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THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT

By George Meredith

AN ARABIAN ENTERTAINMENT

1898/1909

BOOK 3.

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THE LILY OF THE ENCHANTED SEA

Now, after the cockle-shell had skimmed calmly awhile, it began to pitch and grew unquiet, and came upon a surging foam, pale, and with scintillating bubbles. The surges increased in volume, and boiled, hissing as with anger, like savage animals. Presently, the cockle-shell rose upon one very lofty swell, and Shibli Bagarag lost hold of it, and lo! it was overturned and engulfed in the descent of the great mountain of water, and the Princess Goorelka was immersed in the depths. She would have sunk, but Shibli Bagarag caught hold of her, and supported her to the shore by the strength of his right arm. The shore was one of sand and shells, their wet cheeks sparkling in the moonlight; over it hung a promontory, a huge jut of black rock. Now, the Princess when she landed, seeing not him that supported her, delayed not to run beneath the rock, and ascended by steps cut from the base of the

rock. And Shibli Bagarag followed her by winding paths round the rock, till she came to the highest peak commanding the circle of the Enchanted Sea, and glimpses of enthralled vessels, and mariners bewitched on board; long paths of starlight rippled into the distant gloom, and the reflection of the moon opposite was as a wide nuptial sheet of silver on the waters: islands, green and white, and with soft music floating from their foliage, sailed slowly to and fro. Surely, to dwell reclining among the slopes of those islands a man would forfeit Paradise! Now, the Princess, as she stood upon the peak, knew that she was not alone, and pretended to slip from her footing, and Shibli Bagarag called out and ran to her; but she turned in the direction of his voice and laughed, and he knew he was outwitted. Then, to deceive her, he dropped from the phial twenty drops round her on the rock, and those twenty drops became twenty voices, so that she was bewildered with their calls, and stopped her ears, and ran from them, and descended from the eminence nimbly, slipping over ledges and leaping the abysses. And Shibli Bagarag followed her, clutching at the trailers and tearing them with him, letting loose a torrent of stones and earth, till on a sudden they stood together above a greenswarded basin of the rock opening to the sea; and in the middle of the basin, lo! in stature like a maiden of the mountains, and one that droopeth her head pensively thinking of her absent lover, the Enchanted Lily. Wonder knocked at the breast of Shibli Bagarag when he saw that queenly flower waving its illumined head to the breeze: he could not retain a cry of rapture. As he did this the Princess stretched her hand to where he was and groped a moment, and caught him by the silken dress and tore in it a great rent, and by the rent he stood revealed to her. Then said she, 'O youth, thou halt done ill to follow me here, and the danger of it is past computing; surely, the motive was a deep one, nought other than the love of me.'

She spoke winningly, sweet words to a luted voice, and the youth fell upon his knees before her, smitten by her beauty; and he said, 'I followed thee here as I would follow such loveliness to the gates of doom, O Princess of Oolb.'

She smiled and said playfully, 'I will read by thy hand whether thou be one faithful in love.'

She took his hand and sprinkled on it earth and gravel, and commenced scanning it curiously. As she scanned it her forehead wrinkled up, and a shot like black lightning travelled across her countenance, withering its beauty: she cried in a forced voice, 'Aha! it is well, O youth, for thee and for me that thou lovest me, and art faithful in love.'

The look of the Princess of Oolb and her voice affrighted the soul of Shibli Bagarag, and he would have turned from her; but she held him, and went to the Lily, and emptied into the palm of her hand the dew that was in the Lily, and raised it to the lips of Shibli Bagarag, bidding him drink as a pledge for her sake and her love, and to appease his thirst. As he was about to drink, there fell into the palm of the Princess from above what seemed a bolt of storm scattering the dew; and after he had blinked with the suddenness of the action he looked and beheld the hawk, its red eyes inflamed with wrath. And the hawk screamed into the ear of Shibli Bagarag, 'Pluck up the Lily ere it is too late, O fool!—the dew was poison! Pluck it by the root with thy right hand!'

So thereat he strode to the Lily, and grasped it, and pulled with his strength; and the Lily was loosened, and yielded, and came forth streaming with blood from the bulb of the root; surely the bulb of the root was a palpitating heart, yet warm, even as that we have within our bosoms.

Now, from the terror of that sight the Princess hid her eyes, and shrank away. And the lines of malice, avarice, and envy seemed ageing her at every breath. Then the hawk pecked at her three pecks, and perched on a corner of rock, and called shrilly the name 'Karaz!' And the Genie Karaz came slanting down the night air, like a preying bird, and stood among them. So the hawk cried, 'See, O Karaz, the freshness of thy Princess of Oolb'; and the Genie regarded her till loathing curled his lip, for she grew in ghastliness to the colour of a frog, and a frog's face was hers, a camel's back, a pelican's throat, the legs of a peacock.

Then the hawk cried, 'Is this how ye meet, ye lovers,—ye that will be wedded?' And the hawk made his tongue as a thorn to them. At the last it exclaimed, 'Now let us fight our battle, Karaz!'

But the Genie said, 'Nay, there will come a time for that, traitress!'

The hawk cried, 'Thou delayest, till the phial of Paravid, the hairs of Garraveen, and this Lily, my three helps, are expended, thinking Aklis, for which we barter them, striketh but a single blow? That is well! Go, then, and take thy Princess, and obtain permission of the King of Oolb, her father, to wed her, O Karaz!'

The hawk whistled with laughter, and the Genie was stung with its mockeries, and clutched the Princess of Oolb in a bunch, and arose from the ground with her, slanting up the night-air like fire, till he was seen high up even as an angry star reddening the seas beneath.

When he was lost to the eye, Shibli Bagarag drew a long breath and cried aloud, 'The likeness of that Princess of Oolb in her ugliness to Noorna, my betrothed, is a thing marvellous, if it be not she herself.' And he reflected, 'Yet she seemed not to recognize and claim me'; and thought, 'I am bound to her by gratitude, and I should have rescued her from Karaz, but I know not if it be she. Wullahy! I am bewildered; I will ask counsel of the hawk.' He looked to the corner of the rock where the hawk had perched, but the hawk was gone; as he searched for it, his eyes fell upon the bed of earth where the Lily stood ere he plucked it, and lo! in the place of the Lily, there was a damsel dressed in white shining silks, fairer than the enchanted flower, straighter than the stalk of it; her head slightly drooping, like the moon on a border of the night; her bosom like the swell of the sea in moonlight; her eyes dark, under a low arch of darker lashes, like stars on the skirts of storm; and she was the very dream of loveliness, formed to freeze with awe, and to inflame with passion. So Shibli Bagarag gazed at her with adoration, his hands stretched half-way to her as if to clasp her, fearing she was a vision and would fade; and the damsel smiled a sweet smile, and lifted her antelope eyes, and said, 'Who am I, and to whom might I be likened, O youth?'

And he answered, 'Who thou art, O young perfection, I know not, if not a Houri of Paradise; but thou art like the Princess of Oolb, yet lovelier, oh lovelier! And thy voice is the voice of Noorna, my betrothed; yet purer, sweeter, younger.'

So the damsel laughed a laugh like a sudden sweeping of wild chords of music, and said, 'O youth, saw'st thou not the ascent of Noorna, thy betrothed, gathered in a bunch by Karaz?'

And he answered, 'I saw her; but I knew not, O damsel of beauty; surely I was bewildered, amazed, without power to contend with the Genie.'

Then she said, 'Wouldst thou release her? So kiss me on the lips, on the eyes, and on the forehead, three kisses each time; and with the first say, "By the well of Paravid"; and with the second, "By the strength of Garraveen!" and with the third, "By the Lily of the Sea!"'

Now, the heart of the youth bounded at her words, and he went to her, and trembling kissed her all bashfully on the lips, on the eyes, and on the forehead, saying each time as she directed. Then she took him by the hand, and stepped from the bed of earth, crying joyfully, 'Thanks be to Allah and the Prophet! Noorna, is released from the sorceries that held her, and powerful.'

So, while he was wondering, she said, 'Knowest thou not the woman, thy betrothed?'

He answered, 'O damsel of beauty, I am charged with many feelings; doubts and hopes are mixed in me. Say first who thou art, and fill my two ears with bliss.'

And she said, 'I will leave my name to other lips; surely I am the daughter of the Vizier Feshnavat, betrothed to a wandering youth,—a barber, who sickened at the betrothal, and consoled himself with a proverb when he gave me the kiss of contract, and knew not how with truth to pay me a compliment.'

Now, Shibli Bagarag saw this was indeed Noorna bin Noorka, his betrothed, and he fell before her in love and astonishment; but she lifted him to her neck, and embraced him, saying, 'Said I not truly when I said "I am that I shall be"? My youth is not as that of Bhanavar the Beautiful, gained at another's cost, but my own, and stolen from me by wicked sorceries.' And he cried, 'Tell me, O Noorna, my betrothed, how this matter came to pass?'

She said, 'On our way to Aklis.'

She bade him grasp the Lily, and follow her; and he followed her down the rock and over the bright shells upon the sand, admiring her stateliness, her willowy lightness, her slimness as of the palm-tree. Then she waded in the water, and began to strike out with her arms, and swim boldly,—he likewise; and presently they came to a current that hurried them off in its course, and carried them as weeds, streaming rapidly. He was bearing witness to his faith as a man that has lost hope of life, when a strong eddy stayed him, and whirled him from the current into the calm water. So he looked for Noorna, and saw her safe beside him flinging back the wet tresses from her face, that was like the full moon growing radiant behind a dispersing cloud. And she said, 'Ask not for the interpretation of wonders in this sea, for they cluster like dates on a date branch. Surely, to be with me is enough.'

And she bewitched him in the midst of the waters, making him oblivious of all save her, so that he hugged the golden net of her smiles and fair flatteries, and swam with an exulting stroke, giving his breast broadly to the low billows, and shouting verses of love and delight to her. And while they swam sweetly, behold, there was seen a pearly shell of flashing crimson, amethyst, and emerald, that came scudding over the waves toward them, raised to the wind, fan-shaped, and in its front two silver seats. When she saw it, Noorna cried, 'She has sent me this, Rabesqurat! Perchance is she favourable to my wishes, and this were well!'

Then she swayed in the water sideways, and drew the shell to her, and the twain climbed into it, and sat each on one of the silver seats, folded together. In its lightness it was as a foam-bubble before the wind on the blue water, and bore them onward airily. At his feet Shibli Bagarag beheld a stool of carved topaz, and above his head the arch of the shell was inlaid with wreaths of gems: never was vessel fairer than that.

Now, while they were speeding over the water, Noorna said, 'The end of this fair sea is Aklis, and beyond it is the Koosh. So while the wind is our helmsman, and we go circled by the quiet of this sea, I'll tell thee of myself, if thou carest to hear.'

And he cried with the ardour of love, 'Surely, I would hear of nought save thyself, Noorna, and the music of the happy garden compareth not in sweetness with it. I long for the freshness of thy voice, as the desert camel for the green spring, O my betrothed!'

So she said, 'And now give ear to the following':—

AND THIS IS THE STORY OF NOORNA BIN NOORKA, THE GENIE KARAZ, AND THE PRINCESS OF OOLB

Know, that when I was a babe, I lay on my mother's bosom in the wilderness, and it was the bosom of death. Surely, I slept and smiled, and dreamed the infant's dream, and knew not the coldness of the thing I touched. So were we even as two dead creatures lying there; but life was in me, and I awoke with hunger at the time of feeding, and turned to my mother, and put up my little mouth to her for nourishment, and sucked her, but nothing came. I cried, and commenced chiding her, and after a while it was as decreed, that certain horsemen of a troop passing through the wilderness beheld me, and seeing my distress and the helpless being I was, their hearts were stirred, and they were mindful of what the poet says concerning succour given to the poor, helpless, and innocent of this world, and took me up, and mixed for me camel's milk and water from the bags, and comforted me, and bore me with them, after they had paid funeral rites to the body of my mother.

Now, the rose-bud showeth if the rose-tree be of the wilds or of the garden, and the chief of that troop seeing me born to the uses of gentleness, carried me in his arms with him to his wife, and persuaded her that was childless to make me the child of their adoption. So I abode with them during the period of infancy and childhood, caressed and cared for, as is said:

The flower a stranger's hand may gather,
Strikes root into the stranger's breast;
Affection is our mother, father,
Friend, and of cherishers the best.

And I loved them as their own child, witting not but that I was their child, till on a day while I played among some children of my years, the daughter of the King of Oolb passed by us on a mule, with her slaves and drawn swords, and called to me, 'Thou little castaway!' and had me brought to her, and peered upon my face in a manner that frightened me, for I was young. Then she put me down from the neck of her mule where she had seated me, saying, 'Child of a dead mother and a runaway father, what need I fear from thy like, and the dreams of a love-sick Genie?' So she departed, but I forgot not her words, and dwelt upon them, and grew fevered with them, and drooped. Now, when he saw my bloom of health gone, heaviness on my feet, the light hollowed from my eyes, my benefactor, Ravaloke—he that I had thought my father—took me between his knees, and asked me what it was and the cause of my ailing; and I told him.

Then said he, 'This is so: thou art not my child; but I love thee as mine, O my little Desert-flower; and why the Princess should fancy fear of thee I like not to think; but fear thou her, for she is a mask of wiles and a vine trailing over pitfalls; such a sorceress the world knoweth not as Goorelka of Oolb.'

Now, I was penetrated by what he said, and ceased to be a companion to them that loved childish games and romps, and meditated by myself in gardens and closets, feigning sleep when the elder ones discoursed, that I might learn something of this mystery, and all that was spoken perplexed me more, as the sage declareth:

Who in a labyrinth wandereth without clue,
More that he wandereth doth himself undo.

Though I was quick as the quick-eyed falcon, I discovered nought, flying ever at false game,—

A follower of misleading beams,
A cheated soul, the mock of dreams.

At times I thought that it was the King of Oolb was my father, and plotted to come in his path; and there were kings and princes of far countries whom I sought to encounter, that they might claim me; but none claimed me. O my betrothed, few gave me love beside Ravaloke, and when the wife that he cherished died, he solely, for I was lost in waywardness and the slave of moody imaginings. 'Tis said:

If thou the love of the world for thyself wouldst gain,
mould thy breast
Liker the world to become, for its like the world loveth best;

and this was not I then.

Now, the sons and daughters of men are used to celebrate the days of their birth with gifts and rejoicings, but I could only celebrate that day which delivered me from death into the hands of Ravaloke, as none knew my birth-hour. When it was the twelfth return of this event, Ravaloke, my heart's father, called me to him and pressed in my hand a glittering coin, telling me to buy with it in the bazaars what I would. So I went forth, attended by a black slave, after the mid-noon, for I was eager to expend my store, and cared not for the great heat. Scarcely had we passed the cheese-market and were hurrying on to shops of the goldsmiths and jewellers, when I saw an old man, a beggar, in a dirty yellow turban and pieced particoloured cloth-stuff, and linen in rags his other gear. So lean was he, and looked so weak that I wondered he did other than lay his length on the ground; and as he asked me for alms his voice had a piteousness that made me to weep, and I punished my slave for seeking to drive him away, and gave my one piece of gold into his hand. Then he asked me what I required of him in exchange, and I said, 'What can a poor old man that is a beggar give?' He laughed, and asked me then what I had intended to buy with that piece of money. So, beginning to regret the power that was gone from me of commanding with my gold piece this and that fine thing, I mused, and said, 'Truly, a blue dress embroidered with gold, and a gold crown, and gold bracelets set with turquoise stones,—these, and toys; but could I buy in this city a book of magic, that were my purchase.'

The old fellow smiled, and said to my black slave, 'And thou, hadst thou this coin, what were thy purchase therewith?'

He, scoffing the old beggar, answered, 'A plaister for sores as broad as my back, and a camel's hump, O thou old villain!'

The old man grunted in his chest, and said, 'Thou art but a camel thyself, to hinder a true Mussulman from passing in peace down a street of Oolb; so 'twere a good purchase and a fitting: know'st thou what is said of the blessing given by them that receive a charity?'

"'Tis the fertilizing dew that streameth after the sun,
Strong as the breath of Allah to bless life well begun."

So is my blessing on the little damsel, and she shall have her wish, wullahy, thou black face! and thou thine.'

This spake the old man, and hobbled off while my slave was jeering him. So I strolled through the bazaars and thought no more of the old man's words, and longed to purchase a hundred fineries, and came to the confectioner's, and smelt the smell of his musk-scented sweetmeats and lemon sweets and sugared pistachios that are delicious to crunch between the teeth. My mouth watered, and I said to my slave, 'O Kadrab, a coin, though 'twere small, would give us privilege in yonder shop to select, and feast, and approve the skill of the confectioner.'

He grinned, and displayed in his black fist a petty coin of exchange, but would not let me have it till I had sworn to give no more away to beggars. So even as we were hurrying into the shop, another old beggar wretcheder than the first fronted me, and I was moved, and forgot my promise to Kadrab, and gave him the money. Then was Kadrab wroth, and kicked the old beggar with his fore-foot, lifting him

high in air, and lo! he did not alight, but rose over the roofs of the houses and beyond the city, till he was but a speck in the blue of the sky above. So Kadrab bit his forefinger amazed, and glanced at his foot, and at what was visible of the old beggarman, and again at his foot, thinking but of what he had done with it, and the might manifested in that kick, fool that he was! All the way homeward he kept scanning the sky and lifting his foot aloft, and I saw him bewildered with a strange conceit, as the poet has exclaimed in his scorn:

Oh, world diseased! oh, race empirical!
Where fools are the fathers of every miracle!

Now, when I was in my chamber, what saw I there but a dress of very costly blue raiment with gold-work broidery and a lovely circllet of gold, and gold bracelets set with stones of turquoise, and a basket of gold woven wire, wherein were toys, wondrous ones—soldiers that cut off each other's heads and put them on again, springing antelopes, palm-trees that turned to fountains, and others; and lo! a book in red binding, with figures on it and clasps of gold, a great book! So I clapped my hands joyfully, crying, 'The old beggar has done it!' and robed myself in the dress, and ran forth to tell Ravaloke. As I ran by a window looking on the inner court, I saw below a crowd of all the slaves of Ravaloke round one that was seeking to escape from them, and 'twas Kadrab with a camel's hump on his back, and a broad brown plaister over it, the wretch howling, peering across his shoulder, and trying to bolt from his burden, as a horse that would run from his rider. Then I saw that Kadrab also had his wish, his camel's hump, and thought, 'The old beggar, what was he but a Genie?' Surely Ravaloke caressed me when he heard of the adventure, and what had befallen Kadrab was the jest of the city; but for me I spared little time away from that book, and studied in it incessantly the ways and windings of magic, till I could hold communication with Genii, and wield charms to summon them, and utter spells that subdue them, discovering the haunts of talismans that enthrall Afrites and are powerful among men. There was that Kadrab coming to me daily to call out in the air for the old beggarman to rid him of his hump; and he would waste hours looking up into the sky moodily for him, and cursing the five toes of his foot, for he doubted not the two beggars were one, and that he was punished for the kick, and lamented it direly, saying in the thick of his whimperings, 'I'd give the foot that did it to be released from my hump, O my fair mistress.' So I pitied him, and made a powder and a spell, and my first experiment in magic was to relieve Kadrab of his hump, and I succeeded in loosening it, and it came away from him, and sank into the ground of the garden where we stood. So I told Kadrab to say nothing of this, but the idle-pated fellow blabbed it over the city, and it came to the ears of Goorelka. Then she sent for me to visit her, and by the advice of Ravaloke I went, and she fondled me, and sought to get at the depth of my knowledge by a spell that tieth every faculty save the tongue, and it is the spell of vain longing. Now, because I baffled her arts she knew me more cunning than I seemed, and as night advanced she affected to be possessed with pleasure in me, and took me in her arms and sought to fascinate me, and I heard her mutter once, 'Shall I doubt the warning of Karaz?' So presently she said, 'Come with me'; and I went with her under the curtain of that apartment into another, a long saloon, wherein were couches round a fountain, and beyond it an aviary lit with lamps: when we were there she whistled, and immediately there was a concert of birds, a wondrous accord of exquisite piping, and she leaned on a couch and took me by her to listen; sweet and passionate was the harmony of the birds; but I let not my faculties lull, and observed that round the throat of every bird was a ringed mark of gold and stamps of divers gems similar in colour to a ring on the forefinger of her right hand, which she dazzled my sight with as she flashed it. When we had listened a long hour to this music, the Princess gazed on me as if to mark the effect of a charm, and I saw disappointment on her lovely face, and she bit her lip and looked spiteful, saying, 'Thou art far gone in the use of magic, and wary, O girl!' Then she laughed unnaturally, and called slaves to bring in sweet drinks to us, and I drank with her, and became less wary, and she fondled me more, calling me tender names, heaping endearments on me; and as the hour of the middle-night approached I was losing all suspicion in deep languor, and sighed at the song of the birds, the long love-song, and dozed awake with eyes half shut. I felt her steal from me, and continued still motionless without alarm: so was I mastered. What hour it was or what time had passed I cannot say, when a bird that was chained on a perch before me—a very quaint bird, with a topknot awry, and black, heavy bill, and ragged gorgeousness of plumage—the only object between my lids and darkness, suddenly, in the midst of the singing, let loose a hoarse laugh that was followed by peals of laughter from the other birds. Thereat I started up, and beheld the Princess standing over a brazier, and she seized a slipper from her foot and flung it at the bird that had first laughed, and struck him off his perch, and went to him and seized him and shook him, crying, 'Dare to laugh again!' and he kept clearing his throat and trying to catch the tune he had lost, pitching a high note and a low note; but the marvel of this laughter of the bird wakened me thoroughly, and I thanked the bird in my soul, and said to Goorelka, 'More wondrous than their singing, this laughter, O Princess!'

She would not speak till she had beaten every bird in the aviary, and then said in the words of the poet:

Shall they that deal in magic match degrees of wonder?
From the bosom of one cloud comes the lightning and the thunder.

Then said she, 'O Noorna! I'll tell thee truly my intent, which was to enchant thee; but I find thee wise, so let us join our powers, and thou shalt become mighty as a sorceress.'

Now, Ravaloke had said to me, 'Her friendship is fire, her enmity frost; so be cold to the former, to the latter hot,' and I dissembled and replied, 'Teach me, O Princess!'

So she asked me what I could do. Could I plant a mountain in the sea and people it? could I anchor a purple cloud under the sun and live there a year with them I delighted in? could I fix the eyes of the world upon one head and make the nations bow to it; change men to birds, fishes to men; and so on—a hundred sorceries that I had never attempted and dreamed not of my betrothed! I had never offended Allah by a misuse of my powers. When I told her, she cried, 'Thou art then of a surety she that's fitted for the custody of the Lily of the Light, so come with me.'

Now, I had heard of the Lily, even this thou holdest may its influence be unwithering!—and desired to see it. So she led me from the palace to the shore of the sea, and flung a cockleshell on the waters, and seated herself in it with me in her lap; and we scudded over the waters, and entered this Enchanted Sea, and stood by the Lily. Then, I that loved flowers undertook the custody of this one, knowing not the consequences and the depth of her wiles. 'Tis truly said:

The overwise themselves hoodwink,
For simple eyesight is a modest thing:
They on the black abyss's brink
Smile, and but when they fall bitterly think,
What difference 'twixt the fool and me, Creation's King?

Nevertheless for awhile nothing evil resulted, and I had great joy in the flower, and tended it with exceeding watchfulness, and loved it, so that I was brought in my heart to thank the Princess and think well of her.

Now, one summer eve as Ravaloke rested under the shade of his garden palm, and I studied beside him great volumes of magic, it happened that after I had read certain pages I closed one of the books marked on the cover 'Alif,' and shut the clasp louder than I intended, so that he who was dozing started up, and his head was in the sloped sun in an instant, and I observed the shadow of his head lengthen out along the grass-plot towards the mossed wall, and it shot up the wall, darkening it—then drawing back and lessening, then darting forth like a beast of darkness irritable for prey. I was troubled, for whatso is seen while the volume Alif is in use hath a portent; but the discovery of what this might be baffled me. So I determined to watch events, and it was not many days ere Ravaloke, who was the leader of the armies of the King of Oolb, was called forth to subdue certain revolted tributaries of the King, and at my entreaty took me with him, and I saw battles and encounters lasting a day's length. Once we were encamped in a fruitful country by a brook running with a bright eye between green banks, and I that had freedom and the password of the camp wandered down to it, and refreshed my forehead with its coolness. So, as I looked under the falling drops, lo! on the opposite bank the old beggar that had given me such fair return for my alms and Kadrab his hump! I heard him call, 'This night is the key to the mystery,' and he was gone. Every incantation I uttered was insufficient to bring him back. Surely, I hurried to the tents and took no sleep, watching zealously by the tent of Ravaloke, crouched in its shadow. About the time of the setting of the moon I heard footsteps approach the tent within the circle of the guard, and it was a youth that held in his hand naked steel. When he was by the threshold of the tent, I rose before him and beheld the favourite of Ravaloke, even the youth he had destined to espouse me; so I reproached him, and he wept, denying not the intention he had to assassinate Ravaloke, and when his soul was softened he confessed to me, "'Twas that I might win the Princess Goorelka, and she urged me to it, promising the King would promote me to the vacant post of Ravaloke.'

Then I said to him, 'Lov'st thou Goorelka?'

And he answered, 'Yea, though I know my doom in loving her; and that it will be the doom of them now piping to her pleasure and denied the privilege of laughter.'

So I thought, 'Oh, cruel sorceress! the birds are men!' And as I mused, my breast melted with pity at their desire to laugh, and the little restraint they had upon themselves notwithstanding her harshness; for could they think of their changed condition and folly without laughter? and the folly that sent them fresh mates in misery was indeed matter for laughter, fed to fulness by constant meditation on the perch. Meantime, I uncharmed the youth and bade him retire quickly; but as he was going, he said, 'Beware of the Genie Karaz!' Then I held him back, and after a parley he told me what he had heard the

Princess say, and it was that Karaz had seen me and sworn to possess me for my beauty. 'Strangely smiled Goorelka when she spake that,' said he.

Now, the City of Oolb fronts the sea, and behind it is a mountain and a wood, where the King met Ravaloke on his return victorious over the rebels. So, to escape the eye of the King I parted with Ravaloke, and sought to enter the city by a circuitous way; but the paths wound about and zigzagged, and my slaves suffered nightfall to surprise us in the entanglements of the wood. I sent them in different directions to strike into the main path, retaining Kadrab at the bridle of my mule; but that creature now began to address me in a familiar tone, and he said something of love for me that enraged me, so that I hit him a blow. Then came from him sounds like the neighing of mares, and lo! he seized me and rose with me in the air, and I thought the very heavens were opening to that black beast, when on a sudden he paused, and shot down with me from heights of the stars to the mouth of a cavern by the Putrid Sea, and dragged me into a cavern greatly illuminated, hung like a palace chamber, and supported on pillars of shining jasper. Then I fell upon the floor in a swoon, and awaking saw Kadrab no longer, but in his place a Genie. O my soul, thou halt seen him!—I thought at once, 'tis Karaz!' and when he said to me, 'This is thy abode, O lady! and I he that have sworn to possess thee from the hour I saw thee in the chamber of Goorelka,' then was I certain 'twas Karaz. So, collecting the strength of my soul, I said, in the words of the poet:

'Woo not a heart preoccupied!
What thorn is like a loathing bride?
Mark ye the shrubs how they turn from the sea,
The sea's rough whispers shun?
But like the sun of heaven be,
And every flower will open wide.
Woo with the shining patience we
Beheld in heaven's sun.'

Then he sang:

Exquisite lady! name the smart
That fills thy heart.
Thou art the foot and I the worm:
Prescribe the Term.

Finding him compliant, I said, 'O great Genie, truly the search of my life has been to discover him that is, my father, and how I was left in the wilderness. There 's no peace for me, nor understanding the word of love, till I hear by whom I was left a babe on the bosom of a dead mother.'

He exclaimed, and his eyes twinkled, 'Tis that? that shalt thou know in a span of time. O my mistress, hast thou seen the birds of Goorelka? Thy father Feshnavat is among them, perched like a bird.'

So I cried, 'And tell me how he may be disenchanting.'

He said, 'Swear first to be mine unreluctantly.'

Then I said, 'What is thy oath?'

He answered, 'I swear, when I swear, by the Identical.'

Thereupon I questioned him concerning the Identical, what it was; and he, not suspecting, revealed to me the mighty hair in his head now in the head of Shagpat, even that. So I swore by that to give myself to the possessor of the Identical, and flattered him. Then said he, 'O lovely damsel, I am truly one of the most powerful of the Genii; yet am I in bondage to that sorceress Goorelka by reason of a ring she holdeth; and could I get that ring from her and be slave to nothing mortal an hour, I could light creation as a torch, and broil the inhabitants of earth at one fire.'

I thought, 'That ring is known to me!' And he continued, 'Surely I cannot assist thee in this work other than by revealing the means of disenchantment, and it is to keep the birds laughing uninterruptedly an hour; then are they men again, and take the forms of men that are laughers—I know not why.'

So I cried, 'Tis well! carry me back to Oolb.'

Then the Genie lifted me into the air, and ceased not speeding rapidly through it, till I was on the roof of the house of Ravaloke. O sweet youth! moon of my soul! from that time to the disenchantment of Feshnavat, I pored over my books, trying experiments in magic, dreadful ones, hunting for talismans to countervail Goorelka; but her power was great, and 'twas not in me to get her away from the birds one hour to free them. On a certain occasion I had stolen to them, and kept them laughing with stories of

man to within an instant of the hour; and they were laughing exultingly with the easy happy laugh of them that perceive deliverance sure, when she burst in and beat them even to the door of death. I saw too in her eyes, that glowed like the eyes of wild cats in the dark, she suspected me, and I called Allah to aid the just cause against the sinful, and prepared to war with her.

Now, my desire, which was to liberate my father and his fellows in tribulation, I knew pure, and had no fear of the sequel, as is declared:

Fear nought so much as Fear itself; for arm'd with Fear the Foe
Finds passage to the vital part, and strikes a double blow.

So one day as I leaned from my casement looking on the garden seaward, I saw a strange red and yellow-feathered bird that flew to the branch of a citron-tree opposite, with a ring in its beak; and the bird was singing, and with every note the ring dropped from its bill, and it descended swiftly in an arrowy slant downward, and seized it ere it reached the ground, and commenced singing afresh. When I had marked this to happen many times, I thought, 'How like is this bird to an innocent soul possessed of magic and using its powers! Lo, it seeketh still to sing as one of the careless, and cannot relinquish the ring and be as the careless, and between the two there is neither peace for it nor pleasure.' Now, while my eyes were on the pretty bird, dwelling on it, I saw it struck suddenly by an arrow beneath the left wing, and the bird fluttered to my bosom and dropped in it the ring from its beak. Then it sprang weakly, and sought to fly and soar, and fluttered; but a blue film lodged over its eyes, and its panting was quickly ended. So I looked at the ring and knew it for that one I had noted on the finger of Goorelka. Red blushed my bliss, and 'twas revealed to me that the bird was of the birds of the Princess that had escaped from her with the ring. I buried the bird, weeping for it, and flew to my books, and as I read a glow stole over me. O my betrothed, eyes of my soul! I read that the possessor of that ring was mistress of the marvellous hair which is a magnet to the homage of men, so that they crowd and crush and hunger to adore it, even the Identical! This was the power that peopled the aviary of Goorelka, and had well-nigh conquered all the resistance of my craft.

Now, while I read there arose a hubbub and noise in the outer court, and shrieks of slaves. The noise approached with rapid strides, and before I could close my books Goorelka burst in upon me, crying, 'Noorna! Noorna!' Wild and haggard was her head, and she rushed to my books and saw them open at the sign of the ring; then began our combat. She menaced me as never mortal was menaced. Rapid lightning-flashes were her transformations, and she was a serpent, a scorpion, a lizard, a lioness in succession, but I leapt perpetually into fresh rings of fire and of witch'd water; and at the fiftieth transformation, she fell on the floor exhausted, a shuddering heap. Seeing that, I ran from her to the aviary in her palace, and hurried over a story of men to the birds, that rocked them on their perches with chestquakes of irresistible laughter. Then flew I back to the Princess, and she still puffing on the floor, commenced wheedling and begging the ring of me, stinting no promises. At last she cried, 'Girl! what is this ring to thee without beauty? Thy beauty is in my keeping.'

And I exclaimed, 'How? how?' smitten to the soul.

She answered, 'Yea; and I can wear it as my own, adding it to my own, when thou'rt a hag!'

My betrothed! I was on the verge of giving her the ring for this secret, when a violent remote laughter filled the inner hollow of my ears, and it increased, till the Princess heard it; and now the light of my casement was darkened with birds, the birds of Goorelka, laughing as on a wind of laughter. So I opened to them, and they darted in, laughing all of them, till I could hold out no longer, and the infection of laughter seized me, and I rolled with it; and the Princess, she too laughed a hyaena-laugh under a cat's grin, and we all of us remained in this wise some minutes, laughing the breath out of our bodies, as if death would take us. Whoso in the City of Oolb heard us, the slaves, the people, and the King, laughed, knowing not the cause. This day is still remembered in Oolb as the day of laughter. Now, at a stroke of the hour the laughter ceased, and I saw in the chamber a crowd of youths and elders of various ranks; but their visages were become long and solemn as that of them that have seen a dark experience. 'Tis certain they laughed little in their lives from that time, and the muscles of their cheeks had rest. So I caught down my veil, and cried to the Princess, 'My father is among these; point him out to me.'

Ere she replied one stepped forth, even Feshnavat, my father, and called me by name, and knew me by a spot on the left arm, and made himself known to me, and told me the story of my dead mother, how she had missed her way from the caravan in the desert, and he searching her was set upon by robbers, and borne on their expeditions. Nothing said he of the sorceries of Goorelka, and I, not wishing to provoke the Princess, suffered his dread to exist. So I kissed him, and bowed my head to him, and she fled from the sight of innocent happiness. Then took I the ring, and summoned Karaz, and ordered him to reinstate all those princes and chiefs and officers in their possessions and powers, on what part of earth soever that might be. Never till I stood as the Lily and thy voice sweetened the name

of love in my ears, heard I aught of delicate delightfulness, like the sound of their gratitude. Many wooed me to let them stay by me and guard me, and do service all their lives to me; but this I would not allow, and though they were fair as moons, some of them, I responded not to their soft glances, speaking calmly the word of farewell, for I was burdened with other thoughts.

Now, when the Genie had done my bidding, he returned to me joyfully. My soul sickened to think myself his by a promise; but I revolved the words of my promise, and saw in them a loophole of escape. So, when he claimed me, I said, 'Ay! ay! lay thy head in my lap,' as if my mind treasured it. Then he lay there, and revealed to me his plans for the destruction of men. 'Or,' said he, 'they shall be our slaves and burden-beasts, for there 's now no restraint on me, now thou art mistress of the ring, and mine.' Thereupon his imagination swelled, and he saw his evil will enthroned, and the hopes of men beneath his heel, crying, 'And the more I crush them the thicker they crowd, for the Identical compelleth their very souls to adore in spite of distaste.'

Then said I, 'Tell me, O Genie! is the Identical subservient to me in another head save thine?'

He answered, 'Nay I in another head 'tis a counteraction to the power of the Ring, the Ring powerless over it.'

And I said, 'Must it live in a head, the Identical?'

Cried he, 'Woe to what else holdeth it!'

I whispered in his hairy pointed red ear, 'Sleep! sleep!' and lulled him with a song, and he slept, being weary with my commissioning. Then I bade Feshnavat, my father, fetch me one of my books of magic, and read in it of the discovery of the Identical by means of the Ring; and I took the Ring and hung it on a hair of my own head over the head of the Genie, and saw one of the thin lengths begin to twist and dart and writhe, and shift lustres as a creature in anguish. So I put the Ring on my forefinger, and turned the hair round and round it, and tugged. Lo, with a noise that stunned me, the hair came out! O my betrothed, what shrieks and roars were those: with which the Genie awoke, finding himself bare of the Identical! Oolb heard them, and the sea foamed like the mouth of madness, as the Genie sped thunder-like over it, following me in mid-air. Such a flight was that! Now, I found it not possible to hold the Identical, for it twisted and stung, and was nigh slipping from me while I flew. I saw white on a corner of the Desert, a city, and I descended on it by the shop of a clothier that sat quietly by his goods and stuffs, thinking of fate less than of kabobs and stews and rare seasonings. That city hath now his name. Wullahy, had I not then sown in his head that hair which he weareth yet, how had I escaped Karaz, and met thee? Wondrous are the decrees of Providence! Praise be to Allah for them! So the Genie, when he found himself baffled by me, and Shagpat with the mighty hair in his head, the Identical, he yelled, and fetched Shagpat a slap that sent him into the middle of the street; but Kadza screamed after him, and there was immediately such lamentation in the city about Shagpat, and such tearing of hair about him, that I perceived at once the virtue that was in the Identical. As for Karaz, finding his claim as possessor of the Identical no more valid, he vanished, and has been my rebellious slave since, till thou, O my betrothed, mad'st me spend him in curing thy folly on the horse Garraveen, and he escaped from my circles beyond the dominion of the Ring; yet had he his revenge, for I that was keeper of the Lily, had, I now learned ruefully, a bond of beauty with it, and whatever was a stain to one withered the other. Then that sorceress Goorelka stole my beauty from me by sprinkling a blight on the petals of the fair flower, and I became as thou first saw'st me. But what am I as I now am? Blissful! blissful! Surely I grew humble with the loss of beauty, and by humility wise, so that I assisted Feshnavat to become Vizier by the Ring, and watched for thy coming to shave Shagpat, as a star watcheth; for 'tis written, 'A barber alone shall be shearer of the Identical'; and he only, my betrothed, hath power to plant it in Aklis, where it groweth as a pillar, bringing due reverence to Aklis.

THE WILES OF RABESQRAT

Now, when Noorna bin Noorka had made an end of her narration, she folded her hands and was mute awhile; and to the ear of Shibli Bagarag it seemed as if a sweet instrument had on a sudden ceased luting. So, as he leaned, listening for her voice to recommence, she said quickly, 'See yonder fire on the

mountain's height!'

He looked and saw a great light on the summit of a lofty mountain before them.

Then said she, 'That is Aklis! and it is ablaze, knowing a visitant near. Tighten now the hairs of Garraveen about thy wrist; touch thy lips with the waters of Paravid; hold before thee the Lily, and make ready to enter the mountain. Lo, my betrothed, thou art in possession of the three means that melt opposition, and the fault is thine if thou fail.'

He did as she directed; and they were taken on a tide and advanced rapidly to the mountain, so that the waters smacked and crackled beneath the shell, covering it with silver showering arches of glittering spray. Then the fair beams of the moon became obscured, and the twain reddened with the reflection of the fire, and the billows waxed like riotous flames; and presently the shell rose upon the peak of many waves swollen to one, and looking below, they saw in the scarlet abyss of waters at their feet a monstrous fish, with open jaws and one baleful eye; and the fish was lengthy as a caravan winding through the desert, and covered with fiery scales. Shibli Bagarag heard the voice of Noorna shriek affrightedly, 'Karaz!' and as they were sliding on the down slope, she stood upright in the shell, pronouncing rapidly some words in magic; and the shell closed upon them both, pressing them together, and writing darkness on their very eyeballs. So, while they were thus, they felt themselves gulped in, and borne forward with terrible swiftness, they knew not where, like one that hath a dream of sinking; and outside the shell a rushing, gurgling noise, and a noise as of shouting multitudes, and muffled multitudes muttering complaints and yells and querulous cries, told them they were yet speeding through the body of the depths in the belly of the fish. Then there came a shock, and the shell was struck with light, and they were sensible of stillness without motion. Then a blow on the shell shivered it to fragments, and they were blinded with seas of brilliancy on all sides from lamps and tapers and crystals, cornelians and gems of fiery lustre, liquid lights and flashing mirrors, and eyes of crowding damsels, bright ones. So, when they had risen, and could bear to gaze on the insufferable splendour, they saw sitting on a throne of coral and surrounded by slaves with scimitars, a fair Queen, with black eyes, kindlers of storms, torches in the tempest, and with floating tresses, crowned with a circlet of green-spiked precious stones and masses of crimson weed with flaps of pearl; and she was robed with a robe of amber, and had saffron sandals, loose silvery-silken trousers tied in at the ankle, the ankle white as silver; wonderful was the quivering of rays from the jewels upon her when she but moved a finger! Now, as they stood with their hands across their brows, she cried out, 'O ye traversers of my sea! how is this, that I am made to thank Karaz for a sight of ye?'

And Noorna bin Noorka answered, 'Surely, O Queen Rabesqurat, the haven of our voyage was Aklis, and we feared delay, seeing the fire of the mountain ablaze with expectations of us.'

Then the Queen cried angrily, 'Tis well thou hadst wit to close the shell, O Noorna, or there would have been delay indeed. Say, is not the road to Aklis through my palace? And it is the road thousands travel.'

So Noorna bin Noorka said, 'O Queen, this do they; but are they of them that reach Aklis?'

And the Queen cried violently, purpling with passion, 'This to me! when I helped ye to the plucking of the Lily?'

Now, the Queen muttered an imprecation, and called the name 'Abarak!' and lo, a door opened in one of the pillars of jasper leading from the throne, and there came forth a little man, humped, with legs like bows, and arms reaching to his feet; in his hand a net weighted with leaden weights. So the Queen levelled her finger at Noorna, and he spun the net above her head, and dropped it on her shoulder, and dragged her with him to the pillar. When Shibli Bagarag saw that, the world darkened to him, and he rushed upon Abarak; but Noorna called swiftly in his ear, 'Wait! wait! Thou by thy spells art stronger than all here save Abarak. Be true! Remember the seventh pillar!' Then, with a spurn from the hand of Abarak, the youth fell back senseless at the feet of the Queen.

Now, with the return of consciousness his hearing was bewitched with strange delicious melodies, the touch of stringed instruments, and others breathed into softly as by the breath of love, delicate, tender, alive with enamoured bashfulness. Surely, the soul that heard them dissolved like a sweet in the goblet, mingling with so much ecstasy of sound; and those melodies filling the white cave of the ear were even at once to drown the soul in delightfulness and buoy it with bliss, as a heavy-leaved flower is withered and refreshed by sun and dews. Surely, the youth ceased not to listen, and oblivion of cares and aught other in this life, save that hidden luting and piping, pillowed his drowsy head. At last there was a pause, and it seemed every maze of music had been wandered through. Opening his eyes hurriedly, as with the loss of the music his own breath had gone likewise, he beheld a garden golden with the light of lamps hung profusely from branches and twigs of trees by the glowing cheeks of fruits, apple and grape, pomegranate and quince; and he was reclining on a bank piled with purple cushions,

his limbs clad in the richest figured silks, fringed like the ends of clouds round the sun, with amber fringes. He started up, striving to recall the confused memory of his adventures and what evil had befallen him, and he would have struggled with the vision of these glories, but it mastered him with the strength of a potent drug, so that the very name of his betrothed was forgotten by him, and he knew not whither he would, or the thing he wished for. Now, when he had risen from the soft green bank that was his couch, lo, at his feet a damsel weeping! So he lifted her by the hand, and she arose and looked at him, and began plaining of love and its tyrannies, softening him, already softened. Then said she, 'What I suffer there is another, lovelier than I, suffering; thou the cause of it, O cruel youth!'

He said, 'How, O damsel? what of my cruelty? Surely, I know nothing of it.'

But she exclaimed, 'Ah, worse to feign forgetfulness!'

Now, he was bewildered at the words of the damsel, and followed her leading till they entered a dell in the garden canopied with foliage, and beyond it a green rise, and on the rise a throne. So he looked earnestly, and beheld thereon Queen Rabesqurat, she sobbing, her dark hair pouring in streams from the crown of her head. Seeing him, she cleared her eyes, and advanced to meet him timidly and with hesitating steps; but he shrank from her, and the Queen shrieked with grief, crying, 'Is there in this cold heart no relenting?'

Then she said to him winningly, and in a low voice, 'O youth, my husband, to whom I am a bride!'

He marvelled, saying, 'This is a game, for indeed I am no husband, neither have I a bride . . . yet have I confused memory of some betrothal . . .'

Thereupon she cried, 'Said I not so? and I the betrothed.'

Still he exclaimed, 'I cannot think it! Wullahy, it were a wonder!'

So she said, 'Consider how a poor youth of excellent proportions came to a flourishing Court before one, a widowed Queen, and she cast eyes of love on him, and gave him rule over her and all that was hers when he had achieved a task, and they were wedded. Oh, the bliss of it! Knit together with bond and a writing; and these were the dominions, I the Queen, woe's me!—thou the youth!'

Now, he was roiled by the enchantments of the Queen, caught in the snare of her beguilings; and he let her lead him to a seat beside her on the throne, and sat there awhile in the midst of feastings, mazed, thinking, 'What life have I lived before this, if the matter be as I behold?' thinking, 'Tis true I have had visions of a widowed queen, and I a poor youth that came to her court, and espoused her, sitting in the vacant seat beside her, ruling a realm; but it was a dream, a dream,—yet, wah! here is she, here am I, yonder my dominions!' Then he thought, 'I will solve it!' So, on a sudden he said to her beside him, 'O Queen, sovereign of hearts! enlighten me as to a perplexity.'

She answered, 'The voice of my lord is music in the ear of the bride.'

Then said he, in the tone of one doubting realities, 'O fair Queen, is there truly now such a one as Shagpat in the world?'

She laughed at his speech and the puzzled appearance of his visage, replying, 'Surely there liveth one, Shagpat by name in the world; strange is the history of him, his friends, and enemies; and it would bear recital.'

Then he said, 'And one, the daughter of a Vizier, Vizier to the King in the City of Shagpat?'

Thereat, she shook her head, saying, 'I know nought of that one.'

Now, Shibli Bagarag was mindful of his thwackings; and in this the wisdom of Noorna, is manifest, that the sting of them yet chased away doubts of illusion regarding their having been, as the poet says,

If thou wouldst fix remembrance—thwack!
'Tis that oblivion controls;
I care not if't be on the back,
Or on the soles.

He thought, 'Wah! yet feel I the thong, and the hiss of it as of the serpent in the descent, and the smack of it as the mouth of satisfaction in its contact with tender regions. This, wullahy! was no dream.' Nevertheless, he was ashamed to allude thereto before the Queen, and he said, 'O my mistress, another question, one only! This Shagpat—is he shaved?'

She said, 'Clean shorn!'

Quoth he, astonished, grief-stricken, with drawn lips, 'By which hand, chosen above men?'

And she exclaimed, 'O thou witty one that feignest not to know! Wullahy! by this hand of thine, O my lord and king, daring that it is; dexterous! surely so! And the shaving of Shagpat was the task achieved, —I the dower of it, and the rich reward.'

Now, he was meshed yet deeper in the net of her subtleties, and by her calling him 'lord and king'; and she gave a signal for fresh entertainments, exhausting the resources of her art, the mines of her wealth, to fascinate him. Ravishments of design and taste were on every side, and he was in the lap of abundance, beguiled by magic, caressed by beauty and a Queen. Marvel not that he was dazzled, and imagined himself already come to the great things foretold of him by the readers of planets and the casters of nativities in Shiraz. He assisted in beguiling himself, trusting wilfully to the two witnesses of things visible; as is declared by him of wise sayings:

There is in every wizard-net a hole,
So the entangler first must blind the soul.

And it is again said by that same teacher:

Ye that the inner spirit's sight would seal,
Nought credit but what outward orbs reveal.

And the soul of Shibli Bagarag was blinded by Rabesqurat in the depths of the Enchanted Sea. She sang to him, luting deliriously; and he was intoxicated with the blissfulness of his fortune, and took a lute and sang to her love-verses in praise of her, rhyming his rapture. Then they handed the goblet to each other, and drank till they were on fire with the joy of things, and life blushed beauteousness. Surely, Rabesqurat was becoming forgetful of her arts through the strength of those draughts, till her eye marked the Lily by his side, which he grasped constantly, the bright flower, and she started and said, 'One grant, O my King, my husband!'

So he said courteously, 'All grants are granted to the lovely, the fascinating; and their grief will be lack of aught to ask for?'

Then said she, 'O my husband, my King, I am jealous of that silly flower: laugh at my weakness, but fling it from thee.'

Now, he was about to cast it from him, when a vanity possessed his mind, and he exclaimed, 'See first the thing I will do, a wonder.'

She cried, 'No wonders, my life! I am sated with them.'

And he said, 'I am oblivious, O Queen, of how I came by this flower and this phial; but thou shalt hear a thing beyond the power of common magic, and see that I am something.'

Now, she plucked at him to abstain from his action, but he held the phial to the flower. She signed imperiously to some slaves to stay his right wrist, and they seized on it; but not all of them together could withhold him from dropping a drop into the petals of the flower, and lo, the Lily spake, a voice from it like the voice of Noorna, saying, 'Remember the Seventh Pillar.' Thereat, he lifted his eyes to his brows and frowned back memory to his aid, and the scene of Karaz, Rabesqurat, Abarak, and his betrothed was present to him. So perceiving that, the Queen delayed not while he grasped the phial to take in her hands some water from a basin near, and flung it over him, crying, 'Oblivion!' And while his mind was straining to bring back images of what had happened, he fell forward once more at the feet of Rabesqurat, senseless as a stone falls; such was the force of her enchantments.

Now, when he awoke the second time he was in the bosom of darkness, and the Lily gone from his hand; so he lifted the phial to make certain of that, and groped about till he came to what seemed an urn to the touch, and into this he dropped a drop, and asked for the Lily; and a voice said, 'I caught a light from it in passing.' And he came in the darkness to a tree, and a bejewelled bank, and other urns, and swinging lamps without light, and a running water, and a grassy bank, and flowers, and a silver seat, sprinkling each; and they said all in answer to his question of the Lily, 'I caught a light from it in passing.' At the last he stumbled upon the steps of a palace, and ascended them, endowing the steps with speech as he went, and they said, 'The light of it went over us.' He groped at the porch of the palace, and gave the door a voice, and it opened on jasper hinges, shrieking, 'The light of it went through me.' Then he entered a spacious hall, scattering drops, and voices exclaimed, 'We glow with the light of it.' He passed, groping his way through other halls and dusk chambers, scattering drops, and as he advanced the voices increased in the fervour of their replies, saying sequently: 'We blush with the light of it; We beam with the light of it; We burn with the light of it.' So, presently he found himself in a long low room, sombrely lit, roofed with crystals; and in a corner of the room, lo! a damsel

on a couch of purple, she white as silver, spreading radiance. Of such lustrous beauty was she that beside her, the Princess Goorelka as Shibli Bagarag first beheld her, would have paled like a morning moon; even Noorna had waned as Both a flower in fierce heat; and the Queen of Enchantments was but the sun behind a sand-storm, in comparison with that effulgent damsel on the length of the purple couch. Well for him he wilt of the magic which floated through that palace; as is said,

 Tempted by extremes,
 The soul is most secure;
 Too vivid loveliness blinds with its beams,
 And eyes turned inward perceive the lure.

Pulling down his turban hastily, he stepped on tiptoe to within arm's reach of her, and, looking another way, inclined over her soft vermeil mouth the phial slowly till it brimmed the neck, and dropped a drop of Paravid between the bow of those sweet lips. Still not daring to gaze on her, he said then, 'My question is of the Lily, the Lily of the Sea, and where is it, O marvel?'

And he heard a voice answer in the tones of a silver bell, clear as a wind in strung wires, 'Where I lie, lies the Lily, the Lily of the Sea; I with it, it with me.'

Said he, 'O breather of music, tell me how I may lay hand on the flower of beauty to bear it forth.'

And he heard the voice, 'An equal space betwixt my right side and my left, and from the shoulder one span and half a span downward.'

Still without power to eye her, he measured the space and the spans, his hand beneath the coverlids of the couch, and at a spot of the bosom his hand sank in, and he felt a fluttering thing, fluttering like a frightened bird in the midst of the fire. And the voice said, 'Quick, seize it, and draw it out, and tie it to my feet by the twines of red silk about it.'

He seized it and drew it out, and it was a heart—a heart of blood—streaming with crimson, palpitating. Tears flashed on his sight beholding it, and pity took the seat of fear, and he turned his eyes full on her, crying, 'O sad fair thing! O creature of anguish! O painful beauty! Oh, what have I done to thee?'

But she panted, and gasped short and shorter gasps, pointing with one finger to her feet. Then he took the warm living heart while it yet leapt and quivered and sobbed; and he held it with a trembling hand, and tied it by the red twines of silk about it to her feet, staining their whiteness. When that was done, his whole soul melted with pity and swelled with sorrow, and ere he could meet her eyes a swoon overcame him. Surely, when the world dawned to him a third time in those regions the damsel was no longer there, but in her place the Lily of Light. He thought, 'It was a vision, that damsel! a terrible one; one to terrify and bewilder! a bitter sweetness! Oh, the heart, the heart!' Reflecting on the heart brought to his lids an overcharging of tears, and he wept violently awhile. Then was he warned by the thought of his betrothed to take the Lily and speed with it from the realms of Rabesqurat; and he stole along the halls of the palace, and by the plashing fountains, and across the magic courts, passing chambers of sleepers, fair dreamers, and through ante-rooms crowded with thick-lipped slaves. Lo, as he held the Lily to light him on, and the light of the Lily fell on them that were asleep, they paled and shrank, and were such as the death-chill maketh of us. So he called upon his head the protection of Allah, and went swifter, to chase from his limbs the shudder of awe; and there were some that slept not, but stared at him with fixed eyes, eyes frozen by the light of the Lily, and he shunned those, for they were like spectres, haunting spirits. After he had coursed the length of the palace, he came to a steep place outside it, a rock with steps cut in stairs, and up these he went till he came to a small door in the rock, and lying by it a bar; so he seized the bar and smote the door, and the door shivered, for on his right wrist were the hairs of Garraveen. Bending his body, he slipped through the opening, and behold, an orchard dropping blossoms and ripe golden fruits, streams flowing through it over sands, and brooks bounding above glittering gems, and long dewy grasses, profusion of scented flowers, shade and sweetness. So he let himself down to the ground, which was an easy leap from the aperture, and walked through the garden, holding the Lily behind him, for here it darkened all, and the glowing orchard was a desert by its light. Presently, his eye fell on a couch swinging between two almond trees, and advancing to it he beheld the black-eyed Queen gathered up, folded temptingly, like a swaying fruit; she with the gold circlet on her head, and she was fair as blossom of the almond in a breeze of the wafted rose-leaf. Sweetly was she gathered up, folded temptingly, and Shibli Bagarag refrained from using the Lily, thinking, 'Tis like the great things foretold of me, this having of Queens within the very grasp, swinging to and fro as if to taunt backwardness!' Then he thought, 'Tis an enchantress! I will yet try her.' So he made a motion of flourishing the Lily once or twice, but forbore, fascinated, for she had on her fair face the softness of sleep, her lips closed in dimples, and the wicked fire shut from beneath her lids. Mastering his mind, the youth at last held the Lily to her, and saw a sight to blacken the world and all bright things with its hideousness. Scarce had he time to thrust the Lily in his robes, when the

Queen started up and clapped her hands, crying hurriedly, 'Abarak! Abarak!' and the little man appeared in a moment at the door by which Shibli Bagarag had entered the orchard. So, she cried still, 'Abarak!' and he moved toward her. Then she said, 'How came this youth here, prying in my private walks, my bowers? Speak!'

He answered, 'By the aid of Garraveen only, O Queen! and there is no force resisteth the bar so wielded.'

Rabesqurat looked under her brows at Shibli Bagarag and saw the horror on his face, and she cried out to Abarak in an agony, 'Fetch me the mirror!' Then Abarak ran, and returned ere the Queen had drawn seven impatient breaths, and in one hand he bore a sack, in the other a tray: so he emptied the contents of the sack on the surface of the tray; surely they were human eyes! and the Queen flung aside her tresses, and stood over them. The youth saw her smile at them, and assume tender and taunting manners before them, and imperious manners, killing glances, till in each of the eyes there was a sparkle. Then she flung back her head as one that feedeth on a mighty triumph, exclaiming, 'Yet am I Rabesqurat! wide is my sovereignty.' Sideways then she regarded Shibli Bagarag, and it seemed she was urging Abarak to do a deed beyond his powers, he frowning and pointing to the right wrist of the youth. So she clenched her hands an instant with that feeling which knocketh a nail in the coffin of a desire not dead, and controlled herself, and went to the youth, breaking into beams of beauty; and an enchanting sumptuousness breathed round her, so that in spite of himself he suffered her to take him by the hand and lead him from that orchard through the shivered door and into the palace and the hall of the jasper pillars. Strange thrills went up his arm from the touch of that Queen, and they were as little snakes twisting and darting up, biting poison-bites of irritating blissfulness.

Now, the hall was spread for a feast, and it was hung with lamps of silver, strewn with great golden goblets, and viands, coloured meats, and ordered fruits on shining platters. Then said she to Shibli Bagarag, 'O youth! there shall be no deceit, no guile between us. Thou art but my guest, I no bride to thee, so take the place of the guest beside me.'

He took his seat beside her, Abarak standing by, and she helped the youth to this dish and that dish, from the serving of slaves, caressing him with flattering looks to starve aversion and nourish tender fellowship. And he was like one that slideth down a hill and can arrest his descent with a foot, yet faileth that freewill. When he had eaten and drunk with her, the Queen said, 'O youth, no other than my guest! art thou not a prince in the country thou comest from?'

In a moment the pride of the barber forsook him, and he equivocated, saying, 'O Queen! there is among the stars somewhere, as was divined by the readers of planets, a crown hanging for me, and I search a point of earth to intercept its fall.'

She marked him beguiled by vanity, and put sweetmeats to his mouth, exclaiming, 'Thy manners be those of a prince!' Then she sang to him of the loneliness of her life, and of one with whom she wished to share her state,—such as he. And at her signal came troops of damsels that stood in rings and luted sweetly on the same theme—the Queen's loneliness, her love. And he said to the Queen, 'Is this so?'

She answered, 'Too truly so!'

Now, he thought, 'She shall at least speak the thing that is, if she look it not.' So he took the goblet, and contrived to drop a drop from the phial of Paravid therein without her observing him; and he handed her the goblet, she him; and they drank. Surely, the change that came over the Queen was an enchantment, and her eyes shot lustre, her tongue was loosed, and she laughed like one intoxicated, lolling in her seat, lost to majesty and the sway of her magic, crying, 'O Abarak! Abarak! little man, long my slave and my tool; ugly little man! And O Shibli Bagarag! nephew of the barber! weak youth! small prince of the tackle! have I not nigh fascinated thee? And thou wilt forfeit those two silly eyes of thine to the sack. And, O Abarak, Abarak! little man, have I flattered thee? So fetter I the strong with my allurements! and I stay the arrow in its flight! and I blunt the barb of high intents! Wah! I have drunk a potent stuff; I talk! Wullahy! I know there is a danger menacing Shagpat, and the eyes of all Genii are fixed on him. And if he be shaved, what changes will follow! But 'tis in me to delude the barber, wullahy! and I will avert the calamity. I will save Shagpat!'

While the Queen Rabesqurat prated in this wise with flushed face, Shibli Bagarag was smitten with the greatness of his task, and reproached his soul with neglect of it. And he thought, 'I am powerful by spells as none before me have been, and 'twas by my weakness the Queen sought to tangle me. I will clasp the Seventh Pillar and make an end of it, by Allah and his Prophet (praised be the name!), and I will reach Aklis by a short path and shave Shagpat with the sword.'

So he looked up, and Abarak was before him, the lifted nostrils of the little man wide with the flame of anger. And Abarak said, 'O youth, regard me with the eyes of judgement! Now, is it not frightful to

rate me little?—an instigation of the evil one to repute me ugly?

The promptings of wisdom counselled Shibli Bagarag to say, 'Frightful beyond contemplation, O Abarak! one to shame our species! Surely, there is a moon between thy legs, a pear upon thy shoulders, and the cock that croweth is no match for thee in measure.'

Abarak cried, 'We be aggrieved, we two! O youth, son of my uncle, I will give thee means of vengeance; give thou me means.'

Shibli Bagarag felt scorn at the Queen, and her hollowness, and he said, "'Tis well; take this Lily and hold it to her.'

Now, the Queen jeered Abarak, and as he approached her she shouted, 'What! thou small of build! mite of creation! sour mixture! thou puppet of mine! thou! comest thou to seek a second kiss against the compact, knowing that I give not the well-favoured of mortals beyond one, a second.'

Little delayed Abarak at this to put her to the test of the Lily, and he held the flower to her, and saw the sight, and staggered back like one stricken with a shaft. When he could get a breath he uttered such a howl that Rabesqurat in her drunkenness was fain to save her ears, and the hall echoed as with the bellows of a thousand beasts of the forest. Then, to glut his revenge he ran for the sack, and emptied the contents of it, the Queen's mirror, before her; and the sackful of eyes, they saw the sight, and sickened, rolling their whites. That done, Abarak gave Shibli Bagarag the bar of iron, and bade him smite the pillars, all save the seventh; and he smote them strengthily, crumbling them at a blow, and bringing down the great hall and its groves, and glasses and gems, lamps, traceries, devices, a heap of ruin, the seventh pillar alone standing. Then, while he pumped back breath into his body, Abarak said, 'There's no delaying in this place now, O youth! Say, halt thou spells for the entering of Aklis?'

He answered, 'Three!'

Then said Abarak, "'Tis well! Surely now, if thou takest me in thy service, I'll help thee to master the Event, and serve thee faithfully, requiring nought from thee save a sight of the Event, and 'tis I that myself missed one, wiled by Rabesqurat.'

Quoth Shibli Bagarag, 'Thou?'

He answered, 'No word of it now. Is't agreed?'

So Shibli Bagarag cried, 'Even so.'

Thereupon, the twain entered the pillar, leaving Rabesqurat prone, and the waves of the sea bounding toward her where she lay. Now, they descended and ascended flights of slippery steps, and sped together along murky passages, in which light never was, and under arches of caves with hanging crystals, groping and tumbling on hurriedly, till they came to an obstruction, and felt an iron door, frosty to the touch. Then Abarak said to Shibli Bagarag, 'Smite!' And the youth lifted the bar to his right shoulder, and smote; and the door obeyed the blow, and discovered an opening into a strange dusky land, as it seemed a valley, on one side of which was a ragged copper sun setting low, large as a warrior's battered shield, giving deep red lights to a brook that fell, and over a flat stream a red reflection, and to the sides of the hills a dark red glow. The sky was a brown colour; the earth a deeper brown, like the skins of tawny lions. Trees with reddened stems stood about the valley, scattered and in groups, showing between their leaves the cheeks of melancholy fruits swarthy tinged, and toward the centre of the valley a shining palace was visible, supported by massive columns of marble reddened by that copper sun. Shibli Bagarag was awed at the stillness that hung everywhere, and said to Abarak, 'Where am I, O Abarak? the look of this place is fearful!'

And the little man answered, 'Where, but beneath the mountains in Aklis? Wullahy! I should know it, I that keep the passage of the seventh pillar!'

Then the thought of his betrothed Noorna, and her beauty, and the words, 'Remember the seventh pillar,' struck the heart of Shibli Bagarag, and he exclaimed passionately, 'Is she in safety? Noorna, my companion, my betrothed, netted by thee, O Abarak!'

Abarak answered sharply, 'Speak not of betrothals in this place, or the sword of Aklis will move without a hand!'

But Shibli Bagarag waxed the colour of the sun that was over them, and cried, 'By Allah! I will smite thee with the bar, if thou swear not to her safety, and point not out to me where she now is.'

Then said Abarak, 'Thou wilt make a better use of the bar by lifting it to my shoulder, and poising it, and peering through it.'

Shibli Bagarag lifted the bar to the shoulder of Abarak, and poised it, and peered through the length of it, and lo! there was a sea tossing in tumult, and one pillar standing erect in the midst of the sea; and on the pillar, above the washing waves, with hair blown back, and flapping raiment, pale but smiling still, Noorna, his betrothed!

Now, when he saw her, he made a rush to the door of the passage; but Abarak blocked the way, crying, 'Fool! a step backward in Aklis is death!'

And when he had wrestled with him and reined him, Abarak said, 'Haste to reach the Sword from the sons of Aklis, if thou wouldst save her.'

He drew him to the brink of the stream, and whistled a parrot's whistle; and Shibli Bagarag beheld a boat draped with drooping white lotuses that floated slowly toward them; and when it was near, he and Abarak entered it, and saw one, a veiled figure, sitting in the stern, who neither moved to them nor spake, but steered the boat to a certain point of land across the stream, where stood an elephant ready girt for travellers to mount him; and the elephant kneeled among the reeds as they approached, that they might mount him, and when they had each taken a seat, moved off, waving his trunk. Presently the elephant came to a halt, and went upon his knees again, and the two slid off his back, and were among black slaves that bowed to the ground before them, and led them to the shining gates of the palace in silence. Now, on the first marble step of the palace there sat an old white-headed man dressed like a dervish, who held out at arm's length a branch of gold with golden singing-birds between its leaves, saying, 'This for the strongest of ye!'

Abarak exclaimed, 'I am that one'; and he held forth his hand for the branch.

But Shibli Bagarag cried, 'Nay, 'tis mine. Wullahy, what has not the strength of this hand overthrown?'

Then the brows of Abarak twisted; his limbs twitched, and he bawled, 'To the proof!' waking all the echoes of Aklis. Shibli Bagarag was tempted in his desire for the golden branch to lift the iron bar upon Abarak, when lo! the phial of Paravid fell from his vest, and he took it, and sprinkled a portion of the waters over the singing birds, and in a moment they burst into a sweet union of voices, singing, in the words of the poet:

When for one serpent were two asses match?
How shall one foe but with wiles master double?
So let the strong keep for ever good watch,
Lest their strength prove a snare, and themselves a mere bubble;
For vanity maketh the strongest most weak,
As lions and men totter after the struggle.
Ye heroes, be modest! while combats ye seek,
The cunning one trippeth ye both with a juggle.

Now, at this verse of the birds Shibli Bagarag fixed his eye on the old man, and the beard of the old man shrivelled; he waxed in size, and flew up in a blaze and with a baffled shout bearing the branch; surely, his features were those of Karaz, and Shibli Bagarag knew him by the length of his limbs, his stiff ears, and copper skin. Then he laughed a loud laugh, but Abarak sobbed, saying, 'By this know I that I never should have seized the Sword, even though I had vanquished the illusions of Rabesqurat, which held me fast half-way.'

So Shibli Bagarag stared at him, and said, 'Wert thou also a searcher, O Abarak?'

But Abarak cried, 'Rouse not the talkative tongue of the past, O youth! Wullahy! relinquish the bar that is my bar, won by me, for the Sword is within thy grip, and they await thee up yonder steps. Go! go! and look for me here on thy return.'

THE PALACE OF AKLIS

Now, Shibli Bagarag assured himself of his three spells, and made his heart resolute, and hastened up the reddened marble steps of the Palace; and when he was on the topmost step, lo! one with a man's body and the head of a buffalo, that prostrated himself, and prayed the youth obsequiously to enter the palace with the title of King. So Shibli Bagarag held his head erect, and followed him with the footing of a Sultan, and passed into a great hall, with fountains in it that were fountains of gems, pearls, chrysolites, thousand-hued jewels, and by the margin of the fountains were shapes of men with the heads of beasts- wolves, foxes, lions, bears, oxen, sheep, serpents, asses, that stretched their hands to the falls, and loaded their vestments with brilliants, loading them without cessation, so that from the vestments of each there was another pouring of the liquid lights. Then he with the buffalo's head bade Shibli Bagarag help himself from the falls; but Shibli Bagarag refused, for his soul was with Noorna, his betrothed; and he saw her pale on that solitary pillar in the tumult of the sea, and knew her safety depended on his faithfulness.

He cried, 'The Sword of Aklis! nought save the Sword!'

Now, at these words the fox-heads and the sheep-heads and the ass-heads and the other heads of beasts were lifted up, and lo! they put their hands to their ears, and tapped their foreheads with the finger of reflection, as creatures seeking to bring to mind a serious matter. Then the fountains rose higher, and flung jets of radiant jewels, and a drenching spray of gems upon them, and new thirst aroused them to renew their gulping of the falls, and a look of eagerness was even in the eyes of the ass-heads and the silly sheep-heads; surely, Shibli Bagarag laughed to see them! Now, when he had pressed his lips to recover his sight from the dazzling of those wondrous fountains, he heard himself again addressed by the title of King, and there was before him a lofty cock with a man's head. So he resumed the majesty of his march, and followed the fine-stepping cock into another hall, spacious, and clouded with heavy scents and perfumes burning in censers and urns, musk, myrrh, ambergris, and livelier odours, gladdening the nostril like wine, making the soul reel as with a draught of the forbidden drink. Here, before a feast that would prick the dead with appetite, were shapes of beasts with heads of men, asses, elephants, bulls, horses, swine, foxes, river- horses, dromedaries; and they ate and drank as do the famished with munch and gurgle, clacking their lips joyfully. Shibli Bagarag remembered the condition of his frame when first he looked upon the City of Shagpat, and was incited to eat and accede to the invitation of the cock with the man's head, and sit among these merry feeders and pickers of mouth- watering morsels, when, with the City of Shagpat, lo! he had a vision of Shagpat, hairier than at their interview, arrogant in hairiness; his head remote in contemptuous waves and curls and frizzes, and bushy protuberances of hair, lost in it, like an idolatrous temple in impenetrable thickets. Then the yearning of the Barber seized Shibli Bagarag, and desire to shear Shagpat was as a mighty overwhelming wave in his bosom, and he shouted, 'The Sword of Aklis! nought save the Sword!'

Now, at these words the beasts with men's heads wagged their tails, all of them, from right to left, and kept their jaws from motion, staring stupidly at the dishes; but the dishes began to send forth stealthy steams, insidious whispers to the nose, silver intimations of savouriness, so that they on a sudden set up a howl, and Shibli Bagarag puckered his garments from them as from devouring dogs, and hastened from that hall to a third, where at the entrance a damsel stood that smiled to him, and led him into a vast marbled chamber, forty cubits high, hung with draperies, and in it a hundred doors; and he was in the midst of a very rose-garden of young beauties, such as the Blest behold in Paradise, robed in the colours of the rising and setting sun; plump, with long, black, languishing, almond-shaped eyes, and undulating figures. So they cried to him, 'What greeting, O our King?'

Now, he counted twenty and seven of them, and, fitting his gallantry to verse, answered:

Poor are the heavens that have not ye
To swell their glowing plenty;
Up there but one bright moon I see,
Here mark I seven-and-twenty.

The damsels laughed and flung back their locks at his flattery, sporting with him; and he thought, 'These be sweet maidens! I will know if they be illusions like Rabesqurat'; so, as they were romping, he slung his right arm round one, and held the Lily to her, but there was no change in her save that she winked somewhat and her eyes watered; and it was so with the others, for when they saw him hold the Lily to one they made him do so to them likewise. Then he took the phial, and touched their lips with the waters, and lo! they commenced luting and laughing, and singing verses, and prattling, laughing betweenwhiles at each other; and one, a noisy one, with long, black, unquiet tresses, and a curved foot and roguish ankle, sang as she twirled:

My heart is another's, I cannot be tender;
Yet if thou storm it, I fain must surrender.

And another, a fresh-cheeked, fair-haired, full-eyed damsel, strong upon her instep and stately in the

bearing of her shoulders, sang shrilly:

I'm of the mountains, and he that comes to me
Like eagle must win, and like hurricane woo me.

And another, reclining on a couch buried in dusky silks, like a butterfly under the leaves, a soft ball of beauty, sang moaningly:

Here like a fruit on the branch am I swaying;
Snatch ere I fall, love! there's death in delaying.

And another, light as an antelope on the hills, with antelope eyes edged with kohl, and timid, graceful movements, and small, white, rounded ears, sang clearly:

Swiftness is mine, and I fly from the sordid;
Follow me, follow! and you'll be rewarded.

And another, with large limbs and massive mould, that stepped like a cow leisurely cropping the pasture, and shook with jewels amid her black hair and above her brown eyes, and round her white neck and her wrists, and on her waist, even to her ankle, sang as with a kiss upon every word:

Sweet 'tis in stillness and bliss to be basking!
He who would have me, may have for the asking.

And another, with eyebrows like a bow, and arrows of fire in her eyes, and two rosebuds her full moist parted pouting lips, sang, clasping her hands, and voiced like the tremulous passionate bulbul in the shadows of the moon:

Love is my life, and with love I live only;
Give me life, lover, and leave me not lonely.

And a seventh, a very beam of beauty, and the perfection of all that is imagined in fairness and ample grace of expression and proportion, lo! she came straight to Shibli Bagarag, and took him by the hand and pierced him with lightning glances, singing:

Were we not destined to meet by one planet?
Can a fate sever us?—can it, ah! can it?

And she sang tender songs to him, mazing him with blandishments, so that the aim of existence and the summit of ambition now seemed to him the life of a king in that palace among the damsels; and he thought, 'Wah! these be no illusions, and they speak the thing that is in them. Wullahy, loveliness is their portion; they call me King.'

Then she that had sung to him said, 'Surely we have been waiting thee long to crown thee our King! Thou hast been in some way delayed, O glorious one!'

And he answered, 'O fair ones, transcending in affability, I have stumbled upon obstructions in my journey hither, and I have met with adventures, but of this crowning that was to follow them I knew nought. Wullahy, thrice have I been saluted King; I whom fate selecteth for the shaving of Shagpat, and till now it was a beguilement, all emptiness.'

They marked his bewildered state, and some knelt before him, some held their arms out adoringly, some leaned to him with glistening looks, and he was fast falling a slave to their flatteries, succumbing to them; imagination fired him with the splendours due to one that was a king, and the thought of wearing a crown again took possession of his soul, and he cried, 'Crown me, O my handmaidens, and delay not to crown me; for, as the poet says:

"The king without his crown
Hath a forehead like the clown";

and the circle of my head itcheth for the symbols of majesty.'

At these words of Shibli Bagarag they arose quickly and clapped their hands, and danced with the nimble step of gladness, exclaiming, 'O our King! pleasant will be the time with him!' And one smoothed his head and poured oil upon it; one brought him garments of gold and silk inwoven; one fetched him slippers like the sun's beam in brightness; others stood together in clusters, and with lutes and wood-instruments, low-toned, singing odes to him; and lo! one took a needle and threaded it, and gave the thread into the hands of Shibli Bagarag, and with the point of the needle she pricked certain letters on his right wrist, and afterwards pricked the same letters on a door in the wall. Then she said to him, 'Is

it in thy power to make those letters speak?'

He answered, 'We will prove how that may be.'

So he flung some drops from the phial over the letters, and they glowed the colour of blood and flashed with a report, and it was as if a fiery forked-tongue had darted before them and spake the words written, and they were, 'This is the crown of him who bath achieved his aim and resteth here.' Thereupon, she stuck the needle in the door, and he pulled the thread, and the door drew apart, and lo! a small chamber, and on a raised cushion of blue satin a glittering crown, thick with jewels as a frost, such as Ambition pineth to wear, and the knees of men weaken and bend beholding, and it lanced lights about it like a living sun. Beside the cushion was a vacant throne, radiant as morning in the East, ablaze with devices in gold and gems, a seat to fill the meanest soul with sensations of majesty and tempt dervishes to the sitting posture. Shibli Bagarag was intoxicated at the sight, and he thought, 'Wah! but if I sit on this throne and am a king, with that crown I can command men and things! and I have but to say, Fetch Noorna, my betrothed, from yonder pillar in the midst of the uproarious sea!— Let the hairy Shagpat be shaved! and behold, slaves, thousands of them, do my bidding! Wullahy, this is greatness!' Now, he made a rush to the throne, but the damsels held him back, crying, 'Not for thy life till we have crowned thee, our master and lord!'

Then they took the crown and crowned him with it; and he sat upon the throne calmly, serenely, like a Sultan of the great race accustomed to sovereignty, tempering the awfulness of his brows with benignant glances. So, while he sat the damsels hid their faces and started some paces from him, as unable to bear the splendour of his presence, and in a moment, lo! the door closed between him and them, and he was in darkness. Then he heard a voice of the damsels cry in the hall, 'The ninety and ninth! Peace now for us and blissfulness with our lords, for now all are filled save the door of the Sword, which maketh the hundredth.' After that he heard the same voice say, 'Leave them, O my sisters!'

So he listened to the noise of their departing, and knew he had been duped. Surely his soul cursed him as he sat crowned and throned in that darkness! He seized the crown to dash it to the earth, but the crown was fixed on his forehead and would not come off; neither had he force to rise from the throne. Now, the thought of Noorna, his betrothed, where she rested waiting for him to deliver her, filled Shibli Bagarag with the extremes of anguish; and he lifted his right arm and dashed it above his head in the violence of his grief, striking in the motion a hidden gong that gave forth a burst of thunder and a roll of bellows, and lo! the door opened before him, and the throne as he sat on it moved out of the chamber into the hall where he had seen the damsels that duped him, and on every side of the hall doors opened; and he marvelled to see men, old and young, beardless and venerable, sitting upon thrones and crowned with crowns, motionless, with eyes like stones in the recesses. He thought, 'These be other dupes! Wallaby! a drop of the waters of Paravid upon their lips might reveal mysteries, and guide me to the Sword of my seeking.' So, as he considered how to get at them from the seat of his throne, his gaze fell on a mirror, and he beheld the crown on his forehead what it was, bejewelled asses' ears stiffened upright, and skulls of monkeys grinning with gems! The sight of that crowning his head convulsed Shibli Bagarag with laughter, and, as he laughed, his seat upon the throne was loosened, and he pitched from it, but the crown stuck to him and was tenacious of its hold as the lion that pounceth upon a victim. He bowed to the burden of necessity, and took the phial, and touched the lips of one that sat crowned on a throne with the waters in the phial; and it was a man of exceeding age, whitened with time, and in the long sweep of his beard like a mountain clad with snow from the peak that is in the sky to the base that slopeth to the valley. Then he addressed the old man on his throne, saying, 'Tell me, O King! how camest thou here? and in search of what?'

The old man's lips moved, and he muttered in deep tones, 'When cometh he of the ninety-and-ninth door?'

So Shibli Bagarag cried, 'Surely he is before thee, in Aklis.'

And the old man said, 'Let him ask no secrets; but when he hath reached the Sword forget not to flash it in this hall, for the sake of brotherhood in adventure.'

After that he would answer no word to any questioning.

THE SONS OF AKLIS

Now, Shibli Bagarag thought, 'The poet is right in Aklis as elsewhere, in his words:

"The cunning of our oft-neglected wit
Doth best the keyhole of occasion fit";

and whoso looketh for help from others looketh the wrong way in an undertaking. Wah! I will be bold and batter at the hundredth door, which is the door of the Sword.' So he advanced straightway to the door, which was one of solid silver, charactered with silver letters, and knocked against it three knocks; and a voice within said, 'What spells?'

He answered, 'Paravid; Garraveen; and the Lily of the Sea!'

Upon that the voice said, 'Enter by virtue of the spells!' and the silver door swung open, discovering a deep pit, lightened by a torch, and across it, bridging it, a string of enormous eggs, rocs' eggs, hollowed, and so large that a man might walk through them without stooping. At the side of each egg three lamps were suspended from a claw, and the shell passage was illumined with them from end to end. Shibli Bagarag thought, 'These eggs are of a surety the eggs of the Roc mastered by Aklis with his sword!' Now, as the sight of Shibli Bagarag grew familiar to the place, he beheld at the bottom of the pit a fluttering mass of blackness and two sickly eyes that glittered below.

Then thought he, 'Wah! if that be the Roc, and it not dead, will the bird suffer one to defile its eggs with other than the sole of the foot, naked?' He undid his sandals and kicked off the slippers given him by the damsels that had duped him, and went into the first egg over the abyss, and into the second, and into the third, and into the fourth, and into the fifth. Surely the eggs swung with him, and bent; and the fear of their breaking and he falling into the maw of the terrible bird made him walk unevenly. When he had come to the seventh egg, which was the last, it shook and swung violently, and he heard underneath the flapping of the wings of the Roc, as with eagerness expecting a victim to prey upon. He sustained his soul with the firmness of resolve and darted himself lengthwise to the landing, clutching a hold with his right hand; as he did so, the bridge of eggs broke, and he heard the feathers of the bird in agitation, and the bird screaming a scream of disappointment as he scrambled up the sides of the pit.

Now, Shibli Bagarag failed not to perform two prostrations to Allah, and raised the song of gratitude for his preservation when he found himself in safety. Then he looked up, and lo! behind a curtain, steps leading to an anteroom, and beyond that a chamber like the chamber of kings where they sit in state dispensing judgements, like the sun at noon in splendour; and in the chamber seven youths, tall and comely young men, calm as princes in their port, each one dressed in flowing robes, and with a large glowing pearl in the front of their turbans. They advanced to meet him, saying, 'Welcome to Aklis, thou that art proved worthy! 'Tis holiday now with us'; and they took him by the hand and led him with them in silence past fountain-jets and porphyry pillars to where a service with refreshments was spread, meats, fowls with rice, sweetmeats, preserves, palatable mixtures, and monuments of the cook's art, goblets of wine like liquid rubies. Then one of the youths said to Shibli Bagarag, 'Thou hast come to us crowned, O our guest! Now, it is not our custom to pay homage, but thou shalt presently behold them that will, so let not thy kingliness droop with us, but feast royally.'

And Shibli Bagarag said, 'O my princes, surely it is a silly matter to crown a mouse! Humility hath depressed my stature! Wullahy, I have had warning in the sticking of this crown to my brows, and it sticketh like an abomination.'

They laughed at him, saying, 'It was the heaviness of that crown which overweighted thee in the bridge of the abyss, and few be they that bear it and go not to feed the Roc.'

Now, they feasted together, interchanging civilities, offering to each other choice morsels, dainties. And the anecdotes of Shibli Bagarag, his simplicity and his honesty, and his vanity and his airiness, and the betraying tongue of the barber, diverted the youths; and they plied him with old wine till his stores of merriment broke forth and were as a river swollen by torrents of the mountain; and the seven youths laughed at him, spluttering with laughter, lurching with it. Surely, he described to them the loquacity of Baba Mustapha his uncle, and they laughed so that their chins were uppermost; but at his mention of Shagpat greater gravity was theirs, and they smoothed their faces solemnly, and the sun of their merriment was darkened for awhile. Then they took to flinging about pellets of a sugared preparation, and reciting verses in praise of jovial living, challenging to drink this one and that one, passing the cup with a stanza. Shibli Bagarag thought, 'What a life is this led by these youths! a fair one! 'Tis they that be the sons of Aklis who sharpen the Sword of Events; yet live they in jollity, skimming from the profusion of abundance that which floateth!'

Now, marking him contemplative, one of the youths shouted, 'The King lacketh homage!'

And another called, 'Admittance for his people!'

Then the seven arose and placed Shibli Bagarag on an elevation in the midst of them, and lo! a troop of black slaves leading by the collar, asses, and by a string, monkeys. Now, for the asses they brayed to the Evil One, and the monkeys were prankish, pulling against the string, till they caught sight of Shibli Bagarag. Then was it as if they had been awestricken; and they came forward to him with docile steps, eyeing the crown on his head, and prostrated themselves, the asses and the monkeys, like creatures in whom glowed the lamp of reason and the gift of intelligence. So Shibli Bagarag drooped his jaw and was ashamed, and he cried, 'my princes! am I a King of these?'

They answered, 'A King in mightiness! Sultan of a race!'

So he said, 'It is certain I shall need physic to support such a sovereignty! And I must be excused liberal allowances of old wine to sit in state among them. Wullahy! they were best gone for awhile. Send them from me, O my princes! I sicken.'

And he called to the animals, 'Away! begone!' frowning.

Then said the youths, 'Well commanded! and like a King! See, they troop from thy presence obediently.'

Now the animals fled from before the brows of Shibli Bagarag, and when the chamber was empty of them the seven young men said, 'Of a surety thou wert flattered to observe the aspect of these animals at beholding thee.'

But he cried, 'Not so, O my princes; there is nought flattering in the homage of asses and monkeys.'

Then they said, 'O Sultan of asses, ruler of monkeys, better that than thyself an ass and an ape! As was said by Shah Kasirwan, "I prefer being king of beasts worshipped by beasts, rather than a crowned beast worshipped by men"; and it was well said. Wullahy! the kings of Roum quote it.'

Now Shibli Bagarag was not rendered oblivious of the Sword of his quest by the humour of these youths, or the wine-bibblings, and he exclaimed while they were turning up the heels of their cups, 'O ye sons of Aklis, know that I have come hither for the Sword sharpened by your hands, for the releasing of my betrothed, Noorna bin Noorka, daughter of the Vizier Feshnavat, and for the shaving of Shagpat.'

While he was proceeding to recount the story of his search for the Sword, they said, 'Enough, O potentate of the braying class and of the scratching tribe! we have seen thee through the eye of Aklis since the time of thy first thwacking. What says the poet?'

"A day for toil and a day for rest
Gives labour zeal, and pleasure zest."

So, of thy seeking let us hear to-morrow; but now drink with us, and make merry, and touch the springs of memory; spout forth verses, quaint ones, suitable to the hour and the entertainment. Wullahy! drink with us! taste life! Let the humours flow.'

Then they made a motion to some slaves, and presently a clattering of anklets struck the ear of Shibli Bagarag: and he beheld dancing-girls, moons of beauty and elegance, and they danced wild dances, and dances graceful and leopard-like and serpent-like in movement; and the youths flung flowers at them, applauding them. Then came other sets of dancers even lovelier, more languishing; and again others with tambourines and musical instruments, that sang ravishingly. So the senses of Shibli Bagarag were all taken with what he saw and heard, and ate and drank; and by degrees a mist came before his eyes, and the sweet sounds and voices of the girls grew distant, and it was with difficulty he kept his back from the length of the cushions that were about him. Then he thought of Noorna, and that she sang to him and danced, and when he rose to embrace her she was Rabesqurat by the light of the Lily! And he thought of Shagpat, and that in shaving him the blade was checked in its rapid sweep, and blunted by a stumpy twine of hair that waxed in size and became the head of Karaz that gulped at him a wide devouring gulp, and took him in, and flew up with him, leaving Shagpat half sheared. Then he thought himself struggling halfway down the throat of the monstrous Roc, and that, when he was wholly inside the Roc, he was in a wide-arched passage crowded with lamps, and at the end of the passage Noorna in the clutch of Karaz, she shouting, 'The Sword, the Sword!'

Now, while he felt for the Sword wherewith to release her from the Genie, his eyes opened, and he saw day through a casement, and that he had reposed on an embroidered couch in the corner of a stately room ornamented with carvings of blue and gold. So while he wondered and yawned, gaping,

slaves started up from the floor and led him to a bath of coloured marble, and bathed him in perfumed waters, and dressed him in a dress of yellow silk, rich and ample. Then they paraded before him through lesser apartments and across terraces, till they came to a great hall; loftier and more spacious than any he had yet beheld, with fountains at the two ends, and in the centre a tree with golden spreading branches and leaves of gold; among the leaves gold-feathered birds, and fruits of all seasons and every description—the drooping grape and the pleasant-smelling quince, and the blood-red pomegranate, and the apricot, and the green and rosy apple, and the gummy date, and the oily pistachio- nut, and peaches, and citrons, and oranges, and the plum, and the fig. Surely, they were countless in number, melting with ripeness, soft, full to bursting; and the birds darted among them like sun-flashes. Now, Shibli Bagarag thought, 'This is a wondrous tree! Wullahy! there is nought like it save the tree in the hall of the Prophet in Paradise, feeding the faithful!' As he regarded it he heard his name spoken in the hall, and turning he beheld seven youths in royal garments, that were like the youths he had feasted with, and yet unlike them, pale, and stern in their manners, their courtesy as the courtesy of kings. They said, 'Sit with us and eat the morning's meal, O our guest!'

So he sat with them under the low branches of the tree; and they whistled the tune of one bird and of another bird, and of another, and lo! those different birds flew down with golden baskets hanging from their bills, and in the baskets fruits and viands and sweetmeats, and cool drinks. And Shibli Bagarag ate from the baskets of the birds, watching the action of the seven youths and the difference that was in them. He sought to make them recognise him and acknowledge their carouse of the evening that was past, but they stared at him strangely and seemed offended at the allusion, neither would they hear mention of the Sword of his seeking. Presently, one of the youths stood upon his feet and cried, "The time for kings to sit in judgement!"

And the youths arose and led Shibli Bagarag to a hall of ebony, and seated him on the upper seat, themselves standing about him; and lo! asses and monkeys came before him, complaining of the injustice of men and their fellows, in brays and bellows and hoots. Now, at the sight of them again Shibli Bagarag was enraged, and he said to the youths, 'How! do ye not mock me, O masters of Aklis!'

But they said only, 'The burden of his crown is for the King.'

He cooled, thinking, 'I will use a spell.' So he touched the lips of an animal with the waters of Paravid, and the animal prated volubly in our language of the kick this ass had given him, and the jibe of that monkey, and of his desire of litigation with such and such a beast for pasture; and the others when they spake had the same complaints to make. Shibli Bagarag listened to them gravely, and it was revealed to him that he who ruleth over men hath a labour and duties of hearing and judging and dispensing judgement similar to those of him who ruleth over apes and asses. Then said he, 'O youths, my princes! methinks the sitting in this seat giveth a key to secret sources of wisdom; and I see what it is, the glory and the exaltation coveted by men.' Now, he took from the asses and the monkeys one, and said to it, 'Be my chief Vizier,' and to another, 'Be my Chamberlain!' and to another, 'Be my Treasurer!' and so on, till a dispute arose between the animals, and jealousy of each other was visible in their glances, and they appealed to him clamorously. So he said, 'What am I to ye?'

They answered, 'Our King!'

And he said, 'How so?'

They answered, 'By the crowning of the brides of Aklis.'

Then he said, 'What be ye, O my subjects?'

They answered, 'Men that were searchers of the Sword and plunged into the tank of temptation.'

And he said, 'How that?'

They answered, 'By the lures of vanity, the blinding of ambition, and tasting the gall of the Roc.'

So Shibli Bagarag leaned to the seven youths, saying, 'O my princes, but for not tasting the gall of the Roc I might be as one of these. Wullahy! I the King am warned by base creatures.' Then he said to the animals, 'Have ye still a longing for the crown?'

And they cried, all of them, 'O light of the astonished earth, we care for nought other than it.'

So he said, 'And is it known to ye how to dispossess the wearer of his burden?'

They answered, 'By a touch of the gall of the Roc on his forehead.'

Then he lifted his arms, crying, 'Hie out of my presence! and whoso of ye fetcheth a drop of the gall,

with that one will I exchange the crown.'

At these words some moved hastily, but the most faltered, as doubting and incredulous that he would propose such an exchange; and one, an old monkey, sat down and crossed his legs, and made a study of Shibli Bagarag, as of a sovereign that held forth a deceiving bargain. But he cried again, 'Hie and haste! as my head is now cased I think it not the honoured part.'

Then the old monkey arose with a puzzled look, half scornful, and made for the door slowly, turning his head toward Shibli Bagarag betweenwhiles as he went, and scratching his lower limbs with the mute reflectiveness of age and extreme caution.

Now, when they were gone, Shibli Bagarag looked in the eyes of the seven youths, and saw they were content with him, and his countenance was brightened with approval. So he descended from his seat, and went with them from the hall of ebony to a court where horses were waiting saddled, and slaves with hawks on their wrists stood in readiness; and they mounted each a horse, but he loitered. The seven youths divined his feeling, and cried impatiently, 'Come! no lingering in Aklis!' So he mounted likewise, and they emerged from the palace, and entered the hills that glowed under the copper sun, and started a milk-white antelope with ruby spots, and chased it from its cover over the sand-hills, a hawk being let loose to worry it and distress its timid beaming eyes. When the creature was quite overcome, one of the youths struck his heel into his horse's side and flung a noose over the head of the quarry, and drew it with them, gently petting it the way home to the palace. At the gates of the palace it was released, and lo! it went up the steps, and passed through the halls as one familiar with them. Now, when they were all assembled in the anteroom of the hall, where Shibli Bagarag had first seen the seven youths, sons of Aklis, in their jollity, one of them said to the Antelope, 'We have need of thee to speak a word with Aklis, O our sister!'

So the same youth requested the use of the phial of Paravid, and Shibli Bagarag applied it carefully, tenderly, to the mouth of the Antelope. Then the Antelope spake in a silver-ringing voice, saying, 'What is it, O my brothers?'

They answered, 'Thou knowest we dare not attempt interchange of speech with Aklis, seeing that we disobeyed him in visiting the kingdoms of the earth: so it is for thee to question him as to the object of this youth, and it is the Shaving of Shagpat.'

So she said, 'Tis well; I wot of it.'

Then she advanced to the curtain concealing the abyss of the Roc and the bridge of its eggs, and went behind it. There was a pause, and they heard her say presently in a grave voice, toned with reverence, 'How is it, O our father? is it a good thing that thy Sword be in use at this season?'

And they heard the Voice answer from a depth, 'Twere well it rust not!'

They heard her say, 'O our father Aklis, and we wish to know if be held in favour by thee, and thou sanction it with thy Sword.'

And they heard the Voice answer, 'The Shaving of Shagpat is my Sword alone equal to, and he that shaveth him performeth a service to mankind ranking next my vanquishing of the Roc.'

Then they heard her say, 'And it is thy will we teach him the mysteries of the Sword, and that which may be done with it?'

And they heard the Voice answer, 'Even so!'

After that the Voice was still, and soon the Antelope returned from behind the curtain, and the youths caressed her with brotherly caresses, and took a circle of hands about her, and so moved to the great Hall of the gorgeous Tree, and fed her from the branches. Now, while they were there, Shibli Bagarag advanced to the Antelope, and knelt at her feet, and said, 'O Princess of Aklis, surely I am betrothed to one constant as a fixed star, and brighter; a mistress of magic, and innocent as the bleating lamb; and she is now on a pillar, chained there, in the midst of the white wrathful sea, wailing for me to deliver her with this Sword of my seeking. So, now, I pray thee help me to the Sword swiftly, that I may deliver her.'

The youths, her brothers, clamoured and interposed, saying, 'Take thy shape ere that, O Gulrevaz, our sister!'

But she cried, 'He is betrothed! not till he graspeth the Sword. Tell him, the youth, our conditions, and for what exchange the Sword is yielded.'

And they said, 'The conditions are, thou part with thy spells, all of them, O youth!'

And he said, 'There is no condition harsh that exchangeth the Sword; O ye Seven, I agree!'

Then she said, 'Tis well! nobility is in the soul of this youth. Go before us now to the Cave of Chrysolites, O my brothers.'

So these departed before, and she in her antelope form followed footing gracefully, and made Shibli Bagarag repeat the story of his betrothal as they went.

THE SWORD OF AKLIS

Now, when they had made the passage of many halls, built of different woods, filled with divers wonders, they descended a sloping vault, and came to a narrow way in the earth, hung with black, at the end of it a steadfast blaze like a sun, that grew larger as they advanced, and they heard the sea above them. The noise of it, and its plunging and weltering and its pitilessness, struck on the heart of Shibli Bagarag as with a blow, and he cried, 'Haste, haste, O Princess! perchance she is even now calling to me with her tongue, and I not aiding her; delayed by the temptation of this crown and the guile of the Brides.'

She checked him, and said, 'In Aklis no haste!' Then she said, 'Look!' And lo, fronting them the single blaze became two fires; and drawing nigh, Shibli Bagarag beheld them what they were, angry eyes in the head of a great lion, a model of majesty, and passion was in his mane and power was in his forepaws; so while he lashed his tail as a tempest whippeth the tawny billows at night, and was lifting himself for a roar, she said, 'A hair of Garraveen, and touch him with it!'

Shibli Bagarag pushed up his sleeve and broke one of the three sapphire hairs and stepped forward to the lion, holding in his right hand the hair of vivid light. The lion crouched, and was in the vigour of the spring when that hair touched him, and he trembled, tumbling on his knees and letting the twain pass. So they advanced beyond him, and lo! the Cave of Chrysolites irradiate with beams, breaks of brilliance, confluences of lively hues, restless rays, meeting, vanishing, flooding splendours, now scattered in dazzling joints and spars, now uniting in momentary disks of radiance. In the centre of the cave glowed a furnace, and round it he distinguished the seven youths, swarthier and sterner than before, dark sweat standing on the brows of each. Their words were brief, and they wore each a terrible frown, saying to him, without further salutation, 'Thrust in the flame of this furnace thy right wrist.'

At the same moment, the Antelope said in his ear, 'Do thou their bidding, and be not backward! In Aklis fear is ruin, and hesitation a destroyer.'

He fixed his mind on the devotedness of Noorna, and held his nether lip tightly between his teeth, and thrust his right wrist in the flame of the furnace. The wrist reddened, and became transparent with heat, but he felt no pain, only that his whole arm was thrice its natural weight. Then the flame of the furnace fell, and the seven youths made him kneel by a brook of golden waters and dip his forehead up to his eyes in the waters. Then they took him to the other side of the cave, and his sight was strengthened to mark the glory of the Sword, where it hung in slings, a little way from the wall, outshining the lights of the cave, and throwing them back with its superior force and steadfastness of lustre. Lo! the length of it was as the length of crimson across the sea when the sun is sideways on the wave, and it seemed full a mile long, the whole blade sheening like an arrested lightning from the end to the hilt; the hilt two large live serpents twined together, with eyes like sombre jewels, and sparkling spotted skins, points of fire in their folds, and reflections of the emerald and topaz and ruby stones, studded in the blood-stained haft. Then the seven young men, sons of Aklis, said to Shibli Bagarag, 'Surrender the Lily!' And when he had given into their hands the Lily, they said, 'Grasp the handle of the Sword!'

Now, he beheld the Sword and the ripples of violet heat that were breathing down it, and those two venomous serpents twined together, and the size of it, its ponderousness; and to essay lifting it

appeared to him a madness, but he concealed his thought, and, setting his soul on the safety of Noorna, went forward to it boldly, and piercing his right arm between the twists of the serpents, grasped the jewelled haft. Surely, the Sword moved from the slings as if a giant had swayed it! But what amazed him was the marvel of the blade, for its sharpness was such that nothing stood in its way, and it slipped through everything as we pass through still water, the stone columns, blocks of granite by the walls, the walls of earth, and the thick solidity of the ground beneath his feet. They bade him say to the Sword, 'Sleep!' and it was no longer than a knife in the girdle. Likewise, they bade him hiss on the heads of the serpents, and say, 'Wake!' and while he held it lengthwise it shot lengthening out. Then they bade him hold in one hand the sapphire hair that conquered the lion, and with the edge of the Sword touch one point of it. So he did that, and it split in half, and the two halves he also split; and he split those four, and those eight, till the hairs were thin as light and not distinguishable from it. When Shibli Bagarag saw the power of the Sword, he exulted and cried, 'Praise be to the science of them that forecast events and the haps of life!' Now, in the meantime he marked the youths take those hairs of Garraveen that he had split, and tie them round the neck of the Antelope, and empty the contents of the phial down her throat; and they put the bulb of the Lily, that was a heart, in her mouth, and she swallowed it till the flower covered her face. Then they took each a handful of the golden waters of the brook flowing through the cave, and flung the waters over her, exclaiming, 'By the three spells that have power in Aklis, and by which these waters are a blessing!'

In the passing of a flash she took her shape, and was a damsel taller than the tallest of them that descend from the mountains, a vision of loveliness, with queenly brows, closed red lips, and large full black eyes; her hair black, and on it a net of amber strung with pearls. To look upon her was to feel the tyranny of love, love's pangs of alarm and hope and anguish; and she was dressed in a dress of white silk, threaded with gold and sapphire, showing in shadowy beams her rounded figure and the stateliness that was hers. So she ran to her brothers and embraced them, calling them by their names, catching their hands, caressing them as one that had been long parted from them. Then, seeing Shibli Bagarag as he stood transfixed with the javelins of loveliness that flew from her on all sides, she cried: 'What, O Master of the Event! halt thou nought for the Sword but to gaze before thee in silliness?'

Then he said, 'O rare in beauty! marvel of Aklis and the world! surely the paradise of eyes is thy figure and the glory of thy face!'

But she shouted, 'To work with the Sword! Shame on thee! is there not one, a bright one, a miracle in faithfulness, that awaiteth thy rescue on the pillar?'

And she repeated the praises he had spoken of Noorna bin Noorka, his betrothed. Then he grasped the Sword firmly, remembering the love of Noorna, and crying, 'Lead me from this, O ye sons of Aklis, and thou, Princess Gulrevaz, lead me, that I may come to her.'

So they said, 'Follow us!' and he sheathed the Sword in his girdle with the word 'Sleep!' and followed them, his heart beating violently.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Arm'd with Fear the Foe finds passage to the vital part
Fear nought so much as Fear itself
If thou wouldst fix remembrance—thwack!
Nought credit but what outward orbs reveal
The overwise themselves hoodwink
The king without his crown hath a forehead like the clown
Vanity maketh the strongest most weak
Where fools are the fathers of every miracle
Who in a labyrinth wandereth without clue

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT; AN ARABIAN
ENTERTAINMENT — VOLUME 3 ***

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