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THE LIVERY OF EVE

(रागोर्दधदुग्धापूषा)

Though Dusk and the Dawn denied him,
robed each in the Red of thieves,
Could the Gloom of the whole world hide him?
will ye smother fire in the leaves?

Anangasurya

THE LIVERY OF EVE
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INTRODUCTION

'N this lower world, this home of Maya, where all is doubt, illusion, deception, some few things have been rescued from uncertainty, definitely established for us, and won out of chaos; as, for example, this: that 'two straight lines cannot enclose a space.' Nay, there are even pundits who have ventured, greatly daring, to lay down, that 'two bodies cannot, at the same moment, occupy the same space.' But in Europe, we still do not solidly know, as the Hindoos do, that 'two souls cannot simultaneously occupy the same body.' Not, indeed, that this important law is anywhere laid down, 'totidem verbis,' in the books. But it is a rigid inevitable deduction from all those of their stories which turn on what we may term Possession, or the temporary occupation, by any given soul or spirit, of a body not properly its own. A soul in any body must leave it, before the empty shell can afford room for another soul. (Poets, who speak of two souls in one body, do so by an illegitimate, and reprehensible, metaphorical licence, just as they speak of 'solid land' 'melting like clouds,' which all scientific persons know to be contrary to fact.) And so, it is dangerous in the extreme for any body to be empty. An untenanted body offers temptations that may prove too strong to other souls, to

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step in and take unlawful possession. If, that is to say, they know how; but luckily this is a matter not of common knowledge. It is not everybody that can enter empty bodies: the thing is not taught in board schools—as yet. But less valuable things are: patience! we must wait and see.

And since the point is before us, it is curious to note, in passing, how imperfectly the Western peoples understand a matter, involved in the essence of their own cult. Incarnation is a theological idea exotic in the West, dry, strange, severed from its native root, soil, and atmosphere. In India incarnations are innumerable, bad as well as good, actually present, and potentially future, as well as historically past. And how can it possibly be otherwise? If there is a Deity, and if, contrary to the opinion of Ennius and Epicurus, he does concern himself with humanity, and care for it; surely, then, the consequence is necessary, that a single incarnation, a single descent—‘*awatāra*’—is not only insufficient, inadequate, but incredible, nay, absurd. There must have been not one only, but many, as often as the need arose. But here also, the maxim holds: ‘*nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindicenodus.*’ A god will not ‘come down,’ in human form, for slight and trivial occasions: but as often as a real need, a pressing necessity, arises, he will come. Why should he come at all, but that the times required it? and can it really be supposed, that the possibility is exhausted by a single instance? The Hindoos do not think so:¹ and their position is un-

¹ I appear, says Krishna in the ‘*Bhagawad-Gītā*,’ for the suc-

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answerable. A singular incarnation is absurd. And doubtless, every great hero who has rendered service to humanity is an incarnation, a Deity, or a portion of Deity, as the Hindoos say: for there are degrees. This, said old Pliny, is religion, 'man helping man.'¹ Wise old pagan! so does religion surround us, mixing in different degrees with common life. But the wooden stupidity of civilised barbarism shuts it in a dead archæological museum of antiquities, makes it a piece of old furniture, puts it into Sundays, and divorces life from that which is either its very essence, or nothing at all. Not so in India, a classic land, where everything is permeated with religion, even fairy stories: a thing unintelligible in the West, whose peoples take their Grimm without religion. Lay and clerical do not mix, in Europe: a gulf yawns between: consequently, religion 'laudatur et alget.' But the Deity does not require a black coat and a stiff collar: he comes to us in any garb, says Tulsi Dass: anyhow and anywhere.

Green is the Earth, blue is the Heaven, but red, red is blood, red is Sun and Dawn and Dusk, red is Love, affection, passion. Red stands as the symbol of all these things. Red is the livery of Eve. By a fortunate coincidence, our word, Eve, contains exactly the same play as a digit of the moon;² it

cour of morality, over and over again, in age after age; 'yuge yuge.'¹ 'N. H.' ii, 7, 'deus est mortali juvare mortalem.'

² The literal translation of our title is, 'Pūshá' [i.e. a particular digit of the moon] 'milked out of the sea of red' - or

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wavers so, that nobody can tell, a priori, whether it refers to the Eternal Feminine or the beauty of dusk. Red is the gloaming, the 'soft hour' of the poet, the sunset in which the new moon loves to hang, and a synonym, in every Hindoo dialect, with love; just as, in Russian, it stands for beauty. And who is proof against the sorcery of 'Eve,' the 'grand diable Venus,' as Michelet says of the evening star that bewitched Tannhäuser? Who has not worn the livery of Eve? Are we not all sons of cowardly old Adam? cowardly, not because he succumbed to her cajoleries - as, aided by a great red apple, he was bound to do, - but for trying to shift the blame, and lay it on her great white shoulders. The woman tempted me, said the old shuffler. Some of us, in Adam's shoes - but he had none, - would have taken another line - taken, so to say, the Bull by his horn, and exclaimed: Alas! O Creator, I only paid homage to the cunning of thy creative power. Thou hast done thy work only too well. And who knows better than thyself, that this was the very *raison d'être* of Eve, thy masterpiece, to deprive me of my reason, and lead me astray? It was thy own doing. It is not upon me, or even Eve, on whom the blame should fall. And what dost thou resemble but a fisherman, falling foul of the unlucky fish for taking thy own bait? What is injustice, if not this? This is not becoming thee, O Yahweh! nor is this the trap that would be set for

'passion': alluding to the glow of eve, and also the legend that the goddess of beauty, as well as the moon, was churned up out of the sea of 'milk.'

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his creatures by the kindly Indian God, who wears the moon in his yellow hair.

And now, before concluding, a word on yet another matter. Upon strange days, and evil, have we fallen, when it is well-nigh criminal to be anything for the moment, but a soldier. Hail! all hail! to the fighting man! And what apology is it possible to offer to the reader, who is, or was, or will be, fighting for the old country, for presenting him at such a time, with anything so trivial and inopportune as a fairy tale?

I was sitting upon a rock, among the mists of Mahabaleshwar, adding the last touches to the toilette of my Hamadryad, when all at once, like Wordsworth, I dropped my pen, and listened to the wind. All round me were the gnarled and twisted boughs and trunks of trees: trees, which in that mountain home of rain, where it tumbles from the sky as if poured out of a bucket, are all wrapped in an outer skin of greenest moss, hiding their bark, and hanging like a fringe, suggesting seaweed, along their lower edge. The ground was buried in dead leaves, knee-deep, through whose red carpet, here and there, a solitary 'cobra-lily' had pushed its snowy, dainty, quaint, delicious hood, standing erect, pert and demure, upon its ruddy stalk, and looking not like, but utterly unlike, every other thing that grows, except itself: for nobody can describe a cobra-lily to one that has never seen it with his own eyes. It is an incarnation of untrodden, unfrequented solitude, a pre-

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sence haunted, so to say, by the spirit of its own haunts: a thing only to be seen and felt, incapable of being taken from its place, or gathered and carried away, without ceasing to be itself. To touch it, even, is desecration. The wet woods are its shrine, and its only companions are the smell of red earth and the showers of drops that are shaken by the wind, as it passes, from the mist-accumulated crystal of the weeping trees.

And so, in this atmosphere of silence and seclusion and peace of the forest incommunicable, I looked away through a gap in the hills, away over the mists that were creeping and drifting and jostling in the valley, towards the Western sea; and I said to myself: Can it be, that at this very moment, a continuous thunder of 'high explosives' is actually rolling, over there, where the destiny of the nations is now trembling in the balance? And what, then, can those contribute, whom age and duty chafe and chain, far from the scene of action? Must they serve only by inaction? Can they do nothing else but stand and wait, or wait and see? Is this a time for dreaming? The only thing that matters is, to contribute another unit to the legion in the trench.

But the answer to this thorny question came to me a little later: What, if the dream were itself a contribution, not without its use? 'A few moments snatched from the contemplation of political crimes, bloodshed, and treachery, are a few moments gained to all lovers of innocent illusion. Nor need the statesman or the scholar despise the occasional

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relaxation of light reading. When Jupiter and the great deities are represented by Homer as returning from scenes of havoc and carnage to visit the blameless and quiet Ethiopians who were the farthest removed of all nations, the Lord knows whither, at the very extremities of the ocean, would they have given ear to manifestoes or protocols? No, they would much rather have listened to the Tales of Mother Goose.¹

If, then, this little 'digit,' like some of her elder sisters, should help some wounded hero to forget his troubles for but an hour, the work of a blameless and quiet Ethiopian, far removed from the Tohu Bohu and hurly-burly of Armageddon, will have its worth and its reward. And are not the swans of Mánasa and Kailas at least the equals of the geese of other lands? Nay, who knows? Maybe, Mother Goose herself is of Indian origin, and had a great-great-grandmother, who listened to the private conversation of the Moony-crested God with the Daughter of the Snow.

¹ Beckford's 'Travels in Italy,' 1834.

Nág-panchamí, 1916

THE LIVERY OF EVE

A DIVINE CONUNDRUM

BENEDICTION

‘Hail to the rosy blush that lingers on the icy peak of Kailas, as if unwilling to desert it, after the sun has set; resembling the colour that suddenly lit up the cheek of the Daughter of the Snow, when the fire that burned Ananga shot out for his destruction, flooding the ashy mountain with the lightning flash of its angry red.’¹

NOW, long ago, it happened, that soon after they were married, as the Moony-crested God sat toying with the Daughter of the Snow on her father’s icy slopes, he suddenly forgot all about her, and fell into a profound ‘samādhi.’ And so as he sat, hour after hour, motionless as a sacrificial post, she continued to sit beside him, unwilling to disturb his meditation, yet piqued by his neglect. And night followed day, and day night, and yet he never even moved. And in the meanwhile, the snow fell, and began slowly to bury him, as it were, alive, dropping its flakes noiselessly, as if, like her, it feared to interrupt his meditation.

¹ It may be necessary to inform the reader not acquainted with this Digit’s elder sisters, that when the God of Love attempted to lure Maheshwara from his asceticism by the agency of Párvatí’s mountain beauty, standing just before him, that angry god reduced unhappy Love to ashes by a glance from his third eye.

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And little by little, his knotted yellow hair turned into the resemblance of one of the peaks around him. And at last, after three days and nights, Umá lost patience, and turned to look at him, wondering when, if ever, he would come back to himself. And she said presently to herself: Now, then, as I think, I have waited long enough, and I am growing cold; and if I rouse him, it is for me, rather than himself, to be angry: for his behaviour is a shame. Moreover, what is the use of waiting any longer? And what can he possibly be thinking of, and what am I his wife for, if I may not disturb his meditations with impunity?

And as she spoke, she stretched out her arm, and was on the very point of jingling her bangles in his ear, when all at once, that Moony-crested deity suddenly uttered a shout of laughter. And he looked at her, and understood, and he said to her with a smile: See, now, how women are an impediment in the three worlds, and they have absolutely no patience. Then said Párwatī: Buried in thy meditation, and this snow, thou thyself art wholly unconscious of the passage of any time, while thou keepest me, sitting alone, waiting, without ceremony, while every moment seems eternity. And Maheshwara said: For what hast thou been waiting with such impatience, that the time should seem so long to thee? And she said: What lover ever asked such a question, since the world began to be? And for what should I wait, but for thyself? For I cannot do without thee, even for an instant. Then said Maheshwara: But here I have been be-

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side thee all the while. What more dost thou require? And she said: Thy body only was beside me, but thy soul was absent. And as it seems, I am married, not to a husband, but only to a heap of snow.

And then, that husband, willing to cajole her, took her in his arms, and sat her on his left knee.¹ And he said: What then shall I do, to make amends, O thou exacting one? Then she said: Tell me, first, of what thou wert meditating; for I am jealous of thy thoughts.

And Maheshwara said slowly: There is no need, O Daughter of the Snow: since I was thinking about something in which thou art thyself included. And she said: Of what? And he said: Of beauty, and its power, and its danger, resembling as it does yonder precipice of snow, which is just about to fall, in both. For there is absolutely nothing so dangerous as beauty: since to be beautiful is to lure, and thus everything possessing beauty is apt to be the cause of its own ruin as well as that of others: being as it were the root of a tree whose fruits are robberies, and rapes, and jealousies and enmities, and every kind of war. And the case of Chitra is an instance, and, as it were, the very type and symbol of it all. Then said Umá: And who, then, was Chitra, and what was his case? And Maheshwara said: Chitra was a Rajpoot, the very crest-jewel of the three worlds for his extraordin-

¹ The right knee is the son's prerogative: the left, is the place for the wife. Old Hindoo sculpture always obeys this law.

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ary beauty. And one day, as he was lying asleep at midday in a garden full of flowers, three Widyádharts who were bosom friends looked down out of the sky, and saw him, as they were passing over: and were so utterly bewildered by the very sight of him that, there and then, they flew down, and stole him, and took him up into the sky, just as he was, asleep. But as they went, they fell into a quarrel over him, each exclaiming: He is mine: no, he is mine. And on the instant, from friends, they became, out of jealousy on his account, such bitter enemies, that forgetting everything but their mutual hatred, even the sleeping cause of all the mischief, they suddenly let him go, and he fell from the sky, and was dashed to pieces, without even so much as knowing what had occurred. And then, each of those infatuated Widyádharts, looking upon the other two as the cause of his destruction and her own bereavement, abandoned the body in despair, and fell into a lower birth.

And Párwatí said slowly: Widyádharts are always hasty. But surely, the worlds might very justly blame the Creator, for not abolishing beauty altogether. And Maheshwarasaid: Nay, O Snowy One, not so. For as to the Creator, the worlds would have far better ground to blame him, had he deprived them of beauty, since whatever be its mischief, they could absolutely not get on without it. Moreover, the fault does not lie in the beauty itself, but in those who desire and pursue it with a passion that robs them of restraint, and so lose emancipation for want of self-control. And Párwatí

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said: Then it must be the Bodiless God who is in fault. And Maheshwara said: Ha! were punishment awarded to the guilty, who knows? For it may be that it was thy body, rather than his, that should have paid the penalty, by being burned to ashes. And she said: What! then wouldst thou have me burn myself twice over?¹ And Maheshwara said: Nay; but it is better to leave the constitution of the universe to the Creator, who knows how it should be managed better than anybody else. Moreover, there are cases in which the difficulties arising from beauty have nevertheless, by ingenuity, and the favour of the Lord of Obstacles, been successfully removed. And the story of Aparájitá,² at which I was laughing at the very moment when thou wert just about to wake me, is a case in point. Then said Párwati: What was the story of Aparájitá? Aye! I wondered at thy laughter, thinking it was at me thou wert laughing. But now, tell me very quickly, that I may laugh as well as thou.

And then, Maheshwara said with a smile: So this, then, was thy object, and this is the invariable conclusion, and the upshot of all our conversations. And as I said, there is danger in beauty, seeing that, cajoled by thine, I do nothing but sit telling thee stories, wasting my time, and thy own. And she said: What is time to thee, who thyself art

¹ She burned herself before, refusing to be any longer the daughter of Daksha, who had insulted her husband Shiwa by not inviting him to a sacrifice to which the husbands of all his other daughters came.

² I.e. 'peerless,' 'second to none.' It is the name of various plants.

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Time and Eternity? But thou art a juggler, and it was thou thyself who madest the opportunity, rousing my curiosity by speaking of Aparájitá, knowing that I should ask thee, and it may be, preparing all beforehand; and foreseeing the end, even before the beginning began.

Then that crafty deity laughed, and he said: Since thou art so sagacious, come, I will make a wager with thee, and put thee a hard question,¹ defying thee to find the proper answer. And if thou art victorious, I will give thee for a forfeit this moon of mine to wear in thy hair: but if on the contrary, as I anticipate, I prove to be the winner, thou shalt pay me an equivalent, of whose value I myself will be the judge.

And the Daughter of the Snow exclaimed: Said I not, thou wert a juggler, only laying snares for me? Thy words are idle, since well thou knowest, that I must of necessity be the loser, seeing that everything is known to thee before it actually comes about. And even were it otherwise, thou art promising more than thou canst perform: for how couldst thou give thy moon to me or anybody else? For even a deity cannot possibly exist without his proper attributes, and who ever heard of Maheshwara without the new moon in his hair? But thy moon is in no danger. Thou art like nothing so much as a dishonest gambler, staking all in a game where he knows he cannot lose. But ask, for all

¹ The 'kuta,' or riddle, is a feature in old Hindoo literature, as doubtless the Queen of Sheba put to King Solomon many a 'hard question' that has not come down to us.

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that, thy cunning question, and I will give thee an answer, be it right or wrong.

And Maheshwara said : See, now, thou art loading me already with reproaches, as if thou hadst conspired with thy element, this snow, to bury me alive; and all because I kept thee waiting, while I was meditating, devising material for thy amusement. For as a rule, women love to punish their lovers, when they are vexed with them for one thing, by unreasonable retaliation about another, mixing in the vat¹ of their affection just a very little malice. But now, before I tell thee all about Aparájitá, and put my question, in the meanwhile, let us change the scene. And I will save myself the trouble of description, by taking thee to the very place, where everything befell, of which I am just about to tell thee.

And instantly, he rose up, and shook off his covering of snow. And taking in his arms that Snowy One, as if to remind him of what he was about to leave behind, he began to float very quickly through the air towards the south. And they left that lofty mountain like a cloud blown from its summit by the north wind; and as they went, they looked down, and saw their own shadows sweeping down the hillside in a hurry, as if in terror of being left behind as well. So they drifted over a sea of dark green forests, in whose recesses the innumerable ascetics clad in garments of red bark looked like rubies churned up out of the depths of ocean;

¹ 'Vat' is the proper word, since the expression for affection means 'dye.'

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and the smoke of their sacrificial fires rising straight up into the sky resembled pillars, built by those ambitious hunters after emancipation, as ladders for scaling heaven. And after a while, the Moony-crested deity said: See! we have arrived. And as he spoke, he fell down with a swoop like that of Garuda towards the bank of a river that resembled a silver snake.¹

So as they rested on its bank, he said: O Daughter of the Snow, this is the very place. For though it is now nothing whatever but a solitary jungle, the home of lizards, and the mongoose, and the snake, it was formerly a great city. For all the edifices of mortals fall, and all their beginnings end, and all their combinations come to dissolution, and decay and disappear, as time goes on; fading away like flowers, whose bloom is over, and vanishing, like forgotten dreams. And so it is, here; for all that I shall tell thee took place, and went by, and receded into nothingness and oblivion, very long ago.

¹ Garuda, like Sindbad's roc, is the enemy of snakes, his natural food. - Pronounce 'Garud.'

A LOADER OF DICE

A LOADER OF DICE

CHAPTER I

NOW, Aparájitá lived in a pool: a very deep and lonely pool, so buried in the recesses of the trees of the forest that it was unknown even to the birds of the air, and shunned even by the citizens roaming in the wood because they believed it to be haunted,¹ as indeed it was. For it lay on the river bank, standing back from the stream, as if to hide, just where, as thou seest, the water falls with a roar over the ledges of the rock, making a music that sounded, as it were, without ceasing in the ears of the pool, which was so deep that when the river originally started from its source at the command of the Creator, it was delayed in its course for a day and a night by having to fill it up,² before it could go on: for it reached nearly to Pátála, and this was the very reason why it was chosen by Aparájitá for her favourite haunt: since though she was a water-nymph, her father was a Nága who lived in Pátála, and hence

¹ 'Bhútasewita,' 'the resort of demons,' or Bhoots=ghosts. This fear is far more absolute in India than in Europe, because it is the logical corollary of the fundamental idea, metempsychosis. If souls do go from body to body—then—Q.E.D. ² This will be strenuously denied by the modern geologist who believes that rivers scoop out their own beds.

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she was close to her relations, though she was absolutely alone. And her father was so fond of her that he loved to see her as often as he could, though he allowed her to live and do exactly as she chose. And seeing her delight in the pool, he made her by his magic art a flower, and a toy-fish of silver with ruby eyes, and an emerald slab as large as herself. And she used to emerge from the pool, and lie for hours at a time on the slab, watching the fish playing in the water, with the flower growing beside her, as her only companion.

And as for her beauty, it was such that the only rival she had to fear was her own reflection in the pool. And this rival, strange to say! she loved like her own soul, resembling as it did the stamp of ownership set by herself upon the pool, of which she was as fond as if it was, so to say, a second mother that had produced her twin. And being a 'jaladewatá,' she showed her origin in this, that her own eyes were only a double copy of the pool itself in another form, being dark and equally unfathomable, and of exactly the same colour as the pool. And like it, she was of a watery essence, for her skin was exactly the colour of the milky foam that floated on the surface of the river when it swelled and churned itself on the rocks in the flood of the rainy season, while her voice was as it were stolen by the Creator from the echo of the rush of the river, chafing at the obstacles thrown by the rocks themselves, as if they loved to hear it, in its way. And her face resembled a pippal leaf,¹ as if

¹ This means only that it was long. The 'atishayokti,' or hyper-

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striving in vain to be in keeping with her hair, which was far longer than she was herself, so that she used it as her only garment, being of exactly the same colour as the dead leaves that lay like a bed around the pool, as if expressly coaxing her to go to sleep, as often, indeed, she did, looking like an incarnation of a dead new moon in feminine form, laid on the pyre of the setting sun.

But that in which she and her pool most indistinguishably coincided, was, that they were both alike inexhaustible wells of clear water. For Aparájitá could weep better than any woman in the three worlds. And whereas, as a rule, women weep only for a little while, and soon stop, partly because they grow tired, and partly because they are soon exhausted, and partly because, as they weep, they grow uglier and uglier: she did the very contrary, in all three particulars. For she could weep for ever without stopping, as if she contained a very river in her soul, about absolutely nothing at all, and instead of becoming ugly, she grew lovelier and lovelier as she wept, with a beauty that was as inexhaustible as her tears: since she wept, not because of any grief, but simply because she liked weeping, doing it, just as she did everything, solely because it pleased her, and of her own free-will. And coming out of her pool, she would sit on her slab, weeping like a waterfall, till her tears, mingling with the water of the pool, threatened to make it abandon its banks, out of indignation at

bolical expression, is a feature in Hindoo rhetoric. We see the same thing appearing again in picturesque American slang.

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seeing its own element outdone. And even the water-snakes used to wonder at her, as they watched her out of the pool, moving about in the water with coils that resembled the eddies in the river as well as the grace in her own limbs.

And yet her weeping was all the while a delusion, meaning absolutely nothing, since she was always happy, though resembling a feminine incarnation of the extremity of sorrow. And the Creator seemed to have formed her as a brag, saying as it were to the three worlds, Ha! did ye imagine that the limits of feminine deception had been already reached? For here is a specimen of deception upon deception, and illusion out-illusioned by its own very simplicity. Here is a creature in a woman's shape, beautiful beyond comparison, that weeps as if the calamities of the whole world were about to break its heart; and yet it is all the while as it were only rejoicing in its own sorrow, caring for absolutely nothing but itself, and indulging in a caprice, as if on purpose to mock the world. And all to no purpose: for nobody ever sees it.

CHAPTER II

NOW, as fate would have it, there lived on the very outskirts of the city, just where the trees came to an end, not very far from the pool, a poor barber. And the Creator appeared to have made him out of contradiction, and as an afterthought to the fashioning of Aparájitá, as if to furnish her for a reason for her tears, and a foil to herself. For he was her antithesis, being a very

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miracle of deformity, as she was of beauty, and without a rival for ugliness not only in his own city, but in any other: so that nobody ever set eyes on him without reproaching the Creator, as indeed he did himself. For every part of him was at variance with every other, so that his body resembled a musical theme made up of discords, and played on a 'wlná' whose quarter-tones were always quarrelling with one another for being out of tune. For his head was too large for his body, which itself was too large for his legs, of which one was longer than the other, so that he was lame; while his feet resembled his head in that they were those of a giant, that had somehow or other fastened by accident on the legs of a dwarf. And his mouth was too large even for his face, and his eyes very small, and ill assorted, looking different ways, as though disdaining to keep each other's company. But the strangest thing about him was his ears, which exactly resembled the two handles of a pot, projecting as if they were intended not for hearing, but for lifting him about from one place to another. And he had on his back a hump, seeming to say to all beholders, I was a cow in a former birth. And he was so utterly unlike anything but himself that even his neighbours could never get accustomed to the sight of him: while every stranger that first set eyes on him was seized with such laughter as nearly to abandon the body, and looked again, and yet again, as if to settle the doubt, and make sure they were not dreaming: as well they might. For he resembled the essence of surprise, embodied unexpectedly in a human

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form by a blunder of the Creator in a hurry to proceed to something else.

But that which added ridicule even to his deformity, placing it as it were upon a pedestal, as if expressly to thrust it into notice, was his name, which was Kámarúpa.¹ And everyone that heard it exclaimed, as they gazed at him in wonder: Beyond a doubt, his parents knew what they were doing, when they gave him his name. For the very best thing that he could do would be to change his shape, without the loss of even a single moment. But others said: Certainly his name could not have been more in keeping with his body, if he had been born with it. For like everything else about him, it is out of harmony. For what could be more appropriate, than to call this incarnation of miscreation by the name of the Bodiless God? And what is Maheshwara about? For this body requires burning even more than that Love God's old one.

And gradually, as time went on, the soul of that unlucky Kámarúpa became as it were poisoned by close association with the disgrace of his body, so that he lived perpetually ashamed of being alive. And little by little he began to hate everybody else as well as himself, spending his time in cursing his body, and his parents, and every other being, man and woman, for being more fortunate than he was himself, as well as because they laughed at him; not being able to discern that they were hardly to

¹ Pronounce 'Kám-roop.'—It means either 'the beauty of Love'; or, 'one who possesses the power of changing his shape at will.'

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be blamed, not laughing at him out of malice, but simply because they could not help it. And neglecting his affairs, he used to wander about alone, avoiding every eye, with no companion but his own shadow, and choosing by preference the forest, as if to escape even that, in the absence of the sun.

And yet, strange to say! this miserable barber was made more miserable still, by an insatiable thirst which he carried about in his soul for a nectar more unattainable, to him, than the full moon in the midnight sky. And night and day he was haunted by a dream more inaccessible than thou art,¹ so that his soul resembled a pigmy, standing everlastingly on tiptoe, in order to grasp an object hanging above his reach. And this thirst was, for a woman of unimaginable beauty, who should run towards him, as it were, drawn by an overmastering passion for him, like an 'abhisariká,' loading him with caresses fragrant with extreme devotion, and ready, like a slave, to come and go at his beck and call. And yet, possessed as he was by his dream, his longing was almost equalled by his shame, for he was almost terrified even to think of it, lest somebody should divine his secret, and guessing by external signs his inward thought, should overwhelm him with a very ocean of derision. And he kept it carefully hidden away, like a crime, at the very bottom of his heart, and yet, for all that, it was perpetually hovering in the air before him, resembling the thirst of the deer,² mocking him as it were derisively

¹ One of the names of the Daughter of the Snow is 'Durgá' - the 'Inaccessible.'

² I.e., the mirage.

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by suggesting to him the unsubstantial vision of a reality which well he knew to be utterly impossible, and tormenting him without ceasing by goading into madness a thirst which his deformity doomed him never to slake. And he would have given the three worlds and all that they contained for a single glance from almost any woman which was not filled with amusement and contempt. And the absolute devotion of a woman seemed to him what emancipation is to the sage, a thing hardly to be attained by no matter what austerities. And every now and then, the mere sight of almost any woman even at a distance came within a little of driving him out of his mind, by reason of terror and exasperated longing, and attraction rendered nugatory by despair and the absence of reciprocation, so he was nearly torn to pieces by a strong desire compounded half of the inclination to fly from her in affright, and half of an irresistible impulse to rush upon and take as it were vengeance on the entire sex in her person, for their aversion and his own deformity, by trampling her into little pieces, like an elephant run mad.

CHAPTER III

SO then, by the decree of destiny, it happened, that one day, as he was roaming alone in the forest, buried in his dream, and wholly unconscious of where he was going, fearing even to look at the trunks of the trees, lest something should appear from behind them to turn him into ridicule, his steps led him unaware straight upon Aparájitá's pool. And as it happened, she was sitting, admiring

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her own face in the water, for want of something better to do. And suddenly he caught sight of her, and stopped short, and stood, struck by the thunderbolt of extreme amazement. For it was, as though his dream had suddenly become realised, so that he said to himself: Why, there she is, before me, exactly as I see her. But how can it be? And am I mad, or dreaming, and is she actually there?

So he stood, bewildered, not knowing whether he was dead or alive. And after a while, he clasped his two hands together, uttering a faint cry. And hearing him cry, Aparájitá suddenly looked up, and saw him. And at the sight of him, she frowned, annoyed for an instant at his invasion of her solitude. But as she looked, her frown changed all at once into astonishment, and she raised her eyebrows into an arch, gazing at him with huge round eyes, and saying to herself: What extraordinary creature is this, standing staring at me? And is it a man, or what?

And after a while, she broke the silence, and said to him, with hesitation: Hast thou a name and a family, and what art thou doing here?

And that unhappy barber answered, hardly knowing what he said: I am by caste a barber, and my name is Kámarúpa. And hardly had he spoken, when Aparájitá began to laugh, with laughter that sounded in his ears like an echo answering the noise of the river, and seemed to sweep him away like a straw in the cascade of its derision. And as he stood still, with his soul collected in his eyes, watching her eyes and her lips laughing, out of the

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extraordinary confusion of her never-ending hair, which wound all about her like a serpent, suddenly he saw her eyes become filled with anger and disdain, and he heard her voice, saying abruptly with a tone of command: Be off, O thou unlucky, above all in thy name! How dost thou dare even so much as to look at me at all? For such a thing as thou art has no right, either to see or to be seen.

And Kámarúpa instantly turned round, doing exactly as he was told, like a tame elephant. And as he went away, there was no room in his soul even for a single atom of resentment at his unceremonious and contemptuous dismissal. For her presence filled it to the very brim, even though she was no longer there. And she danced before his eyes, that were not even any longer looking at her, so that he jostled against the trees, as he went, saying nothing, and forgetting everything but the vision of her, which had seized upon his heart like a master, fastening despotically upon an unresisting slave.

But Aparájitá, on her part, watched him with curiosity as he went away. And when at last the trees hid him, she drew a long breath, and shuddered, and spat upon the ground¹ as she turned away. And she said to herself: Can this possibly be a man, or is it not, after all, only a dream, and a very bad one? And she closed her eyes, as though to exclude him from her soul, saying: May it never be my evil fortune to see him again! and yet alas! I seem to see him still, and he is not one to be easily

¹ This is, not bad manners, but superstition: not merely to express loathing, but to avert the evil eye, as in Theocritus.

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forgotten. Strange! that opposites should have exactly the same effect! for to see him once is never to be able to forget him, just as if he were in fact, the thing whose name he bears. And out upon him! for he has put as it were a bitter taste in the mouth of my enjoyment.

And then, all at once, she began to weep, as if on purpose to wash from her eyes the defilement of his image. And as she wept, she watched the tears falling on the lotus leaves, as if her weeping dowered them with eyes wherewith to gaze at her, dropping upon them innumerable mirrors of her own. And after a while, she utterly forgot him, notwithstanding her own words: little dreaming of the time that was on the very eve of coming, when she should long for his return, and be almost ready to go and seek him of her own accord.

CHAPTER IV

NOW the city, in which Kámarúpa was so to say the last of all, was the capital of a King, called Keshawa.¹ And wonderful to say! although he was only eighteen, and the reigning King, having recently come to the throne, he was without a queen, and without an heir, and a puzzle and an anxiety to his ministers and his subjects. For he looked upon all women as a peacock looks on snakes, being as if by express design of the Creator, the exact opposite of Kámarúpa, of whose

¹ Pronounce 'Ke' to rhyme with 'say.' - This is a common name of Krishna, it means 'he of the beautiful hair'; Milton's 'unshorn Apollo.'

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very existence he was unaware. For Kámarúpa repelled, desiring all the while to attract, those who fled from the very sight of him: whereas Keshawa, with whom every woman fell in love the very instant she set eyes on him, being as it were a very 'trina-mani'¹ to attract the straw of the sex, repaid all their idolatry with a proportionate aversion, laughing at all their charms, and never so much as deigning to cast at any one of them a single glance, save by way of contempt; so that his way was as it were littered by the stubble of their dead bodies, whose souls had abandoned them in despair.

And yet all this came about, not by reason of his own nature, nor owing to any antipathy arising from the influences of a previous birth,² but solely because of his upbringing, which had cased his soul in an armour of artificial repugnance, so as to make him resemble the fruit of the palm, whose natural sweetness of disposition is hidden behind an outer husk, deceiving and repelling all who are not aware of the hidden core. And his own father was the initiator and the cause of all. For he, who was even more beautiful in his youth than his son, had devoted himself exclusively to women, making of them his idol: only to find, as time went on, that, as is often the case, the deity turned a deaf ear to his worshipper. For he was fated to be unfortunate in all his relations with women, by reason of his own

¹ The fabulous gem with a property similar to that of amber or the magnet.

² That is, it was shallow, not profound: due to the accidents of this life, therefore, superficial: not indelible, like the ingrained essence derived from former action.

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conduct in his former birth. For in that birth he had been to women exactly what he found them to be to himself in this, treachery and ingratitude, incarnate in human form. And his wives betrayed and dishonoured him, one after another, in spite of all that he could do, flitting like bees from flower to flower, and possessed by an insatiable thirst for almost every other man than himself. For a woman disgusted with her own husband, turns as unsteady as a flame in the whirlwind of desire, and resembles the glow of evening, which never can endure, vanishing one twilight to reappear the next, always the same red beauty, 'lent for an hour to each new day, and leaving them all in the lurch in turn.

And at last, that outraged King lost his temper. And having discovered his last queen engaged in conversation from a window in the palace with a very handsome Rajpoot, he had them tied together and threw them before an elephant: and then like a ruined gambler who has lost his last stake, he shut the door on all his hopes, and turned his back on the other sex, not by reason of emancipation from the seductions of the senses, but simply from disappointment and disgust. And he said to himself, after a while: Now, then, I will take good care to do the only thing I can, and put my son upon his guard. For but for my assistance, he will beyond all doubt only repeat my own experience, and sowing the same seed, will gather exactly the same fruit that I did myself, being as he is the very double of me, and, as it were, my second self. Out, out upon

¹ 'Râga' also means affection.

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this poison-tree in the form of woman, that has utterly destroyed the first!

So, then, as his son grew up, turning slowly from child to man, that father of his began to water him like a young tree with good instruction, and bend him, as it were, into a very strange direction. And in the rich soil of his son's heart he sowed the seed of misogyny, and cultivated it with indefatigable care; rooting out continually the rank weeds of natural inclination, as fast as they sprang up, and driving away the birds in the form of feminine attendants that were always on the watch to devour the seed. And not trusting to his own efforts, he assembled cunning gardeners to help him, collecting as tutors for his son from all quarters sages, and ascetics, and pundits in the 'shástra' of woman, who had gone to its farther shore, and resembled a very mine of antidotes to the woman-poison. And all combining, they poured over the head of Keshawa, from his youth up, a very flood of the essence of the experience of feminine craft, till he began to resemble a garden, not only walled in and sheltered from intruders, but stored with innumerable antidotic herbs.

And it seemed, as time went on, that the object was achieved. For relying on his treasury of wisdom, Keshawa was full of confidence, and felt himself secure, and laughed at the very notion of any woman even so much as gaining access to his heart, much less of taking it by storm. And he was in his own opinion so impregnable, that in his innocence he was ready to give as it were odds to the

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enemy, and encounter at close quarters whole armies of women at a time: little knowing, for all his doctrine, that the danger of women is lessened by their multitude, and augmented by their isolation, seeing that the essence of the spell of woman lies always in a single instance, which loses by combination exactly that ingredient which gives its power edge. And he used to bathe his father in an ecstasy of triumph by the readiness he exhibited in shooting from his quiver a whole cloud of arrows in the shape of arguments, proving not only that every woman was a weak and insignificant antagonist easily to be resisted and repelled, but that even a whole ocean of the charm of feminine intoxication could, so to say, be contemptuously swallowed, without even so much as leaving a stain upon the throat of the drinker who had attained emancipation from the spell.¹ And yet, all the while, he was unaware, that he resembled nothing so much as butter, boasting of its own power of resisting every furnace, because it had been carefully painted to resemble stone. Or how should a little lump of gold, newly dug from the mine, and always told it was only wood, guess how hard it is to float, before it had been actually cast upon the ocean's breast?

And just before he entered the fire,² the King his father said in private to his prime-minister: Now,

¹ This was a great brag, in which the speaker was comparing himself even to Maheshwara, whose greatest feat was drinking up the terrible Kālakūta poison. But it left a blue stain, even upon the great god's throat. ² I.e. died.

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it will be for thee, since I am going, to see that he adopts a suitable heir; for very sure I am, that he will never beget one of his own. And as for myself, I can abandon the body without regret, having done my work well, and knowing that I have tempered him like a good sword, and fed him as it were on drugs, rendering him unable to catch that fiery fever in the form of woman, who will never be the bane of his life, as she was of mine. And his prime-minister said politely: By the wisdom of the Mahá-rájá, all has been successfully carried out, and all the danger counteracted and circumvented, foreseen and rendered harmless, beforehand. But within himself, he laughed, and said: Who knows? For pundits are, after all, only pundits, and a woman is a woman still. And as I think, many a fortress has boasted of its own impregnability, until it has the enemy actually within its walls, taken, whether by storm, or bribery, or stratagem, matters not. For he is a very clever guard, who can keep out an enemy really bent upon getting in. And who can fathom the ocean, or count the hairs on a woman's head? and yet they are less numerous by millions than her wiles.

And now, O Daughter of the Snow, that prime-minister was a very pearl among prime-ministers, as the event proved. For this is the essence of policy, not to think yourself wiser than the Creator, who alone knows what he is doing. And if even the Creator wavered, when Tilottamá walked around him, what should his creatures do? For fascination is only a word without a meaning, to one that has

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never felt it: and he labours in vain, who tries to outwit the Creator, by teaching the straw to remain unmoved in the proximity of the gem.

CHAPTER V

SO, then, it came about, that after Kámarúpa had gone away, Aparájitá went on sitting all alone. And little by little, the day died, and the red glow of evening began to steal through the trees, accompanied by the young moon, which peeped in as if out of curiosity to see the fish playing about in the ruddy water till it resembled a second moon, come down expressly to make sport for Aparájitá. And she lay on the leaves, leaning on her right arm, with a blue lotus in her left hand that rested on a coil of her hair running over the mound made by the curve of her left hip, watching the fish leap, with eyes resembling lazy mirrors that were every now and then closed, by their eyelids dropping over them, for she was very drowsy, and on the edge of falling fast asleep, when all at once, she heard a step on the leaves behind her.

And instantly, she came to herself with a start, saying to herself in terror: Why, here this unendurable Kámarúpa is, returning. And she rose abruptly to her feet, and was on the very verge of plunging into the pool to disappear. But in the very act, she turned her head upon her shoulder, to cast a single glance at him, before she went away. And strange! instead of plunging, she stopped dead, as if that very glance had suddenly bewitched her,

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and turned her into stone. And she, who but an instant ago had resembled fear itself, in feminine form, poised in the very act of taking flight, was turned in the twinkling of an eye, by the sudden shock of seeing something the very opposite of what she had expected, intensified by the extremity of that opposition, into a feminine incarnation of the inability even to move at all. For she stood exactly as she was, motionless as a dead tree, lost in her own eyes, like an emblem of the stupor of the victims of Ananga, when one of his poisoned arrows has suddenly struck it in the very middle of the heart.

And at that very moment, Keshawa caught sight of her. For having gone out hunting in the wood, with a solitary follower, it so fell out, by the contrivance of the Bodiless God, that his horse fell down, stumbling in an ant-hill, and becoming lame. And he sent his follower away, to fetch another horse. And then, tired of waiting for his arrival, he began to roam about at random in the wood, and came unawares upon the pool, following unconsciously in Kámarúpa's very footsteps.

So, then, when all at once he saw her, he stopped abruptly, looking at her with an amazement that was equal to her own, yet very far indeed from being the echo of her own emotion. For he said to himself, with extreme annoyance: Why, now, there is actually a woman! And what in the world is she doing here? And yet, I am not sure. Is it, after all, a woman, or is it only a stone image? And yet, I thought that I saw it move.

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So as he stood, examining her attentively, and puzzled by her stillness and her silence, and above all, by her strange appearance, in the solitude of a forest where he thought himself alone, curiosity began to overcome him, opening as it were the door, without his knowledge, to a feeling that was mixed, against his will, with a very little admiration. And seizing its opportunity, his mouth began to smile of its own accord. And presently he said again: Is she alive, or if not, what is the matter with her, that she never even stirs? Or if she is alive, what kind of a woman can she be? For, somehow or other, she resembles, indeed, a woman, yet one of a kind that I have never seen before. For she looks as if she was made of the river foam, rather than of bones, and flesh, and blood, like all the rest.

And Aparájitá, after a while, came back to herself. And she drew a deep sigh, and said softly to herself: Ha! now, lucky it was for me, that I threw a single glance at him, just before I went away. Ha! but for that lucky glance, I should have missed the very fruit of my birth. And only to think, of finding this, where I expected Kámarúpa.

And suddenly, she broke into low laughter, and as she did so, she turned, and caught and twisted and wound her wonderful hair around her, so that it veiled her like a garment,¹ leaving her arms and her feet and her left breast bare. And then, she

¹ The reader accustomed to European garb will not understand this. The Indian women, from time immemorial, have dressed only in a long roll of soft material, wound round them, which never needs buttons, pins, or needles. Happy women, and happy their spectators and their lovers!

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came very quickly up to him, and walked slowly all round him, keeping him on her right.¹ And then, she stood exactly before him, looking at him with her head thrown back, for he was very tall, and half-shut eyes. And she held her blue lotus to her lips for a moment, while she considered him meditatively. And suddenly she said: Art thou a god or a dream? And Keshawa said politely: O Lady, I am neither, but only the King of the city, hard by. And she said: No matter: at least thou art my god and my dream. And instantly, Keshawa started. And he said to himself: Ha! now, here it is! and now, I must be on my guard, and very wary: for here, as it seems, I have accidentally stumbled upon a woman, who almost before I have set eyes on her, is herself setting for me a snare. For what are they all but flatterers, full of deception? And he said coldly: Lady, thou art under a delusion, whoever thou art. And it is by accident that I have come suddenly upon thee, and invaded thy seclusion: so now I will withdraw, and leave thee to thyself. And Aparájitá exclaimed with a cry: Ah! no indeed! Now that I have found thee, dost thou really think that I will so easily let thee go? Either thou remainest, or if thou goest, I will go also: for I belong to thee, from this very moment, body and soul. And it cannot be, but that I was thine in my former birth also: since very certainly I have seen thee before, either in a dream, or before I was born: as beyond a doubt, I was born for this very moment, and the

¹ That is to say, she was offering him divine honours, by performing a 'pradakshina.'

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fruit of my birth has suddenly appeared before me, in thy shape.

And Keshawa looked at her in perplexity, drawn towards her without knowing it by his youth and her own beauty, and yet ashamed of himself, as if the sudden prompting of his obscure inclination was a crime in his own eyes. And he exclaimed: Ha! so now I begin to see that all was true, and very wisely have the sages said, that women resemble creepers, that must absolutely twine round something, and choose by preference the thing that stands nearest to them. And Aparájitá said: Thy sages said well, and for what was I born but to cling to thee? And she drew nearer, as if in fact she was just about to make her words good. And Keshawa stepped back hastily, as if he was afraid of her, exclaiming: Fie! O Lady, surely this is a shame to thee, to offer thyself, as it were, a free gift to an utter stranger, like an 'abhisáriká,' and one who is her own mistress.¹ And she said instantly: And what else should I be, who have been my own mistress ever since I was born? And where is the shame? For I give myself to thee, in very truth, of my own free will, choosing thee for my husband like the King's daughter that I am. Art thou a King, and dost not know, that such has been the 'dharma' of all Kings' daughters since the world began? Nor art thou an utter stranger, for I have known thee, as it seems, from eternity: and I recognised thee, the very moment I set eyes on thee, obeying the

¹ Independence, in Hindoo eyes, is synonymous with bad behaviour.

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command laid on me by my former birth. But as for thyself, thou canst not be a man, but only a painted image. For it is, as if thou wert afraid. But what is there to be afraid of? Or where hast thou seen my equal, in point of beauty? And Keshawa said in confusion: Say, rather, it is thou thyself, that canst not be a woman. For as to thy beauty, let it be as thou sayest: but whoever heard of a mortal maiden that was ready as it were to throw herself into the arms even of a King? And Aparájitá said: Aye! but I am no mortal maiden, but a daughter of a King of the Nágas; and unlike miserable mortal women, we behave as we choose, and above all, in the choosing of our own husbands. And I live in yonder pool, where I was just about to plunge, when by good luck I turned and saw thee, just in time. And I am called Aparájitá, being well named, for even among Nágs thou wilt not find my equal, and needst never be ashamed of me.

So as she spoke, looking at him with pride, as if challenging him to deny it, if he could, Keshawa gazed at her in stupefaction, taken utterly aback by her independence and her frankness, which combined with her beauty and the story that she told him of herself, to deprive him of his tongue. And he stood, utterly at a loss what to say, gazing at her with eyes that as it were wandered wondering over her hair, and seemed to say: Is this a net to catch us, or is it really only a woman's hair? And he thought within himself: Can I be only dreaming, or am I actually succumbing after all, to this curious thing in the shape of a woman, with eyes like pools,

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and hair that never comes to an end? And he gazed at her helplessly, standing before him proudly as if compelling him to yield whether he would or not, and saying to him as it were: What is the use of words? And presently, once more she put her lotus to her lips, and looked at him over the top of it, saying absolutely nothing, but as it were asking him: What art thou going to say next, for I am waiting?

So then, all at once he exclaimed, almost with a shout: Whatever thou art, thou art a woman: and who does not know that all women are alike, crooked, like rivers, and treacherous, like snakes, and variable, like winds, and obstacles to emancipation, and resembling nectar, outside, but poisonous within?

And she looked curiously at him, and she said slowly, with surprise: Thou art very young, to know so much evil of us all. Didst thou learn it from thy wife, for it cannot have been thy mother? And Keshawa said: I have no wife, and as for my mother, she was dead, long before I could remember. And Aparájitá said: From whom, then, didst thou acquire all thy wisdom about women? And Keshawa said: Thou despisest me, because of my youth, and yet, as I think, without reason, for I am as old as thou art: and moreover, young as I am, I know all about thee and thy sex, for I have studied it, with pundits and sages.

And then, all at once, Aparájitá began to laugh, with laughter that shook the soul of Keshawa like a leaf in the wind, half with anger, and half with an

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irresistible desire to laugh himself in tune with its music. And she dropped her lotus, and began to clap her hands, exclaiming: Pundits! Why, what pundit ever knew anything of women, on whom they wreak their vengeance, for being powerless of winning their affection, by calling them names? And where, were it not for women, would all thy pundits be? Come, now, begin again, and I will take thee for my pupil, and teach thee, about women, more than all thy pundits put together. And yet, it is very well, and I would not have it otherwise. For it is plain, that thou art a child, knowing absolutely nothing whatever of women, and thy pundits have only wasted thy time and their own. And now, thy education shall begin, and end, with me.

And Keshawa said angrily: Thou art altogether mistaken, and I do not stand in any need of thy instruction; for as to women, I have nothing left to learn, knowing everything there is to know already. And all thy arts are, in my case, absolutely useless, for I am proof against them all. And she looked at him with laughter and mischief in her great eyes, and she said: What! proof? Is it so? Can absolutely no arrow penetrate thy coat of mail? Why, thou foolish boy, thou art afraid of me already, and with reason: for I am dangerous. Come, thou dardest not so much as look at me, without quailing. And Keshawa said scornfully: I dare. And she said: Then, look! And as he looked at her, as if in defiance, she turned slowly round on tiptoe, attitudinising, and she said, looking at him with her head on

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one side: Is it not so? What is there that is wrong, since thou art so absolute a connoisseur? Tell me where I am defective. Mahārāj is the judge.

And as she stood smiling at him, the heart of Keshawa began, like a traitor, to side with her against his will. And he said, with difficulty: It was not of thy body that I spoke, but of thy soul. Then she said: Ah! then, as it seems, thou hast no fault to find with my body. It is rather my soul which is to blame. And what, then, is the matter with my soul? Come, I will help thee, since thou art so brave a hero, and entirely devoid of fear. And Keshawa said: Why should I fear? And she said: Thou shalt see. But first look into the pool, as I am doing, and tell me what thou seest.

And Keshawa stooped and looked, just as he was told, into the pool, and presently he said: I see nothing there but my own image in the water. And Aparājītā said: It is well; now my soul is like the pool. Look again! And she placed herself exactly before him, with her two little feet exactly together, and looking up at him she fixed her two great eyes on his, and said: Stoop, and say; dost thou not see thyself also in the pool of my soul? And Keshawa stooped, with reluctance, yet not able to refuse, and as she said, he saw his own image in her eyes. And he said to himself: She speaks truth; for her eyes are exactly like the pool. So as he stood, she said softly: Beware! for unless thou art a strong swimmer, thou wilt find my pool very deep, and it will drown thee. And suddenly, before he was aware, she caught him round the neck with both arms, and

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kissed him very gently, saying: Swim if thou canst, drown if thou must.

And then at last, utterly bewildered by the touch of her lips and the scent of her hair, Keshawa lost his reason. And suddenly, he seized her in his own arms, and began to kiss her in return. But the very instant that he did so, Aparájitá pushed him violently away, and tore herself apart. And she began to laugh, very low, saying: Ha! what? Hast thou so utterly forgotten all thy pundits and their saws already? But Keshawa, utterly ashamed, stood in silence, unable to reply. And she said again: I told thee of the danger. But thou, armed with all thy wisdom, wert so sure of thyself. And now, tell me only this: was it nectar, or was it poison?

And Keshawa said in desperation: I know not; but this I know, that I was right from the beginning: and now, the best thing of all, and the best of all answers, is to leave thee, without the loss of a single moment.

And then, as he turned to go away, she began to clap her hands, and she exclaimed: What! a hero! and run away from the danger, armed as thou art at all points! And all at once, she bounded towards him, and caught him, as he went, by the hand. And she leaned against him, and said in his very ear, with emphasis: Maybe, I could tell thee more of thy own soul than thou couldst tell me of mine. But so much only I will tell thee, that thy soul was a prisoner, lying in a dark dungeon, and fettered by foolish gaolers, and now I have set thee free. And

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half thy soul desires, even now, to worship thy deliverer, but the other half is still slavish, refusing, from old association, and pride, and shame, to take advice, and assistance, from a woman. Go, then, back to thy dungeon, and thy pundits, and tell them of thy achievements : and yet for all that remember, thou art destined to return, for I am thine and thou art mine. For I will wait for thee, and not for very long : for I have set my seal upon thee. And take thou this along with thee, to help thee in thy recollection.

And she caught up her lotus from the ground, and pushed it into his hand, which closed upon it half against its will, and half unwilling to let it fall. And then she said : This is only the beginning, and I have still to show thee, as I will very soon, that a woman has means to gain her object, of which all thy pundits in council never so much as dream. And now it is a battle, between them and me, and the victory will be mine, for I have a traitor in thy camp, which is thy own heart. Yet be not so foolish as to hold me for thy enemy, for I am, on the contrary, thy friend, and a very good one. Come to me in thy need, and I will help thee, when all thy pundits fail.

And then, she turned, and threw herself upon the ground, beside her pool : while Keshawa went hastily away, with feet that were, so to say, at variance, one making for the palace with avidity, and one struggling to return.

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CHAPTER VI

SO when he had gone, Aparájítá remained alone, buried in meditation, with a soul that corresponded with her body, for the one was red with reminiscence and love-longing, and the other with the evening dusk. And her eyes glowed in the darkness, and she smiled, every now and then, saying to herself in exultation : Ha ! how glorious he is, and like a mortal incarnation of the valour of the Kshatriya race, and a true scion of the sun ! and yet how simple, and how ludicrous, and how charming, running counter to his youth and his own nature by endeavouring to play the ascetic, and striving to model his behaviour on the maxims of his miserable pundits, which he has learned like a parrot to repeat by rote, without understanding what they mean ! And well I see, that my beauty has caught him like a fish, as indeed he partly understands himself, though he is ashamed and unwilling to admit it, utterly aghast at discovering all his defences collapse, and his weapons crumble in his hands, at the first encounter with the enemy. And yet, if he only knew it, he need not be ashamed, for he has an enemy to deal with, not easy to oppose. And as she spoke, she leaned over, to see herself in the pool, putting her face down so as almost to touch the water, by reason of the gloom. And presently she said : We are well matched, for beautiful as I am, he is my equivalent of the other sex, and I could no more resist his attraction than he can mine : and we are mutually victorious and vic-

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tims, each of the other, and bound in each other's chains. And it is beyond a doubt that we were made for one another by the Creator, by whose contrivance this meeting was arranged, being as we are unable to exist apart, like a word and its meaning. And he is my meaning and I am his, for indeed he resembles the answer to a riddle which all this time I have been endeavouring in vain to solve; for now at last I understand why I was originally born, and for what object. So now, then, it only remains to contrive some scheme, to tame¹ him, and compel him to return to me, whether he will or no. For if once he comes back, he is lost, since his very coming will be a confession of defeat. And once the water begins to trickle through the dam, the flood is not far off that will sweep everything away, drowned in the irresistible torrent of the ecstasy of love.

And she sat on, silently pondering over her plan of action, while it grew gradually darker and darker, till her white limbs glimmering in the gloom began to resemble a snowy curve of thy father's² peaks at midnight. And all at once, a frog suddenly began to croak. And Aparájitá started, and then smiled, saying to herself: Why, it is only a frog, after all; and yet, for a moment, I thought that it was Kámarúpa, for their voices are alike. Out upon him! for he at least is certain to return, and I start at every noise, afraid of his appearance. Alas! it is a very

¹ The 'subjugation' - 'washīkaranam' - of the reluctant or recalcitrant party, is the knotty point in every love-affair. Naturally, it is as a rule the lady who has to be subjugated; here, an expression generally qualifying the woman is applied to the man. ² I.e. the Himálaya.

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tangle, since he will come who is not wanted, and he that is wanted will not come. If only, the parts were interchanged!

And suddenly, she started to her feet, exclaiming: Ha! I have discovered it; and the difficulty is over. And she clapped her hands in delight. And she said: So then, after all, Kāmarūpa is very valuable, for I have found a use for him. But now, then, I must go and find my father, to help me at this pinch: for something is wanting, to make the plot complete, which he only can supply.

And instantly, she plunged into the pool, and making herself heavy, 'sank like a stone to the very bottom. And she went straight to Pátála. And there she found her father, lying on a bed that was made of a single ruby, drawing pictures. And instantly she said abruptly: Dear Father, I take refuge at thy feet. And sitting down beside him, she said: Give me a spell for entering dead bodies, for I have need of it.

And her father stopped drawing, and looked at her in astonishment, with his pencil in his hand. And he laughed, and exclaimed: Ha! Aparájitá! why, what new fancy is this? And what canst thou possibly want to enter dead bodies for? Is not thy own pretty body good enough for thee, and where is the body even living that could bring the advantage by making an exchange?

¹ This power does not appear in European supernaturalism. It is a pity: there is nothing more charming in mythology than the freak of the little Krishna, making himself heavy, so that neither his mother nor anybody else could move him.

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And Aparájitá said : Listen, now, while I tell thee all about it, and do not interrupt till I have finished. And she told him all, beginning at the beginning, and explained her plan. And when she ended, her father looked at her with a smile, and he said : So then, as it seems, at last thou art anxious to get married, and that is as it should be. But what is the use of this miserable mortal, even if he is a King? Rather let me assemble the princes of thy own caste, and thou canst choose from among them all him that pleases thee best. And Aparájitá said : Out upon them all ! what is the use of them to me ? for I will have absolutely nobody for my husband but this King.

And then, seeing that she was absolutely set upon it, her father laughed, and shrugged his shoulders, and he said : Have it thy own way ; for thou wert ever like the wind, refusing to be guided or controlled. And yet I warn thee, that the match is undesirable ; for what union can be permanent between ill-assorted castes. For very soon, thy King will die, leaving thee in the lurch alone, even if thou thyself dost not anticipate him, by growing tired and deserting him first. For what have Kings in common with the daughters of the Nágas ? And moreover, even before he dies, he will become old, and ugly, and wrinkled, and grey. Then said Aparájitá : What have wrinkles and grey hair to do with the matter ? For at present, he is young, and it will be time enough to think of old age when it is there. But in the meantime, I cannot live at all,

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without him : for he is my 'abhishtadewa,'¹ and my country, and my relations, and my second soul. So give me the spell, by which I shall bind him to me more than by any love-charm, and let me go. And then thou wilt be my father by a double right, and I shall owe thee my life twice over.

And she coaxed him, until at last he gave way, and taught her a potent spell. But he said : Be careful to remember it exactly. For spells resemble fire, which may burn even those who use it, unless it is very delicately handled : and unskilful dealers in spells are like people who dig pits, for if they forget the way, they may fall in themselves. And those who enter dead bodies may find, too late, that it is easier to get in than to get out. And as I said before, what is the use of any spell, to such a one as thou art? For thou canst not find in the three worlds a body better worth inhabiting than thy own.

And Aparájitá gave him a kiss, rejoicing, in return for his spell. And she said : Dear Father, be under no concern. For this spell is not for myself, but others. And all bodies are not like mine. For there are bodies, which to abandon, their owners would give their very souls.

CHAPTER VII

NOW in the meanwhile, Kámarúpa, when Aparájitá drove him away with ignominy from her pool, went straight home, hardly knowing how, for he left, as it were, his own soul

¹ I.e. 'the god of my choice.'

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behind him. And he sat down, and remained still, gazing at the wall before him, yet seeing nothing but Aparájitá, hovering just in front of his eyes, as if in fact she were actually painted on the wall, exactly as he saw her. And her voice and her laughter rang in his ears without ceasing; and it was as if she had entered into his body, expelling his own soul, and taking possession herself. And he forgot everything, even eating, drinking, and sleeping, and fell into utter despondency,¹ differing from a dead man only in being still alive. For he realised his hopelessness, and he said to himself in deep dejection: Day follows day, and no change can possibly occur. And now, what is the use of me? And how is it possible that such a thing as she is could ever so much as even look at such a thing as me? Did she not say so of her own accord? And yet I would give not one only, but a hundred lives merely to look at her, sitting at a distance, and hidden, so as to be no cause to her of irritation, nay, even without her knowledge.

And then, as if his own words had unawares suddenly cast a ray of light into his gloomy soul, all at once he cried out with a cry that resembled a yell: Ha! But why not? Why, that is, after all, the very thing within my power. What can prevent me from creeping cunningly to her vicinity, making absolutely no noise, and discovering some convenient lurking-place, and crawling in, so enjoying without detection the nectar of seeing her, with

¹ The old mediæval vice 'acedia,' which has dropped out of European memory, is exactly the Sanskrit 'nirweda.'

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impunity. For even she herself cannot prevent, much less punish, the thing she does not know. And moreover, I can do it every day.

And at the very thought, he was so utterly bewildered with delight, that he could hardly believe in it at all, so simple and yet so incredible it seemed, and so surprising the discovery that he had stumbled on by accident, which transformed him in an instant, lifting him as if by magic from the bottomless abysses of despair to the very pinnacle of ecstasy, and showing him a vision of what came within a very little of resembling actual union with the object of his unattainable desire. And instantly he rose up, and swallowed as it were in a single gulp the food that had lain before him so long untasted and ignored. And he set off almost at a run towards the pool. But as he drew nearer, he got slower and slower, notwithstanding his almost uncontrollable desire, to go faster still. And at last, he began cautiously to stoop down, creeping quietly from tree to tree, so as to hide behind their trunks, holding his breath, and almost dying a double death, half with longing to see her, and half with terror lest he should himself be seen.

And at last, he looked, and lo! there she was, before his eyes, again. And she was sitting on her slab, that hung over the pool, with her two feet hanging down together so as almost to touch the water, like a nectar-oozing digit of the moon, come down to earth in a feminine form of unimaginable beauty. And she looked as if she had but just risen from the sea for the first time, as indeed she had

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from the pool, for her wet red hair was clinging all round her as if trying in vain to hide the outline of her foamy limbs. And she was watching the gambols of a silver fish that kept leaping from the water and disappearing, like the young moon in the rainy season, playing hide and seek with the scudding clouds.

So, then, when he saw her, the heart of Kámarúpa began to beat like a drum, so loud, that he was afraid she would hear. And he began to shake with such agitation that he lost all control over his limbs: and coming within a little of falling, he placed his foot unawares on a dry twig, which broke with a snap. And instantly, she looked up, and saw him. And as he stood, half dead with terror, among the sudden ruin of all his hopes, with the perspiration on his brow, colder than ice, all at once, to his stupefaction, she called to him kindly and said: Hé, Kámarúpa, come and sit beside me, and see how my fish jumps, for it is amusing, and well worth seeing. And two are better than one, to see anything at all.

So hearing her speak, that astounded Kámarúpa could not believe his own ears. And without obeying, he stood staring at her like a criminal caught red-handed, and expecting his own death. So, after a while, she said again: Didst thou not hear me call, O Kámarúpa? Come boldly, and do not be afraid, for this time I will not laugh at thee: I will not even smile.

And yet, as she spoke, she smiled, so, that the heart of the unhappy Kámarúpa almost leaped out of his body. And as he drew near, slowly, she said,

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looking at him with the eyes of a friend: Sit thou here beside me, and we will watch the fish gambol together; for he is my pet and my plaything, and the only companion of my solitude. But what is the matter? Thou art, as it seems, afraid of me, and yet, O Kámarúpa, I do not bite. And the voice of Kámarúpa faltered, as he said with difficulty: What! sit beside thee? And she said with a smile: Why not, O Kámarúpa, for there is no danger. Or is it that thou art unwilling to waste an hour of thy time, sitting by me?

And Kámarúpa said: Unwilling? O Lady, I am ashamed to sit near thee, such a thing as I am, and such a thing as thou art: it is unsuitable. And she said: Nay, I thought only to please thee. For if I am not mistaken, the last time I was seen by thee, when I was not at leisure, and unkind, I saw in thy eyes homage. Is it not so? And the tears stood in the eyes of Kámarúpa as he answered: Aye! indeed! But I cannot understand. For this is the first time in my whole life that I have been accosted kindly by any woman whatever. And surely I must be dreaming. Then she said: Nay, O Kámarúpa, it is no dream. Art thou not Kámarúpa, and am I not Aparájitá? But the Creator has been cruel to thee, giving thee a form such as women do not love to look at. For as a rule, their love begins with and is dependent on their eyes. And it would be difficult for any woman to love thee in that shape. It is thy body which is to blame.

And that unlucky barber sighed deeply, and he said: Alas! thy words are the truth, though they

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pierce my ears like a poisoned needle. And O that it were not impossible to get another body, for it is the cause of all my shame, and of all my woe! Then said Aparájitá: O Kámarúpa, for all things there is a remedy, save only death. And it was for that very reason that I called thee, guessing thy trouble as I sat alone, after I saw thee before. For who knows? What if I could help thee to another body? aye, one such as even I could fall in love with? Wouldst thou consent?

And hearing her speak, the eyes of Kámarúpa almost started from his head with stupefaction, so that he became uglier even than he was before. And he stared at her for a while in silence, and then he stammered in confusion: Consent? what! another body? And all at once he began to shout: Ah! Ha! ha! another body! Ah! thou hast guessed rightly. Ha! I would a crore of souls for a body other than my own. But no! thou art surely only laughing at me, again. And all at once, he began to sob, and he sank dejectedly to the ground, saying: Alas! no! it cannot be.

And Aparájitá said kindly: O Kámarúpa, who knows? Be not too sure. And yet, do not shout, for we might be overheard, and interrupted. And in the meantime, let me ask thee: Hast thou ever seen the King of this city? And Kámarúpa said: Seen him? Why, I see him, as he goes and comes in the city, almost every day. Then she said: How would such a body as is his, suit thee? How would it be, were his body thine? For I have heard, that all the women in this city are in love with him, though I

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cannot tell myself, never having even once set eyes on him. And yet they say that he returns all their adoration with indifference and contempt. And if so, surely there is a mistake made by the Creator. For as it seems, thou hast the soul, and he has the body, to which that soul should belong: and if he had thy body, he would have his way without any trouble at all: since the women would leave him alone of their own accord. And the bodies and souls of thyself and this King have, beyond a doubt, got mixed, and somehow or other, thou hast his body, and he has thine. If, as I said, rumour is to be believed.

Then said Kámarúpa: It is all true. For, as thou sayest, he resembles the very god of love, and has stolen the heart of every woman in the city.

And Aparájitá said: Surely, O Kámarúpa, that King is a thief, having taken the very body of the god of love for himself, leaving thee nothing but its name.¹ And she leaned towards him with a smile, and laid on his arm a hand, whose touch resembled the fall of a flake of snow. And she gazed, with her own great eyes, into his own, so near, that the smell of her hair crept like intoxication into his very soul. And she said, in a whisper: Then, if I should teach thee, how to get back his body for thyself, would it content thee? For if all the women in the city are in love with it, it might act as a spell, even on me: and it might be, that even I could fall in love with thee, when it was thine.

¹ See note ante, p. 18.

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CHAPTER VIII

AND as he listened, the world swam before Kámarúpa's eyes. And he sat, with his mouth wide open, staring at Aparájitá like a man in a dream. And every now and then, he strove to speak, but his voice failed him, while the incomprehensible ecstasy roused in him by her words whirled in his soul. And dizziness overcame him, and he saw nothing, while the sound of her whisper roared, as it were, in his ears. And at last, he came, somehow or other, to himself, and woke as from a dream, and looked, and lo! there she actually was, gazing at him with eyes that shook him like a leaf, and a smile on her red lips that bit his heart like a snake. And at last, without speaking, he joined his two hands together, and fixed on her eyes that seemed to say: Have mercy and make thy words good, or slay me as I sit.

And after a while, she said: Listen, O Kámarúpa, and I will teach thee how to leap from thy own body into another as easily as yonder fish is now leaping from the water into the air. But part depends upon thyself, and it is for thee to play the man, now or never, in thy own cause. And yet, half the difficulty is already over, since thou hast fixed on the King's body as the goal of thy ambition. But still, thou canst not occupy his body as long as he is there himself. But if thou couldst gain his confidence, and induce him, somehow or other, to leave his body, even for a single instant, of his own accord, then it will be for thee to seize thy opportunity. So

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then, when I have taught thee the proper words, and how to make the 'jap,' by which thou canst enter into other bodies, it is for thee thyself to contrive a means of getting at the King, and so worming thyself into his confidence, to excite his curiosity to do the same. And as I think, it will not be very hard, seeing that Kings, by reason of their lack of occupation, are always curious, and ready to make much of any servant who can afford them new diversion. Moreover, thou art designed, as if expressly, by the Creator for such an undertaking, for thy very deformity will be at once thy power, and thy recommendation, and thy cloak, and it will be very easy for thee to raise laughter in him and steal into his favour by playing the buffoon, and so leading him on, gradually tempt him out of curiosity to try the experiment of abandoning his body. And if thou canst get him to do that even for the twinkling of an eye, thy object is attained. And when it is done, come and see me, and show thyself: and then, who knows?

And she looked at him hard, with sweet half-shut eyes; and as she did so, she said within herself: Now, then, let me see, before I complete the work by teaching him the spell, whether this little miserable barber has a soul within him that resembles his body, or whether he will hesitate at the crime of robbing his own King of his body. For if he shows

¹ Pronounce 'jup' to rhyme with 'cup.' - This word means 'muttering,' and to 'make jap,' is to mutter spells. It is done all over India at the present day. Praying, like cursing, is only a special form of 'making jap.'

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compunction, aghast, as well he might be, at what I am prompting him to do, little knowing why, I think that I could almost take compassion on him, and choose some other way. But as I think, his egoism will carry the day, blinding him to all other considerations, especially when he looks at me.

And as she thought, so it proved. For Kámarúpa thought of absolutely nothing in the three worlds, but how to escape as quickly as he could from his own body into that of the King. And the idea, that when it was his, he could gain the favour of Aparájitá into the bargain, filled him with such a frenzy of anticipation that, out of sheer ecstasy, he could hardly refrain from abandoning the body then and there. And he said in a low voice: Only tell me the spell, and the secret of entering into deserted bodies, and leave the rest to me. And as it is, I can hardly endure to wait even to hear it, since I am like a prisoner on the very eve of escaping from a loathsome dungeon in which I have lain during my whole life.

And Aparájitá said: Listen attentively, and sharpen thy ears and thy memory, and beware of forgetting even a single syllable, otherwise thou wilt stick half-way, with thy object unachieved. And she held up her forefinger, and said: This is the spell. Fix thy eye on whatever body thou wilt, that is without a tenant, and, wholly intent on it, repeat to thyself without error: Yathopadésham, Bhútáwésham.¹ And instantly thou wilt leave

¹ Pronounce 'yutt-ho-pa-day-shum, bhoot-á-way-shum.'- This means 'entering dead bodies is strictly in accordance

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thy own body, and enter the other. And when thou wouldst return to thy own, say: Gatásorasya, Smarámritasya.¹ And in the twinkling of an eye, thou wilt return. But hold fast the spell, and say it over and over again before making thy experiment. For a blunder will be fatal.

But as she spoke, Kámarúpa turned and fled away from her, as if shot out of a bow. And Aparájitá watched him as he went, with disdain and derision in her eyes. And presently she said, with emphasis: Little he knows what he is doing, for if he did, he would not run so fast to his own undoing. Brief will be his triumph, and bitter its inevitable end. And all too soon he will discover, when it is all too late, that my father spoke the truth, and that those who play with fire are apt to forget that it will burn its friends as easily as its foes. And now, entering dead bodies is one thing, and keeping them another. And when he knows me better, he will find that I am exactly like a big black bee, laden with honey from the mango blossom, but carrying a sting in its tail.

And suddenly, as he spoke, the Moony-crested God was interrupted by the Daughter of the Snow. And she said abruptly: Surely, this Aparájitá was a little rogue, with a heart harder than a stone, and absolutely without pity, if, as it seems, she was

with instructions': you must be very careful what you are about.

¹ Pronounce 'gut-à-sore-us-ya, smur-ámritus-ya.' - This has a double meaning, the point of which will become apparent later, 'remember that this dead body is not dead after all': or, 'remember the nectar of this dead body.'

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making use of the unhappy Kámarúpa as an instrument to attain her object by means of his own ruin. For if so, she deserved to be strangled with a rope woven of her own hair.

And Maheshwara laughed aloud, and he exclaimed: Ha! O thou Snowy One, art thou so very simple as to wonder at the nature of thy own sex? For Aparájítá was only acting after her own kind, whose essence is self-contradiction. And the very same woman who is softer than a swan's breast and more melting than the snow to a lover that meets with her own approval will behave to other lovers that annoy her by their woebegone solicitations as if her heart were made of adamant and ice, with less compassion for their hearts that break against her own than a rock has for the waves of ocean. Moreover, to gain the lover of her choice, every woman in the world would sacrifice no matter who, brushing everything aside like a cow driving flies from its eyes with its ears,¹ as mere inconsiderable torments and worthless irritations. And again, even if Kámarúpa had deserved any commiseration, what is that to the purpose? Since what was she after all but the instrument of Deity, to punish him for crimes committed in a former birth? And why hast thou broken the thread of my narration for so trivial a consideration, seeing that it all took place exactly as I say, and whether her behaviour be good or bad, Aparájítá cannot now be altered, as if

¹ The ears of Hindoo oxen are an admirable instance of the way in which Nature gets two uses out of a single instrument: they are admirable fly-flaps for the eyes.

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she were only a picture painted for thy approval. And the duty of the listener is only to listen. For if one woman is only to act so as to obtain the approval of another, she will never do anything at all. Since every beautiful woman is a bitter enemy of every other, looking on her as a rival, and condemning her without appeal, for doing exactly what she does herself. For though she understands another woman, she does not understand herself, not recognising the identity, and utterly unable to make herself into a third person.¹ And no beautiful woman has ever understood, since the world began, that she is only a particular instance of a universal: just as a cat² using its paws never even dreams that all other cats do exactly the same.

And the Daughter of the Snow said: Finish thy story without any more delay.

And the Moony-crested God laughed again and exclaimed: What is injustice, if not thyself, chiding me for thy own interruption? But thy pity outran thy patience, and thou wert so anxious to condemn Aparájitá, that thou couldst not endure to wait to the end. And yet it will come very soon.

CHAPTER IX

NOW in the meanwhile, when he left Aparájitá, Keshawa reached his palace, never knowing how, on foot: rejoicing the hearts of his attendants, who had lost him in the forest,

¹ I.e. to see herself as others see her.

² The crafty Maheshwara uses a Prákrit word in malicious allusion to the story of Ahalya, who, when asked by Indra, her husband,

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and thought that he had been carried off and eaten by a wild animal. And then he discovered, exactly as Kámarúpa did before him, that when he came away from the pool, he had left his head behind him, bringing with him in exchange the blue lotus that his hand carried, refusing as it were to let it fall, and gripping it against his will. And it lay before him as if in mockery of all his resolution, saying as it were: Forget the giver if thou canst: as indeed he could not. For she haunted his recollection even when he was asleep. And after dreaming of her all night long, he awoke to sit all day in silence, saying nothing and doing nothing, and unable even to eat, utterly ashamed to confess the truth even to his own soul, overwhelmed by the recognition of the collapse of his conceit, which had suddenly tumbled into ruin at the touch of Aparájitá. And he was so enraged with her, that he could have torn her into pieces, and yet she pulled him to her as with a rope, and though pride and shame combined to pull with a double rope against her, tearing him as it were in two, he was at every moment hovering on the verge of giving up the struggle, and running back to her as fast as he could go, to become her willing and intoxicated slave. And all the while, he saw the lotus, as it were out of the corner of his eye, goading him like a spur, and looking like a flowery incarnation of blue reminiscence, mixed with a flavour of derision, and

who had scratched her, replied, 'Majjao': which means a lover as well as a cat. In the old days, and plays, women spoke Prákrit, as they did not know Sanskrit.

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saying as it were : See, I am slowly withering away, exactly like thyself, and all, because I have been taken from the pool, which was life to us both.

And seeing his condition, his ministers gradually became alarmed, saying to each other : What is wrong with the King, for he has fallen into melancholy? Some snake must have bitten him in the wood, for he resembles a dead man, though he is alive. Then the physicians said : This is our business : what can ministers know about the matter? And it is all the fault of his father. And no wonder he is melancholy : for who ever heard of the very god of love cut off from the society of women? And so, thinking themselves Dhanwantaris,¹ they searched for the most beautiful woman in the city, and brought her to the King. But it turned out contrary to their expectation. For Keshawa suddenly sprang upon those astounded physicians with a roar like a tiger, and drove them away, carrying their remedy in a woman's form with them, for she had fallen in a swoon with affright.

And the ministers said : Ha ! now the physicians are fools, being well punished for their presumption in thinking themselves wiser than everybody else, offering snakes to a peacock, and a woman to this King, who cannot so much as endure the sight of any one of them. And so, taking counsel with the astrologers, they strove to divert him by every means they could imagine, in vain. For he continued to sit, plunged as it seemed, in a very ocean of melancholy meditation, not deigning even so

¹ Dhanwantari was the physician of the gods.

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much as to cast a glance at the dancers and jugglers and musicians who endeavoured by turns to attract his attention. So, after some days, they gave it up in despair. But criers were sent with drums, who went drumming about the city, to proclaim: That any one who wanted as much gold as the King weighed, should come and cure the King's disease. And the news ran through the city like fire, and the citizens buzzed like bees, not only because of the gold, but by reason of grief at the King's condition. For they were very proud of him, thinking him another god of love, and as often as they caught sight of him going through the city on his elephant, they were as delighted as if they had suddenly obtained the fruit of their birth.

And when he heard the news, Kāmarūpa danced, as it were, for joy. And he exclaimed: Why, now, here is the very opportunity for which I have been waiting, with a soul almost ready to leave its body, for sheer impatience, racking my brains in vain endeavours to make one for myself. And beyond a doubt, this is a gift from the Lord of the Elephant-face, who has listened to my prayers, and contrived it for my advantage.

So he spoke, little dreaming that it was not the Lord of Obstacles, but Aparājita herself, to whom he owed his opportunity. Strange indeed is the action of these mortals, who wander like blind men in the dark! And neither Keshawa nor Kāmarūpa had the very least suspicion, who it was that was bringing them together. For what have kings in common with miserable barbers? or who could

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have guessed that they were yoked together, like a pair of bullocks, and driven against their will to the same object by the same invisible goad.

So after long deliberation, Kámarúpa shaved his own head, and clothed himself in a yellow rag, and went boldly to the palace gates. And he said to the guards: Take me in to the King: for I come to cure his melancholy, and bring the antidote of his disease. Then those guards said to one another: Why, surely, this is only Kámarúpa, the little barber, in disguise. But how should clouds hide the sun? And what is the use of a barber, since the King does not require shaving? Then said Kámarúpa: Barbers know everything,¹ and are of more value, in many cases, of which this King's case is one, than all the physicians in the three worlds put together. For they only cure the body, but the barber sees into the very soul. And moreover, I will do my work and cure the King, asking for no reward. For what is the use of gold to me, who care for nothing but the King's person. So then, after a while, those guards gave way, saying: After all, where is the harm? For since everything else has failed, it is worth while to make experiments. And who knows? For the very sight of this ridiculous barber may possibly divert the King, as well indeed it might. And accordingly, they took Kámarúpa, and brought him in before the King.

So when he found himself in the King's presence,

¹ Kámarúpa was right. The barber in the East is like the slave in the old Roman comedy, the universal factotum.

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he began immediately to dance, not knowing how, but flinging himself to and fro, rolling his head, and snapping his fingers, and singing a song of his own making, in a voice like that of a crow. And he made himself so outrageous, that all at once, in spite of all their efforts, all the King's attendants suddenly burst into loud laughter, even in the King's presence. And Keshawa was, as it were, forced against his own will to become aware of the disturbance, and he looked round in anger, to see what could be the matter. And all at once, he also lost all power of restraint, and joining the crowd of laughers, he began to laugh himself, increasing the laughter of the attendants, until they were all together lost in a very sea¹ of laughter, as if they could never stop. And seeing this, all those attendants said to themselves: Now, then, this misbegotten mountebank has made his fortune, and found at last the proper use of his deformity, which has suddenly become a very mine of gold to him in the shape of the King's favour.

And after a while, Keshawa stopped laughing, with great difficulty, and said to Kámarúpa, with tears in his eyes: Hal! Thou calamity in human form, what is thy name? But when Kámarúpa told him, he began to laugh again, as if he was going mad. And at last he said, faintly: Hast thou come here to cure me, or to kill me, O Kámarúpa? But certainly thou art fortunate in thy name, which fits

¹ Laughter is 'white,' in Sanskrit, and the well-known expression of Æschylus is just what a Hindoo poet says: foam, laughter, and the sea having a common essence.

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thee, as a scabbard fits its blade. And Kámarúpa said: Maháráj, thou hast spoken the truth; yet without knowing what thou art saying: for my name does indeed befit me, better by far than thou art aware. And one sword may have many scabbards, and one foot, many shoes. And Keshawa said: Thou speakest in riddles, merely to beguile me, meaning absolutely nothing. Then said Kámarúpa: Thou art judging by my exterior, which is deceptive, like a nut, coarse without, but very sweet within. Ridiculous I am, to see; and yet the Creator, when he made me, made amends, and compensated me, over and above, for his cruelty in giving me this form, by putting in it secrets that others do not share. And he said in a low voice: Maháráj, he is rightly called Kámarúpa, who can change his shape at will. And Keshawa looked at him in derision, and said: It is incredible, O Kámarúpa. For if it were true, and in thy power, thou wouldst have done it long ago. For almost any shape would be better than thy own. And Kámarúpa said: Maháráj, say nothing rash. And even this shape of mine, which thou despisest, may have its use, which another would not serve. Do I not owe to it, if nothing else, at least the favour of my introduction to thyself, which alone is sufficient to repay me for having been born at all? For at what couldst thou laugh, better than at me? And the King said: It is true. Then said Kámarúpa: Thou seest. And who knows what reasons I may have for preferring my own shape to any other? But be that as it may, so much I can tell thee,

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without betraying any secrets, that not only can I change my shape, becoming anything I choose, but I could teach thee also to do the same, hadst thou any curiosity about it: though indeed, there is no need, except by way of amusement. For what possible shape couldst thou assume, half so splendid as thy own?

And Keshawa looked at him with curiosity; and after a while he said: Is it just as easy to resume thy own shape, as to take another? And Kāmarūpa said: As easy, as to resume thy own clothes. Then said Keshawa: How, then, is it done? And Kāmarūpa said: Nay, Mahārāj, not here, and not now. For the secret is not for everybody, nor would I sell to another, for a hundred crores, what I am ready to reveal to thee alone for nothing: since thou art the King, and may command me. But as for myself, I am careless in the matter: and I wished only to divert thee. And it is for Mahārāj to decide. For after all, why should he wish to change his shape for any other, who possesses, without any trouble, the very shape that even a god himself might envy, already: one, which to obtain, even the god of love might be willing to abandon his own.

And Keshawa said: Why, now, come, I will make trial of thy power, and put it to the proof, since, at the moment, I have nothing better to do. And if, as I anticipate, thou art only bragging, thou shalt earn for thyself a good beating, for promising what thou art unable to perform. But if, on the contrary, thou makest good thy words, thou shalt find what it is to do a service to a King.

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And hearing this, Kámarúpa was so delighted, that he began to tremble. And to disguise his agitation, he began again to dance and laugh and leap about, exclaiming: Maháráj is the judge; and I am at his service, soul and body, body and soul.

CHAPTER X

UT in the meanwhile, day by day, Aparájitá continued sitting by her pool, waiting with impatience for the seed she had sown in the soul of Kámarúpa to produce its fruit, and saying to herself: Now, unless that miserable little barber has a soul as awkward as his body, he cannot fail. For the spell is infallible, but it is not all. For one thing only was not in my power, and I had to leave it to him. And time goes on, and yet nobody arrives. And I am beginning to be afraid that after all, he may not have succeeded in finding some means of approaching the King. For once he does that, the rest is very easy: but that is hard; and my only resource is in the favour of the Lord of Obstacles, who, if he only chose, could bring about a meeting even between a rat living in a hole and the sun in heaven.

So, on a day, as she sat thinking, all at once she listened, and she heard steps, as of one running very quickly. And she peeped through the trees, and saw Kámarúpa coming towards her at a run. And instantly, she said to herself, in excitement: Ha! there, at last, he is, coming very quickly, if indeed it is he: for now I shall very soon discover whether my plot has failed or succeeded. But I rather think,

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the latter : for my right eye is throbbing, foreboding success; and moreover, had he missed his mark, he would not return at such a pace, but either very slowly, or not at all. For the failure of his attempt would have brought him to ruin.

And she went quickly back to her seat by the pool; and at that instant, he arrived, plunging as it were through the trees. But no sooner had he caught sight of her, than he ran to her and fell down beside her with a cry, exclaiming: Believe not thy own eyes, for they are traitors that deceive thee. I am not Kámarúpa, not a miserable barber, but the King in his body : for my own body has been stolen from me foully and dishonourably by a stratagem. And now my only hope is in thee, to whom I am flying for refuge, for all others have forsaken me. And hearing this, Aparájitá said to herself in delight: As I thought, all has gone well; and the change of bodies has been successfully effected. But she said aloud: Who thou art, is utterly unknown to me, never having set eyes on thee in my life before; still, wert thou in very truth, as thou sayest, a King, thou wouldst know that it is not for a King to seek refuge from others, but to afford it. And how is it that thou art a King at all. For as to the King of this city, I have seen him, and very certain it is, that thou art not he: since his appearance differs from thine as a blue lotus differs from a withered leaf.

So hearing her speak, that barber's body groaned aloud, and he said in despair: A blue lotus! Tell me not of blue lotuses, since thine has been my ruin. Alas! O Aparájitá, I am beginning to doubt

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whether I am mad or only dreaming. For as it seems, I am neither Keshawa the King, nor Kámarúpa the barber, and yet both at once. And it cannot be, but that I am asleep all the time, without knowing it, and dreaming the most horrible of all dreams. 'Then said Aparájitá: I understand thee not; but whoever thou art, something uncommon must surely have occurred, to produce in thee so strange a conviction. And as for blue lotuses, I gave no lotus to thee, but only to the King; and how thou hast learned it I know not, unless he told thee himself: for as I said, thou art very certainly not he.

CHAPTER XI

THEN said that seeming Kámarúpa: Listen, and I will tell thee all, from the beginning; for very certainly I am the King, bewitched, against my will. And if, when I have told thee, thou also dost disbelieve my story, I will drown myself in yonder pool, without losing a single moment. For when I went away, a day or two ago, in my own proper form, carrying with me the lotus in my hand, I found that I had been robbed of my very soul, by thee, as now I have been robbed of my body, by this execrable barber, in whose body I am bound. And I sat alone, without a soul, seeing nothing but thyself, and utterly unconscious of the passage of time, until after a while, I woke up, as it were, to find everybody laughing. And I looked, and I saw before me this very body on which thou art now looking, dancing. And catching, as it were, the fever from everybody else, I also began suddenly to laugh, as

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if my accumulated melancholy had suddenly been changed into a very flood of its exact opposite. And I asked him his name, which was Kámarúpa, and, unlucky that I am, I entered into conversation with him, and learned, that his name was expressive of his nature. For he boasted, that he knew how to change his shape: as now indeed I know, only too well, that he did: and he offered to teach me the secret also. But I thought him a liar, and agreed, never even dreaming of the purpose, which his abominable body hid in its soul.

So, then, beguiled by that impostor, and taking his advice, I summoned my huntsmen, and we went to the forest. And reaching its edge, I made all the others stop, bidding them await my return. And they did as they were told, yet with faces that were black with envy at the sudden favour which I showed to this barber, who had suddenly risen from obscurity to eclipse them all. And I heard one mutter to another: See what it is to be born under a lucky star; for this barber's very deformity has turned out to be the highest throw of the dice. Yet little that discontented huntsman thought what his words were just about to mean.

But I, with Kámarúpa for my only companion, went on into the wood, I on my horse, and he running along beside me as best he could. And I laughed to see him struggling along, like an ape, and rode expressly by thorny thickets, to put him into difficulty, and punish him beforehand, for giving me such trouble, in order to prove him a lying braggart. And beyond a doubt, all the while that

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hideous deformity was laughing in his sleeve, and saying to himself: Ha! now, we shall return in an inverted order, Kámarúpa upon the horse, and Keshawa among the thorns. And so as we went, all at once we came to a little glade, and in it was a pair of Shabaras, so busy quarrelling over a bunch of dead parrots they had snared in the forest that we stumbled on them unawares. But no sooner had those Shabaras perceived our arrival than they took to their heels.

So then, that Kámarúpa said: Maháráj, see! we need go no farther; for this is a very good place for making our experiment, and nothing was wanting but a dead body. And here it is, provided unexpectedly and laid at our very feet, by these miserable Shabaras, as if on purpose to save us trouble. For one dead body will do, just as well as any other: and one of these parrots will be the very thing we want. And he chose out of the bunch, a parrot, and laid it apart, at the very foot of a great tree. And then he said: Maháráj, come down from thy horse, and tie him to yonder tree.

And when it was done, he said: Maháráj, those who ascend mountains, not possessing the wings of a bird, must begin at the beginning, and climb, step by step, and little by little. So, those, who like thyself are desirous of acquiring magic arts, cannot become Widyádharas¹ at a swoop, but must enter humbly by the door, and learn the grammar of 'tantras.' So to begin with, I will show thee how to

¹ The name of these beings, the fairies of India, means 'possessed of magic science.'

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enter dead bodies, and how to return: and after that, we will come to live ones, and so on in order, till thou hast become as great an adept in the science of shape-changing, as I am myself. So, now, Maháráj, pay attention. For I am about to enter the body of this parrot. And for proof, when I have entered it, I will speak to thee from its body, and fly round the tree, and then return to my own.

So, then, as I stood scornfully, wondering how he would seek to deceive me, never dreaming that he could perform what he promised, that barber placed himself exactly before the parrot's body lying beside the tree. And he fixed his eye on it, and made a jap. And then, strange! as I watched, I saw him sink to the ground. And at that instant, exactly as he said, the parrot rose to its feet. And it bowed at me, saying, with his voice: Maháráj is the judge. And it rose from the ground, and flew round the tree, and returned to its place. And then, it also made a jap, and immediately, it sank once more dead upon the ground. But the body of that miserable barber rose up, and bowed to me, exactly like the bird before, saying: Maháráj is the judge. And as thou seest, it is very easy; for it has all taken place before thy eyes. And now I have made my words good. But let this experiment suffice, if the Mahárájá is afraid.

And I turned upon him, in wrath that as it were swallowed my amazement, and I exclaimed: Dog of a barber, dost thou dare to imagine that a Kshatriya descended from the sun is afraid of doing what such a thing as thou art dares with im-

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punity? But that as yet I do not know thy spell, I would sever thy impudent head from its body, for thy overweening impertinence. Teach me, without the loss of a moment, the secret of thy jap, and I will very soon show thee thy fault, by ocular demonstration. And if I do not beat thee soundly, on my return, it will be a boon, granted to thee only by reason of thy insignificance, and thy ignorance of manners that arises from the baseness of thy origin.

So I spoke, not knowing what that treacherous Kámarúpa meditated, and that for me there would be no return. And O that I had done what I said, and cut him into pieces! For now I understand, too late, that his words were cunning, and well chosen, to goad me like a spur into plunging head first into his snare. But he trembled, as I thought, for fear, but beyond a doubt, for delight, at seeing his object on the verge of attainment. And he said, cringing: Let the Mahárájá show mercy; for the object of this slave of his was only to deter him from risking such a shape as his own, where such a thing as I am risks what is worth less than nothing. But now, such changes as these are all accomplished by 'mantras,' handed down by hereditary tradition, from sage to sage: of which this is one. And then, he recited the spell, which was double, one for going out, and one for coming back, making me repeat it over and over again, until it was fixed without error in my memory. And then, he stood by, close beside me, saying in a voice that quavered with agitation, as well it might: Maháráj, it is not seemly that a body such as thine, with all the royal

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marks, should fall as mine did. So I will stand, to catch it and take far greater care of it than I did of my own.

And I, fool that I was! understood not, even then. But in my eagerness, I thought of nothing but the spell. And I fixed my eye on the parrot, and made the jap. And on the instant, I found myself in that parrot's body.

And then, even as I did so, I heard the echo of my own jap, shouted aloud, with a yell like thunder: Yathopadésham, Bhútáwésham! And as I looked from that parrot, I saw, not my body, but that of Kámarúpa, sink to the ground. But my body stood erect, like a pillar of triumph. And as I gazed in wonder, not understanding even yet, that execrable barber spoke to me from my own body, with exultation that was mixed with derision and revenge. And giving a kick to his old body, he said: Ha! Maháráj! now, then, it is my turn. And yet I bear no malice: and I will make thee a present of my old body, in exchange for thine. For even such as it is, it is better than a dead bird. But Maháráj is the judge.

And then, he got upon my horse, and rode away at full speed, leaving his hideous old body lying on the ground beside me.

CHAPTER XII

I remained, when he had gone, shut in that parrot's body, struck as by a thunderbolt with a lightning flash of understanding. And I lay long in a stupor; and then at last, I said to

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myself: Alas! alas! I am trapped, and have been taken unawares, and robbed of my very body and my caste and my descent, by this little scoundrel of a barber, and what is to be done now? Out on me, that I did not do vengeance on him, while yet I could, and cut his vile head from his body, before he got his chance! But now it is too late, and I am fast in the snare. And I looked at that barber's body, lying on the ground beside me, and shuddered with disgust. And I said to myself with horror: What! can it be? and must I absolutely take refuge in the body he has cast away? But what else can I do? For almost anything is better than remaining in this parrot. And moreover, who knows? For it will be only for a time, and as if I were to wear a very dirty clothing, having nothing else to wear. And in any case, I can get back, even in his body, to my palace, and catch him, and compel him to take it back, and restore me what is mine. And at the thought, I took courage. And I made the jap; and instantly I found myself in that very loathsome body, which had now become mine.

And then I began to weep. And I said to myself in anguish: What! can it be, that from Keshawa, I have become Kámarúpa? and instead of a King, a barber, by the arts of this low-caste shaver of heads and beards? And all at once, seized by a frenzy of rage, I began to run, filled with only one desire, to reach my palace as quickly as I could: tearing not only my clothes, but my body, on the thorns that threw themselves as if on purpose in my way, as much as to say: Do not return. But when,

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after a long struggle, I reached the place where I had left my attendants, I found them gone. So I followed them alone, and reached at last my palace gates. But lo! when I would have entered, the warders stopped me, saying: There is no admittance for thee, O thou deformed, for such are the orders of the King. And what hast thou done, in the forest? Beyond a doubt, thou must have misbehaved, for he is angry, and thou hast lost his favour more quickly even than thou didst gain it.

And hearing this, my reason fled. And I began to rave, exclaiming: Fools! I am the King, and that false King is an impostor, who has stolen my body. Then those guards all began to laugh. But seeing that a crowd collected, finally they grew angry, and drove me away, refusing to go, with blows, exclaiming: Why should we stand here, listening to the raving of this lunatic barber, whose head has been turned either by the King's favour, or by the sun in the forest, making him clean mad? And they pushed me away by main force, while the crowd followed me as I went, jeering, and pelting me with stones and filth. And others bowed before me with mock obeisance, calling to all that passed by to come and do honour to the new King. So they went on, dishonouring and befouling me, until at last growing tired, they left me, and went away, one by one, each on his own business. But I remained, lying alone in the street, not even knowing where to go, and without a home.

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CHAPTER XIII

SO I lay by the roadside, worn out, and oblivious of all around me, overwhelmed by the waves of insult and derision, and sore from innumerable blows. And at last, after a long swoon, I came suddenly to myself. And I stood up, and said to myself: Now, as it seems, this birth of mine has come suddenly to an abrupt conclusion, and I am shut in this loathsome barber's body more securely than even a dead man in his tomb. And it is vain even to dream of recovering my own body, since that is occupied by another, who will take good care never to return to his own. And I see only too clearly that there is absolutely no help for me, since no one will believe me, no matter what I say. So why should I lose time, since one thing only is in my power, and that is to escape, by abandoning this body, without the necessity of entering any other? So now, then, I will go at once to the river, and leap in; and then very soon, it will be all over, and ended, and forgotten, like an evil dream. Ay! beyond a doubt, the river now is my only refuge.

So as I spoke, I began to run, and at that very instant, once again I stopped short. And I said to myself: Ha! the river? And what, then, of Aparájitá? And how is it, that all at once I have suddenly forgotten all about her, ever since I set eyes on this abominable Kámarúpa; as if, like Ráhu,¹ he had swallowed her, like a digit of the moon? Did she

¹ The demon who causes eclipses by devouring the sun and moon.

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not bid me to return to her, of her own accord, if ever I needed help, as very certainly I need it now? And yet, what help can she give, or who could help any one at all, in such a case as this? And yet, who knows? For after all, she is a Nágt.

And then again, my heart sank. And I said: What! can I actually go and show myself, to her, not in my proper form, but in the vile disguise of this deformity? And if I do, surely she will shudder, and with reason, at the very sight of me? Or how could I ever get her to believe in what I say?

And long I stood irresolute, balanced in the swing of indecision, half ashamed, of appearing before thee in this guise, and half willing to believe in thy power to assist me. And at last, I said to myself: I will go, for what does it matter now, even if another drop is added to such a sea of shame. And even if she cannot help me, it may be that she can show me how to punish this body-stealer, and requite him for his crime. Ha! vengeance! Aye! I would buy vengeance, at the price of shame enough to fill up the seven seas. And at the thought, I set off running towards thee; and now I am here, and I have told thee, all that there is to tell.

CHAPTER XIV

SO when he ended, Aparájitá sat silent, looking at him with her chin upon her hand. And she said to herself: What would he say, if he knew, that I was the cause of all his tribulation? But now he is just as I would have him: and very soon I will make him reparation, and bathe

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him in a nectar that will cause him to forget it all. And I have done him a service that later on he will understand. For but for me, he would never have known the value of the thing that he has lost, as he fears, for ever. And little he suspects, that I am more anxious to get it back for him than even he is himself: prepared as he is to offer me almost any bribe, although, if he only knew it, he might command where he implores, since I am only too willing to be corrupted.

And seeing her silence, he said, as if despairing: What! dost thou, too, not believe me? But I am ready to repeat to thee the whole of our conversation, word for word, when I met thee by this very pool. For who was it that spoke to thee of women and of pundits, and who was it that shrank from thee and thy kisses, but myself? And who else knows it in the world, but thou and I. Fool that I was, imputing all the treason in the world to women, and thinking of them as monopolising deceit; for all the women put together could not compete with this Kámarúpa, in the laying of a snare. And now, if thou canst help me, I will never more do anything except by thy order, and I am ready to be thy shadow and thy slave, and as it were thy footstool, to the end of my life.

And Aparájitá said with a smile: Thine is a strange story, and yet I am compelled to believe thee, since who was it but the King who came to see me, and as thou sayest, who else knows it in the world? Moreover, such things happen in the world, as many stories show: and the power of spells is

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unlimited, though I cannot understand how Káma-rúpa managed to discover the secret of a spell so potent as was this. And somehow or other, he must have lurked in the bushes, and listened, and overheard our conversation, at the time of thy visit: since the actions of Kings are difficult to hide. And barbers crawl about everywhere, like ants, to pick up anything of advantage. And beyond a doubt, he saw me, and thought by this means to substitute himself for thee, understanding far better than thyself, the value of what I offered thee, and knowing very well, that the nectar of the moon is unattainable save only to the moonstone. And yet, O Barber King, can it really be possible that such a sage as thou art, armed with the lore of all the pundits, hast actually sunk so very low, as to be driven to seek assistance from a woman? Or hast thou changed thy very soul with thy body? Or if I am right, and that Barber secretly caught sight of me unawares, and fell in love with me, did he leave his affection behind him in that body, to become thine, by hereditary transmission?

And Keshawa said: Alas! O Aparájítá, I cannot answer thee, nor even so much as look thee in the face, so much am I ashamed, not so much of being tamed and defeated by thee, as of this sordid and dishonourable body which has banished me from thy affection, and stands now between us as an obstacle insurmountable even to the Lord of Obstacles; since where is the woman who could endure even to look at it? And now, alas! I resemble a lover who has fallen into the hands of an enemy and rival,

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and been by him maimed and mangled and outrageously disfigured, and returned, only to be rejected and despised by the very woman who loved to look at him before. And if thou loathest me, how can I blame thee, since I even loathe myself? Alas! then, when I was worthy of thy regard, I was a fool; and now that I have learned wisdom in another school than that of pundits, it is too late, and I am become an object of disgust, and repulsive to the nature of every woman in the world.

And Aparájitá began to laugh, and she said: Beware! O King. Trust not overmuch to thy knowledge of women, for they are apt to disappoint all expectation. And it may be so here. And yet I am inclined to agree with thee, that thy soul would be better in its old body than in this; for that was a palace, but this is a hut. And what if I could recover for thee thy old body? Come, shall we make a bargain? If I can help thee back to thy royal body, wilt thou agree to let me share it with thee, so as to resemble 'the Moony-crested God and the Daughter of the Snow'?¹

And the King said with emphasis: Ah! share it? Nay, count it as absolutely and wholly thine, with the soul inside it thrown into the bargain, so only that I get it back.

Then said Aparájitá: Ha! now thou hast come to thy senses, and become wise indeed. And it may be after all, that this momentary sojourn in a

¹ 'Ardhanārī' - 'he that is half male half female' is a common name for the two deities together: a symbol of the inseparable union of a couple devoted to each other.

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degraded body will turn out to thy advantage, enlightening that soul which has run so great a risk, and removing those clouds which hid from its vision its polar star. And now, then, O thou lover of mine, I will show thee that the wit of a woman can achieve what all the pundits in the world could not hit upon even in a dream. Well was it, when thou didst determine to abandon thy own sagacity for mine.

And suddenly she started up, and listened, and running to the bushes, she peeped through, and returned. And she exclaimed: Ha! now I was right, and we are only just in time. For just as I anticipated, yonder is Kámarúpa himself coming in thy form, to use thy body as his instrument in the bewitching of me. And she leaned towards the King, and said in a low voice, with a smile that resembled a caress: And well he might, and yet he little guesses how potent is the spell. But now, there is no time to lose. But luckily that upstart fool is coming with attendants, giving us, as if on purpose, warning of his approach: for had he come alone, he might have stolen on us unawares, and ruined all. And now, then, I will teach him the danger of employing spells, by subjecting him to another more powerful than his own. But go thou quickly into yonder bush, and lie hidden, and beware! I say, beware! of betraying thyself, or giving the least inkling of thy presence, by any noise or sign. But listen, and look, and do not miss thy opportunity, when it comes; for if thou dost, it will never come again. But thou hast not forgotten

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the spell? And Keshawa said: No, indeed! Then she said: Keep it ready on the very edge of thy lips, and use it, when the time comes, without losing a single instant.

And once more, she leaned towards him, and said in a whisper: Go now, and remember that my life is staked on the skill of thy performance, as well as thine. And when thou hast regained thy own beautiful body, perhaps after all, I will prove to thee that thou hast lost nothing of my affection: but not till then. For one thing I will tell thee about a woman, that while she loves one man, she will not kiss another: and thou art for the moment a stranger, even to thyself.

And as the King hid himself, she laid her finger on her lip, saying: Be wary! And then, all at once, she plunged into the pool and disappeared.

CHAPTER XV

AND then, as the King lay hidden, waiting, and wondering why in the world she had gone away, all at once he saw his old body enter, with Kámarúpa in it, through the trees. And when he entered, that barber in a king's disguise stood still, looking round; and presently he said aloud, as if in disappointment: Why, there is no one here; and as it seems, my arrival is unlucky.

And as he spoke, Aparájitá suddenly rose up out of the pool, carrying in her arms, with difficulty, an enormous silver fish, nearly as big as she was herself. And she laid it down upon the slab, where as a rule she sat herself, and threw herself

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down beside it, with the water running from her limbs, and her wet hair clinging round her exactly as it pleased. And then she began to weep, wringing her hands and wailing, mingling the water dropping from her body with the torrent of her tears. And she looked as if, buried in the extremity of her own emotion, she had utterly forgotten not only everything around her, but even who or where she was. And as for Kámarúpa, she never so much as cast a glance in his direction, paying no more attention to his presence than as if he were merely one among the trees.

So he stood, watching her with curiosity and amazement in his eyes, and after a while, he said to himself: She thinks she is alone, and is wholly unaware, who it is that is looking on. But what in the world can be the matter, for surely such extraordinary grief cannot possibly be occasioned by the fish? And yet, why did she drag it from the water at all, if, as it seems, it is dead? And as he watched in silence, wondering what she could possibly be doing with a fish so large, presently he said again: Ha! but after all, what does the fish matter? For somehow or other, she looks even more wonderfully beautiful, now that she is weeping, than she did before. And now, very soon, I shall discover, whether I am not better off now than I was before, and what effect this body will have on her affection. For I have not taken long to learn, that a body makes all the difference between contempt and honour: and this one seems to be a spell more potent than the other which she

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taught me, by which I obtained all: seeing that I have not seen a single sun set, since it became my own, and yet every woman I have met gazes at me as if she were a Rádhá bewildered by her own adoration of the slayer of Kamsa,¹ in my form. And who knows whether she did not help me to this royal body expressly to get it for herself?

So as he stood reflecting, Aparájitá stole at him a glance unobserved, through the meshes of her hair. And she said to herself as she wept: Ha! now it is as clear as the sun in heaven that that glorious body is occupied by the wrong soul: for its bearing is altogether different, as if it were tenanted by vanity instead of pride, and self-conceit instead of dignity, having lost its caste, and standing glaring at me, with eyes that are filled not with affection but with lust. And he resembles exactly what he is, a little thief wearing clothes that do not suit him; and somehow or other, the spirit of a Kshatriya is gone, and everything about him is different, although the same: as if the soul of a crow had managed to inhabit the feathers of a royal swan. But if I am not mistaken, he will discover, before very long, that he consulted bad astrologers in choosing the moment of his coming: for the 'muhurta' is inauspicious, and the constellations frown. But now I must play my part adroitly, for certainly it is not a little lure that will tempt him to abandon that body for any other, even for an instant.

And after a while, finding his presence utterly

¹ I.e. Krishna: who preferred Rádhá to all the other milkmaids.

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ignored, that impatient Kámarúpa called to her, saying: Aparájitá, O Aparájitá! And presently she answered, without turning round: Go away, O thou that callest, go away; for I have no leisure. And he said again: Surely thou hast leisure for a King's occasion. But what is it that so sorely distresses thee? And still she replied without turning: King or no king, I care not. Ah! woe! alas! alas! my mīna,¹ my mīna, my timi, my mīna! Then he said: And what as to thy mīna? And she exclaimed, raining tears on the fish as if she were endeavouring to revive it by a very flood of its own element: Alas! it is dead.

And Kámarúpa said with amazement that was mixed with irritation: What! can it be? All this flood of tears, for nothing but a dead fish!

And instantly, Aparájitá exclaimed with a shriek: Dead! Ah! no! it cannot be. Dead! O my beautiful mīna with silver scales, that wert wont to leap for my delight, shooting hither and thither in the dusky water like the new moon in the great god's hair, never will I consent to thy being actually dead. What! never again to gambol in the pool! shall I never again behold thee nibbling the stalks of the blue lotuses till they sank towards the pool, as if wishing to kiss their own images in its mirror of black? Alas! my timi, what is the use of life, now that thou art gone? Thou hast deserted thy companion, to vanish from the pool in the infinite ocean

¹ Pronounce 'meen' and 'timmy' - these are different names for a fish.

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of death, where nothing that is lost can ever be found again.

And so as she wept, bathing the fish with a very river of tears, as if to afford it the opportunity of swimming once more, Kámarúpa gazed at her in stupefaction. And gradually there came over him a feeling of impatience that was half annoyance, and half an irresistible desire to laugh. And restraining himself, yet with difficulty, he said: O Aparájitá, surely this is unbecoming, and a thing unheard of, that such a one as thou art should be plunged in such a passionate ocean of grief, for a mere fish. Come, if one is dead, there are innumerable others, so exactly resembling this one that thou couldst not tell one from another. Is this the only fish in the threeworlds? Why, as I think, thou art deceiving thyself, and mistaking a fish for the god who carries a fish on his banner, since thou couldst not weep more copiously even wert thou Rati herself, lamenting the loss of her lord's body.'

And as she listened, Aparájitá laughed in her sleeve, and she said to herself: Ha! now, all unaware, he has laid his finger on the very truth. But for her only answer, she burst anew into a very storm of tears, till it seemed as though she were on the very verge of dissolving into water, having absolutely nothing left but a soul of grief and a pool of tears. And as she wept, she threw her bare arms here and there, rocking herself to and fro, half wailing and half laughing, with a voice that sounded

beautifully given expression to her lament in the fourth canto of the 'Kumárasambhawa.'

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like the echo of the river's fall, and bewildering the soul of Kámarúpa as he watched her with a very maze of soft curves inextricably tangled with the confusion of her hair. And after a while he said: Come, O Aparájitá, enough of lamentations. And this shall be my affair. For I will fill thy pool to the very brim with fish of every kind and colour, if only thou wilt cease from thy tears, and let me tell thee of myself. For I came here to talk to thee of other things than dead fish. For now I have escaped from my miserable old barber's body, and I have come to lay this glorious new body like a present at thy feet. And there is not a woman in the city who would not think that in obtaining me for a husband, she had gained the very fruit of her birth.

CHAPTER XVI

AND Aparájitá said: What have I to do with kings or barbers? I care not a straw, whether thou art either, or both: for neither king nor barber can give back its life to my mína. If indeed thou wert a physician, such as Dhanwantari, able to bring the very dead to life, ah! then indeed I would welcome thee in my very arms. And all at once, she started up, and ran towards him, holding out both her arms, looking at him with eyes filled as it were with longing and entreaty: and in an instant, she let her arms fall, in dejection, to her sides, and turned away, saying: But alas! I was only dreaming, and what is the use of thee, who art no Dhanwantari, but only a common King. And she threw herself upon the ground beside the

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fish, at full length, burying her face in her hair. And as she lay, the long sweep of her great hip rose like a sandbank out of her hair, as if expressly challenging the admiration of his eyes, and saying as it were: Find another outline that can rival mine, if anywhere thou canst.

And Kámarúpa, utterly bewildered by her beauty and her behaviour, which had become as it were allies to effect his intoxication, stood looking at her in perplexity, saying to himself: Out upon this accursed fish! for its death was unlucky, occurring at a moment most inopportune for me. And beyond all doubt, her emotion is sincere, though it is altogether incomprehensible, for who ever saw a woman weep like she does, and all for a fish? But when, if ever, will she stop, and what is to be done now? And yet, I know not how, her weeping becomes her, and resembles an adornment added to her beauty, bestowing on her as it were an atmosphere of jewels, resembling rain and sunshine falling both together on a bough of jasmine blossom. And yet I cannot understand. Surely she must have the soul of a very child in that beautiful woman's body, to cry like the rainy season in a woman's form over a broken toy.

And all at once, she rose abruptly from the ground, and sitting down beside the fish, took its head upon her lap, and began to rock it to and fro, as if it were a child; kissing it from time to time, and casting, every now and then, a rapid glance at Kámarúpa, out of the corner of her eye. And presently he said: O Aparájitá, there are other things

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much better suited than this fish to become the object of thy affection; nor is there any reason why thou shouldst be so exceedingly contemptuous of Kings. For though they are unable to give life to the dead, they can add life to the living. And as for me, what is there that I would not do, for thee? And Aparájitá said: I want absolutely nothing, but life for my silver mīna.

And Kámarúpa said angrily: Why harp so on thy mīna? How can I give a soul to a dead body? Am I, forsooth, the Creator? And is not a living husband worth as much as a dead fish, above all when he is a King? And I will make thee a Queen, and blot that lifeless fish from thy memory by a deluge of delight.

And she set her head sideways, so that her right ear almost touched her shoulder, and she let the fish slip to the ground, and looked at him a long while, with dreamy eyes that were half shut, as if she were appraising him. And after a while, she murmured, as if speaking to herself: He speaks truth, and many must be the women who would jump at his offer; for beyond a doubt, he is very handsome, and a King over and above. And she went on gazing, as if she were deliberating, and weighing him in the balance, winding a cord of her hair with one hand about the other, while the fish lay beside her, as if it were half forgotten. And the soul of Kámarúpa smiled as it were within himself, swelling with pride at her admiration. And he said to himself, with exultation: Ha! the spell is working; for now, as I foresaw, I am become an object

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very different from what I was before, possessing as I do a body that is a magnet, and an object of desire in the eyes of every woman. And he, at whom no woman had looked with anything but derision, began as it were, to bathe in the nectar of her approval, exactly like a peacock that spreads his tail before the eyes of the hen.

And then he said: Whatever I am, O Aparájitá, I have absolutely no desire but to serve thee, in any way thou wilt. Come, cast away the carcase of this fish into the pool, and I will make up to thee a thousandfold for its loss. But Aparájitá answered slowly: Nay, O King, thou hast misunderstood me altogether. For I am not one either to love or to forget with ease, as if I were in a hurry. For what I love, I love much, and I love long. And yet it might have been, had circumstances been other than as a fact they are, that I could have found it in my heart, to love thee. But as it is, thou art very cruel, endeavouring insidiously to bribe me, and stealing my affection, ousting from my heart my beloved mīna, to substitute thyself.

And Kāmarūpa answered eagerly: Nay, nay, O Aparájitá, not so. But love thy mīna how thou wilt, thou canst not possibly deny that it is dead. And dost thou actually purpose to spend all the remainder of thy life, as it were, in the shadow of its death? Will not a royal lover help to turn the balance, and console thee for its loss?

And then, without giving him any answer, Aparájitá began to look, first at the fish, and then at him, and then again from him to the fish, and back again.

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And gradually, in this going and coming of her glances, there came as it were by stealth into her eyes as it were the dawn of indecision. And every time her eyes met those of that enraptured Kámarúpa, there stole over her lips as it were the shadow of a smile, as if it were half afraid lest it should be punished for being there at all. And those glances entered the heart of Kámarúpa like diamond arrows tipped as it were with fire, that began to consume it like tinder in a flame. And he murmured to himself: Now beyond a doubt, she is beginning as it were to waver, and falling victim to hesitation, balancing herself dangerously in the swing of a comparison that will end in my favour. And at the thought, suddenly there shot up in his soul a very fire, and a frenzy of the nectar of anticipation, so that unaware he began to tremble with delight. And all at once she said, not looking at him at all, but lowering her eyes, so that her long lashes, seizing their opportunity, began to caress her upper lip: What if I became thy Queen? Say, wouldst thou build me a mausoleum for my mina?

And Kámarúpa answered in agitation: I will erect for it a tower, such as even Kings have never had to keep their memory alive.

CHAPTER XVII

AND Aparájitá remained a while, with her eyes still fixed upon the ground, kneeling before him, and then all at once, she lifted suddenly the lids, like curtains, from her eyes, and shot at that tremulous Kámarúpa a glance that sud-

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denly reduced his soul to ashes more effectually than even I myself annihilated the body of the god of love. And then she turned away, and spoke to the fish with her two hands joined together. And she murmured in a voice whose regretful self-reproach caressed that listening Kámarúpa with a flattery that almost deprived him of his reason: Alas! dear timi, here am I already playing the traitor to thy memory, and as it seems, on the very verge of forsaking thee for another; and yet it is but a moment since thou wert still alive. Out, out upon the hearts of women, whose affections are more fickle than the wind, resembling flies that are caught by the honey of extreme beauty in an irresistible male form! And yet, can it be, that even beauty such as his can bring me to be false to thee? Nay, even if thou couldst forgive me, never could I forgive myself.

And suddenly, she began again to weep, while the heart of Kámarúpa almost burst in his body, with pride, that was mixed with such impatience that he could with difficulty endure. And he exclaimed to himself: Ha! she was wavering, but now she is on the very eve of yielding, finding herself utterly unable to resist my spell, and yet reproaching herself, as if she were to blame for her delicious weakness. And the delight that surged in his soul was suddenly flooded with conceit, so that unaware he began to look on her almost with condescension, as if he were already all but her lord and owner. And as he watched her, he said again: Ha! now I can even forgive her for her

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tormenting devotion to this miserable fish; for troublesome as it was, it sprang from her very nature, which, all unaware, she has betrayed, by showing herself to me torn as it were in two, being half a woman, yielding with reluctance to a lover whom in spite of herself she finds it impossible to resist, and half a child, parting regretfully with an old toy, and crying with the new one in its hand. And yet, can it really be possible that in a very little while, I shall actually have her for my own, and bathe in the nectar of kissing her as often as I please.

And so as he thought, suddenly she threw, as it were, a jar of oil upon the flame that was beginning to burn him to a cinder. For she kissed her *mīna*, as if bidding it good-bye, and stole a glance at *Kāmarūpa*, out of the very corner of her eye, as though to say: Thy turn is coming. And suddenly she said to him: Make it not a reproach to me, *Mahārāj*, in the future, if, subdued by thee, I abandon my *mīna*. For it is thy fault, rather than mine, after all. And she looked at him, as if asking to be forgiven for a fault, and then, all at once, she broke into a smile, till the heart of *Kāmarūpa* began to flutter like a bird about to be released from its cage. And he answered, in a low voice, that shook with agitation: Be under no concern, for I will take all the blame.

And she suddenly stood up, and came towards him, very slowly, looking back over her shoulder at the fish as it lay. And *Kāmarūpa* made a stride to meet her, but she stopped him on the way, put-

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ting up her hand to forbid it, and exclaiming: Nay, stand thou there, absolutely still, for a little. And as he stood in obedience, yet waiting like a hound expecting the order to leap onward, and straining as it were on the leash,¹ she remained, as if poised exactly in the middle, between him and her mīna. And looking from one to the other, she caught up suddenly a strand of her own hair, and putting it in her mouth, she seized it in her teeth, and stood pulling it with her left hand, and gazing at him with a brow wrinkled awry with perplexity, and eyes that were filled with doubt and irresolution. And so as she stood, she resembled a feminine incarnation of indecision, that was waiting to be pushed or pulled into a conclusion that she could not make for herself, by some accidental impulse coming from outside. And then, just as he was in the very act of springing towards her, to make the scale sink in his own favour, utterly unable to control any longer the fierce impatience that was boiling in his soul, she struck her hands together, and exclaimed with a sigh: It is over, and I have decided. Nay, nay, it cannot be. But as for thee, go away at once, without losing another moment: for the strain is at breaking-point, and I cannot answer for my resolution, unless the temptation is instantly withdrawn.

And Kāmarūpa, driven beyond endurance by a

¹ The English reader may peruse, in the excellent translation of Bāna's 'Harshacharita,' by Messrs. Cowell and Thomas, an amusing euphuistic description of the paraphernalia of a Rājā's camp, on p. 209.

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disappointment that snatched his triumph from his very lips in the very act of tasting, cried out: Ah! Aparájitá. And he stopped short. For she made a step towards her mína, and sank down, all at once, to the ground, just as if she were about to swoon. But she put out her hand, in deprecation, and she said, in a low voice: Away! and urge me no more, for I have chosen. I cannot play the traitor. And I make thee, O my mína, the judge between us. Bid me to abandon thee, if I must, and then only will I leave thee. Ay! then only will I leave thee, for this dream of a royal husband, when I am bidden, and as it were, dismissed and forgiven, by thy own mouth. Go, O King, for thy hope is at an end.

And as she closed her eyes, pale with her own emotion, there came suddenly into Kámarúpa's soul, a thought. And he started, and he said to himself: Ha! now, then, she has, unawares, outwitted herself, having utterly forgotten, by reason of her agitation, all about the spell. And instantly, controlling his own emotion, yet with difficulty, he exclaimed, with feigned despair: Alas! Aparájitá, is this thy decision? What! is this to be my doom? But surely thou art jesting? What! and wilt thou actually mock me, by such a miserable evasion, and shift the blame for thy cruelty, and laugh at me by setting my fate, upon the fish, knowing only too well, that its speaking is impossible, even if it were alive? And Aparájitá said, weeping: Reproach me not, for I must have something, stronger than myself, between thee and me. And he said:

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It cannot be. Thou art jesting. And she said: Nay indeed, it is no jest. And he said in wrath: What! and must I wait for my wife until this fish consents? Why, that will not be for another 'kalpa.' And she said: Then must I remain unmarried, under a vow, and a curse, whose termination shall arrive only by consent of my mīna. And Kāmarūpa said scornfully: It is enough, and thou art only prevaricating, as a mere excuse for sending me away. Aye! I understand. And even if the fish spoke, thou wouldst belie thyself, finding some other excuse to deny me still.

And Aparājita burst into a passion of tears. And she said very slowly, sobbing as if her very heart was broken: Thou art unkind, and very cruel. For thou seest only too well, my condition; as indeed, I desire, what thou also desirest, even more than thyself, the consent of my mīna: which if I could but obtain, I would cast myself straight into thy arms.

And Kāmarūpa said to himself, in exultation: She is mine; and now, then, I will astonish her, and hold her to her word: for it will only take a moment to return. And he fixed his eye upon the fish, and made the jap. And instantly he entered the body of the fish, and spoke from its mouth, saying: O *fish*, marry the King; I give my consent.

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CHAPTER XVIII

AND as he spoke, he heard a shout, that fell on his ear like a clap of poisoned thunder: *Gatásorasya, Smarámritasya.*¹ And to his amazement, he saw his old body burst through the bushes, and fall upon its face: while at the same instant, the body of the King, which he had only just abandoned, stood erect. And instantly, Aparájitá started up, with a cry of joy, and threw herself into the King's arms: saying as she did so: Thanks, O most magnanimous fish! I obey thy bidding, and keep my promise. And the termination both of my curse and of my maiden state, has arrived.

And then, there came suddenly from that fish a scream that ended in a wail. And hearing it, Aparájitá began to laugh, exclaiming: Alas! O unhappy fish, why hast thou come back to life, when death was better? But Keshawa put her aside, and drew his sword. And he said: Now, then, thou robber of other people's bodies, return, without losing a moment, to the nectar of thy own. Make the jap, quickly, for I will divide this fish in two pieces, as soon as I have counted ten.

And then he began to count. And that unlucky barber, seeing that there was no help for it, made the jap, very much against his will: and entered his old body. And at that moment, the King said: Ten: and he cut the fish in two, with a single blow. And then, he turned, and seized that trembling Káma-

¹ See note, p. 54.

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rūpa by the throat, exclaiming: Now, then, body-snatcher, I have thee, and there is no escape. Lie down: for I am about to do to thee exactly as I did to the fish. And I promise thee, it shall be done at a single blow.

But Aparájitá caught him by the other arm. And she said: Nay, O my husband, not so. Let him alone, and let him go. And he will have lost nothing, for he is just what he was before. But that will be his punishment, to remember all his life the words of the spell,¹ as I think he will not easily forget them, or the heaven out of which he has been ejected. And Keshawa said: Be it so. But get thee gone, body-stealer, and beware! for if I ever see thee again, remember the fish! For I will not forgive thee, twice.

So, then, as the attendants of the King waited for him outside, they looked, and suddenly they saw Kámarūpa issue from the trees exactly where Keshawa had entered. And that unhappy barber was running very fast, wringing his hands, and wailing, and exclaiming: I was the King, I was the King. And hearing him, those attendants were lost in astonishment and laughter, saying to each other: Why, here is this miserable barber again, dropped as it were from the sky! And doubtless the King has come across him, and sent him about his business. And beyond all doubt, he is mad. For only this morning, in the city, he was saying: I am the King. And now, here he is again in the wood, say-

¹ See note, p. 54.

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ing: I was the King. And it only remains for him to say: I will be the King: as would be far better. For anything may happen in course of time. And who knows? For it maybe, the Creator will make him a King in his next birth, to console him for having been only a wretched barber, in this. And so he will be right after all.

And when he was gone, those two lovers rushed like fire into each other's arms: and for a long time they did nothing at all but kiss each other. And after a while, Keshawa said: See, now, thou art a greater thief than even Kámarúpa. For he only stole my body, but thou hast stolen my very soul. And even without making any jap, it has of its own accord abandoned my body to inhabit thine. And Aparájitá said with a smile: Nay, thou art unjust: for it is thou thyself that art the greatest thief of the three. For even if he stole thy body, and as thou sayest, I, thy soul, thou hast done even worse: since thou hast stolen me body and soul, leaving me absolutely nothing at all - a thing like thy shadow on the ground, and thy image in the water, and the echo of thy voice, existing only by relation to thy existence, whose essence is nonentity, save only by reduplicating and reverberating thee.

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AND Maheshwara stopped. And Párwat said instantly: I believe not Aparájítá, and put no faith in her cajolery; for what was she after all but a cunning little rogue? And who knows, whether Keshawa did not discover to his cost that his original opinions as to the unsteadiness of women were better founded than he knew, and destined to be verified in his case after all?

And the Mooney-crested deity laughed, and he said: Ha! now, O Daughter of the Snow, thy sagacity is unerring; and there is nothing like one woman for penetrating another. For it turned out exactly as thou hast divined, and Aparájítá did indeed abandon him, notwithstanding all her protestations, after living with him for a year, leaving him in the lurch, with nothing but a daughter the very image of herself, as if to console him for her loss. And this is nearly always the behaviour of such elemental sprites as Aparájítá, who are neither gods nor mortals, but something intermediate, and always wayward and capricious and haphazard in all their actions and affections, which are as fleeting and unsubstantially lovely as the ruddy glow of eve, which is neither night nor day. And the whole race of heavenly nymphs, such as Apsarases, and Widyádharts, and Nágis and the rest, is fickle in its

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very essence, and tremulous and utterly unstable, as the histories of Menaká, and Urwashí, and all the others show. And as the future disclosed, the experience of Keshawa, as life went on, threw out and disappointed all the elaborate preparations of his father, whose example he followed, much against his will, and whose conjugal misfortunes were the image of his own. For mortals strive in vain, by no matter what exertions, to avert that fate that is indelibly dyed in their souls by the actions of a previous existence: and like weavers they must work out, will they nill they, the web whose pattern they carry within them, resembling, as they move on, bullocks, dragged by a rope tied fast to their horns along the road they will not go.

But now, then, tell me, O thou sagacious to divine, how as to the thief? Was it, as Aparájitá declared, the King: or as he said, she herself: or was not Kámarúpa rather the thief? And who was the greatest thief of all?

And the Daughter of the Snow said, with emphasis, and without deliberating even for a moment: Beyond all doubt, it was she herself who was the true thief, and the worst of all. For what were Kámarúpa and Keshawa but puppets in her hands?

And instantly, the Lord of Creatures laughed aloud. And he said: Aha! O Snowy One, I have caught thee, spreading for thee a cunning snare: and thy guess is wide of the mark, for the true culprit has escaped thy detection, after all. For not only Keshawa and Kámarúpa, but Aparájitá her-

A Foregone Conclusion

self as well, what were they all, but puppets and playthings of that thief of thieves, the god who carries on his banner a fish, as the story itself might have taught thee? for I gave thee a hint, to which thy detestation of Aparájitá blinded thy eyes, and the fish was all along nothing whatever but a symbol of the god, and as it were an enigma, to which he was the key.¹ For he it was who stole the soul of Aparájitá by means of the Keshawa-Kámarúpa body, and so inspired and incited her to contrive with such craft a cunning scheme, by which her two lovers were so to say combined, losing and then recovering their bodies, and all with no other object than that she might gain her point, and obtain the possession of Keshawa herself, body and soul. For there is not in the world any longing like the longing of a woman for a man, such as Keshawa was, framed as if by Kámadewa himself of exactly such a form as to strike her like an arrow in the very middle of her heart; and obtain him, then, she must and will, by hook or crook, no matter how, trampling without compunction on everything that stands in the way. For the soul of every woman yearns to give itself away, only she can hardly ever find the true recipient. But when, by the decree of destiny, she does, she becomes in that instant fiercer than a tiger, and more cunning than Brihaspati, and more insatiable than Yama and all that in the end, she may fall into the arms of her lover at last, as Aparájitá

¹ This is far more easily apparent in the original. The 'fish,' 'mína,' corresponds with the god, 'mínakétu': a common name for Kámadewa.

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did, with a sigh, more softly than a snowflake, and sweeter than the nectar oozing at midnight from a digit of the moon. And of this, Love is the cause, who escaped thy notice, because, being cunning and a very rogue, he remained himself hidden behind the curtain of the invisible, pulling all the strings, and managing the whole imbroglio from first to last, and from seed to fruit, unseen. As is indeed his practice: for who but himself is the origin of nearly all the mischief in the three worlds, throwing all others into an abyss of misfortune, and coming off himself scot-free. For never yet has he come to grief, except on one occasion, and that was partly his fault, and partly thine. For he ought to have known better, for all his insolence, than to interrupt my meditation. And I told thee the real culprit even before I began, but I caught thee in the end, by finishing the story so as to take thee off thy guard. So, now, thou hast lost our wager, and it is for me to name my reward.

Then said Párwatī: What is the use of paying thee a forfeit; for what can there be, in all the three worlds, which I can give thee, of which thou art in need?

And Maheshwara looked at her keenly, and he said to himself: Now, then, I will catch her, and surprise her again. For she is thinking, that I will ask her for a kiss: but it will turn out contrary to her expectation. And he said aloud: O Daughter of the Snow, there is one thing I need, which thou canst give, but hast never given yet.

And she said, with curiosity: What is that?

A Foregone Conclusion

And he answered: Give me thy forgiveness of Gangá, for living in my hair.

And instantly, that mountain daughter started up, swelling with indignation. And she exclaimed: Ha! thou art a deceiver. Dwell alone, with Gangá for thy companion; for I will abandon thee. And she disappeared, like a flash of lightning, and went elsewhere.

And Maheshwara smiled, and he said to himself as he sat alone: Ha! when she is angry, she is beautiful indeed. And by and by she will return, when her fit of jealousy is over: for she cannot live without me: and she knows, moreover, very well, that it is vain to quarrel, on this head, and to set herself in opposition to my attributes: since I could no more exist without Gangá in my hair, than she could herself, without jealousy.¹ For after all she is a woman, even though a goddess, and if women were not jealous, they would not be women at all. But now that she is gone, I will seize my opportunity, and show favour to my followers, by bestowing on them the boon of my presence.

And then, in the twinkling of an eye, he reached Kailás, and summoned his attendants, who came by being thought of. And surrounded by those ghosts and demons, that lord of goblins rushed for his own amusement like a snowstorm over the hills,

¹ Maheshwara's other half is always represented as jealous, and especially of Gangá, the river Ganges, which wanders in his hair. [You see her, personified as a female, sticking from his head in the temple sculptures.] But such a wife as Sati, who is really her lord's other half, has perhaps a right to be jealous, after all.

The Livery of Eve

roaring as they cast at one another in play rocks and blocks of ice and trees, with loud shouts of laughter that mingled with the echoes of the rolling of the thunder, striking terror into the timid hearts of the Kirátas' lovely wives, who shook with beautiful agitation, as if striving to keep time with the bushy tails of the yaks that waved in the wind singing in the hollows of the mountain caves.

HERE ENDS THE LIVERY OF EVE,
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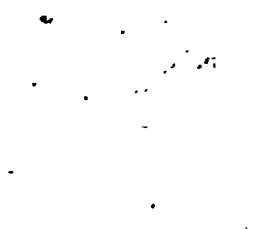
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XIX



**THE INDIAN STORIES
OF F. W. BAIN**

A Digit of the Moon
The Descent of the Sun
A Heifer of the Dawn
In the Great God's Hair
A Draught of the Blue
An Essence of the Dusk
An Incarnation of the Snow
A Mine of Faults
The Ashes of a God
Bubbles of the Foam
A Syrup of the Bees
The Livery of Eve
The Substance of a Dream



