hair the odour of the reed mat on which you have wept all Winter.

10.

If I told my pain to the torrent, the torrent would halt for me. If I told it to the palm tree, the tree would bend down about me. But you pass singing, and do not even regard me. I will tell my pain to the torrent. If the torrent does not halt for me, at least its water will refresh my

Amores

brow. I will tell my pain to the palm tree. If the palm tree does not bend down about me, at least it will shade my grief. Once more I have conquered shame and told you my suffering. You refuse me the water of your lips, the shade of your shadow.

II.

Your hair climbs down about your shoulders, and the forest of Vishamadita shelters the gilded temple of Misrakesi.

12.

A swan sought the silvered flowers of the kumuda on a pool at night, and was deceived by the reverberation of the stars in the crystal water. He pecked at the glittering reflection of the stars. At dawn he did not dare to eat the flowers of the sitopala, though they were white over all the pool. He was afraid that they were only stars. Do not go on telling me that you love me, Sarmichā.

13.

No one has dared to speak of you to me since you went away. But I have said your name to the wind as he passed me, and to a certain man as he lay dying. If you are alive, O my mistress, the wind will some day meet you as he passes, and if you are dead, the dead man will tell you I have not forgotten.

Amaru

14.

My thirst has redoubled since first I drank her lips. Nor am I astonished. There was much salt in that kissing.

15.

O Gāyatri, your love is more inconstant than the reflection of a branch in the water of a lake with boats. The lake is a mirror again when the boats have gone, but your heart is suspicious still when you have pardoned me.

16.

It matters little to me that I shall never behold the thousand gardens and intricate palaces of Hastināpura, since Māyā, Illusion, in the likeness of Pārvati, stays in my dwelling. It matters little to me that I shall never behold the smile of Siddhārta in the temple of Suddhōdana, since the smile of Māyā, his mother, is mine in the smile of Pārvati. My joy is as unshakable as Meru mountain.

17.

Since your husband has got to depart at dawn, listen to me carefully. He must not see your joy ; you must weep, and keep him ; you must tell him that you have not the courage to stay in a room his absence leaves most desolate ; you must go out to see to his horse, and bid the servant saddle the fastest.

Amores

18.

I told you that I knew how to make you happy.
I said the very old words which put a woman's
fears to sleep. Now your tears smile at me as a
child smiles at a dream.

19.

Birds in all the trees of my garden, will you be
able to imprison my longing in your musical
net? It breaks out towards my lover whom I
have not seen for thirty days. My longing would
hasten and make haste and beat against her per-
fumed breasts, against her scented voice. Hold
it not back, good birds.

20.

She put marguerites into her belt and their
petals closed. 'Oh, what is happening?' she
asked, and I replied: 'You looked at them with
the darkness of your dark eyes and they thought
it night.'

21.

Why have you no pity for my love? The stars
do not disdain the sea. They can admire them-
selves in it.

22.

I was surprised that the nightingale singing in
the little tree did not fly off when I came near it.

Amaru

I stretched out my arm and touched that flower of music, and it had a broken wing. I am still singing of your beauty, Dayāmati.

23.

That voyaging cloud now strands on the root of the moon and is broken in pieces. O you who shall some day sing this verse, seek to find why I sighed in writing it.

24.

‘I am no fool, and it is useless for you to lie to me. I see the marks of her kisses on your breast.’ But I strain her violently against my heart, removing those marks of indiscretion, and her memory of them.

25.

If so many birds sing in the trees of Kavindā, and if the flowers of Kavindā can never die, if clouds are not known in the sky of Kavindā, dear : you once crossed Kavindā.

26.

‘You lie in my heart,’ you said, and I thought you commonplace. Now I send you a leaf of balm by Gāyatri. Slip it between your tunic and your breasts so that the perfume reaches . . . me.

Amores

27.

Do not speak. Your love words add nothing to my happiness. Do not speak any more. Sit in this sun-ray.

28.

She has come in spite of the tempest. If you had seen the small rain, *Mātrayā*, falling from the tree flowers into her hair and, as if the thread of her pearls had broken, shining upon her breasts. . . .

29.

The snow of loneliness falls on my heart and shivers into white fruit blossom.

30.

The forest held you prisoner, and the trunks of the trees were the bars of your cage, O dawn. The stream sang a more joyous song to you, dawn, and the mosses were softer. But you broke your cage with light, and went away. I think of *Mahādahi* who loved me for a morning.

31.

She is alive no more, and the flowers still appear. O Death, now that you have got this girl how can you find time to go on killing?

32.

The peacocks cried at nightfall and have beaten

A m a r u

their wings and departed. They carried away the last fires of the sun in their proud fans, and the last embers of our love, it seemed to us.

33.

Perfumes of love and smiles of love, O glory of the sun and splendour of the starry night, as set in the balance against death you fulfil my desire no longer ! Girls of Lankā, palm trees of Sārtha, streams of Mārakī, songs of the wind in the cherry trees of Kamala, I say good-bye.

Amores

Woman

34.

See how his violence has dispersed my powder of sandal ; I spread it with so much art upon my breasts ! See how tired my lips are still, and how the down of the couch has been soiled beyond all cleansing, and this veil torn in pieces !

35.

Whither are you running, O leaping stranger at the borders of this forest ? Has love let fly you, fair boy arrow, and do you hurtle towards the dwelling of your mistress ? The ground rejects you as the tambourine rejects the ball. Are you drunken with immateriality, trying to catch yourself away from your body ?

36.

I shall go, I shall find a pretext for being away until the twilight. I shall go. As I want time to lick over my happiness, I shall take the long path that passes in front of the fountain, and there I shall tell my comrades that I walk out to see if my father's fields have suffered from the flood. O victorious Love, I shall go, O wild heart !

Amaru

37.

This is the Winter season of long sleep. I lie down on my couch at twilight and invoke Matha, the god of gilded dreams. I promise offerings and sacrifices and yet I hardly ever dream of Sṛī Hari. When the storm shakes the walls of my little house, I prefer to lie awake and listen, for the wind walking through the bamboos of my garden says Sṛī Hari.

38.

‘He sleeps, sleep now in your turn,’ said my women, and they left me. Then, in a drunken fit of love, I brushed the cheek of my young bridegroom with my lips. I felt him tremble, and saw that he had only pretended. I was ashamed at the time, but soon I groaned with happiness.

39.

I now abandon my body to the kisses of the water; soon to the kisses of the hours. O kisses of the hours, will you also leave a perfume of lustral water upon my spirit?

40.

Sometimes you can be so fair, O day; O night, so desolate. Sometimes so sweet, O night; so torturing, O day. If he means never to come back, I wish you were both dead.

Amores

41.

My father is away on business, and my mother has been out since this morning upon a visit to my invalid sister. Night is falling and I am too young and afraid to stay alone. Come in, O pleasant stranger.

42.

As the branch bends beneath the weight of that bird, so I bend beneath the weight of your love for me ; but when you leave me, I have not the branch's resilience. Yet what does it matter, O bird? Go on singing. I had forgotten that your song would soon cease and that I had not got it yet by heart.

43.

She said over and over very tenderly : ' Come and see my parakeet.' I followed her into the house, but her women spied on us, and she said : ' My parakeet must be in the garden.' He was not under the arbour, for the scent of the jasmine was too strong there. He was not on the bank of the runlet, for a little boy was cutting wood there. We found him at last in a deserted pavilion, on a gilded sofa.

44

We are but three, yet we are four, for Love dances beside us. Night has fallen, but the breasts of Naranī are light for us. The flowers

Amaru

have closed their petals, but the breath of Privā, as she turns near us, is our refreshment. Arahā ! Let us dance our most secret dances, let our feet pleasurably bite this moss ! Move the tress of hair hiding your throat, O Naranī ! Privā, come nearer ! Look upon our bodies, Love, for we are Naranī, Privā, and Domihī. We love, and not even the calling of Night, couched in the forest, can pluck us asunder. Night wishes our complaints to be added to his great murmur, but, arahā !, we will dance till the violet morn ! Not till then will we carry Privā to our dwelling and drink the wine of her sweat. Arahā ! Arahā ! Your belly is like a pool lashed by the storm, O Naranī ! Why are you already dancing the last dance ? And thou, Privā ! Privā ! O Night, we come !

45.

I write this letter by the sufficient moonlight. My friends have called me, but I preferred to stay in this room since it is full of you. I am still weeping. I looked into the garden, and the shadow of a leaf of the bamboo wrote out an unknown word on the blue sand. It may have been your name.

46.

I take a long time in carefully giving a severe fold to my eyebrows, and know how to harden

Amores

my looks. I am an expert in correcting smiles. When my companions rally me, I fasten an absolute silence upon myself. When my heart is like to break, I tighten my girdle. But the success of these things is in the hands of God.

47.

O night, you have often come to me softly and covered my face when it was weeping. A nectar glistens in my cup this evening, and my lover lies upon my breast. Stay with me as long as you will to-night, O night.

48.

This is a Hymn of the Wife of the Buddha:
O first and fairest of all men, O moon-featured !
Your voice is as sweet as the voice of Kalavinka,
the bird whose singing maddened God ! O my
bright husband ! O terror of the armies of the
Sages ! You were born in the heaven of gardens,
eternally sonorous with bees ! Great tree of
learning, sweetest of saviours, O my husband !
Your lips are as purple as the plum, your teeth
like frost, your eyes are lotuses, your skin a rose !
O redolent of flowers ! O my fair season !
O perfume in the chambers of the women better
than jasmine. . . . O Kanthaka, rarest of horses,
whither has he ridden you ?

A m a r u

49.

If you remember my kisses, say my name once very softly as you crush your mistress.

50.

My blood is calling him but he does not come. That dawn does not rise for me. I said to myself that this is life, that this is the lotus-strewn way. O moon, is it your frozen rays that thus devour my breasts? O breeze of the evening, O freshness charged with garden scents, you burn me terribly. My sight is not what it was. I am going to die.

51.

She teaches me all her secrets : that it is better to soak our cheek betel in snow water, that the powdered root of lemon-grass brightens our teeth, that nothing is better than the juice of green strawberries to reaffirm our breasts ; but not how to forget a door I wept outside all night.

Amores
Man and Woman

52.

What is the weather like this morning?

I do not know.

What? You have crossed the village and you do not know?

The land is white with the sun, but I cannot tell whether the day be fine or not until I know if you are gay or sad.

53.

My dear, my very dear, where are you going thus in the black night?

I fly as upon wings to the place where he who is more beautiful than the day awaits me.

And are you not frightened to run alone, my dear, my very dear?

Love with his terrible arrows keeps me company.

54.

Have the cocks sung yet?

The night is still blue above us, and you may sleep.

I have not slept, my eyes were closed but pictures passed beneath my lids.

What did you see, dear lover?

A house white with jasmine under the palm trees of Rāmī, and us there very happy.

Amaru

55.

A fig of delight !

Where ?

A fig of delight ! You cannot see it.

Then tell me where it is.

Between two branches.

This way ?

No.

That way ?

No, no.

Higher ? Lower ?

Lower. But do not move !

You pick it then.

I shall climb up.

O miserable ! Mother ! Mother !

What is the matter, my child ?

Nothing. I nearly fell.

How warm a thing is a fig, Sandati !

56.

I was looking for you.

I have been here a long time.

I am sorry. One of my kids escaped.

You need not lie. I saw you with
Madādari.

I asked her if she had seen my kid.

And you hunted for it together ?

Yes.

A long time ?

Amores

Quite a long time.

That explains why she is walking with such difficulty.

57.

My mother is not up yet. If you wish me to give you that kiss, come through the hedge.

My hands are already bleeding from the thorny branches. Where are you going ?

To fetch my goats.

Your goats ?

They have not eaten since last night, and will enjoy the thorns and the thorny branches. I shall be scolded, but shall have had your kiss.

58.

I fear to be too warm.

My house is by the side of a river, freshness inhabits it.

People would see me if I went to your house, my friend.

My house is in the forest, only the orchids will see you passing.

The orchid would tell the bee, and the bee the parakeet, and he tells everything.

The orchids would be dumb for a long time with ecstasy after you passed.

My mother would see my hair unmade when I got back.

A m a r u

In my mirror you can make your hair again.
It will keep the shadow of your smile for
ever.

I love you and have forgotten how to smile.

59.

You can ask what you will of me. My husband
is far away.

Alas, alas ! I only love the smell of growing
jasmine.

60.

Those love-wetted eyes that shut and half open
like the wings of a dove in lust, that say so
eloquently all that passes, on whom thrice-
fortunate will you fasten them ?

On him who will speak to me of my dear
love.

Amores

Woman and Woman

61.

What did he give you ?

A tortoiseshell lyre, two flocks, and a silver mirror.

How little !

Rather how much ! For he gave me pleasure also.

You are very young.

Is it my fault he only gave you a she-goat and a sour memory ?

62.

He has just left me for ever, but I am brave, and none shall notice my despair. I smile. I am smiling.

Your smile is as sad as the first dawn over a burned village.

63.

The girls washing their clothes make such a wanton babbling that I cannot hear what you say. Come near. Sit on my bed. Now you were saying ? . . . She knotted her arms about my neck, her breath to my breath, and her lips set to mine.

64.

‘ Caress my breasts with your fingers, they are small and you have neglected them. Enough ! Now set your mouth just there immediately.

Amaru

Oh, why have you delayed so long ? ' She was stifling her cries in her friend's hair when there came a knocking at the door, and a voice said : ' We are the Washers of the Dead. They told us that someone had died here.' ' Next door at Harivansa's, in the name of God, next door ! . . . No . . . wait. . . . '

65.

He has fifty flocks, his face is of the true plum oval, his body is incomparable. When he rises from bathing in the dark lake it is as the moon merging from the night. You must decide !

You are in a hurry ?

In a great hurry.

Then tell him that he will have to content himself by playing with my hair.

Are you mad ? Why should I tell him that ?

Because this morning Vajuna offered the same sum, and by a bawd not quite too ugly for me to play with.

66.

Who is there ?

It is I, and I have been knocking for a long time.

What is your name ?

Mahādeva, and I know you recognised my voice.

I did, for I was dreaming of you.

Amores

And here I am.
You shall not come in, my dream suffices me.

67.

O Dayāmati, you know everything. Why do youths not look at me? I walk against the wind until my tunic clings to me, but they cross and continue their way. What must I do to show them I am old enough?

You must let them suppose you have been loved already.

How?

Passionately.

I do not mean that. I mean how can I get the youths to notice it?

One day they will see that you no longer walk against the wind, and have draped your tunic into concealing folds.

68.

By the sixty paps of Bhāvitā, I tell you he deceived you with Nārāyanī, and I surprised them. Yesterday he took hold of my breasts by guile. Do you hear that? He took hold of my breasts. Also he kissed me by force this morning and tore my lips.

You lie!

Look at these wounds.

I cannot believe my eyes. I must taste them, taste them. I must taste them.

Amaru

69.

How can you leave that passionate lover to murmur at your door? Alas, alas, he might as well be writing his charming lines upon the sand, since you teach them to your wanton parakeet for fun. The young man is rich, and we have need of money.

70.

And you love him?

Indeed I do.

Do you not know that I also love?

I was afraid so. Now there are two of us to love him. Even if one of us dies he will have a mistress.

You? You die?

We never know.

O Sādahī, star of my day, have you not understood that it is you I love, and that I am jealous?

71.

What did he do then?

He set a pillow of fresh grass under my head and went to fetch the milk.

And you slept?

You are foolish. I rose and broke a branch of dādali and reddened my lips with the sap, I made my lids blue with the juice of the wild plum, I powdered my breasts with the pollen of the giant lotus.

Amores

Observation

72.

He came to tell her that he was leaving her and that he loved another. She wept. He had departed, saying nothing of her new way of doing her hair.

73.

She used to pass singing, but since that very handsome boy caressed her, she does not sing, and all is sad on the road she used to take. Why, Madahī, are you so desolate? Is there only one very handsome boy between the Red Mountain and the sea banks?

74.

He covered her face and her breasts and her arms with kisses, and then went away. Because he did not dare to kiss her mouth, she is passing her lips along her trembling arms now.

75.

A gust of wind will blow open the petals of a poppy that is slow in blossoming. Love suddenly brings the spirit of a girl to flower.

76.

One day young Sītā of Ratnāvali indented this determination upon a rose petal: *The prettiest*

Amaru

boy in all the world. But I will never love him. Love is too cruel. She had just graved the last word when the West Wind carried away the petal.

77.

‘Clumsy!’ said Narati. ‘A fool!’ said Dayāmati, and they both laughed. But Ambati does not tell them that he has the most extraordinary eyes in all the world, and that the blackbird tries to peck at his mouth when he lies sleeping in the garden.

78.

See how these vernal airs, charged with the sunrise water-lily, clear the bright sweat from the forehead of this girl, and tangle her hair, and swell her veil in the fashion of a lover, and give back her strength.

79.

I have come out of doors the better to hear this passionate voice, which is kissing all the fields. It is of a woman, a warm and serious voice, saturate with love; but it has ceased. The nightingales have been dumb to-night.

80.

. . . and those women who have broken their lutes go to dream by the small waters. . . .

Amores

81.

This dancer pleases you, but there are fifteen coveting her. Therefore carelessly drop an incendiary phrase into the conversation, say that the talent of the poet Sadāsa is open to discussion, or that the army of Kāmatrasnu is not invincible. Let it work upon heated nerves, and the walls will soon be shaking. Do not wait until your companions come to blows, but make a sign to the dancer.

82.

He entered the house of his mistress after long journeys, trembling with desire, emotion and impatience. And he found her surrounded by women friends, who took malicious pleasure in prolonging their visit. But she was more eager still, and crying: 'Ah, something bites me!' lifted her veil and fanned out the flame of the only torch with it. So that the guests departed.

83.

As men speak:

You are imbecile to groan so because she has refused to let you in. Wash away your tears and crown yourself with jasmine petals. Sing one of the native songs of her servant, for the girl is charming, more beautiful than Vadihā. She

Amaru

will come out at once, and pay you for the rigours of her mistress.

Leave me alone, for I love Vadihā ! Leave me alone !

The servant is very beautiful.

Beauty is not enough.

Her breasts, her legs.

Where does she come from ?

From Mahāpura.

Perhaps she knows my brother, who lives near there. I will sing and bring her out, since you advise it.

I am glad to see you love your brother so. Good-bye.

84.

She remembers the dusk when he swore under the flowering plum tree that he would love her. She remembers his betrayal, his lying, his brutal departure, and rejoices that she has escaped from such a man. But she never sees, save dimly, a branch of the plum tree flowering against the moon.

85.

The chariot of the thunder is crashing over the clouds, it is almost quite dark and here is the rain ! Come and take shelter under my tree, pretty. I invite you for the sake of your new tunic and for the sake of this bird in the branches

Amores

of my tree. He has never seen a man and a girl not take advantage of a storm.' 'Alas, alas, I really must accept your invitation.' But even so the bird soon flew away.

86.

Instead of the deep blue lotus her glance to him,
her teeth in a lighted smile instead of the jasmine,
instead of the cup one moving breast of hers.
Thus, though she has little means, she finds a
celebration for his return.

87.

The gold band of princes is about his brow, he
has thirty elephants and a hundred servants, his
palace is on the bank of the Chandanā, and he
weeps to-night. He weeps as a labourer in a
rice-field, who sees his crop borne down by the
flood of the river. O master of thirty elephants
and a hundred servants, you will not frighten
Love. Your arrows and cutting-wheels will
not frighten Love. So weep.

88.

'Now may Love break my heart in a hundred
and fifty-two pieces, put out the fire of my eyes,
render me as thin as a harp, if I value that faith-
less boy more than a last year's nail-paring!'

Amaru

And then she cast an impatient glance along his usual footpath.

89.

‘You are more beautiful with no veils,’ and he sets an impatient hand upon her girdle. Light grows in the eyes of the young girl, and her women file forth discreetly.

90.

She is young, and has come to sit sadly under a certain cinnamon apple and regard the moon. Her breast is filled with sighs, she falls to weeping and then gives way to sleep. But the wind has listened and makes the cinnamon apple cry down its flowers upon her cheek, so that she dreams that a hand is wiping away her tears.

91.

Bhavāni, Ambālikā and Rohinī mirrored their smiling faces in the water. And Bhavāni, crying: ‘Oh, I am thirsty,’ leaned over the gold disk which was the face of Rohinī and kissed it as it floated trembling. And Ambālikā must weep.

92.

She looks at the torrent from the mountain where her lover keeps his flock, and says: ‘Oh, have you seen him, torrent?’ But the

Amores

torrent answers with its spumy mouths: 'I have seen the blue sky and the white cliffs.' 'Have you heard the music of a bone flute, O torrent?' 'I have heard the noise of the wind breaking against the rocks.' 'O torrent, have you seen an eagle towering?' 'I have seen an eagle.' 'I am happy, torrent, for you have seen an eagle that saw Sadatta.

93.

O Fire, most mighty except for Indra, O fever of nature! Spilling from the snow mountains, flowing from the stars in shining rounds, Agni, Agni, Agni! You flicker, a thousand lotuses; you twist up iron like rushes; you flame in the heart of dancers, in the blood of gazelles gasping ahead of the hunt, in the arms of clinging lovers! Agni, Agni, Agni!

94.

Her husband committed a small fault, and she recalled the eternal perfidious counsel of her women. She bore herself violently, thinking to frighten him; but he only remembered the unchanging sweetness of a certain girl.

95.

The temple bell has loosed its arrow of sound upon the night, and rapid shadows are passing.

Amaru

That, by the sound of her silver bracelets, is Prithā. And that is Hatānenā of the sad hair. That is Umā, and that is Gautamī. Soon they will come back, each with a consecrated coal in a leaf of nenuphar ; and as ever, because she sets it down in the grass to let herself be kissed, the dew will have quenched Prithā's.

96.

Bhavāni and Prithā are whispering. What are they saying ? Now Prithā runs away. Where is she going ? The little bell noises of her bracelets can be heard no longer. Far down there, see, two girls are scratching each other's faces, and a young man strips the petals from a flower.

97.

Flutes becoming silent, young girls running, broken lilies. A storm.

98.

How should we quench love when there is fire even in the pollen of the lotus under water, even in wet sandal essence, even in the dew of the frozen lantern of the moon ?

99.

She played with her collar of shells. She spoke

Amores

to us of flowers, and her hands were as unsubstantial as a rose petal. She spoke to us of birds, and her voice saddened us more than the crying of a lost bird at night. She spoke of the sun, and her great eyes which had been suns were dimmed to two thin sparks, eaten by the shadow.

100.

O Death with the face of Dawn ! O flower-crowned Death ! O drunken with having held the bodies of every man and every woman in your arms since time began ! Death with sealed lips ! O Death, deaf to the supplication of the fallen dancers ! Charitable to the calling of the Buddhas ! Creative Annihilation ! Death with the face of Dawn !

MAYURA

Mayūra

BEFORE YOUR FATHER WAS A YOUTH I WAS a young man, yet I went into the forest when I had seen you, to follow and find the coupling place of the tigers. His feet about the gilded one and his rod flushing out to crimson were as nothing to my youth, who am an old man and a King's poet.

*

A procession of hills no longer impedes me, for I spring over them, and find the flower-covered bow within my hands. I discover under my hand the flowery bow of Kāma, and break large branches out of my path. I have seen you, O daughter of a woman, and I break down branches. I cast great stones from my way.

*

Doubtless the palms of your feet are red with lac; certainly the flowers grow together to check your feet in the forest. The prints of the toes of your feet, as I follow, who am now a young man, are separate and beautiful and red in the dust.

*

Rain scents of the coupling of the trees come to the assembly of poets again. You went to bathe in the river, and I took new interest in the King's stallion. He roared for the quick mares

*

Amores

to be brought to him, he drummed with his forelegs upon them, O woman moist with a boy's love.

*

A yellow cloud of hornets is about the water-flower, and it is scented as it lies on the tumult of the pool. Your navel is a water-flower and lo ! there is a cloud of saffron hornets about it. It is deep to look within, as if the depth of it had been painted with blue kohl.

*

Venturing I have seen you raise your garment and press your palms to your ankles, drawing your hands up, as if you were passing them over tall trees. I have been disturbed by your straight sweetness from ankle bone to the flower of your body.

*

Gradually the trees of the new year come down to drink at the river, and you are there washing between your gold thighs. You break the water of the pool into moons by kicking, and then play the fish, going down to kiss the hidden roots of the water-lilies.

*

No breasts are heavier than these, and yet they are as stable as gourds hardened for wine. Also

Mayūra

there are set impregnable crimson castles on the hills of them.

*

I have been hit about the brow by the many sticks of your beauty, your navel had a stick, your haunches a great stick, your hair a bludgeon. I have fainted at the sight of this woman as a boy faints. Your breasts were two clubs, raining upon my head.

*

Let me come out from the poets' assembly and cast about for the traces of your feet in the dust ; I am more than any tracker since you came to me with wet arms, since you came to me out of the private chamber. Your feet had the appearance of gold with ten rubies. Your eyes were fainting.

*

Rearing the green flame of his tail, the peacock casts the hen beneath him in the dust of the King's walk. He covers her, and we can hardly see her. She cries and he cries ; and the copper moons in the green bonfire of his tail die down ; and I am an old man.

*

As you lay on the palace couch of sea-yellow and showed me lovelinesses, saying that they were unimportant, our King was counting his

Amores

number of gold breastplates and litters woven from bird feathers. I would have made stanzas about your hands.

*

Dust of dead flowers, O tigress, has been spilled smoothly on the body of your breasts. It is a task to praise your breasts, for their tips are gilded like the sun and red like sunset. And I do not know what to think of them.

*

Suavely the wine pouring from your lower lip has called the gold swarm. It is a crimson fruit and has called the bees. The boy who has sucked that carmine fruit is drunken, and I am drunken, and the gilded bees.

*

Early you have plunged as a fire coal into the river pool, the fishes love you, and your breasts displace the water. The demon of the stream, having come down to drink between his tigers, leaps out upon you. He bears you down, and you come up uncooled from the cool river.

*

Now you pout your fruit-red lower lip, O woman with wet hands, to be a comfort to those that thirst. You make me cool with the breathing of your underlip, though crimson lac is afraid before it, and to touch it is annihilation.

Mayūra

*

Old maker of careful stanzas as I am, I am also
as the fishmonger's ass and smell to you in riot.
He is insensate and does not care though the
Royal retinue be passing. He climbs and is not
otherwise contented. And he brays aloud.

*

Rapture disturbed the gold water-hornets, they
were in a cloud about your navel. It was deep
with blue deeps, a flower on the river. It was
cut as if with the three strokes of a sharp sword.
A child with his hand full of musk unguent could
by no means have filled it.

*

Once I told my King that night had fallen, and
he said: 'It is as yet noon.' But I insisted,
proclaiming: 'Night has descended in long
shadows, because that woman has let fall her
most heavy hair.' And he said: 'You are an
old man, Mayūra.'

*

For now I break branches out of my path, seeing
that the palms of your feet are red. The rain
scent of the coupling of the trees comes again
to the poets' assembly, and your
hair is nightfall, and
I am an old
man.

The End.

Volume 6
Love Stories and
Gallant Tales
from the Chinese



EASTERN LOVE



LOVE STORIES AND GALLANT TALES FROM THE CHINESE



ENGLISH VERSIONS BY
E. POWYS MATHERS



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VOLUME VI

*



JOHN RODKER
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MADE IN ENGLAND

THIS EDITION OF LOVE STORIES AND
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*The Wedding
of Ya-Nei*

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

IN THE REIGN OF THE EMPEROR SHÊN TSUNG there lived an official named Wu, who was at that time governor of Ch'ang-sha. His wife, Lin, had given him a son named Ya-nei, or 'In-the-Palace', who had that year reached the age of sixteen. He was well endowed, although not without a tendency to wantonness ; yet he had from childhood diligently studied the classics and poetry. He had only one really extravagant failing : to satisfy his appetite he needed more than three bushels of rice every day, and over two pounds of meat. We will say nothing of his drinking. In spite of all this, he ever seemed half starved.

About the third Moon of that year, Wu was appointed governor of Yang-chow, and the equipages and boats of his new post came up to meet him. He packed his belongings, said good-bye to his friends and went on board, following the course of the river. On the second day he had to stop, because of a storm of wind which raised up the waters of the river in great waves.

At the point on the river bank where the boat lay moored, there was already another official junk, before the cabin of which stood a middle-aged matron and a charming girl, surrounded

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

by several women slaves. Ya-nei perceived the youthful beauty, and thought her so seductive that he immediately composed the following poem :

*Her soul has the tenderness of Autumn rivers
And her pure bones are made of jade.
The rose of the hibiscus lightens her,
Her eyebrows have the curve of willow leaves.
Is she not an Immortal from the Jasper Lake
Or from the Moon Palace?*

He looked at her so ardently that his troubled soul took flight and alighted upon the maiden's breast. But his intelligence at once conceived a plan, and he said to his father :

‘Tieh-tieh, why would you not tell the sailors to anchor our junk by the side of that one? Would it not be safer?’

Wu was also of this opinion and accordingly gave orders to his men. When the vessel was alongside, he sent to inquire the name of the voyagers, and was informed that they were a certain Ho Chang, the new governor of Kien-K'ang, going to his post with his wife Ho tsin, and his daughter Elegant, who was just fifteen. Wu had known the excellent man formerly, so he had his name carried to him. Then, clothed in his official robes, he stepped from one ship to the other. His colleague was awaiting him

Tales from the Chinese

before his cabin, and, having exchanged formal greeting, they sat and talked together, drinking a cup of tea. Wu returned to his boat where, after a few moments, Ho Chang returned his visit. And Ya-nei was present at the meeting. Ho Chang had no son, and took pleasure in seeing this beautiful young man. He questioned him upon certain ancient and modern books, and was satisfied with the ready answers which he obtained. He praised him unreservedly for them, thinking :

‘ This is just the son-in-law that I should like. He would make an unprecedented match with my daughter. But he is going to live at Pien-liang, and I will be at Kien-K’ang which is more than fifteen days’ journey to the south of that place.’

Wu asked him :

‘ How many sons have you, O Old-Man-Born-Before-Me ? ’

‘ I will not conceal from you the fact that I have only a daughter.’

Wu considered :

‘ That charming child was his daughter then. She would be an unprecedented wife for my son. But she is his only child, and he certainly would not be willing to marry her at any great distance from himself.’

He added aloud :

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

‘But if you have no son, you have only to take concubines.’

‘I thank you for your suggestion. It had occurred to me.’

After having talked for some time, Ho Chang withdrew to his cabin, where his wife and daughter were awaiting him. Being a little elated by his cups of wine, he kept speaking of Ya-nei’s merit, and of his intention to invite the father and son for the next day. His words sank deeply into his daughter’s mind.

On the following day the river was still churned by waves, and the storm sent up spray to a height of more than thirty feet. The crash of water was heard on all sides.

Early in the morning Ho Chang sent his invitation, and, when the two men arrived, the feast began. Elegant, in the next cabin, could see Ya-nei through the cracks in the bulkhead, and her heart was secretly moved.

‘If I could have him for my husband, my desire would be satisfied. But I shall not persuade him into a proposal by merely looking at him. How shall I set about making known my thought to him?’

Ya-nei, for his part, looked in vain for some means of speaking to his neighbour. When the meal was finished, he returned to his ship and lay down on his bed.

Tales from the Chinese

But Elegant was so much occupied in thinking of the young man that she could not touch her dinner. Leaving her mother alone, she retired to rest and was on the point of going to sleep, when the sound of a song came to her. It was the voice of Ya-nei, singing :

*A dream has come to me from the Blue Bowl,
But I was not able to speak.
I could not tell her of my delight
Or appoint an endless alliance.*

She rose softly, opened her cabin door without sound and went up on to the bridge. Ya-nei was standing on the other ship, and immediately leaped to her side, and boldly took her in his arms. Between joy and alarm, she did not dare to resist. He drew her into her cabin and loosened her garments.

At that moment one of the slaves passed before the cabin and, seeing the door open, cried out :

‘The door is open ! O thieves !’

Elegant at once covered her lover with the blanket, but one of the slaves saw the invader’s feet. Ho Chang and his wife snatched away the blanket.

‘How does this wretch dare to dishonour my family?’ cried the governor in a rage. ‘Ah, throw him into the river !’

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

In spite of the prayers of the culprit and the girl, two men seized the former, dragged him away and threw him into the water. She followed him in despair, crying :

‘ I have ruined him ! I wish to follow ! ’

And she too threw herself into the water. She woke with a start. It was only a dream.

Till morning she lay and thought, wondering if this dream were perhaps an omen that her destiny ought not to be bound up with that of Ya-nei.

He also had complicated dreams all night. He rose in the morning and opened the port-hole of his cabin. Ho Chang’s ship was touching his own, and the port-hole opposite to him was open. Elegant appeared there, and their eyes met. Surprised, delighted and embarrassed, they smiled, as if they had known each other for a long time. They would gladly have spoken, but were afraid of being heard. Then she made a small sign to him, retired quickly into her cabin, and rapidly wrote some words on a piece of paper ornamented with sprays of rose peach. She rolled it in a silk handkerchief and cleverly threw it to Ya-nei, who caught it in both hands. They saluted each other, and reclosed their port-holes.

He unfolded the handkerchief and smoothed out the crinkled leaf. It bore this poem :

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*Brocade characters are on this paper of flowers,
And the bowels of my sorrow in this embroidery.
I have dreamed of a prince
And, carried upon a cloud, I come to him.*

But there was also a little word or two added :
'This evening your submissive mistress will await you near the lamp. The noise of my scissors will be the signal for our happiness, and of our meeting.'

Beyond himself with joy, the lad hastened to take a leaf of golden paper and wrote out a poem on it. Then he took off his embroidered silken girdle, rolled it all together, and opened his port-hole. Elegant had also opened hers ; she received the small packet and at once concealed it in her sleeve, for she heard the slaves approaching. These were followed by her mother. At last the time came for her father to cross to the other ship for the return feast given by Wu.

Full of cunning, the maiden took a vessel brimming with liquor and gave it to her slaves, who eyed the gift as a thirsty dragon looks upon water. They were half-drunk when Ho Chang came back from the feast, and Elegant told them to go to bed, and that she would do some needle-work. As their faces were red, their ears burning and their legs unsteady, they were

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

only too glad to retire ; and soon their snores were heard over the ship. Little by little all other sound died away in both the junks. Then she gently knocked on her port-hole with her scissors.

Naturally Ya-nei was waiting for the signal ; as soon as he heard it, his body was as if it had been shaken to pieces. However, he softly opened his shutter, stepped from one ship to the other, and glided into the cabin where the maiden waited him. She gave him formal greeting, which he returned ; but they looked at each other under the lamp, and their passion already raged like fire. They could hardly exchange a word, and Ya-nei's trembling hands were undoing her garments. She offered a feeble resistance. He carried her on to the bed, and with his arms joined himself to the fresh breast that lighted him.

At last they were able to speak. She told him of her dream, and of her astonishment on recognising, in his poem, the verses which she had heard him sing in dream. He turned pale and sat down :

'My dream was exactly yours. Before these omens are fulfilled, I shall speak to my father to arrange our marriage.'

But, even as they talked, they silently fell asleep in each other's arms.

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Now about the middle of the night, the wind fell and the river became calmer. At the fifth watch the sailors untied their moorings and began to haul their anchors, singing at their work. The noise awakened the lovers, who heard the men say :

‘ The ship catches the wind rarely. We shall not be long in getting to Ch‘i-Chow.’

They looked at each other in dismay :

‘ What are we going to do now ? ’

‘ Hush ! ’ said she. ‘ You must remain hidden for the moment. We will at last find a plan.’

‘ It is our dream come true.’

Remembering that the slaves had seen her lover’s feet in her dream, Elegant leaned forward and covered them carefully with an ample blanket. At last she said :

‘ I have a plan. During the day you must hide under the couch, and I shall pretend to be ill, and keep in bed, or in the cabin. When we reach Ch‘i-Chow, I will give you a little money, and you must escape in the confusion of the disembarkation. You shall rejoin your parents, and we will arrange for our marriage. If, by any chance, my parents were to refuse, we should tell the truth. My family has always loved me excessively ; they will certainly accede.’

As soon as they had determined on their course,

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

Ya-nei slid under the bed, and made himself a place among the baggages. The curtain fell into place in front of him, and the young girl was still in bed when her mother came in, saying :

‘Aya ! Why are you resting like this ?’

‘I do not feel very well. I must have taken cold.’

‘Cover yourself well, my daughter, if that be so.’

At this moment a slave entered, asking if she should bring breakfast.

‘My child,’ said her mother, ‘if you are not well, you would do better not to take any solid nourishment. I am going to make you an occasional small rice broth until you are recovered.’

‘I am not very fond of broth. Give me some rice. Let them bring it to me here. I shall eat it by and by.’

‘I will keep you company.’

‘Aya ! If you do not go and look after this rabble of women, they will do their work most incontestably wrong.’

Without understanding, the mother did indeed go to the next cabin at that moment when the breakfast was brought in. As soon as she had turned her back, Elegant told the slave to set down the dish on the table.

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‘You may go away. I shall call you when I have finished.’

Ya-nei was watching, and came out from his hiding. On the dish there were only two small bowls of vegetables mixed with meat, a bowl of cooked green-stuff, and a little rice. Naturally, the young girl was not in the habit of taking large quantities of food ; but for her lover, with his three bushels of rice a day, the matter was otherwise. After their meal, he again glided under the bed, nearly as hungry as before. She called the slave, and told her to bring in two more bowls of rice.

Her mother heard this, and entered, saying :

‘My child ! You are not well. How is it that you want to eat all that ?’

‘The reason is not far to seek,’ she answered.

‘I am hungry, that is all.’

And her father, who had come to see the invalid, said :

‘Let her be. She is growing, and needs nourishment.’

When night came, and the evening meal was finished, she shut the door and told her lover he could get into the bed again. But the poor young man was suffering cruelly from hunger.

‘Our stratagem,’ said he, ‘is admirable. But it is in one respect also grievous. I cannot conceal

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

from you that my appetite is considerable. The three meals which I have had to-day seem scarcely a mouthful. On such a diet, I shall starve before we come to Ch'i-Chow.'

'Why did you not say so? I shall make them bring me more to-morrow.'

'But are you not afraid of rousing suspicion?'

'That is nothing. I shall see to it. But how much would you need?'

'We shall never be able to obtain quite that. Ten bowls of rice at each meal would not be enough.'

Next day, when her parents came to see her, Elegant complained.

'I do not know what is the matter with me,' she said. 'I am dying of hunger.'

But her mother began to laugh:

'That is not a very serious affair. I will have more rice brought to you.'

But when the young girl said that she needed about ten bowls, the good woman was startled. She again wished to remain near her daughter.

'If you stay here, mamma, I shall not be able to take anything. Leave me alone, and I shall eat more comfortably.'

Everybody indulged her caprice. When the cabin was empty, she shut the door and Ya-nei came out. Hungry as he was, he made the ten bowls vanish like a shooting star, and did not

Tales from the Chinese

leave a single grain. Elegant watched him with astonishment, and asked him in a low voice :

‘ Is that still too little ? ’

‘ It will suffice,’ answered the other, drinking a cup of tea.

He hastened back to his hiding-place, while the young girl ate some vegetables. Then she called the slaves, who came running up, wondering whether she had been able to eat all that food. They looked at the empty bowls and at their mistress’s slim figure, and murmured as they went away :

‘ What a terrible illness ! ’

One of them, in her anxiety, went to the father and showed him the dish, suggesting that he should call a doctor as soon as possible. And he, for his part, forbade them to give her so much another time, fearing that she would burst.

At mid-day he went himself to speak to her. She began to weep : her mother took her part : and they gave way to her. The evening meal was just as large.

They were approaching Ch‘i-Chow, and Ho Chang, who was really alarmed, ordered his boatmen to cast anchor near the town. Early in the morning he sent his steward to find the best doctor, and when the man arrived, brought him on board and explained the case to him. They

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

then went to examine the invalid and to try her pulse. The doctor at length came back with the father into the central cabin.

‘Well? What is the illness?’

The other coughed, and at last said:

‘Your daughter is suffering from lack of nourishment.’

Her father was staggered:

‘But I have told you that she ate thirty bowls of rice yesterday!’

‘Yes, but your daughter is still a child. She is apparently fifteen years old, but that is equivalent to fourteen in reality, or even to thirteen and some months. Her food accumulates in her stomach, but is not assimilated. From this cause arises the fever which burns her stomach and makes her imagine herself to be always hungry. The more she eats, therefore, the more her stomach burns. In one month it will be too late to cure her, and she will die of hunger.’

‘But how is she to be cured?’

‘First, I shall make her digest what she eats. Of course, she must eat very little indeed.’

He wrote his prescription and went away. The servant went to get the drugs, which were dissolved and boiled according to direction, and finally presented to the young girl.

She said that she would take them, and as soon



Tales from the Chinese

as she was alone threw them out of the port-hole. Thereafter she continued to ask for ten bowls of rice for every meal.

Every one on the ship was now discussing this extraordinary case. Some said that they ought to call in sorcerers. Others thought that religious men would do better, seeing that she had certainly been possessed by one of those starving spirits which wander without purpose in punishment for their sins, with a needle's eye for a mouth, seeking in vain for food.

At the next town, Ho Chang summoned another doctor. After his examination, mention was made of the former diagnosis, and he burst out laughing.

‘Nothing of the sort. It is an internal consumption.’

‘But what, then, is the reason for this hunger?’

‘The hot and the cold principles are at variance in her, and the resultant fire gives her continual opsomania. It is easy to understand.’

‘But she has no fever.’

‘Outside she is cool, but she burns within. The malady is inside the bones; and that is why it is not visible. If she had continued to take the drugs which you have been giving her, it would have been difficult to save her. I shall give her something to soothe her bowels.

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

She will then, of her own accord, refuse all food.'

It need not be said that it was the same in this case as in the other. All the medicines went down the river.

Meanwhile the two lovers continued to profit by the silence of the night. Naturally, the young girl was at first, so to speak, passive in the arms of the young man, who was himself bashful. But little by little, penetrating further into the domain of pleasure, their amorous intelligence redoubled with their rapture, and they forgot entirely where they were.

One night a slave woke up, and heard a 'tsi-tsi-nung-nung' and a 'tsia-tsia' coming from the bed, and then quick breathing. Inwardly surprised, she next day told her mistress, and the mother, seeing that her daughter was always of a brilliantly healthy complexion, began to think this unknown malady a very strange one. She did not inform her husband, however, but ran herself to see her daughter. The child's face seemed to her to be more beautiful and animated even than usual. She went out, without seeing anything which might confirm her suspicion, and, coming back again after breakfast, began gently to question her daughter on her ideas of marriage.

As they were talking, there suddenly came a

Tales from the Chinese

snore from under the bed. Ya-nei, after his efforts in the night and his morning meal, had gone to sleep in his hiding-place.

Elegant's mother at once shut the door and, quickly stooping to look under the bed, saw the young man asleep.

'Alas, how could you do this thing? And then frighten us with your illness? Now everybody will know of it. Where does he come from? May Heaven strike him dead!'

Elegant's face was purple with shame.

'It is all your child's fault. He is the son of the Lord Wu.'

'Ya-nei? But you had never seen him! Besides, he was at the dinner with your father, and we came away at midnight. How can he be here?'

Trusting in her mother's indulgence, the young girl confessed everything, and added:

'Your unworthy daughter has dishonoured our name and lost her innocence. My crime is unpardonable. But it was the will of Heaven. There had to be that storm to make us meet, and then destiny prevented our betrothal. Our strength was too small for the struggle, and we have sworn to love each other until death. I implore you to speak to my father and appease him; for if he makes an uproar, there is nothing left for me but to die.'

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

Her tears fell like rain. And, while they were talking, Ya-nei's snores sounded like thunder.

'At least make him keep quiet,' cried the mother in a fury. 'We can no longer hear ourselves speak.'

And she went out, slamming the door, while Elegant hastened to awaken the sleeper.

'Really you might snore less loudly!' she said with impatience. 'All is discovered now.'

When he heard this, Ya-nei's body was frozen with terror as if he had received a drenching in cold water. His teeth chattered.

'Do not be afraid. I have asked my mother to speak for us. If my father is angry, there will be time enough for us to die then.'

The woman meanwhile had hurried to her husband; but there was a slave with him, putting the cabin in order. So she waited, and the tears rolled from her eyes. Ho Chang thought she was anxious about their daughter's health, and reassured her:

'She will be better in a few days. The doctor said so. Do not so disturb yourself.'

But she sneered at him:

'You have been listening to the flowery words of old Wise-Wand. Better in a few days! She would have to be ill first!'

'What do you mean?'

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Since the servant was no longer there, she told him in a low voice what she had seen and heard. Ho Chang's anger was such that his sight was troubled. She begged him to calm himself.

'Enough! Enough!' he thundered. 'This worthless daughter fouls the very air upon our threshold. We must kill them both in the night, so that none may know.'

The woman's face became as the earth.

'We have already reached a ripe age, and this is the only flesh and bone we have. If you kill her, what will be left to us? As for Ya-nei, he is of a good family, he is intelligent, and well-built. Our stations are identical and our houses equal. His only fault is that he did not make a proposal, but rather forced everything in secret. Yet so the matter is. Would it not be better to send him back with a letter to Wu, requiring gifts of betrothal? We would lose all by making a scandal.'

Ho Chang's rage was already half spent, and he now let himself be persuaded by degrees. He went out and asked the boatmen where they were.

'We are approaching Wu-ch'ang.'

'You will anchor there.'

He then called his confidential steward and, explaining all to him, gave him a letter. After this he went to see his daughter, who hid her-

The Wedding of Ya-Nei

self under the blanket when she beheld him. He spoke no word to her ; but in a stern tone called out Ya-nei, who crept from his hiding-place, saluted the older man, and said :

‘ My crime deserves death.’

‘ How could a young man of your education commit such an act ? My wife has prevailed upon me to spare your life ; but, if you would redeem your fault, you must take my unworthy daughter as your wife. If this is not your intention, do not count upon my pardon.’

Ya-nei abased himself in ritual prostration.

‘ The honour which you do me is a reward which my conduct does not deserve,’ he said. ‘ I shall speak to my parents as soon as I return.’

Ho Chang hurried him away, without leaving him time to speak to the young girl again. She was clinging to her mother, and whispered :

‘ I do not know my father’s intention. Could I not have a letter from Ya-nei on his arrival ? ’

Her truly indulgent mother went and spoke to the steward.

The latter had already hired a boat, and, as it was night, the intruder would be able to pass from one junk to the other without being observed. They set out, while Elegant wept incessantly for sorrow and uneasiness.

We must now return to the family of Wu. After the night of Ya-nei’s departure, their boat

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had proceeded for several leagues before the young man's absence was noticed. But when they called for him, and his cabin was found empty, the souls of his parents left their bodies. They howled their despair, supposing that their child had fallen unobserved into the water. They turned the ship about, hoping at least to recover the body; but all searching was in vain, and they had perforce to resume their journey in despair.

They had been at their destination for two days when Ya-nei arrived; you may suppose that their surprise was only equalled by their joy. They read Ho Chang's letter, and understood everything. They scolded their son, and made a feast for Ho Chang's envoy. When the betrothal gifts were ready, they sent them in charge of their own steward, to whom Ya-nei entrusted a secret letter for his Elegant.

Soon the time came for Ya-nei's examination at the capital, and he was accepted. His father asked for a holiday, and the whole family went to Kien-K'ang, where the marriage was celebrated. The fame of Elegant's wisdom and beauty grew with the years, and the happiness of these two was never dimmed.

• • •
*Hsing shih beng yen (1627),
28th Tale.*

*The Shame
of a Singing Girl*

The Shame of a Singing Girl

*When there is a great peace
Under the gold cup of the sun
Joy reaches its flowering.*

IN THE TWENTIETH YEAR OF THE PERIOD Wan-li, there came, among the thousands of students who gathered at Peking for the examinations, a certain Li, whose first name was Chia and his surname Ch'ien-hsi, or 'Purified-a-thousand-times.' His family were from Shao-hsing fu in Chekiang; his father was Judge of the province of Kang-su; and Li himself was the eldest of three brothers. He had studied in the village school from childhood and, not having yet attained to literary rank, had come, according to custom, to present himself for examination at Peking.

While in that city, he consorted, before his springtide, with the young libertines, the 'willow twigs' of his country; and, in order to gain experience, frequented the theatres and music-halls. Thus he became acquainted with a famous singing-girl called Tu, whose first name was Mei, or 'Elegance.' As she was the tenth of her family, she was known at the theatre as Shih-niang, 'The tenth daughter.'

A delicate seduction diffused from her: her body was all grace and perfume. The twin

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arches of her brows held the black which is blue of distant mountains, and her eyes were as deep and bright as autumn lakes. Her face had the glory of the lotus, and her lips the glory of cherries. By what blunder of the Gods had this piece of flawless jade fallen in the windy dust, among the flowers beneath the willow?

When she was thirteen years old, Shih-niang had already 'broken her claws.' Now she was nineteen, and it would not be possible to enumerate the young Lords and Princes whose hearts she had besotted, whose thoughts she had set in a turmoil, whose family treasures she had swallowed without compunction. In the theatres, they had composed an epigram about her :

*When Tu Shih-niang comes to a banquet
The guests drink a thousand great cups
Instead of a single small one.
When Tu Mei appears upon the stage
The actresses look like devils.*

It must be said that never, in the young passions of his life, had Li Chia experienced the pain of beauty; but, when he saw Shih-niang, emotion was awakened in him, and the feelings of a flowering willow filled his breast. He himself was gifted with rare beauty, and a sweet and gentle nature. He spent his money recklessly,

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with an unbridled zeal for bestowing gifts. For this reason he held a double attraction for Shih-niang, who considered that falsehood and avarice were opposed to rectitude, and had also by this time made up her mind to return to a life of honour. She appreciated Li Chia's gentleness and generosity, and was drawn toward him. But he was afraid of his father and did not dare to marry her at once, as she wished.

Their love was not, on that account, any the less tender. In the joys of dawn and the pleasures of twilight they kept together as do husband and wife, and in their vows they compared their love with the Ocean or with the Mountain, recognising no other vital motive. In truth :

*Their tenderness was deeper than the sea
For it was past sounding,
Their love was as the mountains
But even higher.*

Also, since Chia had been admitted to her favour, rich Lords and powerful Ministers were no longer permitted to see the girl's beauty. At first Li used to give large sums of money, so that the matron to whom Shih-niang belonged shrugged her shoulders and smiled. But the days went quickly, and the months too ; and a year had passed. Chia's coffers had gradually

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become empty ; and now his hand could no longer keep pace with his wishes. But the ancient *ma-ma* remained patient.

In the meanwhile the Judge had learned that his son was frequenting the theatre, and sent him repeated orders to return home. But Chia, who was infatuated, kept on delaying his departure until, hearing that his father was truly furious, he no longer dared to return. It was well said by the ancients : ‘ As long as harmony endures there is unity ; when harmony ceases, there is separation.’

Shih-niang’s love was sincere, and her heart only burned the more for him whose hands were empty. The *ma-ma* frequently ordered her to send her lover away ; then, seeing that the young girl was indifferent to her commands, she tried to exasperate Chia with stinging words, hoping thus to compel him to depart. But her visitor’s nature was so gentle that his anger could not be provoked, and the only result was to make him more amiable in his behaviour to the old woman, who in her impotence ended in reproaching Shih-niang :

‘ We who keep open doors must eat our visitors three times a day, and clothe ourselves with them. We lead out the departing guest by one door, but to receive a fresh one by another. When desire is excited under our roof, our silver

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and silks mount up like hills. But it is more than a year since this Li Chia began troubling your curtains, and now old patrons and new guests alike have discontinued their visiting. The spirit Chung-k'uei no longer comes to our door ; nay, not the littlest devil. Therefore I am angry and humiliated. What will become of us, now that we have no trace of visitors ? '

Shih-niang restrained herself with difficulty under these reproaches, and answered calmly :

' Young Lord Li did not come here with empty hands. He has paid us considerable sums of money.'

' It was so at one time ; but it is now so no longer. Tell him to give me enough to pay for rice for the two of you. . . . Indeed, I have no luck ! Most of the girls I buy claim all the silver, and hardly care whether their clients live or die. But now I have reared a white tiger who refuses riches, opens wide the door, and makes my old body bear the total burden. O miserable child ! You wish to keep the poor for nothing. Where will you find clothes and food ? Tell your beggar to be wise enough to give me a few ounces of silver. If you will not send him away, I shall sell you and look for another slave. That would be better for both of us.'

' Do you mean what you say ? ' asked the girl.

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‘But you know that Li Chia has neither money nor clothes, and cannot procure any.’

‘I am not jesting,’ answered the old woman.

‘Then how much must he give to take me away?’

‘If any one else were in question, I should demand several thousand ounces. Alas! this beggar cannot pay them! So I shall be satisfied with three hundred ounces, with which to buy another “tinted face”. If he brings them within three days, I will take the silver with my left hand and give the girl with my right. But after three days, it matters not at all to me that three times seven are twenty-one; Lord or no Lord, I shall beat out this young spark with my broom, and you must bear no grudge for it.’

‘In spite of all, he should be able to borrow three hundred ounces. But three days is too little; he will need ten.’

‘Ten days!’ cried the other. ‘A hundred would be more like! Yet so be it. I will wait ten days.’

‘If he cannot get the money, he will not have the face to return. My only fear is that you will go back on your promise, if he does bring the three hundred ounces.’

‘I am nearly fifty-one years old,’ answered the *ma-ma*. ‘Ten times I have offered the great

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sacrifices. How should I dare not to keep my word? If you mistrust me, let us strike the palms of our hands together to fix the agreement. Nay, if I break my word, may I be changed into a pig or dog!’

That same evening, by the pillow-side, Shih-niang explained how her body might be rebought, and Li Chia said :

‘ That would delight me, but how can I pay so much? My purse is as empty as if it had been washed.’

‘ Your slave has arranged all with the *ma-ma*. She requires three hundred ounces within ten days. Even if you have spent all that your family gave you for your journey, you have still some friends or relations from whom you can borrow. Then you will have me entirely to yourself, and I shall never again have to endure that woman’s anger.’

‘ Since I became obsessed by our love, my friends and relations have ceased to recognise me. But perhaps, if I asked them to help me to pay for my journey home, I might make up the sum.’

In the morning, when he had arranged his hair and clothed himself, and was about to leave Shih-niang, she said to him :

‘ Do your uttermost, and come back to me with good news.’

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He went to all his relations and friends, pretending that he was taking leave of them before his departure. They all congratulated him ; but when he spoke of the expenses of the journey and asked for a loan, all, without exception, told him that they could do nothing. His friends knew the weakness of his character, and that he was besotted with love for some 'Flower-in-the-Mist' or other. He had remained in Peking, up to that time, they knew, not daring to face his father's anger. Was this departure genuine, now, or but pretended ? If he spent the borrowed money on 'tinted faces', would not his father bear a grudge against those who lent it ? The most he could get together was from ten to twenty ounces.

Ashamed of his failure after a full three days of endeavour, he did not dare to return to Shih-niang ; yet, since he used to spend every night with his mistress, he had no other lodging. After the first evening, therefore, he went and asked shelter from his fellow-countryman, the verylearned Liu Yü-ch'un. This man, seeing the growing sadness of the young man, at last ventured to question him, and learned his story and of his plan of marriage. Liu shook his head :

'That is hardly possible. She is the most famous of all the singing-girls. Who would be content with three hundred ounces for such a

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beauty? The old woman has conceived this method of sending you away, and Shih-niang, knowing that your hands are empty, asks you for this sum because she does not dare to tell you to leave her. If you offered the silver, she would laugh at you. It is a common trick. Do not trouble yourself further, but resign yourself to the breaking off of your relations with the girl.'

Li Chia was speechless for a long time, shaken by his doubts, and Liu added :

'Make no mistake about it. If you show that you really mean to take your departure, many will help you. But as for your plan, you would need not ten days, but ten months to find three hundred ounces.'

'Good Elder-Brother,' answered Li, 'your judgment is indeed profound.'

But none the less he continued his vain search for three further days.

Shih-niang was most anxious when she did not see her lover come back to her. She sent a little servant to look for him, and the child met Li by chance, and said :

'Lord, our Elder-Sister awaits you at the house.'

In his shame, Li answered :

'I have no time to-day. To-morrow I will come to see her.'

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But the boy had been commanded to bring him back, and to die sooner than lose him, so he replied :

‘ It is the absolute wish of the Elder-Sister that you come with me.’

Li could not refuse, and followed the messenger. Once in Shih-niang’s presence he stood still, sobbing *mo-mo, mo-mo*, without a word.

‘ How is our plan going ? ’ she asked.

He only answered with a flood of tears ; so she insisted :

‘ Can people have been so hard as to refuse three hundred ounces ? ’

Stifling his sobs, he answered with this verse :

*It is easier to catch a tiger in the mountains
Than to move the world with speech alone.*

‘ I have gone about for these six days, and my hands are empty. Shame has kept me away from my perfumed companion, and it is only at her command that I have come back. I have tried my hardest. Alas ! such is the spirit of the century.’

‘ We will say nothing to the *ma-ma*. Let my Lord stay here for the night : his slave will propose another plan to him.’

She served him with a meal and wine, and made him to lie down. Then in the middle of the night she asked :

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‘If you cannot find three hundred ounces to free me, what are we to do?’

He wept without answering. Shih-niang waited until the fifth watch; then she drew from under her mattress a bag containing a hundred and fifty ounces in small silver, and said:

‘This is my secret reserve. Since you cannot find the whole sum, I will give you half of it. That should help you; but we have only four days more. Above all, do not come too late!’

Astonished and overjoyed, he carried away the bag and went back to Liu, telling him what had happened and showing him the money. Liu exclaimed:

‘Surely this woman has a loyal heart! Since she acts so, she must not be allowed to suffer. I am going to act as mediator in your marriage.’

Leaving Li in his house, he went himself to ask for loans on all sides. In two days he had amassed a hundred and fifty ounces. He gave them to the young man, saying:

‘I have stood guarantor for you, for I am deeply touched by Shih-niang’s sentiment.’

Li took the silver, as delighted as if the money had fallen from the sky, and ran to see his mistress. It was the ninth day. She asked him:

‘Has it been very difficult? Have you found the hundred and fifty ounces?’

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He then told her what Liu had done ; and both, rejoicing, spent a night of pleasure. Next day she said to him :

‘ When this money is paid, I must follow my Lord. But we have made no preparation for the boats and conveyances of our journey. I have borrowed twenty ounces from my friends. My Lord may take them for travelling expenses.’

In his uneasiness concerning these expenses, he had not dared to speak of them. He took the money, and was full of joy.

At that moment there was a knock on the door, and the old woman entered, saying :

‘ This is the tenth day.’

‘ I thank the *ma-ma* for recalling the fact to us,’ he answered. ‘ I was on the point of paying her a visit.’

And, taking up the bag, he poured the three hundred ounces on to the table. The old woman had not supposed he could succeed. She changed colour, and seemed on the point of gainsaying her word. So Shih-niang said :

‘ I have stayed in your house for a long time, and have brought in several thousands of ounces. To-day I am marrying. If you do not keep your word, I shall commit suicide before you, and you will lose the money and the girl.’

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The old woman could find no words to express her feeling. She took the money in silence, and finally muttered :

‘If you mean to go away, go now. But you shall take none of your clothes or jewels with you.’

Hustling the two young people along, she led them through the door and shot the bolt.

It was then the ninth moon, and the weather was cold. Shih-niang had but just risen from bed, and was not dressed, nor was her hair done. Yet she saluted the *ma-ma* with two genuflexions. Li Chia shook his two hands joined together. Thus the married pair left that not too pleasant old woman :

*Even as a carp escapes the metal hook,
Flirts its tail and shakes its head
And returns not.*

In front of the door Li Chia said to his mistress :

‘Wait a moment ! I will call a little palankeen to take you to the house of Liu.’

She answered :

‘In this very court are my friends, my sisters, who have always been in sympathy with me. I must take leave of them ; and I cannot neglect to thank them for the money they have lent me.’

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Accompanied by her Lord, she went to each pavilion to greet her friends. Now, one of them, Yüeh-lang, was a very close friend of Shih-niang, so, seeing that she had not done her hair, she led her to her own toilet-table, and ran to call another friend, Hsü Su-Su. Then she took from her coffers many ornaments of kingfisher feather and bracelets and jasper pins, even embroidered robes and girdles ornamented with phoenix. She gave them to Shih-niang, overcoming her with gratitude.

She also ordered a feast of congratulation, to which all their friends were invited, and finally, at the end of day, offered the pair a bed for the night.

When she was alone with Li Chia, Shih-niang asked :

‘Where shall we go when we have left the capital? Has my Lord made a decision on this point?’

‘My father,’ he answered, ‘is still angry with me. If, in addition, he learns that I have married my Little-Sister, and that I am coming back with her, he will doubtless be carried quite away by rage. I have not found a satisfactory plan.’

‘Your father has feelings from Heaven. He could not break completely with you. Would it not be better for us to go to him, and to keep

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to our boat while you pray your friends to go and ask for a harmonious reconciliation. After that, leading your slave, you may re-enter your dwelling in peace.'

'That is an excellent plan,' he answered.

Next day they thanked Yüeh-lang again, and went to the house of Liu. On seeing the learned man, Shih-niang knelt down to express her gratitude to him, saying :

'Later we may both know how to return your kindness.'

Liu hastened to answer, according to the polite formality :

'Your admirable sentiment far exceeds my most poor action. You are a heroine among women. Why, then, do you hang such words to your teeth?'

All day the three of them drank wine of joy. Then the pair chose a suitable day for their journey, and obtained horses and palankeens.

When the time for their departure drew near, Yüeh-lang, Hsü-su, and all those friends came to bear the couple company. Yüeh-lang sent her servants to bring a metal casket, furnished with a golden lock, and gave it to Shih-niang, who placed it in her palanquin without opening it. The porters and servants urged the travellers forward, and they started. Liu and the beautiful women escorted them as far as the other

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side of the Ch'ung-wên gate, and there they drank a last cup together. They separated with tears.

When they reached the river Lu, Li Chia and Shih-niang abandoned the land way and hired a cabin in a large junk which was going to Kua-chow. After he had paid their passage in advance, there was only a single piece of bronze left in Li Chia's bag; the twenty ounces which Shih-niang had given him had vanished as if they had never been. The young man had not been able to avoid giving certain presents, and he had also bought blankets and other necessities for the journey. Sadly he asked himself what was to be done, but she said to him :

'My Lord may cease to disturb himself. Our friends have given yet more help.'

She opened her metal casket, while he looked on in shame. She took out a red silk bag and put it on the table, bidding him open it. He found the bag heavy ; for, in fact it contained fifty ounces of silver. Shih-niang had already shut the casket again, without saying what further was in it, now she said smilingly :

'Have not our sisters the most desirable instinct? They did not wish us to have any difficulty on our journey, and in this way they enable us to cross mountains and rivers.'

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Li Chia exclaimed in his delight and surprise :

‘ If I had not met such generosity, I should have had no choice but to wander, and at last to die without burial. Even when my hair turns white, I shall not forget such virtue and such friendship.’

And he shed tears of emotion, until Shih-niang consoled him by diverting his thoughts.

Some days later they reached Kua-chow, where the big junk stopped. But Li Chia was now able to hire a smaller vessel for themselves alone, and in this he stowed their baggage. On the morrow they were to travel across the great river.

. . .

It was then the second quarter of the second month of winter. The moon shone like water. The pair were sitting on the deck of the junk, and the boy said :

‘ Since we left the capital we have not been able to talk freely, because we were in a cabin and our neighbours could hear us. Now we are alone on our own junk. Also, we have left the cold of the North and will to-morrow be on the south side of the river. Is it not a fitting time to drink and rejoice, so as to forget our former sorrows ? You to whom I owe so much, what do you say ? ’

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‘It is now long since your slave was deprived of little pleasantries and laughters, and she had the same sentiment as yourself. Your words prove that we have but one soul.’

They brought wine on deck ; and, seated on a carpet beside his mistress, he offered her cups. So they drank joyously, until they were a little drunk ; and at length he said :

‘O my benefactress, your voice of marvel used to trouble the six theatres. Every time I heard you then, my spirit took wing from me. It is long since you have overcome me in that way. The moon is bright over the shimmering river. The night is deep and solitary. Will you not consent to favour me with a song ?’

For a little Shih-niang refused. Then she looked at the moon, and a song escaped her. It was an affecting melody, taken from one of the pieces of the Yüan dynasty, called ‘The Light Rose of the Peaches.’ In truth :

*Her voice took flight to the Milky Way,
And the clouds stopped to listen.
Its echo fell into the deep water
And the fishes hastened.*

Shih-niang sang. And in a near-by junk there was a young man called Sun ; his first name was Fu, Rich, and his surname was Shan-lai, Excellent-in-Promise. His family was one of

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the wealthiest in Hsin-an of Hui-chow; his ancestors had owned the salt monopoly in Yang-chow. He was just twenty years old, and had moulded his character in accordance with his passion, being a regular visitor at the blue pavilions, where the smiles of painted roses are to be bought. He was making a journey, and had cast anchor for the night at Kua-chow. He was drinking in solitude, bemoaning the absence of companions.

Suddenly in the night he heard a voice more sweet than the sighs of the bird of passion, or than the warbling phoenix. No words seemed adequate, he felt, to describe the beauty of this song. Walking out from his cabin, he found that the music came from a junk not very far distant from his own.

In his eagerness to know who had enchanted him, he told his men to go and question the boatmen. But he learned no more than that the junk had been hired by Li Chia. He obtained no information concerning the singer. He reflected:

‘Such a perfect voice could not belong to a woman of good family. How can I manage to see this bird?’

He could not sleep that night. In the morning, at about the fifth watch, he heard the wind roaring on the water. The light of day was

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strangely veiled by cloud, and flakes of snow
were whirling madly. It has been said :

*The clouds are swallowing
Countless thousands of trees upon the hill.
Footprints disappear on many footpaths.
The fisher in the bamboo hat
On the frail boat
Catches only snow and the frozen river.*

This snow storm rendered it impossible to cross the river, and the boats could not be set in motion. Sun, therefore, told his rowers to leave his moorings and to make fast alongside Li Chia's junk. Then, in a sable bonnet and wrapped in his fox-skin robe, he opened his cabin window, pretending to look at the white snow as it fell. Shih-niang had just arranged her hair, and, with her tapering fingers, was pushing back the short curtains to throw out the dregs of tea in the bottom of her cup. The freshened splendour of her rouge shone softly.

Sun saw that celestial beauty, that incantation ; he scented that perfume ; and his soul boiled over. For a long moment he gazed, and his spirit was as if submerged. But he recovered himself and, leaning out of the window, recited, nearly at full voice, the poem of the ' Blossom of the Plum Tree ' :

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*Snow covers the mountain where the Sage abides,
Under the trees in the moonlight
Beauty advances.*

Li Chia heard the poem and came out of his cabin, curious to see who was reciting it. In this way he fell into the trap set by Sun, who hastened to salute him, asking :

‘ Old-Elder-Brother, what is your honourable name ? And what is your first name which one does not presume to repeat ? ’

Having answered in accordance with the convention, Li Chia had to question Sun in his turn. They exchanged such words as are customary between educated men. Finally the libertine said :

‘ This snow storm was sent by Heaven to effect our meeting. It is a large piece of fortune for your little brother. I was lonely and without diversion in my cabin. Would it not be my venerable brother’s pleasure that we should go to a river-side pavilion and divert ourselves by drinking wine ? ’

Li Chia answered :

‘ The water-chestnuts meet at the caprice of the current. How should I not be glad of this offer ? ’

‘ Between the four seas all men are brothers.’

Then Sun ordered his servant to come with him,

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sheltering Li Chia under a large parasol. The two men saluted each other again, landed on the bank and, after walking a little distance, found a wine pavilion.

Having entered, they chose seats by the window and sat down. The attendant brought them hot wine, Sun raised his cup to give the signal, and soon the two were conversing freely and had become friends. At length Sun leaned forward and said in a low voice :

‘ Last night a song rose from your honourable ship. Whose was that voice ? ’

Wishing to pose as a man of leisure making a journey, Li Chia at once told the truth :

‘ It was Tu Shih-niang, the famous singing-girl of Peking. ’

‘ How comes a singing-girl to belong to my brother ? ’

Li Chia then ingeniously told his story, and the other said :

‘ To marry such a beauty is exceptional good fortune. But will your honourable father be satisfied ? ’

Li sighed and answered :

‘ There is no lack of anxiety in my humble house. My father is of a very stern disposition, and as yet knows nothing. ’

Sun, developing his hidden traps, continued :

‘ If your honourable father is not placable, where

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will my Elder-Brother shelter the Beauty whom he has carried away? Have you come to some arrangement with her on this point?'

With heavy brows, Li answered:

'My little wife and I have already discussed the matter.'

'Your Honourable Favour has doubtless some admirable plan?'

'Her idea,' explained Li, 'is to remain for the time at a place in the country of Su and Hang, whilst I go forward to my family and ask my friends and relations to appease my father.'

The other gave a deep sigh and assumed a saddened air:

'Our friendship is not yet deep enough. I fear that you may consider my words both strange and too outspoken.'

'When I have the good fortune to receive your learned and enlightening counsel, how could I fail to respect it?'

'Your honourable and noble father, being of stern character, is certainly still angry at your conduct in Peking. And now my Elder-Brother marries in the face of convention. How could your prudent relatives and valuable friends fail to share the views of your honourable father? When you rashly ask them to act on your behalf, they will certainly refuse. Then will not the temporary residence of your Honourable

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Favour become a permanent one? In your position, it will be as difficult to advance as to retire.'

Li Chia knew that he had only fifty ounces in his purse, and that half this sum would very soon have vanished. He could not help hanging his head. His companion added :

'I have yet another thing to say, and it comes from my heart. Will you hear it?'

'Having already received your sympathetic advice, I shall be most happy to listen.'

'Since earliest time', said Sun, 'the hearts of women have been as changeable as the waves of the sea. And among the Flowers-in-the-Mist especially there are few who are found faithful. Since the present case concerns a famous singing-girl, who knows the whole earth, it is probable that she has some former associate in the regions of the South. She has consequently availed herself of your help to conduct her to the land where this other lives.'

'I beg to say that that is not certain,' protested Li.

'Even if it is not, the men of the South are very adroit and very active. You leave a beautiful woman to live there all alone : can you guarantee that none will climb her wall or penetrate her dwelling? After all, the relations between

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father and son are from Heaven and cannot be destroyed. If you abandon your family for the sake of a singing-girl, you will wander until you become one of those incorrect Floating-on-the-Wave individuals. A woman is not Heaven. You must ponder this matter seriously.'

Hearing this, Li Chia felt as if he were swept away by a torrent. At last he answered:

'What, in your enlightened opinion, ought I to do?'

'Your servant has a plan which should be very profitable to you. But I fear lest, weakened by the soft pillow of your love, you will not be able to put it into execution, and that my words will therefore be wasted.'

'If you have a really good suggestion, I shall be for ever your debtor. Why do you fear to speak?'

'My Elder-Brother, for more than a year you have Fluttered-in-the-Rain, obsessed by your brothel. You have not been able to give your mind to the difficulties which will assail you when you no longer know where to sleep or to eat. Your father's anger is only due to your having become infatuated with Flowers, besotted by Willows, until you poured out gold as if it were simple sand. He tells himself that you will quickly consume the abundant wealth of your family, and not be assured of

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having children. By returning empty handed you will justify his anger. If, O my Elder-Brother, you could cut the knot which binds you to your love, I would willingly make you a gift of a thousand ounces. With a thousand ounces of silver to show your father, you could say that, during your stay at the capital, you had rarely left your study chamber and that you had never Skimmed the Waves. He will have confidence in you, and the harmony of the house will be restored. Thus, without idle words, you change your sorrow to joy. Give the matter three thoughts. I do not covet the Beauty! I speak with no idea but of loyally helping a friend.'

Li Chia was a man of naturally weak character; moreover, he was afraid of his father. Sun's fine words troubled his heart. He rose, made a deep bow, and said:

'O Brother! Your noble counsel has cleared away the foolish and tangled obstruction of my understanding. But my little favourite has accompanied me for some thousands of li, and it would not be just for me to leave her in this way. I will return to deliberate with her, and to discover whether her mind is favourable to your project. I shall inform you shortly.'

'In our conversation,' answered Sun, 'we have abandoned the paths of strict politeness.

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That was because my loyal heart could not endure to see the separation of a father and son, and wished to help you to return to your family.'

They both drank another cup of wine. The wind had dropped, and the snow had ceased to fall. The colour of the sky proclaimed the evening. Sun caused his servant to pay for the drinks, and, taking Li Chia by the hand, accompanied him as far as the junk. It is very true that :

*You meet a stranger and say three words
And tear off a piece of your heart.*

In the morning Shih-niang, on being left alone in her cabin, had prepared a little feast for her friend, wishing to spend the day with him in happiness ; but the sun had set before Chia came back. She had lanterns lit to guide him and, when he at last appeared and entered the cabin, raised her eyes to his face and found the colour of displeasure. She poured out a cup of hot wine and offered it to him ; but he shook his head without a word, and refused to drink. Then he went and threw himself on the bed.

Sad at heart, Shih-niang put the cups and dishes in order. She then undid her husband's clothes and, leaning on the pillow, gently asked him :

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‘What news have you heard that has so upset you?’

Li Chia sighed, but without answering. She questioned him again three or four times, but he was already asleep. Unable to be indifferent to such lack of regard, she remained for a long time sitting on the edge of the bed, incapable of sleep.

In the middle of the night he awoke and gave another deep sigh; and she said to him:

‘What is this difficult matter with which my Lord is troubled? What are these sighings?’

Li Chia threw off the blanket and seemed about to speak, but the words would not come from him. His lips trembled like leaves, and finally he burst out sobbing. She clasped his head with one arm and held it against her breast, trying to comfort him, and saying tenderly:

‘The love which unites us has lasted for many days, for very nearly two years. We have overcome a thousand hardships and bitter moments, but now we are far beyond all difficulty. Why do you show such grief to-day, when we are about to cross the river and to taste the joy of a hundred years? There must surely be a reason. All things are shared in common between husband and wife, in life and after death. If anything is the matter, we must discuss it. Why do you hide your sorrow from me?’

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Thus urged, the young man mastered his tears and said :

‘ I am crushed beneath the woe which Heaven heaps upon me. In the generosity of your soul, you have not cast me by. You have endured a thousand wrongs for me. That is no merit of mine. But I still think of my father, whose commands I am defying and that against every convention and all laws. He is of inflexible character, and I fear that his wrath will grow double at the sight of me. Where, then, shall we two, floating with the current, come to our anchorage ? How shall I ensure our happiness, when my father has broken with me ? To-day my friend Sun invited me to drink and spoke to me of my prospects, and what he said has pierced my heart.

‘ What is my Lord’s intention ? ’ she asked in great surprise.

‘ I was turning madly in the web of our affairs, when my friend Sun sketched out an excellent plan to me. But I fear that my benefactress will refuse to follow it.’

‘ Who is this friend, Sun ? If his plan is good, why should I not agree to it ? ’

‘ His first name is Fu, and his family had the salt monopoly at Hsin-an. He is a man who has Drifted-in-the-Wind and knows life. Last night he was charmed by your pure song. I told him

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where we came from, and confided the difficulties which beset our return. Then, under the impulsion of a generous thought, he offered to give me a thousand ounces if you will marry him. With these thousand ounces as testimony I shall be able to speak to my father. Also I shall know that you are not without shelter. But I cannot contain my feeling, and that is why I mourn.'

And his tears fell like a storm of rain.

Ceasing to hold his head against her breast, Shih-niang gently pushed him aside. At last she smiled like ice and said to him :

' This person must be a hero, a man of courage and virtue, to have conceived a project so advantageous to my Lord. Not only will my Lord have a thousand ounces to take back with him, not only will your slave gain shelter, but your baggage will be lighter also and more easily handled. As a plan it satisfies both convention and convenience. Where are the thousand ounces ? '

Struggling with his tears, Li Chia replied :

' I had not got your consent, so the silver was not given me.'

' You must demand it first thing to-morrow morning. A thousand ounces is a considerable sum, and it must all be paid into your hand before I enter his cabin. For I am not merchandise which may be bought on credit.'



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It was then the fourth watch of the night. Shih-niang prepared her toilet-table, saying :

‘To-day I must adorn myself to bid farewell to my former protector and to do honour to my new one. It is no commonplace event. I must therefore take great pains with paint and perfume, and put on my best of jewels and embroidered robes.’

Thereafter, with perfume and paint and jewelry, she added to the splendour of her petalled seduction. The sun had already risen before she completed her preparations.

Li Chia was disturbed, and yet seemed almost happy. Shih-niang urged him to insist upon the payment of the money, and he at once carried her answer to the other junk. Then Sun said :

‘It is easy for me to give the money ; but I ought to have the fair one’s jewelry as a proof of her consent.’

Li Chia told this to Shih-niang, who pointed to the casket with the golden lock, and caused it to be taken to Sun, who joyfully counted out a thousand ounces of silver and sent them to Li’s ship. The young woman herself verified the weight and standard of the metal ; and then, leaning over the bulwarks, half opened her scarlet lips and showed her white teeth, saying to the dazzled Sun :

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‘ You can now, I think, give me back my casket for a time. The Lord Li’s passports are in it, and I must return them to him.’

The other at once ordered the little chest to be brought back and placed on the bridge. Shih-niang opened it. Inside there were several compartments, and she asked Li Chia to help her to lift out each in turn.

In the first there were jewels in the shape of kingfisher feathers, jasper pins, and precious ear-rings, to the value of many hundred ounces. Shih-niang took up these things in handfuls and threw them into the river. Li, Sun and the boatmen uttered exclamations of dismay.

In the second compartment were a jade flute and a golden flageolet. In a third were antique jewels, gold furnishings and a hundred ornaments worth thousands of ounces each. She threw them all into the river. The stricken onlookers gave voice to their regret.

Finally she drew out a box filled with pearls and rubies and emeralds and cat’s-eyes, whose number and value were beyond computation. The cries of the wondering bystanders beat in the air like thunder. She wanted to throw all these into the river also ; but Li Chia held her in his arms, while Sun vehemently encouraged him.

So, pushing Li away, she turned to the other and reviled him :

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‘The Lord Li and I suffered many bitter moments before we came to yesterday. And you, to serve a detestable and criminal lust, have undone us and have caused me to hate the man I loved. After my death I meet the Spirit of Retribution, and I shall not forget your vile hypocrisy.’

Then, turning toward Li Chia, she continued :

‘During those many years when I lived in a disorder of the dust and breeze, I secretly amassed these treasures, that they might some day rescue my body. When I met my Lord, we vowed that our union should be higher than the mountain, deeper than the sea. We swore that, even when our hair was white, we should have our love. Before leaving the capital, I pretended to receive this casket as a gift from my friends. It contained a treasure of more than a myriad ounces. I intended to deposit it in your treasury, when I had seen your father and mother. Who would have thought your faith so shallow, that, on the strength of a chance conversation, you would consent to lose my loyal heart? To-day, before the eyes of all these people, I have shown you that your thousand ounces were a very little sum of money. These persons are my witness that it is my Lord who rejects

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his wife, that it is not I who am wanting in my duty.'

Hearing these sad words, those who were present wept, and called down curses upon Li, and reviled him as an ingrate. And he, being both ashamed and desolate, shed tears of bitter repentance. He knelt down to beg for her forgiveness. But Shih-niang, holding the jewels in each hand, leaped into the yellow water of the river.

The onlookers uttered a cry and rushed to save her. But, under a sombre cloud, the waves in the heart of the river broke into boiling foam, and no further trace was seen of that desperate woman.

Alas! she was an illustrious singing-girl, as beautiful as flowers or jade. She had been swallowed in an instant by the water.

The people, grinding their teeth, would have beaten Li and Sun; but these, in terror and dismay, made haste to push their boats out from the bank, and then went each his own way.

Li Chia, seeing the thousand ounces of silver in his cabin, unceasingly wept for the death of Shih-niang. His remorse gave birth to a kind of madness in him, of which he could never be healed.

Sun was so prostrated that he had to keep his bed. He thought he saw Shih-niang standing in

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front of him all day and every day. It was not long before he expiated his crime in death.

We must now tell how Liu, having left the capital to return to his own village, also halted at Kua-chow. Leaning over the river to take up some water in a bronze basin, he let the thing slip, and therefore begged certain fishermen to drag their net for it.

When they drew up, there was a little box in the net. Liu opened it, and it was full of pearls and precious stones. He rewarded the fishermen generously, and placed the box near his pillow.

In the night he had a dream. A young woman rose from the troubled waters of the river, and he recognised Shih-niang. She drew near, wishing him ten thousand happinesses. Then she recounted the unworthy ingratitude of Li, and said :

‘Of your bounty you gave me a hundred and fifty ounces. I have not forgotten your generosity, and I put this little box in the fishermen’s net as an offering of recognition.’

He awoke and, having learned thus of Shih-niang’s death, sighed for a long time.

Later, those who told me this story declared that Sun, since he thought he could acquire a beautiful woman for a thousand ounces, was evidently not a respectable man. Li Chia,

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they said, had not understood the sorrowful heart of Shih-niang, and was consequently stupid, without refinement, and not worthy of mention. Shih-niang alone was heroic. She was, in fact, unique since furthest antiquity. Why could she not meet some charming companion, some phoenix worthy of her? Why did she make the mistake of loving Li Chia? An admirable piece of jade was thrown to him who did not deserve it; so that love turned to hate, and a thousand passionate impulses were drowned in the deep water. Alas!

. . .

Tu Shih-niang nu ch'ên pai pao hsiang. (Tu Shih-niang, being put to shame, drowns herself with her casket of a hundred treasures.)
Chin ku ch'i kuan (17th Century),
5th Tale.

*The Monastery
of the
Esteemed-Lotus*

*The Monastery of the
Esteemed-Lotus*

IN THE TOWN OF ETERNAL PURITY THERE was once a large monastery dedicated to the Esteemed-Lotus. It contained hundreds of rooms, and its grounds covered several thousand acres. Its wealth and prosperity were due to the possession of a famous relic.

The bonzes, who numbered about a hundred, lived in luxury ; and visitors were sure to be received by one of them from the moment of entry, and to be invited to take tea and cakes.

Now in the temple there was a 'Babies' Chapel', which was reputed to possess miraculous virtue. By passing the night in it and burning incense, women who wished to have a son obtained a son : those who wished for a daughter obtained a daughter.

Round the main hall were set several cells. Women who wished for children had to be of vigorous age and free from malady. They used to fast for seven days, and then go into the temple to prostrate themselves before Fo, and to consult the wands of divination. If the omens were favourable, they passed a night locked up alone in one of the cells, for the purpose of prayer. If the omens were unfavourable, it was because their prayers had not

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been sufficiently sincere. The bonzes made this fault known to them; and they began their seven days' fast anew, before returning to make their devotions.

The cells had no sort of opening in their walls, and when a penitent entered one of them, her family and attendants used to come and install her. As soon as night came, she was locked in the cell, and the bonzes insisted that a member of her family must pass the night before her door, so that none might entertain the least suspicion of an entry to her. When the woman returned to her home, the child was already formed. It was born fat and beautiful always, and without any blemish.

There was, moreover, no household, either of public officials or the common people, which did not send one or even two of its members to pray in the Babies' Chapel. And women came to it even from the provinces.

Every day the crowd in the monastery was comparable with mountains or the sea, and the place was filled with the gayest hubbub. They no longer kept any reckoning of the offerings of every kind which flowed in upon them.

When the women were asked how, during the night, the P'u-sa had made his answer intelligible, some answered simply that Fo had told them in a dream that they would have a son. Others

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said that they had dreamed that a lo-han had come and lain beside them. Others asserted that they had had no dream. Others again blushed and declined to answer. Some women never repeated this kind of prayer a second time : others, on the contrary, went to the temple as often as possible.

You will tell me that this story of a Fo or of a P'u-sa coming every night to the monastery is in no way short of preposterous. But it must be borne in mind that the people of that district had a greater faith in sorcerers than in doctors, and could not distinguish the true from the false. Consequently they continued to send their wives to the temple.

As a matter of course these bonzes, whose outward behaviour was so laudable and correct, were wholly and unreservedly gluttons within, both for luxury and debauch.

Although the cells were apparently quite close, each really had a secret door. When the women were sound asleep, the bonzes came softly into the cell, and to such purpose that, when their victims were aroused, it was already almost too late. Those who would have wished to protest kept silence for the sake of their reputations.

Now the women were young and sound : the bonzes were strong and vigorous. They had, moreover, taken the precaution to cause certain

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special pills to be administered to their visitors. Consequently it but rarely happened that these prayers were not heard. Sober-minded wives would have died with shame sooner than confess the matter to their husbands ; and, as for the others, they kept quiet so that they might be able to do it again.

Matters were in this case when a new Governor was appointed to the district, the Lord Wang. Soon after he entered upon his office, he heard tell of the Monastery of the Esteemed-Lotus, and could not help thinking :

‘ Since it is Fo and P‘u-sa who are involved, it should be enough simply to pray. Why, then, must the women also go and pass the night in the temple ? There must be some questionable artifice in that.’

But he could do nothing without proof ; so he waited until the ninth Sun of the ninth Moon, which was a great festival, and then mixed with the crowd of the faithful who went to the holy place.

Passing through the main gate, he found himself beneath great acacias and hundred-year-old pines. Before him stood the temple, brightly painted with vermilion and decorated by a tablet on which was inscribed in golden letters : ‘ Monastery of the Esteemed-Lotus, for Retirement.’ To right and left was a succession of

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pavilions, and innumerable visitors were going out and coming in.

The first bonze who saw the Governor wished to run and warn his companions. The Lord Wang attempted to stop him, but he broke loose, and soon the drums and bells were sounding to do honour to the magistrate, while the bonzes formed in two ranks and bowed as he passed along.

He entered the temple and burned some joss-sticks ; after which the Superior made him a low obeisance and begged him to come and rest himself for a moment in the reception hall. Tea was served. Then, concealing his true design, the Governor said :

‘ I have learned of the great reputation of this Holy Retreat, and I intend to ask the Emperor to grant you a tablet of honour, inscribed with the names and particulars of all the bonzes of the district.’

Naturally the delighted Superior wished to prostrate himself in thanks ; but the Governor continued :

‘ They have spoken to me also of a miraculous chapel. Is the matter so in truth ? And in what manner are these prayers made ? ’

The Superior answered without misgiving that the period of fasting was seven days ; but that by reason of the greatness of their desire and

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the sincerity of their prayers it most frequently happened that the petitions of the suppliants were granted in a dream during the night which they passed at the monastery.

The Governor asked carelessly what measures were taken to ensure the preservation of the proprieties ; and the other explained that the cells had no other entrance than the door, before which a member of the family had to pass the night.

‘ Since that is the case,’ said the visitor, ‘ I shall send my wife here.’

‘ If you wish for a son, it is only necessary for both of you to pray sincerely in your palace, and the miracle will be accomplished,’ the Superior assured him hastily ; for he was greatly afraid to see the local authorities concerning themselves in this affair.

‘ But why must the wives of the people come here, if my wife need not disturb herself to do so ? ’

‘ Are you not the protector of our doctrine, and is it not natural that the spirits should pay special attention to your prayers ? ’ answered the astute bonze.

‘ So be it,’ agreed Wang. ‘ But allow me to visit this miraculous chapel.’

The hall was filled with women, who fled to right and left. The statue of Kwan-yin was

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covered with necklaces and pieces of embroidery. She was represented holding a child in her arms, while four or five babies clung to her robe. The altar and the walls were covered with votive offerings, chiefly consisting of embroidered slippers. Candles beyond number were held in branches of candlesticks. The hall was filled with the smoke of incense. To the left was the immortal Chang who gives us children. To the right was the 'Officer of the Star of Extended Longevity.'

Wang bowed before the goddess. Then he went to visit the penitents' cells. Each ceiling was painted over with flowers, a carpet covered each floor and the bed, the table and the chairs were spotlessly clean.

He examined the cells carefully all over and found no crack. Not a mouse, not even an ant could have entered in. He went out in perplexity and, after the usual formalities, again stepped into his palanquin, which was accompanied to the gate by all the bonzes.

Thinking to the right and musing to the left, as the proverb says, the Governor suddenly conceived a plan. As soon as he arrived at the palace he summoned one of his secretaries, and said to him :

'Go and find me two harlots, and clothe them as honest women. Give one of them a box of

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black ink and the other a box of vermilion paste, and send them to pass the night at the monastery. If any one approaches them, let them mark his head with the red and the black. I shall go myself to-morrow morning to examine the matter. Above all, let this thing be kept the closest secret.'

The secretary at once went to seek out two public women of his acquaintance. One was named Mei-chieh, and the other Wan-êrh. He took them to his house, explained the Governor's orders to them, and clothed them as matrons of good family. He summoned two palankeens, which he caused the sham penitents to enter, and himself conducted the procession to the monastery. He left the women in their cells, and came back to inform the monk on duty.

After his departure, a little novice brought tea to the present visitors, who were more than ten in number. Who would have thought of troubling to examine the two new arrivals? At the sounding of the first watch, all the cells were locked. The members of the various families took up their positions before the doors. The bonzes shut themselves into their own apartments.

When Mei-chieh found herself alone, she put her little box of vermilion near the pillow, turned up the lamp, undressed herself, and lay upon the

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bed. But she was unable to sleep for thinking of her mission, and continually kept looking through the bed curtains.

The second watch sounded. On every side the sounds of human life were silenced, and all things were still. Suddenly she heard, under the floor, this noise : *Ko-ko*. She sat up, thinking it was a rat, and saw a part of the floor move to one side. A shaven head appeared, and was quickly followed by the whole body. It was a bonze. Mei-chieh was astounded, and thought :

‘ So these rascally priests have been outraging honest women ! ’

But she did not stir. The bonze quietly blew out the lamp, came towards the bed, let fall his robe, and slipped under the blankets.

Mei-chieh pretended to be asleep. She felt him gently move her leg to one side, and then she made as though to wake, saying :

‘ Who are you who come in the night and insult me ? ’ She pushed him away, but the bonze embraced her in his arms, and whispered :

‘ I am a lo-han with a body of gold, and I have come to give you a son. ’

While speaking, he busied himself in accordance with his salacity. It must be said that all bonzes have no mean talent in the matter of cloud and rain ; and this one was full of vigorous

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manhood. Mei-chieh was a woman of great experience, but she was unable to resist him and had difficulty, at length, in repressing her sighs. However, she took advantage of his arriving at the supreme point of his emotion to dip her fingers in the box of vermilion and to mark his head without his perceiving it. After a certain time, the bonze glided from the bed, leaving the girl a little packet, and saying :

‘Here are some pills to assist your prayer. Take three-tenths of an ounce each day in hot water, and you will have a son.’

Weary in body, Mei-chieh was just dimly closing her eyes, when she was aroused by a fresh touch, and, thinking that the same bonze had returned, said in surprise :

‘What? Are you able to come back again, when even I am so tired?’

But he answered without pause :

‘You are making a mistake! I have but just come, and the savour of my comforts is as yet unknown to you.’

‘But, I am tired. . . .’

‘In that case, take one of these pills. . . .’

And he handed her a packet. But she was afraid that it might be poison and placed it on the bed, contriving in the same movement to dip her fingers in the vermilion and to stroke the new-comer’s head. He was even more

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terrible than the former, and did not cease before cock-crow.

As the old song says :

*In an old stone mortar
Where so many pestles have been worn away,
There is need of a heavy copper hammer,
Or the work is lost.*

At dawn, another bonze appeared and said to them in a low voice :

‘ Perhaps you have had your fill. Is not my turn coming ? ’

The first bonze gave a chuckle, but rose and went out. The other then got upon the bed, and very gently caressed the whole of Mei-chieh’s body. She pretended to repulse him, but he kissed her upon the lips, and said in her ear :

‘ If he has fatigued you, I have here some pills which will restore the Springtime of your thoughts.’

And he thrust a pill into her mouth, which she could not avoid swallowing. A perfume rose from her mouth into her nostrils, and caused her bones to melt, imbuing her body with delicious warmth.

But, even while thinking of her own pleasure, Mei-chieh did not forget the Governor’s orders. She marked the head of this new assailant also, saying :

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‘What a nice sleek old pate!’

The bonze burst out laughing:

‘I am full of tender and reliable emotions. I am not like the unmannerly people of our town. Come and see me often.’

And he retired.

Meanwhile the Governor had left his yamen by the fifth watch, before the day had yet broken, accompanied by an escort of about a hundred resolute men, carrying chains and manacles.

Arriving at the still closed gate of the monastery, he made the greater part of his train hide to the right and left, keeping only some ten men about him. The secretary knocked at the gate, crying that the Governor was there and wished to enter.

The first bonzes who heard his shout made haste to arrange their garments and receive the visitor. But the Lord Wang, paying no attention to their salutations, went straight to the apartment of the Superior, who was already up and prepared to begin the ritual of his greeting. But the Governor dryly ordered him to summon all the bonzes, and to show him the Convent register.

Somewhat alarmed, the Superior ordered bells and drums to be sounded, and the bonzes, snatched from their sleep, ran up in groups. When the names written on the register had been

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called, the Governor commanded the astonished monks to remove their skull-caps.

In the full light of the morning sun three heads were seen to be marked with vermilion, but, Oh, prodigy, no less than eleven heads were covered with black ink !

‘ It no longer surprises me that these prayers should be so successful,’ murmured the secretary. ‘ Indeed these bonzes are very conscientious ! ’

Lord Wang pointed out the guilty ones, and caused them to be put in chains, asking :

‘ Whence come these marks of red and black upon you ? ’

But the kneeling monks looked at each other and could not answer, while the whole assembly remained stricken with wonder at this strange event.

Meanwhile the secretary had gone into the Babies’ Chapel and, by dint of shouting, had roused the two harlots from a heavy sleep. They quickly put on their garments, and came to kneel before the Governor, who asked them :

‘ What did you see during the night ? Tell me the whole truth.’

Since they had agreed to the mission, the two women rendered a plain account of the events of that night, showing the pills which the

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bonzes had given them, and also their boxes of vermilion and black.

The bonzes, seeing that their schemes were brought to light, felt their livers turn and their hearts put out of working. They groaned in their secret despair, while the fourteen culprits beat the earth with their brows and begged for mercy.

‘ Miserable wretches, you dare to preach divine intervention, so that you may deceive the foolish and outrage the virtuous ! What have you to say ? ’

But the cunning Superior already had his plan. He ordered all the bonzes to kneel, and said :

‘ These unhappy ones whom you have convicted are without excuse. But they were the only ones who dared to act so. All my other monks are pure. You have been able to discover the shame of the guilty, which I in my ignorance could not, and there is nothing for it but to put them to death.’

The Governor smiled :

‘ Then it is only the cells which these two women occupied that have secret passages ? ’

‘ There are only those two cells,’ answered the unblushing Superior.

‘ We shall question all the other women, and then see.’

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The female visitors, who had already been wakened by the noise, came in turns to give their evidence. They were all in agreement : no bonze had come to trouble them. But the Governor knew that shame would prevent them from speaking, and therefore had them searched. In the pocket of each was found a little packet of pills. He asked them whence these came ; but the women, purple in the face and scarlet in the neck, answered no word.

While this examination was taking place, the husbands of the penitents came up and took a part in it. And their anger made them tremble like the hemp-plant or leaves of a tree. When the Governor, who did not wish to push his questioning too far, had allowed the visitors to depart, their husbands swallowed their shame and indignation, and led them away.

The Superior had not yet given up the fight. He asserted that the pills had been given to the women as they entered the monastery. But the two harlots again affirmed that they at least had received them during the visit of the bonzes.

‘ The matter is quite clear,’ the Governor cried at length. ‘ Put all of these adulterers in chains ! ’

The bonzes had some thought of resisting ; but they had no weapons and were outnumbered. The only ones left free were an old man who

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kindled the incense, and two little novices still in childhood.

The gate of the monastery was closed and guarded. On his return to the yamen, the Governor took his seat in the Hall of Justice, and had his prisoners questioned in the usual ways. Fear of pain loosened their tongues, and they were condemned to death. They were cast into prison to await the ratification of their sentence.

As the governor of the prison went his rounds to inspect their bonds, the Superior whispered to him :

‘ We have brought nothing, neither clothes, nor blankets, nor food. If you will allow me to return for a moment to the monastery with three or four of my monks, I will willingly give you a hundred ounces of silver.’

The prison governor knew the wealth of the monastery. He smiled :

‘ My price is a hundred ounces for myself, and two hundred for my men.’

The Superior made a grimace, but was compelled to promise this larger sum. The warders consulted with each other, and finally, when night came, led the Superior and three of his bonzes back to the monastery. From a secret place among their cells the monks took the promised three hundred ounces, and gave them

Tales from the Chinese

at once to the warders. While these were weighing them and sharing them among themselves, they collected the rest of their treasure, and secretly laid hold of weapons, short swords and hatchets, which they rolled up in their blankets. Also they brought away wine. Thus heavily laden, warders and bonzes alike returned to the prison, and held a feast. The priests succeeded in making their warders drunk. In the middle of the night they drew forth their weapons and, having first set each other free, proceeded to force the gates. They might perhaps have escaped altogether; but in their rancour against the Governor they went first to attack the yamen. The troops of police were numerous and well armed, and the bonzes were quickly overcome. The Superior gave his men order to return as quickly as possible to the prison, to lay down their arms and to say that only a few of them had revolted, since this might save the others. But the warders attacked them so hotly that they were all put back in chains.

Their crime was grave, and doubly aggravated by rebellion. Next day, when the sun had well risen, the Governor gave his judgment. All the hundred and twelve monks were led straight to the market-place and beheaded. Groups of men provided with torches went to set fire to

Monastery of the Esteemed-Lotus
the monastery, and it was soon a smoking ruin.
Joy flowered upon the faces of all the men of
that town. But it is said that many of the
women wept in secret.

. . .
Adapted from Hsing shih hêng yen
(1627), 39th Tale.

*The Counterfeit
Old Woman*

The Counterfeit Old Woman

DURING THE CH'ENG-HUA PERIOD OF OUR dynasty there lived at Shantung a young man named Flowering Mulberry, whose parents possessed a sufficient fortune. He had just bound up his hair beneath his man's bonnet ; his fresh and rosy complexion added to the delicate charm of his features.

One day, as he was going to visit an uncle in a neighbouring village, he was overtaken on the way by a heavy storm of rain, and ran for shelter into a disused temple ; and there, seated on the ground waiting for the rain to stop, was an old woman. Flowering Mulberry sat down and, since the storm grew more violent, resigned himself to wait.

Finding him beautiful, the old woman began to converse and ingratiate herself with him, until at length she came across to him, and finally her hands wandered gently over his body. He found this an agreeable manner of passing the time, but said after a little while :

‘ How is it that, although you are a woman, you have the voice of a man ? ’

‘ My son, I will tell you the truth, but you must not reveal it to anybody. I am not really a woman, but a man. When I was little, I used often to disguise myself and mimic the shrill

The Counterfeit Old Woman

tones of young girls ; and I even learned to sew just as well as they. I used often to go to the neighbouring market towns, pretending that I was a young girl and offering to do needle-work ; and my skill was soon much admired by all the dwellers in the houses where I worked. I used to go to bed with the women, and by degrees, according to the licentiousness of their thought, we would enjoy our pleasure. Soon the women found that they had no more occasion to go out for their dalliance ; and even the sober-minded girls among them became involved. They did not dare to say anything, for fear of the scandal : and also I had a drug which I applied during the night to their faces, stupefying them so that they allowed me to do as I liked. When they recovered their senses it was too late, and they dared not protest. On the contrary, they used to bribe me with gold and silken stuffs to keep silence and to leave their house. Ever since then—and I am now forty-seven years of age—I have never again put on a man's garments. I have travelled throughout the two capitals and the nine provinces, and always when I see a beautiful woman I contrive to go to her house. In this way I accumulate riches with but little labour ; and I have never been found out.'

'What an astonishing tale !' cried the fascinated

Tales from the Chinese

Flowering Mulberry. 'I wonder whether I could do the like.'

'One as beautiful as you are,' answered the other, 'will be taken for a woman by everyone. If you wish me to be your instructor you have only to come with me. I will bind up your feet, and teach you to sew ; and we will go into every house together. You shall be my niece. If we find a good opportunity I shall give you a little of my drug, and you will then have no difficulty in achieving your purpose.'

The young man's heart was devoured by a desire to put this adventure to the proof. Without further hesitation he prostrated himself four times, and adopted the old woman as his master, taking not a moment's thought for his parents or for his honour. Such an intoxicating thing is vice.

When it had stopped raining, he set out with the old woman ; and as soon as they were beyond the boundaries of Shantung they purchased hair-pins and feminine dresses. The disguise was perfect, and any would have sworn to Flowering Mulberry as authentic woman. He changed his first name for that of Niang, 'the little girl', though for a few days he was so embarrassed that he did not dare to speak.

But his master seemed no longer wishful to look

The Counterfeit Old Woman

for fresh victims. Every evening he insisted upon his niece sharing his bed ; and up to a very late hour would proceed with his instruction and that even to the furthest detail.

It was not for this that Flowering Mulberry had disguised himself. One day he declared that thenceforward each should go his own way, and the other was bound to agree ; but before leaving him, he gave the boy some further advice :

‘ Two highly important rules are to be observed in our profession. The first is not to stop too long in the same house. If you stayed in the one place for more than half a month, you would certainly be discovered. Therefore often change your district, so that from month to month there may be no time for the traces of your passage to become noticeable. The second rule is not to let a man come near you. You are beautiful, young and alone in life, and they will all wish to interfere with you. Therefore always surround yourself with women. One last word : have nothing to do with little girls ; for they cry out and weep.’

So then the two parted.

In the first village he came to, Flowering Mulberry perceived through a door the silhouette of a most graceful young woman, and struck upon the door by its copper knocker. The girl

Tales from the Chinese

opened, and looked at him through eyes filled with fire. A needle-woman was just what they required.

But in the evening the boy was disappointed by the arrival of a husband, whose lusty appearance left him small hope for the night.

He was forced to wait until the young woman was left alone in the house by day, and came to work in the chamber where he sat. Then he ventured an observation upon the appearance of the countryside, and afterwards congratulated her on her husband. She blushed, and their conversation became more intimate. It was not until the next day, however, that he dared to make an advance. This met with immediate success. Two days afterwards he was forced into a hurried departure; for the husband had taken notice of him, and profited by his wife's momentary absence to suggest caresses.

Thenceforward he followed his trade. At the age of thirty-two he had travelled over more than half the empire, and had beguiled several thousand women. Often, he was so bold as to attack more than eight persons at a time, in a single house, and not even the little slaves escaped his attention. The happiness of which he was thus the cause remained unsuspected, and no one suffered by it, since none could

The Counterfeit Old Woman

dream of its existence. He always remembered his master's rule, and never risked staying for more than a few days in the same place.

At last he came to the province West-of-the-River, and was received into an important house, where there were more than fifteen women, all beautiful and young. His feeling toward each of these was of so lively a nature that twenty days had passed before he could make up his mind to go away. Now the husband of one of these girls perceived him and, at once falling in love with him, arranged that his wife should cause him to come to their house. Flowering Mulberry went, suspecting nothing, and hardly had he entered before the man came into the room, took him by the waist and asked for pleasure of him. Naturally he refused and began to cry out ; but the husband took not the slightest notice of that. He pushed him on to the bed and undid his garments. But his shameless hands found another matter than that which they expected. It was his turn to cry out : the slaves ran in, bound Flowering Mulberry, and led him to the court of justice.

In front of the judge he tried to plead that he had adopted his disguise in order to gain his living. But torture drew from him his real name and the true motive of his behaviour, together with an account of his latest exploits.

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The Governor sent a report to the higher authorities, for he had no precedent and knew not to what punishment to condemn him. The Viceroy decided that the case must come under the law of adultery, and also under that which dealt with the propagation of immorality. The penalty was a slow death. No attenuating circumstances were admitted. So ended this story.

. . .
*Hsing shih beng yen (1627),
10th Tale.*

*The Error of the
Embroidered Slipper*

*The Error of the Embroidered
Slipper*

*The sun is in our eyes
And we think we are running out towards joy ;
Our heart pulls us down
And we shall never know the way of the sky
Or the end of all things.*

DURING THE HUNG-CHIH PERIOD OF OUR Dynasty there lived at Hang-chow a young man who was called Chang Loyalty. After his parents died leaving him a great fortune, he no longer had anyone to guide him, and therefore, throwing away his books, he spent his time with gallants of the sort we name fou-lang-tzŭ, that is to say 'floating-on-the-waves'. They do not know how to profit by opportunity. So Chang no longer studied anything but various ball games, he abandoned himself to the pleasures of the theatre, and took his delight in those gardens where the breezes of love blow in the moonlight. In a word, he followed the changing flowers of illusion ; and, as he was himself seductive, as impassioned as expert in pleasure, and rich and generous, he became the favourite of all the women of the town.

One day, when spring had but just caused all the flowers to come out on the amiable banks of

Error of the Embroidered Slipper

the Lake of the West, Chang invited a company of singing-girls and idlers to spend the afternoon on the blue waters.

He put on a gauze bonnet with floating wings, after the fashion of the time. His great transparent silk robe was of purple and silver, over a second embroidered one of pure white. White gauze stockings and red silk slippers completed the elegance of his appearance.

He went out, walking unhurriedly, gently waving a fan decorated with paintings. Behind him walked his little slave, Clear-Lute, who carried over his shoulder a mantle in case the weather should freshen, and a long guitar with which to accompany the singing-girls.

As they were approaching the gate of Ch'ien-t'ang, Chang looked up, for no particular reason. On the first storey of a house a maiden held back her window curtain and looked at him. From her whole person emanated so troubling a charm that he stopped in his walk, and felt a tremor in his body. For a long time they remained gazing at each other, until she slowly broke into a smile, and he felt his soul fly from him.

At this moment the door of the house opened below, and a man came forth; so Chang hastened to resume his walk, and returned in a few moments. The curtain was drawn back

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over the window. He waited, but there was no sign. At length he drew away, turning his head, and walking as slowly as if he had already gone a hundred leagues on the mountains.

Yet eventually he passed the town gate and rejoined his friends on the boat, which was at once steered to the middle of the lake. The banks were smiling with peach blossom: the willow leaves were a mist of gold and green. Little boats, with brightly-dressed passengers, crossed and re-crossed like ants. In very truth:

Hills are heaped upon hills

And the pavilions on the pavilions.

The songs and dances are never ceasing

On the West Lake.

The warm breeze fans the drunkenness

Of the pleasure walkers.

Heaven is above,

But here we have Hang-chow and Su-chow Lakes.

But Chang carried the picture of that young girl in his soul, and had no heart for pleasure. His companions offered him cups of wine, wondering at his melancholy; but he was far from them.

At twilight they returned, and Chang re-entered by the Ch'ien-t'ang gate, passing before the girl's house. The window was shut. He

Error of the Embroidered Slipper

stopped, and forced a cough ; but there was no sign. He went to the end of the street, and came back again, but all was silent. Therefore he had no choice but to go away.

He returned next morning, and stayed at a shop near by to learn what he could. He was told : ' They are people called P'an. Their only daughter is sixteen years of age, and is named Eternal Life. The father has some connection with a certain powerful family which affords him protection. He lives by swindling, and everyone fears him. He is a veritable skin-pinker and bravo.'

This news made Chang a little thoughtful, but he walked on by the house nevertheless. The young girl was again at her window. They looked at each other ; but there were people about, and he had to go away.

That evening, as soon as night fell, he went back. The moon was shining as brightly as the sun, and the street was empty. The youthful beauty leaned at her window, wrapped in thought and bathed in the white light. She smiled at him, and he drew from his sleeve his scarlet muslin handkerchief. He made the knot known as ' union of hearts gives victory.' Rolling it in a ball, he threw it, and she adroitly caught it in two hands. Then she stooped and took off one of her little embroidered slippers.

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She dropped it into Chang's waiting fingers. Enraptured with this gift, which was a pledge of love and faith, he carried it to his lips and said softly :

‘ Thank you ! Thank you, with all my heart ! ’

In tones of maddening sweetness, she replied :

‘ Ten thousand happinesses ! ’

Just then a rough voice was heard within the house. She made another sign to him and closed the window. And he went home drunk through silent streets made silver by the moon.

Once in his library, he examined the slipper. It was a golden lotus, so small and so light that a thousand thoughts troubled the lover. He said :

‘ I must find someone to arrange our meeting, or else die from an over-stressing of desire. ’

Early in the morning, he put some pieces of silver in his sleeve and hastened to a little wine booth, not far from the house of P'an. He knew that he would find an old woman there, whom he often met in pleasurable places. In fact, he saw her and called to her. She at once saluted him, saying :

‘ Aya ! My uncle, what brings you ? ’

‘ I happened to be passing, ’ he answered carelessly. ‘ But I should like you to walk a little way with me. ’

‘ In what can I serve you ? ’ she hastened to ask.

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Without speaking, he took her into a quiet little tavern. When they were seated, and the attendant had brought them fruit and dishes of food, he poured out a full cup of hot wine and offered it to her, saying :

‘I have something to ask of you, *ma-ma* Lu. But I am afraid that you cannot accomplish it.’

‘Without boasting,’ she answered with a wide smile, ‘there are few enterprises, however difficult, in which I do not succeed. What is it you desire ?’

‘I want you to arrange a meeting for me with the daughter of P’an, who lives in the Street of the Ten Officials. Here are five ounces of silver to begin with. If you succeed, you shall have quite as much more.’

‘The small Eternal Life ? The little witch ! I thought her so demure ! I should never have imagined she was a wild flower. But the matter is difficult. There are only the parents and the daughter in that house, and the father is dangerous. He keeps a damnably suspicious watch over his door. How could you get in ? I dare not promise any success.’

‘You have just boasted that you always succeed. Here are two ounces more.’

The old woman’s eyes gleamed like fire at the sight of the snow-coloured metal, and she said :

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‘I will take the risk. If all goes well, it will be your fortune. If not, I shall at least have done my best. But give me a proof, for otherwise she would not listen to me.’

Not without regret, Chang took from his bosom the little slipper, and gave it to her, wrapped in his handkerchief. The old woman at once slipped it into her sleeve with the pieces of money. As she was leaving him, she said again :

‘The affair is delicate. You must have patience and not hurry me. That would be dangerous.’

‘I only ask you to do your best. Come and tell me as soon as you have an answer.’

Eternal Life was profoundly agitated. Since that moonlit night she had had no more taste for food, but had said :

‘If I married him I would not have lived in vain. But I know neither his name nor where he lives. When I saw him beneath the moon, why had I not wings to fly to him? . . . As it is, I have only this red handkerchief.’

Yet she had to live and speak as usual. But as soon as she was alone she fell again into her musing.

Two days later, old Lu entered their house. The father had gone out. The visitor said to mother and daughter :

Error of the Embroidered Slipper

‘I received certain artificial flowers yesterday, and have come to show them to you.’

She took a bunch of a thousand shades out of her basket.

‘Would you not say they were real?’

‘When I was young,’ said the mother, ‘we only wore ordinary flowers, and did not dream of marvels like these.’

‘Yet these are only considered mediocre. But the price of the finest is so high.’

‘If we cannot buy them, we can at least admire them,’ the young girl answered dryly.

With gathering smiles, the old woman took from the basket a bunch which was indeed incomparable.

‘And what is the price of that?’ questioned the mother.

‘How should I dare to fix a price? I leave it to you. But if you have a little tea, I would willingly drink of it.’

‘In the admiration caused by your flowers, we have forgotten our manners. Wait for one moment, while I fetch some boiling water.’

As soon as the mother had left the room, the woman took a slight parcel from her sleeve.

‘What have you there?’ asked Eternal Life.

‘Something important which you must not see.’

‘Oh, but I must see it then.’

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‘I shall not give it to you,’ said the cunning old woman. ‘Aya! You have taken it from me by force!’ she added, letting the parcel into the girl’s hand.

Impatiently the child untied the handkerchief, and recognised her slipper. Her face flushed into scarlet, and she said with difficulty :

‘A single one of these objects is of no use, *ma-ma*. Why did you show it me?’

‘I know a certain Lord who would give his life to have the pair. Will you not consent to help me?’

Trembling all over, Eternal Life said to her softly :

‘Since you know all, tell me his name and where he lives.’

‘He is called Chang, and he owns a hundred myriads of ounces. He is very gentle ; his love is as deep as the sea. He has lost his soul through thinking of you, and has bidden me arrange a means for his entry.’

‘How can it be done? My father is terrible. When I have blown out my lamp, he often comes to look into the rooms. What is your plan, *ma-ma*?’

The old woman thought for a minute, and then said :

‘It is not very difficult. You must go to bed early and, as soon as your father has come up

Error of the Embroidered Slipper

and gone down again, you must rise quietly and open the window. You must wait for a signal, and let down a long piece of cloth. He will climb up with the help of this rope, and, if he is careful to go away before the fifth watch, no one will surprise you.'

'Admirable!' cried the delighted child. 'When will he come?'

'It is too late to-day. But I will go to him to-morrow morning. Give me a pledge of re-assurance for him.'

'Assuredly! Take the other slipper, He will give it back to me to-morrow.'

The old woman hid it in her sleeve, for the mother came in by this time with the tea. Soon after, she took up her basket and went away, accompanied to the door by the two women.

She went straight to the house of Chang, but he was out. She offered her flowers to the women of the house, waiting for some part of the day in vain.

Next morning she went again to find the young man, but he had not returned. She went away thoughtful.

The truth is that Chang had remained three days in the house of a Flower-in-the-Mist. When he returned and heard of the old woman's two visits, he hastened to find her. She said to him :

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‘The pledge of love which you entrusted to me is in her hand. She bade me tell you that her father is dangerous, but that he is to be away for a long time shortly. She will inform us.’

On his return journey the young man passed by P’an’s house. Eternal Life was at her window, and they smiled tenderly at one another.

. . .

Three months had passed. Chang was sitting one morning in his library, when his servants told him that four police officers had come with a summons. He asked himself fearfully whether he had been mixed up in any scandal at a pleasure house; but he had to obey. He questioned the officers.

‘It is a matter of taxes and duties,’ they answered.

Re-assured, he changed his clothes and went with them, followed by several of his servants. He was taken at once to the hall where the Court sat, and, standing before the red table, he saluted the magistrate. The latter looked at him intently, and harshly asked :

‘How did you enter into an intrigue with P’an’s daughter? How did you kill her father and her mother?’

Chang was a libertine. That is to say he had neither strength nor energy. Hearing himself thus unexpectedly accused of a double crime, he

Error of the Embroidered Slipper

shook from head to foot, as if a bolt had fallen on him from a calm sky. He stammered :

‘ Although I had the intention of establishing a connection with her, I have not yet succeeded in doing so. As yet I have not known her house.’

The Governor thundered :

‘ She has just confessed that her relation with you has lasted several months. How dare you deny it ? ’

Just then Chang perceived that the young girl was kneeling close to him. Bewildered and not knowing what to do, he turned to Eternal Life and asked :

‘ How can you say that I have been intimate with you ? With what object are you trying to compass my ruin ? ’

She sobbed without answering. Meanwhile the Governor called upon the officers to apply the buskin of torture to the young man. And they swarmed about him like ants.

Unhappily for him, Chang Loyalty had been brought up in muslin and gauze, and had grown to manhood in a brocade. How could he endure such torture ? Hardly had he felt the pressure of the buskin before he cried :

‘ I confess everything ! ’

The Governor had a brush and paper given to the accused, that he might himself write out

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his confession. The unhappy man wept, saying :

‘ What must I write ? I know nothing of the matter ! ’ Then he turned to the young girl and added : ‘ Do you at least tell me what you have done, so that I may write my confession. ’

Eternal Life answered in irritation :

‘ Did you not look at me with lecherous eyes under my window ? Did you not throw your handkerchief ? Did you not match the pair of my embroidered slippers ? ’

‘ All that is true. But about the rest ? ’

The Governor here interrupted :

‘ If one thing is true, the rest is also. What is the use of arguing it ? Since he refuses to write, let him be given thirty strokes of the heavy bamboo, let him be cast into the cell for those who are condemned to death. ’

Happily for Chang, his gaolers knew that he was very rich. They but touched him with their blows, and led him to prison with as much care as they would a butterfly. Each of them cried :

‘ Uncle, how could you do such a thing ? ’

‘ O my elder brothers, ’ he lamented, ‘ if it is true that I desired this girl, yet have I never met her. Do you believe that I could be a murderer ? I know nothing about the murder. Tell me of it. ’

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So he learned that, this very morning, Eternal Life on waking up had been surprised by the silence of the house. From the ground-floor room where she had passed the night, she had gone up to the storey where her parents slept, and had opened the door of their room. In front of the bed, under the half-drawn curtains, the floor was a tarn of blood.

She was so frightened that she tumbled down the stairs and fell upon the street door, sobbing and crying out. Neighbours heard her and ran up, and she said to them :

‘Yesterday, my parents went up to their room. I do not know who has killed them both.’

The bolder ones went up the stairs to see. They opened the bed-curtains, and there were the man and his wife, stiff and with their throats cut across. They looked to right and left. The window was shut, and nothing was disturbed.

‘It is a serious matter,’ they muttered. ‘Let us not act hastily.’

One of them went at once to warn the district chief of police, who came and examined the scene of the crime. He shut and sealed the house, and led Eternal Life to the Governor’s Court. The girl knelt down and told all that she knew, and the Governor said :

‘If the doors and windows were closed, and

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nothing has been stolen, the matter is dubious. Had your father an enemy ? ’

‘ Not to my knowledge. ’

‘ That is strange ! ’ murmured the Governor, and thought for a moment.

Suddenly he told the officers to take off the silken veil with which the young girl had half-covered her head. He could then see her exceptional beauty.

‘ How old are you ? Are you not betrothed ? ’

‘ I am seventeen, and I am still free. ’

‘ And you sleep on the ground-floor, while your parents have their room above ? That is very curious. ’

‘ Until quite recently your slave slept above. But fifteen days ago they made a change. I do not know why. ’

The judge again reflected. Then he struck the table violently, crying out :

‘ It is you who have killed your father and mother. Or, rather, it is your lover. Tell me his name. ’

‘ Your slave never leaves the house. How could she have a forbidden love ? Would not the neighbours know it ? ’

The judge made a salacious grimace :

‘ In a case of murder the neighbours know nothing. It is clear that you have had relations with a man. Your parents knew of it, and that

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is why they changed their room. Your lover
killed them in a rage.'

Hearing these words, she became scarlet and
then pale. At a sign from the Governor, the
gaolers threw themselves like tigers upon the
little girl, closing a cruel pair of iron nippers on
her pellucid and delicate jade hand. As the
jaws began to crush her fingers, she uttered
loud cries :

' Mercy, my lord. I have a lover.'

' What is his name ? '

' Chang Loyalty.'

And then she fainted. The Governor knew
enough. He summoned the young man and,
being convinced of his guilt, had him put in
prison, while awaiting further information. It
is well said in a certain proverb : ' Even while
you are sitting in your house with the doors
shut, misfortune falls from heaven.'

In prison, Chang reflected upon this sudden
accusation. Could he have committed this
double crime in his sleep? In the end he
offered his gaolers ten ounces if they would
take him to Eternal Life. When they bargained,
he promised twenty ounces. Then they led
him as far as the grill of the women's prison.

The girl was there, weeping without stint. As
soon as she saw him, she reviled him between
her sobs :

' Ungrateful and dishonourable ! You made me

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mad with love for you. Why should you cut my parents' throats, and cause my death ? '

'Do not make unnecessary noise,' he interrupted.

'Let us rather try to clear up this mystery. It is certain that I sent the old woman Lu to you with your little slipper. Did you see her ? '

'Naturally, wretch,' she answered disdainfully.

Again he interrupted :

'She told me that you had kept your pledge, that your father was terrible, and that you were awaiting his departure in order to arrange a meeting. But since then I have known nothing of you, save a few rare smiles.'

'Forgetful murderer,' she groaned, 'again you deny it. Did you not confess all before the judge ? Why do you come to torment me ? '

'My unfortunate body could not endure the torture. By confessing I gained some days of life. Do not fly into a rage, but answer me : what happened after *ma-ma* Lu had visited you ? '

'We arranged everything for the next night. You came and gave me back my slipper. Since then you have climbed up to my room each night. Dare you say it is not true ? '

Chang thought deeply. The bystanders wondered whether he were guilty and seeking a clever explanation to save himself, or whether he were really innocent. At last he said :

'Then if we have met often, you should be

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very certain of my voice and body. Look at me well, and think.'

The gaolers exclaimed :

'What he says is just. If there were a mistake, would you leave him to die ?'

Eternal Life was puzzled, and looked at him earnestly. He repeated :

'Is it I ? Dear heart, speak quickly !'

'He who came,' she said at last, 'was perhaps bigger. But it was always dark, and how can I be sure ? But I remember that on your left shoulder you have a scar as big as a copper piece.'

The bystanders at once exclaimed :

'That is easy to verify. There can be no further mistake. Uncle, unclothe yourself quickly ! If there is nothing there, we shall inform the Governor.'

Chang immediately uncovered his shoulder, and the white flesh was as smooth as marble. Eternal Life could not believe her eyes. When the young man had gone back, filled full of hope, to his prison, the gaolers made their report to the Governor, who had already summoned mother Lu.

In the audience chamber the old woman knelt down and was quite overcome. The judge began by ordering her forty strokes for having acted as an abettor of corruption. The flesh of her thighs was nothing but a bloody paste. She told the whole story.

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After coming back from Chang's house without having seen him, old Lu had found her son Wu-han in their little food shop. He had said to her :

‘ You come at the right time. I must kill a pig this morning, and our assistant has gone out for the day.’

The old woman did not like this work. But she was very much afraid of her son, and did not dare to refuse.

‘ Wait till I have changed my clothes ! ’ was all she said.

While she was taking off her outer garment, a parcel fell from the sleeve of it. Thinking that it was money, Wu-han quickly picked it up and opened it. It was the pair of embroidered slippers. He said :

‘ Oh! oh ! Who is the little girl who has such feet ? She must be of a very loving nature. If I could hold her to my heart for a whole night, I should not have lived in vain. But how do these slippers come here, for they have already been worn ? ’

‘ Give them back to me ! ’ she cried. ‘ There is much money in them, which I will hand to you.’ And she told him the whole matter. But he objected :

‘ It has been a common saying from the earliest times that acts not committed can alone remain unknown. This P'an is a bravo. If he learns

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of the matter, all the silver which you receive will be too little to buy his silence. Our whole shop would fall into his hands.'

In dismay the old woman replied :

'Your words are full of reason. I am going to give back the silver and the slippers. I am going to let it be understood that I refuse to embroil myself with curtain affairs.'

'Where is the silver ?' he asked.

The old woman took it from her sleeve, and he put it into his, saying :

'Leave all to me. If they should happen to come and seek a quarrel with us, we shall have proofs against them. And, if nothing comes of it, no one will dare to reclaim the money.'

'But what shall I say if he asks me for news ?'

'That you have not had time enough. Or even that the matter cannot be arranged.'

What could she do, she who was thus deprived of the money and the pledge of love ? She was surely obliged to lie.

As for Wu-han, he at once went out and spent the money on rich clothes and a fine gauze bonnet.

In the evening, when his mother was asleep, he put on his pretty clothes and set the slippers in his sleeve. As the great clock sounded the first watch, he went out softly and made straight for the house of P'an. Light clouds were hiding the moon. It was only half full.

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He coughed before the house. The window opened, and Eternal Life appeared. She tied a piece of silk to the frame, and let the other end fall. He caught it and climbed up, making use of the projections of the wall with his two feet. Then, with a thousand precautions, he stepped over the sill. Trembling, the girl hastened to draw back the piece of silk and to shut the window.

Then he took the child in his arms, and passion leaped up in their two hearts. In the darkness, and in such emotion, how could that mistake be known? The usurper drew her toward her bed.

Even so is the precious scented flower of the nutmeg embraced by the bind-weed. Even so is the plum blossom torn by the hail. Even so is the sparrow's nest most outraged by the cuckoo.

When the first clouds of their desire were dissipated by the rain of caresses, Wu-han took from his sleeve the pledges of love. She gave them back to him :

‘ Now that I am happy, I no more wish to go out.’

About the fourth watch, before daylight, Wu-han arose and climbed stealthily down to the street.

Since that time there had to be a storm of rain, or the moon had to be very clear, to prevent

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Wu-han from hurrying to the small woman. The days, and then the months, passed in this way.

One night the deceiver accidentally made some noise as he went away. P'an immediately came up to them, but saw nothing; for Eternal Life succeeded in not betraying herself.

Next night she warned her lover, saying to him in her fear :

'Do not come for a few days. That will be safer. Let us give them time to forget about it.'

But her father had his ears on the alert; he heard the window creak, and he ran up, though again too late. In the morning he said to his wife :

'This baby is certainly about some villainy. She keeps her mouth as tight as a trap.'

'I also have a suspicion,' replied her mother.

'Yet the room opens on to the stairs, which come down into our room.'

'I am going to give her a good taste of the rod to make her speak.'

'That is a bad plan, a very bad plan,' said her mother. It is a true proverb that you must not show family blemishes. If you beat her, all the neighbours will know, and who would wish to marry her? Let us rather make her sleep in our room, which has no way out except

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the door. We will spend the night up the stairs, and see what happens.'

On being told of this proposal, Eternal Life dared not say anything. And on the higher floor husband and wife slept in peace.

One evening Wu-han felt his heart seething with passion. Fearing that he might be attacked by P'an, he armed himself with a knife, which he used to cut pigs' throats. Under Eternal Life's window, he coughed softly. Nothing stirred. He coughed more loudly, thinking she was asleep. But everything remained quiet. He was going back to his house in a thoughtful mood, when he saw a ladder left near to a house which was being built. He seized upon it, carried it away, and put it up against Eternal Life's window. The catch was not locked. He pushed it open, climbed over the sill, and silently went toward the bed.

Drunken with joy, Wu-han was already dis-embarrassing himself of his clothes, when, in the stillness of the night, his ears caught the sound of two people breathing, instead of one. He listened with controlled breath. Unmistakably the rough breathing of a man was mingled with the softer murmur of a woman.

He was suddenly blinded with violent anger :

'This is why she did not answer my signal. The vile child has another man in bed. It was

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to get rid of me that she told me of her father's
suspicion ! '

In his jealous madness he drew his knife and gently felt for the man's throat. With a clean blow he drove the weapon into the flesh, and before the woman could move, he cut her throat also, almost beheading her.

He wiped the knife and his hands on the blanket, opened the window, and descended. He had closed the catches. Once outside, he ran to replace the ladder, and went back to his house.

Denounced by his mother and brought before the Court, Wu-han tried to deny the accusation. But the officers, on uncovering his shoulder, brought a scar to view. Eternal Life recognised his voice and his body. The first tortures overcame his obstinacy, and he confessed all.

The murderer was condemned to slow death. Eternal Life was strangled, as was old Lu Chang, whose lecherous intentions had been the cause of all, was sentenced to a heavy fine. In dismay, and half ruined, he no more left his study chamber. Not long afterwards, he was carried off by a lassitude and a languor.

• • •
*Lu Wu-han ying liu ho chin hsieh (Lu Wu-
han keeps an Embroidered Slipper to
his scathe) Hsing shih beng
yen (1627), 16th
Tale.*

*A Complicated
Marriage*



A Complicated Marriage

MARRIAGES HAVE FROM ALL TIME BEEN arranged beforehand by Heaven. If such is the will of destiny, the most distantly separated persons come together, and the nearest neighbours never see each other. All is settled before birth, and every effort of mortals does but accomplish the decree of Fate. This is proved by the following story.

During the Ching-yu period of the Sung dynasty, there lived at Hang-chow a doctor named Liu. His wife had given him a son and a daughter. The son, who was but sixteen years old, had been called Virgin Diamond, and was betrothed to young Pearl, of the family of Sun. He was brilliant in his studies, and gave every promise that he would one day attain to the highest literary standard, and to the greatest honour.

The daughter was named Prudence. She was fifteen years old, and had just received marriage gifts from her betrothed, the son of P'ei, a neighbouring druggist. Her eyebrows were like the feelers of a butterfly, and her eyes had the grace of those of a phoenix. Her hips, flexible as willow branches swayed by the wind, wakened the liveliest feeling. Her face was that of a flower; and the nimbleness of her light body brought to mind the flight of swallows.

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The go-between who had concluded Prudence's betrothal came one day at the instance of the P'ei family to ask that the marriage might be hastened. But Liu had determined first to accomplish the ceremonies for his son, and accordingly took customary steps with this object in view, so that a day was at length fixed. But when the appointed time was drawing near, Virgin Diamond fell seriously ill. His father, Liu, wished to postpone the ceremony, but his mother argued that perhaps joy would cure him better than medicine.

'But if, by mischance, our son should die?' he insisted.

'We will send back the bride and all the gifts, and the family will have nothing to say.'

The doctor, like many men, was wax in the hands of his wife, and therefore her wish was fulfilled.

But it chanced that one of their neighbours had been slightly affronted by them, and had never forgiven them. He heard of Virgin Diamond's illness, and spoke of it to the family of Sun.

Sun had no intention of compromising his daughter's future; so he summoned and questioned the go-between who had arranged the betrothal. The poor woman was in a great quandary, fearing to offend either the one

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family or the other ; yet she was compelled to admit the truth. In her anxiety she ran to the house of Liu to obtain a postponement of the marriage until Virgin Diamond's recovery, and hinted that, failing this, Sun would send his old nurse to see the sick bridegroom.

Liu did not know what to do ; and before he had come to a decision, the nurse arrived. He saluted her, not knowing what excuse to make. At last he said to the go-between :

‘ Be so good as to entertain this venerable aunt for a moment, while I go and find my Old-Thornbush.’

He hurried into the interior of the house, and in a few words told his wife what was happening.

‘ She is already here and wishes to see our son. I told you that it would have been better to change the day.’

‘ You really are a decayed piece of goods. Their daughter has received our gifts, and is already our daughter-in-law. You shall see.’

Then she said to Prudence :

‘ Make haste and prepare our large room for a collation to the family of Sun.’

She herself went to the room where the nurse was, and asked :

‘ Has our new daughter's mother something to say to us ? ’

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‘She is uneasy about the health of your honourable son, and has sent me to see him, thinking that it would be better to postpone the marriage if he were seriously ill.’

‘I am gratified to receive this proof of her consideration. My son has, in fact, taken cold, but it is not a serious indisposition. As for choosing another day, that is not to be thought of. Our preparations are made, and a delay would involve too great a loss. Furthermore, happiness drives away every ill. The invitations are sent out. We might imagine that your family had changed its intention . . .’

‘At least, can I see the invalid?’

‘He has just taken a drug and is asleep. Besides, I have told you that he has caught cold. Are you trying to insult me by expressing a wish to prove my words?’

‘If the matter stands thus,’ the nurse politely made haste to answer, ‘it only remains for me to withdraw.’

‘You cannot go in this way. You have not even taken a cup of tea. If you please, let us go into the new room; for my house is all in disorder.’

On entering, the nurse observed the excellent arrangement of the young couple’s apartment.

‘Everything is ready, as you see,’ said the wife of Liu. ‘And if my son is not quite recovered

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after the ceremony, I shall take care of him in my pavilion, until he is able to embark upon his conjugal life.'

Having taken tea, the nurse at last arose and went away. On her return she recounted to her master and mistress what had taken place, and Sun and his wife found themselves in a difficult dilemma. They could not think of allowing their daughter to ruin her life by entering the family of her betrothed, if he were going to die, and, if the young man were not seriously ill, they stood the risk of losing all their preparation, and of giving occasion for slander. Suddenly their son Yü-lang, who was present, said :

'If they have not allowed him to be seen, it means that he is seriously ill. There is no way by which we can go back on our contract; and yet we cannot send my sister to her ruin in this fashion. I have a plan, and you must tell me what you think of it. Let us send the go-between to advise Liu that the marriage will take place on the appointed day, but that the bride's equipment will not be sent until after her husband's recovery. I am sure that they will reject this offer, and then we shall have a good excuse for throwing the blame on them.'

'But what if they should agree?' objected his parents, after a moment's reflexion.

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‘They will certainly not agree, or else they would have postponed the marriage. Besides, it is impossible that they should be willing to have another mouth to feed, without any dowry or plenishing.’

His father said :

‘Very well, if by any chance they do agree, you shall disguise yourself as a woman and go in your sister’s place. You could take a man’s clothing with you, and put it on if the sick youth recovered, or matters seemed to take an unfortunate turn. They would not dare to say anything for fear of being ridiculed.’

‘Oh! that is impossible!’ cried the young man. ‘In the first place I would be discovered at once. And what would people say of me afterwards?’

‘They would say that you had played a trick on these people, and that is all. You are still in the freshness of youth. You are sufficiently like your sister to deceive those who do not know you very well, especially in a wedding garment. You must do it. That is decided. The nurse can go with you to arrange your hair. . . . And in this way, if our son-in-law dies, Liu will have neither my daughter nor her equipment.’

When the wife of Liu received Sun’s proposal from the mouth of the go-between, she hesi-

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tated for a moment. But then she reflected on the false situation in which she would be placed by refusing. So, masking her thoughts beneath a smile, she agreed to the arrangement.

On the day fixed for the marriage, Yü-lang was constrained to disguise himself. But two grave difficulties presented themselves. First with regard to his feet: how was it possible for him to imitate his sister's ravishing golden lotuses, so like to sphinx heads, and the balancing of her light steps, a swaying of flowers in the soft breeze? They gave him a petticoat which reached to the ground, and he practised his sister's gait, at which she laughed until she cried. The next question was his ear-rings. It so happened that his left lobe had been pierced; for in his childhood they had made him wear one ring, in order to persuade the evil spirits that he was a girl, whose death would be of no importance. Everybody knows that the Jinn always endeavour to rob us of that which is truly dear to us, and leave untouched that which is of no value.

So Yü-lang hung a jewel in his left lobe, and stuck a small piece of plaster over his right ear, so that it might seem it had suffered a slight wound. His great pearl-decorated head-dress concealed his head, brow and shoulders.

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His scarlet robes, embroidered with gold and silver, helped to disguise his figure, and the transformation was completed by rouge on his lips and cheeks.

When evening at length drew near, drums and flutes were sounded, the flowered palankeen entered the courtyard, and the hoodwinked go-between, admiring the beauty of the bogus bride, herself opened the scarlet curtains. Not seeing Yü-lang, she remarked upon this circumstance ; and they answered carelessly that he was indisposed and kept to his bed. Actually at that moment he was taking leave of his parents and imitating to the best of his ability the sobs which were fitting to the occasion.

The procession at last set out and all the bride's equipment was a little leather trunk.

At the house of Liu there was considerable discussion :

‘ When the bride arrives, our son will be unable to cross the threshold as ritual demands, and the marriage will not be accomplished. The bride will be left alone to salute the ancestors, and this is impossible. What shall we do ? ’

‘ It cannot be helped,’ answered the mother.

‘ So much the worse ! Our daughter must make it known that she will take her brother's place. She shall recite the poem of the threshold in his name, and the rites will be thus observed.’

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And Prudence, in her graceful girl's garments, did in fact receive the false Pearl as she got out of the palankeen, pronounced the sacred formulas, and led the new bride before the tablets. The two seeming sisters-in-law knelt down, and several of the bystanders laughed inwardly to see two women perform the marriage ceremony, and then kneel for the purpose of the grand prostration.

The wife of Liu led Yü-lang to the invalid's bed ; but he had been excited and troubled by the music and noise, and had fainted. They had hastily to revive him by pouring some spoonsfull of hot soup into his mouth.

At length the false bride was led to the prepared pavilion, and her great veil was taken off. Then her fresh beauty shone forth, and everybody uttered exclamations of joy : the wife of Liu was alone in feeling a certain compassion, for she thought of all that the new bride would have to lose, and deplored her son's misfortune in falling ill at the moment of tasting so great happiness.

As for Yü-lang, the tedium of beholding the hideousness of all the guests was curiously diminished by the pleasure of seeing Prudence's delectable face. He thought :

‘What a misfortune that I am already betrothed ! Here is she whom Fate should have given me.’

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Prudence, on her part, felt herself drawn towards him in an irresistible manner, and said to her mother and the go-between :

‘ Alas ! surely my brother has no luck, and my sister-in-law will be very unhappy alone to-night ! Is she not charming ? If my future husband were like her, my life would be free from all regret.’

Meanwhile, the marriage feast came to an end, a present was sent to the musicians, and the guests withdrew. The disguised boy, after being conducted to his pavilion, had his nurse’s assistance in unmaking the complicated structure of his nuptial adornment. At last he found himself alone, but with no wish for sleep.

Now Liu and his wife said to each other :

‘ It seems hard to leave the newly-wed bride alone for her first night under our roof. Would it not be better to tell Prudence to go and keep her company ? ’

As always, the father made certain objections which were not listened to. Prudence insisted, and soon mother and daughter went together to the new pavilion, and approached the bed, the curtains of which were drawn shut.

‘ Here is your sister-in-law come to spend the night with you. . . .’

Yü-lang did not know what to say. He was afraid of being discovered, and held the

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curtains very tightly under his chin, as he put his head through the opening.

‘I am accustomed to be alone,’ he stammered.

But the mother said :

‘Aya ! You are both of the same age, you are almost sisters. What are you afraid of ? If you want to be particular, you have only to keep a blanket between you.’

During this time, Yü-lang was moved as much by fear as by delight. Was it not strangely fortunate that Prudence’s mother should herself have come and led her in this manner to his bed ? But if the young girl should call out ? On the other hand he thought :

‘She is fifteen years old, therefore she has been ready for some time ; the door of her emotions is ajar. If I take precaution and kindle her heart little by little, there is no need to fear that she will refuse to nibble at my hook.’

Now the wife of Liu had already retired, and Prudence had shot the bolt of the door. She was laughing all over the bright chrysanthemum of her face :

‘Sister-in-law, you have taken no refreshment. Are you not hungry ? If you wish for anything, tell me, and I will go and fetch it for you.’

‘I am deeply grateful to my sister-in-law for her gentle thought.’

Prudence noticed that the wick of the lamp

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had not been trimmed, and was burning long, straight and red. So she exclaimed :

‘ That is for your happiness, sister-in-law ! ’

The other could not restrain a burst of laughter.

Prudence blushed and laughed also :

‘ You know how to be merry.’

So they talked together. At length the maiden, taking the flowers out of her hair, got upon the bed and knelt down to undress herself.

He asked her :

‘ On which pillow would you like to sleep ?

The lower one ? ’

‘ As my sister-in-law wishes.’

‘ Then, if you please, let us sleep on the same.’

‘ Very well.’

Prudence had slipped under the blankets to finish undressing, and the boy did likewise, removing his upper garment. The lamp, placed on a little table beside the bed, dimly lit up the recess through the thin curtains.

His emotion began to rise, and he asked :

‘ How many flowering Springtides have you known ? ’

‘ Fifteen, this year.’

‘ Are you betrothed ? ’

But she was seized with unaccountable shyness, and dared not answer. He brought his lips close to the delicate ear lying beside him, and whispered :

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‘Why are you so bashful? We are only two women together.’

Very low, she answered him :

‘I am betrothed to the son of P’ei, the druggist, and already they are urging that the ceremony should take place. Happily nothing is yet decided.’

‘You are not very eager, then?’

She pushed his head gently away, saying :

‘It is not nice of you to take hold of my words in this way, and to make fun of me. If I am not eager, you do not seem to be any more so than I.’

‘And how do you know that, maiden? In any case, how could I be so when we are two women?’

‘You speak to me as if you were my mother,’ the other laughed.

‘Considering my age, I should rather be your husband,’ he thoughtlessly said.

She burst out laughing :

‘It is I who am the husband, seeing that I took my brother’s place at the wedding.’

‘Well, let us not argue, but rather act as if we were husband and wife.’

Thus both of them spoke words of meaning. They grew more and more passionate.

‘Since we are husband and wife,’ he said impatiently, ‘why do we not sleep under the same blanket?’

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As he spoke, he pushed back the thick quilt, and began to caress the upper part of her so sweet and smooth, so soft and graceful body. She had kept on an under garment, but her heart was filled with Springtime thoughts, and she offered no resistance to his hand.

Then, trembling with desire, he came to her breasts that had so lately dawned, and were so firm. Their tender points were red as a cock's crest, and in all things lovable.

Delighted with this game, Prudence put out her hands to return his caresses, and also found his breasts. But there was nothing but quite a little button. She was astonished, and said to herself:

‘ She is as tall as I am. How comes it that she is not further developed ? ’

But by this time Yu-lang was holding her right in his arms, and had his lips glued to hers, wantonly thrusting out his tongue. She continued the game by giving it a little nibble, and then thrust out her own tongue. This he so tenderly caressed with his that the girl's body seemed all at once to melt, and she said languorously :

‘ This is no longer a game. We are truly husband and wife ! ’

The false bride, seeing that he had fully awakened the passion of his dupe, made answer :

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‘Not yet. We must take off our under garments.’

‘But I am afraid lest people should talk. It is not good to take them off.’

He gave a nervous laugh and, without paying attention to her words, undid her girdle and took off her garment. As his fingers advanced toward the secret, she protected herself with her two hands, saying :

‘Sister-in-law, sister-in-law, you must not !’

But he kissed her again upon the lips.

‘There is nothing to forbid it, little sister. You may caress me also.’

In her agitation, and so as not to seem too stupid, she took off his vest, and her timid little hand suddenly encountered a certain matter. Her surprise was such that, for a moment, she could not speak. But at last she said :

‘What man are you who dare to take my sister-in-law’s place ?’

‘I am your husband,’ he answered, hugging her to him.

She pushed him off, and said seriously :

‘If you do not tell me in plain truth who you are, I shall cry and call out, and you will be sorry for that.’

‘Do not be angry, little sister,’ he replied. ‘I will tell you everything. I am Yü-lang, your sister-in-law’s elder brother. My parents heard

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that your brother was seriously ill, and did not wish my sister to leave our house ; but since your parents would not alter the day of the marriage, I had to disguise myself and take my sister's place, until your brother should be healed. I never expected that Heaven would, in its bounty, allow me to become your husband. But we alone must know of our love. Let us not betray it to any.'

Pressing forward again, he tried to bind her in his arms. Although she had believed she was with a woman, Prudence had loved him from the first ; the feeling which she had mistaken for friendship quickly changed to that of love, for it was kindled, as was all of her, by the young man's ardour. Nevertheless she was suffused with shame, and so wavered between one extremity and the other.

As for him, in the freshness of his still maiden youth he spoke to her of everlasting vows, of a love higher than the mountain and vaster than the sea, and of a marriage shaped from a boundless happiness. Her betrothed, her parents and her shame were all forgotten. She covered her face with her hand and resisted no longer.

When the cloud and the rain of their intoxication had been dispelled, they clasped each other close and went to sleep.

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Meanwhile the nurse, being in the secret of this disguise, had been much disturbed at seeing Prudence share the young man's bed. From the adjoining room she had heard their laughter, and then their sighs, and had no further doubt of what had happened. And inwardly she cried: 'Woe! Woe!'

In the morning, after Prudence had returned to her parents' house to perform her toilet, the woman came in to wait upon Yü-lang, and said to him in a low voice:

'O practitioner! You have done a fine thing! What will happen if people come to know of it?'

'I did not search her out. Her mother led her to my bed. How could I have avoided this?'

'You ought to have resisted with all your might.'

'With an adorably beautiful girl in the same bed? Even a man of iron and stone could not have resisted. Also, if you say nothing, who will know of it?'

When the process of disguise was again completed, he went to salute the wife of Liu. Then all the women of the house and the cousins came to see him. Finally Prudence came in, and they two laughed together.

For that day, as was the custom, Liu and his wife had invited their relations and friends,

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and there was a great feast, with music and a dinner lasting until the evening. Then, when the house was quiet again, the girl went, as on the previous night, to keep young Yü-lang company. That night, even more so than the preceding one, the butterflies beat their wings, and the passionate phœnixes were convulsed.

In the morning, they kept together. Therefore the scandalised nurse ran out and told everything to Sun and his wife, and they reeled with surprise and emotion.

‘Alas, misfortune will certainly come of it! We must bring him back as soon as possible.’

They summoned the go-between and told her that, according to custom, on the third day after the marriage they wished to see their daughter at their house. She therefore went to the home of Liu, and the two lovers trembled when they heard of this request. But the wife of Liu had not forgotten the difficulties which Sun had made with regard to the marriage; and she was afraid of not seeing her daughter-in-law again. So she said:

‘But my son is still suffering, and the marriage has not been altogether accomplished. We will speak of this again at some later time.’

This answer had to be sufficient. The nurse was in terror, and watched the approaches of the room all night, for fear lest anybody

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should hear the rapturous exclamation of the lovers.

The days passed, and Virgin Diamond gradually grew better. Since he admired the beauty of his young wife, his desire to know her hastened his recovery, and the time came when he was able to get up. Still walking unsteadily, he went into the nuptial pavilion to see her who was his bride, and came before the door, supported by his attendants. The nurse was there, and cried out aloud :

‘ My Lord wishes to enter ! ’

Yü-lang was, quite naturally, holding Prudence in his arms. He hastily released her, and went close to the door.

‘ You have succeeded in rising, my elder brother ? ’ said Prudence. ‘ You will fatigue yourself.’

‘ That is no matter,’ he answered, making a deep obeisance before her whom he believed to be his wife.

‘ Ten thousand happinesses be with you ! ’ Yü-lang graciously replied.

‘ What an exquisite pair ! ’ cried the wife of Liu, proud of her son and happy at his fortune.

The false bride’s beauty was meanwhile strangely reviving the invalid’s vitality. And the other lad thought :

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‘He is a fine boy in spite of his illness: there is no need to pity my sister. But if he can get up, he will waste no time in coming to spend the night with me. I must depart as quickly as possible.’

When evening came, he explained his fears to Prudence.

‘It is quite necessary to persuade your mother to send me back to my home, that I may change places with my sister. Everything will be discovered if we delay.’

‘You wish to go? But what will become of me alone?’

‘I have already thought of that. Alas! Alas! But we are both betrothed to another. What can we do?’

‘If you do not want me living, I must die so that my soul may follow you.’

And she sobbed and sobbed. He dried her eyes, saying to her:

‘Do not meet trouble in this way, but leave me to find a plan.’

They clasped each other in their arms, shedding most bitter tears.

Now it must be said that the wife of Liu was a little wearied of seeing her daughter night and day inseparable from her sister-in-law. However, she said nothing, because the marriage was not actually accomplished. But passing

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before the marriage pavilion on that day, she heard a sobbing. She drew near noiselessly and, through a hole in the window paper, saw them close in each other's arms and weeping.

'This is very odd,' she said.

She wished to make an outcry, but remembered that her son was just getting better, and would fall ill again from any sorrow. She gently tried to push the door open, but it was locked. She called out :

'It is strange that this door should be locked!'

The lovers recognised her voice, and made haste to dry their tears and open the door. She came in.

'Why do you lock yourselves in during full daylight, and groan and embrace each other?'

They felt the blood flow to their faces, and answered nothing. The mother's hands and feet were trembling with rage. She seized hold of her daughter :

'You are playing some pretty trick. Let me talk to you a little.'

And she dragged her into an empty room. The attendants who saw her asked each other why the girl was being dragged along like that. But by this time the mother had locked the door. When the attendants came and looked through the holes in the paper, they saw her lifting a stick, and heard her crying :

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‘O wretch, tell me the truth, or I shall strike you! Why were you weeping?’

At first Prudence thought of denial. Then she said to herself that it would be better to confess and to beg her parents to break off her betrothal with the family of P’ei, so that they might marry her to Yü-lang. If they refused, she would die. That was all. So she told the whole matter without evasion.

‘We are husband and wife. Our love is boundless, and our vows will endure for at least a hundred years. My brother is recovered, and we fear that we shall be separated. Yü-lang wishes to return to his parents, to send his sister in his place. It seemed, then, to your daughter that a woman cannot have two husbands, and that if Yü-lang cannot marry me, I must die.’

As she listened to her, her mother’s breast opened with rage, and she stamped her feet:

‘This rotten carrion has sent his son here and has deceived me! And now my daughter is lost. I must beat him unmercifully!’

She seized her stick, opened the door and ran forth. Her daughter, forgetting her shame, tried to prevent her; but the old woman pushed her away violently, so that she fell down. Prudence got up and ran after her. The attendants also ran.

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Now Yü-lang had very well understood that all was discovered when Liu's wife had dragged her daughter away. A moment later, the nurse hurried in.

'O my Gods! And, ah unhappiness! All is well lost! Prudence is being questioned with the stick.'

It seemed to him that two knives were piercing his heart. He burst out into sobbing. But the nurse was already taking out his hair-pins and clothing him as a man. In a state of stupor he let himself be hurried to the main door and through the streets. A few moments later he was back at his parents' house.

His father did not fail to say to him :

'I told you to play the girl, not the man. Why have you committed acts of which Celestial Reason disapproves?'

Yü-lang, jostled thus by his father and his mother, no longer knew where he stood. Meanwhile the nurse objected :

'But what can they say there? Our young Lord has only to keep himself hidden for a few days, and it will all pass over.'

But at Liu's house the nurse, as she went away, had unwittingly locked the door, and Liu's wife had come to it and was shaking it violently, stammering with rage and flourishing her stick.

A Complicated Marriage

‘Thief, whom may Heaven strike dead! O very vile rascal! For what did you take me? I am going to show you who I am! I will have your life! If you do not open the door, I shall break it open with a great ease.’

But naturally no one answered. Prudence tried in vain to stay her mother, who loaded her with insults; but at last, in her rage, she succeeded in breaking the lock, and rushed into the room with her stick uplifted. The cage was empty and the bird flown. She knelt on all fours to look under the bed and under the furniture, crying out all the time:

‘Thief, you shall die!’

But, as she was compelled to admit, there was no trace of the ravisher. Then Prudence said to her, sobbing meanwhile:

‘And now, after this scandal, the P’ei family is let into the whole secret. I entreat you to have pity on me and let me marry Yü-lang. Otherwise must I not die in order to redeem my shame?’

She fell on her knees, weeping and groaning.

‘What you say is true,’ answered her mother resuming some measure of calm. ‘After this wonderful affair, no one will want you.’

However, a mother’s love cannot be altogether restrained. She drew near to her daughter:

‘My poor child! All this is not your fault. It

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is that rotten carrion of a Sun who has caused it. But we cannot, of ourselves, break off the betrothal with P'ei.'

As Liu came up in the meantime, the matter had to be explained to him. He was nearly half a day without being able to speak, and it may be surmised that his first words were to throw the blame on his wife :

'The whole fault is yours ! By making me say I do not know what, you arranged all this. Instead of altering the date as you should have done ! And to crown all, you insisted upon placing our daughter in his arms ! She has very well kept him company, has she not ? '

His wife's anger was not quite dead, and these remarks rekindled it. Her voice rolled out like thunder :

'You old tortoise ! ' she began . . .

But on this occasion he also was furious. He advanced, threatening to strike her. Prudence tried to come between them, and all three were nothing but a rolling, striking, shouting and weeping congeries. The servants then ran to inform Virgin Diamond, who rose from his bed and unsteadily ran. His mother was moved with pity to see him, and his father also stopped his vituperation. They both went out muttering.

Virgin Diamond then asked his sister the cause

A Complicated Marriage

of all this, and why his young wife was no longer there. She answered only with tears; but his mother, who had returned, told the whole story.

Virgin Diamond's anger was so strong that his face became the colour of the earth. However, he contained himself, saying :

'Let us not publish this family shame abroad. If the news spreads, everybody will laugh at us.'

As a matter of course, their mischievous neighbour, Li, had heard their shouting and weeping. He had quickly climbed on to his wall, but had been unable to understand what was happening. Next morning he watched for the first of the women slaves who came out, and drew her into his house. Fifty pieces of copper decided the girl to speak, and the delighted Li, letting her depart, ran to the house of P'ei, to whom he told all that he knew.

P'ei went straight to the house of Liu :

'I know all,' he cried. 'Give back the gifts, and let no more be said.'

Liu's face became red and white by turns. He thought :

'How does he already know what happened in my house but yesterday?'

Then he denied the matter :

'Kinsman, whence come these words with which you are trying to sully my family?'

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‘ Miserable cheat ! ’ cried the other, ‘ you are in very truth an old tortoise.’

And he struck him on the face with his hand.

‘ Murderer ! ’ cried Liu in a fury. ‘ Do you dare to come to my house and insult me and strike me ? ’

And he struck P’ei such a violent blow that the old man fell to the ground. Then they began to belabour each other. Virgin Diamond and his mother, hearing their cries, ran up and separated them. Afterwards P’ei, pointing with his finger and trembling, cried :

‘ You know how to strike, old tortoise ! We shall see whether you are as clever in speaking before the judge.’

And he went out swearing. Liu exclaimed :

‘ It is all Sun’s fault. If I do not bring an action against them, they will even now escape entirely free.’

In spite of his son’s curses, he hurriedly set about writing an accusation, and ran to the Governor’s palace.

The court was sitting, and Liu, holding his accusation, approached the judge. P’ei was already there, and reviled him as soon as he saw him. Liu retaliated, and the battle began anew.

At this interruption, the magistrate sternly ordered the two to kneel and explain them-

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selves. Both spoke confusedly at the same time, but the whole story was none the less made clear. All those who were implicated in the matter were summoned, and they came to fall upon their knees.

At length the judge delivered sentence. All the former betrothals were annulled. Yü-lang became betrothed to her whom he had outraged. But the Sun family owed a compensation to the Liu family, which in its turn owed a bride to the P'ei family. So Pearl Sun was given to the son of P'ei, and Virgin Diamond was bestowed upon the former betrothed of Yü-lang. Having settled the affair, the Governor summoned three red palankeens, and the three brides were conducted under escort to the homes of their new husbands. The town of Hang-chow talked of this affair for a long time, but in the end forgot it for some new scandal.

• • •
Hsing shih beng yen (1627),
8th Tale.

*A Strange
Destiny*

A Strange Destiny

*In epochs of deep peace
When days are lengthening,
The flute sounds and songs are heard
Among the drunken villages.
The Phoenix Car is said to be approaching
With the Emperor,
And each one turns his eye
To the splendour of that procession.*

IN THE REIGN OF HUI TSUNG OF THE SUNG dynasty, near the capital of the East, on the borders of the Lake of Clearness of Gold, a new wine pavilion had just been opened, under the sign of *The Quick Hedge*. Fan the landlord, and his brother Êrh-lang, were the proprietors. Neither of them was married; and their business prospered.

It was the week when Spring melts into Summer, and men walk abroad in numbers to enjoy the freshness and beauty of nature.

One day Êrh-lang roamed the lake-side, delighting in the soft air, and saw, in front of a tea-house, a ravishing girl of about eighteen, in whose face, which was as dreamful as the Night Star, flowered all the blossoms of the time.

He stopped, fixed to the ground with admiration and already riotous with love. He could

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not take his eyes from the rose radiance of this face, peach blossom against flawless jade ; from this slender body, from the rare golden lotus of these delicate feet. A scarlet hibiscus in flower framed this phoenix against stirring landscape of the great lake.

Alas ! our emotions do not depend upon our will. The young girl felt herself looked upon, and raised her eyes ; her soul was at once troubled, her child's heart secretly rejoiced. She thought :

‘ If I could marry this beautiful man, I should know many happy moments. But, though he is there now, where will he be to-morrow ? How can I tell him how to find me again ? ’

Just then a seller of refreshments came by with his small vessels on his shoulder. She called him :

‘ Have you a little honey-water ? ’

The merchant set down a bronze vase on the ground to serve her ; but she, with pretended clumsiness, upset the vase, and said to him :

‘ Never mind ! Come to my house and I will pay for all. I will give you my name and address. ’

Êrh-lang pricked his ears, as she continued :

‘ I am the daughter of Lord Chou, who lives near the Ts'ao Gate. My little name is Victorious-Immortal. And I pray you do not charge

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too much, for I am not yet betrothed or married.'

The young lover trembled with joy, saying to himself:

'These words are meant for me, I am sure of that.'

The merchant was meanwhile protesting, and the young girl added:

'My father is not at home just now. But he is terrible, and you will undoubtedly be prosecuted if you try to rob us.'

Êrh-lang earnestly desired to make himself known in his turn, and being unable to think of any other expedient, he did as the girl had done: asked for a bowl of cool water, and pretended clumsily to upset the full jar. He then said:

'Aya! Here is another misfortune! But it does not matter. Come to my house, and you shall be well recompensed. I am Êrh-lang, brother of Fan. We are proprietors of *The Pavilion of the Quick Hedge*. I am nineteen, and no one has yet cheated me in my business. I can draw a bow, and am not yet betrothed.'

'Are you not a little mad?' asked the merchant, looking at him in astonishment. 'Why do you tell me all that? Do you wish me to act as the go-between for your marriage? I am an honest man, and have never cheated anybody.'

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Hearing her admirer's words, the girl rejoiced in her heart. She suggested to her mother, who was sitting by her, that they should go away ; and rising to her feet, said to the merchant :

‘ If you will follow us, we will pay you at once.’

But her eyes spoke in reality to the young man ; who walked slowly behind her, admiring the poise of her gait. In this manner they proceeded until the two women entered their house. But the young girl came back almost at once to draw aside the big door-curtain and to look out at him as he passed. He went on walking to and fro, as if he had lost his senses, and did not return to his house till evening.

From that particular day Victorious-Immortal remained so strangely affected that she was quite unable to swallow a grain of rice, or even to touch a cake. At last, one morning, she was too weak to rise. Her mother ran to her bed.

‘ My poor child,’ she asked, ‘ what is the matter with you?’

‘ I ache all over my body. I have pains in my head, and cough a little.’

Her mother at once thought of calling in a doctor ; but, in the absence of the master of the house and his servant, there was no man

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to go on the errand. But an old female attendant, named Kind-Welcome, was present and observed :

‘ The ancient woman Wang lives, as you know, quite close at hand. She has helped more than a hundred children into the world. She can sew, and she can act as go-between ; but she can also feel a pulse and diagnose an illness. Everybody calls her as soon as there is anything the matter.’

‘ That is true. Go and fetch her quickly.’

Some few moments later the healer came and the mother began a long explanation. But the woman interrupted her :

‘ I shall know all about it when I have examined the patient.’

The sick girl put out a wasted hand, and the woman felt her pulse for a long time. At last she said :

‘ You have pains in the head, and all your body aches. You are in continual agony, and the earth is hateful to you.’

‘ That is exactly the case,’ she answered from her bed. ‘ Also I cough a little.’

‘ But what has caused this illness ? ’

As the girl did not answer, this wise old visitor turned to the mother and the attendant, and signed them to go away. They dared not refuse, and left the room.

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‘Now we are going to cure you. The illness lies in your heart, and nowhere else.’

‘In my heart?’ questioned the sick girl.

‘You have seen a handsome young man, and he pleases you. Your suffering rises from that; is it not so?’

‘There is nothing of the sort,’ denied the other.

‘Come, come! Tell me the truth, and I will soon find a means to save your life.’

Seeing a chance to reach to her desire, little Victorious-Immortal decided to tell everything. When she had finished, the very old woman said:

‘Do not be troubled. I know one of his relations who has spoken to me of him. He is intelligent and level-headed. I shall go and see his brother, to make arrangements for your marriage, if you finally wish to marry him.’

‘You know very well that I do,’ said the sick child with a smile. ‘But will my mother consent?’

‘Do not be uneasy. I have my methods.’

She was already out of the room, and saying to the mother:

‘I know what is the matter with your daughter. If you would like me to make it clear to you, have two cups of wine brought in.’

Kind-Welcome made haste to arrange all on the table. The healer drank a draught of

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burning wine and, turning to the mother, repeated word for word what the girl had confessed to her, adding :

‘ And now there is nothing for it but to marry her to Êrh-lang, for otherwise her death is certain.’

‘ My husband will be away for a long time yet. I cannot decide without him.’

‘ You have only to make the arrangements. You need not celebrate the marriage until after my Lord’s return. She must be given her desire ; there is no other way of saving her.’

‘ If the young man is as desirable as all that . . . ’ the mother murmured uneasily. ‘ But how shall we bring the thing about ? ’

‘ I am going to speak to his elder brother. I will keep you informed.’

Without further delay, the venerable go-between went straight to *The Pavilion of the Quick Hedge*, where she found Fan behind his counter, and saluted him :

‘ Ten thousand happinesses ! ’

‘ You come at the right time,’ he answered with a bow. ‘ I was about to send to beg you to do so. For some days, I assure you, my brother has not been able to take a morsel of food. He says that his whole body is aching, and now he stays in bed. Will you, please, feel his pulse ? ’

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‘I will see him. But it is better for me to be alone with him.’

‘Then I shall not come with you.’

So the old woman went up into the sick man’s room, and he said to her feebly :

‘Mother Wang, it is very long since I saw you. Alas ! you come too late! My life is finished!’

‘In what special way are you so seriously ill?’ she asked, sitting near the bed and touching his wrist.

After a moment she continued :

‘Shall I tell you the name of your illness? It is called Victorious-Immortal, little daughter of Chou, and her house is near the Ts’ao Gate.’

The sick man was startled and sat up :

‘How do you know that?’

‘Her family has commissioned me to come and arrange your marriage.’

Immediate happiness revived the young man. He rose and came down with the wise visitor to his astonished brother.

‘I am cured,’ he announced, ‘And all goes very well.’

Meanwhile the old woman was saying :

‘The family of Chou has sent me especially to talk to you about a marriage.’

All was soon settled, the first gifts were exchanged, and the comforted hearts of the two young people were filled with joy. But they

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had to wait Lord Chou's return before proceeding to the ceremony.

Chou did not come back until eight months later. It is needless to say that, when he did so, all his relations and friends came to drink cups of wine with him to 'wash down the dust of the journey.' At last his wife told him what had happened, affirming that all was decided. But the eyes of the master of the house became round and white, and he bellowed :

'O filthy imbecile, who gave you the right to betroth our daughter to a wine merchant? Is there no son of decent family who would marry her? Do you wish to make us a laughing-stock?'

While he was thus cursing his wife, the servant came up to them, crying :

'Come quickly and save the child! She was behind the door, and heard your cries. She fell down and is no longer breathing.'

Stumbling in her haste, the mother ran out. She saw her daughter lying on the ground and was about to raise her, but her husband prevented her, saying :

'Leave her! She was bringing dishonour on us! If she is to die, then let her die!'

Seeing her mistress held back, Kind-Welcome bent over the girl. But Chou, with a blow that made the air whistle between his fingers,

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sent her against the wall. In his rage, he seized his wife and shook her roughly, and she howled like a dog. The neighbours heard her and ran in, fearing that there was disaster. Soon the room was filled with women, all talking at the same time. But the master of it roughly bade them be silent :

‘I do not allow any spying upon my private affairs.’

The neighbours retired in discomfort, and the mother threw herself upon her daughter’s body, whose ends were already cold. She sobbed :

‘You would not have died if I had come to you. O murderer, you have let her die of set purpose. You did not want to give her the four or five thousand ounces which her grandfather left her.’

He went out, panting like a boar with anger. The mother did not cease to lament her loss : her daughter had been so gentle and so clever.

At length the time came to shut down the coffin, and Chou angrily said to his wife :

‘You pretend that I let her die so as not to lose four thousand ounces ? I order you to put all her jewels in the tomb with her. That is more than five thousand ounces, one would think.’

They brought in the wu-tso, the Inspector of Corpses, and also his assistant, to verify the

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death and to help in hearsing her. The keeper of the family graveyard and his brother, the two Chang, were also there to assist in the mournful work.

The time came for the funeral, and the procession went forth from the town. The coffin was placed in a brick tomb, and the first shovels of earth were thrown upon it. Then all returned home. Three feet of cold insensitive earth covered the body of this young beauty, and it had been full of love.

Now the Inspector of Corpses had a worthless fellow named Fêng for his assistant. This miserable boy, on coming back from the cemetery in the evening, said to his mother :

‘An excellent day’s work ! To-morrow we shall be rich.’

‘And what successful stroke of business have you concluded ?’

‘To-day we buried the daughter of Chou, and all her jewels were put in the coffin with her. Instead of leaving them to enrich the earth, would it not be better to take them ?’

‘Think before you do such a terrible thing !’ his mother begged. ‘This is no matter of a mere whipping. Your father wanted to do the same thing twenty years ago. He opened a coffin, and the corpse began to smile at him. Your father died of that in four or five days.

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My son, do not do it. It is no easy matter.'

'Mother,' he answered simply, 'my mind is made up. Do not waste your breath on me, for that is useless.'

He bent over his bed, and took out of it a heavy iron tool.

'O mother, not each person's destiny is the same. I have consulted soothsayers, and they have told me that I shall become rich this year.'

He took also an axe, a leather sack, and a dark lantern, which he placed in readiness. Finally he wrapped himself in a great mantle of reeds, for it was the eleventh moon and the snow had begun to fall. He made a sort of hurdle with about ten inter-crossed bamboos, and fastened it behind his mantle, so that it should drag along the ground and efface his foot-prints.

The second watch was sounding when he went out, and all was still bustle and gaiety in the town. But beyond the walls both silence and solitude reigned in the growing cold. The snow was already thick. Who would have ventured out there?

From time to time he turned his head, but no one followed him. At last he reached the wall of the family graveyard and climbed in.

Suddenly a dog ran through the tall grass and

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leaped at him, barking. The thief had prepared a portion of poisoned meat, and threw it to the dog. The beast, being badly fed, smelt it and swallowed it. He still barked a little, but the venom was potent, and he very soon writhed on the ground.

In the keeper's hut, young Chang said to his elder brother :

‘The dog has started barking, and then has stopped. Is that not strange? Perhaps it is a thief. You ought to go and see.’

The elder brother rose from his hot bed and took up a weapon, grumbling. Then he opened the door and went out. But he was seized by a whirl of cold snow, and called to the dog :

‘What are you barking for, O animal of the Gods ?’

Then he came back and glided under his blankets :

‘There is nothing at all. But it is very cold.’

From the distant town came the far sound of the gongs and drums of the third watch. Taking heart, Fêng went forward in a snow which deadened his steps. He quickly shovelled the fresh earth from the grave, and then lighted his lantern. Its yellow light lit up but a single point. Forcing two long crowbars between the joints, he loosened one brick, and then another. At last the coffin was uncovered.

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He inserted his pick under the lid, and prised it off and laid it on one side. The corpse was brought to view.

‘Small sister,’ he murmured. ‘I am only going to borrow a little of your useless wealth. Do not you grudge it me!’

He took the veil from that charming face. The head was covered with ornaments of gold, and also with pearls. He took them all. He was tempted by the fine and silken garments of the corpse. He stripped it.

But suddenly, the body shook itself and pushed the thief away with violence. He uttered a cry of imbecile terror and shrank back. The corpse had sat up and, in that little light, looked at the open tomb, the scattered tools, and her own unclothed body. The wretched lad, obeying instinctive habit, trembled and lied :

‘Little sister, I have come to save you.’

Naturally, when little Victorious-Immortal had heard the foul Chou’s violent words, her despair had made her lose all sign of life. It was for this reason that she had been put in her coffin while still alive. Aroused now by the cold, her first thought was to remember her father’s anger. Her only refuge then was the house of her betrothed, and she said :

‘If you will take me to *The Pavilion of the Quick Hedge*, you may have a heavy reward.’

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‘That is easy,’ answered Fêng, seeking in vain for how he should escape.

Ought he to kill her? He hardly had the courage after such a shock. He decided to give her back a few clothes. He put the jewels and his implements in the sack, together with the extinguished lantern, and quickly covered the grave with earth again. Then, because the girl was too weak to walk, he took her on his back and went away from that place. But instead of going to Fan’s house, he went to his own.

His mother opened the door to him, and cried in terror :

‘Have you stolen the corpse also?’

‘Do not speak so loud,’ he answered, setting down his burdens.

He went to his bed, and there put little Victorious-Immortal. He drew a knife from his girdle and showed it to the girl :

‘Little one, I have some business to settle with you. If we come to an agreement, I will take you to Fan’s house. If not, you very well behold this knife, and I shall cut you in two pieces.’

‘What do you want with me?’ she asked.

‘You are going to stay here without making a noise and without trying to escape, until I take you to Fan. As for the rest, we will speak of it another time.’

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‘I will do so! I will indeed do so!’

Then the nasty youth led his mother into the next room to calm her a little.

‘But what are you going to do?’ she asked.

‘Do you think we can be safe when she has gone to Fan?’

‘I am not going to take her to Fan.’

‘What are you going to do, then?’

He gave a country laugh, full of suggestion.

Matters so continued until the fifteenth day of the first Moon, the evening of the Feast of Lanterns. Fêng went out to see the illuminations, and also to profit by the opportunities for theft which are always afforded in a crowd.

The evening wore on, and he had not yet returned, when a shout arose among the neighbours. Fêng’s mother opened the door to see what was the matter. A fire had broken out near there. In terror, the old woman made haste to carry her furniture into the yard.

Profiting by this confusion, the girl slipped through the door; but in the street she did not know which way to turn. At last she found the road to the Ts’ao Gate, and was running in that direction when she lost herself again. However, when at length she asked where *The Pavilion of the Quick Hedge* might be, she was shown a near way to it.

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The attendant was before the door, and she asked him very politely :

‘ Ten thousand happinesses ! Is not this the house of Fan and Êrh-lang ? ’

‘ Certainly it is, small lady. ’

‘ Could you not lead me to him ? ’

‘ Assuredly, ’ he answered.

He showed her the way, calling from the door to his masters ; but when Êrh-lang, in the pale light of the paper lanterns, recognised the white face of his betrothed, he cried out in dismay :

‘ Ghost ! Ghost ! ’

Confident in her love, she advanced toward him, piteously repeating :

‘ Elder brother ! Elder brother ! I am alive ! ’

But he kept recoiling in terror, and crying :

‘ Help ! Help ! ’

How could he fail to believe himself in the presence of a ghost, when he had witnessed the funeral, and had, that very evening, encountered the wife of Chou in mourning garments ?

As she was about to touch him and, cringing against the wall, he could retreat no further, his terror redoubled. Not knowing what he did, he picked up a heavy stool and struck his dear visitor on the head with it. She fell back, and her head sounded dully on the stone flags.

Fan ran up at the noise of this. He saw the

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woman on the ground, and his brother holding the stool.

‘What have you done?’ he cried. ‘What is the matter? Was it you who killed her?’

‘She is a ghost,’ the other said.

‘If she were a ghost, she would not bleed. What have you done?’

Already some ten persons had come up to see what was the matter. The street guard came in to them and seized Êrh-lang, who kept on saying:

‘She is the ghost of Chou’s daughter. I have killed her.’

Hearing this name, a neighbour ran to inform Chou, who would not at first believe him. At length he decided to go to the wine pavilion, where he was compelled to recognise her, though he kept on saying:

‘I buried her long since!’

Nevertheless, the guard insisted upon leading Êrh-lang to prison. Fan had the doors shut then, and stayed with Chou by the corpse till morning.

Early next day the Governor inquired into the matter. The coffin was opened. It was found empty, and the keepers told how their dog had been found dead in the snow on the day after the funeral. In the absence of any completer explanation, they proceeded with their inquiry.

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Êrh-lang, in his prison, was overcome with sorrowful remorse. Sometimes he said that she could not have survived her burial; sometimes he was rent with horror at the thought that she had been alive when he struck her.

He recalled her beauty and grace in Spring by the lake side, and bitter tears rolled from him.

While he was musing in this way, he saw his cell door open, and the girl appeared. In his emotion and fear, he cried:

‘Are you not dead, my darling?’

‘Your blow caused me more grief than harm. Now I have wakened, and have come to see you.’

She approached the bench where he sat, and he took her hand:

‘How can I have been so foolish as to fear you?’

They were talking thus, and already, in their deep love, they were in each other’s arms. His joy was so keen that suddenly he woke. It was a dream.

On the second night the same thing happened, and on the third, and his passion grew stronger for her. As she was going away the third time, she said:

‘My life on earth had come to an end, but my love was so great and so potently called me to you, that the Marshal-of-the-Five-Ways, the

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Keeper-of-the-Frontier-of-the-Shadows, allowed me to come back to you, for these three nights. I must leave you now. But, if you do not forget, there will yet be something of me bound to your soul.'

Then she disappeared, and the young man sobbed most bitterly.

In the end the matter was cleared up by chance. Fêng's mother, having filched a golden trifle from her son's bag, went to sell it to the same jeweller who had made it for Chou. On being denounced before the Governor, mother and son were apprehended, and all the jewels were discovered in their house. Torture found them words, and the whole matter became clear. Êrh-lang had actually believed that he saw a ghost, and was released. Fêng was sentenced to slow death, and strips were torn one by one from his body by the executioner. His mother was only strangled.

As for Êrh-lang, his heart stayed faithful to the girl he had so greatly loved. At every feast he went to the temple of the Marshal-of-the-Five-Ways, and burned incense, so that the pleasant smoke of it might ascend to the palace of the soul of little Victorious-Immortal. His fidelity touched even the rough heart of Chou and, when he came to die a few years later, his body

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was buried in the same tomb with her whom
his arms had known only in sleep.

. . .
*Nao fan lou to ch'ing chou shêng hsien (Chou
Victorious-Immortal, of abundant love,
overthrows the Pavilion of the Fan).*

*Hsing shih hêng yen (1627),
14th Tale.*

The End.

NOTE

These tales are discussed in the Terminal Essay of the Series. They have been translated from the graceful French versions of M. George Soulié de Morant.

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